

## The Wandering Eye: Framing the Female Gaze in Hellenistic Poetry

This paper considers the ways in which male-authored Alexandrian poetry represents a critical female gaze. The gendered dichotomy of the ancient Greek thought world typically associates women either with interior, private spaces, or with an uncivilized, undefined wilderness. In Alexandrian poetry, by contrast, female characters are often situated in urban settings that are public, commercialized, and essentially male territory. Although their appearance in these settings is (at least superficially) constructed as normative, female aesthetic judgments are nevertheless coded as transgressive. Vivid descriptions of objects, especially those that have been artfully crafted in a realistic manner, are of course regularly featured in both male- and female-authored epigrams. Interest in *enargeia* existed long before the third century BC, but as Graham Zanker notes: “in Hellenistic literature and theory the enthusiasm for qualities like *enargeia* intensifies to an unprecedented degree.” Female speakers in the extant poetry of Erinna, Anyte, and especially Nossis of Locri often draw the attention of the audience to precise details. As Kathryn Gutzwiller (1998: 84) explains, Nossis invites us into her world, and her self-projection as an epigrammatist gives us an understanding not only of the women whose portraits are described, but also of the poet herself. However, this public self-identification of female poet is in itself a kind of transgression, as Laurel Bowman (2004) has also shown. From a dominant or normative cultural perspective, then, the female poet and her gaze assume an appropriative and transgressive character that is very much at odds with the inviting, familial, friendly, playful tone and subject matter of her work. The woman who writes poetry intrudes, in other words, into a masculinist scopic regime.

I examine five epigrams by Nossis (AP 6.353, 6.354, 9.604, 9.605, and 9.332) in order to contextualize exemplary passages from Theocritus (*Id.* 2.75-80), Herodas (6.65-73), Callimachus (*Hecale* 42-46 Hollis), and Apollonius of Rhodes (*Argon.* 1.1228-39), all of which represent to varying degrees the female gaze as dysfunctional in a number of contexts, from the artistic and erotic to the sacred and commercial. Probably the best (and certainly best known) examples of women viewing with a critical eye are Theocritus' fifteenth *Idyll* and Herodas' fourth *Mime*. *Idyll* 15 follows the movement of two wives, Gorgo and Praxinoa, from Praxinoa's home through a crowded Alexandrian street to the palace where they admire an Adonis exhibition; *Mime* 4 likewise represents two wives, Phile and Kynno, as they wander through a temple of Asclepius and comment on the statues displayed within. As Marilyn Skinner persuasively argues, these women "appropriate conventional 'viewing' situations and dialogue from mime and drama for the purpose of creating a female visual perspective" (2001: 202). I show that their agency is compromised, however, not only by the crowds who impede their progress but also by their own slaves who either do not hear or at least do not follow orders swiftly enough to satisfy them. Then, too, their aesthetic judgments are framed by expressions of dissatisfaction and by affronts (whether real or only imagined) to their authority. Other erotic visions, some frustrated, others tragic or disruptive, are represented in epic (broadly defined) drawing our attention, once again, to the dangers of a female "wandering eye," illustrated by the love-at-first-sight recollections of Callimachus' eponymous heroine, the widow Hecale, who recounts for her guest Theseus her first glimpse of her husband, and Theocritus' witch Simaetha's description of her lover, Delphis, whom she first glimpsed on the road. These hazardous female journeys though

public space, these miniature odysseys, are far removed from the meditative reflections of Nossis' Locrian women.

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