

Theocritus *Idyll* 1: The Creative Descent of Daphnis

When considering *eros* in Theocritean bucolic poetry, it would always seem sad, in a way, because the love of these characters is always unrequited. No singer of this song ever consummates a relationship with the object of his affection; but, instead, he *τάκεται* - he "wastes away" in distress over the pain that he feels physically and emotionally. These are negative experiences caused by the distress of love's charms on the singers in Theocritus' poetry. However, although the physical body and mind of the singer break down, from this fractured image a poetic space is created that is filled with the beauty of design and sound. This paper suggests that Daphnis and Aphrodite are a likely model for such a relationship, that her love is the inspiration and that his "death" is symbolic for the creation of bucolic song.

Daphnis and Aphrodite offer a paradigm for the creative output of unrequited love, that is, the creation of bucolic song. Daphnis is unique among Theocritus' more common singers of songs, adding to the programmatic messages in *Idyll* 1. His suffering from the love of Aphrodite is heroic. He is her consort, but he refuses her continued advances (Frangeskou-1996). The reason why he distances himself is mysterious and the cause of much debate, but possibly because he shows favor for another girl (1.82) and no longer wishes to experience the all-consuming passion of Aphrodite (Gutzwiller-1991). He still *ἐτάκετο* "continued to waste away" (1.66) from this love, but the agency of his unrequited love, I suggest, is all his own. As he continues to remain steadfast against Aphrodite's persuasion, the landscape resounds in musical tones that accompany the animals' song of lament (1.71-5), signifying his death that follows.

Daphnis, moreover, solidifies his rejection of Aphrodite's affections by creating a liminal space with his "death," a barrier that she cannot cross over. He separates himself by means of his

descent into the eddying waters - he simply walks (ἔβα, 1.140) in, and the waters wash over (ἔκλυσε, 1.140) him like the image of sweet wax coating a cup (κεκλυσμένον, 1.27). The connection drawn between these two images alone suggests artistic creation, not death and decay. So, does Daphnis die? If so, where does he go? Hades? Death is a real event in Theocritus' *Idylls* (4.38-40) and becomes part of bucolic's reception. However, so are themes of creation and regeneration. In the larger bucolic world, the landscape is abundant with movement and productivity, and its characters often youthful and vibrant, and Daphnis himself is often compared to seasonal consorts tied to mother goddess figures. Because of such evidence, I find it difficult to believe that Daphnis simply dies and that is the end of his story. Instead, I suggest that Daphnis is "reborn". The love of Aphrodite inspires him to sing a song in defiance and to enter in the waters. Her role as mother goddess, moreover, leaves open the possibility for Daphnis' rebirth, although he exists separate from her now, diffused among the *locus amoenus*. Daphnis descends into the very landscape that was previously responding to his sorrows, and he himself continues to inspire other lovesick herdsmen, who will take up the flute after him (1.128-9), as the inventor of bucolic song (Bouchard-2022).

Two idylls that this paper will use as external *exempla* that reflect a similar basic story pattern and embrace the creative model of Daphnis' "death" are the parodic, perhaps ironic, *Idylls* 11 and 3. Both Polyphemus and the goatherd request to fulfill their desires with physical satisfaction, but their love is unrequited. Galatea and Amaryllis, the respective objects of obsession, are unique among other bucolic females, besides Aphrodite, as they are separated, too, by a physical boundary, whether a seashore or cave entrance, and of divine origin (Payne-2007). There is a liminal space, like the eddying waters. The distancing causes the herdsmen distress, and the song that emerges from their heartache is as much a symptom of the disease (*eros*) as the

throbbing feet of Polyphemus (11.70-1) and headache of the goatherd (3.52). As Griffith states, "he [Polyphemus] *sublimates* from *procreation* to creating *art*" (2022). Polyphemus, like the goatherd, is inspired by heartache. The descent of Daphnis, I, therefore, suggest, is an allusion for the transformation of painful love into musical creativity and bucolic song.

Works Cited

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