

## Homer as a Cup: Homeric Allusions in Theocritus' *Idyll 1*

This paper explores the Homeric allusions and their implications in Theocritus' ekphrasis of the goatherd's cup in *Idyll 1*.27-60. I explore how the κισσύβιον is a symbol of Homeric poetry and is defeated in contest by the song of the shepherd, establishing bucolic poetry, and Theocritus, as equals of Homer.

Viewing *Idyll 1* as a competition between Theocritus and Homer is contingent on two premises. First, that the goatherd's cup and the shepherd's song are in direct competition. Second, that the cup is representative of Homeric poetry. The first premise has already been established and is well documented (Hopkinson 2015, Frangeskou 1996).

The second premise is the question of this paper. Halperin argues that the cup represents bucolic poetry, as it greatly resembles Homer's ekphrasis of the Shield of Achilles, but depicts humble scenes, just as bucolic poetry resembles Homer in form but is pastoral and unassuming in nature. In this way, it uses Homer as a foil to define what this new genre is and is not. The problem with this interpretation lies in the greater context of the poem: the competition. If the cup represents bucolic poetry as a genre, then what is it competing against? The shepherd's song is about Thyrsis, the legendary creator of bucolic verse. Is the competition simply between bucolic poetry as ekphrasis vs bucolic poetry as song? This also offers little explanation for the fact that the ekphrasis of the shield draws upon Homer to a much higher degree than the song of Thyrsis. Sokolov found that 20/35 of the poem's hapax links to Homer are in the ekphrasis of the cup. Conversely, the song of Thyrsis, according to Sokolov, is "virtually free of Homeric hapax" and the ones that exist "don't seem to 'connect' with these lines in a significant way." If the cup and the song represent the same genre of poetry, why is one full of Homeric references while the

other is void of them? If this is simply a competition between two bucolic songs, why is it so markedly different from all of Theocritus' other bucolic song competitions? For these reasons, I am inclined to disagree with the consensus. I argue that the cup resembles not bucolic poetry but Homeric epic. The description of the cup is certainly a play on traditional Homeric ekphrases. It would be jarring if it was not a more humble, pastoral version of Homer; the description of the cup still needs to fit in the larger poem. Viewing the cup in this light makes for a far more interesting poem. It raises new questions about the origin of the cup and the depiction of two men competing for one woman's affection—a parallel to the *Iliad* that nobody seems to have written about. It also changes the way we view Theocritus and those who followed in the genre he established.

## Bibliography

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