

## Theocritus' Name Game

Theocritus' bucolic poetry has long challenged those scholars who have broached the issue of genre in the Idylls. The bucolic Idylls' resistance to a typology along with our nearly complete ignorance of their dates of composition has caused an understandable reticence to speculate on possible connections between Idylls. Despite problems of genre and chronology, however, some scholars have recently begun reading individual Idylls in concert and exploring the significance created by such readings (Krevans, 2006; Thomas, 1996; Stanzel, 1996). In support of this new approach to Theocritean poetry, my paper will consider the effect that Theocritus' frequent reuse of character names has on the Idylls and how such repetitions may enrich a reading of the poems.

Several character names applied to apparently different characters appear across various bucolic Idylls. The name Daphnis most readily comes to mind in this regard, though others, such as Amaryllis, Polyphemus, and Comatas, are also familiar from multiple poems. Though one may reasonably argue that particular names are used to designate character types as in New Comedy, Theocritus' selection of monikers appears to serve another purpose. Specifically, the high frequency of repeated names found in a relatively small number of poems spurs the reader's recollection of other Idylls. Amaryllis, for instance, appears in Idyll 3 as the goatherd's love interest, though no substantive information is provided about Amaryllis herself. The name Amaryllis occurs again in Idyll 4 where Battus laments her as his dead beloved: □ χαρίεσσ' □ μαρυλλί, μόνας σέθεν ο□δ□ θανοίσας / λασεύμεσθ'· □ σον α□γες □ μ□ν φίλαι, □ σσον □ πέσβης (4.38-39). The Amaryllis of Idyll 4 is also a shadowy figure, but her very name recalls the Amaryllis of Idyll 3, especially when compared to 3.6: □ χαρίεσσ' □ μαρυλλί, τί μ' ο□κέτι το□το κατ' □ ντρον. The context in which Idyll 4 invokes Amaryllis offers a fruitful comparison with Idyll 3. Battus' mention of his goats suggests his role as an analogue for the unnamed goatherd of Idyll 3. The implicit comparison between Battus and the goatherd of Idyll 3 aptly identifies both as inadequate bucolic characters. The connection forged by Amaryllis' name, then, encourages a comparison that leads the reader to ponder, however briefly, the failures of the two shepherd-poets and, more generally, the nature of a shepherd-poet.

In addition to the benefit that careful attention to names has for individual Idylls, that same attention also suggests the approach one ought to take to the bucolic poems collectively. Idyll 7, for example, shares a name with every other Idyll that might be considered bucolic. This

sharing is, I believe, no coincidence, but rather indicates Theocritus' consistent approach in creating his bucolic poetry and further suggests the appropriateness of reading the poems closely together.

#### Works Cited

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