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Theocritus’ Pharmacy: Poetry as Self-Care in the Idylls

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Theocritus’ Pharmacy: 
Poetry as Self-Care in the *Idylls* 

by 

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Theocritus’ Pharmacy: Poetry as Self-Care in the *Idylls*
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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above-mentioned discipline.
Throughout the *Idylls* of Theocritus there are references to the curative properties of poetry and song. In *Idyll 11*, the poet states that “there is no remedy (*pharmakon*) for love other than the Pierian Muses” (*Id.* 11.1-2). This thesis explores the consequences of this claim for the poem as a whole and argues that the poem’s main character, Polyphemus the Cyclops, does achieve an alleviation of the symptoms of lovesickness. The first chapter contextualizes the Cyclops’ recovery in relation to other versions of his character in the Greek literary tradition and within the framework of contemporary medical practice. Chapter two deals with a similar story of lovesickness and song. In *Idyll 2*, Simaetha suffers from a form of lovesickness after her lover, Delphis, abandons her. The poem depicts a series of magic spells that Simaetha employs as well as a song that she sings about the experience of falling in love and the consummation of that desire. The chapter ends with an analysis of the similarities between the song that she sings and the magic that she uses to effect change. In the end, Simaetha does appear to experience a positive change in the symptoms of her desire. The ending lines suggest that now possesses a new resolve to endure her desire.
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“There is no remedy (φάρμακον) for love other than the Pierian Muses” writes Theocritus in his eleventh Idyll.¹ This statement serves as a hypothesis for the poem, which depicts the Cyclops, Polyphemus, as he sings a song of love for the nymph Galatea. In the end he seems to feel some sort of relief, thus justifying the poets’ statement, at least in part. Nevertheless, this is a curious claim to make, especially considering the wealth of material “remedies” for emotional distress in the Greek literary and medical traditions. Hellen’s famous pharmakon in the Odyssey is allegedly able to cure anything: “immediately she cast a drug (φάρμακον) into the wine, from which they were drinking, to banish pain and gall and to bring forgetfulness of all ills” (αὐτίκ’ ἄρ’ εἰς οἶνον βάλε φάρμακον, ἕνθεν ἔπινον, / νηπενθές τ’ ἄχολόν τε, κακῶν ἐπίληθον ἀπάντων [Od. 4.220-1]). In Euripides’ Hippolytus, the Nurse reassures Phaedra that a pharmakon can cure the ills of love specifically: “there are incantations and charming words: something will appear as a cure (φάρμακον) of this [love]-sickness (εἰσίν δ’ ἐπωδαί καὶ λόγοι θελκτήριοι’ / φανήσεται τι τῆσδε φάρμακον νόσου [478-9]). It is clear that there is a strong literary tradition of the φάρμακον, that operates outside Theocritus’ conception of the musical cure. Theocritus’ work builds on previous conceptions of the cure for love by relocating the curative from the material to the practical. In other words, Theocritus’ characters find cures for their emotional distress through the process of singing itself.

But Theocritus’s new take on the cure becomes even more meaningful when contextualized among three fields of self-help that were evolving in the early Hellenistic period: medicine, philosophy, and magic. First, the ever-evolving techne of medicine in the Classical

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¹ All translations are my own.
and Hellenistic periods was generally more concerned with the treatment of lovesickness than modern readers may assume, and a fairly standardized symptomology of lovesickness had developed by Theocritus’ time. Erasistratus of Keos was reported to have been able to diagnose lovesickness by variations of pulse. Theocritus’ poetry interacts with these contemporary writings on medicine in their emphasis on observation and perception: throughout Theocritus’ Idylls, characters describe their own symptomatic responses to love in vivid detail.

Treatment of distress caused by passions was a more complex issue because the full range of options extended well beyond the purview of medicine. Practices of self-care were just as much a part of philosophy as of medicine. Various methods of “care of the self” became more standardized and recognized both for mitigating emotional distress and developing oneself as an ethical subject in the 4th century BCE. Philosophical reflection on the moderation of behavior and practices of self-formation have a long history in Greek philosophical literature. Most importantly Socrates’ injunction to Alcibiades to “take care of himself” represents the origins of such a philosophical reflection on self-care as a means of subject formation. Theocritus’ poetry rests at the periphery of such ideas on self-formation, as his claim that poetry is a vital part of self-care for love resonates with philosophical reflections on the nature of eros and practices for mitigating its effects.

Finally, there is the question of magic in Theocritus’ contemporary world. Magic certainly plays a role in the world of the Idylls, and the magical practices that revolved around the alleviation of lovesickness, either through a manipulation of the desired or through a

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4 This Erasistratus is conveniently associated with the addressee of Idyll 11, Nicias (Hunter (1999) 224).  
6 See especially Idyll 2.
mollification of the desiring subject, were quite common across the ancient Mediterranean world. Interestingly, however, Theocritus’ poetry often questions efficacy of magic. Although magic is a frequent practice alluded to or mimetically performed by the characters of the *Idylls*, Theocritus emphasizes that the song of his characters transcends even the practice of magic ritual. We will return to the use of magic as a palliative for lovesickness in chapter two, which discusses Theocritus’ *Idyll* 2.

Throughout the *Idylls*, poetry is set in opposition to these other forms of self-care, as Theocritus seems to be examining the role and power of the word in the world. Yet recent scholarship has downplayed Theocritus’s statement about the power of poetry to serve as a cure for lovesickness as a form of irony. This thesis will, however, take this claim more seriously and interrogate it as a potential metapoetic statement. I suggest that poetry within the *Idylls* functions according to the curious logic of supplements as first articulated by Derrida: characters’ songs serve as “replacements for” and “additions to” other forms of self-care. In other words, I hope to show that, within the world of Theocritus’ poetry, song does have real power to affect the lives of the characters who use it by at once replacing other, more concrete means of alleviating the symptoms of lovesickness, and also by adding to the experience of being individuals in love: rather than simply removing the symptoms of desire, Theocritus’ characters create beautiful poetry and constitute themselves as unique subjects.

My reading will center around Theocritus’ version of the *pharmakon*. The word itself is a word of notorious doubleness in Greek, as it can mean “a drug, whether healing or noxious.” From this basic definition, the word took on many extended medical usages such as healing

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7 Winkler (1990) 71-100.
9 LSJ. φαρμακον A.
remedy and medicine (mostly of those applied to the outer body). However, this medical
definition also interacts with the magical practice of potion making so that the word also means
“enchanted potion” or “philtre” and by extension “spell.” In addition to its literary pedigree, the
word’s inherent ambiguity invites a complex reading of Theocritus’ pharmakon. I suggest that
the Idylls use the pharmakon to evaluate the double function of poetry: both entertaining and
restorative.

In the following chapters I consider two Idylls that dramatize an attempt to alleviate the
symptoms of lovesickness or desire through singing. Both Idylls highlight a common element:
that the song which the characters sing is set in opposition to the use of a pharmakon. In Idyll 11,
the monstrous Polyphemus sings a song of love for the Nymph Galatea, even though she does
not reciprocate. The poem explicitly places his music in contrast to the use of a pharmakon (here
remedy or medication) and ultimately shows that his use of song is a replacement for the kind of
medication that a doctor would prescribe. In Idyll 2 Simaetha, a young woman from an
unspecified city, performs both magical practices and songs as a way of alleviating her
lovesickness for her former boyfriend, Delphis. Within the poem, these magical rites are often
described as philtra or pharmaka (here in the sense of enchanted potions), but throughout the
intimate and detailed narrative of Simaetha’s experiences these potions (and the magic rituals
that produce them) do not seem to be as effective as song. By the end of the poem, after she has
finished her song, Simaetha has a new relationship to her past and a newfound resolve to bear her
desire in the future.

Yet, despite the rather straightforward way that these Idylls set their characters’ songs in
opposition to the use of a pharmakon for alleviating their distress caused by desire, many critics

10 LSJ. φαρμακον A. II.
have attempted to read these poems as heavily ironizing, thus removing the possibility of the song as a true cure. In some cases, the assumptions that make these readings possible do violence to the text, either by extreme emendation or importing modern prejudices. For instance, many critics have argued for an ironic reading of *Idyll* 2, because Simaetha cannot have the knowledge of Greek poetry necessary for understand her own allusive language. This assumption, robbing a female character of her voice and restricting the interpretive force of Simaetha’s song within the poem, seems to be fueled by gender bias more than understanding of the ancient context. In this thesis, I will attempt to deal with the complexities of genre and intertextuality displayed by these poems without sacrificing the characters’ unique voices. Ultimately, I hope to suggest a reading of *Idyll* 2 that takes into account the full possibilities that Simaetha’s allusive language presents for the poem, without unjustly appealing to the ironic.
Chapter 1

Introduction.

Theocritus’ *Idyll* 11 treats the reader to every charm that poor Polyphemus can muster to win over his beloved, the sea Nymph Galatea, as he sits alone upon the shore. When all these wonderfully cyclopean blandishments fail to provide any tangible results, the Cyclops sings of his frustration and finally his resolve to move on. This final resolve is anticipated in the opening lines: “there is no other cure for love than the Muses.” (Οὐδὲν ποτὲν ἔρωτα πεφύκει φάρμακον ἄλλο… ἤ τα Ἄιρίδες· [11.1-3]). Many scholars have focused on the question of whether this poem really depicts a cure for desire for the reader or the main character. However, few have taken the poem’s central claim seriously and asked how Polyphemus’ song itself acts as a cure.11 This chapter will take the opening lines at their word and read the Cyclops’ song as a transformative and curative experience. I will argue that the song which Polyphemus sings serves as an agent of self-characterization and redefines his self-perception in relation to his object of desire, his body, and his memory. This redefinition of his own personal self-conception leads to an alleviation of the symptoms of his lovesickness.

This poem represents a triumph of *ethopoeia* as Polyphemus appears true to his character as a Cyclops (uncultivated, rustic, passionate), but also uniquely Theocritean (sensitive, thoughtful, naïve). I will examine how Polyphemus self-characterizes through ecphrasis, wishes, dreams, and apostrophes to Galatea in an effort to show that the Cyclops really does change his relationship to himself and his object of desire. Yet, Polyphemus’ story cannot be told without

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11 Griffiths (1979) and Hotsmark (1966) are among the few exceptions.
evoking other versions of this myth. Therefore, the present study of Theocritus’ Cyclops’ song will examine the importance of the past iterations of the Cyclops for the narrative of *Idyll* 11. I will detail how the intertextual references in the mouth of the Cyclops anticipate the reader’s reliance on tradition to interpret this poem. In other words, the poem self-consciously gestures towards its dependence on tradition in the creation of a novel iteration of a familiar character. In this way, Polyphemus’ self-characterization is twofold: he must reconstitute himself in relation to his own desires and his self-perception, yet he must also represent himself as unique in relation to the poetic tradition. It is precisely this uniquely Theocritean idiosyncrasy *vis-à-vis* the Greek poetic tradition that opens up a space for a novel interpretation of the Polyphemus story, one in which the Cyclops does find some sort of cure for his lovesickness.

The gnomic proposition about love, which opens the poem – “there is no other cure for love than the Muses” – seems to set the poem’s agenda: the poet’s voice explains that the “ancient” Polyphemus will serve as an *exemplum* of the raving lover who finds the cure for love in song.12 The poem then transitions to Polyphemus’s inset song of love. Yet, although the frame is very explicit, scholars have been troubled by the relationship between the frame and the song. Rather than illustrating the proposition that there is no other cure for love than the Muses, the song from the mouth of the Cyclops has been thought to represent a symptom of, rather than a cure for, desire. Since the voice of the poet tells us that Polyphemus “wasted away while singing of Galatea” (ἀδων … κατετάκετο [11.13-14]), the Cyclops’ song can be seen as a pathological response to the “most hateful wound (ἐχθιστον ἑλκος) of the Cyprian goddess”

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12 Gow (1950) 208. calls this a “maxim” but I have chosen to follow Payne (2007) and refer to the opening of the poem as a “gnomic proposition” (156) both because it is more correct and because it better contains the ambiguity between a generalizing phrase and a word of advice that has been so suggestive for scholars who seek to reconstruct the relationship between these two poets, Theocritus and Nicias (Cf. Gow’s reconstruction of the relationship between Nicias and Theocritus (p.208)).
(11.15). A. S. F. Gow, in his highly influential edition of the *Idylls* published in 1950, was the first to emphasize what he saw as inconsistency between the frame and the body of the Idyll, and his solution was a radical textual intervention that promotes the omission of lines 1-7, 17-19, 80-1. This editorial choice would remove most of the frame and any mention of a cure for love. Rather than account for the potential ability of song to double as both symptom and cure, Gow chooses to simply remove any references to the song as a cure and thus excise the troubling ambiguity.

More recent readings of the poem have sought to address the problem in a more nuanced way by interrogating Theocritus’ use of the word *pharmakon*, but the word’s wide semantic range has not made this an easy task. Scholars mainly fall into two camps: those who attempt to find a closed/stable definition of the word and those who try to analyze its productive doubleness. In the former category, Dover and Hopkinson seek to define *pharmakon* as a qualified “cure.” It is not an outright remedy, but something that works over time and perhaps not completely. More recently, Richard Hunter has stressed the “irony of the Cyclops’ position” in which his song is both symptom and cure. Hunter follows Köhnken in classifying the *pharmakon* as a “palliative” rather than a final cure for *eros*. While the song may “relieve” Polyphemus’ love for a short time, the very act of singing perpetuates his desire in an unending...

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13 Gow (1950) *Id.*, 11.13 *ad loc.*
14 Gow (1950) *Id.*, 11.13 *ad loc.* Gow’s bizarrely draconian solution to emend the MS text reflects a theory of composition, which Gow himself constructed by triangulating other references to Nicias in Theocritus’ corpus. According to Gow, the poem may have originated in a version that contained no reference to Nicias and was perhaps adapted to fit a specific performance or epistolary context only later. Convinced of this “process,” Gow can safely omit the lines that “provoke suspicion” (i.e. 1-7, 17f., 80ff.).
15 Dover (1971) 174 and Hopkinson (1988) 150, who suggests the word “antidote.” This reading has the advantage of picking up on “the sort of thing” (*τοιαῦτα* [11.8]) that Polyphemus “used to sing” (*αἰδε*). The imperfect tense points to a recurrent practice of staving off the pains of desire and thus managing the symptoms.
cycle as “every song rehearses the attractions of Galatea and the course of his passion.”

Hunter’s reading nicely intertwines the “notorious doubleness” of the word *pharmakon* into the debate over the function of song in the poem. Yet, his concept of the song as a cycle of temporary palliative intervals, which then only serves to feed the Cyclops’ *eros*, is not necessary. In other words, the “rehearsal” of attraction to Galatea does not necessarily mean that Polyphemos cannot find a lasting cure.

The scholarship summarized above regards the poem as incongruous, because the theme established in the opening lines does not seem to fit the Cyclops’ melodramatic song. In the pages that follow, I will change the terms of the debate. Rather than seeking to find a ‘solution’ for the incongruity between the framing proposition and the song, I will instead ask what purpose discontinuity might serve. The frame is clearly a self-conscious editorializing device, which is markedly different from the rest of the poem in voice, tone, and purpose. It is this subtly jarring difference which prompts the very speculation and rereading which has occupied modern scholarship for at least the last half century. Furthermore, the frame itself calls for more “sincere” reading through its invitation to interpret Polyphemos’ song as a discovery of the cure for love.

This chapter presents a close philological analysis to argue that *Idyll* 11 successfully depicts the use of song as a supplement for other forms of alleviation of the symptoms of lovesickness, especially medication. The focus will not be on what sort of cure the song is, but rather how it functions within the poem. My close reading focuses on the elements of self-characterization throughout Polyphemos’ song that constitute a reorientation of the relationship between the self and the object of desire. As the following sections will show, this change in

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18 Hunter (1999) 221.
perspective comes through a reorientation of Polyphemus relationship to Galatea and her world. Furthermore, the Cyclops unknowingly signals this reorientation to the reader through a series of allusions to other versions of his story.

1. **Polyphemus’ self-characterization.**

   Theocritus’ song of Polyphemus exploits the technique of ἡθοποιία (the creation of a fictional character or προσωποποιία) to give the reader a satisfying and apparently novel picture of the Cyclops’ character. Self-description, vocative address, ecphrasis, verbs of knowledge, wishes, and dreams are all used to present a Cyclops who is uniquely sensitive to his own memories, his body, and his feelings. This sensitivity and perception open up a space for the singer’s transformation within the Cyclops’ song. The following section will examine how each of these literary devices contributes to the Cyclops’ strikingly personal voice in *Idyll* 11 and how this voice is able to depict a personal mode of self-transformation.

   The opening lines of Polyphemus’ monody concisely introduce the central conflict of the song: Polyphemus loves Galatea, but she does not care for him (11.29). In fact, the central opposition is the presence of Polyphemus and the absence of Galatea. Polyphemus’ self-characterization builds on this central opposition as the Cyclops establishes himself as opposed to Galatea through voice (first person vs second person addressee), time (he is in the present, she in the past), and other characteristics (personal self-description). The Cyclops opens with a vocative address to Galatea that gives her a principal position within the song, while simultaneously establishing her as an ‘absent presence’ who virtually haunts Polyphemus’ song.

   The voice of the poet in the frame has already defined the Cyclops’ spatial position: “sitting upon a high rock and looking towards the sea he used to sing such things” (καθεζόμενος δ’ ἐπὶ πέτρας

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19 LSJ. ἡθοποιία: “formation/delineation of character.”
To reinforce this physical isolation the Cyclops himself rebukes Galatea by asking her why she “rejects someone who loves” (τί τὸν φιλέοντ’ ἀποβάλλῃ [11.19]) and leaves him to lonely lovesickness. From the very incipit of his song, Polyphemus establishes his character according to two basic oppositions: his first person versus the second person Galatea, his presence versus Galatea’s absence.

The Cyclops continues by adding to his series of dichotomies, as Galatea belongs to the past and only appears within Polyphemus’ memories. Switching to the aorist for the first time in his song, Polyphemus describes the moment when he first fell in love with Galatea (ἠράσθην [11.25]) and recalls how she came (ἠνθες [11.26]) with his mother to gather hyacinths. Yet while Galatea is depicted within Polyphemus’ memory with only aorist verbs, Polyphemus connects this past and his present state, rendering them a continuous experience: “having seen you I am later, even now, no longer able to cease from you” (παύσασθαι δ’ ἐσιδών τοι καὶ ὑστερον οὐδ’ ἐτὶ πα νῦν / ἐκ τήνο δύναμαι [11.28-9]). His love exists in the present and the past where Galatea still resides in his memory. The rather awkward series of temporal adverbs calls attention to the continuity of Polyphemus’ emotional state. These are certainly not the most eloquent words to describe this phenomenon, but they are the words of a Cyclops in distress.

Polyphemus’ song creates another dichotomy between Galatea’s vivid presence in his dreams and her absence when he is awake. The Cyclops laments the fact that Galatea only visits him while he is asleep: “why do you visit me in this way when sweet sleep holds me, but you depart at once going when sweet sleep releases me” (φοιτῇς δ’ αὖθ’ οὔτως ὅκκα γλυκὺς ὕπνος ἔχῃ με, / οὖθ’ ἐυθός ὕπνος ὅκκα γλυκὺς ὕπνος ἄνῃ με [11.22-3]). These lines have often been seen as an incorrect or naïve description of sleep by the Cyclops, who is admittedly not the
There is, however, more to this sentiment than a simple expression of naiveté. Galatea’s presence is confined to the realm of “sweet sleep” (γλυκὺς ὕπνος), while Polyphemus is alone in his wakefulness. Again, the dichotomy is between Polyphemus’ memories and sleep on the one hand, and his wakeful present on the other. At no point is the reader treated to direct access to Galatea; rather she is mediated through Polyphemus’ dreams, memories, and words.

The idiosyncratic description of Galatea that Polyphemus does provide the reader elucidates his character both in terms of his artistic limitations and stylistic affinities. He describes his beloved through comparisons familiar from his own pastoral world: “Oh white Galatea … whiter than curdled milk to see, softer than a lamb, more skittish than a calf, smoother than an unripe grape.” (Ὦ λευκὰ Γαλάτεια, … / λευκοτέρα πακτάς ποτιδεῖν, ἀπαλωτέρα ἄρνος, / μόσχο γαυροτέρα, φιαρωτέρα ὀμφακος ὀμᾶς [Id. 11.19-21]). Yet these lines do far more than situate Polyphemus within the rustic word that he inhabits. The stylistic features of the comparisons gesture towards their speaker’s stylistic pretensions and his almost bathetic use of hyperbole. The Cyclops has arranged his phrases in a 3-2-2-3 pattern so that his compliments to his beloved have a certain symmetry He seems also aware that too much symmetry can become stale, so he has employed a chiastic order for the central terms (adj.-noun-noun-adj.). Despite these attempts at refinement, his description of Galatea has garnered the criticism of scholars. In particular, the string of compliments, although appropriate to his experience as a shepherd and a lover of wine and cheese, are susceptible to the charge of hyperbole. The second century BCE

20 Hunter (1999) Id. 11.22-3. Ad loc. Hunter claims that Polyphemus “does not understand dreaming and imagines that she comes ashore the moment he falls asleep and retreats to the water as soon as he wakes up.” Gow (1950) ad loc.

21 The similarities with earlier poetics will be covered in section 2.

22 Hunter (1999) Id. 11.19-20 ad loc.

23 Hunter (1999) ad loc.
work of literary theory *On Style* criticizes the use of hyperboles such as “whiter than snow” as “particularly frigid because they suggest impossibility” (123-7). This treatise further contrasts the effect of using beautiful nouns with those that are ordinary or common: decorative and beautiful words produce charm, while ordinary words simply produce laughter (*On Style* 163-6). Polyphemus’ use of hyperbole and common vocabulary certainly expose his compliments to criticism of this sort. His best efforts at wooing Galatea by means of a flattering description are mostly successful in characterizing himself as an over-passionate and rather gauche speaker. Despite or perhaps because of these stylistic flaws, Polyphemus has unintentionally done much to give the reader a clear picture of himself at the beginning of his song. We are able to see the exaggeration-prone temperament that has led him to the lovesickness that he is suffering from. The next section will consider Polyphemus’ deliberate self-characterization and his description of his own body, which both contribute to an awareness of his own limitations.

The physical attributes of Polyphemus are no mystery to anyone familiar with the character in his earlier renditions. With Theocritus’ Polyphemus, however, we see a figure who is painfully self-aware of his own physical limitations. I suggest that his awareness creates a space for personal reflection and ultimately reassessment of his desire for Galatea. After emphasizing the spatial and temporal disconnect that separates him from Galatea, Polyphemus turns to his own appearance (11.30-4):

\[
γινώσκω, χαρίσσα κόρα, τίνος οὖνεκα φεύγεις:
οὖνεκά μοι λασία μὲν ὀφρὸς ἐπὶ παντὶ μετώπῳ
ἐξ ὡτὸς τέταται ποτὶ θώτερον ὡς μία μακρά,
\]

24 [Demetrius]. This text was mistakenly attributed to a Demetrius in a tenth century CE manuscript, and subsequent scholars assumed that Demetrius of Phaleron (ca. 360–280 BCE), the student of Aristotle who governed Athens 317–307 BCE and wrote on a number of literary and rhetorical subjects, is the most likely author. For a discussion of the transmission and attribution, see Halliwell, S., W. H. Fyfe, D. A. Russell, D. C. Innes, W. R. Roberts (1995) 310-19 and 330-2. For a fuller discussion of Demetrius’ style as it relates to Theocritus’ poetry, see Hunter (1999) 230.

25 There was, however, controversy over whether “Homer’s” Cyclops had one or two eyes. Cf. *Σ Od. 9.106; for the problem more generally, see Heubeck (1973) on *Od. 9.105-566* and R. Mondi (1983) 17-38.
εἴς δ’ ὀφθαλμός ὑπεστί, πλατεῖα δὲ ρίς ἐπὶ χείλει.

“I know why you flee, graceful girl: because one long shaggy eyebrow stretches across my entire forehead from one ear to the other, but only one eye is beneath, and a broad nose above my lip.”

The opening word of his address (γινώσκω) highlights Polyphemus’ own subjectivity in the passage that follows. He recognizes that she flees because of his appearance. He uses this opportunity to reinforce the dichotomy between himself and Galatea. By addressing Galatea as “graceful girl” (χαρίεσσα κόρα) he emphatically juxtaposes his own description with the beauty of the one who flees him. Furthermore, in contrast to his description of Galatea which did little to paint a picture of her appearance, the Cyclops does not spare the reader any unflattering detail as he gives a kind of mini-ecphrasis of his face. This self-scrutiny provides a kind of foreshadowing for the Cyclops’ discovery of the “cure.”

Quickly abandoning his attempt at self-description, Polyphemus tries to compensate for his appearance by elaborating what exactly Galatea is missing by staying beneath the waves. Unsurprisingly, the benefits that Polyphemus promises revolve around his experience as a herdsman: “1,000 sheep” (βοτὰ χίλια [11.34]), “the finest milk” (τὸ κράτιστον … γάλα [11.35]), and an endless supply of cheese (11.35). He also boasts of his pipe-playing skills: “I know how to play the pipe like no other of the Cyclopes” (συρίσδεν δ’ ως οὕτις ἐπίσταμαι ὡς Κυκλώπων [11.38]). These niceties further situate Polyphemus as the subjective center of the poem, by offering us a glimpse of what he imagines that his beloved would enjoy. By making a list of things that he enjoys, he does not seem to have given any thought to the things that Galatea would enjoy. What good would it do her to tend a thousand sheep? Polyphemus might be skilled

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26 Polyphemus’ self-description is not totally unique to the Idylls. He bears the shagginess and broad lip of Silenus, just like the komast of Id.3.8: ἦ ρά γε τοι σιμός καταφαίνομαι ἐγγύθεν ἡμεν. Even in his characteristic hideousness, he remains a bucolic and Theocritic character.
at playing the pipe compared to the other Cyclopes, but would Galatea consider him good compared with the other immortal beings that she associates with under the sea?\textsuperscript{27}

The Cyclops continues the enumeration of his material advantages with a pleasant description of his cave, finally zooming in on an account of his hearth fire. This conveniently offers a suggestive segue into an examination of his own love (11.50-3):

αι δὲ τοι αὐτὸς ἐγὼν δοκέω λασιώτερος ἔμεν,
ἐνὶ δρυὸς ξύλα μοι καὶ ὑπὸ σποδὸ ἀκάματον πῦρ,
καιόμενος δ’ ὑπὸ τέξις καὶ τάν ψυχάν ἄνεχοίμαιν
καὶ τὸν ἐν’ ὀφθαλμόν, τῶ μοι γλυκέρωτερον οὐδέν.

“And even if I do seem too shaggy to you, I have logs of oak and an undying fire under the embers; Indeed, I’m burning for you and I would offer up my soul and my one eye, there is nothing dearer to me.”

This kind of hyperbolic statement is perhaps what we would expect from one who loves with “straight-up madness” (ὀρθαῖς μανίαις [11.11]). Polyphemus, because he is burning in love, would offer up his own soul and even his only eye. Yet this promise marks a significant transition in the contents of the song. Before the Cyclops had been content to merely describe things as they were (his own and Galatea’s appearance, the things that he had at hand to give to her); now he feels an impetus to create a kind of bodily change, to give up rather than to share. And this loss of his eye is more than just a loss of his prized attribute. Rather, it is a loss of his identity. In his self-description discussed above, Polyphemus places central importance on the singularity of his eye (ἑὶς δ’ ὀφθαλμός [11.34]), and the single eye is of course the salient marker of his species. Now he is willing to give up that singular marker of his identity and his primary means of perceiving (γινώσκω) the world around him.\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{27} The question Galatea’s taste in music is purely hypothetical, of course. The Scholia to Aristophanes’ Plutus (possibly) describes a musical contest between Polyphemus and Galatea (Ar. Plut. 290ss).

\textsuperscript{28} We’ll return to the eye (and the lack thereof) as a marker of Polyphemus’ identity in relation to the Homeric model on page 21.
Polyphemus next wishes for an even more drastic transformation of his body and thus his identity when he says: “If only my mother had borne me with gills, so that I might go down to you and kiss your hand” (ὅμοιοί, ὅτ’ οὐκ ἔτεκέν μ’ ἀ μάτηρ βράγχα’ ἔχοντα, / ὡς κατέδουν ποτὶ τίν καὶ τὰν χέρα τεῦς ἐφύλησα [11.54-55]). Interestingly, Polyphemus plays upon the familiar trope of a lover who desires a metamorphosis in order to gain special access to his beloved, which Theocritus has used elsewhere.\(^\text{29}\) In \textit{Idyll} 3, the komast declares to his absent object of affection: “would that I could become a buzzing bee and enter into your cave, slipping through the ivy and the fern which hide you” (αἴθε γενοίμαν / ἀ βομβεῦσα μέλισσα καὶ ἐς τεῦν ἀντρον ἱκοίμαν, / τὸν κισσὸν διαδύς καὶ τὰν πτέριν ἀ τον πυκάσσει [3.12-14]). However, Polyphemus cleverly extends this trope. Instead of wishing that he could become a fish and swim to his beloved, he laments that such a thing had not happened already at his birth and imagines himself as a novel hybrid. This subtle twist points to the radical transformation that he has in mind: he is again wishing for transformation of his identity as a Cyclops. This desire for transformation into a completely unattested creature points the uniqueness of Theocritus’ Cyclops, who ultimately does undergo a kind of novel transformation (from lovesickness to cured).

Polyphemus’ desire for transformation reflects the dichotomies that he has established at the beginning of his song to define himself in opposition to Galatea (dream/awake, past/present, absent/present). He extends his fantasy to the past by wishing he had been borne as an aquatic monster (ἔτεκέν), and his desired state also allows him to enter Galatea’s habitat. By reconceptualizing his body in the past he begins to dissolve the dichotomy between Polyphemus (present) and Galatea (past) and allows his fantasy self to go down (or sink) to Galatea in her marine habitat (ὡς κατέδουν ποτὶ τίν [11.55]). While the loss of his eye might be an arch

premonition of Odysseus’ Homeric visit, Polyphemus’ imaginary self creatively builds on his earlier tortured experience. If the fantasy of Galatea visited Polyphemus in his sleep, why couldn’t his fantasy-self visit her in the sea?

Ironically, Polyphemus’ desire to erase or modify his identity as a Cyclops draws the reader’s attention to his conflicted nature. The result is that he emerges as a more complete character, one whose motivations and internal conflicts are revealed through his descriptions of himself, his beloved and the world around him. In the final lines of his song, however, Polyphemus seems to snap himself out of his wishful thinking and reaffirm his identity and obligations. By creating a new series of dichotomies, Polyphemus eschews the need to pursue the one who flees and affirms the primacy of the present over the absent. As we shall see, this reorientation of Polyphemus’ perception leads him to consider the situation in a new light and to find alleviation from his own desires (11.72-9):

ὦ Κύκλωψ Κύκλωψ, πᾶ τὰς φρένας ἔκπεπότασαι; αἰ κ’ ἐνθὼν ταλάρως τε πλέκοις καὶ θαλλόν ἀμάσας ταῖς ἀρνεσι φέροις, τάχα καὶ πολύ μάλλον ἔχοις νόν. τὰν παρεισαν ἁμέλεγε’ τί τὸν φεύγοντα διώκεις; εὔρησεῖς Γαλάτειαν ἱσως καὶ καλλίου ἄλλων. πολλαὶ συμπαίσδεν με κόραι τὰν νύκτα κέλονται, κιχλίζοντι δὲ πάσαι, ἐπεὶ κ’ ἀυταῖς ὑπακούσω. δῆλον ὅτ’ ἐν τὰ γὰ κῆγών τις φαίνομαι ἔμεν.

“Oh Cyclops, Cyclops, to where have your wits flown? If you went and weaved baskets and cut young shoots and carried it to your lambs, you would soon have more sense. Milk the sheep that’s by you. Why do you pursue one who flees? You’ll probably find another, even prettier Galatea. Many girls invite me to play with them during the night, and they all giggle when I answer them. For it is clear that, on land, I am somebody too.”

The vocative address to himself in the first line marks an abrupt shift from the preceding section which opened with an address to Galatea. The repetition of this vocative creates a heavily spondaic effect, which serves to emphasize the gravitas of this self-chastisement. The following
phrase (“to where have your wits flown?”) recalls the opening frame of the poem where the voice of the poet asserts that Polyphemus loved with “straight-up madness” (ὀρθοῖς μανίας [11.11]). But more importantly, it serves as a kind of self-diagnosis of his present state. He realizes that his mind is far from his body – i.e. that he is currently wishing to be under the sea, a place he clearly does not belong! The final verses of his song are an attempt to re-secure his identity by affirming the value of the present over the absent.

Polyphemus asserts that he would have more sense if he would only turn to the things that he has at hand (11.74). He sums up his self-exhortation with his own version of a proverb: “milk the [sheep] that’s by you” (τὰν παρεοῖσαν ἀμελῆ [11.75]). Hunter astutely observes that “Polyphemus seeks comfort in the language and conventional wisdom of his own techne, showing that his mind is now moving back to its own sphere.” But perhaps more importantly, the Cyclops re-establishes the superiority of the present (παρεοῖσαν) over the absent (Galatea). He is not only finding comfort in his skills and trade but also his physical presence in the word that he has established for himself in the opening verses of his song. In terms of the dichotomy of presence and absence that he has set up for himself, he is now rooted squarely in the present where he started.

Yet this present is not quite the same, as Polyphemus also attempts to modify certain aspects of his initial identity. The rhetorical question addressed to himself – “why do you pursue one who flees?” (τί τὸν φεύγοντα διώκεις; [11.75]) – implies that he has realized that this is no longer what he wants (or at the very least acknowledges that his desire is questionable). This line responds to 11.19 (“why do you reject one who loves you” τί τὸν φιλέοντ’ ἀποβάλλῃ;) when he establishes his identity as one who loves Galatea, the one who flees. Polyphemus is no longer the

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30 Hunter (1999) *Id.* 11.75 *ad loc.* calls this a particularly appropriate version of “a bird in the hand.”
31 Hunter (1999) *Id.* 11.75 *ad loc.*
pursuer of one who flees; now he has decided to pursue only those who invite him to play. He comforts himself with a cliché consolation: “You’ll probably find another, even prettier Galatea” (εύρησείς Γαλάτειαν ἴσως καὶ καλλίστον ἄλλαν [11.76]). Even if an urbane reader might smirk at the likeliness of this prospect, Polyphemus is encouraged enough to reestablish his identity as “someone” on the land (δῆλον ὅτ’ ἐν τῷ γῇ κήγῳ τις φαίνομαι ἥμεν [11.79]). This statement concludes his revision of his identity. He now thinks of himself as someone who belongs on the land with his pastoral tasks; he does not flee but is pursued.33 Most importantly he is “someone [important]” on the land, and thus there is no need for him to make the transition to the sea.34

With these seemingly intimate details, *Idyll* 11 gives the reader unmediated access to one iteration of the character Polyphemus. His voice is personalized to allow the emergence of a vivid figure, who experiences the transformative powers of song. Yet at every turn Theocritus’ accomplishment must be read against other iterations of the same character, which differ markedly in terms of both characterization and presentation. Moreover, the highly allusive language of *Idyll* 11 *demands* that the reader read Theocritus’ Polyphemus against the tradition.

2. **Anticipating the tradition: how to read “Polyphemus of old.”**

There is perhaps no greater cliché within the scholarship on Hellenistic poetry than to note the “complexity” of its relationship to previous Greek literature. The corpus of Theocritus and *Idyll* 11 in particular are, of course, no exception. The plethora of intertextual relationships between *Idyll* 11 and its predecessors directs the reader’s attention to the originality and special

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32 Although this is a cliché, the statement resonates with the language of the frame: “but he found the cure” (ἄλλα τὸ φάρμακον εὗρε, [11.18]). For other examples within Theocritus’ corpus cf. Id. 3.35-6: “I am guarding for you a white goat that has had twins, which even Mermon’s swarthy female day-laborer begs me for; and I shall give it to her, since you play the prude towards me” (ἢ μέν τοι λευκὸν διδυματόκον αἶγα φυλάσσω, / τάο καὶ ἄ Μέρμυνον ἐρήθακεν ἁ μελανόρροσον / αἴτει καὶ δῶσο οἱ, ἔπει τῷ μοι ἐνδιαβρύπτη).  
33 Presumably these are women from the land and not other sea nymphs, who would cause many of the same problems as Galatea, although this is not explicitly stated.
vividness that Theocritus has created for his version of Polyphemus, and emphasizes the unique space that this character holds within the larger world of bucolic poetry.\(^{35}\) Furthermore, these intertextual gestures toward the poetic precedents for the Cyclops’ story help to characterize Polyphemus as more sensitive and introspective. The iterations of Polyphemus’ character that are most salient for *Idyll 11* are *Odyssey 9*, which depicts Odysseus’ encounter with the flesh-eating Cyclops, and Philoxenus of Cytherea’s dithyramb, which depicts the Cyclops in love with Galatea and his unsuccessful plea to Odysseus to help him win her heart.\(^{36}\) The point is not that Theocritus’ Cyclops is indebted to the previous iterations of this character, but that the allusive language of his own self-description calls the reader’s attention to the uniqueness of Theocritus’ version. *Idyll 11* makes ample use of the *Odyssey* to portray a specifically bucolic Cyclops. Of course, we are meant to anticipate the arrival of Odysseus at almost every turn, but it would be far beyond the scope of this chapter to spell out every instance of Homeric intertext within *Idyll 11*.\(^{37}\) Rather, I will confine my reading to the instances where Polyphemus’ unconscious anticipation of Odysseus’s arrival most affects the drawing of his character and calls attention to his own Theocritean perspective.

In addition to containing an arch reference to the heat of his passion, Polyphemus’ inviting ecphrasis of his dwelling plays off of other bucolic descriptions of landscape as well as the description of the Cyclops’ cave in the *Odyssey*.\(^{38}\) However, what is more salient for my discussion is the additional parallel between Polyphemus’ cave in *Idyll 11* and Calypso’s in the

\(^{35}\) Gow (1952) I.xxvii certainly thought that the bucolic *Idylls* (1, 3-7, 10, 11) formed a kind of unity that could be accounted for in terms of date and composition. However, he noticed that “two of the bucolic poems commonly classed as bucolic are however less conspicuously so than the rest. *Id. 11* contains no human rustics, though the flouted Cyclops is a shepherd and has much in common with the lovesick peasants of *Idd. 3* and 10.” Wilamowitz regarded *Id. 11* as the earliest of Theocritus’ poems, and I agree that it is early and may well be first.

\(^{36}\) Unfortunately, the highly fragmentary state of Philoxenus’ corpus makes a reconstruction of the poem difficult.


\(^{38}\) For treatment of the bucolic landscape, see Segal (1981) 210-234.
Odyssey, since Theocritus has combined two Homeric models to emphasize the novelty of his Cyclops. The Hellenistic Polyphemus describes his own cave as a characteristically Theocritean 
locus amoenus: “there are laurels there, and slender cypresses, and dark ivy, and the vine that bears sweet fruit” (ἐντι δάφναι τηνεί, ἐντι ραδίναι κυπάρισσοι, / ἔστι μέλας κισσός, ἔστ’ ἁμπελος ἁ γλυκύκαρπος [11.45-6]). Yet the laurels come from the description of the cave of the Homeric Cyclops (Od. 9.183), while the cave of Calypso serves as the source for the cypresses (Od. 5.64) and the vines (Od. 5.69). Theocritus’ Polyphemus is a synthesizer of two different modes, both the rustic milieu of his own Homeric existence and the erotic setting of the cave in which Odysseus spent many nights. By situating Polyphemus in an erotic setting from the Odyssey, Theocritus has emphasized the reconfiguration of the Cyclops as a character who is overcome with the powers of eros.

It is also possible to read more Homeric complexity in Polyphemus’ imagined sacrifice of his eye. As discussed above, he promises the absent Galatea: “but I’m burning for you and I would offer up my soul and my one eye, there is nothing dearer to me.” (11.52-3). The juxtaposition of the “burning” (καίομενος) with the “eye” (ὀφθαλμόν) is, of course, highly evocative of Polyphemus’ Homeric fate, but the comparative “dearer to me” (μοι γλυκερότερον) is also quite suggestive. As Hunter points out, γλυκερότερον is a striking word because it is only found in the comparative once in early epic at Odyssey 9.28 where Odysseus describes the pleasure of seeing Ithaca again. Once again, Polyphemus echoes the man who will ultimately destroy him. However, there is more at play here beyond a facetious reference to poor Polyphemus’ fate. Here the reader’s sympathies are reversed since the unsympathetic, savage Cyclops has appropriated the language of his victim in an effort to seem more sympathetic.

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39 Hunter (1999) Id. 11.45-8 ad loc.
40 Hunter (1999) Id. 11.53 ad loc.
Perhaps the most salient interaction between the *Odyssey* and *Idyll 11* comes at the final line of Polyphemus’ song. After consoling himself with the idea that there are other girls on land who take notice of him, the Cyclops ends with the words: “for it is clear that, on land, I am somebody too” (δῆλον ὅτε ἐν τῇ γῇ κήγών τις φαίνομαι ἦμεν [11.79]). As discussed above, Polyphemus’ assertion of his identity as “somebody [important]” on the land is crucial for coming to terms with his situation; there is no need for him to make the transition to the sea as he previously desired to do. But the pronoun he uses to describe his status (“somebody [important]” τις) ironically anticipates the pseudonym that Odysseus uses to trick Polyphemus (“Nobody” Οὐτις). It is striking that at the last moment of Polyphemus’ song he defines himself in opposition to Odysseus. Theocritus, in setting this opposition so starkly, has programmatically asserted the originality and uniqueness of his own Cyclops: this is somebody with a personal identity not a monster to be evaded.

If we return to the beginning of Polyphemus’ song, we can see that Theocritus has successfully incorporated another, different version of the Cyclops story: Philoxenus’ account of Polyphemus’ courtship of Galatea titled *Cyclops*. As far as we can tell in the fragmentary state of the evidence, Theocritus has radically reworked Philoxenus’ version of the love song to give Polyphemus a voice appropriate to both his bucolic and Cyclopean sentiments. As discussed above, the Theocritean Polyphemus addresses and describes Galatea with comparisons familiar from his bucolic lifestyle: “Oh white Galatea … whiter than curdled milk to see, softer than a lamb, more skittish than a calf, smoother than an unripe grape” (*Id.* 11.19-21). In addition to

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41 This is the final form of the series of oppositions that have defined Polyphemus and Odysseus throughout the Greek literary tradition: The Cyclops belongs to the land, Odysseus to the sea, the former struggles to get his beloved’s attention, the latter is known for his amorous affairs all across the Mediterranean. Finally, these dichotomies are carried to their logical extreme: somebody verses nobody.
showcasing Polyphemus’ jejune style, these comparisons seem to allude to one of the few surviving fragments of Philoxenus’ *Cyclops.*

But begore addressing the relationship between the poems, it will be helpful to provide some context for the fragment. The poem was most likely a dithyramb, although there seems to have been some confusion about its genre even in antiquity. Unfortunately, the poem’s highly fragmentary state makes interpretation very challenging; even the content remains uncertain. What can be said with relative security is that the poem contained a meeting between Odysseus, Polyphemus and (later) Galatea. Each character seems to have had their own song: Odysseus sings a lament from within the cave (*PMG* 824) and Polyphemus may give a romantic lament (*PMG* 821). There is also evidence that Galatea gets a song as well, perhaps even in response to Polyphemus. According to the Scholia to Aristophanes’ *Plutus,* the blinding of Polyphemus was also covered. Thus, it is safe to say, Philoxenus’ poem had a far greater range than *Idyll* 11 both in terms of the material covered and in terms of the range of diversity in character and voice.

The fragment of importance to *Idyll* 11 further suggests that Philoxenus’ *Cyclops* had a very different voice. Athenaeus reports that in Philoxenus’ version, Polyphemus praises everything about Galatea except her eyes since he has a “premonition of his own blindness” (προμαντευόμενος τὴν τύφλωσιν [Athen. 13. 564ef]). Rather, he addresses Galatea as follows:

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42 Philoxenus of Cythera seems to have been regarded as an important source for Theocritus since antiquity as evidenced by the references made to his *Cyclops* in the Scholia to *Idylls* 11 and 6, though we can only access the poem through a few testimonies from later authors and some dubious quotations. The following discussion is indebted to Leven (2014) 127-137.
43 By the middle of the second century CE, Zenobius would misidentify Philoxenus’ *Cyclops* as a drama (*Zenob. 5. 45*).
44 According to another passage from the Scholia to Aristophanes *Plutus,* Galatea was also a potential character in the poem. The Scholiast states that Philoxenus used the onomatopoeic word “threttanelô” (θρεττανελό) to imitate the sound of Polyphemus playing the cithara and challenging (ἐρθίζοντα) Galatea (*Ar. Plut.* 290ss).
45 *Ar. Plut.* 290ss = Philoxenus *PMG* 819.
“oh beautiful-faced, beautiful-haired [Galatea] / graceful-voiced offshoot of the Erotes” (ὦ καλλιπρόσωπε χρυσεοβόστρυχε [Γαλάτεια] / χαριτόφωνε θάλος Ἐρώτων [PMG 821]). This is quite a bit more eloquent than the comparisons that Theocritus’ Polyphemus is able to make. The compound adjectives set this invocation in a higher register, and Philoxenus’ Cyclops refrains from using hyperbolic comparisons with quotidian objects such as grapes. The combination of multiple descriptive adjectives in a vocative address in combination with the rhythm of the lines gives this passage an incantatory sound. Yet the sophistication and urbanity of the evocation may reasonably strike the reader as unfitting for the voice of a Cyclops. It is suggestive to think that Theocritus had this passage in mind when writing the opening of his Cyclops’ song, since *Idyll* 11 presents a Polyphemus much more attuned to his own personal environment and much more self-consciously expressive of his limitations.

That is not to say that Theocritus’ Cyclops does not possess ambitions of grandeur, but rather that he gestures towards those ambitions in a way that is most fitting for a bucolic Cyclops in the grips of *eros*. Indeed, his series of hyperbolic and quotidian comparisons resonate with a brief quotation from Sappho, preserved in [Demetrius’] *On Style*: “more sweet-singing than a harp / more golden than gold” (πάκτιδος ἀδυμελέστερα / χρύσω χρυσοτέρα [156]). As Hunter succinctly states, “the lovesick Cyclops [unknowingly] reaches for the poet of *eros* to express his complaint.”46 Furthermore, [Demetrius] quotes these lines as examples of charm-producing hyperbole. Thus, not only is Polyphemus reaching for the poet of *eros* to express his own frustration, but his is actually employing a particularly apt passage for his cyclopean exaggeration. Thus, by reaching back to powerfully expressive precedents, Theocritus is able to display just how fitting his version of the Cyclops is to the unique poetic world that he has

created.\textsuperscript{47} By adding this layer of allusion he enhances the themes of his seemingly immediate characterization of the lovesick Cyclops.


But we cannot forget that these intertextual gestures are not the only metaliterary features that guide the reader through the interpretation of this poem. In other words, it is not only the prior renditions of Polyphemus that inform our reading of \textit{Idyll 11}, but also the persona of the poet himself, who frames the poem with an address to the implied/ideal reader in his own voice. As noted above, the opening lines of the poem give us the gnomic proposition that there is no other cure for love than song, and the last two lines appear to reaffirm this initial statement by stating: “In this way did Polyphemus shepherd his love by singing, and he got along more easily than if he had spent money” (Οὔτω τοι Πολύφαμος ἐποίμανεν τὸν ἔρωτα / μουσίσδων, ῥάν δὲ διὰγ’ ἤ εἰ χρυσὸν ἔδωκεν [11.80-1]). The last two lines echo the opening closely: “desire” (ἔρωτα) picks up on the “desire” (ἔρωτα) of line 1; “fared easily” (ῥᾶν δὲ διὰγ’) echoes “fared most easily” (ῥὰστα διὰγ’) of line 7; and “singing” (μουσίσδων) combines the Muses (Μοίσαις) of line 6 as well as “singing” ἀξείδων of line 13. Οὔτω (“in this way”) emphasizes that this is a description of what Polyphemus’ song accomplishes.

Yet despite these salient echoes, the change from “found the cure” (φάρμακον) to “shepherded” (ἐποίμανεν) has seemed provocative to Goldhill, who argues that prior scholarship has suppressed the ambiguity of the word “shepherded” (ἐποίμανεν).\textsuperscript{48} He points to other metaphorical uses of the word such as “tend,” “care for,” or “nourish” and wonders whether a nourishment of desire can really be the same as a cure.\textsuperscript{49} Yet Goldhill has not taken into account

\textsuperscript{47} It is indeed ironic that Polyphemus (a mythical character) has read Sappho. For a full discussion of the use of irony in the interpretation of the \textit{Idylls}, see chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{48} Goldhill (1991) 254.

\textsuperscript{49} LSJ ποιμάινω II.I. Goldhill (1991) 254, n.78.
contemporary practices for the mitigation of the symptoms of lovesickness. He doubts whether ἐποίμανεν can be read as “implying simply and explicitly the removal, the destruction or even cure of desire.” Yet it is precisely the “care for” and “tending to,” which Goldhill rejects, that were central to subjective responses to eros in Classical and Hellenistic Greek culture. Ancient practices for mitigating the symptoms of eros were based primarily around the regulation of the “use of pleasure” (χρήσις Ἀφροδισιῶν) and the “care of the self” (ἐπιμέλεια ἑαυτοῦ). These were acts of physical and mental askesis which allowed the subject to tend to and care for his/her self over periods of time and thus mitigate the effects of passion. These practices are much more similar to the metaphorical usages of ἐποίμανεν that Goldhill cites.

If a link between Polyphemus’ curative song and contemporary self-regulatory practice seems farfetched, an epigram by Callimachus draws a more straight-forward connection. In an epigram which has “not implausibly” been thought to refer to Idyll 11, Callimachus makes his own claims about the power of poetry and its relationship to another form of regulating desire:

(GA.12.152.4-6)

ἡ πανακές πάντων φάρμακον ἀ σοφία.
toῦτο, δοκέω, γά λιμός ἔχει μόνον ἐς τά πονηρὰ
tῷγαθὸν, ἐκκόπτει τάν φιλόπαιδα νόσον.

For poetic skill is a pharmakon that cures all ills. This, I think, is the only good thing that hunger has vis-à-vis troublesome feelings: it represses the sickness of love for boys.

In this passage, Callimachus equates the power of hunger and poetic skill in curing desire. This claim could be seen as an extension of Theocritus’ gnomic proposition. No longer is the act of

52 “The medical problematization of sexual behavior was accomplished less out of a concern for eliminating pathological forms than out of a desire to integrate it as fully as possible into the management of health and the life of the body” Foucault (1985) 98.
composition simply a cure of *eros*, for Callimachus it is a cure-all. But it is notable that Callimachus compares poetry not to other medications, but to a practice of *askesis*: hunger. A list in The Hippocratic *Epidemics* outlines the areas that encompasses everything that needed to be measured to ensure sound health: “exercises, foods, drinks, sleep, and sexual relations” (VI.6.1). These activities needed to be regulated in a closed system so that those who suffered from an over-fondness for sexual intercourse (φιλόλαγνοι) were prescribed a strict regimen of abstention from wine, exercise and other pleasures.54 In short, Callimachus’ epigram shows that some members of the Alexandrian poetic milieu may have considered the composition of poetry as a parallel to regulatory practices that aimed at mitigating the symptoms of desire through modifying behavior.

**Conclusion.**

As we have seen, the song which Polyphemus sings serves as an agent of self-characterization redefining his self-perception in relation to his object of desire, his body, and his memory. The opening frame of the poem shows the Cyclops neglecting his bucolic duties and suffering from a “wound” (ἕλκος) from Aphrodite (11.12-16). By the end of his song, he admonishes himself to get back to his flock and to attend to the daily tasks of bucolic life (11.73-5). In this way he “shepherds” not only his sheep but his desires by returning to his accustomed bucolic regimen.55 This redefinition of his own personal self-conception leads to an alleviation of the symptoms of his lovesickness. In this way, Polyphemus reconstitutes himself in relation to his own desires and his self-perception. Yet he must also represent himself as unique in relation

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54 Hippocrates *Diseases* II.51. For a full discussion of the regimentation of diet and its relation to sexual desire and practice, see Foucault (1985) 97-124.
to the poetic tradition so that Theocritus can create a novel interpretation of the Polyphemus
story, one in which the Cyclops does find alleviation for the symptoms of love through song.
Chapter 2

Introduction.

_Idyll_ 2, like many of Theocritus’ poems, centers on the theme of unrequited love and present longing for an absent object of affection. Yet unlike many of Theocritus’ more characteristic bucolic poems, which feature the interactive songs of male herdsmen, _Idyll_ 2 focuses on the experiences of a single young woman only accompanied by a silent servant, Thestylis. The poem opens _in medias res_ with the young woman, Simaetha, instructing her servant to bring laurel leaves and potions (τὰ φίλτρα) so that she can perform a binding ritual on her lover, Delphis, who has ghosted her (_Id._ 2.1-5). After performing a series of incantations, Simaetha sends her servant away to complete the ritual above Delphis doorframe. Now that she is alone, Simaetha begins to sing the story of how she saw Delphis one day and was immediately overcome by a terrible love-sickness. After trying multiple remedies, she eventually sends her servant to summon Delphis to her home where they consummate their desire. Although they enjoy a brief period of monogamous bliss, Delphis leaves her for another love. Simaetha, irate, decides to use magic to bind him to her, which is where the beginning of the poem picks up. However, at the end of the poem, after her song has mollified her initial reaction, Simaetha projects a different version of herself, one that emphasizes a new sense of calm and a determination to engage in self-care and self-mitigation of her emotional distress.

The distressed Simaetha shares some similarities with Polyphemus of _Idyll_ 11. Both feel sorry for themselves because their objects of affection do not reciprocate, and most importantly both Simaetha and Polyphemus seek to substitute some practical action of self-care with song. While the Cyclops tries to find the _pharmakon_ for love-sickness through singing, Simaetha
attempts to use her spells and her song as a replacement for a more direct means of getting her lover back, i.e. direct confrontation: *(Id. 2.8-10)*

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\begin{align*}
\text{βασεϊμαι ποτι ταν Τιμαγήτοιο παλαίστραν /} \\
\text{αὔριον, ὡς νιν ἱδω, καὶ μέμψομαι οἶα με ποιεῖ /} \\
\text{νῦν δὲ νιν ἐκ θεόν καταδήσομαι.}
\end{align*}
\]

“I shall go to the wrestling school of Timagetus tomorrow to see him, and I shall reproach him because of the way he treats me. *But for now*, I shall thoroughly bind him with spells.”

These lines juxtapose Simaetha’s activities in the present (νῦν) with those of an imagined future. Furthermore, they frame the rest of Simaetha’s song as a substitution for her future activities, in much the same way that the opening lines of *Idyll 11* frame Polyphemus’ song as a substitution for medication. I suggest that Theocritus pairs song with two different methods of self-care (*askesis* in *Idyll 11* and magic in *Idyll 2*) to promote the idea that song can also have a therapeutic effect.

This chapter examines the ways in which Simaetha’s song serves as a substitution for her more confrontational impulses. Both Simaetha’s binding charms and songs of lament are unsuccessful in that they do not offer her the resolution that she has in mind (i.e. the return of Delphis). However, that is not to say that they are ineffectual. Scholarship on magic has focused on the ways in which magical spells give the performer a sense of control or agency in a situation in which they are almost entirely helpless.56 Magic is seen as a substitution for an action that is not possible. That is not to say that the spell is always effective, but that there is a cognitive benefit to the speaker that comes with performing these rites. Yet less commonly noted is that song can function in the same way. Simaetha’s song of lament, which is also an activity of the “now” in opposition to the later of the events she has in mind, also seems to be a productive

substitute. By the end of the poem her assessment of her own situation has changed: she is no longer passionately focused on her interior emotional state, rather she seems optimistically mollified. Theocritus is perhaps consciously pairing magic and song to suggest that song can have the same indirectly palliative effect.

Pinpointing exactly how this happens proves to be a difficult task because of the narrative’s temporal layering. The poem begins with Simaetha’s instructions to her servant at the beginning of her ritual, which attempts to draw Delphis to her home by means of magic. While she performs her binding ritual, Simaetha addresses the lynx through a refrain: “Iynx, draw that man to my house!” Ἴνυξ, ἐλκε τῷ τῆνον ἐμὸν ποτὶ δῶμα τὸν ἄνδρα (Id. 2.17,22, 27, 37, 42, 32, 47,52, 57, 63). But as soon as her magic has been completed and her servant has been sent to finish the ritual, Simaetha begins a song which reflects on the experiences that have led up to this point, namely the history of her relationship with Delphis. These different times and actions are partly signaled by a change in the refrain; now it is the Moon, who is the addressee of her refrain throughout her song of remembrance: “note Selena, from where my love came” (φράζεό μεν τὸν ἔρωθ’ ὀθεν ἵκετο, ποτνα Σελάνα [Id. 2.69, 75, 81, 87, 93, 99, 105, 111, 117, 123, 129, 135]). The poem finally ends with a return to the “now,” after both the recollected events of the song and the opening ritual, as Simaetha draws the poem to a close by wishing Selena farewell. Although the poem conveys information about many different times, the refrains draw the reader’s attention to the performative aspect of Simaetha’s song about the past. In short, both the song and the spell have a similar place within the poem: they are the now of the present as opposed to the later of the anticipated confrontation with Delphis, and thus they both represent a pragmatic replacement (supplement) for the inevitable or imagined meeting. But not only do these replace

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57 For more information about the Iynx and how it relates to Idyll 2, see Segal (1973).
confrontation, they provide a sense of calm and resolve at the end of the poem that confrontation perhaps could not have provided.

The complexities of time within the poem, which provide a frame for reading Simaetha’s narrative of transformation, have been largely overlooked due to many scholars’ belittling of Simaetha’s character. They have emphasized the ironic distance between Simaetha and the reader of the poem, assuming that any reader of *Idyll 2* would have a much greater familiarity with Greek literature than the main character.\(^58\) However, while there is a difference between the way that the reader interprets Simaetha’s words and the way she understands them at various points in the poem, this “ironic distance” has been over-played. Many scholars have even gone so far as to suggest that Simaetha is not aware of the way that her language echoes earlier models of erotic distress such as Sappho’s lyric. I hope to show, through a close reading of Simaetha’s song, that this “assumption of ignorance” is damaging to Simaetha’s voice and unnecessarily complicates any reading of her transformation.

1. Simaetha’s Curative Song.

If Simaetha’s song culminates in a renewed level of self-confidence and optimism, it certainly does not start that way. Once Simaetha has finished her binding spell and is left alone by the departure of Thestyris, she begins to sing about her experience of love beginning with the events that led to her first encounter with Delphis, detailing the moment of her desire’s consummation and culminating in the very moment she learned of Delphis’ infidelity and her decision to use magic to bring him back. When she has finished her song, Simaetha turns towards the moon, who has been the subject of her address throughout her song and utters a farewell and a promise to endure her longing. This resolve to bear her own passion stands in

contrast to the invocations made at the beginning of her spell. This transformation of Simaetha’s response to her passion happens within the time that it takes for her to sing her song – in other words, between the “now” of the beginning of the poem and the “now” at the end. Thus, the song itself is a kind of transformative experience that not only serves as a replacement for the action of confrontation and magic ritual, but also adds to these experiences by providing her with a fresh resolve to bear her own desire. The following pages will detail the ways in which Simaetha’s song attempts to understand and construct her own experiences as a descent into hopelessness and helplessness that ultimately transitions into a renewed resolve for self-care.

At the very beginning of her song, Simaetha signals the transformative power of time through a thoughtful reflection on the arbitrariness of beginnings: “but now, since I am alone, from what point shall I lament my love? From what point shall I begin? Who brought this evil to me?” (Νῦν δὴ μόνα ἐδοῖσα πόθεν τὸν ἔρωτα δακρύσω; / ἐκ τίνος ἄρξομαι; τίς μοι κακὸν ἄγαγε τοῦτο; [2.64-5]). The “now” of her present song, in contrast to the “tomorrow” of her anticipated reproaches, signals the present implications of her lament about the past. This “now” stands in contrast to the “now” at the beginning of the poem (2.10), which is the time for the beginning of the binding ritual. But the “now” that initiates the song also looks ahead to the “now” that ends it (2.159). These deictic markers are not superfluous. Rather they draw the reader’s attention to the fact that the song takes place between the binding ritual and the farewell address to Selena and emphasize that Simaetha’s present state is gradually developing. I suggest that the song thus serves as a space for Simaetha to reconfigure her subjective relationship to the past and causes a change in her response to her passion.

Simaetha also frames the beginning of her unfortunate desire (ἔρωτα) in terms of space. The local festival of Artemis is Simaetha’s answer to the question of where her sorrow came
from (Id. 2.67-8). While a festival does not seem like an obvious place for the arrival of 
misfortune, festivals often serve as a catalyst for stories of romance in the Greek literary 
tradition. Yet Simaetha’s experience at the festival is not less relevant for her activities at the 
festival per se but because this is one of the last times she is able to leave her house throughout 
the poem. Indeed, Simaetha’s observation of her future lover, Delphis, does not even happen at 
the festival. Rather, she catches sight of him about “half way along the road” as he returns from 
the gymnasium (ἤδη δ’ εὔσα μέσαν κατ’ ἀμαξίτων [76]). A reader familiar with the familiar 
trope of the lovers locking eyes at the local festival would perhaps be taken aback by the rather 
mundane image of a young woman fawning over a sweaty man in the middle of the road on the 
way to a festival where this interaction is meant to take place in an idealized fashion. Although 
Simaetha does not comment on Delphis’ reaction, we are left with the feeling that he did not 
even notice. This lack of reciprocity complicates both the familiar literary trope and dooms 
Simaetha to literal frustration. Since Simaetha is not subject to the male gaze as the trope 
demands, there is no hope that Delphis will act on the desire that she alone feels. 

Although Simaetha’s interaction with Delphis does not follow the trope of instant passion 
that sparks a love story, her version of ‘love at first sight’ is no less transformative. Simaetha’s 
experience in the middle of the road fundamentally changes her relationship to both space and 
herself: (Id. 2.82-85) 

χώς ἱδον, ὅς ἐμάνην, ὅς μοι πυρὶ θυμὸς ἱάφθη 
δειλαίας, τὸ δὲ κάλλος ἐτύκετο. οὐκέτι πομπᾶς 
tίνας ἐφρασάμαν, οὐδ’ ὡς πάλιν οἰκαδ’ ἀπήνθον 

59 One need only think of the relevant sections of Callimachus’ Acontius and Cydippe, as well as An Ephesian Story 
by Xenophon of Ephesus. For bibliography on the festival in Greek romantic literature, see Segal (1985) 105, n.6. 
For a list of such stories, see Whitmarsh (2018) 28, n.18. 
60 For a similar instance of a female character swooning for a male figure who does not (initially) reciprocate, see 
Medea’s reaction to Jason in Apollonius’ Argonautica 3.961-3: “But by appearing, [Jason] aroused lovesick turmoil, 
and her heart fell out of her chest, and her eyes darkened of their own accord and her cheeks were flush with fever.” 
(κάματον δὲ δυσίμερον ὃρασε φανθείς. ἢκ δ’ ἀρα οἱ κραδὶς στηθέων πέσεν, ὀμματα δ’ αὐτως ἠχλισαν, θερμὸν 
δὲ παρηδάς ἐλλεν ἔρευθος.).
“And when I saw him, I went mad, and my poor heart was struck with fire, and my beauty wasted. I no longer took notice of the parade, and I do not know how I made my way home again.”

For a moment, Simaetha is no longer aware of her surroundings. She describes both mental (ἐμάνην) and emotional (θυμὸς) pain. She loses control of herself, as her appearance changes uncontrollably and her memory fails her. We know that she is able to make it home again, but both the reader and Simaetha are not sure of the details. In short, this passage describes a powerful moment of psychological transformation, one that will define Simaetha’s relationship to her surroundings for the rest of the poem.

Once Simaetha makes it back to her house, a burning fever (καπυρὰ νόσος) affects her for ten days and ten nights (85-6). After a brief pause to repeat her refrain – “note lady Moon, from where my love came” – Simaetha begins a catalogue of symptoms: pale skin (88), hair-loss (89), weight-loss (90). But Simaetha’s illness does not confine her to her bed: “But whom did I not visit? Or rather what old enchantress’ home did I leave unvisited?” (καὶ ἐς τίνος οὐκ ἐπέρασα, / ἥ ποίας ἔλπον γραίας δόμον ἄτις ἐπάδεν; [91-2]). Although she does not explicitly say, we are left to infer that these visits to the local enchantresses did not do her much good. We do hear, however, that this sickness is no light (ἐλαφρὸν) matter (92). In the absence of any productive alleviation for her symptoms, Simaetha changes her strategy: instead of venturing out herself to seek help, she sends her servant, Thestyris “to find some remedy of my unhappy suffering” (μοι χαλέπαις νόσῳ εὑρέ τι μάχος [95]). “Remedy” (μάχος) is a strange word for what Simaetha is really seeking. In short, Simaetha desires Delphis’ presence in the flesh, not the
workings of an enchantress. Simaetha’s summoning of Delphis complicates the relationship between action and supplementation: Simaetha has first tried to substitute action with the products of enchantresses, but when this fails, she sends her servant as a substitute for herself to bring Delphis to her. However, what we shall find is that, because Delphis does not reciprocate her desires, he is only a temporary substitute for the real work of self-care that Simaetha recognizes at the end of the poem.

Indeed, from the point that her initial foray into magic fails, Simaetha confines herself to the interior of her house; she no longer goes out to seek some relief but shuts herself up as an effect of the powerful interaction with her beloved and the subsequent illness. Simaetha’s refusal to go out of the house and find a “remedy” for herself creates a dichotomy between agency and passivity along the lines of the exterior and interior respectively. As Charles Segal has argued, “the interior of the house functions both as an actual place and as a metaphorical equivalent for Simaetha’s bondage to her passion. Within the house her emotional subjection and helplessness take the form of immobility.” This moment represents a low point in Simaetha’s path to self-care. She has failed to find a means of alleviating her symptoms, but yet she still hopes that Delphis will be able to provide her with a fulfilment of her desire.

Simaetha’s inward turn is not limited to her physical retreat, for as Simaetha’s recollection of her love-sickness progresses, her speech becomes increasingly oriented toward her interior emotional state. As Segal has noted, this connection between the literary and metaphorical interior “enables Theocritus to explore both the psychological range and the pathos

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61 Hopkinson (1988) *ad loc.* cites μάρικας as a “dignified epicism” and this may in fact be an attempt by Simaetha to raise the register of her speech. This, however, does not preclude the idea that Simaetha is seeking the presence of her Delphis.
62 Segal (1985) 104.
63 Simaetha’s immobility breaks down across different gender lines from *Idyls* 11 and 6 where the male is restricted and immobile as a result of lovesickness.
of Simaetha’s passion.” This inward turn is the first stage in Simaetha’s eventual progression towards a cure for her passion.

This metaphorical interior of Simaetha’s distress is present from its first arrival. She describes how she “went mad,” how her “poor heart was struck with fire,” and how her “beauty wasted” from the moment she first saw Delphis (2.82-84). As often noted, these lines seem to be a reworking of Sappho fr. 31 lines 7-16:

"For when I look at you for a moment (βρόχε’), it is no longer possible for me to speak, and even my tongue has snapped, and immediately a slender fire has gone beneath (ὑπαδεδρόμηκεν) my skin, my eyes see nothing (?), and my ears hum, sweat flows from me, and trembling seizes all of me, and I am greener than grass, and I seem not too far from death myself.”

Both Simaetha and Sappho reflect on their emotional response to the sight of their beloved in ways that privilege the phenomenological, subjective feeling. However, there is an otherness embedded within this self-description that simultaneously undercuts the sense of intimacy.

Longinus, who also provides the main source for this fragment, notes how Sappho’s “reaching” for her body parts marks them as other: “are you not amazed at how, at the same time, she reaches for the soul, the body, her ears, her tongue, her eyes and her skin as though they are departed or other.” (οὐ θαυμάζεις ώς ὑπὸ τὸ αὐτὸ τὴν ψυχὴν τὸ σῶμα, τὰς ἀκοὰς τὴν γλῶσσαν, τὰς ὀψεῖς τὴν χρόαν, πάνθ’ ώς ἀλλότρια διοιχόμενα ἐπιζητεῖ [de subl. 10. 1–3]).

64 Segal (1985)108.
65 Hopkinson (1988) Id.2.82. ad loc.
Simaetha reflects a similar experience of otherness and departure from herself. She is driven mad as her “heart is struck with fire” and her appearance changes. A lack of agency forces Simaetha to react to her own physiological and psychological responses as though they were someone else’s. As if to stress her own body’s otherness, she further relates that she was not conscious of how she got back home (οὐδ’ ὡς πάλιν οἰκαδ’ ἀπῆνθον / ἕγνων [2.84-5]). Thus, just as her retreat into the interior of her house emphasizes Simaetha’s helplessness and despair, so too does her retreat into her own feelings reflect a feeling of despondency and lack of control over her own person. Nevertheless, her means of coping with her emotional distress and emotionally enforced immobility are the same: just as Simaetha seeks to supplement (replace) her activity outside the house with her speech, so too does she employ her speech to alienate herself from her own physiological experiences of desire. This move is an important part of the process of reaching some kind of alleviation for her love-sickness.

From Simaetha’s position within the house, she decides to send out her servant, Thestylis, to “find a remedy” for her suffering (2.95). But this remedy does not involve more charms or enchantresses. Rather, Simaetha instructs Thestylis to go straight to the source, Delphis, and to give him a simple message: “Simaetha calls you” (Σιμαιόθα το καλεῖ [2.101]). This scheme apparently works and Delphis is drawn to her house, just as the refrain of her magical incantation exhorts the lynx to do. However, as soon as Delphis crosses the threshold of her home, Simaetha’s symptoms change again (2.106-10):

πᾶσα μὲν ἐνυχθην χιόνος πλέον, ἐκ δὲ μετόπω ἱδρώς μεν κοχύδεσκεν ἵσον νοτίωσιν ἔξρασις, οὐδὲ τι φωνήσαι δυνάμαν, οὐδ’ ὡςσον ἐν ὑπνῷ κνυζόμεναι φωνεύναι φιλαν ποτὶ ματέρα τέκνα· ἄλλ’ ἐπάγην δαγχίδι καλὸν χρόα πάντοθεν ἴσα.
“all of me became much colder than snow, and sweat streamed from my forehead like damp dew, and I was not able to say anything, not even as much as children whimper in their sleep, when they cry to their dear mother. But my beautiful body became stiff just like a doll.”

Delphis has entered the space of Simaetha’s helplessness, and her body responds accordingly. She describes her reaction in ways that continue to evoke Sappho; “colder than snow” varies Sappho’s “greener than grass.” And both women describe heavy perspiration as a common symptom. Finally, Simaetha borrows the familiar trope of loss of speech from Sappho, but with a clever twist. Simaetha is able to speak but only in the way that a small child can whimper to their mother. This simile further alienates her from her own (adult) body. Obviously, Simaetha is not a child, but here we find her confined to her bed, unable to do much more than whimper softly. This method of infantilization takes away the last of Simaetha’s power, her speech. Although she has secluded herself within her own home, she still has been able to use speech to her advantage. Now she must confront the source of her misfortune without recourse to speech.

Now that Delphis has seen Simaetha, it is his turn to act: “he fixed his eyes upon the ground, sat on the bed, and spoke” (ἐπὶ χθόνος ὁμματα πάξας / ἔξετ’ ἐπὶ κλιντῆρι καὶ ἐξόμενος φάτο μοῦθον [2.112-3]). Delphis’ active description stands in stark contrast to the passive verb that ends Simaetha’s account of her own body: ἐπάγην (2.110). As Segal deftly observed, “even the slightest movement of his eyes exercises power over Simaetha.” To further stress his power over the bed-ridden woman, Delphis exploits the dichotomy established earlier between the exterior as a space of agency and the interior as a space where one loses control. As he continues to address Simaetha, Delphis’ speech refers to things outside of the house. In fact, his first words to Simaetha are a sort of humble-brag meant to claim the idea of entering her house as his own.

66 These kinds of superlatives are characteristic of Sappho and are picked up on by [Demetrius] On Style 123-7.
67 Segal (1985) 112.
68 Griffiths (1979) 83: “love at first sight… is properly the man’s business.” Delphis has been sent for by Simaetha and thus has to make a point of pretending that this was all somehow his idea, but that he was only late.
He describes a recent victory in a race as a metaphor for how narrowly Simaetha has been the first to initiate contact (2.114-6). Delphis’ reassurance to Simaetha focuses on the moment of his arrival: “I would have come, by sweet Eros, I would! With three or four friends as soon as it was night” (ἢν θὸν γὰρ κεν ἐγὼ, ναὶ τὸν γλυκῶν ἢνθον Ἑρωτα / ἢ τρίτος ἢ τέταρτος ἐὼν φίλος αὐτίκα νυκτός [2.118-9]). Thus, his hypothetical arrival at Simaetha’s house is described as a komos that culminates in the use of force. Delphis imagines himself threatening her door with axes and torches, if she locked him out (πελέκεις καὶ λαμπάδες ἢνθον ἑφ’ ὑμέας [2.128]). Delphis’ prerogative in this encounter is to dismantle (literally) the boundaries that Simaetha has created by confining herself to her own home. He furthermore threatens her interior space with violence. Such hypothetical violence is mirrored in the actual violence that he does to her inner emotional state.

Delphis continues to constitute his version of events around activity and exteriority. As his bedside speech proceeds, he elaborates on his conception of Eros: “with wicked madness he rouses the maiden from her bedroom and compels the bride to leave her husband’s mattress while it is still warm” (σὺν δὲ κακαῖς μανίαις καὶ παρθένον ἐκ θαλάμου / καὶ νόμφαν ἑφόβησ’ ἐτι δέμνια θερμὰ λποίσαν / ἄνερος. [2.136-8]). This account of the power of Eros could not be more ironic: Simaetha has finally succeeded in drawing this man to her home and even to her bed where she has been secluded, only to hear him extoll the powers of love to rouse women from their beds. Furthermore, Delphis’ account of the powers of Eros anticipates Simaetha’s future: the “heat” (θερμότερ) of their lovemaking (2.141) recalls the warmth of the husband’s

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69 Hopkinson (1988) Id.2.188-28. ad loc. cites this kind of aggressive behavior as typical of the excluded lover. Such scenes of the excluded lover leading the kômos are quite frequent in epigram and New Comedy. “Here, however, Delphis’ allusions to the standard behavior of male lover and reluctant female beloved serve to draw attention to his own anomalous position: it is he who is the beloved, she who is the pursuer. In making this speech Delphis goes some way to restoring the conventional role.”
mattress that the bride abandons. The bed itself is also a point of contrast between Simaetha and Delphis’ version of Eros. Simaetha leads Delphis to the soft bed (μαλακῶν ἐκλιν’ ἐπὶ λέκτρων [2.139]), but one cannot help but think of the bed that the bride leaves, while she is under the influence of Delphis’ Eros. This imagery further serves to highlight just how disparate Simaetha’s and Delphis’ plans for the relationship are.

During Simaetha’s recollection of her encounter with Delphis she frames his agency and control of the situation in the same spatial terms that she had earlier used to signal her own despondency and helplessness. Delphis’ assertive movements within Simaetha’s bedroom and his references to his activities outside of the house only reinforce his characterization as active and powerful in contrast to Simaetha’s self-characterization as pitiful and helpless. This self-characterization serves as a poignant contrast to the assertive and resolute Simaetha of the “now.” However, after a care-free period of physical intimacy, their relationship changes. Delphis no longer comes around. Simaetha’s reaction to this change triggers an emotional response, which leads to the possibility of relief from her passion and perhaps even personal growth.

From the end of Delphis’ bedside speech, the structure of Simaetha’s song changes. There is no longer a refrain, and the pace of the story quickens as she reaches the present of Delphis’ absence (2.159). She skips from the period of their intimacy to “yesterday” (2.144). Simaetha’s story concludes with the arrival of a friend with news: “the mother of our piper Philista and of Melixo” (Ἱνθέ μοι ᾧ τε Φιλίστας / μάτηρ τάς ἁμάς σύλητριδος ᾧ τε Μελιξοὺς [2.145-6]). The mother tells Simaetha that Delphis has been “continually making toasts of unmixed wine to Eros and he was departing quickly and said that he was going to strew a house with garlands” (αἰὲν Ἑρωτος / ἀκράτῳ ἐπεχέιτο καὶ ἕς τέλος φύετο φεύγων, / καὶ φάτο οἱ
στεφάνοις τὰ δόματα τῆνα πυκαξέειν [2.151-3]). Again, reported speech of activities outside of the house characterizes Delphis as the one in charge. He is the one making toasts and running off and garlanding houses; it is Simaetha who is affected by these actions. But Simaetha’s reaction to Delphis’ behavior is not to sink back into her bed as we might expect. Rather, she takes a moment to corroborate the mother’s story: “it’s true” (ἐστι δ’ ἀλαθής [2.154]). In a moment that has often been overlooked by scholars of this poem, Simaetha calmly recalls a detail of her interaction with Delphis: he would often leave his Dorian oil flask with her, but it has been twelve days since he has done so.70

Once she has sufficiently established that the mother is not telling her lies about Delphis’ behavior, Simaetha begins to question Delphis’ motive: “does he have some other delight, and has he forgotten about me?” (Ἡ ῥ’ οὐκ ἄλλο τι τερπνόν ἔχει, ἀμῶν δὲ λέλασται; [2.158]). Again, Simaetha’s speech is rational and collected. She does not blame the personification of desire as she does at the beginning of the poem (2.6-7). Rather, she simply acknowledges that Delphis could have forgotten about her and found someone else. At this point in her song, her assessment is more critical. Rather than attribute Delphis’ behavior to supernatural forces or unspecified desire, she supposes that a mixture of desire for another and blunt loss of interest for her have been the impetus for his actions.

Simaetha’s reevaluation of the situation along more rational and critical lines allows her to change her modus operandi from inactive helplessness to a rather aggressive style of self-help: magic.

νῦν μᾶν τοῖς φίλτροις καταδήσσομαι· αἱ δ’ ἔτι κά με

70 This flask is likely to have contained oil for a post-workout bath. Given what we know about Delphis’ exercise habits, this was probably a very important item. Thus, the fact that he would leave it with Simaetha can been seen as a sign of his immanent return. The adjective “Dorian” (Δορίδα) could perhaps refer to the shape of the vessel, but since the word most often used for this flask is λήκυθος a more likely translation would be “what the Dorians call an ὀλπα” (Hopkinson (1988) Id. 2.156. ad loc.).
λυπῇ, τὰν Ἀιδαὸ πύλαν, ναὶ Μοῖρας, ἀραξεῖ·
toĩ̜ αἰ ἐν κίστα κακὰ φάρμακα φαμὶ φυλόσσειν,
Ἀσσυρίῳ, δέσποινα, παρὰ ξείνου μαθοῖσσα.

“Now I shall bind him with charms, and if he still causes me grief, he shall knock on Hades’
gate, by the fates! I say that I guard such evil drugs in my basket, lady, which I learned about
from an Assyrian stranger.” (2.159-62).

Simaetha here resumes the active language, which she used in the opening of the poem. She will
bind Delphis. Furthermore, she is no longer willing to accept his mistreatment of her – his
actions, which were of primary importance for his characterization as powerful and capable, now
redound on him with deadly consequences – “he shall knock on Hades’ door!” In addition to
signaling Simaetha’s return to agency, such comments about magic also reveal the restoration of
her memory, which she lost after she first saw Delphis on the road. She is able to employ her
skills in making and using drugs (φάρμακα), which she learned (μαθοῖσσα) from an Assyrian
stranger. The aorist tense of this participle implies that this is information that she acquired in the
past, before her encounter with Delphis left her bedridden. Her restored agency and will have
reactivated the powers she had temporarily lost.

The final lines of the poem solidify Simaetha’s newfound agency and control. After
completing her magic rites and her story, she bids farewell to the moon: “but you farewell, Lady!
And turn your steeds towards the ocean; and I will bear my desire as I have endured it” ἀλλὰ τὸ
μὲν χαίροισα ποτ’ ὄκεανὸν τρέπε πῶλῳς, / πότνι’ ἐγὼ δ’ οἰσῶ τὸν ἐμὸν πόθον ὀσπερ ὑπέσταν.
[2.163-4]). The opening word of her salutation (“farewell”) suggests that these lines offer a sort
of closure, not just to the poem itself, but to her transformative account of her own desire,
especially as they end with Simaetha’s intention to bear her desire (πόθον). Furthermore, these
final lines betray a reorientation of her outlook away from the interiority associated with her
helplessness towards a sense of agency and determination associated with the world beyond her
own home. Just as Delphis expressed his agency and power by alluding to activities outside of Simaetha’s home such as his races, exercises, and his kômos through the streets, so too does Simaetha express her own active determination to bear her desire by orienting her speech towards the outside. Yet, while Delphis alluded to the streets and gymnasia of the urban world, Simaetha fixes her speech on the heavens. By orienting her words towards the heavens, Simaetha moves beyond the local world that Delphis references and her concern for Delphis’ local desires. Instead Simaetha has signaled that her “desire” is no longer the dominant force in her decision making by orienting her speech towards a greater exterior than that of Delphis.

While Delphis is reported to have “run off” (2.152) to some new object of affection, Simaetha’s resolve is to bear her desire (πόθος) – in other words, to mitigate its effects on her way of life. Here, word choice is important. Pothos or “desire” is decidedly different from the other figures of speech that Simaetha has used to describe her feelings for Delphis earlier in the poem. Madness is perhaps the most common description of her feelings. At the pivotal moment when Simaetha first sees Delphis, she describes how she was “seized with madness” (ὥς ἐμάνην [2.82]). Though we might expect Eros to play an important role in the beginnings of desire, Simaetha situates him at the center of a disturbing metaphor that describes the pain of being scorned: “ah cruel Eros, why do you fasten upon me and drink my black blood from my skin, altogether like a leech from a swamp?” (αἰαὶ ἔρως ἁνιαρέ, τί μεν μέλαν ἐκ χρυσὸς αἷμα / ἐμφύς ὡς λιμνᾶτις ἀπαν ἐκ βδέλλα πέπωκας; [2.55-6]). In contrast to these aggressive descriptions of “desire,” πόθος has a more subdued range of meanings. While it can certainly mean “desire” in the sense of “love,” πόθος also has a more common meaning, closer to “longing,” “yearning,” or “regret for something lost.”71 This is the kind of desire that one can “bear” or “endure” unlike the

71 LSJ. Πόθος. A. II. Cf. also, Plato Cra.420a.
sort that drains blood and life. In this way, Simaetha’s self-characterization of her desire points
to a new ability to cope with and overcome her emotions. Perhaps, in this way, Simaetha’s song
again points to Sappho’s: “but all can be endured” (ἄλλα πάν τόλματον [fr.31.17]).

2. De-ironizing Simaetha’s Intertextuality.

Although I have argued that Simaetha’s language points to a substantial and salutary
change in her attitude towards her desire, many recent readers of Idyll 2 have used the “ironic
distance” between the reader and Simaetha’s (“unreliable”) voice as a way to question the
sincerity of this transformation. For example, Simon Goldhill has emphasized the gap between
the (male) poet and the voice of the subject, Simaetha, that allows the reader to understand
Simaetha’ “unintentional” meanings. This reading builds on previous work on Idyll 2 that
focuses on the highly allusive language throughout Simaetha’s song and the unreliable nature of
her performance of Delphis’ speech.72 In short, the question these scholars have asked is who
understands the difference between the basic force that Simaetha’s words take in their present
setting and the meaning generated by her words’ allusions. Unfortunately, no one has dared to
suggest that Simaetha herself is the one who actively understands the poetry to which she
alludes. The following section will address the underlying assumptions that inform the “ironic”
reading of Simaetha’s song: namely that Simaetha is/could not be aware of the fact that she
intertextually engages with Sappho’s lyric and the Odyssey. Such an assumption is problematic
because it denies a woman the ability to describe and act on her own feelings and because it
precludes an interpretation of the poem that trusts Simaetha to effectively communicate her own
understanding of events.

Thus, Charles Segal argues that it is the reader who understands the significance of the details which Simaetha relates.\(^73\) Employing Northrop Frye’s concept of the “ironic mode” to provide a reading of the poem that sees the reader as superior to the character, Segal suggests that Simaetha wins over the reader’s sympathy by presenting details without grasping their full significance.\(^74\) According to Segal, Simaetha is not aware that her description of her own desire intertextually reflects Sappho’s famous poem, yet the reader is and smiles at her naiveté. Furthermore, he argues that there is more to this echo than an urbane nod to a celebrated erotic “classic,” concluding “Theocritus thus implies the universality of love’s power: two such different women in love, with such differences of surroundings, status, and sexual orientation, nevertheless resemble one another in the symptoms of passion.”\(^75\)

Segal’s analysis of Simaetha’s “ironic” speech also extends to her treatment of Delphis. Through another “unaware” intertext, Delphis is made to share in the trickiness of Odysseus. When Delphis arrives, Simaetha relates that “the faithless man fixed his eyes upon the ground:”  
(ὀστοργος ἐπὶ χθονὸς ὅμματα πάξας [2.112]). Although Simaetha – like Gow – takes this to be a sign of modesty, the informed reader appreciates it as an intertextual echo of Antenor’s description of the “much-plotting Odysseus” (πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς) from the teichoskopía (Iliad 3.217): “[Odysseus] looked downwards and fixed his eyes upon the earth” (ὑπαὶ δὲ ἱδεσκε κατὰ χθονὸς ὅμματα πήξας).\(^76\) Delphis, like Odysseus, dupes his audience with speech that appears straightforward but actually conceals careful artistry. According to Segal, the reader is aware of

\(^{73}\) Segal (1984) 201.

\(^{74}\) Frye (1957) 40ff.

\(^{75}\) Segal (1984) 204.

\(^{76}\) Gow Idyll 2.112. ad loc. Also, for comparison, see the nurse’s description of Medea in Euripides’ Medea (26-7): [Medea] neither raising her eyes nor lifting her face from the earth’ (οὔτ’ ὃμμ’ ἐπαίρουσ’ οὔτ’ ἀπαλλάσσουσα γῆς πρόσοψιν), and later: “I am afraid that she is planning something new” (δέδοικα δ’ αὕτην μή τι βουλέσῃ νέον· [37]). There seems to be a connection between this body language and some kind of sinister plan here too.
this indictment, but the speaker is not. While the Homeric echo is interesting, Segal’s insistence on Simaetha’s ignorance of her own language is restrictive and unproductive.

At first, Segal’s analysis sounds reasonable: many commentators feel a sense of sympathy for Simaetha, and the allusive language she uses is, no doubt, in part a cause of this feeling. However, Segal’s reasons for assuming that the reader is superior to the character remain unclear. In other words, the claim that Simaetha presents details “whose import she does not herself grasp” is left entirely undefended even though Segal’s entire analysis rests upon this assumption. One might be forgiven for questioning Simaetha’s literacy, as literacy rates in the ancient world were generally low (more so for women than for men). However, there is considerable evidence from the Hellenistic period which indicates that women were reading and writing about literature. Thus, it is not out of the question that Simaetha could read, especially given that her socioeconomic status is generally taken to be at least upper-middle. Most importantly, however, if the reader asks why it is necessary that Simaetha be “ignorant” of Sappho, there is little in the text to support this.

Indeed, Simaetha presents a knowledgeable posture throughout *Idyll 2*. Although there is no explicit mention of writing or reading within the text, Simaetha certainly betrays a vast knowledge of magical ritual. Furthermore, there is the distinct possibility that some of the more obscure pieces of her magical invocations reveal a knowledge of Homer. Towards the beginning

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77 Segal (1984) 201: “The poem wins our sympathy for its protagonist by having her present details whose import she does not herself grasp.”
78 Segal (1984) 201. At p. 206 he writes “These intertextual echoes… are one-directional only: they operate for the benefit of the reader, not the speaker. The effectiveness of the patterns behind the participants’ attributes in fact depends upon their ignorance of the models which they are following.”
79 Harris (1991) 252 stresses that, among the Greek and Roman elite, “women may have been virtually as literate as men.”
of her incantation, Simaetha invokes the goddess Hecate to “make her drugs no less strong than those of Circe, Medea, or fair-haired Perimede” (φάρμακα ταύτ’ ἐρδοῦσα χερείονα μῆτε τι Κύρκας / μῆτε τι Μηδείας μῆτε ξανθῶς Περιμήδας [2.15-16]). According to the scholia on Idyll 2, “fair-haired Perimede” is the same as “fair-haired Agamede” (Iliad 11.740). This suggests that Simaetha is able to marshal extensive knowledge of epic to characterize the hoped-for strength of her magic. Moreover, Theocritus writes about moderately cultured women in a different poem. Idyll 15 depicts two women who attend an Adonis festival, where they appreciate visual art and compare a poetic performance favorably to their past experiences (15.78-146). In short, these women are able to appreciate poetic performance and evaluate it on an aesthetic level in a public (non-textual) reception context. Neither Homer nor Sappho were considered obscure, and it is more than likely that Simaetha could have been exposed to such language in a similar context, even if she could not read it herself. In fact, Simaetha herself is on her way to a similar festival at the start of Idyll 2, and we can assume that this is not her first festival.

A more productive approach to the irony in Simaetha’s song comes from a close reading of Delphis’ self-characterization, which Simaetha repeats: “For I am called easy and beautiful by all the young men” (καὶ γὰρ ἐλαφρός / καὶ καλὸς πάντεσσι μετ’ ἡμιθέοις καλεῖμαι [2.124-5]). The word ἐλαφρός stands out as uncommon in Hellenistic writing, and its definition has apparently troubled readers since antiquity. As Gow notes, a papyrus from Antinoe glosses the word as ἀστεῖος (“witty” or “sophisticated”). However, Gow suggests that “it is more probable

83 Scholia ad Theocritum (2.15 ad loc.). Hopkinson (2015) 39 offers a range of solutions: “Theocritus may have misremembered the name, or he may refer to an alternative form unknown to us or represent Simaetha as misremembering.”
84 Dover (1971) 96 seems to think that Idyll 2 takes place on the island of Kos. This is suggestive, but it is not provable and the evidence for literacy in the Hellenistic world would be applicable there as well.
85 P. Ant. For Gow’s initial reaction to the publication of the papyrus, see Gow (1930); for the discovery of the papyrus, see Johnson (1914).
that Delphis is advancing only his physical attractions.” Dover suggests a particularly epic definition (“light” or “nimble”), which would pick up on Delphis’ boast about his speed (2.114-5). Goldhill adds the possibility that this word could take on the meaning “fickle” here as well.

In light of these various definitions, how is this line to be read? Does Delphis self-characterize himself in epic terms? Is he pompously boasting? Is this self-deprecating humor? Goldhill’s “fickle” opens up the possibility of an ironic hint at Delphis’ infidelity. But at what level is the irony present? Perhaps the other young men call Delphis fickle and he repeats it without realizing the double entendre. Or perhaps Delphis is dropping hints at his plan to abandon Simaetha from the start. Or is it the poet who slips a “self-undercutting and self-fulfilling remark” into Delphis’ mouth? Goldhill frames the interpretative issue nicely: “from whose voice does ἐλαφρός take its significance?” In other words, the uncertainty of the source of the irony forces us to read the text from the perspective of a particular voice (poet, speaker or narrator). This kind of observation is more productive because it introduces the theme of uncertainty into the song of love without requiring that the reader make assumptions about the “ignorance” of a character.

The ending of the poem has proven to be its most contentious portion, precisely because of the “ironic distance” that many scholars have read between Simaetha’s speech and its deeper meaning. Because these readers unjustly question Simaetha’s ability to grasp the meaning of her own speech, they are forced to question whether she really does have the resolve to bear her desire at the end of the poem. Interpretation has focused on the end of Simaetha’s song: “I will bear my desire as I have endured it” (ἐγὼ δ’ οἰσῶ τὸν ἐμὸν πόθον ὀσπερ ὑπέσταν [2.164]). For

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86 Gow. Idyll 2.124. ad loc.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
Hopkinson, these lines constitute resignation, for Dover, descent “into darkness and melancholy.” Hopkinson is especially committed to the ironizing view that robs Simaetha’s speech of its effectiveness. He states that “by the end of the poem Simaetha has achieved only resignation, which we feel will be short-lived. She still wants Delphis, and we know that he will not come again.” Hopkinson’s assertion raises many questions, the most pressing of which is epistemological: how do we know that Delphis will never come again and that she only achieves resignation? Such a view is only tenable, if we do not trust Simaetha to truthfully relate her own feelings and resolve. These readings, which view Simaetha’s self-expression as a reference to a mere moment of fleeting resignation and descent into melancholy do damage to Simaetha’s ability, as a woman, to express and mitigate her own emotional turmoil. As my analysis in part one has attempted to show, there are many good reasons for reading Simaetha’s closing lines as a change in perspective and motive. The temporal variation of line 164, which incorporates both the future and the past, suggests a new perspective on time – one that incorporates both Simaetha’s acceptance of the past and her resolve for the future. There is no indication of the fleeting aspect of this statement, as Hopkinson suggests, so long as we trust Simaetha to tell us what she is feeling.

**Conclusion.**

As I hope the above analysis has shown, Simaetha’s song depicts her own journey from unsuspecting contentment to devastating lovesickness. However, by the end of her song, there seems to be a positive change in the way that Simaetha conceptualizes her own feelings, and by the end of her poem, she exhibits a feeling of hopefulness and personal resolve. As I have

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90 Hopkinson (1988) 156, Dover (1971) 94. Ironically, Segal (1985) 43 argues that these lines suggest “lucidity, calm, mastery of passion.” But this is an outlying position, which does not sit easily with his other views on this work.

91 Hopkinson (1988) 156 (my emphasis).
argued, this positive change in feeling is portrayed as an effect of the song that she sings. This song, like the magical incantation that she performs at the beginning of the poem, is set up as a substitute for practical action such as direct confrontation with the source of her sorrow, Delphis. Her song is constructed as a product of the here and now, in opposition to the later and away of her proposed meeting with Delphis. Yet this song in the here and now of the poem has powerful consequences for her own understanding of herself: by the end of the song, Simaetha orients her resolve to both the past and the future as well. If we do trust Simaetha to tell us what she is feeling and to do so in a way that echoes the Greek literary tradition, what is to stop us from continuing to read Sappho with Simaetha: “but all can be endured” (ἀλλὰ πᾶν τὸλματον [fr.31.17])?
The beginning of Theocritus’ *Idyll* 13 imparts a reassuring message to the reader through another address to the poet’s friend Nicias: we are not alone, the pain that we feel as a result of *eros* is universal. This statement not only frames *Idyll* 13, a poem about the *eros* of Heracles for his beloved Hylas, but also serves as a programmatic link to the ubiquitous theme of love within the *Idylls*. This thesis has addressed Theocritus’ general discourse of *eros* through the ways in which *Idylls* 2 and 11 depict their characters’ songs as an alternative means of alleviation of lovesickness. Both Simaetha and Polyphemus confront the madness of *eros* within their songs. By reformulating their relationships between themselves, their bodies, their memories, and their objects of desire, they create a new perspective which leads to a renewed sense of calm and resolve.

But Theocritus’ claim to universality does not only apply to the internal world of his poetry. Nicias, the addressee of *Idylls* 11 and 13, was a real-life doctor and poet from the island of Kos. Thus, the phrase “not for us alone” applies to the reader just as much as the character. The same, of course, can be said of Theocritus’ address to Nicias at the opening of *Idyll* 11:

“Not for us alone, as we used to think, Nicias, was Eros begotten by whichever of the gods was his father. Beautiful things do not appear for us first, we who are mortals do not perceive the morrow.”

“Οὐχ ἀμῖν τὸν Ἐρωτα μόνοις ἔτεχ’, ὡς ἐδοκεῖμες, 
Νικία, ὅτι τοῦτο θεόν ποικα τέκνον ἔγεντο· 
οὐχ ἀμῖν τὰ καλὰ πράτοις καλὰ φαίνεται ἣμεν, 
οἱ θνατοὶ πελόμεσθα, τὸ δ’ αὔριον οὐκ ἑσορῶμες; (*Id.* 13.1-4)
these statements to a real-world figure, Theocritus invites the reader to bring her own experiences of *eros* to reading the *Idyllums*.

By setting up his characters’ songs as “replacements for” and “additions to” other forms of self-care, Theocritus extends a further invitation to reflect on the means by which readers alleviate the symptoms of their own lovesickness. Although Theocritus’ statement that there is “no cure for love other than the Muses” seems to limit the available means for ameliorating *eros*, the *Idylls* are full of possible remedies. Medication (11), magic (2 and 7), and military service (14) are all offered as examples of remedies for *eros*. However, in *Idyll* 2 and 11, the characters’ songs serve as a replacement for and an addition to magic and medication respectively. In other words, the practice of singing not only relieves the symptoms of desire, but also brings about a change in perspective. Through an address to a real person (Nicias), Theocritus suggests the universal relevance of song as a remedy for the symptoms of lovesickness. In this way, these depictions of singing for the cure can be read as a metapoetic statement on the pragmatic power of poetry to change the reader. As such, they function as one important but previously neglected aspect of the *Idylls*’ meditation on desire.
Bibliography


