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CHAPTER FIVE

THEOCRITUS

J.J.H. Klooster

Introduction

Since bucolic poetry is all about herdsmen in the countryside, Theocritus might be expected to be the Greek landscape poet *par excellence*. Indeed:

... bei keinem anderen griechischen Dichter laden so verführerisch weiche Grasteppeiche zum Verweilen ein, plätschern so viele Bäche im Schatten sich wiegender Bäume, hallt die Gegend wider vom Gesang der Vögel, oder ist erfüllt vom Summen der Bienen, vom Zirpen der Zikaden, gibt es so viele Bäume, Sträucher, Blumen, Gräser und Farne wie bei Theokrit.¹

Still, it would be a mistake to call Theocritus ‘a poet of nature’ in the Romantic sense of the phrase: natural beauty is hardly ever admired for its own sake in his poems. In the bucolic *Idylls* (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7) it mostly features as a backdrop for the herdsman’s song. Moreover, even if there are numerous passages concerning landscape, they hardly ever take the form of clear descriptions. Elements of the setting are sketched in but their relation to each other remains uncertain. This lack of contingent detail is reminiscent of the vague way Theocritus indicates time.² On the few occasions landscapes are strongly stylized or idealized (cf. *Id.* 1, 5, 7) they have a specific function. Either these descriptions occur in character-text, and serve to characterize the speaker, or, as in some mythological *Idylls* (11, 13, 22),³ the pastoral setting thematically collides with grander heroic/epic elements of the story.

¹ Elliger 1975: 318. The number of flowers, plants, shrubs, and trees Theocritus mentions is in fact so large (87 different species, twice as many as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* together) that it has been asked whether he was a botanist (Lindsell 1936–1937: 78–93); see further Lembach 1970. Other important studies focusing on Theocritus’ landscapes are Rosenmeyer 1969: 179–205 and Segal 1975: 115–139. Krevans 1983: 201–220 discusses the significance of geographical names in *Idyll* 7.

² SAGN 2: 97–98.

³ I here omit the discussion of the (spurious) *Idylls* 21 and 25 as well as epigrams 1–5.

A truly idealized pastoral landscape enters poetry only after Theocritus.⁴ This may be related to the fact that the opposition city-country (in which the city is compared negatively to the innocence and freedom of the countryside) is not strongly present in the *Idylls*. It is true that *Idyll* 3 features an urban custom (the *paraclausithyron*) transposed to a rustic setting (a cave) for comic effect, and in *Idyll* 7 Simichidas and Lycidas have sometimes been said to represent respectively (or both) city and countryside (see below). But the emphatic contrast between these two environments only comes to the fore in the spurious (later) *Idyll* 20, where a herdsman complains that he is rejected by an arrogant city girl on account of his rusticity.⁵ All in all, the opposition is at its most meaningful if we are willing to suppose that the narratee of the *Idylls* is a city-dweller.⁶ But, as noted above, a more explicit contrast is created between epic heroism and pastoral themes/landscapes (11, 13, 22).

Nevertheless, rusticity of setting and character, and prominence of nature are elements that set Theocritus' achievements apart from previous Greek literature. Though herdsman and their surroundings as well as *loci amoeni* occur in earlier poets (→ Homer), Theocritus is the first to make them his trademark. He thus creates his own literary domain, which is unified and characterized precisely by his descriptions of landscapes and objects:

The descriptive elements in Theocritus' pastoral landscapes are not purely ornamental but are related to one another ... as constituent parts of a total design, like letters in an alphabet which we can eventually learn to read.⁷

Embedding of Settings

As stated, the bucolic *Idylls* function on the premise that the narratee is not a countryman but a city-dweller, presumably even a member of the urban elite. On the one hand this presupposes a narrator who is himself at home in both of these milieus, and on the other hand it creates an—often delicately ironic—psychological distance between the naive characters in the poems and the (by implication) sophisticated narratees. Yet,

⁴ The one exception is the wish for peace on Sicily expressed in the *Encomium for Hiero* (*Id.* 16.88–97).

⁵ See Reinhardt 1988.

⁶ See Gutzwiller 1991.

⁷ Segal 1975: 210. See also Krevans 1983: 201–220.

at the same time this distance is paradoxically diminished by the fact that the herdsmen function as ‘analogies’ of the narratees.⁸ In their, often comic, naïveté, the characters serve to reflect the narratees’ own concerns: unanswered love, the search for spiritual peace, etcetera. This creation of analogies is effected through the embedding of songs (usually variants of a bucolic *agon* or *amoebaeon*). Of course such embedding also affects the representation of space; in particular the differentiation of the *space of the narrator* from the *story-space*. Analysis of *Idyll* 6 illustrates how this works.⁹

- (A1) (1–5): In an unspecified setting the external narrator tells his narratee about two herdsmen, Damoetas and Daphnis, who propose to sing: the story-space is briefly indicated: they ‘gathered the herd together to the same place’ (1–2, indicating their harmonious friendship) and ‘sat down at a spring’ (3). The *narrator’s own space*, though not specified, is presumably different from that of the story.
- (B1) Song of Daphnis (6–19) posing as a *praeceptor amoris* advising Polyphemus on his affair with the nymph Galatea. He sketches a landscape: Polyphemus and his dog are *at the edge of the sea* (11–14), while Galatea throws apples at his herds. This is clearly meant as a mythical imaginary setting: the island of the Cyclops, in other words, not the location where Daphnis himself is physically present.
- (A2) (20): The external narrator interrupts for change of speakers.
- (B2) Song of Damoetas (21–40), who enacts the role of Polyphemus and takes over landscape elements sketched by Daphnis, adding *caves* (28), and elaborating on the *mirroring qualities of the sea* (35–38).
- (A3) (41–46): The external narrator concludes: after their song, the herdsmen exchange kisses and play the *syrix* and the *aulos*, while their heifers dance *in the tender grass* (45). There is no return to the space of the external narrator.

We see how embedding here generates various levels of *imaginary spaces*, differentiated from the space of the external narrator. In *Idyll* 1, embedding of space further serves to emphasise the contrast between ‘mythical’ and ‘realistic’ space. In this mimetic poem, the space of Thyrsis and the

⁸ See Gutzwiller 1991.

⁹ Translations are based on Gow 1952.

Goatherd is presented in their opening dialogue (1.1–23, see below). Though clearly stylized, it seems on the whole realistic, even if it contains references to Pan and the Nymphs. These are not referred to as actually present, and thus may exist only in the herdsmen's religious imagination. However, in Thyrsis' embedded song about the fate of the mythic *boukolos* (cowherd) Daphnis, nature gets distinctly unrealistic traits. Animals (cows, but also jackals, wolves and even the outlandish lion) come to mourn Daphnis (pathetic fallacy), and gods are in direct contact with the human protagonist. Daphnis seemingly enjoys a privileged, mystical relation with nature,¹⁰ which his death upsets, hence his wish that a series of *adynata* may mark this event:

Now violets bear, brambles, and thorns, you must bear violets, and let fair narcissus bloom on the juniper. Let all be changed, and let the pine bear pears, since Daphnis dies. Let the stag pursue hounds and from the mountains let owls cry to nightingales. (1.132–136)

In the already distinctly mythical world of the song about Daphnis, this inset is even more fantastic; like the recurrent refrain, it clearly marks the embedded song as poetic art, stylized and set apart from the real world.

The element of pathetic fallacy recurs in the references to Daphnis in *Idyll* 7, where similar, if even more complicated, embedding of songs and real and imaginary spaces occurs. The internal narrator Simichidas, at some temporal remove (7.1: 'there was a time when'), recalls his walk *from the city* to a harvest festival *in the country* (*Thalysia*) organized by friends on Cos (as appears from various topographical names). On the way, he meets the mysterious goatherd-poet Lycidas, and they exchange songs, which abound with geographical indications.

Lycidas announces his song (7.52–89) as 'fashioned *on the mountain*' (51), while herding his flocks. Its opening evokes a miraculously calm winter sea over which his beloved Ageanax may safely sail to *Lesbian Mytilene*, if he 'saves Lycidas from desire'. He then describes in concrete detail the comforts of a rustic party at which he will be present once Ageanax has departed. Lying on a leafy couch, Lycidas will drink *Pteleatic* wine (a reference to a Coan deme?) while shepherds pipe, one from *Acharnae* (Attic Acharnae?) and one from *Lycope* (unclear) (7.71–72). And Tityrus will sing of the fate of Daphnis (cf. *Id.* 1), whom '*the oaks on the banks of the river Himeras*' mourned (7.74–75, suggesting Sicily, and

¹⁰ Cf. Segal 1974.

perhaps Stesichorus of Himera, who allegedly wrote about Daphnis) as he was wasting away like snow on ‘*high Haemus, or Athos or Rhodope or furthest Caucasus*’ (7.76–77, evoking a vast, inhospitable world to symbolize the extent of Daphnis’ suffering). Tityrus will also sing of legendary, otherwise unknown Comatas, a goatherd imprisoned *in a cedar chest* by a king and miraculously fed on honeycombs by bees (7.78–82). The song ends with an apostrophe of Comatas (embedded in the song within the song), and the wish that he were alive today, so that Lycidas might

herd your beautiful goats *upon the mountains* and listen to your voice,
while you, divine Comatas, would lie down and make sweet music *under
the oaks or pines.* (7.88–89)

Through embedding and allusion to numerous geographical locations that may refer to poetic traditions, Lycidas’ song moves steadily into the realm of the imaginary, or, we might say, to the heartland of bucolic poetry (note the return of ‘*on the mountains*’, 51 ~ 88)¹¹ as well as towards ever greater spiritual peace. The opening description of the *deep, calmed sea* points to a concrete space, but on a figurative level foreshadows the calm Lycidas wishes to attain; Mytilene might allude to Sappho and the Lesbian lyric tradition. Through his apostrophe of Comatas, a miraculous example of the redemptive powers of music, Lycidas finally enters a virtual *locus amoenus*, completely freed from his burning desires. As realistic settings give way to realms of poetry and inner peace, concrete topographical references disappear: Lycidas bases himself mainly on legendary forebears.¹²

Simichidas claims his song is a bucolic poem too, similarly composed by him while he ‘tended his herds *in the mountains*’, but it is very different in tone and allusions, although it also evokes a range of imaginary locations.¹³ Simichidas describes his friend Aratus’ unanswered love for a boy, Philinus. Pan, connected with *Thessalian Homole* (7.104–105, an obscure allusion to a cult place, reminiscent of Callimachus’ *Aetia?*) is

¹¹ On the significance of the marginal spaces ‘mountain’ and ‘sea’, see Segal 1975: 223–226. It must be noted that shepherds in the other *Idylls* are not located explicitly ‘on the mountains’, but rather near a spring, in the shade (although this does not preclude mountainous settings).

¹² Cf. Krevans 1983: 201–220.

¹³ See in particular Giangrande 1968: 491–533 on Simichidas’ quasi-bucolicism.

asked to make the boy gratify Aratus' desires. If he accomplishes this 'then never may the *Arcadian* boys flog you whenever they find scanty meat' (7.107), referring to a—once more obscure—rustic custom, again adding a pastoral (if learned) flavour to the song. If Pan denies his favour, Simichidas wishes considerable discomfort on him:

May you sleep in nettles and in midwinter find yourself *on the mountains of the Edonians turned towards the river Hebrus, near the pole*. And in summer may you herd your flocks *among the furthest Ethiopians beneath the rock of the Blemyes from where even the Nile is no more seen*. But you, leave the *sweet stream of Hyetis and Byblis, and Oecus, that steep seat of golden haired Dione, Eroles, rosy as apples, and wound with your bow the lovely Philinus* ... (7.110–118)

The learned description of Pan's unpleasant experiences in the extreme north and south symbolically reflects Aratus' erotic distress and answers Lycidas' catalogue of mountains (7.76–77): the Edonians and Hebrus are located on *Mt Rhodope*. Eroles are called to the scene from Byblis, Hyetis and Oecus. The first two names refer to springs in the neighbourhood of Milete, and hence to Byblis, who was metamorphosed into a spring after her love affair with her brother Caunus; Oecus is a city near Milete, founded by Byblis' father.¹⁴ Despite the prayer to *pastoral* Pan, it appears from the following lines that the affair of Aratus and Philinus is really set *in the city*, since there is talk of Philinus' doorstep (7.122: *epi prothuroisin*), on which the speaker no longer wishes to stand all night long with Aratus. This refers to the typically urban practice of the *paraclausithyron* known from e.g. the epigrams of Asclepiades (*AP* 5.167, *AP* 5.189), in which young men after their revels went to the house of the beloved to serenade him/her in front of the closed doors.

Obscure references to pastoral cults, enigmatic allusions to Milesian myths, and an urban *paraclausithyron*: all things considered, Simichidas presents a 'potpourri' (Hunter) of Hellenistic poetical fads, whereas Lycidas' song seems to point back to the past, beyond the archaic lyric singers to an alleged legendary pastoral tradition.

The poem ends with a description of a lush *locus amoenus* by Simichidas, the primary narrator, after he and Lycidas have taken leave of each other (7.132–155). The direct and sensual description of the rustic banquet, on a leafy couch, with cool splashing water, abundant, sweet-

¹⁴ Both Nicaenetus and Apollonius are attested to have written *ktisis*-poems related to this myth, so the allusion may be to their poetry.

scented fruit, a 'bucolic orchestra' of woodland animals and fragrant wine (all five senses are appealed to), is interrupted by references to Castalian Nymphs (Delphi), Heracles at the cave of the Centaurs and Polyphemus dancing by the river Anapus (these last two of course figure prominently in Theocritus poetry, cf. *Id.* 6, 11, 13, 25). It seems that this last *locus amoenus* signifies, on a structural level, the fusion of Simichidas and Lycidas' poetics: both elements from earlier and contemporary poetry, and a direct 'pastoral' inspiration are mixed at the source of the *Thalysia* (cf. *diekransate*, 7.154); they provide a rich poetic drink or harvest. Krevans relates this to her argument that the many geographical names in the poem constitute allusions to previous authors and genres of poetry; together they form the basis for Theocritus new bucolic poetry.¹⁵

Songscales

In purely mimetic poems (1, 2, 4, 5, 14, 15), setting and props, including changes of scene, are all incorporated in the words of the characters. These mimetic poems were presumably not meant for performance in the way of classical mime or drama. So for the mental envisaging of the scene, narratees are completely dependent on information provided by the poet through his characters. Interestingly, this does not always result in clear, visual descriptions. Take for instance the celebrated opening of *Idyll* 1:

THYRSUS: A sweet whispering *the pine*, Goatherd, *there, by the springs is singing*, and sweetly too do you pipe ...

GOATHERD: Sweeter, shepherd, does your song stream down than *the echoing water there from that high rock* ...

TH.: Will you, by the Nymphs, will you, goatherd, sit here, *opposite the hillock and the tamarisks and pipe?* ...

G.: It is not allowed, shepherd, in the noontime, we are not allowed to pipe: we fear Pan ... Let us sit *here under the elm, opposite Priapus and the water nymphs, where the shepherd's seat is and the oaks.* (*Id.* 1.1–23)

We have a pine, sources, rocks, a hill, tamarisks, an elm, apparently a shrine of Priapus and the water nymphs, a shepherd's seat and oaks;

¹⁵ Krevans 1983: 201–220. Spanoudakis 2001 points out that the geography of *Idyll* 7 probably owes a great deal to the (mostly lost) elegiac *Demeter* of the Coan poet Philitas (mentioned at 7.40). It may be remembered that Ptolemy Philadelphus was born on Cos.

everything indicated with deictic pronouns (*ha pitus tēna*, 1; *teide*, 12; *touto geōlofon*, 13), to create a sense of nearness and tangibility. But what are the relations between these features? Are the waters in the first line and in the reply of the Goatherd the same? ‘Derlei Fragen sollte man jedoch lieber nicht stellen.’¹⁶ The truth is that a translation of the passage does not do justice to the *musicality* of the Greek original, arguably one of its main aims. The first line, an onomatopoeic series of *ā*, *i* and *ū*-sounds (*hadu ti to psithurisma kai ha pitus aipole tēna*, 1), evokes the fluty sound of the panpipe (*hadu de kai tu surisdes*, 2–3), the bucolic instrument *par excellence*. Moreover, the remarkable syntactical structure of the lines creates the impression, through parataxis, internal rhyme and anaphora, that nature and music are somehow a continuum. The pine *sings* a sweet whispering which is compared (in acoustically similar and onomatopoeic words) to the sweet piping of the Goatherd; the song of Thyrsis in turn *streams down* more sweetly than the *echoing* (not *cold*, *clear* or any of the more normal epithets) water. Rather than a clear-cut visual impression, the lines evoke a melodious, if indistinct, *locus amoenus* in which music and nature blend into what Segal has termed a ‘songscape’.

Characterizing Functions of Space

Since the (ironic) distance between Theocritean characters and their narrator and his narratees emerged as important, it follows that references to spatial settings or objects by these characters should perhaps be evaluated differently from those furnished (and usually focalized) by an external narrator. This works in many different ways. In *Idyll* 5, for instance, there is an abundance of lovely landscape-descriptions (31–34, 45–49, 50–59, 124–131). Surprisingly, these figure in the context of an otherwise aggressive shouting match between two herdsmen. Their real purpose (already apparent in the strong emphasis on deictic adverbs in 22 *teide*; 45, 46 *toutei*, *hōde*; 50 *teide*) is to outshine the antagonist’s words, and emphasise the superior qualities of the speaker’s own *locus amoenus*. Whereas in *Idylls* 1 and 6 herdsmen decide to sing *in the same place*, no such concord is reached in this poem; the loveliness of the description contrasts sharply with the unpleasantness of the repartee.

¹⁶ Elliger 1975: 326 on this passage.

Like a tragic heroine, Simaetha (*Id.* 2) marvels at the discord between her feelings and the cosmos, exclaiming: ‘Mark, still is the sea, still are the breezes; yet not still the torment in my breast!’ (2.38–39; cf. 163–166, the quasi-hymnic farewell to the moon). This cosmic appeal comically exceeds the boundaries of her otherwise narrow universe which is defined by gossipy neighbours (154), her own bedroom (86, 139) and her lover’s favourite haunt, ‘Timagetus’ gymnasium’ (8, 51, 80, 97). Invoking ‘Lady Moon’ as witness to her confessions, naive Simaetha, left by her lover (*Id.* 2), thus attempts to place her little urban drama in a grand cosmic scheme.

Simaetha sees things out of proportion; the lovelorn Cyclops (*Id.* 11) is blind in a different way. Seated at the edge of sea and land, looking out over the waves like a parody of Achilles (*Il.* 1.350) or Odysseus (*Od.* 5.101), heroes from the epic domain to which he traditionally belonged, Polyphemus, now the unlikely denizen of a bucolic world, sings. He knows why Galatea flees from him: because of his monstrous looks. Yet, as he claims, he has enough to make up for this handicap: cattle, cheese and ‘eleven fawns all with collars and four bear cubs’ (11.30–41). He cannot understand why Galatea prefers the sea to his island with its many attractions:

Leave the grey-green sea to break on the shore; you will spend the night more pleasantly here with me in the cave; there are laurels, and slender cypresses, there is black ivy and a vine with its sweet fruit, there is cold water, which wooded Etna pours to me as an ambrosial drink from her white snow. Who would rather have the sea and the waves than those?¹⁷

(11.43–49)

The setting the Cyclops pictures here in his clumsy catalogue, which once more lacks clear spatial relations, is perfectly acceptable in itself—that is, if we leave out its ugly inhabitant. Polyphemus’ own incongruous presence in his *locus amoenus* is one problem; another is that Galatea is a sea-creature and, although this element may seem strange and unattractive to a Cyclops, it is her habitat. Polyphemus is unable to identify with Galatea’s perspective: she does not belong on land nor does she eat cheese. And no more does a Cyclops belong in the sea, but still he sighs: ‘Alas, that my

¹⁷ *Od.* 9 describes the Cyclops’ island; features which Theocritus takes over are the cave, shadowed by laurels (9.189), the vines, and in general the exceeding fertility of the (uncultivated) soil (9.109). The laurels praised here ironically play a role in the Cyclops’ blinding.

mother bore me not with gills, so I might have dived down to you and kissed your hand' (11.54–55) and announces his intention to learn to swim anyhow. What makes these grotesque wishes poignant is the fact that traditionally Polyphemus' mother was indeed a sea-nymph, Thoosa, while his father was Poseidon: he is constitutionally drawn to the element to which he does not belong.

Obviously, poor one-eyed Polyphemus does not see clearly: he is unable to view his surroundings or the sea, or himself as Galatea would.¹⁸ But it can be more complicated to judge the tone of spatial references, even in a context of naive characters. Let me illustrate this by a discussion of *Idyll* 15. In this poem, Theocritus furnishes information about the setting while creating an image of the bustling city of Alexandria seen through the eyes of two housewives. That Alexandria is the setting becomes clear at 22, where Gorgo proposes to go see the Adonis festival at the palace of 'rich king Ptolemy' (cf. 46–50, 106–111). The scene in this poem changes twice: 15.1–43: at Praxinoa's; 44–73: on the way to the palace; 74–149: inside the palace (shifting scenic standpoint). This works as follows:

GORGO: Is Praxinoa *inside*?

PRAXINOA: Gorgo darling, how long it's been! She is *inside*. A miracle that you should have come even now. Eunoa, quick, *fetch her a chair and put a cushion on it*.

GO.: That's fine.

PR.: Sit down.

GO.: Dear me, I only nearly made it here, Praxinoa, *such masses of people, so many chariots. Leather boots wherever you look, and everywhere men in uniforms. And the road was endless. You live further and further away.*

(15.1–7)

Later on, the crowdedness of the city of Alexandria is stressed by Praxinoa's exasperated exclamations about rearing horses and madding crowds:

PR.: Dear Gorgo, what will become of us, look, the cavalry of the king! Dear man, please don't step on me! The chestnut reared! Look how wild he is! Foolhardy Eunoa, won't you get out of his way?! He'll kill his rider. It's good I left the little one at home!

(15.51–55)

¹⁸ A similar connection between lack of judgment (seeing and seeming) is the theme of *Idyll* 6, also featuring the Cyclops in love. In *Idyll* 11, the Cyclops' blindness also extends to his future fate, cf. SAGN 2: 103.

By now Gorgo and Praxinoa have emerged as typical bourgeois housewives, who see the world as coloured by their own down-to-earth worries about clothing, annoying husbands, busy crowds and exasperating servants. So how are we to interpret their reactions to, and hence our own appreciation of, the following hymn, embedded in the poem as ‘the song of the Argive woman at the Adonis-festival of the Ptolemies’?

For your sake [Aphrodite] ..., does Berenica's daughter Arsinoe, lovely as Helen, pamper Adonis with all that is beautiful. By him in their season are all that fruit-trees bear, and delicate gardens in silver baskets guarded, and golden flasks of Syrian perfume. And all the cakes that women fashion on the kneading-tray, mingling every hue with white wheat-flower, are there and those they make of sweet honey and smooth oil. All creatures of the earth and air are there besides. And green bowers have been built, laden with the tender dill, and boyish Erotes flit overhead like young nightingales that flit upon the tree from spray to spray, making trial of their fledgling wings. O ebony, O gold, O eagles of white ivory that bear Zeus the son of Cronus a boy to pour his wine. And crimson coverlets above, soft as sleep. Miletus will say, and he who pastures on Samos with his flocks: ‘Ours are the coverlets for the fair Adonis’ couch. In Adonis’ rosy arms the Cyprian lies, and he in hers. Of eighteen years or nineteen is the groom; the golden down is still upon his lip; his kisses are not rough. And now farewell to Cypris as she clasps her lover ...

(15.109–131)

The language of this hymn not only differs greatly from the colloquial style of the rest of *Idyll* 15, but also from Theocritus’ descriptive style in general.¹⁹ The singer begins with an enumeration of the offerings surrounding Adonis. There is notable stress on their richness and abundance, to the detriment of precision: *every kind* of fruit, *all* the cakes that women fashion, *every* hue, *all* creatures of the earth and the air. The unusually large number of adjectives (beautiful, silver, delicate, golden, sweet, smooth, green, crimson, soft, rosy, etc.) is uncharacteristic of Theocritus.²⁰ The singer’s impressionistic apostrophe ‘O ebony, O gold, O eagles of white ivory’ presumably refers to a wooden inlaid couch on which Adonis reclines, featuring the rape of Ganymede.

The people producing the gifts are given prominence. This provides a dynamization of the descriptions and both stresses the inclusive nature of the festival (cf. *all women* bake for Adonis) and underlines the extent of Ptolemy’s domain (including Miletus and Samos). Other narrative

¹⁹ The emphasis on inclusiveness, completeness and abundance returns in *Idyll* 17 for Ptolemy Philadelphus, suggesting that the hymn in 15 employs (or parodies) the style of royal encomium.

²⁰ See in particular Elliger 1975: 318–363 *passim*.

elements are present in the implied movement of the eagles and the Erotes, and the description of Adonis' kisses.

The secondary narratees are impressed by these stylistic pyrotechnics, as Gorgo's comments show:

Go.: Praxinoa, that woman is just the cleverest! Happy to know so much, thrice happy to have such a sweet voice. Still, time we went home. Diocleidas hasn't had his lunch, and the man's all vinegar; don't you go near him when he's hungry.

The comic lapse into bathos clashes with the exalted pathos of the hymn, but, apart from this, how are we to judge Gorgo's reaction to the singer? Just how erudite is she? How should the remarkable stylistic characteristics pointed out above be evaluated? Are they meant to achieve a serious aesthetic goal or is the hymn, as Zanker puts it 'an example of how badly people wrote public poetry'? Precisely the asking of such questions may be the aim of this passage:

Theocritus distances himself from commitment to interpretation by putting the evaluative statements into the mouth of designedly naive *dramatis personae* like Gorgo and Praxinoa, 'which turns back on the reader the requirement of evaluative response'.²¹

The poem's encomiastic intention (it is, after all, a scene at the royal palace) makes the problem especially intriguing. It is hard to imagine that the Ptolemies would allow their festivals to be ridiculed by poets; most likely, therefore, the hymn is crafted as a clearly recognizable pastiche (this would be in tune with the thematic emphasis on 'lifelikeness' in the rest of the poem, cf. 15.80–86), an evaluation of which was left to the discretion of the narratees. What is at any rate provided is a comic view of what royal splendour looks like if seen through the eyes of the populace.

Concluding, spatial references by characters in the mimetic *Idylls* serve to *characterize* them, or provide clues as to their *psychological state*. Since these poems mostly lack narratorial comment, narratees are invited to participate actively and see if they may extrapolate an 'objective' evaluation of what is being described, or interpret its structural significance.²²

²¹ Zanker 2004: 83 quoting Goldhill 1994: 197–223. See further on this *Idyll* e.g. Manakidou 1992: 83–90.

²² Similar issues arise in connection with the *locus amoenus* in *Idyll* 7 (see above), since here we have the (naive?) internal narrator Simichidas.

Ekphrasis

In general, ekphrasis, of course, often leaves the interpretation of its relation to the themes of the surrounding narrative implicit; we may think of Achilles' shield (→ Homer) or Jason's cloak (→ Apollonius of Rhodes). These descriptions are provided by external narrators; in the mimetic *Idyll* 1, however, which contains Theocritus' most famous ekphrasis (the *kissubion*, or goatherd's cup, 1.27–60),²³ description is furnished by one of the characters (the Goatherd). Yet, it fulfils the same function as the ekphrases referred to above: it maintains many implicit thematic relationships with elements both of the poem *per se* and the bucolic *Idylls* as a collection. In the last instance this ekphrasis focuses the narratees' attention on the creative activity of the author: he creates a character who describes an artefact which symbolizes the poetic creation he is himself a part of (the bucolic corpus). The cup is offered by the Goatherd to Thyrsis in return for his song of the 'Sufferings of Daphnis'; the ekphrasis thus actually balances the song in the way one song balances another in bucolic contests (cf. 5, 6, 7, [8, 9]).

All major ekphrases in Greek literature are usually read as significant variations on the Homeric and pseudo-Hesiodic *Shields*. In the *Argonautica* the fact that a cloak is chosen characterizes its wearer Jason as unwarlike; here the *kissubion*, a wooden (and thus not very valuable) cup, indicates the humility and rusticity of bucolic poetry. Still, it is a refined work of art in its own right: an *aipolikon thaēma* ('goatherd's marvel'), 'a wonder (*teras*) that will strike your heart' (1.56). It is 'newly fashioned' (*neoteukhes*), 'still smells of the knife' (1.28) and has remained 'untouched' (*akhranton*) until now (1.60), suggesting the novelty of the type of poetry it symbolizes; its 'sweetness' (27, 149) advocates a poetic aim (cf. the recurrent *hadu* in the opening of *Idyll* 1). Like the song of Thyrsis, the finely wrought cup elevates popular art to a high level. On it are depicted three scenes from everyday life, not strictly bucolic in theme, which could be read as 'the three ages of man' located in three different types of spatial locations (city, countryside, sea-shore), as well as three types of 'labour'. It has been suggested that the cup represents scenes from the life that Daphnis has spurned. This could be

²³ See Gallavotti 1966: 421–436; F. Cairns 1984: 96–99, 101–107; Manakidou 1992: 51–82; Hunter 1999: ad 27–56; Zanker 2004: 12–15; Payne 2007: 28–40.

Theocritus' reinterpretation of Achilles' shield and this hero's choices in life: if Daphnis is a bucolic Achilles, Theocritus is a bucolic Homer.²⁴

The pictorial themes (love, old age, childhood, as well as 'simple folk' and the physical results of hard labour) are frequent in Hellenistic art. Despite many attempts at reconstruction, the exact collocation of the scenes is (deliberately?) left unclear. The cup's rim is encircled by flowering ivy winding its tendrils (1.29–31).

And within (*entosthen*)²⁵ is wrought (*tetuktai*) a woman, such a thing as the gods might fashion (*theōn daidalma*)²⁶ wearing a cloak and headdress. And beside her two men with long beautiful hair contend from either side in alternate speech. Yet these things touch not her heart, but now she looks on one and smiles, and now to the other she shifts her thoughts, while they, long hollow-eyed from love, labour to no purpose (*mokhthizonti*).

(1.32–38)

The dynamization of the description turns static images into little narratives: the men *are contending*, the woman apparently *looks to both sides alternately*. A psychological interpretation is provided by the goatherd: the men are in love; the woman does not care for them. Thus a narrative is created, whose details remain obscure, though its outcome for the men is revealed: they labour in vain. Theirs is clearly not an individual story, rather a vignette of 'love's labour lost', a frequent theme of Theocritus' poetry (1, 2, 3, 6, 10, 11, 13). Similar traits characterize the next description, of an old fisherman casting his net:²⁷

By these (*tois de meta*) is carved (*tetuktai*) an old fisherman, and a rugged rock on which the old man eagerly gathers up a great net for a cast, looking like a man who labours greatly (*kamnonti*). You would say that he was fishing with all the strength of his limbs, so do the sinews stand out all about his neck, grey-haired though he is; yet his strength is as a youth's.

(1.39–44)

The stress here is on physical labour and the strength it requires. The narratees' reaction to this is incorporated by the comparison (*eoikōs*)

²⁴ F. Cairns 1984: 107–109; the fact that the *Idylls* are written in hexameters and were therefore regarded as a subspecies of epic supports this suggestion.

²⁵ It is ambiguous whether this means 'inside the cup' or 'inside the frame of ivy'.

²⁶ Such formulas are typical of ekphrasis (cf. 15.79), but this one also alludes to Pandora, the woman fashioned by the gods to cause men grief and pain (Hesiod, *Works and Days* 66).

²⁷ Although fishermen do not belong to the authentic Theocritean *Idylls* (21 is spurious, perhaps even inspired by this description), a fisherman also occurs in the Hesiodic *Aspis* 213–215; the Homeric shield features other labourers.

and the phrase 'you would say'. Although the depiction is again more or less dynamic (the net is about to be cast), there is no real narrative: it is a 'snapshot' of a man *working*, and as such a rather rare occurrence in the bucolic world (except *Idyll* 10, where work is significantly contrasted with lovesickness). The description of the man's hair as 'grey' should probably be attributed to the interpretation of the Goatherd, who describes the man as 'old'. Physical labour here contrasts with the futile love-labour of the earlier picture. The third description addresses yet another kind of 'labour':

And a little way from the sea-worn old man, there is a vineyard with a fair load of reddening clusters, guarded by a little boy who sits upon its dry stone wall. About him hang two foxes, and one goes to and fro among the vine rows plundering the ripe grapes while the other brings all her wit to bear upon his bag and vows she will not let the boy be [until she has raided his breakfast bread].²⁸ But the boy is weaving a pretty cricket cage of bond rush and asphodel and has more joy in his weaving than care for bag or for vines. (1.45–54)

The absence of a verb referring to the process of fashioning of the image makes this scene the most lifelike. It once more contains elements of narration: one fox ravages the vines; the other preys on the boy's lunch, its intentions are even described. But the boy remains blissfully unaware of his troubles, which, like the young men's love-cares and the old man's intense labour, remain forever suspended. The foxes flank the little boy in the same way as the two men flank the young woman and as the two three-figure scenes apparently flank the one-figure scene of the old fisherman (ABA). The labour in this last image is 'artistic' and playful; the boy is plaiting a cricket-cage for his own pleasure. The image obviously denotes poetical activity: crickets (more frequently cicadas), weaving, and the child at play (Call. *Aet.* fr. 1) occur as metaphors for poetry in Hellenistic authors. Thus the boy's undisturbed pleasure forms an image of the *hasukhia* sought (and sometimes found) by Theocritean herdsmen in poetry (1, 7, 11). By this *mise en abyme*, the cup contains a metaphorical depiction of the activity through which it has come into being.

²⁸ On the textual problems, see Gow 1952 and Hunter 1999: ad loc.

Space in the Mythological Idylls

So far we have been concerned with spatial references in the voices of characters in mostly mimetic *Idylls* and have been able to conclude that the element distinguishing such references is their psychologically revealing nature with regard to the personage speaking. We will now have a look at descriptions by external narrators. This situation occurs most prominently in two 'mythological' *Idylls*, 13 and 22. Both feature episodes from the Argonautic quest that also occur in the epic of Apollonius (resp. *Arg.* 1.1221–1232; 2.1–97).

Idyll 13 recounts how Heracles lost his beloved Hylas in Mysia, when the boy went to fetch water at a spring. Heracles, the archetypal Greek hero, is here, like Polyphemus in *Idyll* 11, transposed to a bucolic world. This causes remarkable clashes between style and subject matter. For instance, to express Heracles' dedication to Hylas, the narrator states:

He never parted from him, neither at noon's onset, nor when dawn with her white steeds sped upwards to the Halls of Zeus, nor when the chickens looked twittering to their roosting-place as on the smoke-stained perch their mother shook her wings. (13.10–12)

After the grand tragic-epic formula 'the white steeds of dawn', the final lines incongruously evoke the image of Heracles and Hylas snuggling cosily together like a hen and chick. Similarly, the time of sailing for the Argonauts is the onset of summer, when 'the far uplands pasture the young lambs', surely not the association we are to imagine the heroes themselves as having. Although similes and time-indications taken from the animal-world or even country-life are rife in epic (think of the many Iliadic similes concerning wild animals, or of farmers and shepherds at their tasks), the flavour here is distinctly different. It is as if the heroic world is being focalized by a bucolic narrator, who 'mit sichtlichem Behagen' lingers over such descriptions (cf. the leafy couches in 7.67–68, 132–134). The same flavour clings to the rustic description when the Argo lands and the Argonauts prepare their camp for the night:²⁹

One resting place they laid for all, for there was a meadow with mighty store of litter for their couches, where they cut sharp sedges and tall galingale. (13.33–35)

²⁹ Tränkle 1963: 504. On the clash between bucolicism/eroticism and heroism in this poem, see Mastronarde 1968: 273–290; Gutzwiller 1981: 19–29.

This emphasis on bucolic settings becomes especially obvious when we compare the extreme brevity with which the synopsis of the Argo's voyage is given (13.22–24; landmarks singled out are the Symplegades and the Phasis). The landscape in which Hylas finally disappears could be described as the 'dark side' of this bucolic world: the space of the Nymphs, 'dread goddesses for the country folk' (13.44):

Soon in a low-lying place he saw a spring, around which grew thick
rushes, and dark celandine, green maidenhair and luxuriant wild celery,
and creeping dog's tooth. And in the water Nymphs were arraying the
dance ... (13.39–43)

The spring is focalized first by Hylas, then the narrator breaks in by mentioning the Nymphs, obviously unseen by Hylas. Usually the refreshing shaded coolness of springs is emphasised (cf. 5.33; 7.7–9, 136–137), but here 'the learned botanical catalogue is highly evocative of the pool's mysterious dangers' and its lush vegetation, which practically smothers the spring itself, is suggestive of feminine eroticism. The place represents forces against which Heracles' physical strength achieves nothing. In this sense the power of the Nymphs is similar to the internal force of erotic desire that propels the hero on in his frantic search for Hylas, through thorny bushes, over hills and thickets, 'all Jason's quest forgotten' (13.64–67). Heracles completely loses his way in this (bucolic) world full of nymphs and insinuating vegetation, as his getting lost in the thorns suggests, in what seems like an exteriorization of his anguish. When he finally reaches his heroic destination Phasis, it is on foot, long after his comrades, who scold him as *liponautēs* (ship-deserter, 13.73–75); Hylas, however, is 'numbered among the immortals'. The narrator's descriptive stress on bucolic elements—which may have seemed incongruous at first—with hindsight reveals a consistent symbolism.

In *Idyll 22*, the pastoral elements also serve to create contrasts. In this poem, the Dioscuri are hymned in two separate narratives. The first of these two recounts how Polydeuces defeats Amycus, the brutal king of the Mariandyni, in a boxing match (22.27–134). Once more, the Argonauts disembark (*ekbantēs*, 22.32, cf. 13.32) to prepare for themselves a bed made from the local flora. This time Castor and Polydeuces stray from the group:

But together Castor of the swift steeds and swarthy Polydeuces wandered
apart from their comrades and viewed the varied wild woodland on the
hill. Beneath a smooth rock they found a perennial spring brimming
with clearest water, the pebbles in its depths showing like crystal or like

silver. Hard by, tall pines were growing, poplars and planes and tufted cypresses, and fragrant flowers farmed gladly by the shaggy bees—all flowers that teem in the meadows as spring is on the wane. (22.36–43)

The spring (not present in Apollonius 2.1–97) is focalized by the Dioscuri, who, we may guess, were looking for drinking water; hence the emphasis on the water's clearness. This spot is a true *locus amoenus*, shadowed by all kinds of trees, fragrant with flowers from the nearby meadow, and buzzing with bees. But its loveliness only serves to create a contrast (cf. *Id.* 11, Polyphemus contrasted with his *locus amoenus*). In this case, the contrast is with the man seated next to the spring, Amycus, described almost as if he were an object (a statue):³⁰

There a monstrous figure was seated in the sun. Terrible to look at was he; his ears were crushed by the blows of hard fists; his mighty chest and broad back rounded with iron flesh, as if it were some colossus of forged metal, and beneath his shoulder-points the muscles in his brawny arms stood out like rounded boulders which some winter torrent has rolled and polished in its mighty eddies. A lion-skin fastened by the paws swung on his back and neck. (22.44–52)

The description establishes a motionless image and thus creates a pause; this strongly contrasts with the stichomythic dialogue between Amycus and Polydeuces that follows directly afterwards (22.54–74), and the visually precise account of the subsequent boxing match (22.80–130). The poem appears to experiment with the juxtaposition of widely different narrative styles and effects.³¹ The lovely setting (comically?) clashes with its monstrous inhabitant; its peacefulness and the pause in the narrative are in contrast with the dynamic action of the bloody fight that it accommodates.

Conclusion

Theocritus' use of space shares some characteristics with his treatment of time: both may convey an impression of indistinctness, but on the other hand, both are also used for very precise structural aims, in particular the psychological characterization of speakers.

The embedding of songs in other songs (and thus of spaces within spaces) is a typically Theocritean device. It is used for the creation of

³⁰ There have even been attempts at identification with the bronze Terme-boxer, cf. the discussion in Zanker 2004: 34–35.

³¹ Cf. SAGN 2: 108–109.

'pastoral analogies', that is, imaginary, mythical or at least distanced worlds where events and characters are located that to some extent predicate on the realities of other levels of the poem, or of its narratees. In *Idyll* 1, the embedded song about Daphnis clearly defines itself by its mythical elements as different from, more unreal than, the world evoked in the dialogue of Thyrsis and the Goatherd. But even this dialogue, through its artificial fusion between song and landscape, had already declared itself *a work of art*. True *pathetic fallacy* only has its place in the embedded mythical world of the likes of Daphnis and Comatas. At the same time, we might say that the harmony of music and nature in the opening of *Idyll* 1 is a translation of this concept, signifying that man can reach the same mystical harmony with nature as Daphnis and Comatas *through poetry and music*.

In the mimetic poems, settings are created in the words of the speakers. This raises some interesting issues. Firstly, there is the question of whether a strictly 'visual' representation of space is aimed at. This is clearly the case in some *Idylls* (2, 3, 15), but not always: in 1 and 7 musicality appears to take precedence over sight. Secondly, since Theocritus' characters are frequently naive, the narratee is left with a relatively large interpretational role. How are their references to space to be evaluated? What characterizing or psychologizing elements may be gathered from them? Often these passages form keys to the interpretation of the character's state of mind and thus to the themes of the poem, as in the case of Simaetha's disproportionate invocations of the elements, or Polyphemus' misguided evocations of his *locus amoenus*. The evaluation of spatial references may also become a theme in itself, as in *Idyll* 15, where it remains tantalizingly unclear how we are to judge the Adonis-hymn Gorgo so enthusiastically praises. In the ekphrasis of the *kissubion*, finally, the poem's narratee is implicitly invited to find reflections of themes essential of Theocritus' poetics, and to place the description in the tradition of epic ekphrases.

A similar bucolic *Auseinandersetzung* with epic seems to be taking place in the mythical narratives in 13 and 22. In both poems, the narrator consciously sets up a contrast (especially through the settings) between the bucolic world, the habitat of his own particular poetic invention, and heroic epic, the genre to which his poetry is related through its metre.