CHAPTER SIX

THEOCRITUS

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Introduction. Time awareness in Theocritus' poetry

Thinking of the world of Theocritean *Idyll*, our first impression may be that it is one in which the concept of time must be of little or no account.¹ Especially the so-called *bucolic* poems, which established Theocritus' name as a canonical author, convey the idea of remote and endless summer afternoons, the typical time of day for bucolic singing (*Idylls* 1, 6 and 7) when 'Pan is resting' (1.15–16) and even 'the lizard sleeps in the stone walls' (7.21–22).

When an indication is given as to the relative time in which the narrative should be placed, it is often vague: 'once upon a time' (*ēs khronos hanika*, 7.1; *pote*, 6.2; 18.1).² These indications may refer both to a remote mythical past (as in *Idyll* 18, describing the wedding of Helen) and to a more recent past, for example within the lifetime of the internal narrator (*Id.* 7, where Simichidas is reminiscing). Although this vagueness in itself may not be surprising, it gains relief through the peculiar recurrence of identical names in a number of the *Idylls*. So we may ask: does *Idyll* 6 feature the *mythical* cowherd Daphnis (about whom Thyrsis sings in *Idyll* 1) or a *contemporary* cowherd, who just happens to be called Daphnis?³ It seems that the ambiguity serves to underline the a-temporality of the bucolic world as represented in

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¹ Cf. Segal 1981: 1: 'pastoral's tendency to exclude the temporal dimension'; Stanzel 1995: 38–43; Goldhill 1991: 245–246.

² There are no references to relative time in the pastoral mimes without a narrative frame, that is, 1, 3, 4, 5, 10. In the absence of references to contemporary political events in these poems, they are impossible to date.

³ Cf. on this Wilamowitz 1906: 136; Ott 1969: 121; Lawall 1967: 69; Dover 1971: 140; Bernsdorff 1994; Stanzel 1995: 39–40. This in turn entails the question of whether Daphnis in 6 is supposed to be singing about the Cyclops Polyphemus as a contemporary or as a figure from the mythical past; cf. Hunter 1999: 245. The same applies to Comatas in *Idyll* 5 and 7; cf. E.A. Schmidt 1987: 88.

Theocritus' *Idylls*: the countryside and the pursuits of the herdsmen are always the same.⁴ In Homer, by contrast, the difference between men living in the heroic past and 'men who live now' is signposted explicitly (→ Homer).

The fact, furthermore, that the herdsmen in the poems never seem particularly pressed for time, nor engage much in what may reasonably be termed 'action', but leisurely saunter along with their cattle or seek shelter from the heat in the shade of the nearest tamarisk, adds to this mood of dreamy timelessness.⁵ The general impression that is consciously created in the bucolic *Idylls*, then, is one of a world in which time matters little. Only when love is involved do Theocritean characters all of a sudden display an acute awareness of time, for example when Simaetha mentions that her lover has not visited her 'for eleven days' (2.4).⁶

But if time may not be of prime importance to the characters, the narrator Theocritus is certainly interested in experimenting with narrative time. It would be impossible to describe *the* single Theocritean way of dealing with time, since the corpus consists of a wide-ranging collection of poems which display a considerable variety in narrative form (purely narrative, mimetic, or mimetic with a narrative frame).⁷ In this chapter, some of the more characteristic and striking instances of Theocritean handling of time will be discussed.⁸

⁴ The point that human nature does not change is explicitly made in the opening of *Idyll* 13 (1–3): 'Love was not born for us alone, Nicias ... we are not the first to consider beautiful things beautiful'. This is illustrated by the tale (placed in heroic times) of Heracles' love for Hylas. Cf. also *Id.* 11.

⁵ Cf. Rosenmeyer 1969: 65–98 on the *otium* characteristic of pastoral poetry. Strootman 2007: 206 tentatively suggests that the leisure of Theocritus' fictive herdsmen may be a reflection of the *otium* of the elite who read about them.

⁶ A characteristic aspect of the time awareness of many of Theocritus' characters is their reckoning of time by the days since they first/last saw their beloved. (*Id.* 2.4; 10.12; 11.25–26; 12.1–2; 14.44–47; 30.2).

⁷ Cf. *SAGN* 1:83, 94 on the many narrative forms represented in the Theocritean corpus.

⁸ The 'Theocritean corpus' refers to all the *Idylls* handed down to us under the name of Theocritus. Some of the *Idylls* (8, 9, 19, 20, 21, 23, 25, 27) are generally considered spurious. The epigrams are not discussed, as they do not contain much narrative material.

The time span of the narratives

The time span of the mimetic idylls (*Idylls* 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 14 and 15) is usually short. The same is true for mimes embedded in a narrative frame, in which an external narrator sketches the setting (*Idylls* 6, [8], [9], 11 and 18). No events to speak of happen in these short narrative frames.

Many of the poems, however, contain embedded narratives that reach beyond the time span of the main story (e.g. in *Idylls* 1, 2, 11 and 14). Thus in 14 the time span of the poem itself is only a brief conversation; but in it one of the speakers outlines the history of the estrangement from his ex-sweetheart, starting at a point ‘two months minus two days’ before the actual conversation, as he conscientiously calculates (14.44–47). We find something similar in the narrative *Idyll* [25]. The time span of the poem encompasses the meeting of Heracles with an old man who accompanies him to the stables of Augeas, his inspection of the cattle and a walk to the palace with the son of Augeas, all in all comprising a couple of hours. However, the larger part of the poem consists of a speech, in which Heracles recalls in detail how he once, at some point in the past, slew the Nemean lion (192–282).

The narrative idylls may comprise variable time spans. *Idyll* 22 (*Dioscouri*) contains two separate narratives of exploits of the Dioscouri in one poem (27–134, 135–211); it is not indicated what the relative chronology of the events told in the two narratives is. They both comprise events of one day. A longer time span is covered in 13 (*Hylas*) and 24 (*Heracliscus*). The latter poem (*Heracliscus*) can be divided into three parts: 1–63 recount the events of a single night; 64–102 relate a conversation between Alcmena and Tiresias on the morrow of that same night, in which the seer predicts Heracles’ future; and 103–140 (where the manuscript breaks off) tell of Heracles’ childhood.

In 13, the first event, strictly speaking, is found in the relative clause ‘Heracles, who withstood the fierce lion’ (13.6), alluding to the first of Heracles’ twelve labours. This might however also be called a heterodiegetic analepsis, if we prefer to consider the main story we are dealing with here to be that of the Argonautic expedition, rather than that of Heracles’ exploits.⁹ Chronologically the last events in the narrative (72–75) are the establishment of Hylas’ immortality (which consti-

⁹ We may compare the reference to the birth of Dionysus in 26.33–34 (*Maenads or Bacchantes*).

tutes a kind of never-ending future; → Homeric hymns) and Heracles' arrival in Colchis on foot. In between (25–71), the narrator relates how Heracles lost his beloved Hylas and went searching for him while the Argo departed, events that span only a couple of hours.

Modes of narration: subsequent, simultaneous and prior

As in most Greek literary genres, by far the most frequent form of narration in the *Idylls* is subsequent narration. Theocritus does display a certain fondness for simultaneous iterative narration. A first example is found in 17.18–33 (*Encomium of Ptolemy*), the description of a banquet on Olympus, and later in 77–116.¹⁰ The latter passage glorifies the enduring accomplishments of the ruler: the political and economic situation of Egypt under Ptolemy Philadelphus. This is achieved by bringing the marvels of Egypt and the martial prowess of its king before our eyes in detail, for example in:

Countless countries, and countless tribes of men therein, with the aid of rain from heaven, bring their crops to ripeness ..., but none is so prolific as the plains of Egypt when the overflowing Nile soaks and breaks up the soil, nor has any so many towns of folk skilled to labour. ... And of all Lord Ptolemy is king. Yes, and of Phoenicia he takes himself a part [*apotemmetai*]¹¹ [etc.] ... the best ships that sail are his ... about him gather horsemen and shielded warriors in host, harnessed in flashing bronze.¹²

(77–94)

The praise of the king is reminiscent of the way victorious athletes and rulers are honoured in Pindar's (→) victory odes, or of the way in which

¹⁰ Cf. also 22.8–22 (*Dioscuri*); 16.8–12, description of the poet's Graces, always returning home moodily, when they have been sent out to no avail. The joke here is that these Graces are goddesses and personifications of Theocritus' poems at the same time. It is therefore fitting and ironic at the same time that this is a case of simultaneous iterative narrative: the ways of goddesses are usually unchangeable, and Theocritus' poetry will, he presupposes, never find a patron ...

¹¹ It is hard to make out the precise nuance of the present tense here. Theoretically, it could be singulative narrative in the historic present (Ptolemy has in the past encroached on the borders, that is, was engaged in warfare). Gow 1952: II 339 is in doubt whether an ongoing war is being described (i.e. 'he cuts off') or whether this is a description of pacified regions (i.e. 'he has cut off'). Hunter 2003: ad loc. resists the idea of drawing chronological conclusions regarding Ptolemaic warfare from the passage and remarks: 'that Philadelphus *is cutting slices off* ... merely shows that he is acting as a proper warrior-king should'. This points to an iterative reading of the form.

¹² All translations are adaptations from Gow 1952.

deities are sung of in the Homeric hymns (→),¹³ not accidentally the two genres with which this poem is often compared. The marvels of the land of Egypt, on the other hand, might be related to the geographical digressions (usually in the present tense) found in historiography. The *simultaneous iterative* narration, with its use of the present tense, gives the impression—without spelling it out—that what is presented is an unchangeable, everlasting situation.

In the same poem, the simultaneous iterative narration of 18–33 indeed describes such an everlasting situation unambiguously. Theocritus here relates how Ptolemy Soter is sitting on Olympus with on the one hand his ancestor Heracles and on the other Alexander the Great, and how the two minor godheads help Heracles whenever he returns drunk from his banquet to the chamber of his wife Hebe (note the iterative optative *ioi* in 28 and the gnomic aorist *edōken* in 30).

Idylls 14 and 15 also contain stretches of simultaneous narration. In 14.46–49 Aeschinas describes the present behaviour of his ex-sweet-heart Cynisca; for example, ‘Now Lycus is everything to her, and she keeps her door open for him at night’ (47).

In *Idyll* 16 (*Graces* or *Hiero*), we find a more complicated case of simultaneous narrative. The narrator presents himself as trying to find a patron for his poetry. He hopes Hiero II, tyrant of Syracuse, will fulfill this position, and therefore addresses him as follows:

Not yet are the heavens wearied of bringing around the months and years; often still shall the steeds set the wheel of Day in motion. That man shall be who shall have need of me for his poet when he has done such deeds as great Achilles wrought or dread Aias ... Already the Syracusans grip their spears by the middle and charge their arms with shields of wicker, while Hiero in their midst girds himself like the heroes of old with crest of horsehair shadowing his helmet. (72–81)

(A long prayer for the defeat of the Phoenicians and the establishment of peace on Sicily follows, 82–100.) The reason why *Idyll* 16 predominantly expresses wishes for the future instead of praising laudable accomplishments has been sought in the fact that Hiero had not yet done anything praiseworthy at the moment Theocritus chose to write him an encomium—if we are to take the poem literally, this encomium

¹³ Of course, the Homeric hymns describe an everlasting state (gods are immortal); this is not what Theocritus *explicitly* claims for Philadelphus, although he obviously tries to create the impression of everlastingness, cf. the opening lines, juxtaposing Ptolemy to heroes and gods (1–8); and the deification of Philadelphus’ parents (13–52; 121–125).

was in fact unsolicited.¹⁴ Yet, after a short introduction, which consists of prior narration (72–75), lines 76–81 employ simultaneous narration, as if Hiero's warfare were already in full swing. The following prayer for peace on Sicily, which is neither exactly a prediction nor, obviously, a narrative, manages to capture exactly the same suggestive tone.

The third form of narration, *prior* narration, is sparingly used. There is, however, one intriguing case: the song of Lycidas in 7.52–89 (*Thalysia*). In this embedded narrative the goatherd-singer Lycidas pictures to himself the day when the boy he loves, Ageanax, will depart:¹⁵

Fair voyage to Mitylene shall Ageanax have [*essetai*] ... if he saves Lycidas from the burning of Aphrodite [*rusetai*, prospective subjunctive]. (52–56)

He then describes in detail what he himself will do:

And I on that day will wreath my brows with anise ... and draw from the bowl of Pteleatic wine as I lie by the fire ... and will drink at my ease remembering Ageanax ... (63–66)

The paradoxical effect of *reminiscing* about Ageanax in the future tense is one of distancing, almost of acquiescing in advance in the absence of Ageanax.

Prolepsis and analepsis

Straightforward prolepsis is only sparingly used throughout the *Idylls*. An instance is the external actorial prolepsis made by Tiresias concerning Heracles, his life, death, and apotheosis (24.72–100). We do find instances of subtle foreshadowing, for example in 13.49–53, where it is couched in a comparison. Hylas falls into the spring of the Nymphs:

And headlong into the dark pool he fell as when some flaming star falls from the heavens headlong in the sea, and some sailor cries to his comrades, 'Loosen your tackle, my boys, it is a sailing breeze'.¹⁶

(13.49–53)

This passage appears to be foreshadowing the actual departure of the Argo (68–70), leaving Heracles behind, still searching for Hylas

¹⁴ So Gow 1952: II 305–307; F.T. Griffiths 1979: 12–16; but contrast Hunter 1996: 77–78.

¹⁵ Hunter 1999: 167 following Puelma 1960 and Williams 1971 (Lycidas is really the god Apollo in disguise) suggest that Lycidas is prophesying here.

¹⁶ Cf. van Erp Taalman Kip 1991: 116; Hunter 1999: 281.

(→ Homer, → Apollonius). Another variant is the playful foreshadowing of future events known to the audience in *Idyll* 11 (*Cyclops*), in which we see young Polyphemus *before* the events of *Odyssey* 9.¹⁷ These allusions to the future are not inserted into the text of the external omniscient narrator (11.1–18 and 80–81), but are, ironically enough, *evoked* by certain utterances of the character Polyphemus, who is of course pathetically unaware of his future. In this way, they get the character of so-called ‘dramatic irony’ (→ Apollonius). Polyphemus, in love with Galatea, refers to his single eye in a way deliberately calculated to remind the reader through intertextual hints of his blinding by Odysseus in *Odyssey* 9. So in 11.50–53:

But if it is myself that seem too shaggy to you, I have oak-logs and undying fire beneath the ash, and you may burn my soul, and my one eye too, than which nothing is dearer to me.¹⁸ (11.50–53)

Sometimes we find no prolepsis where it might be expected, as in 18 (*Epithalamium of Helen*), which recounts the songs sung at the wedding of Menelaus and Helena. An external narrator introduces the song of the Spartan maidens in lines 1–8.¹⁹ The wishes then expressed by the maidens for the future happiness and eternal mutual love of the couple in lines 50–53 would seem to clash poignantly with the fated outcome of this notoriously unhappy marriage, as told in, for example, the *Iliad* and Euripides’ *Hecuba* and *Troades*. Alternatively, we might think of the other version as told in the *Helen* of Euripides, or the *Palinode* of Stesichorus, in which Helen was *not* unfaithful to Menelaus, but was abducted to Egypt, while a phantom-Helen stayed at Troy. Which of these two outcomes is here to be presupposed?²⁰ It might just

¹⁷ His youth is explicitly referred to in lines 8–9: ‘When, with the down new on his lips and temples, he was in love with Galatea’. This reference probably has a double intention: to explain the youthful gaucheness of the Cyclops in the affairs of the heart, and to make clear that this episode is taking place before the famous meeting of *Odyssey* 9.

¹⁸ Further allusions to this episode in his later life: 61–62, his wish that some stranger might arrive by ship in order to teach him how to swim; 79 (‘It’s plain that on land I too am somebody’—*tis phainomai ēmen*), perhaps an allusion to Odysseus’ false name *Outis* (Nobody) in *Odyssey* 9.408; cf. Hunter 1999: 242.

¹⁹ There is one reference in the frame to events before the wedding. This is found in lines 16–18 (the chorus speaking): ‘Menelaus alone of all princes who came to Sparta was awarded the daughter of Zeus as bride’.

²⁰ The poem may have been written to celebrate the wedding of Arsinoe and Philadelphus (F.T. Griffiths 1979: 86–91). If so, reference to a negative outcome of the marriage would have had to be carefully avoided. In view of Helen’s Egyptian

be that Theocritus was interested in the fact that at this point in the story, every ending was theoretically still possible. There are no hints in the text foreshadowing the great upheaval this marriage was eventually going to cause. Thus, the suppression of the external prolepsis arguably dramatizes the impossibility for ordinary human beings to foresee the future, but also points to the possible variants of the myth. Clearly, Theocritus relishes exploiting the ironic or comic potential inherent in ‘before the famous story’-episodes of myth, or prequels. He makes use of this potential by the insertion of what might be called intertextual prolepsis or prolepsis based on the narratees’ prior knowledge and, conversely, by leaving out an expected prolepsis. The same techniques are found in Apollonius (→); they seem typically Hellenistic.

Yet another variant of external prolepsis is found when the narratees are actually left in the dark as to whether or not what a character says will come true, while the odds against are high. An example is Simaetha’s prediction that she will win back her lover:

Now with my love magic will I bind him, but if he will vex me still, so help me the Fates, he shall beat upon the gates of Hades, such evil drugs, I vow, I keep for him in my box, lore that I learned, o mistress, from an Assyrian stranger. Farewell, now Lady Moon, and turn your steeds towards the Ocean. And I will bear my longing as until now I have endured it. (159–164)

To this prospect can be added her assertion in lines 8–9: ‘Tomorrow I will go to Timagetus’ wrestling-school to see him and will reproach him that he treats me so’. Evidently, this leaves room for four alternative endings of the affair: either (1) Simaetha will go and scold Delphis at the gymnasium; or (2) he will succumb to the magic of her drugs, and love her again; or (3) he will not, and she will try to poison him; or (4) she will just ‘endure her longing as she has done until now’, that is, do nothing but indulge in melodramatic expressions of self-pity. Judging by what we have witnessed so far, the choice will probably be between the first and the last alternative. Although the narratees in this case have no objective information about events and only hear Simaetha’s subjective

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connection, the popularity of the cult of chaste Helen (cf. Hdt. 2.112) there and the assimilation of Arsinoe with Helen in *Idyll* 15.111, such a positive conception of Helen is not at all unlikely (cf. Call. *Pannyichis* fr. 227 Pf.). Contrast Konstan 1979: the disparity between the divine Helen and the human, slow-witted Menelaus foreshadows the unhappy outcome of the marriage. In some respects, *Idyll* 18 is reminiscent of Sappho 44 Voigt (the wedding of Hector and Andromache), which also excludes references to future tragedy, focusing on the happy present.

account, the net result is still that they can form a clear picture of the eventual outcome, which is something that is beyond Simaetha's grasp.²¹

Analepsis is much more frequently used, mostly to sketch (usually briefly) what went before, in order to explain the current situation (completing external analepsis) to the narratees. Thus, Simaetha's narrative (2.64–158) is one long analepsis, explaining her statement in lines 2–6:

... I will bind a spell upon my lover, so hard to me. For eleven days, he has not even visited me, the wretch, and knows not so much whether I am dead or alive. (2–6)

After some hocus-pocus and prayers to Hecate to win back Delphis' love (10–63), she proceeds to unravel the story of how she has ended up in the present situation. She starts with the *aporia*-topos:

Now that I am alone, from what point shall I lament my love? From where shall I begin? Who brought this curse upon me?²² (64–65)

She then actually goes back in time a bit too far, describing in great detail irrelevant facts about the neighbour who invited her and a friend who lent her a wrap when she went out to see the parade of Artemis (66–76). At the same time, of course, this apparently irrelevant excursus provides us with valuable information both about Simaetha's social environment (not too elevated) and her intellectual capacities (not too great).

A comparable characterizing use of actorial analepsis is found in Aeschinas' narrative in *Idyll* 14.12–55. In his account of the last occasion on which he saw Cynisca, his ex-sweetheart, he relates how somebody mentioned a certain 'Lycus', Cynisca's present lover:

There is this Lycus, it's Lycus, the son of Labes, the neighbour, a tall soft-skinned fellow that many think handsome. It was for him, that precious passion that had Cynisca on the grill. The thing had come to my ears one day, just on the quiet, but I never looked into it ... (24–28)

Judging by this little story about Lycus, Aeschinas could have spotted trouble coming long ago. His inability to do so illustrates his disinterest for Cynisca's feelings, which probably contributed to the break-up, and is comically at odds with his sentimental moping for her loss.

²¹ Cf. 11.77–79, Polyphemus asserting that he can get any girl he wants.

²² For this topos see also 17.8–12 and *SAGN* 1; index s.v. 'narratorial devices'.

A final topic related to order concerns the handling of simultaneous events. In *Idyll* 13, when Hylas has fallen into the spring and is being comforted by the nymphs (13.53–54), Heracles is already worried and searching for him (13.55–57; *men ... de...*); while he is doing so, the Argo departs (13.68–71; *gemen*). The synchronization underlines the unheroic nature of Heracles' behaviour: while looking for his lover, he 'misses the boat'. In *Idyll* 24, Amphitryo is alerted by Alcmena to the weird phosphorescence caused by the snakes sent by Hera, and prepares to intervene (34–52), while baby Heracles has already strangled the monsters (23–32). Here, the synchronization serves to emphasize Heracles' precocious powers, and independence.

Ellipsis and allusive narrative

Ellipsis is employed to some effect by Theocritus. An intriguing use is found in *Idyll* 7 (*Thalysia*). The internal primary narrator Simichidas recounts his meeting with the goatherd Lycidas and their exchange of bucolic song. Throughout this narrative, temporal ellipses seem to occur that create the enigmatic atmosphere clinging to Lycidas. Thus, when the two meet (line 21), they call each other by their respective names (20, 27). Yet, we have not yet heard how they became acquainted. Have they ever met before, or have they just introduced themselves to each other? The narrator does not tell us anything on these points.²³ The air of mystery caused by the ellipsis may well be deliberate (on the part of Theocritus), and has led to much speculation about the true identity of Lycidas.²⁴

Related in effect is the remarkable use of temporal ellipsis or allusive narration in 1.65–142, Thyrsis' song about Daphnis.²⁵ The embedded narrative tells us about Daphnis' wasting away and death while animals and men mourn him, and gods come to enquire into the cause of his

²³ Cf. Hunter 1999: 155: 'Whether the narrator's information about [Lycidas] is to be understood as something Simichidas had at the time, or something he subsequently acquired, is left mysterious'.

²⁴ Cf. Stanzel 1995: 35–36. For the idea that Lycidas is Apollo see e.g. Puelma 1960; Williams 1971; Hunter 1999: 167.

²⁵ On the elusiveness of the story of Daphnis, and the ancient *testimonia* concerning it, see Hunter 1999: 63–68, with bibliography. The myth of Daphnis is found in e.g. Ael. *VH* 10.18 and D.S. 4.84. This local Sicilian myth presumably would not have been widely known to Theocritus' contemporaries and, at any rate, the version we find here does *not* fit the traditional story.

suffering and offer commiseration or comment upon it. The narrator, Thyrsis, omniscient and external to the narrative he recounts, does *not* explain *why* Daphnis is suffering. There is no analepsis to relate what has caused the situation that is narrated in the song; it is passed over in silence. The narratees must base their guesses on the fragmentary, and perhaps unreliable, information that can be gathered from the remarks of Daphnis' visitors. Yet, this is not enough to form a consistent *fabula*. It has been a scholarly challenge to reconstruct the 'true' story of Daphnis' suffering and death from ancient *testimonia*. This approach starts from the assumption that there was a well-known myth, which is alluded to here, leaving it to the narratees to fill in the gaps, a practice we find in the victory odes of Pindar and Bacchylides. However, as recent critics have argued, it is possible that what we find here is a *pastiche* of this kind of allusive narrative. In reality, the primary narratees would *not* be able to piece together a complete *fabula*—even if the secondary narratee in the *Idyll* itself, the goatherd, does appear to be familiar with it. In other words, the primary narratees are *meant* to be tantalized by the elusive details of Daphnis' story.²⁶ It looks as if the story starts *in medias res*, but in reality Thyrsis completely leaves out the 'what went before'-part, and leaves the primary narratees with an incomplete *story*.

Other forms of rhythm

In the mimetic *Idylls* the *fabula*-time and *story*-time naturally coincide, and we are dealing with scenes. In narratives that are embedded in such *Idylls*, we may find effective variations in rhythm. Thus, the change of tack in the narrative is psychologically revealing in Simaetha's account of her love affair with Delphis (*Idyll* 2). The day she meets Delphis is described with elaborate detail in 66–80 (scenic). A dramatic acceleration follows as Simaetha breathlessly emphasizes the disastrous speed with which she fell in love with Delphis (82–83): 'The instant I saw him, madness seized me, my poor heart was set aflame, and my looks wasted away'. This is followed by an account of the effects of her lovesickness (85–92; summary, comprising ten days). She finally decides to tell her maid what is ailing her (94–102; scene, emphasized because

²⁶ Hunter 1999: 62–63; Goldhill 1991: 142.

it forms a turning point in her story). The maid goes to fetch Delphis, and he *immediately* arrives (102–104; the acceleration underlines Delphis' eagerness). Simaetha's instant emotional and physical reaction to this is once more described in a detailed way (105–110; slowing down). Delphis embarks upon a lengthy speech, repeated verbatim (111–137; scene; Simaetha, recalling the scene, has apparently absorbed every single word Delphis said). The lovers then yield to their desires (140–143): 'And quickly body warmed to body and faces burned hotter than before, and sweetly we whispered. And to tell you no long story, dear moon, all was accomplished, and we both came to our desire.' This (slightly elliptic) summary underlines Simaetha's coyness,²⁷ which is strangely at odds with the fact that it is *she* who invited Delphis (whom she has only glimpsed in the street) to her house in the first place and the eagerness with which she yields to his proposals. In this way she glosses over her own part in the proceedings, while earlier spending a lot of time on Delphis' first speech to her. She plainly tries to exonerate herself. The rest of the relationship is briefly summarized in a single line (144): 'and he had no fault to find with me until yesterday, nor I with him', accentuating the unexpectedness for Simaetha of the troubles that followed. In the remaining lines, Simaetha relates what happened today (she has heard Delphis is unfaithful; 145–158; scene), announces her plans for the future (159–166; summary), and takes leave of the Moon, to whom she has been addressing her tale. This variation of narrative rhythm is a psychologically realistic tool, used to characterize Simaetha in her plight.

In the narrative *Idyll* 22 (*Dioscuri*), which all commentators agree has a distinct hymnic flavour, we also find a varied use of rhythm, reminiscent of Pindar (→). The *Idyll* starts out with a passage employing simultaneous iterative narrative (hymning the Dioscuri, the narrator wonders which of the two heroes he will hymn first, 1–26); next, in a summary, the voyage of the Argo is recounted until the moment the Dioscuri land in the country of the Bebrycians (27–29). Between 30–36 the rhythm of the narrative gradually slows down: the Argonauts debark and prepare their camp; Castor and Polydeuces wander off into the woods to investigate the surroundings. In 37 they find a spring, which is described extensively in no less than seven lines (37–43; pause). By this beautiful spring a hideous man is seated, Amycus, who is

²⁷ Not Theocritus' own sense of decorum, cf. 4.58–59; 5.41–43.

again described in seven lines (44–52; pause). The narratees are invited mentally to picture the spot and the man.²⁸ At the same time the slowing down, the pause and the contrast between the surroundings and the man create suspense: what will happen next?

The poet then brings the ‘mental picture’ evoked by the elaborate description of the spring and Amycus to life: Amycus and Polydeuces engage in a stichomythic dialogue, extremely unusual in hymn, taking up over thirty lines (scene). Amycus refuses to let the Argonauts draw water from his spring, unless Polydeuces will engage with him in a boxing match. After this conversation, five lines are taken up to tell how both parties summon their cronies (75–79; acceleration). Next a detailed—and rather gory—account is given of the boxing match (80–136; scene), which is interrupted at 115–117 by an address to the Muse by the narrator asking how Polydeuces laid low Amycus. The final phase of the fight at 118–136 is once more scenic.²⁹

Frequency

As in most narrative, the default form of frequency is the singulative one. Of the other forms of frequency, *repetition* is used sparingly in Theocritus, which is not surprising as we are dealing with relatively short poems. An effective example can however be found in *Idyll* 2, where Simaetha relates the same event three times, each time with a slightly different emphasis. First she reveals that it has been some time since she last saw Delphis, and what the presumable reason for this is:

For eleven days now he has not even visited me, the wretch, and knows not so much as whether I am dead or alive. No, he has not once knocked on my door, so cruel is he. Surely Eros and Aphrodite have turned his fickle heart elsewhere. (4–7)

Later, in line 144, she states: ‘He found no fault with me, nor I with him, until yesterday’. This seems a strange thing to say, when the narratees know that she has not seen Delphis for eleven days nor, presumably, heard from him. This would surely be a reason to find fault with him? I assume that this was self-delusion to make herself

²⁸ For comparable descriptions of *loci amoeni*, cf. 13.39–42, the spring of the Nymphs (similar in function, that is, pause, meaning suspense and pictorial effect), and 7.135–146, no pause, but only a (overly) picturesque sketch of a bucolic pleasanse.

²⁹ The second half of the poem displays a similar rhythmic pattern; cf. also *Id.* 13.

believe that ‘until yesterday’, when she was told that Delphis was in love with another (149–154), everything was fine. Now that she has heard this, she can no longer deny the true nature of her situation, and interprets the eleven days of absence rather differently (157–158): ‘But now eleven days are gone since I have so much as seen him. Must he not have some other delight, and have forgotten me?’ Simaetha’s pathetic mulling over the question why Delphis has not come to see her for eleven days and trying to tell herself that this was really only normal is once more psychologically convincing.

Iterative narration is used, apart from the hymn-like cases already discussed, mainly in passages that characterize protagonists, describing typical actions. Thus, it is found in 11.10–18, recounting the behaviour of Polyphemus in love:³⁰

And he did not love with apples or roses or lovelocks, but with downright frenzy, counting all else but trifles. Often [*pollaki*] would his sheep come of their own accord back from the green pastures to the fold while he, alone upon the wrack-strewn shore, would waste away with love as he sang of Galatea from the dawn, having deep beneath his breast an angry wound which the shaft of the mighty Cyprian goddess had planted in his heart. Yet, he found the remedy, and seated on some high rock he gazed seaward and sang thus ...

(11.10–18)

When we compare the ending ‘Thus Polyphemus shepherded (*epoimainen*, note the imperfect) his love’ (81), we may conclude that the song we have just read is only a sample of the many love songs Polyphemus may be supposed to have sung.

Conclusions

Though, by and large, Theocritean characters appear not to be interested in time, except when they are suffering from love, the narrator Theocritus is clearly experimenting with forms of temporality, a characteristic aligning him with his Hellenistic contemporaries Lycophron, Apollonius (→) and Callimachus (→), and looking back to the practice of predecessors like Pindar (→) and Bacchylides (→). He uses the devices available to him to achieve very different effects, depending

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³⁰ Cf. 13.8–15: the way Heracles’ love for Hylas expressed itself; 24.135–140: eating and dressing habits of young Heracles; simultaneous iterative narrative in 14.46–49: present behaviour of Cynisca.

entirely on the context. Thus, prior narration expresses the melancholy detachment of a lover in 7, and predictions by a seer in 24; combined with simultaneous narration, it is employed for encomiastic purposes in 16. Simultaneous iterative narration is found in hymn-like contexts, whereas in other cases it describes situations taking place in the present of the narrator (14; 15).

In Theocritus' employment of analepsis and prolepsis, we may note the omission of explicit prolepsis to the conclusions of well-known myths (11; 18), and omission of analepsis in an unknown, and possibly incomplete myth, to create a tantalizing and allusive narrative (1, song of Thyrsis). Conversely, Theocritus makes primary narrators construct their stories in such a way as to enable the narratees to imagine the objective facts beyond the presentation by the narrators (2; 14).

The potential of rhythm is fully exploited to characterize the narrator Simaetha in 2, while in 22 the change of tack is reminiscent of Pindaric practice. We find a decided penchant for *descriptive pause* in what we might call *ekphrastic* narrative (13; 22).

Repetition and iterative narrative are both, in different ways, used to characterize characters. In Simaetha's mouth repetition becomes a recognizable psychological trait, whereas in 11 the iterative narrative of the Cyclops' behaviour gives relief to the hopeless incurability of his impossible longing for Galatea.