

## Theocritean Aphrodite(s)

This paper looks into the manifold and puzzling representations of Aphrodite in Theocritus. In the programmatic first *Idyll*, Aphrodite is the powerful adversary of the quintessential bucolic poet Daphnis – she mocks him cruelly, he responds in kind with a catalogue of goddess’ most embarrassing exploits, and yet, Aphrodite tries to restore Daphnis back to life and ultimately fails. When combined with the image of a smiling woman courted by two men from the cup *ecphrasis*, the role of Aphrodite in the poem becomes even more ambivalent. Aphrodite also features as the powerful and cruel goddess in *Id. 2*, where Simaetha blames her for Delphis’ unfaithfulness and turns to love magic in order to save her relationship, or kill her lover if all else fails. In *Id. 7*, Lycidas is ‘roasted by Aphrodite’ (v. 55). However, *Idylls 15 and 17* represent the goddess in a different light: At Alexandria, the Ptolemaic queen Arsinoe II celebrates the Adonia festival and everyone is invited; we experience the opulence and the grandeur of the palace celebration through the eyes of the ordinary citizens, and the hymn performed by the court poetess glorifies Aphrodite as the one who periodically brings Adonis back to life and immortalizes female members of the Ptolemaic dynasty. In *Id. 17*, Aphrodite not only immortalizes Berenice I, wife of Ptolemy I, she is the guarantee of the conjugal love of the royal couple and the stability of the Ptolemaic dynasty.

While the role of Aphrodite in the cult of Ptolemaic queens (and mistresses) has been a subject of lively scholarly interest, the discrepancy between Aphrodite as the goddess of legitimate wedlock in Theocritus’ ‘Ptolemaic’ poems and the goddess of destructive passion in his bucolic poems is usually understood as yet another marker of the ‘urban mimes’ / ‘idealized landscape’ divide. But the division is not at all clear-cut: Simaetha’s passion is destructive, while the propagandistic elements of the spousal love of royals intrude in the humble landscape of *Id.*

10, where a reaper wishes he could dedicate golden statues of himself and his beloved to Aphrodite. A further complication is presented in *Id.* 18, usually classified with other mythological poems, but propagandistically closely aligned with Theocritus 'Ptolemaic' poems, where Aphrodite is invoked to provide marriage stability for Helen and Menelaus, which, at least to some degree, undermines the goddesses' role as the patroness of the Ptolemaic marriage bliss. My paper will examine the moments of tension between the bucolic Aphrodite and the Aphrodite of the city and explore the frictions between their domains and powers.