

## Becoming Bucolic in *Idylls* 1 and 7

Theocritus' bucolic world is remarkable for its coherence and internal consistency (Fantuzzi and Hunter, 141-166; Segal, 176-177). This uniformity, however, has also been problematic in that such consistent repetition gives the impression of deliberate generic formation and perhaps even encouraged generic codification by ancient critics (Fantuzzi, 241). The oxymoronic nature of a "generic founder" has been often noted (Van Sickle, 18; Gutzwiller, 9-12), but the bucolic world still leads some scholars to attribute generic intent to Theocritus (Payne 9-10). In this paper, I will propose that the tension evident in scholarship between the bucolics' novelty of form and place within the literary tradition was similarly felt by Theocritus himself and forms a sustained theme throughout the bucolics, though most significantly in *Idylls* 1 and 7.

Theocritus undoubtedly maintains a strong connection with his literary forebears, particularly in *epos*. Despite some quite overt engagements with his predecessors, however, Theocritus' most direct treatments of bucolic poetry suggest its literary isolation. Perhaps most famously, Thyrsis gives an account of the death of Daphnis, the mythical discoverer of bucolic song. Not only is it striking that the death (or at least suffering) of its mythical forebear becomes bucolic's most cherished theme (cf. *Id.* 5.20, 7.72-3), but Daphnis, on his deathbed, entrusts his syrinx, a symbol of bucolic poetry, to the immortal Pan (*Id.* 1.128-30) rather than a mortal who would participate in a line of succession. Despite the sense of stagnation and isolation that surrounds bucolic in Thyrsis' song, the first *Idyll* nevertheless seems simultaneously to place itself within the tradition of *epos*. Thyrsis sings in exchange for a cup, whose ecphrasis, though variously interpreted, certainly recalls Achilles' shield from *Iliad* 18. The relationship between the song and cup implies, too, a relationship between epic and bucolic.

Within the first *Idyll*, Theocritus thus presents competing visions for bucolic that are connected through the equality implied in the exchange of cup for song, but also kept discrete through the separation of the mythical setting of the song and the rustic setting of the frame, which more closely mirrors the reader's reality. The tension between the novelty of Theocritus' poetry and its debt to literary forebears, particularly Homer and Hesiod, suggests an ongoing questioning of bucolic identity in the Theocritean bucolic corpus rather than the communication of a preconceived definition. Theocritus' consideration of bucolic identity comes to a head in *Id.* 7 as the quasi-mythical Lycidas, evoking Hesiod's famous investiture scene (*Hes. Th.* 22-35), blends myth and reality in an exchange with Simichidas, who is widely considered to represent Theocritus himself.

When read with *Idyll* 1, *Idyll* 7 progresses toward an assimilation of tradition and novelty that may be informative for scholarly considerations of the bucolic genre. More broadly conceived, an analysis of Theocritus' approach may also lend insight into the tension between past and present in Hellenistic literature generally and open new avenues for generic study.

#### Works Cited

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