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**BOTANICAL EMPIRES:
THE POLITICS OF PLANTS IN THEOCRITUS' IDYLLS**

by

CHRISTIAN RHOADS

**B.A., CLASSICS, UNIVERSITY OF NEW
HAMPSHIRE, 2020**

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Masters of Arts
Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies**

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Botanical Empires: The Politics of Plants in Theocritus' Idylls

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B.A., Classics, University of New Hampshire, 2020

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Abstract

This project identifies a system of plant-based identity politics in Theocritus' *Idylls*. In Chapter One, I trace a paradigm of unequal reciprocal interactions, "plant-*hubris*," throughout the erotic relationships of the *Idylls* as one partner acts violently against another who "overwaters" them with affection. I argue that characters in the *Idylls* use plants to explain their own relationship dynamics. In the second chapter I examine *Idyll* 1 and identify social commentary on culturally specific poetic competition that relies on vegetal imagery. The competition between the goatherd and Thyrsis in *Idyll* 1 is informed by both the immediate vegetal environment as well as by the contents of both performances, each of which use the relationships between plants and humans to root the poetry in a specific cultural tradition. Theocritus, I argue, uses the relationships between humans and their natural environment to explain the position of Sicilian poetics in Alexandrian literature.

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Botanical Empires: Introduction

“Man is defined as much by what he includes in his definition of his humanity as by what he excludes. And that not only is it not universal, it is highly culture-specific, and it is a term, really, the human, that indexes access to power, to be human enough or to not be human enough is an indexation of power and anything but neutral.” - Rosi Braidotti (2019)

This study focuses on multiplicities of environments and their mutual engagement within the identities of Theocritus' *Idylls*. Ecological environments, political environments, and social environments all converge in the individual; they knot and twist and press against the boundaries of the 'human'. Matrices of ecosystems can be complex, distressing, and often nearly indecipherable when considered from a personal perspective; this is especially the case when social relationships between the human and the members of their environments are inter-special. The division between human and inhuman is fraught with political biases; these very same biases also inform divisions between human communities. The question which has evolved into this project is how Theocritus frames the environmental perspective of the *Idylls* and to what extent he utilizes the distinction between human and other to explain his own variegated political milieu.

The epigraph above, from a lecture where Rosi Braidotti summarizes the definitions and impact of Posthumanism, identifies the political implications of defining 'humanity' as the underlying ethical position driving the post-humanist philosophical movement. For Braidotti, when one talks of the 'human', they are utilizing a political definition which has a history of exclusion. Humanity as a term has long been used to define the white male as distinct from people who do not fit that category and so are less valuable. In her book on the same topic, Braidotti discusses the ways in which ecological approaches to post-humanism position the individual as a

subject within systems of varying unique perspectives: “I define the critical posthuman subject within an eco-philosophy of multiple belongings, as a relational subject constituted in and by multiplicity, that is to say a subject that works across differences and is also internally differentiated, but still grounded and accountable.”¹ The philosophy that Braidotti espouses here provides an avenue through which to analyze the definitions of human as necessarily varied both internally within a given individual as well as in the context of that individual’s environmental relationships; accordingly, Braidotti’s philosophy is an attempt to counter the supremacy of the European ego, to check the domination of the other which ecologists have noted extends beyond minority groups, but also to the domination of the natural world. That is to say, Braidotti connects the distinction between human and non-human to the inclusion of individuals in communities. In doing so, Braidotti interrogates the consequential processes of political and social exclusion. I read Theocritus’ *Idylls* with an interest in investigating the multivalency of political identity as similarly informed by the characters’ relationships with non-human entities. In the *Idylls*, I argue, Theocritus connects humanity and plants in mutually intelligible systems of economic and emotional reciprocity which in turn form the emotional basis of characters’ political affiliations.

Theocritus’ *Idylls* are rich with political dynamics. Some of the relationships which contain political consequence are between humans or, in some cases, between humans and gods. Others are complex relationships between humans and plants which seem based on agricultural practices but, in the *Idylls*, are as emotionally charged as the relationships between humans. The title of this project, *Botanical Empires: the Politics of Plants in Theocritus’ Idylls*, ought to be elaborated within the notion of inter-special relationships for the sake of clarity. The two chapters which construct my argument may be considered as each elaborating on one of the conceptual terms in

¹ Braidotti 2013: 49.

the phrase *Botanical Empires*. Chapter One, *The Vegetal Agon*, is, broadly speaking, the “botanical” chapter that examines the relationships between humanity and the plants that inhabit their natural environments. Chapter Two, *Theocritus’ Vegetal Politics*, deals with “empires” and aims to connect the relationships established in Chapter One with notions of communal and political exclusion, especially to identify the relationships between Sicilian poetics and the poetic production of Alexandria. Both chapters are necessarily hyper-focused on the *Idylls* themselves, given that the intricacies of social politics, of which there are many, that constitute the project’s principal framework require a great deal of elaboration to maintain intelligibility. As such, it is important to provide here necessary background context in terms of Theocritus’ botanical and political circumstances.

My use of the term “botanical” to describe the relationships between vegetation and humanity is a deliberate one. Theocritus was, according to Alice Lindsell, if not a botanist by trade, at least familiar with Theophrastus’ *Enquiry into Plants*.² Some scholarship points also to the possibility, based heavily on internal evidence, that Theocritus may have spent time studying botanical medicine and poetry on Cos with Philitas.³ Even his invention of the *bucolic* genre seems to indicate a significant engagement with Hesiod, whose *Works and Days* promotes proper agricultural practices.⁴ Regardless of the degree to which Theocritus was personally trained in the study of plants, he certainly shows a degree of botanical sensibility. By this I mean to say that botany, a heavily philosophical approach to categorizing plants, must rely first and foremost on an interaction between humanity and the plant. Botany cannot exist without the human and cannot exist without the plant. My use of the term botanical refers to what is shared between the study of

² Lindsell 1937, rpt. in Raven 2000.

³ Gow 1951: xxvi-xxvii. See also Bulloch 2016 for an overview of scholarship on possible readings of Theocritus’ life.

⁴ Van Sickle 1976.

plants and includes the ‘scientific’ treatises by Theophrastus, the medicinal effects of plants, and the tending to plants in agriculture: relationships between the human and the plant. I argue, in Chapter One, that Theocritus demonstrates an awareness of botanical practice, of the relationships between humans and their vegetal environments. To highlight this, I examine the social relationships between humans and plants in the *Idylls* and the ways in which the singers within the poems use these vegetal sensitivities to elaborate on their own interpersonal relationships. Through characters such as Adonis (*Idyll* 15), whose mythological tradition contains heavy agricultural implications, and Daphnis (*Idyll* 1), whose connection with nature is strong enough that his death disrupts the natural world, Theocritus constructs a system of relationships that emphasize issues of emotional reciprocity and, more importantly, the plant-like violations of social exchange.

My use of the term “empire” to categorize the second chapter is equally as deliberate as my use of botanical. “Empire” is a term burdened with associations; of course, the most immediate elicited sense of the word is an idea of the nation-state as a political entity which is founded on control. My use of “empire” is associated with the politics of governance, but is first and foremost meant to highlight the forced — and necessarily fraudulent — sense of community, exclusion, and contest which arises from empire in the experience of the individual. In her 2020 book *Beyond Alexandria*, Marijn Visscher argues that literary production in the Ptolemaic and Seleucid Kingdoms was not only in mutual dialogue, but also engaged in contests over which literature could better depict its kingdom as the more dominant global force.⁵ Literature in this period seems to be engaged in imperial discourse and engages in the contests between defined political entities. While Visscher’s work contextualizing Alexandrian literature within contemporaneous global

⁵ See especially Visscher 2020: 119-153 on the Ptolemaic responses to Seleucid literature in Callimachus’ *The Lock of Berenice*.

literary production focuses on the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, I suggest that this dynamic of rivaling domination must apply also to the other Hellenistic kingdoms of the Mediterranean. ‘Minor’ kingdoms such as that of Hiero II of Syracuse and the Attalid dynasty had developed ruler-cults designed to promote images of cultural distinction and, at least in the case of Hiero II, a sense that the Syracusan kingdom was of equal importance to the Ptolemies and Seleucids.⁶ Theocritus presents a prime example through which to examine the effect of experiencing multiple, conflicting empires simultaneously, given that he was both a Syracusan and lived in Alexandria and shows clear affiliations with both Hiero II and Ptolemy II Philadelphus in *Idylls* 16 and 17. It is significant to note, also, that both Hiero II and Ptolemy II seem to have used plants either in writings or processions to signify their global influence, such that Theocritus’ own network of vegetal imagery fits in with their political and poetic agendas.⁷

In Chapter Two, I examine the individual experience that arises from this conflict of polity. I utilize the relationships between humans and plants from Chapter One to examine a politics of exclusion and the efforts to have one’s poetry deemed valuable. While I do not, for the sake of clarity as well as concision, explicitly connect the sense of community presented in Theocritus to the governing kingdoms, I do connect the processes of inclusion and exclusion to matters of Sicilian and Alexandrian identity, and, to be certain, argue that their politics of governance are implicit within Theocritus’ sense of self. Focusing on *Idyll* 1, I identify systems of Alexandrian social politics and literary tradition in the vegetal imagery on the ivy cup which is given to singer Thyrsis for his song, a song which itself contains distinctly Sicilian identities and Sicilian poetry.

⁶ Van Amsterdam 2015: 39 observes: “The numismatic, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence left behind from his reign points to Hieron’s conscious effort to portray himself as a great king whose kingdom was the peer of those in the eastern Mediterranean. He undertook building projects, engaged in competitive philanthropy, and amassed a large amount of wealth for his kingdom, all while remaining a loyal ally to Rome.”

⁷ Totelin 2012.

The relationship between the goatherd who offers the ivy cup and Thyrsis presents Thyrsis's quality of song as a determining factor for his value within the community depicted in the ivy cup.

Theocritus, I argue, maps his social and political identities using vegetation. The plants in the *Idylls* are political agents. The breakdown of plant/human division is, for Theocritus, a means to similarly deconstruct his internal conflict between his Sicilian and Alexandrian identities. The subsequent logical progression, which requires a project on the larger scope than is presently possible, is that the politics of identity inclusion contained in the plant relationships of the *Idylls* reflects the politics of empire contained in the layers of the self. I offer here, then, a methodology through which to consider Theocritus' eco-consciousness and the distinction between the human-self and the vegetal-other as inseparable from the divergence of Theocritus' Syracusan self from the Alexandrian community.

Chapter 1: The Vegetal Agon

“The question is to rethink our language in order that it expresses life, ours and that of other living beings.”
 – Luce Irigaray, *Through Vegetal Being* (2016: 90).

Introduction

Nature and humanity are inseparable entities. Ancient Greek thought often incorporated and/or depended on interactions with the objects in their environment, their embodied presence determined by their surroundings.⁸ This is the case also for modern humanity, whose engagement with nature and the objects of the world inform identity, as the posthumanism movement in philosophy and literary ecocriticism informs us.⁹ The entities constructing a person’s perspective act with their own distinct influence and come to represent culturally meaningful aspects of human thought. Plant life occupies a unique space within such issues of ecological sympathies. Despite the western neglect of non-capital value of plant life in modernity, vegetal beings are often found ‘thinking’ alongside humans as they grapple with important philosophical, emotional, and social issues.¹⁰ Luce Irigaray (2016), elaborating on the statement quoted in the epigraph above, says of the language of plants: “We have neglected to consider such a resource and have constructed a culture that thwarts this potential, instead of letting it be and making it blossom, which has rendered the living world sterile, except regarding reproduction.”¹¹ Irigaray’s point is that humanity’s commodification of vegetal substances has negatively impacted the empathic wholeness of human thought, allowing other groups (read women) to be consequentially marginalized.¹² A remedial

⁸ See Purves 2015; Chesi and Spiegel 2020; Bianchi et al. 2022.

⁹ See Braidotti 2013; Schliephake 2017.

¹⁰ On the West prioritizing the products of plants, see Irigaray and Marder 2016: 34-40. On the proximal relations between plants and philosophers generally, see Marder 2013 (especially 1-7) and Marder 2014.

¹¹ Irigaray and Marder 2016: 91.

¹² Irigaray and Marder 2016: 91: “This has led to the depreciation of the woman, the one who gives birth to a being made of flesh and blood. Is not our education based on the scorn for flesh, blood, even blood ties, and the attempt to

practice for this, she argues, is a thought process which takes the dialogue between plant and human seriously in discussions of identity (human, plant, self). For Irigaray, western approaches to the environment have reduced the plant to an agentless entity whose sole role in interactions with humans is to support and nourish humanity; the natural antithesis of this is a view of plant life as engaged in fully reciprocal relationships, of which I will highlight economic (agricultural), parental (nurturing), and romantic/sexual (erotic) relationships. Within Greek literature, which informed the possibility of ethical plant-human relationships in many modern theorists, the complexities of this dialectic are perhaps nowhere better showcased than in the *Idylls* of Theocritus. Theocritus, I argue, demonstrates an awareness of the ecological sensitivity that modern scholars have identified as lacking from contemporary discourses on plant and human life and which are crucial to problems of humanity by weaving throughout the *Idylls* a paradigm of interdependence between vegetal and anthropomorphic emotional expression.

Alice Lindsell's 1937 study "Was Theocritus a Botanist?"¹³ provides an important evaluation of the diverse quantity of plant life found in Theocritus' poetry, identifying eighty-seven unique terms for plant life throughout the *Idylls*, most of which are found in the pastoral poems.¹⁴ Lindsell's work is sufficient in identifying Theocritus' pastoral *Idylls* as remarkably vegetally endowed, containing roughly twice as many names for types of plants as are found in Homer.¹⁵ As part of her study, the goal of which was to use the geographical specificity of plant species to determine where Theocritus was when he authored his *Idylls*, Lindsell found that the types of plants used in Theocritus are not consistent with their representations as food-stuffs in

master them through laws rules and discourses arbitrary with respect to life? Which results, at best, in ambivalence toward all that has something to do with living, in and around us."

¹³ Lindsell 1937, rpt. in Raven 2000.

¹⁴ Lindsell in Raven 2000: 65.

¹⁵ Lindsell in Raven 2000: 65.

ancient Comedy, nor as ceremonial garlands in Tragedy and Lyric, but are, rather, the plants of foothills, mountains, and meadows which have few regular uses: “[Theocritus] writes of plants for their own sakes, and it is this that makes his attitude modern and interesting.”¹⁶ It is this claim which I am investigating. Lindsell’s geographical findings are vitiated by her unquestioned trust in Sir William Thistelton-Dyer’s identification of ancient terms for plants as post-Linnean, binomial species classifications, a methodology which has been critiqued by some scholars, including John Raven (2000) who identifies it as “too insubstantial to determine the proper equivalent with any certainty.”¹⁷ Lindsell was, however, correct in one respect. Theocritus’ plants are from the outset seemingly independent and self-determining, relying neither on the natural nor their anthropocentrized environment to establish their identity. A pine tree is, for nearly all intents and purposes, simply a pine tree without need for contextualization within a human ecosystem. And yet, Lindsell’s claim does not account for the multifaceted identities layered in both man and plant as they are contextualized alongside one another within the structure of the poetry. Indeed, it is not only the plants’ relative use and physical descriptions, components which constituted a majority of Lindsell’s work, but also their inclusion into the poetic arrangement of the *Idylls* which informs for whose sake (human or plant) Theocritus has written them into his poetry — a question to which the answer, I argue, is both.

Greek literature leading up to Theocritus had incorporated varying degrees of interconnected emotional relations between plants and humanity. In the *Iliad* one need not search long for similes comparing soldiers and trees; Glaucus’ famed “generation of leaves” simile (*Iliad*.6.146-9) which compares the seasonal growth and decay of leaves to the generations of

¹⁶ Lindsell in Raven 2000: 65.

¹⁷ Raven 2000: 6. Sir Thistelton-Dyer’s work is not publicly available beyond the entries for plant names used in the LSJ. John Raven was granted access to the notes kept by Thistleton-Dyer for his work on a compendium of Greek Plants left unpublished at his death. Thistleton-Dyer’s advice on plant names was sought by the editors of the LSJ.

soldiers fighting and dying on the battlefield, has been described by Charles Stein as “express[ing] a bleaker outlook on human life.”¹⁸ The *Odyssey* provides the first example of the term φύσις “nature” in the context of a plant.¹⁹ Perhaps most instructive among extant works are the philosophers who attempt to define the plant. For instance, Plato, in his *Timaeus* (77a-c), describes plant life as void of reason but imbued with sensation and feeling.²⁰ All this is to say: one should not marvel at the thought of Theocritus including in his *Idylls* a paradigm of emotional relations between humans and vegetation.

Theocritus’ own expression of the Greek eco-consciousness is, of course, unique to him. Theocritus’ formation of the bucolic genre makes available a new mechanism to comment on plant-human interdependency.²¹ While plants are seemingly independent, by incorporating plants into his *Idylls*, Theocritus weaves plants into an ecosystem including both humans and nature and, in the process, gives plant life a symbolic value and the ability to convey meaning within human systems of understanding. The *Idylls* operate by a system of congruous mimetic and allegorical representation; a term or phrase derives meaning through its immediate context and by the literary implications drawn from the collective memory of his erudite audience.²² The naivete of the speakers in Theocritus *Idylls*, who are comically unaware of the gravity hidden in Theocritus’ words and the sophistication of his intertextual poetic voice, gives way to new, sublime meaning

¹⁸ Stein 2013: 115.

¹⁹ *Odyssey* 10.303: “having plucked it [the *molu* plant] from the earth, he showed me its *phusis*” (ἐκ γαίης ἐρύσας καὶ μοι φύσιν αὐτοῦ ἔδειξε). The observation about the term *phusis* used for the first time here for plants was made in a lecture by Brooke Holmes (2014) “Human and Nonhuman Communities and the Question of Nature” delivered at the University of Chicago.

²⁰ Plato *Timaeus* 77a-c: ἃ δὴ νῦν ἡμερα δένδρα καὶ φυτὰ καὶ σπέρματα... μετέχει γε μὴν τοῦτο ὃ νῦν λέγομεν τοῦ τρίτου ψυχῆς εἶδους, ὃ μεταξὺ φρενῶν ὀμφαλοῦ τε ἰδρύσθαι λόγος, ᾧ δόξης μὲν λογισμοῦ τε καὶ νοῦ μέτεστι τὸ μηδέν, αἰσθήσεως δὲ ἠδείας καὶ ἀλγείνης μετὰ ἐπιθυμιῶν. “Which are now cultivated trees and plants and seeds... And this thing very which we are now talking about has a share of the third type of soul, the type which our argument says is seated between the midriff and the navel, for which there is no opinion or reason or thought, but there is a share of sensations of pleasure and pain along with emotions.”

²¹ On Theocritus as the founder of the Bucolic genre, see Van Sickle 1976.

²² On the allegorical and mimetic structure of the *Idylls*, see Gutzwiller 1991. On collective memory in Hellenistic literature, see Klooster 2011.

when one focuses on the perspective of the plant.²³ In other words, when the plant becomes the topic of study, the complex representational structures at play in the *Idylls*, which often require a reader to return to passages when new information comes to light, begin to demonstrate an intertwined relationship between man and his vegetal counterparts. Theocritus represents relationships between plants and humans through the combined efforts of comparisons between man and nature, imbedded allusions to mythological traditions, and mutually comparable systems of power which blur the line between human and plant ethics. The term plant ethics here refers to the relations of equitable exchange and care that constitute the interactions between humans and plants in the *Idylls*.

As the plant-human dialectic comes to the foreground of the text, so too must the status of the poet. Theocritus' *Idylls* are not only compositions in their own right, but they also include characters who compose their own works. Throughout the corpus is a masterful display of metapoetic social commentary on the process of poetic competition, one which houses a great deal of the plant-human relationships in the corpus. The internal singers of the *Idylls* often use the motif of mutually informed meaning between plants and humans — or, occasionally, plant-human hybrids — to comment on their own status as lover, contested singer, and so on. Yet these issues also come to inform the personal identity of Theocritus himself. Plants have long been noted to root people in their ethnic identity and personal history.²⁴ As Theocritus explains his diegetic poets' experiences through their use of vegetal imagery, so too does he come to discuss his own experiences as a Sicilian in the court of the Ptolemies and the poetic competition between Hellenistic kingdoms.²⁵

²³ See Gutzwiller 1986 and Gutzwiller 1991: 1-19.

²⁴ See Jones and Cloke 2002 for the geographical associations between trees and a person's local and national ties. On plants and their use in ethnic identity and personal cultural history, see Kimmerer 2013.

²⁵ On the literary competition between Hellenistic kingdoms, see Visscher 2020.

In this chapter, I will demonstrate Theocritus' integration of complex human-plant relationships throughout his poetry to serve as a method through which to analyze the emergent identity politics in the following chapter. First by studying the plant-human allegorical relationship as set out in the opening of the collection, then by using the mythological figure Adonis as a means to study the mixed erotics of plant and human entities, I will analyze the system of incongruous reciprocity developed as a result of the erotic comparisons between man and plant. In as vegetal a process as is possible, this chapter means to express life and to highlight a process of solidarity between humanity and plant life from which further arguments on Theocritean identity can be drawn.

1. A Contest of Man and Plant

To understand the emotional entanglement of anthropomorphized and vegetal beings in the *Idylls*, it is necessary first to establish the position of plant life within the collection's representational framework. The most prescient and informative section in the *Idylls* for the generic structure of entire collection are the opening six lines of *Idyll 1* which were consistently placed first in ancient editions,²⁶ and, as Richard Hunter (1999) describes it, "announces a 'new' poetry."²⁷ As such, I will spend significant time discussing the passage. The *Idylls* begin with a dialogue between an unnamed goatherd and the shepherd Thyrsis. Each character is introduced as a remarkable singer by their counterpart in an ensemble of complements. The types of complements on display in the introductory refrain offer an important example of the way such poetry and the relationships between humanity and vegetal life should be read: chronologically,

²⁶ Van Sickle 1976: 21.

²⁷ Hunter 1999: 68.

then retroactively recontextualized by literary and mythological traditions. Here, Thyrsis, the first to speak, urges the unnamed goatherd into competition (*Idyll* 1.1-6):²⁸

Ἄδύ τι τὸ ψιθύρισμα καὶ ἃ πίτυς, αἰπόλε, τήνα,
 ἃ ποτὶ ταῖς παραῖσι μελίσδεται, ἄδύ δὲ καὶ τύ
 συρίσδες· μετὰ Πᾶνα τὸ δεύτερον ἄθλον ἀποισῆ.
 αἴ κα τήνος ἔλη κεραὸν τράγον, αἴγα τὸ λαυῆ·
 αἴ κα δ' αἴγα λάβη τήνος γέρας, ἐς τὲ καταρρεῖ
 ἃ χίμαρος· χιμάρω δὲ καλὸν κρέας, ἔστε κ' ἀμέλξη.

How sweetly both this pine whispers, goatherd,
 which sings along the rivers, and how sweetly you, too,
 whistle; you will win the second prize behind Pan.
 if he chooses the horned he goat, you will take the she-goat.
 and if he takes the she-goat as a prize, the kid
 will fall to you; the meat of the kid is good, and you can milk it before.

Theocritus, from the outset, establishes a view of man and plant that is not dominated by notions of complete control of one by another, but rather one dictated by a paradigm of contested equilibrium under mutual subjugation to Pan. Plant life is autonomous and free from human control; rather, plants are on par with humans in their mutual subjugation in comparisons with Pan and the god's mythological traditions.

The goatherd here is thrust into competition not only with Thyrsis, as is understood by the dialogical structure of the scene, but a competition situated in a series of comparisons between singers and their natural environs. The pine tree (πίτυς) partakes in poetic contestation through its “sweet whispering” (*Id.*1.1), which is contrasted by the goatherd addressed as “also whistling sweetly” (*Id.*1.2-3). Ἄδύ, which is regularly used as a determinate of value in bucolic poetry,²⁹ is unmistakably used here to describe the sounds both the pine and the goatherd make. Additionally, the combination of the connective particles used within the clause suggests an inherently

²⁸ All quotations of Theocritus are from the edition of Gow 1951. All translations are my own unless otherwise specified.

²⁹ Hunter 1999: 70 n.1.

associated yet contrasting relationship between the goatherd and the vegetal environment. The καί of the pine tree (ἄ πίτυς) in the first line is complemented by the καί of “you” (τῷ) in line two, which must refer to the goatherd due to the vocative address αἴπολε, effectively categorizing the pair as comparably “sweet.” The value of this lies in the corresponsive and reciprocal notions in καί...καί constructions as they relate to the paring of clauses within a sentence.³⁰ That the pine tree and the goatherd are both defined by such emphatically equalizing particles suggests a similarly equalizing representation of vegetation alongside its human counterparts and vice versa. Yet their relationship must not be entirely equivocal, as the particle δέ which defines the clauses’ coordination also provides the corresponding καί... καί construction with an “adversative or disjunctive sense with the idea of addition.”³¹ In other words: even though Thyrsis is addressing the goatherd directly, he addresses the goatherd as secondary to the pine, an apparent afterthought. The first sentence instructs us to consider the pine tree as a crucial and primary component of the collection’s comparative structure and, moreover, a worthy competitor in the poetic ἄγων (“contest”).³²

As Kathrine Gutzwiller (1991) observes, these analogical comparisons are the structural backbone of pastoral symbolism.³³ Through a close reading of these opening lines of the *Idylls*, which she notes have been seen as essentially programmatic since even antiquity,³⁴ Gutzwiller identifies the series of comparisons between goatherd and pine tree, goatherd and Pan, and various prized goats arranged by sex and age, as indicative of “a continuum that fails to distinguish between” the herdsman and nature.³⁵ While Gutzwiller’s observations are well noted, it would be

³⁰ Denniston 1996: 289.

³¹ Denniston 1996: 305.

³² The placement of the pine tree as first among competitors signals its primacy within poetic contestation.

³³ Gutzwiller 1991: 15.

³⁴ Gutzwiller 1991: 14.

³⁵ Gutzwiller 1991: 85.

a mistake to categorize nature as a homogenous entity. Plant life occupies a radically different role in this passage than the rivers or the goats. The pine tree is capable of song, thereby playing in a field occupied only otherwise by Pan, the goatherd, and Thyrsis, whereas the goats serve as descriptors of quality in their role, here, as prizes for the best singers, and the rivers do not become clearly associated with song until the goatherds response in lines 7-8: ἄδιον, ὃ ποιμήν, τὸ τεὸν μέλος ἢ τὸ καταχές | τῆν' ἀπὸ τᾶς πέτρας καταλείβεται ὑπόθεν ὕδωρ, “Sweeter, shepherd, does that song of yours slip down than does the one that echoing water drips down from the rocks above.” It is worth noting, here, the audible distinction between the sounds of the goatherd and pine and that of the river. The pine tree μελίσδεται “sings” along the rivers and the goatherd συρίσδεις “whistles” whereas the sound of the river in lines 7-8 καταλείβεται “slips down.” In both μελίσδεται and συρίσδεις the -σδ-, Doric for the -ζ- found in Attic, are onomatopoeic depictions of the hum in both the whispering and the whistling, a characteristic that is noticeably lacking from the river’s accompanying καταλείβεται. Even as the sound of the water becomes identifiably comparable to Thyrsis’ song, the sweetness of the river’s song is set as qualitatively inferior to the song of the poets.³⁶ If the pine tree is, as the opening lines suggest, a musician comparable to and in competition with the goatherd, the music of the river must also be inferior to that of the pine-trees. The continuum which Gutzwiller identifies between the goatherd and nature is, therefore, not balanced, and plant life takes priority over the rest of the environment in terms of song.

In the remainder of the passage the comparisons between the goatherd’s ability to win only the second-best prize serve to reinforce the man-nature contestation which was determined from the outset. As is fitting for a goatherd, the first of the blatant comparisons is between the goatherd and Pan--fitting because the Greeks associated Pan with the “edges” of society, or borderlands

³⁶ The lack of an onomatopoeic verb for the river’s song is indicative of the river’s inability to compete with the whistling of human voices and the sounds of wind through trees.

which constitute the “frontier of human space.”³⁷ Pan’s position on the limits of civilization is crucial in ascertaining Theocritus’ use of plant life. Pan’s cultural liminality oversees the analogical relationship between nature and human life. Because Pan at once encompasses both humanity and nature, his inevitable success in the competition between man and nature emphasizes the deficiency of the other contestants. Locked in competition with each other, the goatherd and the pine tree do not succeed as individual entities. The pine tree and its accompanying song may have priority over the goatherd and his piping, but the goatherd is the only one who will get a goat. Pan has no such problem and succeeds both in prize and in allegory. Such disputes between man and plant are overlaid onto the very notion of poetic competition as depicted in the first couple of lines. The goatherd and the pine tree are ambiguously interpretable as both mutually contested through analogy and also unified in their mythical associations. Hellenistic poets were quite fond of incorporating pluralized meaning in any given word, and no less so in Theocritus than the other Alexandrian poets.³⁸ Theocritus’ employment of the terms “πίτυς” and “συρίσδεξ” endows the analogy between plant and human life with further meaning within the context of Pan’s erotic exploits.

A cursory search for the term *πίτυς* reveals its primary meaning as “pine tree.” Its sources are translated into several possible species of pine tree with little to support the varied readings, the term alone seems to refer to any pine tree,³⁹ and thus will suffice to support the initial reading from which I have analyzed its comparison to the goatherd. With the mention of Pan, however, a secondary reference to the mythological figure Πίτυς comes into focus. The nymph Pitys is recorded by a number of sources with varying details as a nymph pursued by Pan who eventually

³⁷ Bourgeaud 1988: 60.

³⁸ White 1979: 37; Kuchenmüller 1923: 53; Segal 1981: 210.

³⁹ See LSJ, s.v. Πίτυς.

turns into a Pine tree. The most explicit version of the story derived from an early Byzantine farming manual, the *Geoponica*, which explains that Pan and Boreas were in competition for the girl, Pitys, when she ultimately chose Pan. Boreas, now a jilted lover, pushed Pitys off a cliff to her death, only for Earth to turn her into a pine tree.⁴⁰ While this source's ability to speak to Theocritus' particular use of the myth is tenuous given the vast temporal gap, similar, if abridged and varied accounts come also from Propertius, who mentions the pine tree as a beloved of "the Arcadian god" (Pan),⁴¹ and Lucian, who has Pan claim Pitys as one of his many lovers.⁴² While sources depicting Pan's love for Pitys come primarily from the imperial era,⁴³ it is likely that the myth was already established within the collective memory from which the Alexandrian poets were so fond of invoking.⁴⁴ The very term used to represent the vegetal world at the opening of the *Idylls*, then, not only refers to the pine tree itself but an embodied connection between anthropomorphic and botanical identity once it is considered in association with Pan's liminal and transitional culture.

Likewise, the emphasis on the goatherd's ability to play music which parallels the pine's is evoked using the verb *σπρίζω*, literally meaning "to play the *σύριγξ*."⁴⁵ Such a term should not be surprising to find in the introduction to a pastoral poem which centers on a song competition between goatherds. The *σύριγξ* was, by the time of Theocritus, long established as the generic instrument of the goat/shepherd song. Already in Homer, the *syrinx*'s connection to the world of

⁴⁰ *Geoponica* 11.10: Γῆ δὲ ἐλεοῦσα τὸ πάθος φυτὸν ὁμώνυμον τῆς παιδὸς ἀναδίδωσι, "But the earth pitied her suffering and sent up a plant with the girl's name."

⁴¹ Prop. 1.18.19-20: *vos eritis testes, si quos habet arbor amores, fagus et Arcadio pinus amica deo*, "You will be witnesses, if a tree can have any love, beech tree and pine, girlfriend for the Arcadian God."

⁴² Lucian *Dialogues of the Gods* 2.4.

⁴³ Hunter 1999: 71.

⁴⁴ Borgeaud 1988: 78.

⁴⁵ See LSJ, s.v., *Σύριζω*. I. On the uses of *σπρίζω* to refer to playing the *σύριγξ* within Theocritus c.f. the description of Polyphemus at *Idyll* 6.9 and *Idyll* 11.38 and the description of Menalcas and Daphnis at *Idyll* 8.4.

the rustic herdsman was immortalized on the shield of Achilles.⁴⁶ Popular in the Hellenistic period, however, was the etiological myth that Syrinx was originally a nymph sought after by Pan.⁴⁷ Despite variations, the myth of Syrinx explains that she was chased by Pan and was able to escape only by being consumed by the earth; reeds sprout in the spot of her departure from which Pan created the eponymous pipe.⁴⁸ Just as *πίτυς* comes to refer to the mythological character who became the pine tree, so too does the goatherd's piping refer to Syrinx and her own metamorphosis into the instrument of bucolic poetry once the initial comparison between man and plant is set in reference to Pan. *Συρίσδεξ* in line three, then, enlightens the readers to the goatherds' dependence on plant life to perform.

Conversely, *πίτυς*, the vegetal foil to the goatherd, depends on a human voice to sing, as signaled by the verb *μελίσδεταί*, a term which is used most often to refer to vocal performance. Given the human origin of the *πίτυς*, it is fitting that she uses a human voice for her song, yet this sets a contrast with the goatherd who, though distinctly human, relies on sounds purportedly produced as the result of a vegetal transformation, the syrinx. Though initially set in opposition to one another, the goatherd and the pine also operate on a level that is distinctly reciprocal. Pan mitigates the tension that emerges from these two readings through his association with civilization and wilderness, allowing the dialectic between humans and plants to stand distinct within a series of comparisons. Among the natural scenery in the introductory *agōn* between Thyrsis and the goatherd, only plant life is granted a position of contrasting empathy. Humans and plants are distinct from one another, but are shown to relate to one another through the erotic exploits of Pan.

⁴⁶ Homer *Iliad* 18.526. On the *syrinx* as index of "pastoral" poetry, see Pearce 1993: 70-71; cf. Rosenmeyer 1969: 75, who notes Theocritus' use of the literary pastoral syrinx dating back to the Shield of Achilles.

⁴⁷ Borgeaud 1988: 80.

⁴⁸ Ovid *Metamorphoses* 1.689-712; Longus 2.34.

2. Plant-human *desiderata*

Implicit in the opening lines of the *Idylls* is an established relationship identifying plant-human hybrids — plants that at the same time also human — as the frequentative and subliminal objects of desire of the Theocritean world. In typical Theocritean subterfuge, this paradigm of plant erotics is deliberately repressed, only revealing its clarity within complex representational systems. The fragile contestation between plants and humans informs and is informed by the imbalanced relationship between the lover and the beloved. In the instances of Pitys and Syrinx (*Idyll* 1.1, 1.3), their vegetal hybridity is not merely formed through the comparison with Pan; mythologically, it is formed as a direct result of their role as pursued object of erotic desire. Similar is the case of Adonis, whose mythological traditions consistently place him as a manifold focal point from which to observe the roles of plant, human, lover, and beloved. In this section I will use Adonis as a tool to explore the erotic relationships between vegetation and humanity. The Adonia of *Idyll* 15 depends and elaborates on a system of vegetal erotics inherent in Adonis' variant mythological tradition. Adonis' sexual relationships here are inseparable from both his vegetal associations as well as his repetitive cycle of birth, life, and death. Reading *Idyll* 3, then, with an understanding of Adonis as an ambassador between the vegetal and the anthropocentric worlds reveals a pattern of plant-assisted tragedy in the other myths mentioned by the goatherd's song including those of Iasion, Hippomenes and Atalanta, Bias and Melampous, and Endymion. The relatively brief song of mythological lovers is built on a notion of vegetal relation within which tragic outcomes are mediated by the characters' use and/or recollection of the vegetal world. It is apparent that Theocritus is not only aware of such ambiguity but uses it as a fulcrum on which he may construct a complex system of emotion emerging from the interactions between humans and their vegetal environment.

The most immediately evident example of Adonis' placement within the Theocritean corpus is as the centerpiece of the Adoniazousai, the evidently annual festival explored in *Idyll 15*. Theocritus' use of such a character embodies his program of vegetal-humanity. While Theocritus does not explain the myth in whole, he utilizes the aftermath of Adonis' transference between the vegetal and human worlds in a way which is dependent on the tradition's syncretic details and prioritizes the retroactive interpretation of Adonis as a focus point of the desirable plant-hybrid. Theocritus' Adoniazousai follows Syracusan women living in Alexandria attending the festival, admiring a tapestry which depicts the demi-god, and listening to a song in his commemoration. The song celebrates Adonis and laments his death, particularly through the use of vegetation and harvest: πὰρ μὲν οἱ ὄρια κεῖται, ὄρα δρυὸς ἄκρα φέροντι, | πὰρ δ' ἀπαλοὶ κᾶποι πεφυλαγμένοι ἐν ταλαρίσκοις | ἀργύρειοις, "beside him all things lay in their season, which the fruit-trees grow, and beside him the tender/delicate gardens are guarded in little silver baskets" (*Id.* 15.112-114). The singer goes on to explain that εἶδατά θ' ὅσσα γυναῖκες ἐπὶ πλαθάνῳ πονέονται | ἄνθεα μίσγοισαι λεῦκῳ παντοῖα μαλεύρω, "women carry so much food in their dishes, mixing all sorts of flowers with white wheat-meal" (*Id.* 15.115-116). The particular manner in which the citizens of Alexandria are said to bring offerings to Adonis, here, is less than surprising for a festival whose focus is apparently fertility; yet, it nevertheless emphasizes the vegetal importance of Adonis in Theocritus' cultural milieu. Historical festivals for Adonis have been sourced primarily from classical Athens,⁴⁹ with Theocritus' account here being important evidence for whatever Alexandrian practice may have existed. Certainly, the overlap seen in Theocritus' *Idyll 15* with such Athenian traditions as the offering of potted seedlings and, indeed, the reference to the singer as daughter of an Argive,⁵⁰ reinforces an understanding of the demi-god's cross-cultural

⁴⁹ Reed 2000: 320.

⁵⁰ Theoc. *Id.*15.97: ἂ τᾶς Ἀργείας θυγάτηρ.

association with plant growth. As Reitzimmer (2016) acknowledges, too, the depiction of the Adonia in Theocritus' *Idyll* 15 does not entirely align with the Athenian practice, since the Athenian festival was generally private and carried out on rooftops rather than at a royal palace.⁵¹

Detienne (1994) investigates the Adonia in the Athenian context as parallel to the Thesmophoria and finds that the Athenian festival commemorates Adonis as a god of sterile sexuality compared to the productive value of Demeter in the Thesmophoria.⁵² Detienne's assertion regarding the sterile sexuality of the Athenian Adonia are the result of his setting the festival parallel to the Thesmophoria, the former being a festival by women about women, the latter a festival by women for the male farmers. Scholars such as Winkler (1990) have found significant fault in this argument, arguing that it "would imply a complete assimilation of women's consciousness, even on occasions of relative autonomy, to the ruling categories of male discourse."⁵³ Furthermore, his findings are paradoxically too specific, in that the Athenian use of the festival does not indicate a unified depiction of Adonis' sexuality throughout the Mediterranean, and too vague: as Reed (1995) notes, Detienne omits iterations of the Adonis myth which do not include, for example, his birth out of myrrh — a crucial component in Detienne's assessment of Adonis' vegetal sexuality.⁵⁴ In Theocritus' depiction of the myth, however, uses of such variant mythologies and historical depiction are key to understanding Adonis as an embodied mediator between humankind and its vegetal environs. Theocritus' Adonis is not meant to depict a form of infertile life, even if that were the case for the actual festival in Athens; instead, he highlights the erotic duality of death and birth inherent in plants.

⁵¹ Reitzammer 2016: 121; see also McInerney 2017 for criticisms of Reitzammer's arguments that find the Adonia in literary works such as *Lysistrata*, arguments which McInerney calls an "overreach."

⁵² Detienne 1994: 103 "The gardening of Adonis stood for a negation of the true cultivation of plants and was an inverted form of the growing of cereals as represented, in a religious context, by the principal power responsible for cultivated plants, namely Demeter."

⁵³ Winkler 1990: 199.

⁵⁴ Reed 1995: 321.

The scholia to Theocritus (quoted below) insists that Adonis' role in his eponymous festivals was as a physical *embodiment* of grain's rebirth in season. Because the extant commentaries to Theocritus come from later sources, the accuracy of the scholiasts' readings has been questioned by scholars such as Reed (1995).⁵⁵ Yet, there is still room to consider Adonis as *representative* of vegetal growth, particularly in a society as multicultural as Alexandrian Egypt. Joseph Reed (1995) and Charles Segal (1969) have suggested that Adonis' connection to plant life was a relic carried down from Near Eastern traditions which associated their harvest god, Tammuz, and his sexual relations with Ishtar, as a myth of agricultural production. By the time of classical Athens, however, this agricultural purpose had become tradition.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, in Theocritus' diegetic Alexandria the fertile associations between Adonis and plant life and Aphrodite are definite. The pots impregnated with seedlings are not described as being limp and infertile, as they are in the Athenian tradition, shifting the festival's purpose from Adonis' death to encompass his inevitable rebirth as well. Just as was the case in its Near Eastern ancestry, the importance of Adonis' central position in the dialectic formed between vegetation and civilization is matched by his desirability.

A significant portion of the song which the Argive woman sang is devoted to the demi-god's relationship with Aphrodite. In this iteration of the myth, Aphrodite is seen as his lover. The couple are honored with *χλωραὶ δὲ σκιάδες μαλακῶ βρίθουσαι ἀνήθω*, "green canopies laden with soft dill" (*Id.* 15.119) around which Erotes fly *οἷοι ἀηδονιδῆς ... ἐν δένδρω*, "like nightingales ... in a tree" (*Id.* 15.121). The description of Aphrodite and Adonis has been identified by Gow as a marriage scene,⁵⁷ instead of the anticipated funeral bier, and this is supported by the singer's use

⁵⁵ Reed 1995: 315.

⁵⁶ Segal 1969; Reed 1995: 317-319.

⁵⁷ Gow 1950: 298 n. 123-130.

of the term γαμβρός “bridegroom.”⁵⁸ It seems, however, that given the connotations of both marriage as well as the inevitable death of Adonis, the sequence is both a funeral oration as well as a wedding song. Here, too, we see Adonis’ vegetal worship inextricably entwined with his relationship with Aphrodite.

It is worth noting, at this point, that Adonis’ sexuality is consistent with the conception of vegetal eroticism found in works both earlier than and more-or-less contemporary with Theocritus’ *Idylls*. In their 2017 chapter “Eroticized Environments” Thomas Sharkie and Marguerite Johnson apply ecocritical analyses to erotic poetry in the Hesiodic corpus, the Orphic *Argonautica*, the fragments of Empedocles, and Aratus’ *Phaenomena*. They note that in the Orphic tradition as well as in the pre-Socratic works of Empedocles, Eros carries the function of both creator and destroyer of all beings.⁵⁹ Citing Empedocles’ first principles (fr. 31B21 DK) which explain that Eros unifies all creatures — Empedocles specifically mentions trees first, then men — Sharkie and Johnson argue that Empedocles’ philosophy “offers a means by which to captivate and inspire his readers to rediscover Eros and strive again for a communion with nature,” having since divorced themselves from the Earth.⁶⁰ Hesiod and Aratus set such sentiments at the center of their natural erotics; Sharkie and Johnson find in the *Works and Days* as well as the *Phaenomena* a paradigm in which nature is “an avenue by which to make life easier, as long as humanity is in close communication with the rhythms of the natural world.”⁶¹ To connect with nature is, for these authors, an erotic act, one necessary and urgent. Adonis encompasses this relationship as his sexuality and vegetality are intertwined through his cyclical role in generation and death. In fact, the mythology of Adonis must always at least allude to both his associations with plants and his

⁵⁸ Theoc. *Id.* 15.129. See Reed 2000: 320.

⁵⁹ Sharkie and Johnson 2017: 71-81.

⁶⁰ Sharkie and Johnson 2017: 79-81.

⁶¹ Sharkie and Johnson 2017: 86.

relationships with the gods given that it is because of these very relationships that he passes through stages of death, life, and rebirth, where life is occupied by his role as lover, and both life and death are tethered to his relationships.

This tripartite identification—death, life, and birth— is exemplified by the epithet *τριφίλητος* “thrice-loved” used by Praxinoa, one of the festival goers, to describe Adonis’ depiction on a tapestry.⁶² It is unclear from the isolated use of the epithet who the third lover of Adonis is, if in fact this is meant to evoke his numerous lovers, among whom Aphrodite and Persephone certainly would be included, given that theirs are traditionally the domains between which Adonis divides his time. The Scholia suggest that the term may refer to Zeus,⁶³ who is mentioned by the singer of *Idyll 15* in terms of his recruiting young men as cupbearers.⁶⁴ However, perhaps Gow’s suggestion that the term does not refer to the numerous lovers of Adonis—for who would be the third?—but rather that the *τρι-* “has intensive force,”⁶⁵ is aimed in the correct direction. While Gow’s interpretation goes no further, the immediate context of the word’s use in the present poem invites an elaboration on how this “intensive force” is being used. Praxinoa remarks that Adonis is *ὁ κὴν Ἀχεροντι φιληθείς*, “Loved even in death” (*Id.* 15.86). It is peculiar that she has not yet, in explaining the beauty of the tapestry in question, identified Adonis in terms of his lovers, favoring instead the position he holds within the cycle of life and death while being loved. *Τριφίλητος* only secondarily refers to the lovers of Adonis via its primary association with the botanical stages of growth, love, and death which comprise the Adonis myth.

⁶² Theoc. *Id.* 15.86.

⁶³ Scholia KUEA at Theocritus 15.82a (ed. Wendell): *ὁ πολυφιλήτος ὡς καὶ παρ’ Ὀμήρω ἄσπασίη τρίλλιστος*. ἢ ὅτι ὑπὸ τριῶν ἐφιλήθη· Διός, Ἀφροδίτης καὶ Περσεφόνης, “He is much beloved so also ‘especially welcome’ by Homer. Or that he was loved by three: Zeus, Aphrodite, and Persephone.”

⁶⁴ Theoc. *Id.* 15.123-4: *ὦ ἔβενος, ὦ χρυσός, ὦ ἐκ λευκῶ ἐλέφαντος | αἰετοὶ οἰνοχόον Κρονίδα Διὶ παῖδα φέροντες*, “O ebony, O gold, O the eagles of white ivory bringing a child as cup-bearer to Zeus, the son of Kronos.”

⁶⁵ Gow 1950: 289 n. 86. On the use of the prefix *τρι-* as having intensive meaning, see also the use of *τρισμέγιστος* (thrice-great) as epithet of Hermes.

Charles Segal (1969), while examining the mention of Adonis in *Idyll 3*, reaches a similar conclusion regarding the connection between love, death, and plants in Theocritus' Adonis. At *Idyll 3.46-8* Adonis is depicted as having “driven Beautiful Cythera to her fill of madness so that she would not put him away from her breast when he was dead.”⁶⁶ The significance of this lies in the word used for “breast,” μάζος. Segal notes, following intrigue expressed by Gow,⁶⁷ that the noun is most often reserved for maternal instincts rather than sexual ones, and he traces Theocritus' dual expression of the pair's relationship to the original myth at the core of the Adoniazousai, in which “The maternal and sexual relation between the Young God and the Great Mother are ... originally part of a complex whole.”⁶⁸ Moreover, the Scholia for this passage explains that Adonis' passage between life and death is vegetal in nature:⁶⁹

Λέγεται δὲ περὶ τοῦ Ἀδωνίδος, ὅτι καὶ ἀποθανὼν ὁ Ἄδωνις ἕξ μῆνας ἐποίησεν ἐν ταῖς ἀγκάλαις τῆς Ἀφροδίτης, ὥσπερ καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἀγκάλαις τῆς Περσεφόνης. Τοῦτο δὲ τὸ λεγόμενον τοιοῦτόν ἐστιν ἀληθῶς· ὅτι ὁ Ἄδωνις ἤγουν ὁ σῖτος ὁ σπειρόμενος ἕξ μῆνας ἐν τῇ γῆ ποιεῖ ἀπὸ τῆς σπορᾶς καὶ ἕξ μῆνας ἔχει αὐτὸν ἡ Ἀφροδίτη, τούτεστιν ἡ εὐκρασία τοῦ ἀέρος· καὶ ἔκτοτε λαμβάνουσιν αὐτὸν οἱ ἄνθρωποι.

They say, when it comes to Adonis, that even while dying he spent six months in the embrace of Aphrodite, just as he also spent in the embrace of Persephone. But this story is truthfully told as follows: Adonis, or rather, the planted grain spends six months in the earth after the planting, and for six months Aphrodite, that is the mildness of the air, holds him. And then mankind takes him.

Adonis' plant associations are difficult to ignore here. Even if it is unlikely that he was in real practice considered “planted grain” itself, it is likely that the tradition of his agricultural affiliations which derive from his origins in the Near East continued well into the society within which Theocritus finds himself, as multicultural as it is.⁷⁰ The presentation of Aphrodite and Persephone

⁶⁶ τὰν δὲ καλὰν Κυθέρειαν ἐν ὄρεσι μῆλα νομεύων | οὐχ οὕτως Ὠδωλις ἐπὶ πλέον ἄγαγε λύσσας, | ὅστ' οὐδὲ φθίμενόν νιν ἄτερ μαζοῖο τίθητι.

⁶⁷ Gow 1950: 74 n.48.

⁶⁸ Segal 1969: 85.

⁶⁹ Scholia QUEAPT at Theocritus *Id.* 3.48d (ed. Wendell).

⁷⁰ Segal 1969: 84, 87.

here ought not be ignored: Aphrodite is not birthing Adonis, nor is she his lover, but rather in being equated with the elemental properties she — along with Persephone, as the soil — is depicted as part of the fertile environment that nurtures plant growth. Adonis' unique syncretic value encompasses both amatory and vegetal ambiguity, and, as such, Segal argues that his use in Theocritus “points back to the deepest layers of the myth: the telescoping of the three irrevocable stages of life — birth, sexual consummation, and death — into one and the presentation of the ambiguous dyad — male and female, husband and wife, son and mother.”⁷¹ I argue that it is safe to insert also plant and human into this same dyad Segal identifies.

A closer look at the context encompassing the mention of Adonis at *Idyll* 3.48 reinforces the notion that the sequence of birth, love, and death repeating ad infinitum in turn evokes at once his vegetal nature and his multifaceted roles as beloved. The scene is that of an unnamed singer whose love interest, Amaryllis, does not reciprocate his feelings. In response the singer recounts in song a series of mythological heroes who become successful in love, but who, as a result, turn out ultimately unlucky (*Id.* 3.40-51):

Ἴππομένης, ὅκα δὴ τὰν παρθένον ἤθελε γᾶμαι,
 μᾶλ' ἐν χερσὶν ἐλὼν δρόμον ἄνυεν· ἅ δ' Ἀταλάντα
 ὡς ἴδεν, ὡς ἐμάνη, ὡς ἐς βαθὺν ἄλατ' ἔρωτα.
 τὰν ἀγέλαν χά μάντις ἀπ' Ὀθρυος ἄγε Μελαμπος
 ἐς Πύλον· ἅ δὲ Βίαντος ἐν ἀγκοίνοισιν ἐλκίνθη
 μάτηρ ἅ χαρίεσσα περίφρονος Ἀλφειβοίας.
 τὰν δὲ καλὰν Κυθήρειαν ἐν ὄρεσι μῆλα νομεύων
 οὐχ οὕτως Ὠδωνὶς ἐπὶ πλέον ἄγαγε λύσσας,
 ὥστ' οὐδὲ φθίμενόν νιν ἄτερ μαζοῖο τίθητι;
 ζαλοτὸς μὲν ἐμὶν ὁ τὸν ἄτροπον ὕπνον ἰαύων
 Ἐνδυμίων· ζαλῶ δέ, φίλα γύναι, Ἰασίωνα,
 ὅς τόσσων ἐκύρησεν, ὅσ' οὐ πευσεῖσθε, βέβαλοι.

Hippomenes, when he wished to marry the virgin,
 finished a race by taking apples in his hands; but how
 Atalanta saw them, how mad she went, how she leapt into deep love!
 And the prophet, Melampus, too drove the herd from Orthys

⁷¹ Segal 1969: 86.

to Pylus; and the most graceful mother of
cunning Alpheisiboea was laid in Bias' arms.

And didn't Adonis in this way, pasturing sheep in the mountains,
drive beautiful Cythera to her fill of madness
so that she did not put him away from her breast when he was dead?

Endymion on the one hand, sleeping the unturning slumber,
Seems enviable to me; on the other hand, I envy Iasion, dear woman,
who met so many things that you will not learn, uninitiated ones.

Many of the other myths which constitute the song reveal a similar association between personal relationships and a characters' relationships with plant life as that which applies to Adonis. It should be noted, for example, Adonis' maternal ambivalence is bolstered at the mention of Alpheisiboea, whose name is included in the fragments of Hesiod as Adonis' mother, and whose name literally means "she who brings the cattle."⁷² It would not be a radical move, then, to associate Adonis with the goatherd, since Theocritus's propensity for blurring the lines between sexual and maternal relations has already been established, and since the adjective *χαρίεσσα* is used also to define Amaryllis at *Idyll* 3.6.⁷³ Hippomenes' marriage to Atalanta comes about thanks to his use of golden apples to beat her in a race;⁷⁴ already the erotic interaction between the two is dependent on the use of a qualitatively vegetal substance, yet this notion is further engrained by the very name *Ἴππομένης*. Outside the context of this myth, the name aurally reminds the reader of a particular species of plant which Theocritus had included in *Idyll* 2 as a component of Simaetha's spell to attract Delphis. The use of the plant, *ἵππομανές* by Simaetha is surely etymological, given its literal meaning as "horse maddening,"⁷⁵ but its use here in *Idyll* 3 would have a similar implication in so far as the mythological character Hippomenes was said to have

⁷² Hunter 1999: 125 n.45, citing Hesiod *Catalogue* fr. 139 M-W. The sense of *ἀλφεσίβοιος* appears to mean "bringing (many) cattle from suitors," as a compound adjective built on the root of the verb *ἀλφάνω* "earn, gain."

⁷³ Theoc. *Id.* 3.6: ἼΩ χαρίεσσ' Ἀμαρυλλί.

⁷⁴ Hunter 1999: 123 nn. 40-2.

⁷⁵ Theoc. *Id.* 2.48-49: ἵππομανές φυτόν ἐστι παρ' Ἀρκάσι, τῷ δ' ἐπι πᾶσαι | καὶ πῶλοι μαίνονται ἀν' ὄρεα καὶ θοαὶ ἵπποι, "Hippomanes is a plant from Arcadia; for it all foals and quick mares throughout the mountains go mad."

been gifted the apples by Aphrodite and that it is thanks to them that Atalanta was driven to madness.⁷⁶ Just as Simaetha in *Idyll 2* uses the plant *ἵππομανές* in an attempt to induce love-madness in the unwilling Delphis, the goatherd uses vegetal allusion to sew tragedy into his snapshot of Atalanta's and Hippomenes' story.

Likewise, the singer cloaks Iasion in plant erotics. The vegetal endowment present in the myth of Iasion is more straightforward; he was, after all, the lover of Demeter who was in some traditions “considered a *protos heurates* of agriculture,”⁷⁷ and, like Adonis, he was descended from a pre-Greek fertility god.⁷⁸ Just as Atalanta is ultimately unfortunate as a result of her association with plants, so too, according to Homer, was Iasion (*Od.* 5. 125-128):

ὥς δ' ὀπότε Ἰασίῳ ἐνπλόκαμος Δημήτηρ,
 ᾧ θυμῷ εἴξασα, μίγη φιλότητι καὶ εὐνή
 νειῶ ἔνι τριπόλῳ· οὐδὲ δὴν ἦεν ἄπυστος
 Ζεὺς, ὅς μιν κατέπεφνε βαλὼν ἀργῆτι κεραυνῷ.

So when fair haired Demeter mingled affectionately
 with Iasion, giving way to her heart, and lay with him
 in a thrice-plowed field, Zeus was not unaware
 for long, who struck him down, hitting him with a bright bolt.

It is no question that an author in the Hellenistic period would be prone to using Homer as a model, if only one of many. Calypso includes Iasion in a list of unlucky gods whose affairs with mortals meet tragic ends and highlights the contextualized position of Iasion in the network of shared meaning between humans and plants within the song of *Idyll 3*.⁷⁹ His position as the goddess's lover would, alone, be tenuous evidence for his vegetality, yet the claim that the pair consummated

⁷⁶ Scholia: KUEA at Theocritus *Id.* 3.120b (ed. Wendell): τὰ ἐράσματα καὶ ἔρωτος ποιητικά, καθὸ (τὰ) ὑπὸ Ἀφροδίτης διδόμενα τῷ Ἴππομένει μῆλα ἐκ τῶν Διονύσου, ταῦτα δὲ εἰς ἔρωτα τὴν Ἀταλαντὴν ἐκίνησεν, ὡς φησὶν ὁ Φιλητᾶς, “The pleasantries and products of love, in respect to the apples from Dionysus given to Hippomenes by Aphrodite, these stirred Atalanta to love, so Philetas says.”

⁷⁷ Hunter 1999: 128 n. 50b-1, citing Hellanikos of Lesbos *FGrHist* 4 F 135 (*apud* Scholia at Homer *Odyssey* 5.125): ὥς δὲ Ἑλλάνικος Ἠλέκτρας καὶ Διὸς υἱός. Παρ' ᾧ μόνῳ μετὰ τὸν κατακλύσμον εὐρέθη σπέρματα, “but as Hellanicus says, [Iasion] was the son of Elektra and Zeus. Seeds were found after the flood because of him alone”

⁷⁸ Segal 1969: 84.

⁷⁹ Calypso is the speaker of *Odyssey* 10.125-128, the passage just quoted.

their love “in a thrice-plowed field” roots their sexual experience in their natural, agricultural environment.⁸⁰

Endymion, on immediate context, has less to do with plants than Iasion or Hippomenes and Atalanta. Yet when one considers the events of *Idyll* 3 leading up to the song, his is perhaps most informative in terms of the emotional complexity layered onto plant life. The myth of Endymion results in a sleep which is a result of his affair with the goddess Selene, who met him in a cave on Mount Latmos after falling in love with him.⁸¹ The singer’s lament for Amaryllis takes place outside the cave which holds her, and the mention of Endymion pulls the reader back to the diegetic context of the song. It is useful, then, to explore the ways in which the cave setting of the poem is described.

The first description of the cave which contains Amaryllis appears at *Idyll* 3.12-14:

Θᾶσαι μάν. Θυμαλγῆς ἐμὶν ἄχος. Αἴθε γενοίμαν
ἄ βομβεῦσα μέλισσα καὶ ἐς τεδὸν ἄντρον ἰκοίμαν,
τὸν κισσὸν διαδύς καὶ τὰν πτέριν ἄ τυ πυκάσδει.

See here. I have heart grieving pain. Would that I were
the humming bee and I come to your cave,
slipping through the ivy and the fern which hides you.

In this poem labeled a *κόμος* thanks to the singer’s lament outside the cave, the traditional door which encloses the beloved inside, rendering her inaccessible to her lover, is seemingly replaced by ivy and fern.⁸² Clearly, the overgrowth is substantial enough of an obstacle if only bees can get by. Gow claims that “the goatherd ... is not altogether happy with his choice of myth” since “Endymion profited little” from his affair with Selene.⁸³ However, a mistake of this scale would

⁸⁰ See further Page duBois 1988 on ancient associations between sexual intercourse and agricultural practice.

⁸¹ Hunter 1999: 127 n.49-50a. See also the mention of Selene at Apollonius of Rhodes *Argonautika* 4.57-58: οὐκ ἄρ’ ἐγὼ μούνη μετὰ Λάτμιον ἄντρον ἀλύσκω, | οὐδ’ οἷη καλῶ περι δαίομαι Ἐνδυμίῳ, “So I am not the only one escaping to a Latmian cave, nor am I alone in burning for handsome Endymion.”

⁸² On the generic expectations of the *κόμος* sung at the beloved’s door (the so-called *paraklausithyron*) see Copley 1956 and Cairns 2020.

⁸³ Gow 1950: 74 n. 50.

be out of character for Theocritus and the goatherd who have shown thus far no indication of mythic ignorance. This is especially the case given that the goatherd so readily finds himself in the other mentions of heroes and heroines. One might rightly wonder, then: why include Endymion? I argue that the mention of Endymion does not reflect the condition of the goatherd. It seems, rather, as though the goatherd finds himself mirrored not by Endymion, but by his lover, Selene, whose ability to access Endymion in the cave remains unhindered. Endymion is enviable insofar as his affair with Selene was successful. Meanwhile the goatherd has identified the ferns and ivy as the barrier to his love's success.

The singer of *Idyll 3* recounts the series of mythological lovers as a foil to his own misfortune; their respective affairs depend on an erotic relationship between plants and humans for the resultant tragedy which is the purpose of the song. One arrives at this depth of meaning after setting the stories not only, as in the case of Adonis, in the context of their other mentions within the *Idylls*, but also, as in the case of Endymion, in the immediate context of the singer's song. In the case of Adonis in *Idyll 15*, much of what is learned of the plant-hybrid-god rests in the voice of the singer and depends on Theocritus' audience having extensive prior knowledge of the variegated historical and mythical iterations of Adonis. So, too, do the myths of *Idyll 3* depend on external knowledge and reside in the lyrics of a song. Yet as we have seen from *Idyll 3*, these songs cannot be separated from the immediate context of the singer and act as informants on how one should interpret the singer's own experiences. The system of plant-human interdependence which comes to the fore within the internal songs of the *Idylls* reflect a similar experience for the goatherds who sing them.

3. Humanity Overwatered

As the mythological references are contextualized alongside their singers' purpose for singing, the emerging eroticism of plant-human relationships comments on both the singer's romantic status as well as the resultant tragedy. The singers use the vegetal implications in their own song's characters to define their own experiences. In doing so the status of the singer becomes informed by a system of social economics which affects not only the expected plant life, but the humans in their environment as well. This system of vegetal economics will come to have further implications for the issue of poetic competition in *Idyll* 1, which I will discuss in Chapter Two; at present, however, it is necessary to establish the ways in which characters—whether they are singers or sung about—in the *Idylls* enter into and represent plant-like experiences in their reciprocal engagement with their surroundings.

Adonis, again, serves as a useful starting point for the present investigation into how Theocritus describes the systems of experiential exchange blurring the line between vegetation and humanity. I argue that the *Idylls* depict ostensibly human life as affected by a delicate agricultural economic system of reciprocal labor crucially argued by Ann Michelini (1978) within which excess of nutrients disrupts the life of the plant. More specifically, Adonis and other characters such as Hylas (*Idyll* 13) whose deaths involve water in excess seem to die as though they were a plant that was overwatered, an act which is interpreted by Michelini as violence against the caretaker who anticipates produce in exchange for his tending to the plant.

Already we have seen a representational connection between the singer of *Idyll* 3 and his choice of lamentable characters, one which focuses on the characters' respective lamentability. Adonis — the erotic lynchpin between human and vegetal emotions — is poised to strengthen this tragic connection vis-à-vis the vegetal essence of his own death. As we have seen, the song

of *Idyll* 15 is positioned as both a marriage song as well as a funeral oration; this ambiguity serves in interpreting Adonis' death as encoded within a system of erotic excess. The singer, having just explained an image of Adonis laying in Aphrodite's arms, says of the disposal of his body (*Idyll* 15.131-133):

νῦν μὲν Κύπρις ἔχοισα τὸν αὐτᾶς χαιρέτω ἄνδρα·
 ἄῶθεν δ' ἄμμες νιν ἅμα δρόσῳ ἀθρόαι ἔξω
 οἴσεῦμες ποτὶ κύματ' ἐπ' αἰόνι πτύοντα

Now let Cypris say goodbye while holding her man;
 and in the morning with the dew we, in a crowd,
 will carry him out to the waves spitting on the shore.

As we know, Adonis' departure from Cypris is indicative of his transition into his time with Persephone in the underworld. His death itself is not depicted here, merely a "goodbye" which operates alongside a veritable burial-at-sea. It is not until we hear that he will be carried out to sea that we can be certain Adonis is dead. At this point, Adonis' actual cause of death is unclear, whereas the water is shown to be the place of his transition from his time with Aphrodite, to his time in the underworld with Persephone. Adonis' mythological death is, as explained above, inseparable from the notion of rebirth and annual agricultural renewal. In this particular instance, however, the funereal process indicates deeper vegetal importance. A water-based death is, as Ann Michelini (1978) has shown, a demonstration of hubris by plants.

Michelini argues that ὕβρις is often used to explain overabundance of plant life. In early botanical writings such as Theophrastus and parts of Aristotle, the terms ὑβρίζω and ἐξυβρίζω — terms which are often used for interactions between humans and gods, but in fact refer to a system of economic social status violations⁸⁴ — refer to overgrowth and excess as a result of exuberant nourishment.⁸⁵ Ultimately, however, the terms are inseparable from their anthropomorphic

⁸⁴ Michelini 1978: 35.

⁸⁵ Michelini 1978: 36-38.

reference to misbehavior and, according to Plato (*Laws* 691C), disease; as such, “ἐξυβρίζειν in animals, humans, and plants stems from super abundance of nurture. It may be termed either misbehavior or disease, or ‘madness,’ that is, misbehavior as disease.”⁸⁶ What “nurture” may refer to is, of course, varied based on the entity that is receiving it (be they plant, human, or animal); for plants, nurture is water, the “superabundance” of which, as any amateur gardener will recognize, often kills the plant. This disease manifests as limited or non-existent agricultural production despite early quick growth: “health expands until it verges into unhealthiness.”⁸⁷ The plant’s lack of productive value is, for Michelini, an act of economic violence. The relationship between vegetation and the farmer is one which depends on reciprocal trade; if the farmer waters and tends to his crops, they should provide produce in exchange. Yet, when a farmer or gardener over-cares for their plants, the plant violates the reciprocal economic exchange by refusing to produce the expected fruit or expand their root systems, eventually leading to the death of the plant. For a plant-human hybrid such as Adonis, one can easily see how his nourishment may be conveyed both through his maternal/erotic love (the conflation of which has been discussed above) and excess of water. It is through this process that Adonis’ vegetal hubris against Aphrodite is showcased as he no longer reciprocates the love he has received.

Adonis’ relationships are the cause of his perpetual death, a death which is, in Theocritus, only depicted through his burial at sea. In support of the argument for the analogous relationship between Adonis’ water-death and his maternal-erotic nurture, the women who carry him to the shore say λύσασαι δὲ κόμαν καὶ ἐπὶ σφυρὰ κόλπον ἀνεῖσαι στήθεσι φαινόμενοις λιγυρᾶς ἀρξέμεθ’ αἰοιδᾶς “when we let loose our hair and unfastened our garments to our ankles for our breasts to be shown, we began our clear song” (*Idyll* 15.134-5). It is not unusual for women to

⁸⁶ Michelini 1978: 38.

⁸⁷ Michelini 1978: 41.

have bared their breasts at a funerary occasion such as this.⁸⁸ Yet when one considers Adonis' death in *Idyll 3* alongside that of *Idyll 15*, the incorporation of breasts into his ritualized death begins to illuminate the maternal and eroticized nourishment which leads to his death. The statement that Aphrodite οὐδὲ φθίμενόν νιν ἄτερ μαζοῖο τίθητι “did not put him away from her breast when he was dead” (*Idyll 3.48*) gives a strong impression of breast feeding given the maternal connotations to the term μάζος. Hunter (1999) notes that this scene is comparable to the *pieta* statue with a mother embracing her dying son.⁸⁹ In considering a mother's breast vis-à-vis the death of a son, a useful referent is Hecuba's bearing of her breasts at *Iliad 22.79-92*. To dissuade Hector from returning to meet Achilles on the battlefield, Hecuba μαζὸν ἀνέσχε “held up her breast” (*Iliad 22.79*) and pleaded that he remain inside the walls of the city saying: “Hector, my child, respect these and have pity on me, if I ever made my calming breast available to you” (*Iliad 22.83-84*).⁹⁰ Both Aphrodite and Hecuba use their breasts to extend their maternal experiences; Hecuba to keep her son from dying, and Aphrodite seemingly in denial that her son/lover had died. I make this connection not to draw some direct ancestry from Homer's Hecuba to Theocritus' Aphrodite, but instead to illuminate the dynamic of a failed maternal reciprocity. In a situation where the son is destined to die, the next logical act progressing after bearing one's breast as preventative of death (as Hecuba performs) would be to use the breast to deny the act of dying.⁹¹ Ultimately, however, neither Aphrodite nor Hecuba are able to save their sons' lives and are devastated for it. Adonis' death conflates this maternal act of desperate nurturing with excess water. As such Adonis' death is reflective of the vegetally hubristic death a plant exhibits when it refuses to repay its caretaker.

⁸⁸ Gow 1950: 302 n. 134.

⁸⁹ Hunter 1999: 126 n.48.

⁹⁰“Ἐκτορ τέκνον ἐμὸν τάδε τ' αἶδεο καί μ' ἐλέησον| αὐτήν, εἴ ποτέ τοι λαθικηδέα μαζὸν ἐπέσχον.”

⁹¹ See further Murnaghan 1992 on the logic connecting maternity with mortality in Greek poetry.

Within the remainder of *Idyll* 3, the notion of dying alongside water presents itself also in the voice of the goatherd, whose hypothetical suicide informs not only how the goatherd uses Adonis as a literary backdrop for his own suffering, but also his own tenuous relationship with Amaryllis. At lines 25-27, the goatherd says of his own peril:

Τὰν βαίταν ἀποδύς ἐς κύματα τηγῶ ἀλεῦμαι,
ὥπερ τῶς θύννωσ σκοιάζεται Ὀλπις ὁ γριπεύς·
καὶ κα δὴ ᾿ποθάνω, και γε μὲν τεδὸν ἀδὸ τέτυκται.

Having taken off my cloak, I will jump into the waves there,
The same place as Olpis the fisherman watches the tuna;
And indeed if I die, *your* pleasure at any rate has been fulfilled.

This sort of tragic leap into the sea is not uncommon in Classical literature and, as explained by Hunter (1999), if someone survived their jump they were thought to be cured of their lovesickness.⁹² The goatherd's hypothetical here offers this as one of two possibilities through his use of the potential particle *κα*. Given the goatherd's later harkening to Adonis and his mythological ilk, one might rightly wonder if his imagined death operates under similar systems of nourishment gone awry. Indeed, the goatherd's imagined leap into the water has the potential to cure him and must not spell certain death given the goatherd's use of a conditional statement. To do so, the water must then occupy the role of sustenance which fulfils his need for Amaryllis to reciprocate his love. This assertion is supported by the only description of the water as a prime locale for fishing, effectively encoding the water as fruitful and nourishing. This quality of water may initially be surprising but has been noted already by Segal (1981), who finds an association between water and sexual vitality: "water functions as a numinous substance whose presence marks a man's entrance into a world beyond his normal ken and normal powers, a world which may be the realm of artistic or prophetic inspiration or sexual vitality or death."⁹³ Water offers the

⁹² Hunter 1999: 118 n 25-7.

⁹³ Segal 1981: 49.

goatherd of *Idyll 3* an opportunity to relieve his stress, however it also has the very real possibility of killing him in the process.

As Gow (1950) notes, the manuscript tradition for this passage prefers the reading καὶ καμῆ ἴποθάνω in line 27 over the emended δὴ which was accepted by Gow on the grounds that “it is less easy to see what satisfaction [Amaryllis] will derive from an abortive attempt at suicide.”⁹⁴ Such an emendation seems, to me, unnecessary. The μῆ makes clear the risk involved for Amaryllis if he were to act on his impulse. The water’s dual purpose as potential injurer and caretaker in the goatherd’s fantasy illuminates the vegetally hubristic relationship between himself and Amaryllis. If μῆ is preferred to δὴ, his lack of death would gladden Amaryllis; The antithesis of this, then, in his conditional — that is, if he *were* to die — depicts his death as unpleasant for Amaryllis. Because this death would come as the result of his exposure to the fisherman’s waters, the goatherd’s death effectively mimics the process surrounding Adonis. While the major difference between the two is that Adonis, so far as we are told, does not drown, each scenario is left evidently uncertain as to the actualized death of the character. Nevertheless, both scenes are firmly rooted in the juxtaposition between death, nourishment, and water in imagery remarkably emblematic of the vengeful plant. In the case of the goatherd, his hubristic position, where death comes at the expense of the erotic focal point, is an act of violence against his un-requiting lover. In an unexpected turn of events, the goatherd’s threat of suicide indicates a reversal of the imbalanced affection shown in the rest of the poem. Whereas Amaryllis is elsewhere shown to not fulfil her side of the amorous exchange, harming the goatherd in the process, here the goatherd attempts to offend Amaryllis by threatening to remove himself from the equation either by killing himself or curing himself.

⁹⁴ Gow 1950: 69 n.27.

Ultimately, then, the goatherd's imagined death scene turns his own feeling as the recipient of Amaryllis' hubris into his own vegetal threat to make her feel the same.

These characters undergo deaths which reflect the disease in plants stemming from a superabundance of nourishment. Adonis makes clear the vegetal system encompassing his death through the motif of water and his immediate and allusive textual relations with Aphrodite; meanwhile, the goatherd in *Idyll 3* expands on this dynamic to comment on his personal romantic relationship, particularly as a response to an imbalanced degree of affection. In *Idyll 13*, however, Hylas himself inadvertently rebels against his own imbalanced relationship with Hercules when he is pulled beneath the surface of a spring and taken from the rest of the Argonaut crew. The spring is described within the context of its vegetal surroundings (*Idyll 13.40-42*):

περὶ δὲ θρύα πολλὰ πεφύκει,
κυάνεόν τε χελιδόνιον χλωρόν τ' ἀδιάντον
καὶ θάλλοντα σέλινα καὶ εἰλιτνῆς ἄγωστις.

And around it grew much rush,
And dark celandine, and pale maiden-hair
And thriving celery and marsh-spreading dogs-tooth

The vegetation here is important for our purposes on two levels. The first is that the water itself is not granted any descriptive value on its own; the image of the spring relies entirely on the plants which surround it as well as the nymphs who inhabit it, who are of interest to us as well and will shortly be explored more thoroughly. The second point to draw from the description of the spring's vegetation is the notion of excess and growth. The rush which grows along the waterline is described as plentiful (πολλὰ) and the dog's-tooth is εἰλιτενῆς "spreading through the marshes." The celery takes this further and is described as θάλλοντα, which literally refers to growth, a meaning which dates back to its Indo-European ancestor **dhal-* meaning "spring forth or emerge

(with moisture or from moisture).”⁹⁵ When describing the condition of a thing, *θάλλω* is often translated as “thriving,” whereas it is used in early literature such as Homer to describe humans as possessing “sexual maturity and desire”; its adjectival derivative *θάλος* is used to describe children born out of this desire.⁹⁶ The plants exhibit excess growth as a result of the springs hyper-fertility; as the only description of the spring, the superabundance of plant life must then indicate the water’s nourishing and, as we will see further in the description of the nymphs, erotic value.

As though this were not sufficient for establishing that the spring’s plants are reflective of the excess growth which often, for Theophrastus and then Michelini (1978), results in a hubristic death or lack of production, the very notion of growth is perpetuated by the polysyndeton used in the list of plants. The repetitive *τὲ ... τὲ*, and *καὶ ... καὶ* constructions which connect the string of nouns, each of which has its own accompanying adjective but with no verbal change following the *πεφύκει* in line 40, convey a sense of continuous expansion. Moreover, the plant’s overgrowth creeps into even the meter of these lines. Briefly stated by Hunter (1999), the description of the celandine and maidens-hair in line 41 has a distinct lack of caesura in the third foot.⁹⁷ The plant life surrounding the water is excessive to a degree that it spills over into the very grammatical and metrical structure of its own description. Because this scene is one of only two descriptions of the spring, and that this seems to be the sole purpose of the description, it would not be an exaggeration to consider the superabundant growth of plant life as resulting from the excessive nourishment of the spring water.

⁹⁵ Lowenstam 1979: 132.

⁹⁶ LSJ s.v. *θάλλω* A.2; On the Homeric uses of *θάλλω* and its related forms see Lowenstam 1979: 132-134.

⁹⁷ Hunter 1999: 277 n. 40-2

The description of the nymphs who live in the spring and, more importantly, their admiration for Hylas is equally as informative. Theocritus describes the scene of Hylas being pulled into the water (*Idyll* 13.46-49):

ἦτοι ὁ κοῦρος ἐπεῖχε ποτῶ πολυχανδέα κρωσσόν
 βάψαι ἐπειγόμενος· ταὶ δ' ἐν χειρὶ πᾶσαι ἔφυσαν·
 πασάων γὰρ ἔρωσ ἀπαλὰς φρένας ἐξεφόβησεν
 Ἀργείῳ ἐπὶ παιδί.

Truly the boy held out the wide-mouthed pitcher to the stream
 Hurrying to dip it in; they all grew on his hands;
 For their love for the Argive child struck fear
 In the tender hearts of all of them.

Within this description there is a conflation between the growth of plant life and the nymphs' love for Hylas. The use of the term ἔφυσαν is particularly pointed. It is curious that Theocritus does not use a more traditional verb for grabbing or holding to refer to the nymphs' snatching of Hylas. Instead, he uses a word more akin to the rapid growth of the surrounding vegetal environment. Here, too, it is useful to turn to Homer for a deeper understanding of the term's implications. At *Iliad* 6.253 Hector returns from battle and, upon seeing him, Hecuba ἐν τ' ἄρα οἱ φῶ χειρὶ "clung to his hand," which is explained by Kirk (1990) as being an instance of tmesis separating ἐν and the aorist φῶ, more literally meaning "grew into."⁹⁸ This act is repeated at *Iliad* 6.406 when Andromache pleads with Hector to not return to battle and, just as Hecuba, she also ἐν τ' ἄρα οἱ φῶ χειρὶ. Theocritus' use of ἐν χειρὶ ἔφυσαν, then, has a clear history of affection which, being a decisively vegetal term set along the natural environs of *Idyll* 13, merges the notions of affection with those of vegetal growth. Furthermore, the clause which explains the nymphs' action puts the blame on their love for Hylas. The growth of plant life and the erotic evaluation of the beloved Hylas, then, are conflated through the nymph's abduction of the youth. Hunter (1999) takes this

⁹⁸ Kirk 1990: 195 n.253.

far enough to suggest that Hylas was not taken into the water, but that his lifeless body is hidden among the reeds.⁹⁹ This seems to me unlikely — for if Hylas were not dragged into the water, how would he have died? Nevertheless, the notion of vegetal growth is certainly present and expands throughout the scene. And, more importantly, the growth which overtakes Hylas is the direct result of ἔρωσ. Segal’s interpretation of the water in this scene supports this interpretation; the water holds parallel and conflicting values. At lines 53-54 the Νύμφαι μὲν σφετέρους ἐπὶ γούνασι κοῦρον ἔχουσαι | δακρύνοντ’ ἀγανοῖσι παρεψύχοντ’ ἐπέεσσιν, “Nymphs hold the boy in their laps and calm him with gentle words as he weeps.” Segal comments that the verb παρεψύχοντο both refers to “the refreshing coolness of water” and also “the chill of violent emotions and of death.”¹⁰⁰ There is also, here, a notable recollection of the *pieta* image found of Aphrodite and Adonis. When Hylas goes to the spring to gather water for his lover Hercules, the sustenance he sought was ultimately his own undoing.

Much like the goatherd of *Idyll 3*, the focus of Hylas’ death is its impact on his significant other, Hercules. At *Idyll 13.5-9*, Theocritus describes their relationship as a pederastic blend of erotic and paternal love:

ἀλλὰ καὶ Ἀμφιτρώωνος ὁ χαλκεοκάρδιος υἱός,
 ὃς τὸν λῖν ὑπέμεινε τὸν ἄγριον, ἦρατο παιδός,
 τοῦ χαρίεντος Ὑλα, τὰν πλοκαμῖδα φορεῦντος,
 καὶ νιν πάντ’ ἐδίδασκε, πατήρ ὡσεὶ φίλον υἱόν,
 ὅσσα μαθὼν ἀγαθὸς καὶ ἀοίδιμος αὐτὸς ἔγεντο·

But even the iron-hearted son of Amphitryon,
 Who stood against the savage lion, loved a boy,
 Beautiful Hylas, wearing braided hair,
 And he taught him everything, as a father does his son,
 Which he himself became good and famous by learning.

⁹⁹ Hunter 1999: 279 n. 47.

¹⁰⁰ Segal 1981: 55.

The continued, extensive, and multifaceted affection Hercules holds for Hylas is certainly undeniable here. Yet, as Hunter (1999) notes, the paternal affection for Hylas becomes transferred from Hercules to the nymphs in the spring at lines 53-54 when the nymphs create the maternal pieta-like image.¹⁰¹ The result of this transfer is that Hylas is incapable of reciprocating his affection or responding to Hercules when he goes raving mad in search for Hylas. The poem concludes by explaining that Hercules has been left behind by the rest of the Argonauts as he searches frantically for Hylas. More importantly, we are told that οὕτω μὲν κάλλιστος Ὕλας μακάρων ἀριθμεῖται· | Ηερακλήω δ' ἥρωες ἐκερτόμεον λιτοναύταν, “In this way most beautiful Hylas is counted among the blessed; but the hero Hercules is taunted as a deserter.”¹⁰² The outcome of Hylas’ encounter in the spring is not merely a transfer of parental affection, but a transfer of the fame and esteem which we are told Hercules spent his time teaching Hylas. Hylas’ death seizes the value from his former mentor and caretaker and stunts any possibility of return of investment.

Adonis, the goatherd, and Hylas all present an image of water as critical link in their transition from life to death. More importantly, however, each of these instances incorporates a contestation of influence centering on the economic mechanisms established between farmer/caretaker and plant. Adonis’ movement from Aphrodite to Persephone is conveyed through his burial at sea and is accompanied by his lover/mother Aphrodite’s excessive nursing. The goatherd imagines himself in a reversal of roles between he and Amaryllis where his death would provide her with the same anguish he himself feels from her rejection. Hylas’ episode combines these: Hylas both reverses his relationship with Hercules and no longer can grant him reciprocal love, while also transitioning to new influence in his death. This distinctly vegetal hubris — dying at the expense of the one who provided the object of care with the means to live — is intertwined

¹⁰¹ Hunter 1999: 281 n. 53-4.

¹⁰² Theoc. *Idyll* 13.72-73.

with notion of contestation, be it between mother and child, an imbalanced romantic relationship between lover and beloved, or, in the case of Daphnis in *Idyll* 1, a mutual system of emotional reservation.

4. Thorns' Flowers and Daphnis' Owls

As we have seen in section 1, Theocritus' first *Idyll* operates in part under a system of analogous comparisons between plants and humans centering on poetic and musical composition. The poetic *agon* between Thyrsis and the goatherd in *Idyll* 1 consists first of a description of the goatherd's cup, the prize which will ultimately go to the victor of the contest, followed by Thyrsis' song, an account of Daphnis' death. One of the several instances of humans who portray a plant-like death as a violent act of hubris against their partners, Daphnis' death is immediately contextualized by his interactions with Aphrodite. Yet the retaliatory action is subtly portrayed as operating in a system of mutual neglect between both Daphnis and Aphrodite. The disjuncture in the relationship between Aphrodite and Daphnis comes to impact, through Daphnis' own self-association with nature, the very systems of power and production in the natural world. Within the account of nature-turned-awry, we learn also of future implications of poetic composition and its value which arise out of Daphnis' relationship with both nature and Aphrodite.

It must first be noted that Theocritus' iteration of the Daphnis myth is particularly peculiar. While the lack of extant evidence for Daphnis before Theocritus' time makes it difficult to effectively determine what the mythology surrounding him looked like, Parthenius cites Timaeus' *Sicilica* in his own recounting of Daphnis as a Sicilian musician who finds himself unlucky in his romantic affiliations.¹⁰³ If we are to believe Parthenius' claim about his source material — and

¹⁰³ C.f. Gutzwiller 1991: 95 and Anagnostou-Laoutides and Konstan 2008. For a more complete analysis of the textual references to Daphnis and the issues surrounding them, see Zimmerman 1994: 25-37.

indeed there is no reason to refute it — this version of Daphnis may reasonably be considered foundational and even a potential source for Theocritus’ own iteration.¹⁰⁴ The tale consists of Daphnis being ordered by a nymph, Echenais, not to engage romantically or sexually with any other woman; eventually, a princess of Syracuse gets him drunk and manipulates him into sleeping with her, and Echenais then blinds Daphnis for his unintended transgression. It is apparent, however, that this is not the version of events told by Thyrsis. In the *Idylls*, Thyrsis does not show us clearly any details about Daphnis’ love life, only that his being lovelorn is the cause of his ailment, that there is a woman searching for him, and that this all has *something* to do with Aphrodite, an apparently novel introduction to the Daphnis mythology.

The introduction of Aphrodite into the Daphnis myth is crucial to understanding Daphnis’ place within the eco-critical structures of the *Idylls*. Thyrsis’ song progresses from first giving a description of Daphnis as abandoned in Sicily by the nymphs (1.64-69) to a series of addresses from Hermes and Pan about the cause of Daphnis’ death (1.77-91) before we hear Daphnis himself addressing Aphrodite (1.97-136). It seems no coincidence that the only words we hear from Daphnis and, in fact, his last words before dying, are addressed to Aphrodite. We will return to the intricacies of Daphnis’ reproach of Aphrodite shortly, but first it is worth examining his death, since it is the focal point of Thyrsis’ song. The very way Daphnis dies directs us to consider his relationship with Aphrodite as one of intimacy. At *Idyll* 1.138-141 we hear a hint of Aphrodite’s response to his statements and his death:

Χὼ μὲν τόσσος’ εἰπὼν ἀπεπαύσατο· τὸν δ’ Ἀφροδίτα
ἦλθ’ ἀνορθῶσαι· τὰ γε μὰν λῖνα πάντα λελοίπει
ἐκ Μοιρᾶν, χὼ Δάφνις ἔβα ῥόον· ἔκλυσε δῖνα
τὸν Μοίραις φίλον ἄνδρα, τὸν οὐ Νύμφαισιν ἀπεχθῆ.

And speaking so much, he stopped; and Aphrodite
wanted to raise him up again; in fact, the whole thread from the Fates

¹⁰⁴ Gutzwiller 1991: 95.

abandoned him, and Daphnis went to the river. The whirl
washed over the man dear to the muses, and the Nymphs were not his enemy.

Aphrodite here is apparently distressed by the passing of Daphnis; his death elicits a response of longing to fix the tragic outcome. Ἀνορθόω, from which ἀνορθῶσαι derives, properly means to “make straight”; through extension, however, the term comes to mean “to correct” and even “to make healthy again.”¹⁰⁵ What Aphrodite expresses, then, is not simply a desire to make right the complaints Daphnis had expressed but also, in a conflagration of ambivalent meaning, a desire to heal Daphnis from his death. This reading is bolstered by the introduction of Aphrodite at lines 95-96: ἦνθέ γε μὰν ἀδεῖα καί ἃ Κύπρις γελάοισα, | λάθρη μὲν γελάοισα, βαρὺν δ’ ἀνὰ θυμὸν ἔχοισα, “and Cypris came sweetly smiling, smiling in secret, but holding back heavy emotion.” These lines have been the source of significant scholarly debate. It seems to some that Aphrodite’s smiling sweetly is incompatible with the notions of her concurrently hiding her smile, and that the antithesis of her concealment must lie in the verb ἀνέχω (which is presented in the text as the tmesis ἀνὰ...ἔχοισα).¹⁰⁶ The emphasis on this assumed discrepancy leads Zuntz (1960) to suggest a translation of ἀνέχω as the equivalent of the Latin *ostentans*, meaning something along the lines of “displaying.”¹⁰⁷ While this is a possible and even acceptable translation of the term, the insistence that the word *cannot* mean “withholding,” as it has often been translated, lacks any consideration of the withholding of production and affection that is sown throughout the *Idylls*. It is more than reasonable to expect Aphrodite to conceal her affection and keep her emotions in check, given the paradigm of death and emotional restriction elsewhere in the *Idylls*. In fact, withholding emotional capital is central to understanding the complexities of Daphnis’ death, which itself is presented as remarkably similar to that of the vegetally hubristic characters explored

¹⁰⁵ LSJ s.v. ἀνορθόω A.2.

¹⁰⁶ See Gow 1950: 21-22 n.96; see also Zuntz 1960.

¹⁰⁷ Zuntz 1960: 39.

in section three. Aphrodite’s inability to fulfill her desire of resurrecting Daphnis at 1.139 reads as a reflection on the aftermath of her own inability (or unwillingness) to express her affection for Daphnis.

When one considers Aphrodite’s initial deception alongside her apparent desire to rectify Daphnis’ illness at the point when he submits himself to the waters of the river, a discrepancy appears between the expected and manifest vegetal death. At first glance, Daphnis’ death appears to fall in line with those of Hylas and Adonis, insofar as his succumbing to a watery death represents a violent transgression against the counterpart of his relationship. Indeed, Daphnis so much as insists upon our reading his interaction in this light when he mentions Adonis and Anchises, known consorts of Aphrodite at lines 105-107, 109-111:

Οὐ λέγεται τὰν Κύπριν ὁ βουκόλος; ἔρπε ποτ’ Ἴδαν,
 ἔρπε ποτ’ Ἀνχίσαν· τῆναι δρύες ἠδὲ κύπειρος,
 αἱ δὲ καλὸν βομβεῦντι ποτὶ σμάνεσσι μέλισσαι. [...]
 ὠραῖος χῶδωνις, ἐπεὶ καὶ μῆλα νομεύει
 καὶ πτωκάς βάλλει καὶ θηρία πάντα διώκει.

Isn’t a shepherd spoken of when it comes to the Cyprian? Go on to Mt. Ida,
 go on to Anchises. There are oaks and cypresses there,
 and the bees which buzz around the beautiful boy in a swarm...
 and Adonis in his season when he pastures his sheep
 and attacks hares and pursues all the wild animals.

Daphnis, the literary pinnacle of *βουκόλοι* — a statement which hardly needs much in way of defense but is nevertheless evident in this context given Thyrsis’ repeated refrain “begin, dear muses, the *bucolic* song”¹⁰⁸ in a song dedicated to Thyrsis — appears to reject his inclusion among similar tropes, ironically alerting the audience to the similarities. It is apparent here that Daphnis is not the naïve goatherd we have seen elsewhere in the *Idylls*; his initial statement that Aphrodite and herdsmen are often spoken of in reference to one another is counteracted by his ordering that

¹⁰⁸ The line “ἄρχετε βουκολικᾶς, Μοῖσαι φίλαι, ἄρχετ’ αἰοιδᾶς” and its variants are repeated in irregular intervals throughout the song.

Aphrodite leave him be and go to the familiar herdsman consorts of her literary tradition. Anagnostou-Laoutides and Konstan (2008) arrive through a similar reading of this passage to the conclusion that Daphnis and Adonis both fall under a trope of Near Eastern- derived mythological characters whose position as beloved of the goddess ultimately causes their own demise.¹⁰⁹ In the sense of Daphnis' associations with Adonis, Anagnostou-Laoutides and Konstan find that the object of Daphnis' love-sickness is no other than Aphrodite herself, but that he is unwilling to or incapable of indulging in these emotions.¹¹⁰ To consider Daphnis among the other vegetally reactive deaths is not, then, an exaggerated point. His death is inseparable from his refusal to offer Aphrodite what has elsewhere been identified as a reciprocal act of emotional economic productivity. The issues arise, however, at the realization that the hubristic violence is enacted on both sides of the relationship. Aphrodite, of course, cannot die; but as we have seen she withholds her own affection by concealing her smile at her entrance into the scene in lines 95-96. Thyrsis' song, then, depicts Daphnis and Aphrodite as locked in a contest of mutual reservation, each one understood as the recipient of an affection that will never come. Daphnis' last words to Aphrodite, we learn, are a prayer for a miraculous transformation of the natural world into the unnatural.

At 1.132-136 Daphnis finishes his speech by describing nature, particularly plants, as producing incorrect if valuable by-products:

Νῦν ἴα μὲν φορέοιτε βᾶτοι, φορέοιτε δ' ἀκάνθαι,
 ἃ δὲ καλὰ νάρκισσος ἐπ' ἀρκεύθοισι κομάσαι,
 πάντα δ' ἀναλλα γένοιτο, καὶ ἃ πίτυς ὄχνας ἐκείναι,
 Δάφνις ἐπεὶ θνάσκει, καὶ τὰς κύνας ὄλαφος ἔλκοι,
 Κῆξ ὀρέων τοῖ σκῶπες ἀηδόσι γαρύσαιντο.

Now may you brambles bear violets, and may you thorns bear them.
 And the beautiful narcissus bloom on the junipers,
 And may all things become askew, and may the pine bare a pear,

¹⁰⁹ Anagnostou-Laoutides and Konstan 2008: 492-503. See also Hunter 1999: 96 n. 105.

¹¹⁰ Anagnostou-Laoutides and Konstan 2008: 522. See also Zimmerman 1994: 35-36, who relates Daphnis' rejection of his own emotions to the characterization of Phaedra in Euripides' *Hippolytus*.

since Daphnis is dying, and may the stag worry the dogs,
And may the owls cry from the mountains in competition with nightingales.

It is clear here that Daphnis sees his death inexplicably tied to the processes of the natural environment. As Hunter (1999) notes, Daphnis' "obsessive concern with his own position places him, in his own eyes, as the very center of the natural order."¹¹¹ Zimmerman (1994) arrives at a similar conclusion regarding the nature of environmental disruption and Daphnis' role within it. Zimmerman notes that the sequence of plant disruption focuses heavily on the conversion of something ugly into something beautiful, but ultimately the specific uses of floral imagery hints at a sinister connotation. The use of violets and potentially also that of the pine trees, Zimmerman explains, hints at a reference to Attis, yet another lover of Aphrodite whose blood from his genital self-mutilation sprouted violets and who was turned into a tree upon his death by Aphrodite.¹¹² Zimmerman's ultimate conclusion is that Daphnis is here an adaptation of the Narcissus myth, drawing heavily on the fact that the narcissus is the only plant in the sequence that is modified by an adjective. This conclusion seems, to me, unlikely and has welcomed criticism;¹¹³ Zimmerman's specific analysis of this passage is, however, important. He finds in the transformation of vegetal coherence a process through which beauty is derived from perversity.¹¹⁴ Moreover, the final couplet addresses a non-botanical influence which informs how to read the passage; the stags begin to occupy the role of hunter (formerly occupied by the dogs they now hunt), which Zimmerman notes is "fitting for Daphnis, who has trouble figuring out just who should be pursuing whom."¹¹⁵ Indeed, the paradoxical hubristic withholding of affection on the part of both Aphrodite and Daphnis seems to suggest just this: that the degree of balance in relationships between characters

¹¹¹ Hunter 1999: 103 n. 132-6.

¹¹² Zimmerman 1994: 63-64.

¹¹³ For criticisms of Zimmerman's argument see Hopkinson 1995.

¹¹⁴ Zimmerman 1994: 64.

¹¹⁵ Zimmerman 1994: 63.

is directly linked with the natural order of things. Daphnis' last-ditch effort to take action against Aphrodite by drowning himself — for him, a permanent act, unlike Adonis who will be resurrected *ad infinitum* — effectively reverses the power dynamic between him and Aphrodite, just as the stag now frightens its aggressors. Such a natural disjuncture produces, in Daphnis' view, a production of beauty; but when line 136 is interpreted in this light, the production of beauty and fruit seems coordinated with that of song. The owls' newfound ability to cry out to the nightingales is itself auditorily alluring, and appears even more so given the common alternative meaning of ἀηδών to refer to both the poet or even the poet's song.¹¹⁶

This extended meaning should not be taken lightly and, as Hunter (1999) discusses, the passage alludes to another in which Daphnis, upon his death, gifts his pipe to Pan:¹¹⁷ “It is clear that Daphnis identifies himself with the nightingale, the singer whose sweet song is surpassed only by Pan; It was for this reason that Daphnis handed his Syrinx to Pan.”¹¹⁸ It is peculiar that Daphnis gives his instrument to Pan in the first place. As we have seen in section one, Pan is generally thought to have invented the pipe, but the mention of the owls' apparently new ability to cry on a level comparable to the nightingale-poet offers a fascinating perspective into Daphnis' prioritization of his own craft. Hunter (1999) comments on this as well, suggesting that “after his death this beautiful song will be replaced by the harsh sounds of lesser singers trying, in an unequal song-contest, to rival his sweetness as they sing of his death.”¹¹⁹ Insofar as Daphnis' death causes an inversion of the natural order of the world, so too is this ecological disruption related to poetic production, the sweet song of the nightingale suddenly challenged by the screech of the owl.

¹¹⁶ LSJ s.v. ἀηδών.

¹¹⁷ Theoc. *Idyll* 1.128-129: ἔνθ', ὄναξ, καὶ τάνδε φέρει πακτοῖο μελίπνον ἐκ κηρῶ σύριγγα καλὸν περὶ χεῖλος ἔλικτάν· “Come, lord, and take this syrinx, honey-scented from its packed on wax, wrapped on its beautiful lip”

¹¹⁸ Hunter 1999: 104 n. 136. See also Zimmerman 1994: 63.

¹¹⁹ Hunter 1999: 104 n. 136.

Daphnis, it seems, is a prime exemplar of vegetal action. Unavoidably tied to notions of nature as well as issues of poetic production, Daphnis' relationship with Aphrodite and his plant-like death indicate the degree to which nature informs song. Moreover, the careful crafting of a complex mutual suppression of emotion on the part of both Aphrodite as well as Daphnis as well as the resultant discordance of the natural world and the systems of power within it indicates that Thyrsis himself understands the vegetality of social balance. He himself, after all, must understand that he is numbered among the screeching owls rather than the idealized Daphnis-nightingale. The implications of this on poetic competition will be explored further in the following chapter, yet it is clear that Thyrsis crafts his poetry with a system of social dominance in mind that emulates and depends on the relationships between man and plants.

Conclusion

Theocritus' *Idylls* are remarkably endowed with vegetal imagery, characters, and politics. I have shown that in reading the *Idylls* non-linearly and with a focus on the priority given to plants, a system of complex power relations arises; at times between man and nature, other times between man and god, but always rooted in vegetal beings. As the opening to *Idyll* 1 demands, we must think of plants as locked in an unending contest with man. This contestation is an erotic one, encapsulating notions of love that are informed by and break through the limitations of maternity, sexuality, and ecology. Men are drawn into systems of plant economics, experiencing and exhibiting violence at the expense of their loved ones through their own demise. In the case of Daphnis, the mythological founder of the bucolic genre, this violence uproots the expectation of proper natural processes. Among these processes is listed the production of worthy poetry.

This chapter is meant to serve as a basis on which to build further analysis of the same systems of plant politics within the context of human politics. The contestation between humans

and plants is, as we have seen, an ongoing battle; it serves, though, as only the deepest form of analysis. Imbedded within the *Idylls* is a system of ascending poetic composition. Much of what has been analyzed in this chapter consists of internal poetry: the song of the Adonia, the lament of the goatherd in *Idyll 3*, the song of Daphnis. I have explored the complexities surrounding the domination of nature and nature's resistance to human hegemony; it is a natural next step, then, to explore the transferability of this dominance/resistance to issues of poetic contestation and the politics of national identity. The Daphnis story, for example, must be further contextualized within the context of his contest with the goatherd. The Adonis song must be understood as a component of a political festival funded by the Ptolemies. The following chapter will expand on the system of plant ethics used in these songs and will explore the elusive question: why does such a system exist in the *Idylls* to begin with?

Chapter 2: Theocritus' Vegetal Politics

“If citizenship means an oath of loyalty to a leader, then I choose the leader of the trees. If good citizens agree to uphold the laws of the nation, then I choose natural law, the law of reciprocity, of regeneration, of mutual flourishing.” – Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013: 134)

Introduction

It is easier to speak about the politics within human society than those political bonds that adhere between humans and plants. But often, I think, the simplicity that allows this difficulty to happen is also that which informs the immediate interpretation of “politics” as indicating governmental entities that stand over the personal relationships one has with the people around them. There is, nevertheless, a casual and powerful relationship between humans and plants that, as I have shown in the previous chapter, is exploited in the *Idylls* to elaborate on the nuance of interpersonal relationships. These relationships extend to notions of community that are informed by *both* governance and environment. Characters in the *Idylls* rely on their relationships with plants to explain their interactions with each other. Their relationships with their vegetal landscape, then, come to represent the characters' relationships with their political milieu. The *Idylls* operate using structures of landscape that themselves are varied and tense. Human relationships in the *Idylls* are immersed in and informed by their natural environment. The most important relationship, I argue, are those between humans and their craft. For many characters in the *Idylls*, though not all, this craft is poetry. The internalized poetic processes in the *Idylls* — that is, the layered acts of poetic production by the characters of the *Idylls* who use their songs to explain their own complex emotions — allow us to see more clearly a connection between the political economics within the poetry and those of Theocritus' own lived experience. In other words, Theocritus works human-vegetal relationships into the poetry within the *Idylls* to inform characters' relationships with each

other; these characters' own vegetal environment, then, similarly allows us more easily to interpret Theocritus' own relationship with his local identity.

To explain most accurately the entanglement of local identity, plant life, and poetic production it is useful to consult as a model for investigation the theory of identity politics that appears in the works of indigenous American/Chicanx writers. In doing so, I must first clarify that my use of such works are not meant to convey a strict linear ancestry from the political context of Hellenistic Alexandria and the abhorrent treatment of non-white communities in the Americas, as such an argument would require more space than my current project is capable of providing; I believe, instead, that the theoretical relationships identified in a work that focuses on a given community, be that of ancient Mediterranean or 'modern' indigenous studies, are capable of being responsibly used to illuminate corresponding perspectives across cultures. In this case, I refer to Theocritus' status as 'displaced' in a city which was almost exclusively founded on notions of cross cultural influence under a single ruling power. In her book *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013), Robin Wall Kimmerer, a botanist and member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, elaborates on the relationship with nature held by many indigenous American peoples. Throughout her book, but especially in her chapter "The council of Pecans," Kimmerer discusses the relationship her family had with their land and, emotionally, the realities of this pressure while being forced out of their homes by the United States government:

Children, language, lands: almost everything was stripped away, stolen when you weren't looking because you were trying to stay alive. In the face of such loss, one thing our people could not surrender was the meaning of land. In the settler mind, land was property, real estate, capital, or natural resources. But to our people, it was everything: identity, the connection to our ancestors, the home of our nonhuman kinfolk, our pharmacy, our library, the source of all that sustained us. Our lands were where our responsibility to the world was enacted, sacred ground.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Kimmerer 2013: 14.

Kimmerer's account here is beautiful, tragic, and informative. Most importantly, it illuminates the connection that can be and is often made between a person home, their landscape — for Kimmerer this is heavily dependent on plant life — and a sense of community.¹²¹ Important also is one crucial fact — even when displaced in the most vile capacities — that one's connection to the land, the ancestral vegetal ecosystem, remains. There is no evidence, so far as I can tell, that Theocritus experienced being forcibly removed from his home, and it would certainly be ethically suspect to suggest that the suffering of indigenous peoples could somehow be seen as transferable to Sicilian man from the third century BCE; but the sense of community encapsulating both people and plant which Kimmerer has identified is potent and, I argue, is similar to Theocritus' use of plant relationships to qualify his own relationship to a land he is no longer in.

Daniel Selden, in his seminal essay "Alibis" explains that in Alexandria "The population had no local roots and its constituents possessed no common race or tribal stock, but virtually everyone who made his home there had come from somewhere else"; it was a city of "expatriates" who were all "under Macedonian rule."¹²² Selden's focus on Callimachus' *Aitia* and *Hymns* within this context reveals that Callimachus' poetry is crafted with Ptolemaic civic organization in mind:

Callimachus' writing takes shape as part and parcel of the Ptolemaic reorganization of society and state; the same protocols, in fact, that define Alexandria's civic apparatus — variety, displacement, collocation — likewise, as we have seen, provide the compositional framework for the poet's work: a hymn by Callimachus turns out to be as much a concrete embodiment of Ptolemaic ideology as the law courts, onomastic codes, the Pithom Stele, or Museion.¹²³

¹²¹ See also on the connection between plant life and localized community Jones and Cloke 2002.

¹²² Selden 1998: 290.

¹²³ Selden 1998: 406.

I argue that Theocritus' depiction of life in Alexandria is similar to that of Callimachus's *Aitia* and *Hymns* insofar as he depicts societies which are varied and displaced. The major difference, however, is that Theocritus' depiction of plant-human interactions provides an avenue through which to express the nuanced tension arising from one's *individual*, concurrent relationships with their immediate and ancestral communities. Theocritus' *Idylls* come to represent not only the tense conglomeration of variant non-native communities under the rule of a foreign entity, but, by expressing locality and perspective through vegetal environments that are incorporated into every layer of poetic production, a specifically *Syracusan* feeling of cultural inclusion (or lack thereof) within the greater Alexandrian context.

These layered systems of identity — the local/ancestral/vegetal and the immediate/governmental/communal — converge on Theocritus and are expressed as a miscegenated system of political identity in the *Idylls*; he (Theocritus, the goatherd, Daphnis — all at once) does not compartmentalize these different parts of himself — for he could not, even if he wanted to, fully separate the two; he chooses instead to embrace the arising internal conflict. The conflict which accompanies partial occupation of disparate cultures, the incomplete integration/rejection from multiple societies, does not need to be resolved. Gloria Anzaldua, in writing about her own experience living on the Rio Grande River valley on the border of the United States and Mexico as a lesbian, Mexican, Indigenous, and American woman, highlights her own inability to differentiate her many layered identities.¹²⁴ Anzaldua's approach to her own individual identity is itself intricately associated with her status as a writer. Her writing, she says, is her own way of processing her identity: "Being a writer feels very much like being a Chicana, or being

¹²⁴ Anzaldua 2007: 44, Speaking of her own experience growing up in the violence of the borderlands as a result of being devalued by her various cultures, says : "Don't give me your lukewarm gods. What I want is an accounting with all three cultures – white, Mexican, Indian."

queer — a lot of squirming, coming up against all sorts of walls. Or it’s opposite: nothing defined or definite, a boundless floating state of limbo... Living in a state of psychic unrest, in a Borderland, is what makes poets write and artists create.”¹²⁵ For Theocritus also, the poetic act seems to be a means of coping with this “psychic unrest,” the new consciousness which Anzaldua later describes as having an energy which “comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm.”¹²⁶ Theocritus is, of course, in a very different cultural situation than Anzaldua. I argue, however, that Anzaldua’s navigation of multiplicity is a useful and applicable tool in deciphering the conflicting experiences within the *Idylls* when set in the context of Alexandrian civic displacement.

Theocritus, forcibly or voluntarily, is writing from the perspective of a Syracusan living in cosmopolitan Alexandria. I would argue that his poetry is an important, perhaps necessary, way for him, as also for Anzaldua, to work through the layers of identity that arise from his expat status. The relationships between humanity and plants that he works into the internal poetic structures of the *Idylls* (which I have identified in Chapter One) are, like the plants of Kimmerer’s indigenous botanical politics, a means through which to highlight the relationship between his ancestral and immediate homes. A crucial focal point in posing this argument is Theocritus’ *Idyll* 1, the programmatic status of which grants it paradigmatic relevance to Theocritus’s idyllic plant-politics present in the remainder of the *Idylls*. The poetic ‘agon’ of the first *Idyll* plays with the very notion of contestation and value first by situating humans alongside their vegetal environment, then by imbedding notions of community and poetic predecessors within the imagery of the ivy cup, and finally by encoding the song of Daphnis with indices of Sicilian identification. Of course, any argument about Theocritus’ emotional state or self-identity will necessarily be incomplete — for

¹²⁵ Anzaldua 2007: 94-95.

¹²⁶ Anzaldua 2007: 102.

how could one ever hope to prove it? — but to search for proof in such a respect is a fruitless endeavor and misses the point. What I posit here is an answer, potentially one of many, to the question of why Theocritus' humans have such a contentious relationship with the plants that inhabit their world, and why this contention seems to inform poetic processes which are themselves self-conflicting. The plants of the *Idylls* anchor Theocritus in his homeland despite his being transplanted into Alexandria, which is itself a showcase of variant botanical identities.

1. Songs Imbalanced, Ingrown

As I have shown in Chapter One, Theocritus' first *Idyll* sublimates poetic competition under the guise of contestation between plants and humans. The pine trees which produce sweet music along the banks of the river are set in competition with the goatherd, who finds himself immersed in his own contest with Thyrsis, the shepherd. The songs sung between the two are inseparable from notions of human-nature challenges. Thyrsis' song, which garners him respect and wins him the prize, expresses this very contest — the human and the plant are locked in a repressed battle between otherwise equivocal partners for dominance over the other. The song of Daphnis is, I have argued, self-reflective of the position in which Thyrsis finds himself, using the imagery of vegetal relationships to highlight poetic production. This, however, is only half of the contest.

If Thyrsis' song is so carefully crafted as to delineate the power dynamics of a poetic *agon*, it is worth looking at the opposing song — after all, every contest ought to have at least two sides. A song seems to be missing. As Frangskou (1996) notes, what is clearly meant to be a poetic competition in *Idyll* 1 is warped by the fact that Thyrsis' song is the only true song in the poem.

Thyrsis' competition is, to Frangeskou, the description of the prize to be won.¹²⁷ The description of the prize, the ivy cup, is worth exploring in order to further contextualize the power dynamic between Thyrsis and the goatherd as well as between plants and humanity. Much research has been done in an attempt to reconstruct what the cup would have looked like, as though it were referring to a potential archaeological find. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that simply by virtue of being realistic, the artifact might have existed separate from its literary context.¹²⁸ The ekphrasis of the ivy cup, instead, incorporates culturally relevant literary descriptions into the description of the ivy cup in a manner which resembles the famous craftsmanship of Alexandrian silverwork.¹²⁹ The cup, the purpose of which is to go to the winner of a contest, thus comes to represent not only the value of song, but especially the community of poetic influence which determines a poet's legitimacy in the greater schema of Alexandrian craftsmanship. When set opposite to Thyrsis' song, then, the vegetal imagery of Daphnis' song similarly represents not only the tension of poetic production, but specifically the production of poetry within Alexandrian literary culture.

In his analysis of *Idyll 1's pseudo-agon*, Frangeskou (1996) highlights the musical distinction between Thyrsis' song and the description of the ivy cup. The former depends on lyric alone, stripped of its musical accompaniment, whereas the latter is a poetic description which deliberately takes the place of the musical accompaniment itself. The goatherd himself explains his decision not to pipe shortly before he introduces the description of the ivy cup at lines 1.15-23:

οὐ θέμις, ὦ ποιμήν, τὸ μεσαμβρινὸν οὐ θέμις ἄμμιν
 συρίσδεν. Τὸν Πᾶνα δεδοίκαμες· ἧ γὰρ ἄπ' ἄργας
 τάνικα κακμακῶς ἀμπαύεται· ἔστι δὲ πικρός,
 καὶ οἱ ἀεὶ δριμεῖα χολὰ ποτὶ ῥινὶ κάθηται.

¹²⁷ Frangeskou 1996: 23-24.

¹²⁸ See Gow 1952: 14 n. 27-56 for a brief overview of the artistic lay-out of the ivy cup as well as criticisms of the cup being a true artifact: "That [Theocritus] has an actual cup in mind is improbable."

¹²⁹ Gow 1952: 14 n. 27-56 "The echoes of literary sources...suggest, further, that [Theocritus] is inventing a work resembling in a general way silver-work with which he was acquainted, and that he has transferred his invention, which is a perfectly plausible product of Alexandrian art, to a rustic context in which, if we scrutinize it too closely, it is somewhat out of place."

ἀλλὰ τὸ γὰρ δῆ, Θύρσι, τὰ Δάφνιδος ἄλγε' αἰίδες
καὶ τᾶς βουκολικᾶς ἐπὶ τὸ πλεόν ἴκειο μοίσας,
δεῦρ' ὑπὸ τὰν πετέαν ἐσδώμεθα τῷ τε Πριήπῳ
καὶ τὰν κρανίδων κατεναντίον, ἄπερ ὁ θῆκος
τῆνος ὁ ποιμενικὸς καὶ δρύες.

It is not right, shepherd, it at mid-day is not right for us
to whistle. We are afraid of Pan: for certainly he is,
at that time, wearily breaking from the hunt. He is harsh,
and bitter bile always sits along his nose.
But then you, Thyrsis, sing of the pains of Daphnis
and arrive at the majority of the Bucolic song.
Come here and let's sit under the elm across from
Priapus and the spring, right where that shepherd seat
and the oaks are.

At first reading, the goatherd's resistance to playing the pipe seems reasonable for someone who is subject to the rule of the god. As we have already seen in Chapter One, the goatherd, Thyrsis, and vegetal life are all in competition for second place after Pan himself. Yet the goatherd's choice to have Thyrsis sing his song is peculiar. What is it about playing the pipe that carries more risk of irritating the god than Daphnis' song? The replacement of the musical piping which ought to accompany the song with a poetic ekphrasis is, for Frangeskou, an attempt by Theocritus at compensating for the difficulties involved in transcribing musical affect in a poetic medium.¹³⁰ In crafting his poetry in this way, Theocritus forms a distinction between the musical comparison of piping and singing within the narrative and poetry in the "historical time of the poet or modern reader."¹³¹ The relationship between the two is crucial for interpreting the meaning of the ivy cup and Thyrsis' song: matters of musical quality in the *Idyll*, it seems, seek to inform *poetic* quality in the experience of the audience/poet. I do not concur with Frangeskou's further assessment that the ivy cup is equivalent to the pipe-playing we expect from the goatherd, given that the goatherd makes a point to say that such noise must not be played; rather, I posit that the transition from

¹³⁰ Frangeskou 1996: 26-27.

¹³¹ Frangeskou 1996: 27.

piping to poetic ekphrasis is one of replacement in keeping with the other major replacement at play in this passage — namely, the vegetal environment itself. When the distinction between piping and singing is contextualized in the context of plants, it becomes easier to understand the rationale for replacing piping with song.

The introduction to *Idyll* 1, as I have shown, exposes a system of imbalanced competition between man and plants. More specifically, Thyrsis' opening refrain compares the (human) goatherd's piping to the (vegetal) pine-trees' whistling and singing. It seems no coincidence that we see here a negotiation between instrument and lyric. Before the goatherd's cautious replacement, Thyrsis tells him at lines 12-14: λῆς ποτὶ τᾶν Νυμφᾶν, λῆς, αἰπόλε, τεῖδε καθίξας, ὡς τὸ κάταντες τοῦτο γεώλοφον αἶ τε μυρῖκαι, συρίσδεν; Τὰς δ' αἶγας ἐγὼν ἐν τῶδε νομευσῶ. "Come on, by the Nymph, goatherd, will you sit down here and pick up your whistling, where this steep hill and the Tamarisks are? In the meantime I will shepherd your goats." The significance of this lies in the fact that Thyrsis describes their immediate environment through an inclusion of the local flora. When the goatherd suggests singing instead of 'whistling', he concurrently suggests that the pair move to sing where the oaks and the elm trees are. In doing so, the goatherd (and so too Theocritus) recalls the earlier distinction between plants that sing and humans that play instruments (1.1-3). That the piping ought to be considered in comparable context with the opening refrain of the poem is supported by the consistent enjambment of the verb συρίσδω. In line three, the Goatherd's whistling begins the line of dactylic hexameter; this is also the case for Thyrsis' request to hear the piping at line fourteen and the goatherd's subsequent refusal to whistle at line sixteen. The consistency of piping in a vegetal context carries with it the systems of hierarchy found in the earlier passage. As I have argued, Thyrsis' description of the plant-human competitions at the opening of the *Idylls* presents a seemingly imbalanced system within which trees are valued for

their song capabilities, and the goatherd is, while equally valued, given a secondary position in the poetic hierarchy. The goatherd understands this and in turn suggests moving from the tamarisks to the trees and from piping to song — for the tamarisk-informed piping would be more apt to upset their shared subjugator than the tree-informed song.

There is a degree of irony here when the transition from tamarisk to oaks are considered intertextually alongside Callimachus' fourth *Iamb*. *Iamb* four is itself a poetic *agon*, one in which the contestants are an Olive and a Laurel tree who have grown alongside each other and are vying for superiority. At the end of the poem, a neighboring bramble bush comes in and informs the trees that their competition is for naught (Call. *Iambi*. 4.96-104):

βάτος τὸ τρηχὺ τειχέων π..δ.[.]να
 ἔλεξεν (ἦν γὰρ οὐκ ἄπωθε τῶν δενδρέων)
 “οὐκ ᾗ τάλαιναί παυσόμεσθα, μὴ χαρταὶ
 γενώμεθ' ἐχθροῖς, μηδ' ἐροῦμεν ἀλλήλας
 ἄνολβ' ἀναιδέως, ἀλλὰ ταῦτά γ' .β..μ.;"
 τὴν δ' ἄρ' ὑποδράξ οἶα ταῦρος ἢ δάφνη
 ἔβλεψε καὶ τὰδ' εἶπεν· “ᾗ κακὴ λώβη,
 ὡς δὴ μί' ἡμέων καὶ σύ; μὴ με ποιήσαι
 Ζεὺς τοῦτο· καὶ γὰρ γειτονεῦσ' ἀποπνίγεις.”

A jagged bramble [...] from the walls
 said (for she was not far away from the trees):
 “Will we not stop, poor ones, in order that we do not
 Come to delight in hostility, in order that that we will not shamelessly say
 Wretched things to each other, but these things [...]?”
 But the Laurel tree looked at her under its brow like a bull
 and said these things: “You terrible disgrace,
 do you really think that *you* are one of us? May Zeus not
 do this to me: for you and your neighboring suffocate me.”

The introduction of the bramble at the end of the argument provides a useful parallel to understand Theocritus' own categorization of bushes/shrubs and trees in respect to poetic contestation. As I have noted in Chapter One, Alice Lindsell's survey of plant species in the *Idylls* shows that

Theocritus' plants are, generally speaking, the bushes and shrubs of the countryside.¹³² In regard to Callimachus' *Iamb* 4, scholars have long argued for a degree of autobiographical authorial voice in the plants. Is Callimachus speaking as the Olive tree or the Laurel? Some, including David Konstan and Leo Landry (2008), argue that Callimachus disperses his identity throughout all three of the plants in an act of satirical self-criticism.¹³³ Others such as Rebecca Armstrong (2019) have identified the perspectives of the trees as representing poetic style, where the olive is a conservative, traditionalist form of poetry and the laurel the innovative progressive style.¹³⁴ Regardless of how one positions the representational direction of Callimachus' plants — whether they are poets or poetry itself — the immediate relevance to Theocritus' work lies in the role of the 'bramble' as an attempted peace maker in a context of poetic craft. Konstan and Landry (2008) identify just this phenomena while critiquing Ralph Rosen's (2007) analysis of the passage; they suggest that Rosen, who identifies the bramble as misunderstanding how iambic insults ought to work and pleads for a "non-iambic behavior," is only partially correct, instead Konstan and Landry note that the Laurel and the Olive trees are themselves overly spiteful and are taking the insults of iambic poetry too far.¹³⁵ The bramble bush, then, becomes an arbiter for moderated poetic contestation in a peaceful environment, set opposite the harsh contestation of trees, whose quest for authority over one another is hyper-exclusionary of external poetic style.

In Theocritus' *Idyll* 1, the goatherd's suggestion to move from the tamarisk bush to the oak trees coincides with a change in musical and poetic craft. It is no coincidence, I argue, that the goatherd provides a change of scenery into a setting ruled by vegetation regularly known to be

¹³² Lindsell in Raven 2000: 65.

¹³³ Konstan and Landry 2008: 49.

¹³⁴ Armstrong 2019: 1-52. I find this argument regarding style more convincing as it avoids many of the pitfalls of reading poetry from a rigid lens of autobiography, while still maintaining the necessary inclusion of personal bias in the poetic act. In each instance, however, I would hesitantly suggest associating the bramble with Theocritus and/or the bucolic genre for both his frequent use of plants as well as his own narratorial status as balancing conflict.

¹³⁵ Konstan and Landry 2008: 49, citing Rosen 2007: 200-204.

engaged in harsh contest, as the narrative itself transitions out of a normal, equal *agon* to one predicated on Thyrsis' ability to prove his own independent value when compared to the ivy cup and all its cultural relevance.

The ivy cup, which essentially constitutes the opposite half of the *agon* from Thyrsis' song, is not a performance; it is a prize. In convincing Thyrsis to sing, the goatherd offers the cup as one of several offerings (1.23-28):

αἰ δέ κ' αἰείσης
ὥς ὄκα τὸν Λιβύαθε ποτὶ Χρόμιν ἄσας ἐρίσδων,
αἰγὰ τέ τοι δωσῶ διδυματόκον ἐς τρίς ἀμέλξαι,
ἃ δὺ' ἔχοισ' ἐρίφως ποταμέλγεται ἐς δύο πέλλας,
καὶ βαθὺ κισσύβιον κεκλυσμένον ἀδεί κηρῶ,
ἀμφῶες, νεοτευχές, ἔτι γλυφάνοιο ποτόσδον.

And if you sing
as you once sang in competition against Chromis the Lybian
I will give you a twin-born goat to milk up to three times,
which, since it has two kids, produces an additional two pails of milk,
and a deep cup coated in sweet wax,
with two handles, newly made, still smelling of the knife.

The goatherd does not offer the cup as a prize for any current competition; instead, he offers a series of rewards contingent on the quality of his performance. Notably, the goatherd determines the quality of Thyrsis' song in reference to a previous competition which is quantified by geographical affiliation, and aside from the ivy cup the other prizes are reminiscent of those hypothetically won by the goatherd and Pan in Thyrsis' introductory call for competition. The implications of this on the song itself and the description of the ivy cup will be explored in the pages that follow, but for now it is worth noting the immediate reading. Up until this point, the only mention of goats, aside from Thyrsis' offer to tend to them as the goatherd plays his tune, are found in the context of the goatherd's inability to win better than the second-best prize when Pan

in included in a competitive setting.¹³⁶ Thyrsis has not yet had the opportunity to be included among the rankings of musical production, but now the goatherd offers him entry. In this sense, the ivy cup is not merely a quaint prize given to one of two musicians, but a prize which determines Thyrsis' ability as a poet among a pre-existing contest.

2. The Ekphrasis of vegetal relationships

With the ivy cup coming to dictate Theocritus' success not in a contest but as a poet generally, the ekphrasis of the ivy cup ought to be considered in a similar respect. The series of images that constitute the cup are easily sorted into distinct sections: two men vying for the attention of a single woman (1.32-38), a fisherman casting his net (1.39-44), a young boy neglectful of his duties in tending to his vineyard (1.45-54), and a background of ivy and acanthus encasing each of these (1.29-31; 1.55-56). I will examine each of these images independently as each scene contains unique representations of the vegetal relationships that constitute communal experience. It is worthwhile, however, to first look at the entire passage and its relationship to the literary tradition, which will inform both how to read the individual images on the cup as well as how to read the cup in relationship to Thyrsis' performance.

Hunter (1999) notes that the ekphrasis of the ivy cup is generically indebted to the similarly structured ekphrasis of Achilles' shield in the *Iliad*, the only one which presents a "bucolicisation" of the shield's depiction of the world so that the cup "offers a view of the wider world against which the limited concerns of 'bucolic' poetry are played out."¹³⁷ But, as Hunter also notes, the cup does not itself present any truly bucolic scene — there are no goatherders, there are no flocks,

¹³⁶ See Chapter One §1 for a further analysis on the vegetal competition and the prize-goats.

¹³⁷ Hunter 1999: 76 n. 27-61.

there is no pipe playing.¹³⁸ The contextual limitations of the bucolic ekphrasis, then, — that is, the depiction of the world in which Theocritus’ bucolic has positioned itself — does not refer to the world of bucolic poetry itself but instead to the context of the bucolic craft. Niels Koopman (2018), following similar arguments made by Gutzwiller (1991) and Klooster (2012), argues that the goatherd’s description of the object is reflective of Theocritus’ own voice, even if — as Koopman argues is the case for all ekphrases — the passage reflects the goatherd’s interpretation of the object rather than a consistent description.¹³⁹ This particular duality of the goatherd’s voice as representing Theocritus’ own authorial biases is similar to Frangeskou’s (1996) assessment of the division between poetry and song. Klooster (2012) notes, referring to this balance between the Goatherd as interpreter and Theocritus as author, that the “ekphrasis focuses the narratee’s attention on the creative activity of the author,” an activity which constitutes “elements both of the poem *per se* and the bucolic *Idylls* as a collection.”¹⁴⁰ At once the goatherd interprets the images on the ivy cup as a replacement for his own musical craft and Theocritus positions the interpretation as the poetry which sets the standard to be met by Thyrsis’ performance. The view of the world which the ivy cup represents is, for Theocritus, his *own* interpretation of the standards that must be met for poetry to be considered valuable.

Already we have seen that the ivy cup is often considered in relationship to Homer’s ekphrasis of Achilles’ shield. The goatherd’s — and so too Theocritus’ — account of the images on the cup in their entirety are dependent on pre-existing poetic tradition. Koopman (2018) notes that κισσύβιον, the term used by the goatherd for the cup, is a Homeric allusion to the *Odyssey*

¹³⁸ Hunter 1999: 75 n. 27-61.

¹³⁹ Koopman 2018: 182-3. See also Gutzwiller 1991: 93 and Klooster 2012: 111-113 for arguments regarding the interplay of Theocritus’ and the goatherd’s voices. See also Miles 1977:147, who is cited by Koopman, for an argument on behalf of the notion that the goatherd’s speech is interpretive rather than descriptive. For the interpretive nature of all ekphrases see Koopman 2018: 5-8.

¹⁴⁰ Klooster 2012: 111.

14.78.¹⁴¹ Koopman does not examine the context of its use at *Od.* 14.78, though it is worth noting that it is used of the cup with which Eumaeus offers wine to a disguised Odysseus;¹⁴² in other words, it is used in the context of welcoming a stranger whose appearance as ‘Other’ disguises his dominance. So too, I argue, does the cup of *Idyll 1* offer Thyrsis the opportunity to enter into a pre-existing system of poetic challenges, only for Thyrsis’ song to claim superiority over the contest itself. I will return to Thyrsis song after having examined the ways in which the varying individual components of the ivy cup resemble similar allusions to poetic tradition as the ekphrasis does generally, many of which depend on plants themselves or notion of vegetal hubris.

The collection of images on the ivy cup, the lovers, the fisherman, and the vineyard scene have been identified by Hunter (1999) as a sequence of emotional, physical, and poetic πόνος “labor.” The first two, the emotional labor of unrequited love and the economic labor of a man fishing transition to a labor of poetic production.¹⁴³ The cup, then comes to recognize each of the ways in which I have previously identified plants as relating to humanity — the erotic, the economic, the poetic, with the name of the cup itself recalling a nourishing act (Eumaeus offering Odysseus wine). This collective vegetality is furthered by the rim of the cup being covered in extravagant ivy and the ἄκανθος plant growing between the images. What’s more, these images intertextually recall a cosmopolitan literary ‘canon’ — that is, the images utilize different literary traditions from various cultures, each present in Alexandria. I will examine the images in the order I have presented them here — lovers, fisherman, vineyard, ivy/ἄκανθος — since the vegetal ring

¹⁴¹ Koopman 2018: 184. See also Dale 1952 who discusses the term *κισσύβιον* and its relationship to other terms used for pottery in order to determine the physical structure of Theocritus’ vessel as well as to determine whether the images were on the outside or the inside.

¹⁴² *Od.* 14.78: ἐν δ’ ἄρα κισσυβίῳ κίρνη μελιθεῖα οἶνον, | αὐτὸς δ’ ἀντίον ἴζειν, ἐποτρύνων δὲ προσήδα· “and he mixed honey sweet wine in the cup, and he sat himself across from him, and egging him on he addressed him...”

¹⁴³ See hunter 1999: 77 n.27-61 who compares the sequence to the binary opposition of “war” and “piece” on the shield of Achilles.

composition crafted by Theocritus — ivy, lovers, fisherman, vineyard, ἄκανθος — is less conducive for an analysis of the vegetal imagery which surrounds the scenery. The ivy and the ἄκανθος work in unison to encode the scenes that they surround, and so also the entire cup, with social status. After identifying the cosmopolitan meanings in the scenes of the woman, the fisherman, and the boy, I will return to the images of vegetation in order to identify how the cosmopolitanism fits into the political dynamics of poetic contestation.

The first of the images listed on the ivy cup is that of a woman who is pursued by two men but does not reciprocate their affection. This dynamic, I argue, may be viewed as a brief snapshot of not only the vegetally hubristic relationships I have identified in my first chapter, but also of their relationship to contestation. The image is described as follows (1.32-38):

ἔντοσθεν δὲ γυνά, τι θεῶν δαίδαλμα, τέτυκται,
 ἀσκητὰ πέπλω τε καὶ ἄμπυκι· πὰρ δέ οἱ ἄνδρες
 καλὸν ἐθειράζοντες ἀμοιβαδὶς ἄλλοθεν ἄλλος
 νεικεῖουσ' ἐπέεσσι· τὰ δ' οὐ φρενὸς ἄπτεται αὐτᾶς·
 ἀλλ' ὅκα μὲν τῆνον ποτιδέρκεται ἄνδρα γέλαισα,
 ἄλλοκα δ' αὖ ποτὶ τὸν ῥίπτει νόον· οἱ δ' ὑπ' ἔρωτος
 δηθὰ κυλοιδιόωντες ἐτώσια μοχθίζοντι.

And within a woman, some art of the gods, is crafted,
 adorned with a shawl and a headband: for the men
 with beautiful long hair each alternately defeating the other
 in song: but these things did not grab her heart.
 But whenever she, laughing, took sight of that man,
 she then throws her attention to the other; but they
 having bags under their eyes from love, toil in vain.

The first point to note about this scene is the way it conveys the same sense of vegetal hubris as is found in other passages in the idylls as it pertains to interpersonal human relationships. The woman is clearly here a non-reciprocating love interest for both men. As they take turns trying to garner her attention, she remains unimpressed (τὰ δ' οὐ φρενὸς ἄπτεται αὐτᾶς, “These things do not grab her heart”). The men are then described as not only physically impacted by this in that they have

bags under their eyes,¹⁴⁴ but they specifically are noted to be laboring entirely in vain. The paradigm of emotional labor yielding no results and resulting in the other party, although immediately decadent and attractive, causing pain to the one showing affection ought to be familiar as it is the same paradigm which I have argued is both vegetal in nature and applies to human relationships elsewhere in the *Idylls*. But it is important also to note the instrument of the men's labor which is insufficient in winning over their shared love interest: their songs.

We do not hear the songs sung by the men, only that they defeat one another in succession as she alternates looking at each of them. The words *νικκίουσι* and *ἐπέεσι*, are, notably, not Doric forms. Hunter (1999) notes that these terms are Homeric and, with *ἔπος* only used here in the *Idylls*, “marks the epic diction of the scene”.¹⁴⁵ The alternation of the men's songs suggests, to Hunter, an example of the bucolic *agon*.¹⁴⁶ If this is the case, what are the men competing *for*? It is clear that within the image they are in competition for the woman's affection, yet I would argue that the woman represents the cup itself as the object of bucolic acceptance within a multi-cultural social climate. The woman is described as both a *δαίδαγμα*, “a work of art,”¹⁴⁷ and being *τέτυκται*, “produced by work.”¹⁴⁸ The term *δαίδαγμα*, used as an adjective, has the additional meaning of “spotted” or “speckled;”¹⁴⁹ this is significant insofar as the episodic qualities of the cup itself, which unlike Achilles' shield is not explained in its entirety before describing the individual components, has been noted by Cairns (1984) as “the *ποικιλία* sought by Hellenistic poets.”¹⁵⁰ The woman, then, is described not merely as a woman but as an object of ekphrasis herself. The reflexive

¹⁴⁴ Hunter 1999: 80 n.38 notes that having swollen under-eyes is, much later, listed as a symptom of love by Heliodorus of Emesa in his *Aetheopica* 4.7.7.

¹⁴⁵ Hunter 1999: 80 n. 35-38.

¹⁴⁶ Hunter 1999: 80 n. 35-38.

¹⁴⁷ LSJ, sv *δαίδαγμα* I.1.

¹⁴⁸ LSJ, sv *τέτυκται* I.

¹⁴⁹ LSJ, sv *δαίδαγμα* I.2.

¹⁵⁰ Cairns 1984: 102. See also Koopman 2018: 189 for the lack of a totalizing description of the ivy cup.

commentary on the nature of competition for a prize within the ivy cup's images is also distinctly multicultural, at least in regard to its linguistic identity. The dialects used in this passage are, I argue purposefully, inconsistent. The terms *νικεῖουσιν* are *ἐπέεσσιν* are, we have seen, Homeric; *ὄκα...ἄλλοκα* is a Doric version of *ὄτε...ἄλλοτε*; and the form *γέλαισα* is in the Aeolic dialect.¹⁵¹ What we are presented is, then, an image of bucolic contestation which operates within a system of multicultural literary allusion.

As the goatherd moves into the following image, the economic impact of the previously espoused communal system of hubristic relationships is brought to the fore. The second distinct image which is described in the ekphrasis of the ivy cup is that of a fisherman. The description reads (1.39-44):

τοῖς δὲ μετὰ γριπεύς τε γέρων πέτρα τε τέτυκται
 λεπράς, ἐφ' ἧ σπεύδων μέγα δίκτυον ἐς βόλον ἔλκει
 ὁ πρέσβυς, κάμνοντι τὸ καρτερόν ἀνδρὶ ἐοικώς.
 φαίης κεν γυίων νιν ὅσον σθένος ἔλλοπιεύειν,
 ὧδὲ οἱ ᾠδήκαντι κατ' αὐχένα πάντοθεν ἴνες
 καὶ πολιῶ περ ἑόντι· τὸ δὲ σθένος ἄξιον ἄβας.

And beside them an old fisherman and a jagged rock is crafted,
 on which the old man hastily grabs his net for a cast,
 resembling a working man in his strength.
 You would see him fishing as though with all the strength of his limbs,
 since the tendons swell all over his neck
 even though he is grey: but with strength worthy of a young man.

Whereas the woman refuting her suitors' advances is representative of the *erotic* relationships between human and their vegetal environment, the old man fishing is here a recollection of the economic necessities that accompany these relationships. The fisherman does not, ultimately receive any reward for his efforts —and it is clear from his own physical description that he is, like the men of the first image, pained by his own actions. Yet we see here, as Hunter (1999) also

¹⁵¹ See Hunter 1999: 80 n. 36-7 and Gow 1952: 9 n. 36.

recognizes, that the man's efforts are a more significantly material πόνος than we saw in the description of the men and the woman.¹⁵² Additionally, Hunter finds in this imagery a self-reflexive commentary by Theocritus on his own poetry; the imagery of a fisherman is repeated in the song of the goatherd at *Idyll* 3.25-27, which I have argued is itself associated with the goatherds understanding of the vegetal relationships. Hunter's reading of the fisherman on the ivy cup notes that the imagery of a fisherman hard at work is common in Hellenistic metal-work reliefs, and that "by suggesting that the subjects of his poetry have already been copied into art, only then to be re-inscribed in Literature through the device of *ekphrasis*, Theocritus re-enforces the sense of tradition in his poetry."¹⁵³ The fisherman then represents not only physical craft but the literary tradition on which craft relies. His efforts ought to pay off in a degree of economic security, but they do not. Theocritus presents this same issue of economic security in relationship to his own poetry and its economic viability in *Idyll* 16. It is useful, then, in considering the fisherman's labor, to compare the limited but crucial examples provided by Theocritus on the economic payoff of his own literary craft.

In *Idyll* 16, the narrator of the poem — a narrator long associated with Theocritus himself — criticizes rulers who do not provide economic security for the artists working under his rule. At *Idyll* 16.13-14 Theocritus asks τίς τῶν νῦν τοιόσδε; Τίς εὖ εἰπόντα φιλήσει; Οὐκ οἶδ' "who is of such a sort now? Who loves what was well said? I do not know" and continues with a list of phrases that are now spoken by people in positions of power (*Idyll* 16.19-21): 'θεοὶ τιμῶσιν ἀοιδούς,' 'τίς δέ κεν ἄλλου ἀκούσαι; ἄλις πάντεσσιν Ὅμηρος.' 'οὗτος ἀοιδῶν λῶστος, ὅς ἐξ ἐμεῦ οἴσεται οὐδέν.' "The gods honor singers,' and 'Who would listen to another? Homer suffices for everyone.' And 'this is the best of the singers, who will get nothing from me.'" Many scholars have used this

¹⁵² Hunter 1999: 77 n. 27-61.

¹⁵³ Hunter 1999: 77 n. 27-61.

passage as autobiographical evidence that Theocritus was born in Syracuse and ultimately moved to Alexandria in order to have a more profitable environment in which to produce his poetry.¹⁵⁴ This may very well be the case, especially considering the fact that the following poem, *Idyll* 17, reflects on Ptolemy Philadelphus' being a patron for artists. While I am unwilling to definitively argue on behalf of any autobiographical reading, it is clear that *Idyll* 16 reflects on the economic return affiliated with poetic production. When considered in the context of the fisherman on the ivy cup, one might more willingly read in the fisherman a struggle for individual recognition in a system where poetic competition is tied to economic survival. Just as Theocritus struggles with the potentially fruitless labor of writing poetry in *Idyll* 16, the fisherman depicted on the ivy cup, itself being a commentary on poetic tradition, reaps little reward for his efforts.

The following imagery on the ivy cup — that of the boy who neglects his vineyard in order to weave a cage for a locust — is more immediately vegetal in nature (1.45-54):

τυτθὸν δ' ὅσσον ἄπωθεν ἀλιτρώτιο γέροντος
 περκναῖσι σταφυλαῖσι καλὸν βέβριθεν ἄλωά,
 τὰν ὀλίγος τις κῶρος ἐφ' αἰμασιαῖσι φυλάσσει
 ἤμενος· ἀμφὶ δέ νιν δύο ἄλώπεκες, ἃ μὲν ἄν' ὄρχως
 φοιτῆ σινομένα τὰν τρώξιμον, ἃ δ' ἐπὶ πῆρα
 πάντα δόλον τεύχοισα τὸ παιδίον οὐ πρὶν ἀνησεῖν
 φατὶ πρὶν ἢ ἀκράτιστον ἐπὶ ξηροῖσι καθίξει.
 αὐτὰρ ὄγ' ἀνθερίκοισι καλὰν πλέκει ἀκριδοθήραν
 σχοίνῳ ἐφαρμόσδων· μέλεται δέ οἱ οὔτε τι πήρας
 οὔτε φυτῶν τοσσῆνον ὅσον περὶ πλέγματι γαθεῖ.

And a little way off from the sea-worn old man
 there is a vineyard filled with dark grapes,
 and there is some small boy guarding it seated
 on the walls; and around him there are two foxes, one of which
 is passing through the rows doing harm to the produce, the other
 using all of his tricks on the purse says that it will not let up

¹⁵⁴ For this argument see Gow 1952: 305, who uses the references to Hiero II and his plan to defeat the Carthaginians in Sicily to date at least this poem, if not also the entire collection, to immediately following Hiero's acquisition of power in roughly 275 BCE. Though Gow also concedes that Theocritus "may well not have been writing in Sicily." See also, on the topic of Theocritus' migration from Syracuse to Sicily Bulloch, 2016: 63-65.

on the boy until [she sits down having breakfasted on the dry food].¹⁵⁵
 Nevertheless, this boy weaves together a beautiful locust-trap
 with asphodel, fitting it onto rush; and not any part of the purse or the plants is
 a great concern for him as much as he rejoices about the weaving.

The boy's association with his vegetal environment is fraught with economic and poetic tension; in fact, it is through the boy's relationship with vegetation that Theocritus depicts the congregation of poetic craft and economic necessity, a congregation which depends on intertextual allusion to literary traditions of varying cultures.

It is clear, in the first place, that the boy is neglectful of his duties in tending to the vineyard. The very last line says just this: The boy cares not about the plants which produce the fruit, but instead gives his full attention to the asphodel and rush which he uses for his trap. Just as the earlier passage of the man fishing depicts the labor associated with economic security — the fisherman is fishing whether for food or for profit — so too is the boy depicted here in terms of his relationship with a food source that does not end up giving him the nourishment needed to live. The obvious distinction in this respect is that the boy is not benefitting from his labor because he is not laboring in the proper way. His neglect of the vineyard allows the foxes to steal his food and even go so far as to take away his wallet.

It is a peculiar relationship, the one between the boy and his vineyard. Already I have noted that Hunter (1999) explains that the transition between the fisherman and the boy as a portrayal of change from physical to poetic *πόνος*.¹⁵⁶ But it is important to be clear about how the poetry comes into play here; it is alluded to in the locust itself. Plato, in his *Phaedrus*, uses the locust as a

¹⁵⁵ I have, for the purposes of clarity, accepted here the reading of Hunter (1999): 83 n. 50-1, in the translation of ἀκράτιστον ἐπὶ ξεροῖσι καθίζη, given that the “textual and interpretive problems have as yet found no satisfactory solution.” My reading of the passage will rely slightly on this section, but I am confident that any interpretations within my argument may stand as the textual issues likely do not negate any matters of economic and vegetal relevance stemming from the individual words.

¹⁵⁶ Hunter 1999: 77 n. 27-61.

metaphor for the poet who obsesses over his work to a degree that he forgets to care for himself, favoring his song inspired by the muses over his own basic needs such as eating and drinking.¹⁵⁷ It is clear, here, that a similar dynamic is at play in the imagery of the boy and his vineyard. As the boy focuses on his locust cage — that is, his poetic craft — he is forgetful of the vineyard which presumably is meant to provide his nourishment. One might rightfully wonder, then, what the meaning of the cage is. I argue that the allusion to the locust has a significance beyond mere allusion to general poetic craft; instead, the ἀκριδοθήραν refers to a specific trend in literary craft. In the *Phaedrus*, men become locusts after dying because of a hyper-fixation on the Muses. It goes without saying that the Muses have long been considered the inspiration for Greek poetic tradition. The boy then is using a physical metaphor for poetic composition — the careful weaving of the locust cage — in order to catch the embodiment of the inspiration associated with traditional Greek poetry.

Through his near-obsession with capturing the perfect version of the Greek poetic inspiration, the boy falls into a parallel scenario as the original locusts. His focus on the cricket cage and subsequent neglect of his vegetal responsibilities costs him the grapes which the vineyard produces; this too has reference to poetic traditions. Anagnostou-Laoutides and David Konstan find that the vineyard is, in fact, an intertextual allusion to the Song of Songs.¹⁵⁸ More specifically, the foxes which ruin the vineyards harvest appear also at the song of songs 2.15: “Catch us little foxes, the foxes that ruin the vineyards — for our vineyards are in blossom.”¹⁵⁹ That Theocritus is referring to this work of Jewish literature is, as Anagnostou-laoutides and Konstan note, plausible

¹⁵⁷ Plato *Phaedrus* 259b: λέγεται δ' ὡς ποτ' ἦσαν οὔτοι ἄνθρωποι τῶν πρὶν Μούσας γεγονέναι, γενομένων δὲ Μουσῶν καὶ φανείσης φῶδης οὕτως ἄρα τινὲς τῶν τότε ἐξεπλάγησαν ὑφ' ἡδονῆς, ὥστε ἄδοντες ἠμέλησαν σίτων τε καὶ ποτῶν, καὶ ἔλαθον τελευτήσαντες αὐτούς. “They say that these [locusts] were once men until the Muses came into existence, and when the muses came and their song appeared, the men were struck out of their senses by pleasure, so much so that they preferred singing over food and drink, and forgetting these things they died.”

¹⁵⁸ Anagnostou-Laoutides and Konstan 2008.

¹⁵⁹ Translated by Anagnostou-Laoutides and Konstan 2008: 509.

given that “it was translated into Greek, along with the rest of the Hebrew Bible, in Alexandria, more or less at the time when Theocritus was composing his poetry.”¹⁶⁰ It should be noted that Anagnostou-Laoutides and Konstan’s argument does not attempt to position Theocritus as engaging with the same version of the Song of Songs as has been transmitted to modern audiences, but instead they argue that Theocritus was engaging with Near Eastern literary traditions in a significant way. Indeed, I believe this is not only true, but is crucial to understanding the juxtaposition of the locust with the vineyard imagery. The boy, it seems, is not only focusing on the locust rather than the vineyard he is in charge of but is in turn focusing on capturing an idealized inspiration from the Greek muse by neglecting his immediate, culturally diverse surroundings.

All of these images on the ivy cup — the woman and her suitors, the fisherman, and the boy who neglects his culturally significant vegetal surroundings — form a complex representation of the erotic, economic, and poetic dynamics which I have previously identified as embodied by the *Idylls*’ vegetal relationships. What is more, the images, independently of one another and especially in their entirety, also blur the notion of a single poetic culture. The description of the woman uses varied Greek dialects, the fisherman recalls the economic struggles which Theocritus himself elsewhere depicts in his *encomia* to Hiero II, and, most pointedly, the scene of the vineyard contains references to contemporary Jewish literature. In each of these scenes, the characters are unfulfilled. The woman does not end up with either of the men, the fisherman does not catch a fish despite his struggle, and the boy’s obsession with a particular tradition of poetry leads to the ultimate destruction of his vineyard’s produce. In constructing these images in this way, Theocritus portrays a multicultural tension — as if to say that the lack of erotic, economic, or poetic fulfillment and the cosmopolitan nature of craft are one and the same. Theocritus, however, does not leave

¹⁶⁰ Anagnostou- Laoutides and Konstan 2008: 504.

the tension undefined; he surrounds these images with descriptions of the vegetal reliefs on the cup, effectively defining his own specific experience and encoding the issues of culture into the context of Alexandria.

3. Locating the Cup and Planting Syracusan Roots

The description of images in the ivy uses a ring-composition of vegetal imagery. Before we learn of any of the previously mentioned images, we learn that there is a string of ivy wrapping its way around the lips. Immediately following the description of the boy and his vineyard, we learn that there are ἄκανθος plants depicted all over the cup around the images. Both of these plant descriptions aid in encoding the cup itself as depicting Theocritus' interpretation of the cultural tensions which are housed in the scenery they surround. When one sets this in the context of the song of Daphnis, the emerging depiction of value — for we ought to remember that the ivy cup is the prize for Thyrsis' song — comes to reflect the (desired) place of Syracusan literature within Alexandrian cosmopolitanism.

The first image we learn about on the cup is, understandably, going to have significant weight in how one ought to understand what follows. As such, the ivy is a defining characteristic of the cup's representative value (1.29-31):

Τῷ ποτὶ μὲν χεῖλῃ μαρύεται ὑψόθι κισσός,
κισσὸς ἐλιχρύσῳ κεκονισμένος· ἅ δὲ κατ' αὐτόν
καρπῷ ἔλιξ εἰλεῖται ἀγαλλομένα κροκόεντι.

And ivy winds up high along its lips,
ivy which is intertwined with helichrysos; and upon it
the tendril twists adorned with saffron fruit.

The acceptance here of Gutzwiller's alternate reading, that A.S.F Gow's κεκονισμένος ("dusted") in line 30 should rather be "κεκονισμένος" ("intertwined") as it is more likely from the verb κονίζω

and is the most common manuscript variant, allows for further implications of the ivy's role in the ekphrasis of the cup.¹⁶¹ She offers an analysis of the text in which the description of the ivy evokes the *Homeric Hymn to Dynonyesus* where ivy climbs the mast of the ship with “supernatural speed.” Theocritus’ use of this “illogical” imagery through “high poetic” language in order to adapt the hymn to contemporary demands, she argues, suggests that pastoral is “an intertwining of the complex and the simple with the result that our sophistication and the characters’ naïveté meet, indistinguishably, like helichryse and ivy, in a form of aesthetic pleasure.”¹⁶² I would add to this astute observation that this “intertwining of the complex with the simple” allows Theocritus to overlay onto the cup poetic tradition and the social structures illuminated through humanity’s relationship with vegetation. But the ivy does more than this, it also encodes the cup as something to have a relationship with. The fruit on the ivy balances the loss of produce, the economic violations, that we have seen in the imagery of the boy and his vineyard. The ivy cup then is something which itself provides nourishment — a sentiment we have already seen in the intertextuality of the very term for the cup, κισσόβιον. It would do well then, to better define this relationship between the ivy that encodes the object and the characters who would relate to it by comparing other uses of ivy in the *Idylls*.

Important in this context is the use of ivy which we have already seen at play for the goatherd’s *komos* song at *Idyll* 3.12-14, when he longs for Amaryllis:

Θᾶσαι μάν. Θυμαλγῆς ἐμὶν ἄχος. Αἴθε γενοίμαν
 ἅ βομβεῦσα μέλισσα καὶ ἐς τεὸν ἄντρον ἰκοίμαν,
 τὸν κισσὸν διαδὺς καὶ τὰν πτέριν ἅ τὸ πυκάσδει.

See here. I have heart grieving pain. Would that I were
 the humming bee and I come to your cave,
 slipping through the ivy and the fern which hides you.

¹⁶¹ Gutzwiller 1986: 253.

¹⁶² Gutzwiller 1986: 255.

Ivy, it seems, is not only something which contains what is desired, but is particularly the obstacle to obtaining the object for one's fulfillment. It is the plant which refuses to give back, but spreads quickly, blocking off the desirer from the desired — that is, Thyrsis' desire for the cup and the goatherd's desire for Amaryllis.

The ἄκανθος plant on the cup acts similarly in that it encodes the cup as a thing to be desired, but more importantly it also provides a degree of reference to Alexandrian literature broadly (*Idyll* 1.55-56):

παντᾶ δ' ἀμφὶ δέπας περιπέπταται ὑγρὸς ἄκανθος,
αἰπολικὸν θάημα· τέρας κέ τυ θυμὸν ἀτύξαι.

And everywhere soft boars-foot is spread out around the bowl,
a goatherd's wonder; you would be amazed in your heart at the sight!

Francis Cairns (1984) identifies the specific use of ὑγρὸς ἄκανθος as a reference to the idealized “softness” of Alexandrian literature in debates of style when compared to Homeric epic.¹⁶³ Additionally, Hunter (1999) finds that the description of the cup as having the ἄκανθος plant scattered throughout its entirety suggests that “the *whole* cup is a τέρας,” as the universality of the plant must necessarily inform the reading of the cup on the whole.¹⁶⁴ The description of the actual marvel itself, then, ought to be investigated, especially since we are given a genuine description of the interaction between the object and its observer. The description that the cup is a “goatherd's wonder” and that Thyrsis would “be amazed by seeing it” utilizes language of amazement that is typical for ekphrasis, yet the distinct labeling of its relationship to goatherds indicates a degree of separation between the goatherd and the content of the cup. The cup does not represent the life of a goatherd, but rather the social structures that are distinctly not those of the goatherd and thus are liable to cause wonder. The goatherd's exclamation that the cup is a marvel and so also separate

¹⁶³ Cairns 1984: 101.

¹⁶⁴ Hunter 1999: 84 n.56.

from his lifestyle positions the social structures that are contained in the images as those from a separate cultural experience.

The vegetation surrounding the scenes on the ivy cup encode the socio-economic relationships of multiculturalism in the context of Alexandrian poetics, particularly those that are exclusionary to the goatherds. It is crucial then, given that the cup is a prize which will determine the quality of Thyrsis' performance, to contextualize the exclusivity of Alexandrian poetics within the structure of *Idyll* 1's agonistic structure. More specifically, the local expression of poetic production that is contained in the song of Daphnis ought to be considered alongside the cosmopolitanism of Alexandrian poetic production. Thyrsis's song is distinctly Sicilian (1.65-67):

Θύρσις ὄδ' ὡς Αἴτνας, καὶ Θύρσιδος ἀδέα φωνά.
 πᾶ ποκ' ἄρ' ἦσθ', ὅκα Δάφνις ἐτάκετο, πᾶ ποκα Νύμφαι;
 ἦ κατὰ Πηνειῷ καλὰ τέμπεα; ἦ κατὰ Πίνδῳ;
 οὐ γὰρ δὴ ποταμοῖο μέγαν ῥόον εἶχετ' Ἀνάπω,
 οὐδ' Αἴτνας σκοπιάν, οὐδ' Ἄκιδος ἱερὸν ὕδωρ.

This is Thyrsis of Etna, and Thyrsis' voice is sweet.
 Where were you, where were you, Nymphs, when Daphnis was wasting away?
 Surely in the beautiful valley of Peneius or of Mt. Pindus,
 for you certainly were not attending to the great rush of the Anapus river,
 nor Etna's peak, not the holy water of Acis.

The geographic specification here is unmistakable. Daphnis must have died in Sicily as Thyrsis' claims that the Nymphs were negligent in their traditional jobs of caring for the rivers and mountains of Southern Italy. Etna's location certainly needs no further explanation. The Anapus river is considered to be located in Sicily and feeds directly into the harbor of Syracuse;¹⁶⁵ and the waters of Acis likely refers to the well of water which springs underneath Mt. Etna.¹⁶⁶ The poetry is not only about Daphnis, whose literary tradition strongly positions him as a Sicilian¹⁶⁷ who dies

¹⁶⁵ Smith 1870: 130.

¹⁶⁶ Gow 1965: 18.

¹⁶⁷ Gow 1965: 1-2.

in Sicily, but is also sung by a Sicilian as we learn from Thyrsis' self-introduction. Thyrsis' song, then, is a song about his homeland which, as I have argued in Chapter One, operates using a system of social reciprocity that is connected to the natural world and results in poetic production upon its being violated. Daphnis' death does not merely trigger a series of natural elements which are now discordant, but especially encourages a poetic production that is uniquely Sicilian within a system of unruly and improperly productive natural elements.¹⁶⁸

Daphnis and Thyrsis both operate within a system of imbalanced social exchange. Daphnis is entangled in a repressive relationship with Aphrodite, the result of which is that nature, and so too poetic production and the quality of song, is turned upside-down. For Daphnis, this disruption is explained through the natural world, Thyrsis' poetic disruption, however, is his poetic contest and the relationship between his own song and the ivy cup which determines his worth. The ivy cup and the Daphnis song depict similar social violations; each one utilizes systems of violated social reciprocity and cultural signifiers to represent different social contexts. Whereas the ivy cup shows the possibility of a varied community that excludes others, the Daphnis song shows a Sicilian who has been neglected by both Aphrodite as well as by the nymphs. The dynamic of the cup being awarded to Thyrsis pending the quality of his song indicates that Thyrsis' own depiction of Sicilian poetics is an attempt to prove its value, a value which is determined by the exclusive cosmopolitanism of Alexandrian poetics as is depicted in the scenery and vegetal images on the ivy cup.

Conclusion

¹⁶⁸ See Chapter One above for a further discussion of the poetic production of nature in Thyrsis' song.

Idyll 1 demands that Sicilian poetics be considered valuable. More importantly, it demands that they be considered valuable within a multicultural poetic environment in Alexandrian artistic production. The emotional conflict arising from this quest for recognition is mapped onto the vegetal imagery both on the ivy cup, the song of Daphnis, and the immediate environment in which the ‘contest’ between Thyrsis and tradition takes place. The landscape change that takes place in order for the contest to happen uses the surrounding vegetation to convey a sense of generic shift. The imagery within the ivy cup all depict varying degrees of social and economic relationships that are unfulfilled and reflect the system of interpersonal plant-hubris that I have identified in the previous chapter. The vegetal imagery of ivy and ἄκανθος throughout the cup explain that these social dynamics in the cup are sought-after and behind a barrier to access. This cup, which comes to represent social dynamics of Alexandrianism, is then given to Thyrsis as a prize for his Syracusan poetry. The interpersonal relationships between humans and plant-life, then, are used by Theocritus to work through his relationships with his social environment and the validity of a poetic style that depends on his Sicilian roots.

Conclusion

The emotional range of the *Idylls'* humans extends beyond the limits of intra-special relationships. Plant communities are in constant dialogue with the characters of the *Idylls* and their own compositions. They are loved and nurtured. They are violent and greedy. Theocritus joins together the human and vegetal worlds in acts of anthropomorphism and phytomorphism; each one, man and plant, meet within the other's social and political worlds. Social empires of humans and plants grow into, through, and around each other, creating a rich tapestry of blurred definitions. Through plants, Theocritus rejects concepts of singular identities of man/plant and, indeed, Sicilian/ Alexandrian; a man in a vegetal world is forced into the political sphere of plants as much as a displaced Sicilian is forced into the politics of Alexandria. Theocritus layers his many identities in an act of ecocritical self-reflection. The issues of community, economics, and domination that define Theocritus' relationship with the politics of governance are played out through humanity's relationships with plants.

Throughout the *Idylls*, humans are overwhelmed and incorporated into the lived experiences of their vegetal neighbors. At times, characters such as Hylas in *Idyll* 13 go too far into the woods and find themselves succumbing to a violent death, as a plant would when overwatered. Others, such as Adonis in *Idyll* 15, embody the very division between plant and human and offer a focal point through which to examine what a relationship with a plant might look like and all the erotic-economic violence which accompanies over nurturing. Still other humans, like the goatherds of *Idylls* 1 and 3, utilize this relationship dynamic between human and plant in nuanced ways to explain and process their own inter-personal relationships. Poetry is what allows them to do it. The goatherd's *komos* song in *Idyll* 3 demonstrates the process through which he is able to relate stories of vegetal significance to his unrequited love. The natural disruption

stemming from Daphnis' death in Thyrsis' song in *Idyll* 1 demands that we take seriously the relationship between the degradation of song and the perversion of nature. Systems of economic and erotic reciprocity which define the relationship between human and plant—if the human gives too much, the plant might rebel, not give anything back, and die—define human relationships with other humans and also with their craft.

By focusing on *Idyll* 1, one can see more clearly the overlaying systems of community at play between local identities (plant/human, Sicilian/Alexandrian). The programmatic *Idyll* is imbued with negotiations of social and economic reciprocity which depend on and reflect human relationships bridging natural environments with artistic production. Thyrsis finds himself engaged in a contest against an exclusive community of insecure poetic interplay; the quality of his song will determine his entry into the cosmopolitan society found in the images of the ivy cup. Through his ekphrastic description of the scenes on the ivy cup—the woman rejecting her two suitors, the struggling fisherman, and the boy unaware of the violence being done to his vineyard—the goatherd in *Idyll* 1 grafts processes of plant-human social exchange onto the object which determines the value of Thyrsis' individual song. When this encapsulation of community and poetry is contextualized alongside the geographical specificity of Thyrsis' song, which itself connects the environment to the act of poetic production, what is being judged seems to be a defined Sicilian poetry. Thyrsis' value as a Sicilian is determined by his being gifted a representation of Hellenistic intercultural poetic discourse.

What we are offered as an audience are two overlapping environments: the vegetal and the local-political. Theocritus uses the social dynamics of plants to comment on the localized identities of the characters in the *Idylls*. These localized identities, such as the irrefutable Sicilian-ness of Thyrsis and his song about Daphnis and the cultural references on the ivy cup, evoke the social

dynamics inherent in being a Sicilian vying for recognition within the context of Alexandrian poetry. What I have identified here refers specifically to the ephemeral roots of political discourse which carry the emotional experiences of living in a government. It is the network of relationships that construct societies of plants, societies of poets, and the ever-widening overlap of many. I have offered here a methodological framework through which to consider Theocritus' engagement with not only communities but distinct systems of governance. Upon situating the political relationships of Thyrsis and the goatherd within existing local identities of disparate Hellenistic kingdoms, the positioning of the *Idylls* in dialogue with and about the Ptolemaic kingdom and that of the Syracusans under Hiero II may be analyzed using similar ecological criticisms.

Beyond *Idyll* 1, several characters of Theocritus' poetry are not situated in an abstract imagined landscape, but have degrees of allegiance to existing and geographically locatable societies that are worth investigating in light of the ecological social sensitivity that I have identified. For example, what does it mean to consider Polyphemus in *Idyll* 11 as a Sicilian engaged with and devalued by an economic society akin to the interpersonal relationships established with plants? He is certainly a Sicilian, as he states that his vegetally endowed home is along the foothills of Etna (11.45-48). Polyphemus' love of Galatea begins when she and his mother come to pick flowers on the land (11.25-29), only to return to the water and effectively cut the Cyclops off from his desired emotional reciprocation. The hubristic, erotic relationships between plants and their nourishing counterparts (water/caretaker) may rightly inform the means through which Polyphemus understands the lack of reciprocity, and his plea that he wishes he could enter Galatea's underwater world (11.54-57) is balanced by his final exclamation: δῆλον ὅτ' ἐν τᾷ γῆ κῆγών τις φαίνομαι ἤμεν "It is clear that even I am someone on the land." The claim is a statement of begrudged inclusion. Polyphemus' song for Galatea is, like Thyrsis in *Idyll* 1, linked to his

desire to be included into a social exchange. He is well regarded economically and artistically, it seems, by his peers on Sicily (11.34-40), but is disregarded and “Othered” by non-Sicilians, namely Galatea. His Sicilian identity, here as in *Idyll* 1, struggles for globalized validation.

Likewise, the *Adonia* in *Idyll* 15 is pointedly political. What is one to make of the Syracusan women who are disrespected at the palace and proudly proclaim in response: πασάμενος ἐπίτασσε· Συρακοσῖαις ἐπιτάσσεις. ὡς εἰδῆς καὶ τοῦτο, Κορίνθιαι εἰμὲς ἄνωθεν, ὡς καὶ ὁ Βελλεροφῶν “Give orders when you are in charge; you are ordering around Syracusan women. You know this too, we are descended from Corinthians, as also was Bellerophon” (15.90-92). In crowded Alexandria, at a festival to a god with strong vegetal associations, the women assert their right to be included through a presentation of cultural and ancestral dominance. The systems of violated reciprocal economics which are embedded in the song to Adonis elaborate on the systems of Syracusan inclusion within Ptolemaic Alexandria.

The *Idylls* refuse categorization as wholly Alexandrian or wholly Syracusan — they are both and negotiate the overlay of several imperial ideologies within the individual person. Theocritus’ capacity for nuanced internal conflict, I argue, is a foundational perspective for post-*Idylls* pastoral. Vergil’s *Eclogues*, famously a collection that is a generic descendent of Theocritus’ *Idylls*, plays with plants and their associations with empire; Vergil refers often to Rome and contemporary historical figures through the use of vegetal imagery. Theocritus’ experience — the entire focal point through which Theocritus engages with his political sphere — is fundamentally different from Vergil’s. The political structures of Alexandria allowed for independent cultures to exist and to maintain their roots; it was a community with very little national identity. While Rome was certainly a multicultural society, Augustus’ early regime emphasized unification. It stands to reason, then, that the dynamics of plant-human interaction would operate in a different capacity.

Vergil's plants, as in his adaptation of the "golden age" metaphor in *Eclogue* 4 where ivy and acanthus and bean plants spread wide *nullo cultu* "without cultivation" (*Ecl.*4.18-20), are depicted through rapid growth of vegetation with Rome at its geographic and political center point. I suspect that in Virgil's *Eclogues* the relationships between humans and plants refer not to the inter-communal contestation of the Alexandrian literary context but to the trans-communal appropriation of divergent cultures under the overgrowth of Roman imperial expansion.

The pastoralism developed by Theocritus is tense, distressing, and plays on the economic/erotic/maternal/poetic hubris that makes up human-plant relationships. Theocritus' perspective on the natural world is also his perspective on his political environment. The poetic production both of and within the *Idylls* conflates the vegetal and Hellenistic worlds in an act of individual experience. Theocritus' many allegiances converge and are expressed in the vegetal environments of his literary production. His ecological awareness is dynamic and dramatic, informed by both plants and politics. All this directs us to consider pastoral poetry, at least the pastoral poetry that follows Theocritus, as playing on an equal collaborative process between nature, government and the poet. Indeed, what seems to be a defining characteristic of Theocritus' poetry is a seamless illustration of the many different environments humans inhabit.

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