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Epyllion, Epic Poetry, Large-Scale Poetry, Small-Scale Poetry, Hellenistic Period, Archaic Period, Invention, Deconstruction, Romanticism

#### ABSTRACT (German)

In der Klassischen Philologie wird in der Regel davon ausgegangen, dass die Gattung ‚Epyllion‘ im Hellenismus als formaler und inhaltlicher Gegenentwurf zur tradierten Großepik der Archaik erfunden wurde. Allerdings vermögen neuere Forschungsergebnisse zu zeigen, dass diejenigen griechischen Texte, die heutzutage üblicherweise als Epyllien betrachtet werden, erst seit dem 18. Jahrhundert als eine gattungsmäßige Einheit empfunden werden, während sich für die Antike eine eigenständige Gattung ‚Epyllion‘ nicht nachweisen lässt. In diesem Aufsatz werden in einem ersten Schritt die zahlreichen methodologischen Probleme, die sich aus der etablierten Taxonomie dieser angeblichen Gattung ergeben, analysiert und zur Diskussion gestellt. In einem zweiten Schritt werden Geschichte und Entwicklung des Epyllions im Laufe der vergangenen zwei Jahrhunderte skizziert, und es wird gezeigt, inwiefern die ‚Erfindung‘ literarischer Gattungen unsere Wahrnehmung antiker Texte beeinflusst und inwiefern die ‚Deonstruktion‘ etablierter Gattungstaxonomien dazu dienen kann, die Konstruiertheit antiker Gattungen und unseres Antikebildes insgesamt zu verstehen.

#### ABSTRACT (English)

In classical scholarship, the genre ‘epyllion’ is commonly considered to have been invented in the Hellenistic period in order to oppose large-scale archaic epic in terms of both form and content. However, recent research results

demonstrate that those Greek texts which are usually regarded as epyllia today only came to be viewed as a coherent genre in the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, but did not constitute an independent genre in antiquity. This paper first analyses and discusses the various methodological problems concerned with the established taxonomy of this supposed genre. Subsequently, the history and destiny of the epyllion in the past two centuries is sketched and discussed as a case study of how the ‘invention’ of literary genres can model our perception of ancient texts, and how the ‘deconstruction’ of established generic taxonomies can help us to further develop the understanding of the ‘constructedness’ of ancient genres and of antiquity itself.

# Inventing and Deconstructing Epyllion: Some Thoughts on a Taxonomy of Greek Hexameter Poetry

Silvio Bär (University of Oslo)

Kurt Schärer zum Gedenken

## I

It has long been noted that the word “epyllion” was not used as a literary term in antiquity, but is a modern invention no more than approximately two hundred years old.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, it is generally assumed in contemporary classical scholarship that the ancient Greek (and Latin)<sup>2</sup> texts which are, by default, labeled “epyllia” today, constituted a reasonably coherent genre in ancient literature. As Adrian Hollis puts it:

“Everyone knows that the ancients did not use the term in the way that it is familiar from modern scholarship, but [...] it remains useful and does describe a genuine type of poem.”<sup>3</sup>

This attitude is symptomatic of most modern critics who wish to adhere to the established concept of epyllion; a look into specialized handbooks such as *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* or *Der Neue Pauly* confirms this stance as *communis opinio*.<sup>4</sup> Essentially, the view is held that, in the Hellenistic period, the epyllion was invented as a *Gegenentwurf* to the established, large-scale heroic poetry known from the archaic epoch, and that it contrasted with the latter in terms of both content and form. Apart from the formal category of the epyllion’s relative brevity, content-oriented categories such as the subversion or parody of the heroic world, emphasis on femininity, concentration on non-canonical versions of myths and stories, subjective

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- 1 On the development of the term and its history of scholarship, cf. section II in depth.
  - 2 On the Latin epyllion, which is not subject to this chapter, cf. May (1910), Jackson (1913), Perutelli (1979), Styka (1995) 220–230, Koster (2002), Bartels (2004), Edmunds (2010), Wasyl (2011) 13–109, Trimble (2012).
  - 3 Hollis (2006) 141.
  - 4 *OCD*<sup>3</sup>: Courtney (1996); *DNP*: Fantuzzi (1998).

and emotional tonality, etc., are regarded as constitutive of the genre. These and similar categories are habitually attributed to what is thought to be typical of Alexandrian poetics.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the idea of a small-scale type of “fresh” and “refined” hexameter poetry seems appropriate for the Hellenistic age and its ideas and ideals; a diminutive “epyllion” almost looks like the logical consequence of the Callimachean vilification of a μέγα βιβλίον as a μέγα κακόν.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, it is often argued that the dichotomy between large-scale and small-scale epic which developed at this time was consolidated centuries later in the *Dionysiaca* by Nonnus of Panopolis, who blended different strands of hexameter poetry into one monumental epic of no fewer than forty-eight books. In so doing, Nonnus incorporates the small-scale (“epyllic”) mode of narration into the overarching frame of his gigantic epic tale.<sup>7</sup>

A first, cursory glance at the history of scholarship reveals that the idea of the epyllion as a programmatic invention of the Hellenistic era was explicitly promoted 110 years ago by Johannes Heumann in his thesis entitled *De epyllio Alexandrino* (1904).<sup>8</sup> It is, however, Mary Marjorie Crump’s dissertation *The Epyllion from Theocritus to Ovid* (1931) which has had the profoundest effect on the reception of the term and the concept throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and to this day,<sup>9</sup> as the author of this book not only

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5 It must not be forgotten, however, that there is no such thing as an entirely coherent Alexandrian poetology, style, or tonality. In fact, authors such as Callimachus, Apollonius of Rhodes, and Theocritus differ significantly in these matters: cf. very briefly on this point Asper (2004) 51–53; also Asper (2001) and Pontani (2014).

6 Fr. 465 Pfeiffer = fr. 511 Asper: Καλλίμαχος ὁ γραμματικὸς τὸ μέγα βιβλίον ἴσον ἔλεγεν εἶναι τῷ μεγάλῳ κακῷ. “Callimachus the grammarian said that ‘the big book’ was equal to ‘the big evil.’” – All translations of Greek are my own.

7 Cf. esp. D’Ippolito (1964). Shorrock (2001) 19 describes the *Dionysiaca*’s mode of narration as a “jeweled style.” In a similar manner, the *Dionysiaca* are often called a “baroque” poem (however, this metaphor has often been criticized: cf. van Opstall [2014] 446–449 for an overview).

8 Cf. Tilg (2012) 46: “Heumann’s [...] sole focus on the Alexandrian period led later scholars to believe – although Heumann never stated this apodictically – that the epyllion was essentially a Hellenistic phenomenon.” Allen (1940) 4, who disavowed the existence of the ancient genre of the epyllion on the grounds that the term was not ancient, sulkily states that “after Heumann’s dissertation was published, the damage was done.”

9 In fact, recent lexical definitions such as that of Courtney (1996) or Fantuzzi (1998) largely draw on Crump’s account. Cf. also Trimble (2012) 74–76 on the continuous influence of Crump’s study and esp. her catalog of criteria.

strengthened the idea of the epyllion as a specifically Alexandrian phenomenon,<sup>10</sup> but she also drew a direct line from there to the Roman Neoterics and, at the same time, also offered an unambiguous catalog of criteria to which a text was supposed to adhere in order to be awarded “membership” in the epyllic “Olympus”:

“An epyllion is a short narrative poem. The length may and does vary considerably, but an epyllion seems never to have exceeded the length of a single book, and probably the average length was four to five hundred lines. The subject is sometimes merely an incident in the life of an epic hero or heroine, sometimes a complete story, the tendency of the author being to use little-known stories or possibly even to invent new ones. The later Alexandrians and the Romans preferred love stories and usually concentrated the interest on the heroine. The style varies; it may be entirely narrative, or may be decorated with descriptive passages of a realistic character. The dramatic form is frequently employed, and it is usual to find at least one long speech. So far the only distinction between the epyllion and the narrative hymn consists in the subject. A hymn always tells the story of a god, whereas an epyllion deals with human beings; gods may appear as characters, but there is no emphasis on their divinity. There is, however, one characteristic of the epyllion which sharply distinguishes it from other types, namely the digression.”<sup>11</sup>

When the definition is reduced to its kernel, we can discern three clearly distinguishable parameters:

1. Form: relative brevity as compared to the large-scale heroic (Homeric) poetry known from the archaic epoch.<sup>12</sup>

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10 At the beginning of her investigation, Crump (1931) 25 states that “[t]he Greek epyllion is an outcome of the tradition which took its rise in the Homeric hymns and the short narrative episodes which varied the monotony of the Hesiodic catalogues”; however, she does not further discuss these forerunners, but states in her next sentence that “[t]he epyllion was an easy and natural development of [the Alexandrian] tradition.”

11 Crump (1931) 22–23.

12 The vexed question as to whether elegiac poetry should be included in the discussion of the epyllic genre will not be addressed further in this chapter, since it will be argued that content-related matters are to a large extent negligible in discussions of ancient literary genres, whereas it is the form that primarily determines the generic belonging.

2. Content: narrative like the Homeric epic, but in opposition to the latter by way of their inclusion of (seemingly) un-Homeric themes and characters, as well as their inclusion of specific elements such as digressions and/or ekphraseis.

3. Literary period: contextualization within the Hellenistic period and, subsequently, within the circle of the Neoterics in Roman poetry.

In what follows, I will critically review these three aspects successively. First, concerning the matter of relative brevity, Crump concedes that the lengths of the texts in question vary “considerably,” but she then instantly dismisses the problem by calculating an average, which is subsequently taken as a norm and no longer questioned.<sup>13</sup> However, it seems worthwhile to take a second look. When we compare the lengths of some of the extant Greek and Latin hexameter texts which are habitually categorized as epyllia,<sup>14</sup> we are confronted with the following picture:

Greek:

[Bion], *Achilles und Deidameia*: 32 lines (fragmentary)

Theocritus, *Idyll* 26: 38 lines

Theocritus, *Idyll* 13: 75 lines

Bion, *Adonis*: 98 lines

Moschus, *Megara*: 124 lines

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Heumann (1904) 7 excludes elegiacs from the discussion entirely (“carmina narrativa parva [...] exceptis elegiacis”). Crump (1931) 271–273 addresses the question only in a brief addendum. In more recent scholarship, cf. Pinotti (1978), Cameron (1995) 437–453, Koster (2002) 42–43, Fantuzzi/Hunter (2004) 193, Wasyl (2011) 21, Klooster (2012).

- 13 Hence, Courtney (1996) defines the epyllion as consisting of up to 600 lines – thus, the average has become the norm. Cf. also Merriam (2001) 159: “the epyllion of the Hellenistic and Classical Roman periods [...] presents a number of very clear distinguishing characteristics. The most obvious of these [...] is the length of the poems which must be considered epyllia – none is longer than approximately 600 lines.” Admittedly, this is true for the limited selection of texts Merriam chose to analyze.
- 14 Cf. e.g. the texts analyzed by Crump (1931) or the list given by Fantuzzi (1998) 31–32. I include in my list some Latin texts for comparative reasons only; they will not be further discussed. I exclude texts of which only fragments survive, when no sound estimation can be given regarding their supposed length (e.g. in the case of Philetas’ *Hermes*); however, I include Eratosthenes’ *Hermes* and Callimachus’ *Heale* (on their estimated lengths, cf. the subsequent note).

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Theocritus, *Idyll* 17: 137 lines  
Moschus, *Europa*: 166 lines  
Theocritus, *Idyll* 24: 172 lines (fragmentary)  
[Theocritus], *Idyll* 25: 281 lines  
Musaeus, *Hero and Leander*: 343 lines  
Callimachus, *Hecale*: 1000–1500 lines (fragmentary)  
Eratosthenes, *Hermes*: 1000–1600 lines (fragmentary)

Latin:

[Virgil], *Moretum*: 122 lines  
Virgil, *Georgics* 4, 281–588 (= so-called “Aristaeus epyllion”): 286 lines  
Petronius, *Satyricon* 119–124: 294 lines  
Catullus, *Carmen* 64: 408 lines  
[Virgil], *Culex*: 414 lines  
[Virgil], *Ciris*: 541 lines

When we compare these works, the heterogeneity of the texts, with regard to their various lengths, is immediately striking. Even if we exclude the only fragmentarily preserved texts of Eratosthenes (*Hermes*) and Callimachus (*Hecale*) for a moment, the longest text that remains (Musaeus’ *Hero and Leander*) is still ten times longer than the shortest (Theocritus’ *Idyll* 26). If we include the *Hermes* and the *Hecale*, which, according to sound estimations, may have exceeded the scope of thousand lines considerably,<sup>15</sup> the proportion of the shortest to the longest text amounts to 1:30. Consequently, the question arises as to whether it is reasonable to group texts of such great proportional heterogeneity into a seemingly coherent genre – a genre which is thereupon set in opposition to so-called large-scale epic poetry such as the *Iliad* (c. 15000 lines) and the *Odyssey* (c. 12000 lines). It is sometimes argued that the upper limit of a single ancient book scroll should be regarded as the demarcation line for the generic difference

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15 The length of Callimachus’ *Hecale* is commonly estimated at between 1000 and 1500 lines; cf. Asper (2004) 37, Fantuzzi/Hunter (2004) 191–193, Hollis (2009) 337–340. The latter conjectures that the four books of Apollonius of Rhodes’ *Argonautica*, ranging in length between 1285 lines (Book 2) and 1781 lines (Book 4), “might provide a parallel for a longer *Hecale*” (Hollis [2009] 340). Eratosthenes’ *Hermes* is calculated at 1600 lines by Parsons (1974); cf. also Cameron (1995) 447, Fantuzzi/Hunter (2004) 191. Furthermore, Hollis (2006) 142 n. 13 speculates that “some of the mythological hexameter poems by Euphorion of Chalcis were on a similarly generous scale, but proof is lacking.”

between “epos” and “epyllion.”<sup>16</sup> However, this criterion is questionable and does not seem convincing in view of the fact that it is, for one thing, unduly formalistic, and, for another, that it would no longer allow for texts such as the *Hecale* or the *Hermes* to be incorporated into the “epyllic” group, since the maximum capacity of an ancient book scroll was 1100 lines.<sup>17</sup> In addition to this, such a purely formalistic definition would, ultimately, also have to permit the incorporation of (non-elegiac) epigrams<sup>18</sup> as well as of some of the narrative parts of the (Homeric and Hellenistic) hymns<sup>19</sup> – a widening of the genre which would be consequent, but this would render it even more haphazard and thus make its usefulness all the more questionable.

Furthermore, it is not only the quantitative diversity within the group of the supposed epyllic genre which strikes us as problematic; rather, a comparison between the lengths of the epyllia and those of epic poems, as well as a comparison of the lengths of various epic poems, does not make it possible to draw a clear demarcation line between “small” and “large” epic. Two examples may suffice: the Hellenistic *Argonautica* by Apollonius of Rhodes (c. 6000 lines) will certainly count as an “epos” when compared to, for example, Theocritus’ “epyllia” (between 38 and 281 lines). However, when compared to Eratosthenes’ *Hermes* or Callimachus’ *Hecale*, the length of which may well have amounted to up to 1500 lines (cf. above), the question arises as to where exactly a boundary line could, and should, be drawn, and one might arguably posit that these two longish epyllia are more akin to the *Argonautica* than to Theocritus’ *Idylls*, and therefore, ultimately, more “epic” than “epyllic.”<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, when juxtaposed with the

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16 Cf. e.g. Crump (1931) 22: “An epyllion seems never to have exceeded the length of a single book.”

17 On the capacities of ancient book scrolls, cf. Birt (1882) 289–307. – Fantuzzi/Hunter (2004) 191 make an attempt at coming to terms with this problem by postulating two strands of epyllic poetry: “ambitious poems of considerable length, such as Callimachus’ *Hecale* and the lost *Hermes* of Eratosthenes” on the one hand, and “shorter narratives of, roughly speaking, between one hundred and three hundred verses” on the other. However, in so doing, they implicitly question the unity of the epyllic genre, which makes their adherence to a dichotomy between large-scale and small-scale epic (“epos” vs. “epyllion”) problematic.

18 Cf. my remarks in Bär (2012) 461–463.

19 Cf. Gutzwiller (1981), Baumbach (2012).

20 Cf. the scholium on Callimachus, *Hymn to Apollo* 2,106 (test. 37 Pfeiffer = 1 Hollis), in which the *Hecale* is labeled a μέγα ποίημα (cf. Gutzwiller [2012] in detail). Cf. also Hunter



*Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, the *Argonautica* is again rendered almost “epyllic” from a relational/quantitative perspective.

The Homeric example leads us away from the Hellenistic period back to the archaic epoch. In this context, it must not be forgotten that archaic epic poetry did not only encompass the two great Homeric poems, but consisted of a whole series of epic poems which are generally subsumed under the heading “Epic Cycle”: a collection of various epics from the Trojan (and Theban) saga, attributable to various authors – of which, however, only few fragments survive,<sup>21</sup> along with Proclus’ prose summaries from the fifth century AD.<sup>22</sup> Despite the relative scarcity of our knowledge, it can be assumed that the cyclic poems differed significantly from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* with respect to their narrative mode,<sup>23</sup> and also that the length of the Homeric epics exceeded that of the cyclic poems considerably.<sup>24</sup> Along similar lines, some of the longer Homeric hymns, as well as the pseudo-Hesiodic *Aspis*, also belong in the orbit of shorter archaic epic.<sup>25</sup> When viewed from this angle, the question arises as to whether it ought to be assumed that a certain programmatic dichotomy between short(er) and long(er) epic may have existed as early as the archaic epoch. In any case, it seems evident that a certain contrast of this kind existed before the Hellenistic era and therefore cannot be attributed to this very period *sensu*

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(2008) 128: “If much about the *Hekale*, particularly its aetiological focus and its interest in ‘ordinary’ lives, recalls other areas of Callimachus’ œuvre, the ‘generic’ resonance of the poem was clearly that of epic.”

- 21 For the testimonies and fragments, cf. Davies (1988) and Bernabé (1996), as well as West’s (2013) commentary. Much has been written and speculated on the Epic Cycle’s scope, content, authorship, and the futile question as to when exactly it may have been lost – despite (or perhaps because of) the meager textual evidence; cf. e.g. Kullmann (1960), Griffin (1977), Davies (1986), Davies (1989), Burgess (2001) and (2005), West (2013).
- 22 It has to be noted that Proclus’ *Chrestomathia*, in which his comprehensive summaries were contained, is lost. All we have is a summary of the summary in the *Bibliotheca* of the Byzantine patriarch Photius, and a few excerpts in some medieval manuscripts of the *Iliad* (cf. Davies [1986] 100–109, West [2013] 4–11).
- 23 Cf. esp. Griffin (1977). Burgess (2005) 350 mentions “an entirely different pace from the Homeric norm,” “styles [that were] necessarily dissimilar,” and “very different narrative strategies.” Cf. now also West’s (2013) 51–54 attempt at reconstructing plot and narrative structure of the cyclic poems.
- 24 Cf. e.g. Burgess (2001) 143–148, Burgess (2005) 345.
- 25 Hollis (2009) 25 regards the *Aspis* and the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* and *Hymn to Aphrodite* as “prototypes of the epyllion in pre-Hellenistic times.”

*stricto*. In other words, the claim that the Alexandrians “invented” the epyllion as a *Gegenentwurf* to archaic/Homeric epic poetry is unsustainable. This last point ties in nicely with an astute observation made by Alan Cameron that several Hellenistic poets who are today commonly looked upon as authors of epyllia (e.g. Nicaenetus of Samos, Euphorion) were regularly given the apostrophe ἐποποιός by later ancient critics (e.g., prominently, by Athenaeus). In other words, any “hexameter-poet” could be called ἐποποιός; thus, post-Hellenistic literary criticism did, by all appearances, not conceive “the epyllion” as an autonomous genre.<sup>26</sup>

The second point of Crump’s definition concerns matters of content. As stated above, categories such as the subversion/parody of the (male) heroic ideal, emphasis on femininity and female heroines, a focus on non-canonical versions of myths and stories, or a tonality of subjectivity, emotionality or domesticity, are claimed to be characteristic of this genre.<sup>27</sup> Sometimes – as in Crump’s work – these aspects are all blended, whereas in some other cases, scholars focus on one specific, content-related aspect, which is thereupon regarded as the core feature of the epyllic genre.<sup>28</sup> There is no room here to review in detail all the content-related criteria that have ever been suggested to be constitutive of the epyllic genre. However, the general question, as Cameron effectively puts it, is whether “there exist sufficient short poems united by sufficient shared features to justify the assumption of

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26 Cameron (1995) 268–269. Nevertheless, Cameron does not suggest dismissing the concept of the epyllion entirely; instead, he attributes it to “post-Callimachean development” (452).

27 Apart from Crump (1931) 22–23, cf. also Fantuzzi (1998) 32 and Merriam (2001) 159–161 for a collection of these and similar categories.

28 For example, Merriam (2001) 161 defines “feminine presence,” “female action and control” and a “more feminine perspective” as constitutive of the epyllic genre. To achieve this end, she restricts the selection of her texts to those which fit her criteria. According to Koster (2002), the presence of a love story (ἐρωτικὸν πάθημα) is a *condicio sine qua non* for an epyllion. Thus, he suggests a terminological differentiation between “Epyllion” (for short hexameter texts with a love story) and “Kleinepos” or “Kleinstepos” (for short hexameter texts without a love story). Gutzwiller (1981) 6 considers an “ironic approach to the Homeric world of heroes and gods” to be a key feature of epyllia, which allows her to incorporate narrative Hellenistic hymns in her definition of the genre. Nonetheless, her textual selection is arbitrary, too (for a justified criticism of Gutzwiller’s approach, cf. Cameron [1995] 447–448). For a critical assessment of such content-related criteria in general, cf. also Allen (1940) 12–18.

a fully fledged subgenre, whether ancient or modern.”<sup>29</sup> In fact, not a single poem of those we generally consider to be epyllia will meet all of Crump’s criteria,<sup>30</sup> nor will any single of these criteria be applicable to all of these poems. Some scholars address this problem by resorting to a differentiation between “hard” and “soft” criteria:<sup>31</sup> for example, Kathryn Gutzwiller concedes that

“[t]hese features cannot [...] be considered essential characteristics by which we may define the genre. At best we can say that they are features which *tend* to occur in epyllia, perhaps because they proved effective in short poems of this type” (emphasis added).<sup>32</sup>

It is, in fact, Gutzwiller’s last statement which is crucial here: it is not any random kind of “epyllic genre” which defines the content or “dictates the rules,” but the short form *per se* which entails certain modes of narration and/or types of content. We may – or may not – go so far as to agree with Cameron that “anyone wishing to write a short poem would pick a less well-known story, or a less familiar adventure of a well-known hero,”<sup>33</sup> and we may equally put into perspective Walter Allen’s apodictic verdict that “no two of these poems have any one characteristic in common unless it be some characteristic which is so general that it is shared by a large proportion of ancient poetry.”<sup>34</sup> However, it does seem conclusive that specific modes of narration, such as the compression or acceleration of the narrative pace, or the selection of a specifically focused and perhaps more remote part of a

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29 Cameron (1995) 447; already Allen (1958) 517: “Certainly, if seven or eight Classical poems are supposed to belong to a distinctive minor genre, it is not too much to ask that they should have some recognizable qualities in common.”

30 Ironically, Baumbach (2012) 144–147 demonstrates that most of Crump’s criteria are in fact applicable in one case – but to a pre-Hellenistic text: the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite* (cf. also section III below).

31 The idea of a genre that can be defined by a number of partially optional and therefore “soft” criteria ultimately stems from Ludwig Wittgenstein’s concept of “family resemblance” (“Familienähnlichkeit”) in his *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, §§ 65–67 (edition: Schulte et al. [2001] 786–788). For a justified criticism of this concept, cf. e.g. Holenstein (1985) 169–210, Geldsetzer (1999). – I owe this point to Kenneth Mauerhofer.

32 Gutzwiller (1981) 3.

33 Cameron (1995) 450.

34 Allen (1940) 18.

longer storyline, are almost inevitably consequences which an author will encounter when composing a “short poem.”

Furthermore, an even more general question of principle has to be addressed – namely, whether or not it is appropriate to postulate content-related criteria for the definition of an ancient literary genre at all. It has to be remembered that in antiquity it was the form, not the content, which primarily determined the generic taxonomy of a text.<sup>35</sup> It therefore seems problematic to apply content-related criteria to the definition of the ancient epyllion. However, even if we acknowledge their validity to a certain extent, difficulties arise: it might, for example, justifiably be asked whether the *Odyssey*, with its strong focus on female as well as non-heroic, “domestic” characters (Circe, Calypso, Penelope; Eumaeus), can still count as an “epos” proper under these circumstances – as compared to the decidedly “male,” “heroic” *Iliad*.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, anti-heroic tendencies are clearly present in Apollonius of Rhodes’ *Argonautica*: for one thing, the motivation for the voyage as such – that is, the quest for the Golden Fleece – is essentially unheroic; the entire enterprise is, as Marco Fantuzzi and Richard Hunter have bluntly put it, “a story which Homer has ‘avoided’.”<sup>37</sup> For another, Jason,

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35 Cf. e.g. Aristot. *poet.* 1447b,13–16: οἱ ἄνθρωποι γε συνάπτοντες τῷ μέτρῳ τὸ ποιεῖν ἐλεγειοποιούς, τοὺς δὲ ἐποποιούς ὀνομάζουσιν, οὐχ ὡς κατὰ τὴν μίμησιν ποιητὰς ἀλλὰ κοινῇ κατὰ τὸ μέτρον προσαγορεύοντες. “By linking the making of poetry with metre, people call some [poets] ‘makers of elegies’, some ‘makers of epic’, addressing them as ‘poets’ not according to their [kind of] imitation, but, generally, according to the metre [they use].” Cf. also *Anthologia Palatina* 9,369: πάγκαλον ἐστ’ ἐπίγραμμα τὸ δίστιχον· ἦν δὲ παρέλθῃς / τοὺς τρεῖς, ῥαψωδεὶς κοῦκ ἐπίγραμμα λέγεις. “The distich is a very nice epigram; but if you go beyond the number of three, you’re a rhapsodist and no longer write an epigram.”

36 Cf. Vessey (1970) 39.

37 Fantuzzi/Hunter (2004) 90. – Questions concerning the standing of Apollonius’ epic in the context of the Alexandrians have been discussed for decades, if not centuries. Ziegler (1966) postulated the existence of an entire school around Apollonius writing large-scale (historical) epic. Another moot point is the (alleged) controversy between Callimachus and Apollonius over (alleged) differences in their poetical ideals; cf. e.g. Rostropowicz (1979), Rengakos (1992) 55–67, Cameron (1995) 263–267, Lefkowitz (2008) 55–69; furthermore, see also Allen (1940) 6–12 *sub specie epyllii*. I do not wish to enter this debate here; however, I am inclined to agree with Rengakos (1992) 65, who states that „[d]ie Zeugnisse zum Streit sind [...] alles andere als auf echtem Wissen beruhende, womöglich sogar noch zu Lebzeiten des Apollonios und des Kallimachos entstandene Nachrichten; sie stellen nur das Echo der spätalexandrinischen

the leader of the expedition, is prominently characterized by his ἀμηχανίη (“helplessness; lack of leadership”) and thus staged as a virtual anti-hero, who is set in stark contrast to the heroic ideal of archaic epic poetry.<sup>38</sup> Another case in point may be Theocritus: whereas *Idyll* 24 can readily be understood as an epyllion, since the toddler’s snake adventure is clearly set in an un-heroic, domestic and thus partly ironic context, *Idyll* 25 does not seem to meet these criteria, since it evidently opposes the un-heroic and ironic tendencies of *Idyll* 24 by attempting to “rehabilitate” Heracles as a “hero proper” and thus to re-inscribe him in an epic setting.<sup>39</sup> Thomas Schmitz summarizes this problem as follows:

“Should we call [*Idyll* 25] an epyllion [...]? [...] Some of the characteristics that seem to be present in a majority of epyllia are certainly absent from our poem. If we compare it to the two other narratives about Herakles in the Theocritean corpus, we see that it has no erotic sub-plot [...], no focus on the domestic, ‘private’ side of its protagonists [...], that it does not subvert or call into question the values of epic. The labor Herakles is undertaking in this poem may be less than heroic, yet he remains a strong, towering figure [...], and the poem ends on a triumphant note with his victory over the formidable lion.”<sup>40</sup>

Crump’s third point, which has been regarded as an almost undisputable fact in scholarship ever since she made it, is the idea of the epyllion as a programmatic invention of the Hellenistic era (and, subsequently, as an integral part of Roman Neoteric poetry, too). As was demonstrated above,

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Interpretation der Werke dieser beiden Dichter dar und haben nicht mehr und nicht weniger Wert als die verschiedenen Erklärungen moderner klassischer Philologen.“

38 Jason is qualified as ἀμήχανος several times in the *Argonautica* (1,460; 1,1286; 2,410; 2,885; 3,423; 3,432; in addition to this, the root ἀμηχαν- is to be found 26 times). On Jason’s ἀμηχανία and his characterization as an anti-hero, cf. e.g. Hadas (1936), Vian (1963) 26–27, Lawall (1966), Klein (1983), Hunter (1988), Jackson (1992).

39 Cf. also Vessey (1970) 41–42. – Bernd Effe, in a paper delivered at the University of Zurich (18 April 2012), spoke of an opposition between “irony” (*Idyll* 24) and “affirmation” (*Idyll* 25). – The relationship between these two poems is characterized by a number of “thorny philological problems” (Schmitz [2012] 259) relating to questions of authorship and authenticity (of *Idyll* 25), completeness (of both), and the intertextual relationship between the two poems. Aside from Schmitz’s excellent treatment, cf. also e.g. Stern (1974), Henrichs (1977), Hunter (1998), Fantuzzi/Hunter (2004) 201–215.

40 Schmitz (2012) 279–280.

one problematic aspect in this context is that the Epic Cycle most probably consisted of comparably small(er)-scale poems, so much so that a certain dichotomy between short(er) and long(er) epic can arguably be traced back to as early as the archaic epoch. As a result of this, the role of the Hellenistic period in the emergence of short epic poetry is put into perspective. Connected to this is the question of whether it seems appropriate to equate the Alexandrian predilection for short(er) and more refined forms – that is, what is generally subsumed under the Callimachean label *λεπτότης* – with the idea of the promotion of a programmatically short, “epyllic” type of epic poetry. Concisely, there is no evidence which would allow us to postulate the existence of a specifically Hellenistic “epyllion theory” *sensu strictu*.<sup>41</sup> It may, of course, be argued that the promotion of short(er) epic poems may have become increasingly popular in that era; however, this would not entail the postulation of a new genre, but, rather, it would help to explain the varying degrees of smallness, ranging from Apollonius’ *Argonautica* and Callimachus’ *Hecale* to Moschus’ *Europa*.<sup>42</sup>

## II

It was argued in the preceding section that the concept of the “epyllion” as a genuine literary genre in Greek and Latin literature is untenable for various reasons. Therefore, it can justifiably be asked when and why this term and its modern usage became established in Classics and literary history. As to the question of when, it can be unequivocally stated that the word *ἐπύλλιον* as such is attested in ancient Greek a few times, but never in the technical sense in which it is used nowadays.<sup>43</sup> For the past thirty years, scholarly *communis opinio* has been that its use as a literary term was first established by

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41 This is in line with the fact that ancient literary criticism tended to label poets of texts which we habitually label “epyllia” as *ἐποποιοί* (cf. above).

42 Cf. Koster (1970) 124–144.

43 In Aristophanes’ comedies, the diminutive *ἐπύλλιον* is used three times in a derogatory sense to denote Euripides’ “versicles” (*Acharnians* 398; *Peace* 531; *Frogs* 942). Athenaeus once uses it with reference to the pseudo-Homeric poem *Epikichlides* (*Deipnosophistae* 639a). The latter is the only ancient passage in which the usage of the word comes close to our modern meaning; however, given its uniqueness, it is rather unlikely that it might have been a literary *terminus technicus* as early as antiquity, and we may safely assume that Athenaeus’ usage is *ad hoc*. For a few more isolated records of the word in ancient Greek, cf. Wolff (1988) 299–300 (incl. discussion).

the philologist Friedrich August Wolf (1759–1824), in an edition of the pseudo-Hesiodic *Aspis*, which was published posthumously by Wolf's pupil Karl Ferdinand Ranke (1802–1876). In a short, but influential, article, Glenn W. Most claimed that Wolf must have coined the term as a derogatory *ad hoc* invention at some point between 1817 – when, according to Ranke, Wolf had begun working on his edition of the *Aspis* – and his death in 1824.<sup>44</sup> However, Most was unable to supply conclusive evidence for his hypothesis, since Wolf's usage of the term “epyllion” was attested to only second-hand (that is, via Ranke). It is only recently that Stefan Tilg has provided new evidence with far-reaching implications for the history of the rise of this scholarly term: for one thing, he proved Most's conjecture partly right by providing unambiguous evidence of Wolf's usage of the term in his edition of the *Aspis*.<sup>45</sup> For another, however, he was able to retrieve no fewer than thirty-four additional, earlier, attestations of the term “epyllion/-um” used in a technical/literary sense by Classicists in scholarly writing between 1797 and 1855. Thus, Tilg clearly verified that Wolf was not the *πρῶτος εὐρετής* of the term.<sup>46</sup> The term's first attestation is now to be found in an edition of the Homeric hymns by Karl David Ilgen (1763–1834), with reference to the *Hymn to Hermes*. While Tilg is doubtful as to whether or not Ilgen should be regarded as the inventor of the term,<sup>47</sup> he convincingly demonstrates that neither Ilgen nor Wolf used it in a derogatory sense; rather, Tilg suggests that it was “applicable to a broad range of narrative poems without necessarily implying a value judgment.”<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, the identification of yet another use of “epyllion” by Wolf, in a lecture at the University of Berlin, entitled “Theocriti idyllia et epyllia” (1821), not only testifies to Wolf's value-neutral usage of the term, but also suggests that *ἐπύλλιον* may in fact have emerged as a coinage analogous to *εἰδύλλιον*.<sup>49</sup> The latter is

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44 Cf. Most (1982) 156: „Es liegt nahe, Wolf als den *πρῶτος εὐρετής* des Wortes ‚epyllion‘ als eines terminus technicus zu betrachten und die Motivierung für die Erfindung in einer augenblicklichen Gereiztheit zu finden.“ In a footnote (n. 13), Most adds: „Wolf benutzt gern griechische Ausdrücke, ohne sie zu erklären.“ – On the history of the term, cf. also Reilly (1953/54) and Wolff (1988).

45 Cf. Tilg (2012) 41–42.

46 Cf. Tilg's commented list (2012) 47–54.

47 Tilg (2012) 35.

48 Tilg (2012) 41–42.

49 Cf. Tilg (2012) 39–41; also von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1924) 117 n. 2, Trimble (2012) 64.

known as an ancient literary term in the scholia on Theocritus,<sup>50</sup> but was, as Gutzwiller states, “clearly not a generic term in antiquity, since it did not refer to specific formal characteristics.”<sup>51</sup> Under these circumstances, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that an established “blurry” term such as “eidyllion” may have facilitated the analogous creation of the (originally) equally unspecific “epyllion”; the conspicuously casual way of introducing the latter into writing further suggests that it may have been in oral use among scholars for a while before it was first employed in written scholarship.

In an equally recent study, Gail Trimble was able to prove that the growing restriction of the application of the term “epyllion” to the Hellenistic period (and, hence, to Roman Neoteric poetry) was largely a matter confined to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that is, after Ilgen, Wolf and others had used it more widely only some decades ago.<sup>52</sup> It was, however, not scholarship on Hellenistic poetry which promoted this constriction, but, rather, scholarship on Catullus’ *Carmen* 64. In short, a constricted concept of epyllion was developed in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in scholarly discussions of Catullus’ *Carmen* 64; this narrowed concept was then *ex posteriori* applied to Hellenistic poets, based on the idea that the Neoterics had derived their poetic ideas and ideals in a direct way from the Alexandrians.<sup>53</sup> In the course of this process, archaic epic poetry was gradually excluded from the epyllic “Olympus,” culminating in Heumann’s doctoral thesis on *De epyllio Alexandrino* (1904; cf. above, section I) – so much so that, subsequently, pre-Hellenistic short epic poems were, at the most, considered to be predecessors or prototypes of what was thought to be a genuinely Hellenistic innovation.<sup>54</sup>

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50 On εἰδύλλιον as an ancient literary *terminus technicus* applied to Theocritus’ poems, cf. e.g. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1924) 117–119, Bickel (1941), Zucker (1941), Gutzwiller (1996) 129–133, Fantuzzi (1997). On the diminutives on -ύλλιον, cf. Leumann (1953) 214–216 (but he wrongly asserts that ἐπύλλιον was an Alexandrian term for „Klein-Epos“, [1953] 214–215 n. 4).

51 Gutzwiller (1996) 129.

52 Trimble (2012).

53 Cf. Trimble’s (2012) 78–79 conclusion: “It may not in fact be completely meaningless to say, as some scholars I have mentioned have come close to doing, that ‘epyllion’ means ‘Catullus 64.’”

54 Their destiny is in some way similar to that of those philosophers who remained uninfluenced by Socrates and thus were subsequently labeled “Pre-Socratics” and consequently “downgraded” to “predecessors” of Socratic philosophy.



Finally, attention must also be drawn to a study by Virgilio Masciadri, the results of which are remarkably congruent with Tilg's findings.<sup>55</sup> On the basis of a meticulous analysis of textual editions, translations, commentaries and other scholarly works ranging from c.1500 to c.1800 AD (that is, approximately, from the beginnings of printing to the French Revolution), Masciadri convincingly argues that the ancient texts that are, by default, labeled "epyllia" today and are thus considered to constitute a reasonably coherent genre, were not so regarded until the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, before 1750, "our" epyllia were hardly ever associated with each other in editions, collections, etc., whereas in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a paradigmatic change occurred: suddenly, they started to be printed, edited and translated together and were, by all appearances, considered a newly arisen, coherent genre from that point onward. In Masciadri's words:

"The texts which today we designate as epyllia were not regarded as belonging to one and the same genre between the humanist period and the mid-eighteenth century. [...] In the second half of the eighteenth century, this picture changed. From that time onward, we can see how these texts were increasingly associated with one another [...]."<sup>56</sup>

To summarize, when one reviews the current state of research, it seems to be incontrovertible that the coinage and rise of the term "epyllion," as well as the emergence of a generic consciousness for comparatively short narrative texts written in hexameters, was a matter of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, whereas the restriction of the term's application to the Hellenistic period occurred subsequently, that is, in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>57</sup>

What remains a challenge, however, is the question of why: what might be the reasons for this paradigmatic change, which apparently started around 1750? A few provisional thoughts and considerations will have to suffice in this context. Masciadri conjectures that the emerging popularity of small-

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55 Masciadri (2012).

56 Masciadri (2012) 23.

57 Subsequently, the term "epyllion" was also exported into modern philologies. In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, narrative poems such as William Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* (first published in 1593) or Christopher Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* (first published in 1598) began to be labeled as such; thereupon, the literary history term "Elizabethan epyllion" was introduced; cf. e.g. Jahn (1972), Weaver (2012).

scale epic poems and, especially, the perception of their generic coherence may be due to aesthetic changes in European national literatures:

“there was [...] a transference of method from contemporary literary discussions. This process is evident when Bodmer applies a specific concept of ‘fragment’ to the short work of Musaios – a concept which was to have a great future – and when Gurlitt uses Ossian in order to better interpret the character of Catullus’ Peleus poem. This development, which with Gurlitt even led to the use of the term ‘short epopee,’ which in turn anticipated the later meaning of ‘epyllion,’ did not emerge from within the study of Classics, but rather from a projection of a ‘modern’ conception of literature onto classical texts. It is striking that in the same period, a new kind of short epic in hexameters developed in German-language literature which showed a close relation to the tradition of idyll poetry, but which forewent the establishment of a specific generic term for these texts. Both tendencies moved surprisingly parallel to the movement which had already given rise to the Greek epyllion.”<sup>58</sup>

These observations deserve further consideration, especially in light of the first attestation of the word “epyllion” in literary criticism in 1797 (cf. above), because this date conspicuously coincides with the beginning of Romanticism. As is known, Romanticism was a literary period which not only favored forms of short(er) poetry, but also developed and celebrated a specific aesthetic of the fragmentary and the unfinished. The latter was most famously evoked and represented by Karl Wilhelm Friedrich von Schlegel’s (1772–1829) so-called “Athenaeum Fragment 116” on “Universalpoesie” (published in 1798), with which he attempted to distance himself from the Enlightenment idea of well-defined literary genres with clear boundaries.<sup>59</sup> Thus, one might hypothesize that the increasing interest in ancient small-scale epic could be contextualized in the orbit of these aesthetics: perhaps, the small form and the “restricted” content of poems such as Triphiodorus’ *Capture of Troy*, Moschus’ *Europa*, or Museaus’ *Hero and Leander* came to be regarded as “fragmentary” in one way or another (e.g. in opposition to more comprehensive large-scale epic like the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*); perhaps, the

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58 Masciadri (2012) 23–24.

59 Cf. e.g. Janowitz (1998), Pikulik (2000) 123–138.

juxtaposition of these diverse small-scale epics better embraced the idea of an anti-Hegelian ideal of blurred boundaries between genres.<sup>60</sup>

### III

In an essay on the applicability of theoretical approaches to discussions of genres, Hayden White writes: “I have never been presented with a genre (of literature or anything else) that I didn’t feel expected to love or hate or at least feel *ambivalent* about.”<sup>61</sup> It is perhaps exactly this notion of ambivalence which makes any discussion of genre so difficult, since both the construction and the postulation, as well as the deconstruction and challenge, of any literary genre will inevitably leave blank spaces, open new gaps, and raise further-reaching questions. This is starkly virulent in the discussion of the “existence,” or “non-existence,” of the ancient epyllion. Plainly, it could be asked what the benefit of all the above-noted insights into the invention and deconstruction of “the epyllion” is – or can be. Therefore, in what follows, I will offer some considerations of a more general nature.

First, it has to be remembered that our knowledge of antiquity is anything but comprehensive. On the contrary, if there is one constant factor, it is perhaps precisely the fact that our knowledge is highly fragmentary, defective, and constructed. For one thing, we simply lack fundamental knowledge and insights which we do not – and most probably never will – have at our disposal. One question among many is whether or not ancient literary theory ever knew anything similar to what we think of as “the epyllion.” For another, the entire discussion once more reveals the constructedness of “our” antiquity as such – in other words: when we think, speak, and write about antiquity, we equally think, speak, and write about ourselves. It has been typical of Classical Philology in the past two centuries to (re-)construct an antiquity which is defined by a striving for order and symmetry, consisting of clearly identifiable periods, authors, texts, and genres. In such a context, there is only limited room for fragments, gaps, and a lack of sound knowledge. One conspicuous consequence of this

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60 Compare also the qualification of Ernst Schulze’s (1789–1817) Romantic verse poem „Die Bezauberte Rose“ (published in 1816) as an “epyllion” by a contemporary critic; cf. Tilg (2012) 38–41.

61 White (2003) 598 (author’s emphasis).

attitude is, for example, the typically philological quest for authorship, that is, the attempt to ascribe “unidentified” or “anonymous” texts to a clearly identifiable author and an equally clear epoch. As Richard Hunter effectively phrases it,

“[t]he authorless text [...] has [...] received a cold reception from classicists; for reasons which lie deep in the heart of the history of the subject, classicists have [...] never been very comfortable with the anonymous, and this anxiety may [...] surface in ‘aesthetic condemnation.’”<sup>62</sup>

Along similar lines, the attempt to categorize small-scale epic poetry under the heading “epyllion” and, at the same time, to anchor its origin in a clearly identifiable period, can be perceived as lying “deep in the heart of the history of the subject” too. Hence, history of scholarship on this topic is not an end in itself, but a means of reflecting on the self-concept and aims of classical literary studies, as well as on its problems and limits.

Furthermore, in close connection with the aforementioned aspect, the example of the epyllion can make us aware of the problems which are likely to arise when a genre is defined by too many, and too restricted, criteria. On the one hand, a too close-knit genre definition such as that by Crump runs the risk of haphazardly associating texts which do not necessarily engage with one another intertextually, except for the superficial circumstance that they both happen to be comparatively short and written in hexameters. On the other hand, the opposite side of the coin is that there is an equal risk of certain other texts being excluded from consideration and discussion because they seem not to belong to the genre. This is prominently the case for all pre-Hellenistic short epic poems, which were essentially “downgraded” to predecessors or prototypes of the Hellenistic epyllion,<sup>63</sup> and for later small-scale epic poems such as Triphiodorus’ *Capture of Troy* or Colluthus’ *Kidnapping of Helen*, which were also downgraded because of their seemingly “un-epyllic” content.<sup>64</sup> However, with regard to the Homeric *Hymn to Aphrodite*, Manuel Baumbach was able to demonstrate that most of

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62 Hunter (2002) 91.

63 Cf. n. 25 in section I.

64 Cf. e.g. Fantuzzi (1998) 32, who argues that these two poems should not be regarded as epyllia since they were „nicht konform [...] vom kyklischen Thema und der mangelnden Einheit der Handlung her“. In contrast, Magnelli (2008) interprets Colluthus’ *Kidnapping of Helen* as a “Homeric” epyllion.

Crump's epyllic criteria are in fact applicable to this text;<sup>65</sup> in so doing, he not only puts the notion of the epyllion as a Hellenistic invention into perspective, but also offers a critical re-thinking and re-evaluation of Crump's criteria from a completely new viewpoint. In a similar vein, Vincent Tomasso analyzes Triphiodorus' short epic poem with regard to its intertextual engagement with both archaic and contemporary large-scale epic (Homer's *Iliad* and Quintus of Smyrna's *Posthomerica*, respectively);<sup>66</sup> thus, he clearly demonstrates that Triphiodorus' brevity is indeed set in programmatic opposition to grand epic.<sup>67</sup> Whether we call the *Capture of Troy* an epyllion because of this or not is, after all, irrelevant; what is important, however, is the fact that it is not a set of generic "rules" that counts, but rather the intertextual engagement of a text with other texts, and the conclusions which can be drawn from an analysis of this engagement.<sup>68</sup>

Finally, if discussing the "(non-)existence" of the ancient epyllion can help us reconsider the constructedness of "our" antiquity, the same is, to a greater extent, the case for an ubiquitous but nonetheless questionable theoretical concept such as "genre."<sup>69</sup> As mentioned before, most contemporary scholars usually acknowledge the fact that the word ἐπύλλιον is a modern invention and that it was not used in antiquity; at the same time, however, they state that they nevertheless believe in the existence of the genre as such and therefore wish to adhere to the term.<sup>70</sup> In opposition to this, Allen, from his insights into the term's modern origins, jumped to the conclusion that consequently no such genre may have existed in antiquity at all.<sup>71</sup> Both views are, of course, equally undifferentiated. Technically speaking, there is no factual conclusion to be drawn from the term's modern origin; with regard to the question as to whether or not there was any

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65 Baumbach (2012) 144–147.

66 Tomasso (2012).

67 Cf. the programmatic declaration of a "swift song" in the proem of *Capture of Troy* 5: ταχέϊη [...] ᾠοδῆϊ.

68 Cf. also Vessey's (1970) 43 refreshingly candid statement: "Poets in general do not write according to abstract rules, and it is not for the philologist to assume the role of a literary Procrustes."

69 It is impossible to give an exhaustive list of references relevant to the field of genre theory; I only mention the following studies as a selection: Croce (1928), Behrens (1940), Rossi (1971), Berger (1974), Fechner (1974), Kaiser (1974), Raible (1980), Nauta (1990), Farrell (2003), White (2003), Zymner (2003).

70 Cf. section I at the beginning.

71 Allen (1940) 5–6.

generic awareness of something like an “epyllion” in antiquity, the insight into the term’s belatedness is of no use. It can, however, be valuable on a meta-level, namely, as a case study for the constructedness of genres and the changeability of generic awareness. Generally speaking, it is crucial to be aware of the fact that a genre *qua* genre is neither a given entity nor the product of a development, but a construct. Rüdiger Zymner, for example, goes so far as to argue that “the question as to whether genres exist is an essentialist misunderstanding.”<sup>72</sup> In an even more extreme manner, Gerhard Kaiser states that “there are no genres at all; genres are but fake concepts.”<sup>73</sup> We may or may not agree with the latter’s uncompromising point of view. However, Zymner is certainly right when claiming that “in no case there is *the*, but always only *a* history of a genre.”<sup>74</sup> Looking at it from this perspective, the invention of the epyllic genre in the 18<sup>th</sup> century can be conceived as but one piece within a potentially infinite net of genre histories.

Indeed, there is some tentative evidence for one such piece of genre history occurring before 1750, namely, in late antiquity. It was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter (section I) that Nonnus of Panopolis’ epic poem *Dionysiaca* is sometimes analyzed as a series of little, self-contained, episodic narratives (which may, or may not, be labeled “epyllia”). Shortly after Nonnus’ climax as a poet (c.500 AD), a certain popularization of small-scale epic poetry seems to have arisen. We can find, for example, Colluthus, who, like Triphiodorus, employs the form of small-scale epic for the reworking of a “cyclic” theme in his *Kidnapping of Helen*. Musaeus, in his epic romance *Hero and Leander*, utilizes the hexameter form in combination with decidedly novelistic elements, so much so that he creates “a cut set between both epic and novel,”<sup>75</sup> which can be regarded as being “at the crossroads between ancient and Middle Greek poetry, forming the germ of the

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72 Zymner (2003) 59: „Demnach kann man auch sagen, daß *die Frage, ob Gattungen existieren, ein essentialistisches Mißverständnis ist*. Sinnvoll ist es demgegenüber, zu fragen, unter welchen Bedingungen man von Gattungen spricht, welches die kulturell eingeübten und tradierten Regeln der Sprachspiele sind, in denen man über Gattungen spricht“ (emphasis added).

73 Kaiser (1974) 32: „Es gibt gar keine Gattungen; Gattungen sind lediglich Scheinbegriffe.“

74 Zymner (2003) 198: „In keinem Fall gibt es *die* Geschichte einer Gattung, sondern immer bloß *eine* Geschichte einer Gattung [...]“ (author’s emphasis).

75 Dümmler (2012) 444.

Byzantine novel.”<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, Christodorus of Coptos uses the “epyllion” form for his description of the statues in the so-called “Zeuxippus,” the bath-gymnasium at Constantinople, and, in doing so, shrewdly combines an ekphrastic text with a literary form that is otherwise inherently narrative.<sup>77</sup> Finally, one might also point to Marianus of Eleutheropolis’ paraphrases of Callimachus’ works, amongst which a prose paraphrasis of the *Hevale* also seems to have featured.<sup>78</sup> In sum, it might therefore be argued that the short hexameter form was viewed and used as a means of poetic experimentation around 500 AD; apparently, it was considered suitable for the combination of various literary forms, genres, and contents.<sup>79</sup> In turn, it may be concluded that the paradigmatic change that occurred around 1750 might perhaps just have been one among several in a long row of genre history.

To finally return to the taxonomic discourse, the question ultimately arises as to whether – and, if so, to how far an extent – the word “epyllion” should be used as a generic term henceforth. As was argued here, it would be inappropriate to use a generic term and the criteria attached to it without reflection on the term’s provenance and the validity of the criteria. On the other hand, it would mean throwing the baby out with the bathwater if one were to entirely disavow the term’s authority on the sole basis of its historical belatedness. What seems worth challenging, however, is the traditionally harsh opposition between large-scale and small-scale epic poetry, since a comparison between the lengths of the existing Greek hexameter texts does not point to a clear demarcation line between “small” and “large,” but, rather, to a more gradual continuum ranging from “tiny” to “huge.”<sup>80</sup> As demonstrated, there is sufficient evidence to argue for a more

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76 Bernhardt (1867) 405: „Dieses Gedicht steht gleichsam an dem Scheidewege zwischen der alt- und mittelgriechischen Poesie [...]; in ihm ruht der Keim des Byzantinischen Romans.“

77 Cf. Bär (2012). Cf. also Kaldellis (2007), who emphasizes the performative and encomiastic aspects of the text.

78 Callimachus, test. 24 Pfeiffer = 12 Hollis; cf. Hollis (2006) 154 and (2009) 37,340.

79 Cf. Hollis (2006) 154–156, Bär (2012) 469–471.

80 As it was, for example, postulated by Koster (1970) 124 as an „Antithese von Groß- und Kleindichtung“: „Platon, Aristoteles, Isokrates und Theophrast waren die Hauptzeugen für die Vorstellungen, die man sich vom Inhalt epischer Dichtung machte. Die hellenistische Reaktion in Theokrit und Kallimachos hat diese Vorstellung durch die Antithese in ein scharfes Licht gerückt. Dabei stellte sich heraus, daß der Gegensatz in großer und kleiner, langer und kurzer Dichtung lag.“

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nuanced taxonomy in many respects – to the benefit of more thorough investigations into the intertextual engagement between texts, which the traditional dualistic scheme would not have in one genre. The term “epyllion” may – or may not – retain its position within a framework of scholarly discussion of hexameter poetry that disposes of a strict duality between “long” and “short” epic. Alternatively, it might as well die and be resurrected again in a few hundred years’ time.<sup>81</sup>

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