

Verbal Echoes in Theocritus 2 and 11

Theocritus 2 and 11 present very different lovers experiencing surprisingly similar situations of unrequited love. Despite the differences in contexts (epic time vs. (seemingly) contemporary time; rural, rocky island vs. domestic, city life), the two poems exhibit a deep connection, which several scholars have noted. Parry 1988 is particularly interested in their differences, reading Simaetha's ultimate experience of self-expression as successful in a way that is very distinct from that of Polyphemus. Damon 1995 observes the process of how the narrator forms his or her story, working in the shadow of the Homeric model. Duncan 2001 seeks to establish Simaetha as a powerful poet figure and attempts to rescue Simaetha from a tradition of criticism, whereas Segal 1973 and 1985 argues that Simaetha's Homeric language is unintentional and used by Theocritus as a way to amuse the reader. In connecting Simaetha's language to Polyphemus's, I argue that they are neither unintentional users of Homeric or Sapphic models, as Segal suggests, nor, as Duncan would have it, powerful narrators in control of their language. Rather, both Polyphemus and Simaetha are attempting to access a form of speaking—that of the lover mourning the absence of the beloved—and, in doing so, illuminating their inability to fully take on this role.

Through the verbal linkages, Theocritus puts forth two lovers who share a common naïveté, which they remedy through different (mis)uses of *pharmaka* and ineffective attempts at the conventions of love. Both poems begin with a mention of *pharmakon* (11.1; 2.15), seeking a way to heal the wounds caused by their absent lovers. Both Polyphemus and Simaetha draw on forms of *pegnumi* to illustrate their situations: while Polyphemus largely uses this word in relation to cheese (11.66), he also connects it with the weapons of Aphrodite (11.16) and describes Galatea as *leukotera paktas* (11.20), as though hoping to affect her in a way similar to

the way Aphrodite's weapons have affected him. Simaetha uses *epagen* to describe her physical reaction to Delphis entering the house (2.110) but quickly contrasts this with his eyes, which are "fixed" on the ground (2.112). She begins by searching for her *daphnai* (2.1, 23), so as to bring Delphis back to her, while Polyphemus attempts to persuade Galatea with a mention of the *daphnai* growing in his cave (11.45). Just as Simaetha describes her magic ritual with *taketai* (2.18) and portrays her sickness with *etaketo* (2.83), the narrator presents Polyphemus as wasting away, *katetaketo* (11.14). Simaetha recalls her cold sweat at Delphis's entrance, *epsuchthen chionos* (2.106), while Polyphemus positively offers the *psychros* water flowing from the mountain *chionos* into his cave (11.47-48). Polyphemus wishes he could only go down and kiss Galatea's mouth (*hos katedun poti tin chera teus ephileisa*, 11.55), while Delphis tries to reclaim his control over the affair by telling Simaetha that he wishes he could only kiss her lovely mouth (*ei ke monon to kalon stoma teus ephileisa*, 2.126). Finally, both poems ascribe a large sense of responsibility to Kypris/Aphrodite as the instigator behind not only their love, but also the painful situations in which they find themselves (11.16; 2.7, 30, 130, 132).

Within this paper, I demonstrate how Polyphemus and Simaetha draw heavily from an established vocabulary for erotic poetry, relying particularly on Homeric, Sapphic, and other lyric diction. Despite Polyphemus's efforts to paint a picture of the locus amoenus and Simaetha's attempt to cast herself as the innocent, wronged lover, both misuse the language of their predecessors. In their failed appropriation of erotic diction, both narrators admit their overwhelming naïveté and betray their lack of knowledge about the proper erotic conventions, casting themselves into a shared category of bad lovers.

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