

REALISM IN THE FIFTH *IDYLL* OF THEOCRITUS

GREGORY CRANE
Harvard University

The fifth *Idyll* of Theocritus depicts a singing contest between the goatherd Comatas and Lacon, a shepherd. In the end, Comatas wins, but the reason for his triumph is not immediately clear from the text. Explanations for his victory have dominated discussion of the poem. Though these have differed,¹ all have at least one thing in common: none has gained general acceptance. The waters are now so muddy that, if Hermes brought up from Hades a fresh manuscript, written by Theocritus himself, describing why Comatas had won, divided scholarly opinion might unite only long enough to denounce the new theory.

One idea has, however, recurred in several discussions of the poem. Immediately before the contest begins, Comatas declares (76-77) ἐγὼ μὲν ἀλαθέα πάντ' ἀγορεύω / κούδ' ἐν καυχέομαι, and this statement has been seen as programmatic. Comatas is, according to this view, championing truthfulness, and each herdsman must describe things as they really are. While no

¹ Gow looked outside the poem for an explanation and supposed that Comatas' performance must have been musically superior, but this suggestion has elicited little enthusiasm, and remains only one of many theories. Comatas, for example, is "another incarnation of Theocritus' favorite figure of the passionately desirous lover...it is Comatas the lover who, in spite of his crudeness, commands the sympathies of Theocritus, the reader, and the judge Morson," G. Lawall, *Theocritus' Coan Pastorals* (Harvard 1967) 64-65. Most theories, however, look for some failing on Lacon's part: Lacon is supposed to follow Comatas very closely, and loses the contest when, at 134-35, he speaks of requited love instead of unrequited love (as Comatas had at 132-33). So U. Ott, *Die Kunst des Gegensatzes in Theokrits Hirtengedichten*, Spudasmata 22 (Hildesheim 1969) 33; Gallavotti *RFIC* 64 (1936) 34; L. Deicke, *Über die Komposition einiger Gedichte Theokrits* (Programm Ratzeburg 1912) 19. Or Lacon uses the same word in the same position in the line (ἐφίλησε in 135) as had Comatas in the preceding couplet (132). He thus violates an (unspoken) rule of the contest (S. L. Radt, "Theocritea," *Mnemos.* 24 [1971] 252-53). Or Lacon cannot, for one reason or another, answer at 138-39, so Morson stops the contest: So, for example, R. Merkelbach, "BOUKOLIASTAI," *RhM* 99 (1956) 112-13, and, recently, A. Köhnken, "Komatas' Sieg über Lakon," *Hermes* 108 (1980) 122-25. Or Lacon violates the rules of verisimilitude, either generally throughout the poem, (E. A. Schmidt, "Der Göttliche Ziegenhirt," *Hermes* 102 [1974] 207-43; see especially 240-41) or specifically when he claims, at 134-35, to have given Eumedes a syrinx: such an instrument was too valuable (see *Id.* 5.3ff.) for a slave to give away (G. Giangrande, "Victory and Defeat in Theocritus' *Idyll* V," *Mnemos.* 29 [1976] 143-53). Or Comatas simply wins on the grounds of seniority: T. E. Rinkevich, "Theocritus' fifth *Idyll*," *Arethusa* 10 (1977) 295-303. For further references, see Köhnken's *Hermes* article cited above, 122 note 1.

two scholars agree on precisely why Comatas wins, more than one has argued that verisimilitude (which I would, for the purposes of the current discussion, loosely define as "plausibility") is the guiding aesthetic principle behind the poem² and the contest itself.³

Certainly, Theocritus had a keen eye for rustic detail. His scenery and characters are more than conventional backdrops.⁴ The *Idylls* owe much to popular tradition of mime, with its interest in everyday life and in the less exalted reaches of society.⁵ *Idyll* 5 in particular, like *Idyll* 4, attempts to depict its countryside more realistically than *Idyll* 11 or even *Idyll* 1.⁶ A few carefully selected touches (such as the thorn in Battos' foot at *Id.* 4.50–57, or the rennet at *Id.* 7.16 that saturates Lycidas' goatskin with its pungent and overpowering odor), lends Theocritus' poems immediacy and vigor. His characters are never simply "drawing room shepherds."⁷

But Theocritus is not Sinclair Lewis. Humor as well as irony enlivens his realistic countryside.⁸ The *paraclausitheron*-before-a-cave in *Idyll* 3 is funny precisely because Theocritus has incongruously applied a city topos to the

² See G. Serrao, "L'Idillio V di Teocrito; Realtà campestre e stilizzazione letteraria," *QUCC* 19 (1975) 73–109.

³ See Schmidt (above, note 1) 217–19; Giangrande (above, note 1) 148; Segal "Thematic Coherence in Theocritus' Bucolic *Idylls*," *WS* 90 (1977) 59.

⁴ Thus, the imprecision with which the eighth *Idyll* describes the countryside has provided one of the most convincing arguments that Theocritus did not compose this poem. See, for example, L. Rossi, "Mondo pastorale e poesia bucolica di maniera: l'idillio VIII del corpus teocriteo," *SIFC* 43 (1971) 5–25. Likewise, the seventh *Idyll* demonstrates a precise knowledge of the geography of Cos: G. Zanker, "Simichidas' Walk and the locality of Bourina in Theocritus, *Id.* 7," *CQ* 30 (1980) 373–77.

⁵ Compare the *Mimiamboi* of Herodas. These poems are, like the *Idylls* of Theocritus, self-consciously literary productions, but they seem at the same time to reflect mime's traditional interest in depicting "the world as it is." The tradition of mime and generic connections between Theocritus and Herodas have not attracted the attention that they deserve. Thus, for example, Graham Zanker, "The Nature and Origin of Realism in Alexandrian Poetry" (*Antike u. Abendland* 29 [1983]) passes quickly over Herodas (p. 128) and mentions Euripides, Middle and New Comedy, but not mime as sources for Alexandrian Realism. David M. Halperin (*Before Pastoral: Theocritus and the Ancient Tradition of Bucolic Poetry* [Yale 1983]), who explores at great length Bucolic poetry as a genre, touches upon Herodas only in passing. A systematic study that considers both Herodas and Theocritus from the standpoint of genre would be a valuable contribution.

⁶ See C. Segal, (above, note 3) 35–68, who discusses at length the "gradation or sliding scale among the seven bucolic *Idylls*, from the low-toned realism of 4 and 5 to the more mythical subject matter and loftier tone of 1 and 7" (p. 36).

⁷ Contrast the landscape of Bion and Moschus: W. Elliger, *Die Darstellung der Landschaft in der griechischen Dichtung* (Berlin 1975) 365ff.

⁸ On which, see Axel Horstmann, "Ironie und Humor," *Beiträge zur Klass. Philol.* 67 (1977), who discusses Theocritus generally, but selects from the pastoral poems *Idylls* 7 (pp. 137–65) and 11 (pp. 80–110) for close analysis. For the poet's "ironische Distanz" from the mythological poems (24, 13, 22, 26, 18) see B. Effe, *RhM* 121 (1978) 48–77.

singing goatherd.⁹ The bloodthirsty Polyphemus, portrayed within the Theocritean landscape, becomes "our countryman the Cyclops" (*Id.* 11.7), one of the most charming bumpkins in Greek literature.¹⁰ The transitions between the mundane and the ideal are often rapid, always deliberate, and only funny when they are supposed to be.¹¹

Verisimilitude is not therefore the sole measure for either Theocritean poetry as a whole or *Idyll* 5 in particular.¹² In *Idyll* 7, Lycidas does, like the Callimachean Apollo,¹³ make self-consciously programmatic statements about poetry (45–8), and he does mention ἀλήθεια. But Comatas' remark at Theoc. *Id.* 5.76–7 is not so obviously programmatic, and Theocritus undercuts the ἀλήθεια of *Il.* 44 by juxtaposing it with a term for artificiality (πεπλασμένον). Lycidas may smell like a shepherd, but, even ignoring the literary dialect of the poem, he sounds like a Hellenistic poet.

The fifth *Idyll* is, like Lycidas' staff, ἐπ' ἀλαθείᾳ πεπλασμένον, a mixture of artifice and truth. "Realism" and "plausibility" are used below in an attempt to render one aspect of ἐπ' ἀλαθείᾳ into English. The meaning and function of "realism" in Hellenistic poetry could easily occupy volumes. This paper approaches one small aspect of the larger problem: it focuses initially on the mundane setting of the poem, then examines how the tone changes as the contest approaches. Ultimately it explores the tension between artifice and truth

⁹ On this, see Dover's introductory remarks to his comments on this poem (p. 112).

¹⁰ See, for example, E. W. Spofford, "Theocritus and Polyphemus," *AJP* 90 (1969) 22–35; Gary Miles, *Ramus* 6 (1977) 143–45.

¹¹ It is not easy to idealize a rustic environment successfully: James Fenimore Cooper, for example, enjoyed considerable popularity for a while, but his reputation waned as "realism" began to shape nineteenth-century literary tastes. Mark Twain in his essay "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses" mercilessly satirized him for inconsistency and implausibility. Scrutiny of this type, devastating to Cooper, would, however, generally bring out the strengths of Theocritean poetry, and demonstrate Theocritus' mastery of his medium and his material.

¹² Some have deemphasized the realistic aspect of Theocritus' poetry: e.g., B. Snell, *Discovery of the Mind*, trans. T. G. Rosenmeyer (Harvard 1953), generally and p. 287: "above all these shepherds are not to be taken seriously"; Rosenmeyer, *Green Cabinet* (Berkeley 1969) *passim*, e.g., 57, 102 ("the pastoral herdsman does not look upon his flock as chattel, and instruments of profit, but as associates in pleasure and happiness"); D. Halperin (above, note 5) draws a sharp distinction between bucolic and pastoral, arguing that the term bucolic suits *Idyll* 2 as well as it does *Idyll* 1; in his opinion, understanding "the essence of Bucolic poetry to be the realistic depiction of rural life" (p. 18) is clearly a post-Theocritean innovation. See, however, Dover's balanced and succinct remarks (*Theocritus* lvii–lviii); also, C. Segal, in *Poetry and Myth* (Princeton 1981) "Introduction; Poets and Goatherds, Forests and Consuls: Art, Imagination, and Realism in Ancient Pastoral Poetry" (3–24) and "Landscape into Myth" (210–34); see, for example, p. 8: "*Boukolos* in Greek and *pastor* in Latin denote the lowly figure of the herdsman, smelly, uneducated, often a slave, the fit companion of the beasts with whom he spends most of his time."

¹³ Call. *Aetia* fr. 1.23ff.; *H. Apoll.* 105–12.

within this particular poem, and seeks to place this tension against the background of Hellenistic poetry in general.

1. A Goatskin and a Syrx, and the Realistic Introduction

Comatas and Lacon open the fifth *Idyll* with a carefully balanced exchange of insults. Two lines from Lacon echo two lines from Comatas (1–4), and Comatas' subsequent three lines elicit a three-line response from Lacon. The corresponding lengths frame the similarity of content: charge inspires counter-charge, each herdsman accusing the other first of theft, then of never having possessed the allegedly stolen article. Though the singing contest will not begin for another seventy lines, the echoing statements and responses have already begun. The elaborate *Kunst des Gegensatzes* that so characterizes and stylizes the poetry of Theocritus is nowhere more apparent than in these lines.¹⁴

Yet the setting is not quite so stylized as the form. While the overall picture is intended to amuse, this poem, of all Theocritus' *Idylls*, presents the grittiest image of the pastoral world. Only in this *Idyll* are both main characters identified (at least by each other) as slaves: Comatas calls Lacon δῶλε Σιβύρτα (5), to which Lacon replies, first with a sarcastic ὠλεούθερε (8), then with a reference to Comatas' own "master," Eumaras, using a term (δεσπότης, 10) that essentially states that Comatas too is a slave. Both Lacon and Comatas are quick to defend themselves when they can (e.g. 5–7, 8–10), but neither, touchy as they are, denies this charge,¹⁵ and a later passage strongly suggests that Comatas is a slave.¹⁶ It is not entirely clear whether this is literally true or is simply abuse, but the idea gives a sarcastic bite to the term Συβαρίτα, "Mr. Citizen of Sybaris"—as a slave, Lacon would be citizen of nothing.

None of the other pastoral *Idylls* can match the scurrilous, almost slapstick tone with which the fifth *Idyll* begins. Even the pederastic relationship that had once existed between Comatas and Lacon, something that in more dignified circles would deserve respect, becomes an object of scorn (41–44). Later, when he emerges victorious from the subsequent contest, Comatas cackles and leaps with delight (142–144). He ends the poem with a threat to castrate one of his billy-goats (147–150). Lacon and Comatas are earthier characters than Polyphemus in *Idyll* 11, or Thyrsis and the Goatherd of *Idyll* 1.

The fifth *Idyll* opens with a dispute: Comatas charges Lacon with stealing a νόκος, a goatskin; Lacon, in turn, claims that Comatas has stolen his syrinx. Animal skin and herdsman are naturally associated. As for the syrinx, already in the *Iliad* we find νομήες / τερπόμενοι σύριγξι (Il. 18.526), and the context (the description of the shield) strongly implies that the picture is typical. Certainly,

¹⁴ See Ulrich Ott, (above, note 1) *passim* on this topic; on the opening of the fifth *Idyll*, see pp. 14ff.

¹⁵ So, Gow; Dover argues that Theocritus took it for granted that his herdsmen were free men. Note that T. Rosenmeyer (above, note 12, 101) argues at length that "the herdsman of literature...is thought of as free" (p. 99, see 98–129), but readily assumes that both Comatas and Lacon are slaves (p. 101).

¹⁶ *Id.* 4.118–9, where we hear that Eumaras tied Comatas up and whipped him, a punishment that would suit a slave, but not a free laborer.

in classical literature the syrinx regularly characterizes herdsmen,¹⁷ and after Theocritus the syrinx belongs almost exclusively in the countryside.¹⁸ But conventional associations pose their own challenges to the poet. Certainly, it is easy to depict herdsmen with goatskin and syrinx, but such details easily degenerate into mere props, tiresomely dragged on stage to fill out a regular pattern.

Theocritus, here as elsewhere, does not let the conventional ossify and lose its meaning. Most of his urban and urbane readers surely lived in a world much closer to that of Herodas or *Idyll* 16 than to that of Theocritus' rustic poems. Few will have had an eye for, or interest in, the realia of the countryside. Theocritus' Hellenistic followers, such as Moschus and Bion, do not attempt to create a pastoral world that goes beyond the artificial. But when Comatas and Lacon open the poem by wrangling over a goatskin and a syrinx, they allow us to see these items from a different perspective. The goatskin and syrinx are not just literary props, but valuable commodities with specific origins and sentimental importance for the two herdsmen (8–16).

Initially, Comatas and Lacon emphasize the material value: each scoffs that the other could have so precious an object as a goatskin or syrinx. When each in turn names the person who gave him these possessions, he accepts the terms of the challenge, and implies that the goatskin and syrinx are valuable items. This in itself contributes significantly to the scene.

Comatas' νέκος was a raw goatskin fresh from a sacrifice (11–12), and skins are better suited to savages¹⁹ or barbarians than to Greeks.²⁰ In the *Wasps*, Bdelycleon draws a laugh by mistaking a luxurious Persian cloak for a σισύρα, a garment that the Scholiast identifies with a βαίτα; this passage only has its

¹⁷ At Euripides *Helen* 1483, we hear of the σύριγξ...ποιμένος. Eur. *Rh.* 551–53: ἦδη δὲ νέμονται κατ' Ἴδαν / ποίμνια· νυκτιβρόμου / σύριγγος ἰὼν κατακούω. See also, Heather White, "The Panpipe (or Syrinx) in Theocritus," in *Studies in Theocritus and Other Hellenistic Poets* (Amsterdam 1979) 37–50. Elsewhere, Pan plays the syrinx (e.g. Eur. *Ion* 501) and the sound of this instrument characterizes Pan's rural shrines (Eur. *Ba.* 951–2). On Lemnos, Sophocles' Philoctetes does not even have the μολπὰ σύριγγος (213)—a luxury available to the ποιμὴν ἀγροβάτας (214). At Plato, *Republic* 399D, the lyre and the cithara are permitted for use in the city, but as for herdsmen in the countryside: καὶ αὐτὸ κατ' ἀγροῦς τοῖς νομεῦσι σύριγξ ἂν τις εἴη.

¹⁸ So almost always in the *Greek Anthology*; see, for example, *AP* 6.177.1; 6.73.1; 6.73.5; 7.174.1 etc.; for a non-rustic use, see 5.206.7; Gregory of Nazianzus (*AP* 8.22.1) even applies the ποιμενὴν σύριγγα to his own Christian ends.

¹⁹ See Theognis 56, with references of *Theognis of Megara*, edd. T. J. Figueira and G. Nagy (JBaltimore 1985) 44 (end of section 29, note 4) and 110.

²⁰ In Herodotus (4.64), the Scythians skin their victims and make barbarous *chlainai* out of their hides, tying them together into a kind of βαίτη. Sophocles (fr. 1031) uses βαίται *de tentariis barbaricis*. In Diodorus (8.29.1), an oracle applies the epithet βαίτοφοροι το βάρβαροι ἄνδρες.

full comic effect if the βαίτα is ludicrously rude.²¹ To wear skins (particularly goatskins that stink like the one that Lycidas wears in *Id.* 7.16) strongly suggests a primitive and impoverished condition.²² What little we know about actual conditions in the Hellenistic countryside suggests that a νάκος would be, even for a herdsman, quite a humble garment.²³

At the same time, Lacon, bemoaning his lost syrinx, doesn't look much better off. Scorned as a mean and crude instrument,²⁴ the syrinx is not, *pace* Giangrande,²⁵ inherently luxurious. The materials out of which it is made are not precious, and highly specialized skill is clearly not required to make one.²⁶ Few readers will probably ever have imagined that a shepherd could lack a syrinx. When Comatas asks Lacon how he ever got such an instrument (5–7), he raises a question that would probably have occurred to few readers. A shepherd too poor to own a syrinx—this could have become a proverb for poverty.²⁷

Theocritus owes much to the latter part of the *Odyssey* for his rural landscape, but Eumaeus is a foreman and a cut above Comatas and Lacon. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus and Iros fight over the begging rights among the suitors. This ugly fight differs, of course, from the undignified, but essentially humorous, exchanges of Lacon and Comatas. But in both passages, the topic of

²¹ Schol. ad. Aristoph. *Vespae* 1138B Koster: σισύραν εἶπεν οὐ τὸ μαλλωτὸν στρώμα, ἀλλὰ τὴν λεγομένην νῦν βαίτην. ἔστιν δὲ ἡ ἀπὸ δερμάτων συρραπτομένη χλαρίς. On the humor, see Macdowell ad loc.

²² See Pseudo-Lucian, *Amores* 34, where a νάκος is referred to as the most primitive type of garment and clearly contrasted with woven wear in the scheme of things. See the proverb, *Adespot.* 546 Kock: ἀρχαιότερα τῆς διφθέρας λέγεις Διός. See, for example, Anacreon, *fr.* 82.2-3 Gentili, where the poet emphasizing, in the strongest possible terms, Artemon's former poverty, describes him as wearing a ψιλὸν περὶ / πλευρῇσι (δέρριον) βοός.

At *Odyssey* 14.530, Eumaeus puts on a νάκη...αἰγός—but only on top of a χλαῖνα (see 529). Even Eumaeus' farmhands each has a χλαῖνα (*Od.* 14.513-14)—a manufactured item, fundamentally more expensive than a goatskin, representing considerable labor and expensive wool.

²³ Even a lowly farm worker in third century B.C. Egypt received a yearly ἱματισμός, "clothing allowance," of about 14 drachmas (see W. L. Westermann and E. S. Hasenoeherl, *Zenon Papyri* (Columbia 1934) vol. 1, nos. 5.47-49, 31.4, with notes), a sum that could in Egypt during the same period purchase about seventeen live ἔριφοι—skins and all. See *P.S.I.* 368.22-23: ἐρίφων σοι ἀποδέδωκα / ἀνὰ πέντε ὀβολοὺς τοῦ ἐρίφου.

²⁴ See Eur. *IA* 1085-86: οὐ σύριγγι τραφεῖσαν οὐδ' / ἐν ῥοιβδῆσει βουκόλων; Plato *Leges* 700c: οὐ σύριγξ ἦν οὐδὲ τινες ἄμουσοι βοαὶ πλήθους, καθάπερ τὰ νῦν.

²⁵ See Giangrande, (above, note 1) 150 note 13, who stresses the material value of a syrinx within the pastoral world.

²⁶ So, for example, we hear at *Id.* 4.28, that Aegon has made his own syrinx (ἐπάξα = Attic ἐπήξω); see, also, *Id.* 8.18; *AP* 5.206.5-8. On the construction of a syrinx, see Aristotle *Probl.* 919B; Gow, on *Id.* 4.129. Comatas implies that the aulos, the simple flute, is more elaborate than the syrinx, but at *Id.* 6.43 the two instruments are freely exchanged.

²⁷ Compare Neoptolemus' reactions to Philoctetes' crude implements at Soph. *Phil.* 35-36.

the quarrel enhances the picture before us: the fight with Iros over scraps of food focuses our attention on the gap that separates the disguised Odysseus from those who have usurped his home; the fight over a goatskin and a syrinx pulls these items out of the background, and, at the same time, renders tangible the gritty world in which the herdsmen live. Theocritus has used his conventions to strike a realistic tone at the opening of this poem.

2. Idealizing the Countryside

Comatas and Lacon may not occupy quite such a squalid position in life as they suggest in the opening of the poem—each, after all, is needing the other, and their comments about their respective status should be taken with a grain of salt. But if the poem begins by bringing the realia and overall reality of the countryside to our attention, its tone soon changes. The initial emphasis on social position provides a canvas on which a more somewhat more idealized (and typical) Theocritean world is painted.

Theocritus did not entirely invent the “pastoral landscape,” the image of a restful and tranquil countryside.²⁸ Already at *Iliad* 18.525–6, the poem contrasts the peaceful herdsmen playing the syrinx with the violent fate that awaits them, while in Euripides, the country shrines of the Nymphs and of Pan should remain undisturbed, filled with the song of the syrinx.²⁹ Those who followed Theocritus idealized this landscape, far more, however, than Theocritus himself. But while the Aristophanic Strepsiades or the ἄγρικός of Theophrastus may represent extreme examples, they do faithfully represent the attitude of the city dweller to those ἐν ἄγρῳ.³⁰

Theocritus, of course, skillfully exploits traditional ἄγρική. Sometimes, as with the lovesick goatherd of *Idyll* 3, or the Polyphemus of *Idyll* 11 or Bucaeus of *Idyll* 10, the “realities” of the countryside form an amusing and ironic backdrop for the refined sentiments that these characters express. This second, artificial reality was so compelling, not only in *Idyll* 5, but in all the other Bucolic *Idylls*, that it has inspired poets ever since to seek passage into the pastoral landscape. The contrast between the ἄγρικός and the herdsmen poet is strongest in the fifth *Idyll*, because Comatas and Lacon seem to occupy the lowest social stratum of any protagonists in the pastoral *Idylls*. At the same time, their singing contest demonstrates, with correspondingly greater force, the charm that pastoral poetry could exert. Theocritus does not simply show us the pastoral landscape, but herdsmen idealizing the landscape in their song.

As soon as the two herdsmen begin to prepare for their contest, the tone begins to change. Lacon describes the place where they can hold their singing match:

²⁸ For a description of idealized landscapes in Greek literature, see G. Schönbeck, *Der Locus Amoenus von Homer bis Horaz* (Heidelberg 1962); Elliger (above, note 7) esp. 318–364.

²⁹ Eur. *Bacch.* 951–52; see also [Eur.], *Rh.* 551–53, where the shepherd’s pipes at night have a gentle, almost drowsy effect.

³⁰ Compare, for example, [Plato] *Hipparch.* 228D, where οἱ ἐν τοῖς ἀγροῖς require special measures for their education.

- LA. μὴ σπεῦδ'· οὐ γάρ τοι πυρὶ θάλλεαι. ἄδιον ἄσῃ
 τεῖδ' ὑπὸ τὰν κότινον καὶ τάλσεα ταῦτα καθίξας.
 ψυχρὸν ὕδωρ τουτεῖ καταλείβεται· ὧδε πεφύκει
 ποία, χά στιβάς ἄδε, καὶ ἀκρίδες ὧδε λαλεῦντι.
Id. 5.31–34

When the herdsman turns to poetry, the lost syrinx is forgotten. The querulous, impoverished countryside with which the poem began yields to a more alluring image. Comatas does not at first reciprocate Lacon's tone, instead lampooning his "old friend" (35–42), but ultimately he introduces his own *locus amoenus*:

- KO. οὐχ ἔρψω τηνεῖ. τουτεῖ δρύες, ὧδε κύπειρος,
 ὧδε καλὸν βομβεῦντι ποτὶ σμάνεσσι μέλισσαι,
 ἔνθ' ὕδατος ψυχρῷ κρᾶναι δύο, ταῖ δ' ἐπὶ δένδρει
 ὄρνιχες λαλαγεῦντι, καὶ ἅ σκιὰ οὐδὲν ὁμοία
 τῶ παρὰ τίν· βάλλει δὲ καὶ ἅ πίτυς ὑψόθε κώνοις.
Id. 5.45–49

Comatas and Lacon vie with one another to see who can paint their surroundings in more charming colors or who can offer a more attractive spot for repose. Trying as much to evoke as to describe, the herdsmen select from the countryside trees, plants, cool springs, the sounds of birds and of bees, the typical attributes of a *locus amoenus*.

They continue their offers of hospitality with another exchange, but here the singers begin to evoke their alluring world:

- LA. ἦ μὲν ἀρνακίδας τε καὶ εἴρια τεῖδε πατησεῖς,
 αἶ κ' ἔνθης, ὕπνω μαλακώτερα· ταῖ δὲ τραγεῖαι
 ταῖ παρὰ τὴν ὄσδοντι κακώτερον ἢ τὴν περ ὄσδεις.
 στασῶ δὲ κρατῆρα μέγαν λευκοῖο γάλακτος
 ταῖς Νύμφαις, στασῶ δὲ καὶ ἀδέος ἄλλον ἐλαίῳ.
 KO. αἶ δέ κε καὶ τὸ μόλης, ἀπαλὰν πτέριν ὧδε πατησεῖς
 καὶ γλάχων' ἀνθεῦσαν· ὑπεσσεῖται δὲ χιμαιρᾶν
 δέρματα τᾶν παρὰ τὴν μαλακώτερα τετράκις ἀρνᾶν.
 στασῶ δ' ὀκτῶ μὲν γαυλῶς τῶ Πανὶ γάλακτος,
 ὀκτῶ δὲ σκαφίδας μέλιτος πλέα κηρί' ἐχοίσας.
Id. 5.50–59

The squabbling never quite leaves their conversation—Lacon cannot resist a peevish dig at Comatas (51–2). More importantly, the focus shifts away from the features of a *locus amoenus*. Now each begins to boast of his possessions: Lacon urges Comatas to come lie on his soft lambskins (50–51), but Comatas praises the pennyroyal and fern on his side, and objects that his goatskins will provide far softer repose than Lacon's lambskins (55–57).³¹

Such comforts were modest indeed (Lacon's reference to the smell of goatskins and of Comatas should remind us that both Lacon and Comatas are

³¹ Presumably, the νόκος that Comatas had lost has fulfilled its major function (demonstrating Comatas' poverty) and should be forgotten. Otherwise, the goatskins of 56–57, being from χίμαιραι, are not as substantial as the lost νόκος (which came from an αἶξ, a full grown goat), perhaps less striking too, since the νόκος was ποικίλον.

offering very rough hospitality). Next, Lacon and Comatas promise offerings to the Nymphs and Pan respectively. These promises, humble though they may seem to us, are moderately extravagant when compared with what preceded them,³² and represent a step towards the happy fantasies that we see in the contest itself. Already before the contest, the two herdsmen move from the attractions of the countryside (which anyone can see and believe), to their own rude comforts (lambskins and goatskins), to surprisingly generous offerings that suggest greater prosperity than the poem's opening implies.

To the self-conscious Hellenistic poet, poetry explicitly offers a refuge, even a remedy, for the harsh realities of life. This is not the place for a full discussion of this topos—that would require an article, if not a book, to itself—but its importance is clear enough. Theocritus emphasizes the successes and failures of poetry as a cure for love.³³ Callimachus not only sees poetry as a cure for love, but touches upon the wider theme of poetry as a cure for all grief or pain.³⁴ Pastoral poetry itself serves much the same need, providing a world to which the poet or reader may retire. When at the conclusion to the Eclogues, Gallus turns from his pastoral world with the despairing note (*Ec.* 10.60) *tamquam haec sit nostri medicina furoris*, Vergil dramatizes this quest and its limits.

For later poets, the countryside becomes a quietly luxuriant playground.³⁵ But for Theocritus, the countryside is no readymade paradise. If the poor slaves of poor masters frame their contest with squabbling and scurrilous abuse, their contest allows them, if only briefly and in limited degree, to recast their own world in a gentler and more refined form.³⁶

³² Lacon promises one large crater of milk and another of oil; Comatas offers eight pails of milk and eight bowls of honey. In *Idyll* 1, Thyrsis receives as a prize not only the kissubion, but three opportunities to milk a goat that yields two πέλλαι even after she has fed her young (25-26). This seems intended as a generous offer, and the unnamed goatherd who makes it does not appear to be a slave.

³³ For poetry successfully applied, see *Idyll* 11.1-9, 80-81; at *Idyll* 2.38-39, Simaetha laments that his magic song can quiet the sea and the wind, but not her own pain.

³⁴ See Call. *Epigr.* 46. The poet is perhaps echoing Theocritus, but note that the cure-for-love topos is probably already in Philoxenus' *Galateia* (see *PMG* 822). At *H. Apoll.* 20-24, even Thetis and Niobe cease from grieving over their children when they hear the paean. Compare this with Hesiod *Theog.* 98-103; note Euripides *Medea* 190-203, where we find the polemical assertion, which must be directed against a conventional idea, that poetry cannot cure truly harsh ills. See, also, Bion fr. 3; F. T. Griffiths, "Poetry as *pharmakon* in Theocritus' *Idyll* 2," in *Arktouros: Studies presented to Bernard Knox* (Berlin 1979).

³⁵ See, for example, L. Rossi, "Mondo pastorale e poesia bucolica di maniera: l'idillio VIII del corpus teocriteo," *SIFC* 43 (1971) 5-25.

³⁶ Likewise, the bowl in *Idyll* 1 remains an αἰπολικὸν θάγμα (56), a crude and unpainted wooden affair, worth a goat and a cheese. (*Pace* Dover, [see his note on 29-63] who assumes that the artistry of the bowl really is on a high level.) In the unnamed goatherd's eyes, it becomes something very different—but unless we

3. Theocritean Irony

In the midst of their singing contest, Comatas makes a surprising claim:

ἔστι δέ μοι γαυλὸς κυπαρίσσινος, ἔστι δὲ κρατήρ
ἔργον Πραξιτέλεως· τᾷ παιδί δὲ ταῦτα φυλάσσω.
Id. 5.103–4

He boasts that he owns not only a γαυλὸς made of cypress, but a κρατήρ made by the sculptor Praxiteles—a modern workman might as well boast of owning a statue by the great Rembrandt or a painting by Rodin.³⁷

Comatas' boast is certainly funny (though whether he intended it to be funny is less certain), but it is only the most extreme example of a more general tendency within the contest. Once the two herdsmen begin their exchanges, they describe a very different world from that which we see they implied in the opening lines of the poem. Theocritus defines his setting: Theocritus' characters define their setting in concrete terms early in the poem, in part so that the reader will be able to view the contest, with its boastful claims, with a mixture of irony and humor.³⁸

Giangrande (above, note 1) has emphasized the tension between Lacon's bitter concern for his lost syrinx at 1–10, and his assertion at 134–135 that he has presented a syrinx to Eumedes. Consider as well the opening of the contest:

KO. τὰ μοῖσαι με φιλεῦντι πολὺ πλεόν ἢ τὸν αἰοδόν
Δάφνιν· ἐγὼ δ' αὐταῖς χιμάρως δύο πρᾶν ποκ' ἔθυσσα.
LA. καὶ γὰρ ἔμ' Ὀπόλλων φιλέει μέγα, καὶ καλὸν αὐτῷ
κρίον ἐγὼ βόσκω· τὰ δὲ Κάρνεα καὶ δὴ ἐφέρπει.
Id. 5.80–83

Leaving aside the privileged position that these two herdsmen claim for themselves with the Muses and Apollo, consider the actions of which they boast. Comatas, with his rich wardrobe of one raw, untanned goatskin, claims “just the other day” to have sacrificed two χίμαροι to the Muses. Lacon, not to be outdone, matches this boast: he is fattening up a κρίος for the upcoming Karneia—his master Siburtas would probably be hardpressed to match this himself. Taken literally, such statements are, at best, open to question. The herdsmen are not lying. Abandoning strict plausibility, they use conventional fictions only loosely applicable to themselves.

If plausibility does indeed represent an aesthetic principle and a key to the decision in the subsequent contest, then both herdsmen should have lost. Poets who portray shepherds speaking in hexameters ought, in any event, to view with some irony the plausibility of their work. Elsewhere in the *Idylls*, Theocritus shows a playful attitude towards “truth” and “fiction.”³⁹ Comatas and

properly emphasize the humble nature of the bowl, we cannot properly appreciate the triumphant magic that the goatherd's description exercises.

³⁷ The scholia recognize the absurdity, but suggest, in their somewhat humorless way, that this is a younger Praxiteles. See, however, Gow ad loc.

³⁸ On irony and humor generally in Theocritus, see Horstmann (above, note 8).

³⁹ See above, note 14.

Lacon are, as characters, credible enough; what they say about themselves is not credible—Theocritus thus adheres much more closely to τὸ πιθανὸν καὶ πειστικόν in what he implicitly says about his characters than do his characters in what they say about themselves.

In some ways, the contest recapitulates the encounter that precedes it. We hear the same apostrophes to the animals that we find elsewhere in the poem (compare exchange 6 [100–103] with 1–4) and the realia of the countryside form a consistent backdrop (exchange 4 [92–95], 8 [108–111], 9 [112–115], 11 [120–123], 12 [128–131]). Even the homosexual relationship mentioned at 41–43 reappears (see exchange 10 [116–119]).

Yet the contest itself differs from the frame (1–79 and 138–150). Stylistically, the contest was even more artificial than the rest of the poem, standing out (as it should) as poetry within poetry. Whereas 1–79 contain statements that vary from a fragment of a line to five lines in length, the string of couplets at 80–137 is unbroken. Already in 1–79, Comatas and Lacon tend to echo one another, both in the length and content of their statements, but the contest carries this tendency further and makes the responsion rigid.

The content, however, becomes even more artificial than the style. Towards the end of the contest, both Comatas and Lacon pray for a golden age: in exchange 12, Comatas (124–125) prays that Himera run with milk, Krathis with wine, and that the reeds bear fruit; Lacon (126–127) wishes that Sybaris might flow with honey. The wish is not much more far-fetched than the world that they describe. In their songs, they can themselves, as we have seen, host sacrifices to the gods. In the contest, their world suddenly appears filled with prosperity: foxes and beetles do some picturesque damage (112–115), but both Comatas' and Lacon's animals have plenty of good pasture (128–131); all but two of Comatas' goats that have born young have had twins (84–85), while Lacon has almost twenty baskets of cheese (86–87).

Comatas and Lacon suddenly view themselves in a similarly positive light. Destitute ragamuffins though they may be, they picture themselves as objects of amorous attention. 'A παῖς pities Comatas, milking all those goats by himself, while Lacon cheerfully buggers ὁ ἄναβος (84–87). Clearista flirts with the dashing Comatas, as he drives his flock past her, while Cratidas fills Lacon with passion (88–91). Comatas will catch a φάσσα and give it to ἄ πάρθενος, while Lacon will give Cratidas wool with which to make a χλαῖνα (98–101). Comatas will give ἄ παῖς his γαυλός and his prized κρατήρ-by-Rembrandt; Lacon will give ὁ παῖς a prized sheepdog (104–107). Neither herdsman need content himself with a single admirer: Comatas resents the fact that Alcippe did not appreciate the φάσσα that he gave her, whereas Eumedes fully appreciated the syrinx that he received from Lacon (132–135). We see φάσσαι at 96 and 133—does Comatas specialize in catching φάσσαι? At 134–135, we hear that Lacon gave away a syrinx—is this where the syrinx described at 3–4 really went? The questions are inappropriate because what the herdsmen say during the contest has little to do with their actual lives.

4. Hellenistic taste and the Bucolic World

In Theocritus as a whole, the idealized pastoral landscape, with its abundance and easy living, maintains a precarious balance between the features of a golden age and the realism of Hellenistic poetry.⁴⁰ Even in the best of times, a golden age can only sustain a certain amount of poetry—a world with no problems or difficulties is not a promising subject for more than a few lines.⁴¹ By the Hellenistic period, mythological never-never lands have generally lost their appeal. All the wanderings of Odysseus have been localized in one place or another; the mysterious city of Aetes, far on the edge of the world, has long been identified with Phasis on the Black Sea.⁴² Even the Islands of the Blessed have their place on the map,⁴³ and no mythical story, according to Strabo, would appeal to anyone if it were not firmly located somewhere in the world.⁴⁴ Whereas in Homer, even historical peoples can be conceived in largely mythological terms,⁴⁵ mythology has, by the third century, been historicized. The love of the mysterious had long gone out of style, and an interest in the exotic had taken its place.

The Sybaris of *Idyll* 5 plays a role equivalent to that of Aea or Phaeacia in earlier poetry. In choosing Sybaris as the backdrop for his poem, Theocritus appeals to Hellenistic taste by combining the exotic and the mundane, irony and nostalgia.

Sybaris was an exotic and evocative name in the ancient world. The adjective “sybaritic,” suggesting excessive luxury, comes to us from antiquity. From the fifth century on, time and again in Greek literature, an anonymous “man from Sybaris,”⁴⁶ or some notorious citizen, such as Alcimenes⁴⁷ or the

⁴⁰ On realism in Hellenistic poetry, see most recently Zanker (above, note 5). On the greater idealization of the pastoral world as it appears in the Greek poets who imitated Theocritus, see above, note 7.

⁴¹ See, for example, some classic descriptions in archaic poetry: Elysium, at *Od.* 4.563-68 (6 lines); the Islands of the Blessed at Hesiod *WD* 168-73 (5 lines); the Island of the Blessed at Pindar *Ol.* 70-77 (8 lines); Ortygia (a golden age variant) at *Od.* 15.405-11 (7 lines). When a idyllic place like Ogygia or Phaeacia is described at length, its charm must be undercut or used for some ulterior purpose (i.e., the charm of Ogygia and of Phaeacia test and prove Odysseus' determination to return home).

⁴² On the shift from Aea to Phasis, see Albin Lesky's “Aia,” in his *Gesammelte Schriften* (Munich 1966) 26ff.

⁴³ See Strabo 1.1.5, 3.2.13.

⁴⁴ Strabo *Geogr.* 1.2.40: ἐν γνωρίμοις τόποις καὶ εὐανδροῦσι τῆς ναυστολίας γενομένης.

⁴⁵ See, for example, the Aethiopians at *Od.* 1.22-24, and the Cimmerians (if that really is the proper reading) at *Od.* 11.14-19.

⁴⁶ Συβαρίτης ἀνὴρ. Aristoph. *Vesp.* 1427; Plut. *Pel.* 1.1; in Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 12.518D, ἀνὴρ Συβαρίτης introduces one story (in which Athenaeus follows Timaeus *FGrH* 566 fr. 50), ἄλλος Συβαρίτης another.

⁴⁷ Aristotle *Mir.* 2.838A; according to Athenaeus (12.541A) called Alkisthenes by Aristotle; Tzetztes (*Chiliades* 812-20, citing Plutarch [fr. 214 Sandbach]) calls him Antisthenes.

effeminate Hemitheon⁴⁸ or the famed Smindyrides,⁴⁹ introduces yet another outrageous story about the affluence and high living in this city. The people of Sybaris were generally so soft that they would break a single day's journey into three stages, and some of their roads into the country were actually roofed.⁵⁰ According to Phylarchus, a lady of Sybaris expected her invitations a year in advance, so that she could have enough time to prepare her wardrobe.⁵¹ According to Aristotle, even the horses of Sybaris joined in symposia, dancing to the music of flutes.⁵² The wealth of Sybaris was proverbial.⁵³

But there was another side to Sybaris. The wealth of Sybaris belonged, along with most true wonders, to the distant past. The destruction that befell this city illustrated terribly the catastrophic turns of fortune. The people of Croton had utterly destroyed Sybaris, bringing down its power and glory in the briefest of time, diverting, according to tradition, the river Crathis over the remains of the city.⁵⁴ A brief union with the Athenian colony Thurii ended with the Sybarites driven off, sliding ever deeper into obscurity. In the early fourth century, the Lucanians threatened, and at least once seriously defeated, Thurii (D.S. 14.101)—a discouraging sign for the surrounding country. In the middle of the fourth century, Bruttians, a wild collection of brigands, largely composed, we are told, of runaway slaves, began to ravage the toe of Italy, sacking Hipponion, Thurii and various other sites (D.S. 12.22, 16.15). Later in the century, we find Bruttians, Thuriens and Crotoniates still engaged in intermittent, brutal conflict (D.S. 19.10).

When Theocritus composed his *Idylls* in the third century, Greeks had inherited much of the known world. In the ancient land of Egypt, Alexandria itself was a showcase of new Hellenic power and wealth. The Greek cities of Southern Italy, however, were hard put to hold their own among the various barbarian peoples that surrounded them,⁵⁵ and by Theocritus' lifetime the Greeks in this backward countryside probably found themselves, almost alone among their contemporaries, dominated by barbarians.⁵⁶

⁴⁸ Lucian, *Pseudol.* 3; Adv. 23.

⁴⁹ Already in Herodotus (6.127). See, also, Aristot. *Ee.* 1216A; Theophr. *fr.* 84 Wimmer (= Athen. 12.511C); Athen. 6.273B.

⁵⁰ See Athen. 12.17ff. for this and other anecdotes.

⁵¹ *FGrH* 81 fr. 45 (= Athen. 12.521B).

⁵² *Fr.* 583 Rose (= Athen. 12.520C-D).

⁵³ See, also, Timaeus (*FGrH* 566 fr. 50 = Athen. 12.519BC), Polybius (7.1.2 = Athen. 12.528A), etc.

⁵⁴ So Strabo 6.263; the story seems already implicit, however, in Herodotus: see τὸν ξῆπον Κρᾶθιν at Herod. 5.45, with How and Wells' note.

⁵⁵ See, for example, the harshness of the treaty binding the Greek cities already in the early fourth century, Diodor. 14.101.1: if any Greek city failed to come to the aid of another that was beset with Lucanians, the generals of that city would be executed.

⁵⁶ Our knowledge of Magna Graeca at this period is slight, but even the power of the great Greek cities seems fitful and strained. See, for example, the wars in 303 B.C. between the Tarentines (to the north of Sybaris) with Romans and Lucanians (Diodor. 20.104-105); at the opening of the third century (295 B.C.), Agathocles treacherously seized Croton (to the south of Sybaris), plundering the

Within this context, the names of masters and slaves in *Idyll 5* are particularly interesting. Whereas the slaves have good Greek names like Lacon and Comatas, Siburtas has no parallel, Eumaras is rare (and not wholly reputable), and both may have sounded vaguely foreign.⁵⁷ The Hellenistic audience may be expected to see in Comatas and Lacon Greek slaves to barbarian or semi-barbarian masters. If Lacon is understood as “the Lacedaimonian,”⁵⁸ the ethnic name would thus invert the normal Greek practice: whereas a Greek might call his slaves by their country of origin (e.g. the comic slave name Getas, for the Thracian tribe Γέται),⁵⁹ Siburtas owns a slave called “the Lacedaemonian.”⁶⁰

city and putting its male inhabitants to death. In the end, he made an alliance with the barbarians around Croton (Diodor. 21.4). The following year, he made war on Hipponion, coming primarily into conflict with Bruttians (Diodor. 21.8).

⁵⁷ The name Siburtas has no exact parallel: the name Σιβύρτιος appears at Athens in the fifth century: a Siburtiades was γραμματεὺς (Kirchner 12645) and a Siburtios ἐπιστάτης πρυτάνεων (Kirchner 12646); Antiphon evidently referred to the Palaestra of Siburtios, and Aristophanes mockingly calls Cleisthenes the “son of Siburtios” (*Ach.* 118). Note, also, Siburtios, confirmed as a satrap by Alexander at Arrian, *Anab.* 6.27.1. It may recall Sybaris, or it may simply have the same foreign sound as Sybaris.

Lysias uses Eumaras triumphantly as a slave’s name, when he denounces the parentage of Agoratus: (*Orat* 13.64)

δεῖ γὰρ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι ὅτι δοῦλος καὶ ἐκ δούλων ἐστίν, ἣν
εἰδῆτε οἷος ὢν ὑμᾶς ἐλυμαίνετο τούτῳ μὲν γὰρ πατήρ ἦν
Εὐμάρης, ἐγένετο δὲ ὁ Εὐμάρης οὗτος Νικοκλέους καὶ
Ἀντικλέους.

See, also, Εὐμαρία as the name of a slave woman at Athens in the third century B.C. (*IG* II 3712, cf. Fr. Bechtel, *Historische Personennamen* (Halle 1917) 614).

⁵⁸ This is how the scholia unambiguously understand the name Lakon. The problem lies in the quantity of the α in Λάκων: normally, the α is short (so, for example, at *AG* 7.18.6; 7.531.8; 9.397.2), but here the meter forces us to take the α as long. (For other suggestions, see Gow ad loc.; also, Ott (above, note 1) 14, note 44.) The scholia (on *Id.* 5.1) simply suggest that the α has been lengthened for metrical reasons. The Doric dialect might soften the effect of such lengthening (see, also, the long α in the penult of the name Eumaras at 10). Note the complaint (*Id.* 15.88) that Gorgo and Praxinoa ἐκκναίσευντι πλατειάσδοισαι ἅπαντα. The phrase means that they speak with a thick Doric accent (note the response at 89-95). If πλατειάσδοισαι ἅπαντα refers to Doric dialect generally, then the speaker is just as guilty as the two women. If, however, it alludes to a Doric habit of making all vowels broader, then the stranger’s comment would identify a general characteristic of Doric in Gorgo and Praxinoa’s accent, one that does not come through in the written word. If Doric vowels tended to be longer, then scanning a short α as long would simply extend an otherwise noted feature.

⁵⁹ So, already, the scholia see Lacon as a slave’s ethnic name: ἐτίθεσαν γὰρ οἱ παλαιοὶ τοῖς δούλοις τὰ ὀνόματα ἀπὸ τῶν ἐθνῶν, Σύρον, Λυδόν, Καρίωνα. For examples of such names, see M. Lambert, *Die Griechischen Sklavennamen* (Vienna 1907) 10-21; see, also, Gow on *Id.* 2.69.

⁶⁰ We actually find “Λαψο,” as the name of a slave in a second century A.D. inscription from Samothrace (*CIL* 3.7371); also, note Λάκαινα as the name of ἡ

The first line of the poem, with its reference to ὁ Συβαρίτας, is problematic: the *Idylls* are, properly speaking, timeless. The Sybaris of *Idyll* 5 could be the city of wealth and luxury—certainly this was the only Sybaris of which anyone normally ever heard—but it could conceivably be the forgotten backwater of the third century. The reader cannot initially know for sure how Sybaris is to be perceived, and the alternatives are, as we have seen, strikingly diverse. Ultimately, the mention of Thurii (72) shows that this is the fallen Sybaris, after its destruction by Croton. The first ten lines of the poem, however, already paint a distinct picture of simplicity, even poverty, that firmly distinguished this Sybaris from the storied city of the past.

Comatas and Lacon, though poor, inhabit a site of fallen glory and antiquarian nostalgia. Already in Homer, Greek literature self-consciously exploits the contrast between the distant past and the present. Thus, Helen at *Il* 6.358 views the sufferings of the Greeks and Trojans against the background of heroic poetry to come. Even the sober Thucydides wonders at how the ruins of Sparta and Athens would appear in distant ages (1.10.2). Theocritus, in the third century, can use the backdrop of ruined Sybaris to make the reader's response to the scurrilous Comatas and Lacon more complex. The herdsmen's poverty contrasts sadly with the fallen glory of that region. Their idealized world becomes all the more artificial because it recalls a period that was, in fact, far more prosperous than anything Lacon or Comatas could imagine.

In his rustic *Idylls*, Theocritus served two normally incompatible ends at once. The idea of a golden age exerts a universal appeal that people in every age feel, but Hellenistic literature tended strongly towards the familiar and the mundane. Thus, we find not only Callimachus' *Hecale*, but the mimes of Herodas. Even a world such as Aia becomes, as Apollonius' *Phasis*, less mysterious, its details drawn more from ethnography than imagination. Rather than creating an unreal, idealized world—a paradise just beyond the horizon and forever beyond our reach—Theocritus looked to the world around him. His paradise has considerable vitality, and does not require the boundaries of space and time to insulate it from his audience. He presents us with figures from the lower reaches of the social order, peasants far beneath his audience in wealth, standing or education. Here, at the bottom of the world, we find the outlines of a dreamy, alluring life.

Comatas and Lacon reflect with particular clarity the gulf between a "realistic" countryside and the countryside of the imagination. With little or nothing of their own, using only their imagination and their surroundings, they idealize their own world. They do not actually leave their world behind (they still picture themselves as slaves, and never quite abandon their mutual abuse and chicanery), but instead augment their world with their own dreams. They and their fellows elsewhere in the Theocritean corpus evoke a paradise that

Μέλανος πάλ(λ)αξ at *IG* 3, part 3 68b.14; at Achill. Tat. 5.17.9, a slave dealer names a slave, newly acquired from pirates, Λάκκινα; see M. Lambertz (above, note 61) 14.

captured the imaginations of poets for thousands of years, and proved far more powerful than the distant fields of Elysium or the Islands of the Blessed.⁶¹

⁶¹ I would like to thank Lowell Edmunds and Adolf Köhnken for their suggestions and encouragement. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance that I received from using the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* in search of lexicographic evidence.