

## ABSTRACT

### *An Innovation in Mundanity: Theocritus and the Quotidian Woman*

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This thesis proposes to analyze the representation of women in the urban mimes of the Greek Hellenistic poet Theocritus. Best known for his bucolic poetry which incorporates aspects of mime into a country setting, Theocritus nevertheless also wrote more traditional mimes, known as the urban mimes, as a subset within his main work, the *Idylls*. Of these poems, *Idylls* 2 and 15 describe, respectively, a young woman's attempt to avenge her lost chastity with magic, and the participation of two housewives in a religious ceremony held at Alexandria. These *Idylls* reveal a striking development in the representation of female characters in literature, featuring women who no longer conform to the artificial paradigms inherited from myth and epic, but instead fall under a newly emergent archetype of the Hellenistic period: the quotidian woman. By implementing this new literary figure, which epitomizes the mundane and humanizes his poetry, as the chief voice of his urban mimes, Theocritus simultaneously draws upon and innovates the work of his forebears and contemporaries, enhancing the female figure into a relatable and realistic character, both comic and poignant, through whom he can more artfully relate the themes of his poetry.

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*An Innovation in Mundanity:*  
*Theocritus and the Quotidian Woman of the Urban Mimes*

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## DEDICATION

τὸ χρήμα σοφώτερον ἂν θήλεια.

—*Idyll* 15.145

For all who have helped me with this terrible, wonderful adventure, but most of all for the quotidian women in my own life: my sisters, Katie and Laurie; my mother, Amy, and my grandmother, Grace; my long-time mentor, Julie Dalton; and especially my good and patient friend, Genesis Urbina.

ἑαυτῆς ἐστ' ἐκείνη κυρία.

—*Perikeiromene* 374.

## CHAPTER ONE

### A New Figure Among the Women of Greek Literature

#### *Introduction*

This thesis aims to explore the adaptations of the depiction of women particular to the works of Theocritus in the Hellenistic period. This subject, though profiting from much recent scholarship, has for a long time stood for the most part overlooked. Due to societal expectations and scholastic trends, the world of the ancients has for centuries been understood as the epitome of a “man’s world,” recorded by men, for men, about men.<sup>1</sup> Yet while the importance of women in the reality of Greek civic life was more or less repressed for much of Greek history (see Cohen 1996, Keuls 1993, Pomeroy 1985, and many others for a survey of women’s lifestyles in antiquity), the power of their fictional counterparts flourishes: the author’s inclusion of women in a male-focused sphere, such as poetry, is the more striking because of its infrequency. They are the rare exception, rather than the rule, and thus they strike the modern reader with an impact that male characters do not have. Theocritus’ *Idylls* 2 and 15 are thus of huge import within his corpus because of this divergence—not only does he cast women as his main characters, but he fills

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<sup>1</sup> The predominance of the male within literature can be explained either by the culture of affluent city-states, such as Athens, in which women were kept indoors, by the tendencies of epic to focus on masculine pursuits like war, by the expectation for the man to be well educated (while there was little comparable standard imposed on women), and even by the tendency toward misogyny evidenced by some ancient authors (Pomeroy 1975: 2).

them with independence and gives them personal voice and, over their respective domains, even authority. I argue therefore that the Theocritean woman described in these particular *Idylls* reflects a new, developing archetype: the quotidian woman, who is neither rich nor divine, but meager and free enough to play the role of a non-specific heroine of the Hellenistic era. Above all else, this character is defined by her function, which is to grant Theocritus an insider's perspective on certain events and emotions that allow him, in his retelling, to strike emotional chords in his readers and patrons, the Ptolemies, that would be impossible to reach with male figures.

This application of female characters is both nuanced and novel to the Hellenistic Age. Of course, certain traditional female roles have been perpetually present within the Greek corpus: in drama, one can instantly call to mind the unwavering Antigone, the formidable Medea, and the hapless Deianira, to name a few. In poetry, the figures of Penelope for epic and of Semonides' and Hesiod's caricatures for lyric leap to the fore. Furthermore, women play various roles in mythological literature:<sup>2</sup> there are the goddesses of the Greek pantheon, who as mothers and patronesses guard or persecute epic and tragic heroes; the Muses and Nymphs who foster poetry itself; and the innumerable paramours (both human and divine) of the gods. However, these figures do not feature in literature because of their humanity, but usually because of their divinity, or semi-divinity, or their relation

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<sup>2</sup> Mythology is not in itself a particular strain of literature, and as such often overlaps with drama, epic poetry, and other genres, as it is pervasive throughout Greek culture and thought. Nevertheless, it is a unique sphere of literature, and its female figures should be treated separately from mortals.



to a set mythology. The characterization of the divine never fully descends to the mundane lives of actual Greek women, and the few myths that seem to depict such an amalgamation do so with latent austerity, such as Demeter as Doso in the Eleusinian mysteries, or with suppressed irony, as with Athena's weaving competition with Arachne; these legends are also clearly didactic, and serve to remind mortals of their position as servants to the gods, or even relate specific ritual actions or the etiology for rites. The attributes of these immortal heroines are not only idealized, but they are bound by the religious and cultural milieu to which they originally belonged.

This chapter will begin with a brief outline of the roles of women in early Greek literature, focusing on mythology, drama, and epic and lyric poetry, respectively. Once the pattern of early depictions has been established, I will lay out what constitutes the "quotidian woman" as an archetype, how she contrasts with her literary predecessors, and project her development throughout literature leading up to and into the Hellenistic Age. Concluding that she reaches the apex of her characterization in Theocritus, I will then discuss the poet's background and corpus, setting the stage for chapters two and three, which will in turn describe *Idylls* 2 and 15 as stages for the quotidian woman's literary debut *en force*. In the final chapter, I will project the lasting influence that such an archetype would have on Greco-Roman literature, focusing on the characterization of women in Virgil's *Eclogues* and other Augustan poetry. I will begin, however, with a limited summary of my sources.

### *Survey of Scholarship*

This thesis has drawn much on the work of previous scholars. In my research, I have aimed at being as inclusive as possible, studying not only publications by experts on Theocritus and the Classics, but also delving somewhat into feminist and literary theory (as pertains to the *Idylls*), and into the findings of archaeologists and art historians. Though my thesis focuses on the literary aspects of *Idylls* 2 and 15, interpretation means nothing without context, and thus these sources have been helpful in establishing the social structure of the Hellenistic period, its art and architecture, which in turn reflect the lives of its citizens. Particularly influential for this study and for my grasp of the social dynamics of the period, Joan Burton's *Theocritus' Urban Mimes* originally made me question the poet's application of women and attempt to categorize their uses. Although Burton's monograph discusses all three of the urban mimes, and my thesis discusses only two, her insight on the influence of socio-political changes of the Hellenistic era, and her analysis of the urban mimes as reflections of such changes, has been of paramount importance to my study of the quotidian woman.

For sources on the contentious question of the "status of women" in the Hellenistic period and before, I have utilized first Sarah Pomeroy and Eva Keuls. Keuls' work, *The Reign of the Phallus*, focuses on the lives of women in Athens during Classical Greece, but nevertheless is very discerning in its analysis of goddess cults and legends in Greek society. Pomeroy's numerous works on ancient women should not be ignored by any scholar studying gender roles in the ancient world;

however, for this thesis, I consciously shy away from some of the conclusions that Pomeroy comes to with regard to the quality of women's lives, or their happiness as secluded women. In addition to these authors, whose work has been viewed as inflammatory, I have tempered my study with various articles, particularly those collected in Ian McAuslan and Peter Walcot's *Women in Antiquity*, which offers various opinions and conclusions about women's status, and draws on a broad range of situations throughout the Greek (and Roman) world. Additionally, Arthur Nock's classic "Σύνναος θεός" and Joseph Reed's current "Arsinoe's Adonis and the Poetics of Ptolemaic Imperialism" were useful for their analysis of Queen Arsinoe's power and authority, the former work focusing on her apotheosis in death, the latter on her political supremacy in life.

In studying Augustan poetry, I found Barbara Gold's *A Companion to Roman Love Elegy* of particular value, and utilized this resource extensively. Megan Drinkwater and Sharon James, though seemingly contradictory, were also of great help in my grasping of the literary archetype of the *domina* in elegy, especially in what way she compares to the quotidian woman (or, rather, does not compare). For Virgil's eighth *Eclogue*, Jennifer Macdonald's article "Structure and Allusion in *Idyll* 2 and *Eclogue* 8" was useful, for she collated the similarities and differences clearly and succinctly, and comparison between the poems allowed me to compare the sorceresses. John Van Sickle's work on tracing Virgil's bucolic inheritance to Theocritus aided my research in a similar way, enabling me to put

Simaetha and the sorceress of *Eclogue* 8 on similar terms and determine whether the later sorceress was in fact emulating Theocritus' literary figure.

The work of David Konstan and Barbara Watson (who is actually a scholar involved primarily with Women's Studies and the work of Bernard Shaw) particularly informed my study of New Comedy and mime. Konstan and Watson's positions on the role of women in New Comedy, I think, could not be more accurate: they function as fixtures, the pivot on which a plot turns, but subsequently more mechanical than human; through their compliance with the stereotypical plots of comedy (and the social demands encased within the plays), the author elicits his desired response, humor. Mary Lefkowitz' overview of the position of women, which is similarly less personal and, instead, didactic (1987: 503, 505), in epic also influenced my own view substantially.

As for my research of Theocritus' corpus itself, it goes almost without saying that Richard Hunter, Charles Segal, Mark Payne, Kathryn Gutzwiller and Marco Fantuzzi influenced my study, particularly with regards to my understanding of the bucolic works as a collection. For the urban mimes, however, I found several other authors equally as perceptive. Foremost among these is Frederick Griffiths, who wrote many studies of *Idyll* 2 and forcefully, and persuasively, argued for Simaetha's position as a pitiable, even triumphant, narrator. Michael Lambert and Christopher Faraone contributed much to my understanding of the function of magic in *Idyll* 2 as compared with archaeological evidence and current reconstructions of ancient magic rites, while Hugh Parry and Laura Gibbs-Wichrowska in particular developed the

motif of Simaetha herself as a witch, Parry focusing on her purpose, Gibbs-Wichrowska on the potential threat of this figure.

For *Idyll* 15, Marilyn Skinner's and John Whitehorne's respective conclusions regarding the mundanity of the women and the purposes of their conversations, hers focusing on their discussion of the tapestries, his on their competitive complaints, are reflected in this thesis. Michael Lambert's research influenced my work on *Idyll* 15 as well, and in his work Lambert provides an appropriate foil for my idea of the quotidian woman, since he views Praxinoa, Gorgo, and Simaetha, in particular, as "vapid" figures to be mocked, not understood or empathized with (2001: 100).

Collectively, these works make up the main body of my citations, footnotes, and sources, though for complete scholarship, see the works cited page at the end. Some of these works divulge opinions that contradict each other, and in these cases, I have attempted to recognize the value of both arguments, or to consolidate the disparity for the sake of my study. With these sources recognized, then, my chapter will resume with a broad outline of the history of women in ancient Greek literature.

### *A Select Overview of Women in Archaic and Classical Greek Literature*

It almost goes without saying, but the following section is, as hinted in the title above, *selective*. I do not propose to cover in detail the characterization of every female character of Greek literature from the Archaic period up to the founding of Alexandria: such a comprehensive list is quite beyond the scope of this thesis, and would likely lead to oversight and over-generalization. Rather, this section is

designed to be a representative sample of Greek literature as it developed from its early to middle periods; I have chosen examples that I believe to be among the most well-known and influential of female paradigms from a wide range of fictional and legendary genres, with characters ranging from goddesses and witches to queens and mortals.

In myth, the role and power of goddesses is typically made manifest in their fertility and their associated power over the fertility of the world and mankind. The ideal of an Earth-mother goddess manifests itself cyclically in the Greek pantheon, firstly with Ge and Uranus, then Rhea and Cronus, and finally Hera and Zeus (Morford, Lenardon, and Shaw 2011: 62-63; Renehan 1974: 193-195). These are the rulers of heaven, and their union in particular insures the peace and order of the world, and particularly its ability to foster mankind. But other goddesses, too, have attributes of the typical, fertile mother goddess: Cybele, later the *Magna Mater* of the Romans, may come to mind first, with her Near Eastern associations with Astarte, her symbolic relation with her indirect descendent Attis,<sup>3</sup> and the dynamics of her worship, which included the castration of bulls (see Hornblower and Spawforth 1996). But Aphrodite, associated with Adonis and queen of love and of sex, is also tied to fertility, as is Demeter, the goddess of grain and fields, and her daughter Persephone, whose life provides an etiology for the seasons. Even Artemis, despite

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<sup>3</sup> Cybele's relationship with Attis is in turn reminiscent of that of Adonis, Aphrodite's consort who is reborn annually to mark the rebirth of the world. The worship of Cybele has been tentatively traced back as far as ancient Anatolia due to the uncovering of now-familiar images of the mother-goddess figurines, which have come from Anatolian sites such as Çatalhöyük (see Roller 1991).

being a virgin, has some attributes of fertility and shares iconography with the other figures associated with Eastern mother-goddesses (Roller 1991: 140-141); she is the goddess who presides not only over childbirth, but also over the hunt and the fertility of the woods, as is suggested by the famous, if bizarre, “Polymastic Artemis” of Ephesus as well as by the numerous depictions of her as the mistress of animals, proliferate in Greek painted pottery, and specifically named such in Anacreon’s Fragment 348—δέσποιν’ Ἀρτεμι θηρῶν (Hanfman and Waldbaum 1969: 265, 269; Steward 1983: 63).

These representations of goddesses which typify them in literature as idols of fertility follow the dictates of the religious canon and mythological tenets set down by civilization and custom. Most of these works focus either on the goddess’s concerns for their mortal offspring, on their sexual exploits (sometimes as the pursuer, but more often as the pursued), on their envy of mortal women more appealing or more skilled than themselves, or their fostering of women similar to themselves. Because of their abilities to seduce, charm, and limit human and earthly fecundity, the goddesses are feared by mortals and are given roles in literature that are frequently threatening, even cruel (Pomeroy 1985: 13).

Take, for example, Hera’s punishment of Leto, in which the aggrieved goddess actually forbids the birth of Apollo and Artemis, her vengeful power manifested in her ability to postpone and intensify the pain of Leto in childbirth and limit her rival’s fertility (*HH* 3). Aphrodite, too, punishes her lover Anchises with infertility, because of their relationship and the shame she feels for having taken a

mortal as a lover (*HH* 5). Cybele's rage also results in infertility, chiefly in Attis' castration. Demeter, above all, plays the role of the avenging mother-goddess in the tale of her mourning over the rape of Persephone when, in response for her daughter's abduction, she withholds from the world crops and the harvest. It is because of these goddesses' ability to make a man, or even the world, sterile that they are feared and worshipped, and their roles in mythology reflected this concern.<sup>4</sup>

Like these chief goddesses, lesser divinities such as nymphs and Nereids are bound by mythology to serve as wives, mothers, and lovers for the gods and for heroes—all roles oriented around their fertility. Examples abound of Nymphs and Titans with whom Zeus had relationships: Callisto, Mnemosune, Leto, to name a few. Some of these desired Nymphs, however, refuse the gods, waylay heroes, or even threaten divine order—all through the dangers of their fertility. Thetis, for example, is

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<sup>4</sup> The chief exception to this motif of the fertility goddess is, of course, Athena, the goddess given the otherwise masculine virtues of reason and battle prowess. There are, however, numerous problematic features to be found in Athena's etiology which empower her as a non-fertility figure. First of all, she is born from Zeus. Eva Keuls remarked that this masculine birth (combined with Dionysus' later birth from his thigh and Hera's failure to reproduce alone, which is manifested in Hephaestus' disfigurement) effectively strips the goddess Hera of her import in the divine court, as Zeus is now able to bear children without a wife or mistress (1993: 42), and makes his offspring take on many of her father's specific attributes (Call. H. 5.132-136). Athena, like Zeus, carries an aegis and, delighting in battle, bears the epithets of "counselor" and "shrewd" (for examples, compare Zeus' role in the *Iliad* with Athena's in the *Odyssey*, or look to the *Eumenides* for an example of Athena depicted in her role as an arbiter). But with her devout spurning of male affection and her virago characteristics, Athena is in a sense stripped of her feminine attributes altogether (Pomeroy 1975: 5). In a sense, she is not a fertility goddess because she lies outside the sexual domain, as does her power—note that Athena's punishments often entail a loss of reasoning, such as the transformation of Arachne into an insect, or the blinding of Tiresias; her rewards, on the other hand, often involve the restoration of judgment, as in the *Eumenides* where Athena bestowed the Furies with a sense for civil justice, rather than blind revenge.



the most powerful among her sisters seemingly because of the prophecy about her, which predicts that she would bear a child greater than its father.<sup>5</sup> Thetis's potential to bear a child who would displace Zeus as king of the gods emphasizes not any skill of hers other than her fecundity and potential as a divine mother. Calypso and Circe, on the other hand, hinder Odysseus' homeward progress by means of their physicality and attraction; sex with these nymphs promises delays and threatens outright prevention of Odysseus' homecoming. Daphne serves as a final example of a nymph resisting divine schemes; although she successfully spurned Apollo's love, she does so by becoming an asexual being, namely, a tree.

Yet, in spite of the power and allure of these minor goddesses, none enjoys total success over the gods or heroes they struggle with or against. Thetis, even though she was powerful enough to be an aid to the king of the gods, was unable to save her son Achilles from his fate (*Il.*1.413-418; *Ach.*1.252-255; Slatkin 1991: 11, 23; Mendelsohn 1990: 198-199); Calypso and Circe do not ultimately win over Odysseus; and the price of Daphne's chastity is essentially her freedom, not only of movement, but of life and love. The Nymphs' roles in literature and legend are thus defined largely by their sexual roles with gods and with mortals.

The heroines of tragedy and of epic, however, have an altogether different purpose in literature. Like the goddesses, they are to some degree bound to a firm

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<sup>5</sup> See Slatkin 1991 for a discussion of the possibility of Thetis' power as a goddess, particularly as the freer of Zeus. Slatkin proposes that there may be a lost legendary cycle which develops Thetis as a highly influential deity whose abilities are hinted at by Homer in the *Iliad*. Regardless, there can be no greater power attributed to Thetis than an ability to overthrow the hierarchy of Olympus, which her offspring would gain by her act of conception.

framework of histories and mytho-histories: Clytemnestra has to be unfaithful to and kill Agamemnon, Medea has to kill her children and her rival, and Iocasta has to kill herself because legends gave to them these roles. Their actions simply follow the mandates of what stories had survived the ages, perhaps depicting, as some have ventured, the fears of the patriarchal society in which women were so thoroughly shut in, kept private for the integrity of the *oikos* (Gardner 1996: 147; Walcot 1996: 93; Parry 1988: 50). But the manner in which they perform the prescribed actions may vary largely from poet to poet (compare the Medea of the *Argonautica*, for example, with Euripides' figure and you will find them to be quite different women; the same for Clytemnestra in the *Odyssey* when compared with the *Agamemnon*). In tragedy and epic, therefore, we see a proliferation of female personality types, in their motivations, and in their desires.

Yet the women of epic and tragedy tend to perform reactively more than actively: that is, the actions of these women typically function more as responses to the those of males within the play, and the true tragedy lies not in their actions, but in the ignorance and denial of the men. Deianira, for example, does not purposefully kill her husband, and Hercules is given ample warnings about in what way he will die; it is he who ultimately brings about his own death, while Deianira is merely the instrument of his demise (Rutherford 1982: 148). Similarly, Helen is not viewed as a coconspirator with Paris, equally as responsible for starting Trojan War (Lefkowitz 1987: 505); she is simply viewed by the male elders of the city as the unfortunately beautiful, irresistible downfall for men, and, by herself, as the most wretched among

the Trojan women (Blondell 2010: 11). The authors are again using women as characters, but they are not independent figures and their primary importance in the plots of tragedy and epic are simply responses to the truly independent decisions of their male counterparts.

Furthermore, those few female characters from this era of literature who are able to perform successful, independent actions are frequently masculinized, as the case with the goddess Athena. Though maintaining at the core their womanhood (unlike Amazons, who essentially attempt to be men), these figures act outside the realm of sanctified female means in order to accomplish feats suitable to male characters. For example, Sophocles' portrayal of Antigone may allot to her some traditional female attributes, but her actions and words reflect the gender of her author, of her actor, and of her audience not only in her freedom to bury her brother and oppose her uncle, but also in the dynamics of her relationship with her fiancé. In her response to her sister Ismene's insistence that the sisters cannot stand up to Creon given their sex (*Ant.* 62), Antigone storms off and disobeys Creon's edict, refusing to don the traditional meekness of her gender. William Robert notes, however, that Antigone does not fully lose her identity as a woman, retaining an altogether feminine focus on the importance of burial purification and mourning (2010: 414, 427; Shapiro 1991: 629; Lefkowitz 1987: 511). Furthermore, she chooses suicide rather than shame, and her death prompts the reciprocal suicide and paternal curse of Creon's son, which is an action more typical of mythical women (for example, the suicides of Thisbe or Helle); her virility—or, as Helen North puts it, “[her ability] to be as

passionate and heroic as men (1977: 40)”—effectively emasculates the men around her, threatening Creon and destroying Haemon. Thus, Antigone is figuratively a woman donning man’s clothing: she rejects the “normal” tenets of the female in society in order to maintain piety in her role as a sister and as a woman in Thebes.

Aeschylus’ Clytemnestra is another example of the masculine heroine as she usurps the role of adulterer and murderer (O’Neill 1998: 227). In her addresses to the chorus, Clytemnestra makes it clear that she is resolute about her actions, which are only motivated in large part by her sexual libido and lust for power, matched by that of Agamemnon himself. For the plot of the *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra puts aside her womanly empathy for Cassandra, a war prize and concubine, and she denies her wifely reliance on Agamemnon, her husband, in order to kill them both without qualms. In the following play, the *Libation Bearers*, both of her surviving children, Orestes and Electra, deny her position as a mother so that Orestes’ murdering her may be accomplished with the approbation of the chorus (*idem*: 220, 226). As both a murderer and as a victim, therefore, Clytemnestra loses most of her feminine qualities, giving up her role as wife, mother, and queen in order to become ruler and killer.<sup>6</sup> In the same manner, Medea kills her children, ignoring natural matronly compunction and spousal piety. Thus, tragic heroines ultimately reflect tragic heroes more than they do the average Greek woman.

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<sup>6</sup> Note that in the *Odyssey*, however, Clytemnestra is still recognized by Agamemnon to be a negative paradigm for women, indicating that her crimes do not entirely divorce her from her gender (*Il.* 11.444). Homer’s representation of Clytemnestra, however, is also different from that of Aeschylus, since Homer makes Aegisthus the key plotter and executioner.

Greek epic heroines, on the other hand, maintain their feminine virtues, often depicted in working before the loom (epithets for both Andromache in the *Iliad* and Penelope in the *Odyssey*); this is one of the twin appeals of women as named by Homer in Book 1 of the *Iliad*: beauty and works (*Iliad* 1.31). Homer's women, however, are royal, mythical figures who have sway over their subjects, both men and women; Nausicaa and Penelope both clearly control their servants, and Queen Arete holds sway over her people and over visitors alike, as Odysseus himself learns. Yet these royal women do not control their male peers, and they do not control their own lives. Andromache cannot give Hector advice, on battle tactics, and she cannot save her son from the Greeks by prayers, schemes, or actions; once widowed, she is among the most pitiful figures in Greek literature, portrayed both in *Iliad* 6 and in an eponymous play by Euripides, and ultimately in the Latin *Troades*, which shows her to be an influential, pitiable model even in the age of Latin poetry and tragedy (see Fantham 1979). Penelope's machinations can only delay the suitors, and she is ultimately dependent on the intervention of her son and husband in slaying the undesired suitors. The true purpose of women in epic seems to be, as Mary Lefkowitz puts it, "to exert a significant moral force" and to motivate the actions of men, as is the case with Helen, Briseis, Chryseis, and Penelope (1987: 503, 505). So while Homeric heroes and, ostensibly, heroines demonstrate agency, the woman's action potency is actually inferior to that of men. Moreover, epic heroines are not comparable to common Greek women—they are simultaneously more powerful and less capable than their real-life counterparts.

The Archaic poets reinvent the purpose of the female character, at once enlarging the type of woman that can star in a poem and limiting her influence within it. Although they may have broadened the scope of the female character in early Greek literature by using non-divinities and non-royals as the beloved ones in their poems, also adapt women merely as conduits for their emotions, both positive and negative, without imbuing them with independent voices. Often, named women serve as the addressees, the dedicatees of love songs, or as the objects of desire within a work (as in Sappho fragments 16, 49, and in Archilochus' fragment 71): their importance is relative to the passion of the author, not to their actions or perspectives as characters. Semonides, for another example of the overtly subjective representation of women, provides a lengthy catalogue of his so-called "types" of wives. All are sprung from animals or from the rudiments of nature (earth and water, respectively), and their mindset is "apart" from that of man (*Sem.* 7.1)—nevertheless, all the women qualify to be wives, whether good, bad, or ugly. The focus of all these poets in describing the various women is their function in a sexual role, as an object of desire, a figure desiring another sexually, or a creature to be abhorred for her lust or physical repulsiveness. Women in the Archaic period<sup>7</sup> are thus still used as a romanticized model of what their predecessors were: fertility figures, merely mirrors and vessels of the desires of the male audience. However, the women of lyric poetry

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<sup>7</sup> With the obvious exception of Sappho herself, who acts as the speaker of many of her poems, and who is not an external female designed by the author.

are no longer just divine or royal: the literary cast has broadened to include the common and even the grotesque.

Thus the women and goddesses of myth, of epic, and of lyric poetry are effectively the strategic devices of authors, models used to fulfill plot needs, sexual desires, and the alternatively promising or threatening paradigms of fertility. Just as the goddesses operate within a divine sphere that does not accurately reflect that of mortals, so too do the mortal heroines of early Greek literature (such as Antigone, Andromache, or any of the figures described above) belong to a world completely separate from that in which real women lived. The women of Archaic and Classical Greek literature are wealthy, royal, or divine; their concerns reflect their pedigree. They may be used as main characters, but only if they are imbued with supernatural powers (particularly over male fertility), or have rejected female attributes in favor of masculine ones; otherwise, they are usually just placeholders, characters that reflect or motivate the action of the male who is truly the vital character of the work, or literary targets which bear the brunt force of the emotion (positive or otherwise) that the author feels toward them.

Theocritus's *Idylls*, however, appear to innovate on these trends, not only showing mortal women in their natural environments, but also imbuing them with potent agency and freedom of opinion separate from the author. Although his bucolics are on the one hand replete with nymphs who consistently serve as his rustics' unrequiting love interests and the goddess Aphrodite retains her power over men (as shown in Daphnis' death), many of the women in the *Idylls* are painstakingly

mundane figures, carefully depicted to be representatives of common, everyday Greek wives and daughters. His “urban mimes” (*Idylls* 2 and 15) in particular depict such day-to-day figures as their main characters; in *Idyll* 2, it is a love-struck girl, now scorned, bewitching her once-lover who narrates the work, and in *Idyll* 15, it is a pair of Alexandrian housewives who attend and comment on an annual festival to Adonis, known as the *Adonia*. These women are newcomers to Greek literature—neither divine nor powerful, neither voiceless nor mere projections of lust, they belong to the new era: the Hellenistic period.

*Hellenistic Literature and the Development of a New Archetype:  
The “Quotidian Woman”*

The Hellenistic era brought changes to Greek society that no other time could have. With the known world briefly gathered under the power of Alexander the Great, isolated Greek city states such as Athens were suddenly confronted by the customs of foreign nations, such as Egypt, to an extent that had not been possible before, and many traditions of the Archaic period changed as a result. Ptolemaic Egypt was ruled by a single eponymous monarch, part Greek *basileus* and part Egyptian pharaoh. As has been observed, women’s freedom is actually better ensured under tyrants or monarchy than in democracy (where men’s equality essentially necessitates women’s inequality), and as a result of women’s increased freedom, particularly that of movement, the men of the traditional Greek *polis* were also increasingly aware of women (Burton 1995: 41; Pomeroy 1984: xvii-xviii). The Ptolemaic regime, additionally, offered poets a new opportunity for consistent



employment, offering writers a stable court for an audience, the Museum, and eventually the famous Library of Alexandria; Theocritus' career seems to have begun in Syracuse under the reign of the tyrant Hieron II, after which he travelled to Alexandria to restart his work under the young rulers Ptolemy Philadelphus and Arsinoe II (Edmonds 1996: xi; Burton 1995: 8). This new setting and the cultural shifts expressed by the mass migrations and novelty of a city and government founded so recently are materialized in Theocritus' poetry and in his use of a relatively new genre: mime.

This new form of fiction was typified by its focus on mundanity: instead of describing the life of a god, or the legend of a hero, a mime will normally relate a scene from everyday life, such as the temple visit of a woman, or the education of a child. The very term *mime*, of course, refers to anything that imitates life, and the literary genre is marked by performative elements that suggest that the works may have been acted out (Payne 2007: 55; Kutzko 2007: 141-142). Mime is also frequently bawdy, filled with dirty jokes or innuendoes (Herodas' *Mimiamb* 6, for example, depicts two housewives discussing and purchasing dildos). The genre arose in the late Archaic, but was popular in the Hellenistic period, too, as evidenced by Theocritus and his contemporary Herodas, both of whom based some of their poetry on the mimes of Sophron who, along with Xenarchus, is credited with the creation of literary mime (Gagarin and Fantham 2010: 440). Herodas innovated mimes in adapting a new meter to the everyday scenes, iambic, and the result of his adaptation is now called the *mimiamb* (*idem* 2010: 441; Cunningham and Rusten 2002: 184-

185). Theocritus, too, adjusted the genre of mime to suit his overarching purposes, and the result of his reworking of mime can be seen not only in many of his pastoral *Idylls*, but above all in the poems which are collectively known today as his “urban mimes.”

The urban mimes of Theocritus (which include *Idylls* 2, 14, and 15) have in the past been studied because of their metropolitan setting or the mundane nature of the exploits they unfold, which in turn were often passed off as nondescript, off-handed jabs aimed to evoke a quick laugh from a sympotic audience (see Lambert, 2001 and 2002, for example).<sup>8</sup> Yet these poems are in fact quite significant within Theocritus’ corpus not simply for their divergence from the pastoral verse that is now his recognized hallmark, but also for the facets of information that they relay which potentially give insight into how Hellenistic men perceived the lifestyle of their wives and daughters. In essence, Theocritus’s urban poetry unfolds a striking expansion of the roles of women in literature. By employing women as his main characters for the urban *Idylls* 2 and 15, Theocritus—along with other Hellenistic authors such as Herodas—creates a new female persona in the genre of poetry, namely the quotidian woman.

By the term “quotidian woman,” I refer to the representation of women predominant in mimes of the Hellenistic period, particularly in the works of Theocritus. She is more or less the common woman—usually a wife—whose encounters with men in the men’s world provided a source of comedy, pathos, or

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<sup>8</sup> See Pretagostini 2006 for a discussion of the likelihood of Theocritus writing for a symposium.

relatability even to ancient audiences. The “quotidian woman” is not royal, nor is she divine: she is average, and anonymous because of her banality. That is, she belongs neither to the elites, nor to the lowest or servile class; the quotidian woman has enough means to live a decent, if modest, life—she may own slaves or keep servants and she has the means to secure an education for her children, but she is not so wealthy that money is not a concern. Furthermore, the authority figures in her life, male relatives or husbands, are relatively petty, entirely neglected or mentioned only in passing, often because of monetary concerns.

To this end, the quotidian woman’s life is still in a sense defined by her interactions with males: the wife still needs to feed her husband, the smitten still needs to please her lover, and all are reliant on men for their income (whether this necessity is stated or not). However, the quotidian woman is still imbued with personal agency largely independent from male demands. In her day to day life, she serves as the focal point for poetic narratives, driving scenery and plot changes as the reader would expect of any other main character, particularly males. But the action is utterly mundane, such as complaining about husbands or ex-lovers; the quotidian woman does not compare to legendary female roles like Antigone or Iocasta, nor to epic heroines like Helen or Hypsipyle. For literary intents and purposes she is an unknown figure who is at once relatively free, shown to interact independently with people outside her household, and allowed to make her own decisions based on these interactions. This freedom is particularly noteworthy, as scholarly consensus indicates that—for good or ill—the lifestyles of Greek women, especially in Athens

after Solon's reforms, were highly restricted (Cohen 1996: 134; Parry 1988: 50; Keuls 1993: 30).

Further, there are no over-arching paradigms to which her life has to correspond, as is the case with myth, epic, and any other genre that uses older folk tales and legends as a basis. The powerful women of Greek tragedy all show only what autonomy mythology provides for them; their lives and deaths are dictated, didactic, and the plotlines of their lives must ultimately conform to the canon of cult or oral traditions with fairly limited poetic variation. This is one of the benefits of the quotidian woman, however; because her actions are not directed by any expectations of previous poetic tradition or by the framework of a mythology, she can move freely and perform whatever action the author desires. Prior fictional figures do not share in the freedom provided by her anonymity: their actions are controlled by custom and by the models of ancient elites, or by the character of a real-life model.

In short, the quotidian woman is a lower-to-middle class woman, generally young, who acts within accepted cultural norms yet maintains a degree of autonomy unusual among women of previous literary genres. However, the truest marker of the quotidian woman is her independent voice. She makes independent decisions, holds private opinions, and it is through her actions and perspective that the author chooses to relate his own viewpoint and observations on contemporary life. Through the quotidian woman, Theocritus is able to instill his works with characteristic nuance, and he is further able to represent complexity through shallow figures, an act not only typical of mime, but also a reflection on the very nature of the genre and the literary

styles popular in the Hellenistic age. She is thus both the lens through which Theocritus presents his plots, but also the one through which he invites his reader to analyze his poetry.

But Theocritus was not the only author to capitalize on this literary figure. The quotidian woman as an archetype developed over time and across genres, with many authors contributing to the finessed form we find in Theocritus' work. The inception of the independent woman as a literary model was not feasible until the Hellenistic period, when women began to appear *en force* throughout the Greek world once more as powerful figures (such as the Ptolemaic queens Berenice and Arsinoe II and the new mother-goddesses of the Egyptian pantheon), reflecting shifts in the status quo regarding women (Lefkowitz 1987: 517). The earliest appearance of a truly independent female character in literature seems to be in New Comedy, the genre of plays which occurred in the liminal period just before the Hellenistic Period. New Comedy, which built off the dramatic works of Aristophanes but incorporated new problems and new solutions, most often involving mistaken identity or problems of parenthood (whether adultery or illegitimacy) that present problems to a pair of lovers (Konstan 1987: 124). These plots, often predictable, have comic resolution and usually resolve in marriage, setting a literary tradition for comedy that would continue until the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the modern day (Watson 1974: 2).

Such an independent heroine can be found in the works of Menander, who seems to have, at least to some extent, exploited this stereotype and invested her with more of the trapping of daily life in order to universalize the characters of his plays

and thereby make his works appealing to a broader audience than just the aristocratic and the well-educated (Balme and Brown 2001: xxvii-xxix). Menander's heroines are frequently orphans, conveniently free of paternal influences (Konstan 1987: 124): take for example Glycera in the *Perikeiromene*, who easily escapes the house of her lover with the aid of her servant, Doris, and also manages to elude the romantic advances of her brother, who does not realize that they are siblings. In the *Samia*, too, the titular character Chrysis, figuratively, lands on her feet after her patron and lover Demeas sends her away with her adopted child. These are obviously women capable of surviving outside the traditional domestic setting of the Greek family—Glycera is even called “her own mistress” in the *Peirokomene*, though it is notable that this phrase does not have any binding, legal bearing (374; *idem*: 127, 129-130). To quote David Konstan, “Glykera’s freedom is rather the reverse of this [the wife’s] status notion: it is the capacity to act independently and without obstacle (*idem*: 130).” This freedom is one of the key features of the quotidian woman.

Further, Menander's women are commoners: Glycera is an orphan entrusted to her lover's care by her adopted mother, and Samia is an immigrant; though both women are ultimately revealed to be Athenian citizens, they are never noble, and their status as citizens is only influential enough to the plot to allow them to marry their lovers legally (see Konstan 1987). Indeed, for the majority of these plays, the women are *παλλακαί*, concubines who share intimacy with their “husbands” and have demonstrable freedom of speech and decision, but no legal rights or protection of legitimate marriage (*idem*: 127). As non-citizens, they interact with men outside their

households without shame, beseeching their next-door neighbors for protection (though in Glycera's case her male neighbors are actually her father and sibling, they are unaware of the relation until the play's conclusion and thus address her as a stranger for the majority of the play). Yet once these women gain citizenship, they fall silent and surrender their right of choice (Konstan 1987: 134). Thus, Menander ultimately consigns the course of their lives with the decisions of his leading males—Glycera's father marries her off to her lover; Chrysis' lover takes her back, presumably as his legal wife.

So, although his female characters enjoy brief periods of autonomous action, Menander's heroines are not quite examples of the quotidian woman. The quotidian woman is not as bound to her status as Menander's figures, and she is not put aside at any point in the narrative. Due to their inevitable relegation to the domestic and silent paradigm of the Athenian wife, Menander's women are better described as the pivot on which New Comedy turns its plots, rather than the medium through which his views are conveyed. However, without Menander's women, the role of the quotidian woman would likely not have developed. They are her predecessor and the appropriate segue between the heroines of epic, tragic, and lyric works and the poetry of Theocritus and his peers in the Hellenistic period.

The Hellenistic period, with its literary shift from tragedy to comedy, and with its renewed focus on the sexual attributes of women as well as men (Burton 1995:4), is a good launching point for such genre shifts as the portrayal of the quotidian woman could reflect. In theory, interpreting Theocritus' use of this archetype stands

to offer great insight into the poetry and drama of the later periods, particularly the Augustan Age, in which authors actively imitated their Alexandrian forebears. This thesis, of course, will focus in large part on the role of the quotidian woman in the pastoral works of Theocritus, but that does not mean that this figure's effect is limited to bucolic poetry: the repercussions of the development of this archetype can be seen in later Hellenistic works and eventually in Roman comedy, in other Mimes, and in the female persona of elegy, who would seemingly become an even more independent creature than her Hellenistic ancestor.

Furthermore, the purpose of the creation and development of the quotidian woman should be analyzed. Of course, the political and cultural spheres of the Greek male were forced to undergo drastic changes in the Hellenistic period, and the evidence of such changes can be seen in the innovation and popularization of new literary genres and styles which finally, at least in part, supplanted the entrenched influence of epic and tragedy. The traditional city-state philosophy had been all but destroyed by the campaigns of Alexander the Great and his successors, and the empires which replaced democracy could understandably have been the cause of such cultural shifts as mobility and integration would encourage (Burton 1995: 7-9). After all, Alexandria was a newly founded metropolis: the city's traditions had yet to be established, and the melting pot between Egyptian and Greek customs must have resulted in many adaptations, as are hinted at in surviving papyri, notably marriage contracts (Bagnall and Derow 1981: 19-201). This multi-ethnic locus, so far from traditional centers like Athens and Sparta and with a royal family willing and able to



support the arts, allowed for breakthroughs in social and literary norms. The appearance of women moving with freedom beyond the confines of their houses in Hellenistic poetry seems to reflect these changes in the real world.

### *The Quotidian Woman in Theocritus*

As I have hinted at above, it is my belief that the quotidian woman reaches the height of her development in the works of Theocritus, particularly in his urban mimes, *Idylls* 2 and 15. Both works center on quotidian women as their main characters, incorporating elements of mime and advancing on the plots and figures of New Comedy. A difficulty, however, in dealing with these two *Idylls* comes in determining their place within the corpus of Theocritus' poetry, which is typically known for his pastoral poems. The location and, thereby, the role of the two poems within the surviving body of Theocritus' work is, of course, still debatable given the incompleteness natural to Hellenistic poetry (which is, by the nature of its transmission, fragmentary), and due to confusion over the dates of Theocritus' composition, and the subsequent arrangement, of the individual *Idylls* (see Gow 1973 for discussion of likely chronology). Establishing how these two urban mimes fit in the spectrum of his other works is nevertheless significant to how we interpret the manifestation of the quotidian woman because it affirms her either as a figure of the urban world, of the bucolic, or, possibly, of both.

Various scholars have argued that the nature of the bucolic genre is not very well-defined, and in fact, is quite difficult to pin down simply (Gutzwiller 2006: 380-

381; Van Sickle 1975: 49). As an ancient mode of poetry that spans both Greek and Roman cultures as well as hundreds of years of imitation and various re-rendering, some variation between poets is to be expected. But Theocritus within his own corpus shows almost as much variation as we see across the centuries. His works, which many have credited as being programmatically bucolic (Pretagostini 2006: 53; Van Sickle 1975: 49, 53-54, 72), do not actually follow any clear program: some are strongly influenced by mythology and epic (such as 11 and 18, which are respectively about Polyphemus, the Cyclops of the *Odyssey*, and about the wedding of Helen of Troy); others appear wholly pastoral, incorporating a natural *locus amoenus*,<sup>9</sup> the fertility god Pan or his colleague Priapus, shepherds or goatherds, and Nymphs (such as 1, 3, and 7, which chiefly relate the love affairs of rustics and the aspects of composition); then there are the poems that are set in the city, or involve the Ptolemaic family (including 2 and 15, with which this thesis is primarily concerned, as well as *Idyll* 14).

How do we as readers and interpreters cope with such diversity? These three categories within the *Idylls* are so distinct that Kathryn Gutzwiller proposed that they may reflect separate papyrological traditions, one mythic, one bucolic, and one urban and encomiastic (1996: 130-142). Charles Segal, on the other hand, proposed to

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<sup>9</sup> This Latin term refers to a serene country setting where rustic herders may tend to their flocks, and, more importantly, to the peaceful retreat where a poet would be accessible to the inspiration of the Muses and Nymphs. The *locus amoenus* is thus a locale that encourages and intensifies the melodic effect of song. The description of this landscape frequently takes precedence in the poem, providing a frame for the action of the songs composed there to take place in.

arrange Theocritus' works on a scale of "bucolity," that is, identifying pastoral elements and using them to classify the pastoral "refinement" of his style in the poem (Segal 1977:195, 199). Susan Stephens, however, has most recently argued for a certain unity pervasive throughout his works, perceivable despite the difficulties of the poems' dates and ordering (2006: 92). While each scholar contributes to our understanding of the bucolic genre as it is today, I follow Stephens in arguing that, in spite of the variety throughout his poems, there are several unifying motifs inherent throughout Theocritus' works that make it possible to understand one *Idyll* in light of another.

In fact, there are many aspects of the "urban" poems that align with Theocritus's perceived pastoral themes: *Idyll* 2, for example, follows the same pattern of a skilled singer performing with an evolving refrain as *Idyll* 1,<sup>10</sup> and though the setting and the gods invoked differ, the purpose of the song—to soothe the ache of spurned love (Parry 1988: 43, 45; Griffiths 1979: 82)—is remarkably like a poem that is generally accepted within the bucolic corpus, *Idyll* 11. Similarly, *Idyll* 15 is closely connected with the programmatically-pastoral *Idyll* 1, since both poems involve a lengthy introduction—involving friendly competition between peers, ekphrastic scenes, and mimetic elements—which sets up a song that has been proven worthy by victory in a past singing competition (see Hunt 2011). Since these songs have clear correspondence with non-urban *Idylls*, it seems reasonable to treat *Idylls* 2 and 15 as

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<sup>10</sup> See Burris 2004 for a full discussion of Simaetha's use of a refrain compared with that of Thyrsis.

belonging to the so-called “spectrum” of Theocritus’ pastoral poems (Segal 1977: 199); though there are many aspects of the poem which would, admittedly, place them rather low on the scale. I will briefly outline these differences.

The first, and most obvious, is the setting of his poems, which for the majority occur in the countryside, whether woods or hills. *Idyll* 1 begins with a description of the location where the two herders tend to their respective flocks, and throughout the poem additional information regarding the setting is continuously given. Thus Thyrsis lies beneath a pine tree, while nearby cascades of water provide amplifying acoustics for his lyrics (*Id.* 1.7-8). Yet some of Theocritus’ poems are set elsewhere, and *Idylls* 2 and 15 are among these, centered firmly in an urban locale. Moreover, the description of the setting, so crucial to the pastoral *Idylls*, is, in the urban mimes, given much less significance, and may even be overlooked altogether. In *Idyll* 2, for example, there is no mention of where Simaetha casts her spell, whether in the city walls or outside it. *Idyll* 15, which on the one hand clearly occurs in Alexandria (even specified to occur in part within the very palace of Ptolemy Philadelphus himself), is blatantly lacking in descriptions of the street and city itself, the only background described is the interior of the palace itself, and the setting of the palace seems more important for encomiastic purposes than for poetic ones. Other works of Theocritus, such as *Idylls* 10 and 13, also lack the rich description of their rural setting given in 1 and 7, but these nevertheless maintain the outdoor location and are never far from the *locus amoenus*. Obviously, the poems set within the city show a shift from those set in the country.

Another cause for the distinction between 2 and 15 and other groupings is the diverse character of the setting. *Idylls* 2 and 15 occur within the districts of large, presumably multi-ethnic cities in which the traditional, Classical Greek identity is at stake (Burton 1995: 9-10), whereas the rustic fields of Sicily and Arcadia seem to us remote and homogenous, typically Greek in populace and character. As a result of this change in location, the urban mimes seem to focus more on ethnicity than the pastorals: in *Idyll* 2, for example, Simaetha notes that her lover Delphis is from Myndos, and that the warlock from whom she learned to cast spells is Assyrian; in *Idyll* 15, the housewives boast of their Doric heritage, and spurn “Egyptian” habits, which they view as dishonest and even criminal (15.47-50). This attention to race is downplayed in the other *Idylls* (though it is not entirely absent; note that in *Idyll* 1, Thyrsis competed against a Lydian singer), while in the urban mimes it is mentioned several times over, perhaps, as Burton suggests, reflecting a certain defensiveness on the part of the characters regarding their identity as Greeks in the new metropolis (*idem*: 12, 14).

Also, *Idylls* 2 and 15 share a striking likeness to the *Mimiamb*s of Herodas, an Alexandrian contemporary of Theocritus. Herodas’ mimes relate similar feminine scenes and parody day-to-day life (Cunningham and Rusten 2002: 183). *Mimiamb*s 1 and 6 in particular call to mind *Idyll* 15, since all three poems depict women marveling at works of art, with *Mimiamb* 6 and *Idyll* 15 both describing women involved in religious rites, the former at the *Adonia*, the latter at a temple to sacrifice

to Asclepius. The subjects are blatantly similar, but it has been argued that the treatment of women's opinions are widely divergent, with Theocritus investing his characters with valuable input and Herodas using women as his mouthpiece merely for the purpose of mocking some contemporary female poets (see Skinner 2001). Although Theocritus uses elements of mime in his other works, the influence and generic interplay is clearer in *Idylls* 2 and 15 than it is in the pastoral poems.

Finally, the focal point of the urban mimes—namely, the female characters through which Theocritus relates his stories—seems to stand in sharp contrast with that of the pastoral poems. At first glance, the woe-begotten Simaetha and garrulous housewives, in *Idylls* 2 and 15 respectively, do not share much resemblance with the rustic poets in the fields, pursuing paramours in the hills and verbally competing in couplets. Truly, one of the most noticeable differences between the urban mimes and the *Idylls* of the “bucolic spectrum” is that women, rather than herdsmen, suddenly control the narrative. No longer relegated to mere love interests, Simaetha, Praxinoa, and Gorgo are not the nymphs of the Sicilian groves and grottos; instead, they are Theocritus' main characters, quotidian women serving as competitors, singers, and unrequited lovers in lieu of a goat- or shepherd. Within the urban environment, after all, women have a status similar to that of rustics: inferior, less educated, and essentially foreign to the typical Greek aristocratic male.

This idea of externalism, or “otherness,” is crucial to the literary appeal of the bucolic and intrinsic, too, to the idea of the quotidian woman, who simultaneously embodies the type of woman you could meet on the street, and the figure you would

expect to see in a mime. By replacing the rustics with women in the setting of the city (where shepherds and goatherds cannot serve), Theocritus keeps artificial distance between his audience and his art, even between himself and his setting (Clausen 1995: xix), yet maintains cohesion within his works (Payne 2007: 92). While the quotidian woman marks a divergence from the pastoral, she is in some ways a reinvention of the rustic designed to function in the urban setting.

Ultimately, the urban mimes are therefore different from the other bucolics only in terms of their physical and cultural setting. However, there are many key elements within the urban mimes that tie them closely with other *Idylls*; these features, inherent to Theocritus' bucolic, include: the beauty of performed (and performative) song; a tradition of verbal rivalry between friends, composers, and enemies; a poetic structure which introduces a setting and figures in order to prime the audience for a climactic song; and the levelling power of love, both unrequited and unfulfillable. Throughout his poems, both urban and pastoral, Theocritus has the expert and uncanny ability to present heartbreak with irony, and to mix the ridiculous with the pitiable. In reading the Cyclops' woes in *Idyll* 11, for example, the heartbreak of Simaetha resounds too; united by the cause of their singing, these characters, polar opposites, collectively represent the lovelorn, and as such cannot be viewed as entirely separated entities, nor can the poems which relate them. Just as *Idylls* 2, 12, and 15 are commonly grouped as the "urban mimes," *Idylls* 2, 3 and 11 could be grouped as the consoling songs of heartbroken, ill-used lovers. Theocritus also maintains his ability to meld divine with mundane—a key attribute of Hellenistic

poetry—whether by rendering his own version of Homer’s famous shield of Achilles on a wooden cup to be filled with cheese (Faber 1995: 412-415), or by relating the mysteries of the *Adonia* through the lips of bickering housewives. His focus on simplicity and on familiarity with the supernatural is consistent throughout the *Idylls*, and perhaps is more striking in the urban mimes. Thus, I argue that *Idylls* 2 and 15 should not be read in a vacuum, held separate from Theocritus’ pastoral works, but rather ought to be viewed as part of an urban subset within his collective oeuvre.

This thesis does not set about to assign the urban mimes specifically to any particular genre, but rather recognizes that they belong to a larger whole. Simply their composition and inclusion with the other bucolics in Theocritus’ corpus is enough to justify a careful examination of *Idyll* 2 and 15, yet understanding these poems’ function in the broader range of his poetry clearly aids in analyzing how and why Theocritus infused his narratives with independent quotidian women. Since Theocritus’ innovations in poetry would influence later writers in the Hellenistic and Augustan periods alike (Van Sickle 1975: 72), the importance for scholarship of his development and application of the quotidian woman as the new archetype for female figures in these later periods is clear.



## CHAPTER TWO

### *Idyll 2: Simaetha the Quotidian Woman*

#### *Introduction*

This chapter will analyze the quotidian woman as we encounter her in *Idyll 2*, a poem generally studied for the elements of magic within it. The main character of this *Idyll* is a young woman named Simaetha, who throughout the poem, attempts to make herself a witch like Circe or Medea and, in the process of her failure, reduces herself to the quotidian woman that we would expect in an urban mime. Common, crass, and in control of the narrative (if not of her life), Simaetha offers a particularly captivating account of the quotidian woman, whose story has been interpreted variously as either pathetic and laughable, or relatable and touching (compare Lambert 2002 with Griffiths 1981). In either case, it is through Simaetha's feminine helplessness, which causes her to turn to the counter-cultural resort of magic (Gibbs-Wichrowska 1994: 254, 261), that Theocritus elicits powerful emotional responses from his readers and it is through her mundanity that he makes her at once ordinary and emotionally accessible; yet her mastery over the narrative (which involves both her menacing spell and her rueful confession to the moon, Selene) and the personal perspective she provides for the work is what gives this poem its powerful impact, be it comedic or sympathetic. Femininity, mundanity, and being the key focal point of

the narrative—these very features which mark Simaetha as a quotidian woman make this *Idyll* one of a kind within Theocritus' corpus.

After a short synopsis of this *Idyll*, I begin this chapter with a brief examination of the technical structure of the poem and an account of the intratextual components that tie this work with several of Theocritus' other *Idylls*, such as the connection with *Idyll* 11 of the idea of song as a *pharmakon*, and the presence of a refrain, rare in Theocritus' works and shared only between *Idylls* 1 and 2. Following this, I will analyze Simaetha, first as a would-be witch surrounded by the trappings of her craft (this section will also include an investigation of the magic that she aims at performing, and a discussion as to the potency of her spell), then as a quotidian woman resorting to the arcane and acting outside the expectations of society but within the constraints of the archetype. This chapter will close with conclusions about the effect of Theocritus' characterization of Simaetha as a quotidian woman in *Idyll* 2.

### *Idyll 2: Structure and Position in the Bucolics*

*Idyll* 2 diverges in many ways from the other poems in the *Idylls*: in setting, in characterization, and in content. It tells the story of a young woman named Simaetha, presumably a young Greek settler—possibly Doric (Lambert 2002: 82)—who attempts to draw back the affection of her recent lover, Delphis. Her song begins with an incantation to lure him: she invokes Selene, Aphrodite, and Hecate to aid in her spell. Once she completes this rite, however, she addresses the moon and the *Idyll*

transitions into a confession that explores the origins and development of her affair with Delphis. As the poem progresses, the goal of her spell begins to vacillate between restoring Delphis as her lover and destroying him as Simaetha reveals the depth of her suffering due to his departure. The poem concludes with Simaetha's decision to continue to endure the pain to which Delphis has abandoned her.

Clearly, this poem is drastically different from the bucolics for which Theocritus is better known. There are no sheep or goats, and there are no shepherds. The second *Idyll* does not give any explicit setting for the song's composition, but has been understood to take place outdoors (Segal 1985: 119), possibly at a three-way crossroads as the invocation and cult associations of Hecate would imply.<sup>1</sup> But it has also been supposed that the song could be set in an inner chamber of Simaetha's house (White 1979: 17-18), an argument that emphasizes the clandestine nature of her spell, and, indeed, the domestic bounds of Simaetha's influence.<sup>2</sup> In her narrative, however, Simaetha describes the urban setting where she met Delphis in the streets as

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<sup>1</sup> Hecate has a widely-varied history of cult worship throughout the Greco-Roman tradition, but among her more frequent epithets is *Hecate Trivia* or, in Greek, *τριοδῖτις*; both names refer to three-way, Y-shaped crossroads common in the ancient world. The crossroads were places of sacrifice to Hecate; sacred to the goddess that Simaetha here invokes, such a crossroad may be a possible setting for this *Idyll*. See the *OCT* for a full discussion of Hecate's cultic rites.

<sup>2</sup> It is notable that this argument emphasizes Simaetha's helplessness to outside forces, like Delphis. When Simaetha leaves the relative safety of her house to attend the festival of Artemis, she first comes under the dangerous sway of Delphis, and it is when she allows this man to enter the confines of her house that she truly begins to suffer heartsickness and pain. His intrusion into her house not only strips her of the respectability of her chastity (Burton 1995: 20), but also the stability of her domestic sphere. If Heather White is correct and the spell was designed to be performed inside (1979: 17-18), then the magic may have functioned secondarily to reestablish the safety of Simaetha's home after Delphis' trespass.

he returned from the *palaestra*, the wrestling center of the Greek gymnasium and sign of the civilized Greek world. Clearly, Simaetha and her slave, Thestylis, are not rustics; they are women who traditionally belong to the domestic, indoor world of the urban woman.

However, at the core of this poem remains one very pastoral element: a love song. *Idylls* 1, 3, and 11 are notable examples of Theocritus' use of an embedded singer communicating the plight of unreturned love, his own or another's. In the first *Idyll*, the goatherd Thyrsis sings of Daphnis' fatal lovesickness. In the third *Idyll*, an unnamed goatherd pines away because of his hopelessly unrequited love for a "nymph" named Amaryllis.<sup>3</sup> This *Idyll* interweaves alternatives of death and the fulfillment of love in a manner similar to that of *Idyll* 2 (Gutzwiller 1991: 121). The key difference between the two poems, though, is that while *Idyll* 3 offers a choice between death of the scorned lover and a happy, romantic conclusion in which affection is mutual, Simaetha in her spell wishes that either the scorning lover die or that their love be renewed by his return. The comparison between *Idylls* 2 and 3 also remind us that Simaetha's love is, ultimately, hopeless, which ushers in the purpose behind the second half of the poem and its chief similarity with *Idyll* 11.

In the eleventh *Idyll*, the Cyclops Polyphemus laments the unfeeling departure of the nymph Galatea. Despite her femininity and the urban setting to which she

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<sup>3</sup> Some have interpreted *Idyll* 3 as a love song to the statue of a nymph within a grotto (Gutzwiller 1991: 120-121). This Pygmalion-like obsession would clearly make any attempt at seduction moot, yet the naïveté that would motivate the goatherd to sing to a statue would also link him more closely with Polyphemus in *Idyll* 11, who sings to a water-bound nymph, although he is a land creature (Gutzwiller 1991: 120).

belongs, Simaetha in her distress conforms easily to these other forlorn lovers (Griffiths 1979: 82; Parry 1988: 43, 45; Payne 2007: 93). Love is, in a way, the great equalizer between the figures. Her song aligns with the music of these shepherds, and her status as a woman effectively disassociates her from the elite.

Finally, all three *Idylls*—2, 3, and 11—also entail what is known as a *paraklausithyron*, an event particular to the Greek komastic culture (Pretagostini 2006: 71-72), in which a lover lays outside his beloved's house. Each poem warps the traditional *komos* in some way, the third with the "house" set as a cave, the eleventh with the Cyclops romancing his beloved Galatea under the sea, and the second with the sexual pursuer the woman (after their sexual encounter, Delphis claims that he was preparing a *paraklausithyron*, but the truth is dubious) (Gutzwiller 1991: 115; MacDonald 2005: 29-30). Thus her song and status as a rejected lover group her with the lovesick rustics like Daphnis, Polyphemus, and the unnamed lover of *Idyll* 3 and link the second *Idyll* at least tentatively with Theocritus' pastorals.

As an abandoned lover, the purpose of her song joins Simaetha still more closely with the unrequited shepherds of other bucolic *Idylls*. Although she casts a spell to bring her lover back, the conclusion of the poem "I will bear up as I have endured" (ἐγὼ δ' οἰσῶ τὸν ἐμὸν πόνον ὥσπερ ὑπέεσταν) indicates that, by the end of her spell and confession, her goal has either been revealed truly or has changed (2.164). By the poem's end, Simaetha's song purposes not to bring Delphis back; rather, it is designed to manage and even overcome her heartache (Griffiths 1979: 81; 1981: 268; Parry 1988: 43, 45; Payne 2007: 99-100). The Cyclops' song has the same

purpose at heart, and Theocritus himself says at the opening of the eleventh *Idyll* that music, poetry, is the only cure for love. There is no medicine, φάρμακον, that can cure it (11.1-3, 17-18).

Theocritus uses this same term twice in reference to Simaetha's spell (2.15, 161). According to Christopher Faraone, φάρμακον is a very loaded word, on the one hand denoting the assumed medicine or herbal remedy for an illness, but also referring to preventative incantations (2006: 83). By employing this word choice, he links *Idylls* 2 and 11, and makes clear that Simaetha's potions and spell alone will not cure her heartache: it promises only to make Delphis suffer. He thus gives us two sides to the φάρμακον and two uses; the Cyclops uses his song as both a cure for love and a defensive spell to ward off Love, while Simaetha, on the other hand, uses her song to cure her heartache while casting a spell to inflict Love on Delphis. Her identifying with Circe is especially important here, as Circe is in many such preventative spells, identified as the danger for unsuspecting men, just as Simaetha here pretends to be (*idem*: 77-78, 87).

Hence, the orientation of the spell focuses on Delphis (as implied by the refrain "Draw back the man to my house," repeated every five lines from 2.17-62), while the song that follows emphasizes Simaetha and her suffering (the refrain to this song, less regular in its frequency, is "Moon, tell me whence my love came" and occurs from lines 2.69-135). The real cure for her lovesickness is in the confessional song that follows her witchcraft, in the act of song, not the magic of an incantation.

Polyphemus similarly sings to alleviate the pain of his abandonment. On the other hand, Daphnis in *Idyll* 1 does not sing, and therefore does not give into the urge to express his song, instead yielding to the poison of his pent-up feelings. Thyrsis' song in the first *Idyll* closes with Daphnis' death—a significant contrast with the endurance of Polyphemus and Simaetha implied by *Idylls* 2 and 11. Whether music is truly a successful cure for heartache is not expressly affirmed by either work, and the effectiveness of the panaceaic song seems to be largely in the eye of the reader. Perhaps because of Theocritus' ambiguity, we are meant to determine our own conclusion for Simaetha's affair; Charles Segal offers that the calm dawn that Simaetha welcomes at the last stanza of the poem may indicate a similar tranquility introduced to her spirit, compared to the turbulent pain that she suffered due to Delphis' infidelity (1985: 118-119). However, the devastating influence of love as both an ailment and as a possible cause of death are clear, not only from Thyrsis' watery end, but also from the suffering of Simaetha and Polyphemus, and the threat that Simaetha's magic potentially offers Delphis.

Simaetha's song, however, seems to have great success relative to that of her spell. Regardless of her success in soothing her pain, the song is clearly the focal point of the narrative and the more relatable portion of the *Idyll*. The fact that her confession to the moon is the emphasis of the overall poem also more closely ties the second *Idyll* with the other pastoral poems. Simaetha's very position as a singer clarifies and strengthens her similarity with the rustics of the bucolics, whose songs relate similar heartbreak.

*Idyll 2* has also been grouped with other poems from Theocritus' corpus that share a similar domestic setting: these are called the urban mimes, and frequently include *Idylls* 2, 14, and 15 (Pretagostini 2006: 67). These poems all occur within civilization, bound by city walls or streets and the civic institutions therein. These are also so-named because they resemble mimes that were being written by contemporaries of Theocritus, such as Herodas, and his precursor, Sophron (Lambert 2002: 80; Gagarin and Fantham 2010: 440). The poems share certain performative elements with mimes, and have a clear focus on the mundane elements of common life (Burton 1995: 1-3, 8-9; Payne 2007: 55; Kutzko 2007: 141-142). Certain plotlines and characters become motifs in the genre, and *Idyll 2* resembles the works of Sophron, according to the scholiast, since Simaetha receives her namesake from one of his mimes (Lambert 2002: 80). But as this earlier mime is lost, any other points of comparison are unknown.

Yet *Idyll 2* does not as clearly exhibit many of the mimetic elements that the other urban mimes do. As mentioned above, there are clear similarities with the pastoral *Idylls* that make *Idyll 2*'s position in the urban mimes particularly complicated: this poem, with Simaetha's rustic naïveté and desperate love song, resembles pastoral poems such as *Idylls* 1, 3, and 11. The very structure of *Idyll 2* contains numerous allusions to *Idyll 1*. Firstly, both songs share a refrain and an introduction. In the first *Idyll*, the conversation between Thyrsis and a rival shepherd establishes the setting and dynamics of the eventual song, and prime the reader for Thyrsis' composition, which utilizes an evolving refrain to encapsulate and develop



the narrative. In the second *Idyll*, Simaetha's spell itself sets up her confessional piece, and both her spell and her song have recurrent, if changing, refrains which differentiate them from one another, but ally both with that of the first *Idyll* by introducing the phases of performance (Burris 2004: 170). The refrain of Thyrsis' song transitions from "begin the bucolic songs" to "cease the bucolic songs" as he nears the end; Simaetha's refrain changes completely between the spell and the song, transitioning from the imperative summoning of Delphis to an introverted question inquiring about the source of her love. Thyrsis' shift marks the start and closure of his narrative, namely, Daphnis' death due to his love; Simaetha's instead seems to denote an almost cathartic shift in her attitude, from one of revenge to one of confused, rueful pain. Notably, however, in the first *Idyll*, only Thyrsis' song includes the refrains—the poem's introduction and the agonistic preamble between the rustics is unaccompanied—whereas most of *Idyll 2* contains one of the two refrains, that of her spell or that of her confession.

*Idyll 2* also employs a ring composition. The poem is related cyclically, with an end that refers back to the opening lines and interweaves the motifs that lie in between (for example, Simaetha invokes the help of her servant Thestylis in both the opening line of the poem and near the end). This circular structure helps emphasize Simaetha's plight as a lover trapped by her own emotions (MacDonald 2005: 15). The layout of the stanzas, too, reveal a specific, if dizzying rhetorical pattern—Simaetha begins the poem with her enchantment, but only explains the reason for her distress after the finale of the spell, in the context of her complaint to Selene, the

moon. The disorder of Simaetha's incantation also hints at the chaotic state of her emotions due to her feelings for Delphis; the organization of the ring structure, which seems to conflict with the discrepancies of her narrative, could also reveal the resolution of her confusion.

Approaching this *Idyll*, then, is difficult, for it requires careful observation of both the bucolic elements and the features that make it one of the urban mimes. Simaetha herself seems to both resemble a rustic and an urbanite, and the tension between these different realms manifests itself in the composition *Idyll* itself, which begins with an urban spell and concludes with a bucolic song. In analyzing Simaetha, the reader also has to encounter the duality of her persona, first as a would-be witch, then as a grieving and scorned young woman.

### *Simaetha the Witch: Magic in Idyll 2*

The apparent disorder in the spell of this ode has caused some to question the legitimacy of Simaetha's spell as a form of actual witchcraft. Michael Lambert particularly notes that the dynamics of her spell do not align with the patterns of the papyri that contain contemporary and paradigmatic enchantments (2002: 79). He remarks that, although Simaetha's incantation had been previously grouped with *agoge* spells (those used for binding unwilling lovers), her ritual actions throughout the poem do not uphold the traditions of which we are aware; this aspect, coupled with Simaetha's tendency to ramble almost aimlessly, has brought him to the conclusion that her spell is utterly in vain, even comic due to the nature of her errors

(*idem*: 81). If Lambert's hypothesis is correct, Simaetha's clumsy spell-casting trivializes the arcane world of witchcraft, perhaps bringing it into the comedic level of the other mimes in Theocritus' corpus.

This is not, however, the only interpretation available to explain the divergences between the pattern of Theocritus' spell and that of the curse tablets and the papyri. It is equally as possible that Theocritus tailors Simaetha's poem to suite his literary purposes and merely assumes elements of the arcane in order to conjure in the mind of the reader the sort of mystical environment with which he is associating Simaetha (Graf 1997: 184). On the other hand, Hugh Parry notes that Simaetha acting as a witch places her in the long-standing tradition in Greek literature of women gaining revenge through magic (1988: 50).

Acting out of her desire, Simaetha is ushered suddenly into womanhood and is subsequently abandoned on the threshold of what should have been her marriage quarters. The aim of her magic, thus, is reciprocal retribution: for Delphis to be aflame with passion and to suffer in death, just as she herself was consumed with a heated desire and consequently underwent the metaphorical death of her chastity. As Simaetha herself recognizes in the poem (2.15-16), she is continuing the work of exemplars like Circe and Medea, though the level of her spell and its overwhelmingly erotic purpose are vastly different from those of her claimed forebears. Magicians in Greco-Roman literature are typically women, though exotic and foreign male experts are occasionally called upon (Parry 1988: 50-51). Both elements of the heritage of magic are recognized in the poem, as Simaetha learned her magic from just such a

foreign specialist (2.161-162), and tried the expertise of old women in the town to cure her lovesickness (2.90-91). Theocritus' recognition of this magical descent from both sources seems to reflect an over-zealous attempt to reconcile the two approaches, one that instead of validating Simaetha's authenticity as a witch—as it seems meant to do—practically undermines her authority as a magician. Furthermore, by drawing a comparison between Simaetha and her models, Circe and Medea, the inefficacy of her spell is revealed: their spells have tangible results recorded in fiction; Simaetha at the close of the *Idyll* has resigned herself to carrying on with her life without Delphis (Gibbs-Wichrowska: 254-255). Theocritus, in a way, attests too much: Simaetha is not a convincing threat in her spells because she is trying so hard to be a threat. The result is amusing and pathetic, but hardly intimidating, and Simaetha retains her humanity in spite of her witchcraft because of this fact.

As such, Simaetha is not the typical epic Greek heroine, enchantress or otherwise. She is, at her very core, a nobody—or, in Laura Gibbs-Wichrowska's words "a girl-next-door type of character, who is realistic to the very core, rather than supernatural" (*idem*: 255). Her emulation of the epic enchantresses Circe and Medea is an empty one: her spell does not raise her to the level of epic, nor does it place among them. The specifics of her life are notably omitted, but by this very omission we can assume that she is not of the aristocratic class.<sup>4</sup> There are no legal guardians

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<sup>4</sup> Joan Burton argues that the poem's ambiguity may imply that Simaetha is a loner, a dislocated Greek settler who briefly unites with Delphis, who is himself an immigrant from Myndos and her superior in status thanks in part to his clear identity (1995: 19). On the other hand, Delphis' Myndian heritage may simply be invoked as part of his agonistic cognomen, like the singer whom Thyrsis defeated in the first *Idyll* (1.24).

mentioned to protect Simaetha from the *komos* that Delphis promises, and there was clearly no husband or legal marriage consummated.<sup>5</sup> Simaetha, her nurse, and her maid seem to make up her household, and her dealings (apart from those sexual encounters with Delphis and the attested education from the Assyrian magician) tend to be with other women: the *aulos* player's mother, the old women who make potions, and her various female servants. Simaetha's failure to become a threatening enchantress is emphasized by the company she keeps: just as her chief acquaintances are everyday wives and women, so too is Simaetha. Because she serves as our main character then, this quasi-witch characterized by commonness becomes an example of the quotidian woman.

### *Simaetha the Quotidian Woman*

One of the difficulties in analyzing Theocritus' characterization of Simaetha comes in his unique choice in setting for *Idyll 2*: the normality of Simaetha's character contrasts heavily with the arcane scene. Obscurity underscores the poem: we have no specific location for her spell, Simaetha's skill as a sorceress is shaky at best, and the outcome of her spell is unclear. Dabbling in witchcraft, she sings her spell and her complaint, not as Thyrsis sang under a the shade of a pine, but rather,

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<sup>5</sup> The process of Greek marriage by the Hellenistic period had been largely universalized, and the marriage contract itself typically took on a patterned format which more closely resembles the modern prenuptial agreement than a license. The document would typically state the name and lineage of the bride and groom, the bride's dowry upon marriage, and the terms for divorce agreed upon in the case of infidelity or, often, children born outside the marriage (see Pomeroy 1984: 83-124).

perhaps, over an enchanting table, an altar to the dark Hecate. This is no day-to-day event, yet through Simaetha's song we are given brief glimpses of the Hellenistic world in which she lives her normal life. Though the occasion for her spell is extraordinary, the events that created her situation were mundane, and, as I argued in the previous section, as a spell-caster she is defined by her shallow imitation of ancient magic.

Theocritus' depiction of her daily life, however, reveals her outdoors and enjoying freedom previously not ascribed to women;<sup>6</sup> in a sense, Simaetha's life is idealized, or perhaps glossed over, in much the same way as that of his bucolic shepherds in the countryside. Theocritus does not depict Simaetha in the women's quarters doing her daily work, or preparing herself as a chaste maiden for marriage. Instead, he shows her in the roles that a man in Alexandria would likely see a young woman: first as an observer of a religious ceremony to Artemis, secondly as a lover within her bedroom, and finally as the woman known and scorned.<sup>7</sup> Yet he still restricts her to a female-dominated realm (Griffiths 1981: 263). Throughout the poem

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<sup>6</sup> Compared with the lifestyles of their male counterparts, Greek women typically lived very restricted lives. Aristocratic women were meant to pride themselves on being unheard and on being mothers, according various speeches of the orator and poet Solon (Keuls 1993: 88; O'Higgins 2003: 100); furthermore, society encouraged women to be kept indoors as much as possible, making them unseen citizens as well. In terms of literature, however, the Hellenistic mimes imbue women with an independence of choice that surprised readers of earlier Greek literature.

<sup>7</sup> Recall that in Lysias' speech for Euphiletus the wife similarly first meets her lover at an outdoor event, a funeral procession. In the course of Lysias' speech, the matronly wife transitions from a bystander at the event, to the secretive lover who is visited in her own home, and ends as the disgraced adulteress. Perhaps this chain of events became commonplace enough in Greek society to spark a literary theme..

she gives orders to her maid Thestylis and her nurse, recalling her attendance at the festival of Artemis, to which she was invited by another female friend. Next, after likening herself to Medea and Circe, she invokes the goddesses Aphrodite, Selene, and Hecate as a response to the actions of the one dominant male figure in the poem. She learns of Delphis' unfaithfulness from the mother of an *aulos* player, and finally searches for a cure for her lovesickness from a wise woman or witch. There is a clear pattern. Almost all of her human encounters—and the sum of her divine— occur thus, woman to woman.

She is in this sense grounded in reality, constrained by the expectations of her gender in Greek society, and perhaps even limited by Theocritus' own experience of women. But she is also idealized by the purposeful omission of reality and the inclusion of surreal and supernatural elements take, for example, the ease with which she converses with the goddesses (Gibbs-Wichrowska 1994: 255). For the duration of *Idyll 2*, Simaetha is able to transcend her circumstances, not only in the sense of overcoming heartbreak by appealing to the divine, but also in the sense of defying to some degree the typical literary silence of a good female commoner by opting instead to join the long line of witches, deliberately controlling the narrative that tells her story through her use of magic.

Simaetha, despite her sorrow, is in command of the narrative almost from the beginning, whether in ordering her servant around or demanding that Delphis visit her and respond to her affection. But Simaetha's authority does not extend beyond the physical and personal boundaries of her household, and ends with Delphis' crossing

the threshold of her house; once he visits her, she reverts from an assertive woman to a child afraid in the night, desiring the comfort of her parent (2.108-109). Most notably, Delphis robs Simaetha of her compliance with tradition by the act of sex, by the physical use of his masculinity: before she met Delphis, Simaetha would not have resorted to magic; but he made her *κακὰν καὶ ἀπάρθενον* (a bad and unchaste girl, 2.41). Moreover, he made her revert to a childish state of helpless dependence (2.108-110), due to which she now turns to spells for comfort and freedom. Just as the addition of masculine force to *oikos* strips Simaetha of her capability, removing masculine influences from the majority of the *Idyll* empowers her. With Delphis, she is helpless, but among the goddesses, she can assert authority.

Within the poem, Simaetha is in command not only of herself, but also of Thestylis, the nurse, and even Delphis for a time. Without the challenge of familial or social obligations, Simaetha is granted the same kind of freedom with which Theocritus endows his herdsmen. There is even a certain counter-cultural aspect to the lives of the rustics and of Simaetha too; the shepherds live without the interference of masters, and Simaetha lives without a male authority figure to protect or punish her. Furthermore, rather than conducting herself as a young, respectable Greek woman should, Simaetha is shown throughout the poem to violate the tenets of her sex: breaking social custom by assuming the role of sexual aggressor, conspiring against a male figure with magic, and above all losing her virginity before marriage.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Her conduct reveals her to have rejected the expectations of Greek society: in Athens, an aristocratic girl who had lost her virginity was seen as “damaged goods” and, according to Plutarch’s



Yet regardless of the audacity of her actions, she remains a pitiable, perhaps even sympathetic character, due to her helplessness and motive. Love has no cure except for song (*Id.* 7.1-3), and by relating her seduction and suffering, Simaetha resolves not only her heartache, but also any rebellious tendencies against the male hierarchy that could concern Theocritus' audience (who were, after all, largely male, though Arsinoe II's position as his patroness must not be neglected or overlooked). Theocritus, by making Simaetha simultaneously the instigator of her love affair and the helpless lover spurned, gives her enough power to function as his main character, but limits her abilities enough to ensure her believable femininity and minimize the threat of her position.

In order to maintain Simaetha's position as an average contemporary woman, despite her magical affiliations, Theocritus utilizes her interactions with the goddesses and her relation to her magical paragons in part to contrast her inability with their divinity. Assuming, if clumsily, the role of Medea, Simaetha calls on the divine for aid, petitioning Aphrodite, Selene, and Hecate, her alter-ego.<sup>9</sup> This divine pairing of lover and virgin reveals more of Simaetha's character: just as the contradiction between the goddess of love and the manifestations of the virgin goddess Artemis is clear, so too is the division within Simaetha, between the woman who sought out the

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account of Solonian law, could be sold into slavery by her father (Sol. 23.2; McHardy and Marshall, 2008: 3-4).

<sup>9</sup> Note that all three counterparts of Artemis are incorporated into this poem along with Aphrodite. Artemis, however, is only mentioned as the benefactor of the festival where Simaetha first met Delphis, while both Selene and Hecate participate as part of the audience in the incantation.

physical intimacy of a male and the naïve innocent who, *in flagrante delicto*, is compared metaphorically to a child seeking its mother in the night. Though Delphis has made her ἀπαρθενov (2.41), Simaetha remains naively inexperienced to heartache, and the pain of Delphis' actions strip her of that innocence too in the poem.

In their own distinct ways, all these goddesses have shunned the masculine world. Hecate/Selene's resistance to male domination is perhaps more obvious, for she has literally avoided their presence and maintained a form of sexless autonomy in the wilds and mystic rites of the woods and the night (Pomeroy 1975: 5-6).

Simaetha's resemblance to Artemis evolves through the *Idyll*, from a virgin who shuns men entirely at the festival, to the vengeful Hecate who justifies wrongs with witchcraft, and finally to Selene, known for accepting her hopeless love affair with Endymion. All three aspects of the goddess are embodied in Simaetha at different points in the poem, and her similarity to the goddesses is reflected by their appearance.

Simaetha's similarity to Aphrodite, on the other hand, occurs at the inception of her love when she takes charge of her emotions and seeks out Delphis as a lover. Aphrodite's freedom from men, after all, comes in her pursuit and use of them for pleasure: in *Idyll* 1, Daphnis mocks Aphrodite for her bond to Adonis and Anchises, men who conquered her (1.105-113)—but in Simaetha's spell, these men do not appear. Aphrodite is again in control of love, powerful and independent, and so is Simaetha, if only briefly.

But Simaetha's resemblance to these goddesses is transient, and we are given

frequent reminders in her song and spell that she herself is not only mortal, but also human and flawed. Her passionate love made her an ugly, “wicked woman” (2.41), thinning her hair and paling her skin. Her relationship does not transform the mortal into a goddess, and, as insinuated by the rapidity with which Simaetha changes from Artemis to Aphrodite to Hecate, and finally to Selene, any similarity between Simaetha and a goddess is impermanent and shallow. Her interaction with the goddesses is also fundamentally one-sided: they do not answer her questions, and they do not respond manifestly to her prayers. She has no real relationship with them, and no special connection to lift her up from the obscurity into which Theocritus places her character. In spite of the incantation and her likeness to the divine goddesses she calls upon, Simaetha remains a common woman.

Furthermore, by referencing powerful sorceresses like Medea and Circe, Theocritus essentially demarcates the drastic gap between his own heroines, these quotidian women, and those of royal contemporaries and epic predecessors. Though she may be a witch, Simaetha is definitively no Circe. On the other hand, Theocritus goes to great extents to emphasize the mundane, physical realities of their worlds: Simaetha’s spell is riddled with descriptions of her bodily experience and her desire for her ex-lover’s corporeal suffering. Moreover, according to A. S. F. Gow, the rites in her spell, such as the burning of laurel leaves at the beginning, also emulate her physical lust and the ingredients of an erotic rite (1973: 35). Additionally, she continues with her day-to-day language even when placed in the presence of goddesses, rather than adopting hymnic or ritual language. Theocritus hereby

attempts to keep Simaetha humble, to separate her from the epic sorceresses that she aspires to be, and to focus instead on the pedestrian love affair that she has undergone and continues to endure. The powerful women, although they seem to be Simaetha's role models, are actually her unattainable superiors, and their purpose is to keep the upstart in her role as a non-specific, distressed woman in unrequited love.

### *How the Quotidian Woman Functions in Idyll 2*

The purpose of *Idyll 2* and Theocritus' use of the quotidian woman as a model for his main character can be interpreted in various ways. Theocritus gives no clear closure for the poem: the success or failure of Simaetha's cathartic songs are largely left to the discretion of the reader, and the result of this song determines in some respects whether this poem is to be viewed as a sympathetic, comic, or perhaps a mixture of both. Simaetha's position as a common woman informs the reader's conclusion.

Michael Lambert viewed this song as blatantly and starkly comic. He argues that, because of the discrepancies in Simaetha's spell, the overall effect of Theocritus' work is designed to be comedic and mocking (2002: 81). Simaetha is actually a failure as a sorceress, and her pathetic, novice mistakes are designed to undermine her assumed role. If this is the reader's opinion of the song, then Theocritus surely tailors his depiction of Simaetha as a quotidian woman to intensify the extent of Simaetha's inadequacy as a magician. The quotidian woman archetype is, after all, an average Greek woman, and, as evidenced by papyri, the normal Greek magician was expected

to be a man and therefore educated and independent (Lambert 2002: 78, 84)<sup>10</sup>.

Simaetha, with her loose sexuality, education from the Assyrian master, and power over the narrative of *Idyll* 2, resembles a man enough to perform the spell with only the aid of her servant, but she is not powerful and learned enough to enjoy the threatening success that witches of epic could have. In fact, Simaetha would be the opposite—the threat she poses to Delphis is, literally, a joke (Lambert 2002: 85).

If *Idyll* 2 is essentially comic in nature, it belongs more closely with the other urban mimes, which are similarly amusing and light. Diminishing the power of women through such mockery would not have been an unusual trope of the stage or of literature, although it may have been more risky given Arsinoe II's power over the poets of Alexandria (for more information on Arsinoe II's influence and cultic privileges, see Nock 1930). The spell itself clearly does not methodically promise any tangible results for Simaetha's magic, but her song's relation to *Idylls* 3 and 11 present a moderately successful tableau of other lovesick singers who, at the close of their songs, have achieved a form of closure. Given the atmosphere of the Alexandrian period, the belittlement of Simaetha's position as a woman scorned seems both unlikely and uncreative, especially for an author such as Theocritus, who has been viewed as highly innovative.

On the other hand, Theocritus may have designed Simaetha as a quotidian woman because her status as a common, relatable figure whose plight is all the more

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<sup>10</sup> Lambert's argument is contra Parry's, who maintains that women were the chief spell-casters in antiquity, adhering to the traditions of witches that is evidenced by mythology and literature (1988: 50).

pathetic because of her inability to prevent it. As a non-elite, her hapless love affair makes her future uncertain; as a woman, her enchantment is quaint and recalls those of other sorceresses, while remaining harmless; as an independent, she is free enough to engage in her relationship with Delphis and to hope for resolution at the closure of her complaint to the moon. The relatability of the quotidian woman, and more so, the applicability of her heartbrokenness to an audience is also an explanation for the function of Theocritus' characterization of Simaetha for those readers who see in her a sympathetic figure.

In either interpretation, Theocritus' decision to make Simaetha a woman affects the emotional tone of his work. Thus, the analysis of the quotidian woman as a trope in his poetry is essential to determining the range and poignancy of his meaning, and the true debate between these interpretations lies in whether the *Idyll* is designed to be humorous or empathetic. However, the poem is never merely one or the other, and perhaps Theocritus casts Simaetha as his main character in order to be both sardonic and serious. Segal called this Theocritus' way of "Allow[ing] us occasionally to smile at Simaetha's innocence and naiveté, but...not therewith diminish[ing] our compassion for her misery," and this interpretation seems to account best for all the elements present in the poem (1985: 119).

Simaetha also, with her correspondence and her failed emulation of Circe and Medea, allows Theocritus to interact with his literary forebears in epic and tragedy. Her everyday characteristics make her belong to his mimes, it is true, but her power over the spell and confession, and her authority within the poem as a whole, gives

Simaetha the presence of her magical paragons, although she lacks their arcane capabilities. Moreover, through the personal nature of her confession to Selene paired with her galvanized spell, Theocritus grants Simaetha both the authority and the intimate voice that the female figures of tragedy and epic so rarely got. This complex mixture of pedestrian characteristics with epic authority of speaking and with a genuine, personal perspective that allows the woman to communicate for the author defines the quotidian woman, and here defines Simaetha.

In conclusion, Theocritus' second *Idyll* makes the quotidian woman both ironic and sincere, and broadens the use of mimesis from slapstick plays and crass mimes of New Comedy and the early Hellenistic age into a form more complex and cohesive with the literary legacy of epic and tragedy. Integrating comedy and mundanity with magic and love, Theocritus' *Idyll 2* relies on Simaetha's characterization to condense all of these paradoxical elements into a workable whole. She, as a quotidian woman, is able to illustrate the complexity of the *Idyll* by embodying a figure at once relatable and comic; in the simplicity of her position, the mastery of the narrative, and her dynamic with the reader, she fulfills the expectations of the archetype and satisfies the intricacy of this *Idyll*.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *Idyll 15: Praxinoa and Gorgo, More Quotidian Women*

#### *Introduction*

This chapter focuses on the quotidian woman as she appears in *Idyll 15*, one of Theocritus' urban mimes. The two main characters, Praxinoa and Gorgo, respectively exemplify this character type, but though they conform in some ways to the standard set by Simaetha in *Idyll 2*, they also depart from her paradigm. Like Simaetha, Praxinoa and Gorgo lack elite status and mythic namesakes, and are instead filled with a naïveté bordering on the absurd, which makes this *Idyll* striking. Most importantly, Praxinoa and Gorgo dictate the narrative, their perspectives not just evident, but dominant. But there are differences as well: the women themselves are married and, overall, content in their mundane lives, whereas Simaetha was unhappy in her love and therefore in her life; also, instead of interacting with goddesses, as Simaetha does, they meet with other women and men on the street, their glaring commonality visible because of the palatial setting of the poem. Because the women themselves are even more ordinary than Simaetha, the purpose of the fifteenth *Idyll* too is at once more comic and more political than the second *Idyll*, and thus Theocritus' application of his new archetype requires separate analysis. Following a brief introduction to the poem, this chapter will discuss the poem's setting within Theocritus' works, the duality between Praxinoa and Gorgo as wives and as poetic



figures, and finally my own conjectures as to the purpose behind Theocritus' quotidian women in this *Idyll*.

### *Idyll 15: Position and Setting*

As was the case with *Idyll 2*, the fifteenth *Idyll* entails a narrative that is unexpected when compared with others of Theocritus' poems. In brief, this poem describes the journey of a pair of housewives, Gorgo and Praxinoa, along with their maids from the outskirts of Alexandria to the palace of the Ptolemaic Queen Arsinoe II, where they admire the royal celebration of the annual *Adonia*, a festival to Aphrodite and her consort Adonis. The first half of the poem is devoted to the women's travels through the street, and their interactions with various strangers; in the second half of the poem, the two women marvel at the tapestries of the palace and are treated with a song by "the Argive woman's daughter" (15.97).

*Idyll 15* may be considered the epitome of the urban mimes: it is clearly set in the suburbs and city of Alexandria, and it focuses on the daily activities of an urban pair of women. There landscape is no longer that of the pastoral setting, and there is no song of unrequited passion to connect with the songs of the love-struck shepherds. There are, nevertheless, three typically Theocritean elements that help reorient this outlier—the first is the element of competition, the second is the beauty of song, and finally the incorporation of divinity into mundanity.

The role that competition plays in this *Idyll* is not immediately apparent to the casual reader, although the confrontational manner with which the women encounter

strangers is fairly obvious. When the women first meet each other, however, their friendly exchange also reflects a certain agonistic quality, as the women aim to one-up one another in complaints about their husbands, hiding behind their exasperation boasts about their income (Whitehorne 1995: 68-70). Such friendly ribbing, especially if it is in fact boasting, is reminiscent of *Idyll* 1, in which Thyrsis and the goatherd open the poem with compliments that aim to improve on one another. In both cases, the competitive conversations culminate in ekphrases and in erotic songs about the love affairs of the gods and their companions, where Daphnis and Adonis are cast in similar roles (see Hunt 2011).

Once they have left the safety of Praxinoa's home, they meet, in order: a man with or near a horse, an old woman, a kind stranger, and a rude man who criticizes the pair because of their accents. These encounters each have a different tone—with the first stranger, the women shy back, frightened of a rearing horse nearby; they exchange no words with this man, only with one another. With the old woman, the pair share cryptic words, an interchange that has been variously interpreted as being symbolic of an initiation ceremony,<sup>1</sup> a further hint to the supernatural elements to this poem and foreshadowing the central rite of the *Adonia*. The first male stranger with whom they converse, then, is very kind to them, promising to try to protect them from

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Burton briefly enumerates the events that occur throughout the poem that seem to point to a mystical religious rite concurring with the actions of the *Idyll*: these include Praxinoa's and Gorgo's beset journey, the ritual tearing of Praxinoa's garment, the cryptic exchange with the elder at the gates, and the locking-in of the initiates upon reaching their destination, but center on the transition from the physical road to the spiritual destination of the religious festival (1995: 15-17). Hans Hansen, on the other hand, views the whole second half of *Idyll* 15 to be a form of *katabasis*, where Praxinoa and Gorgo are "descending" to meet an Adonis ascending from Hades (2010: 48).

the crush of the crowd in response to Praxinoa's brusque and assertive command (15.70-73).

Yet it is their encounter with the last stranger, the second man, that most exhibits the nature of rhetorical competition. The conversation is initiated by the stranger, who remarks disparagingly about the women's "prattling" as they marvel at the effigy of the goddess Aphrodite and her consort Adonis. Praxinoa's response to his put down is incredibly well-formed, methodological, and even, to some degree, comically ironic, and she cries out that she has no desire for another master (15.94-95). Gorgo then hushes her friend so that they can enjoy the song (15.96). In the exchange, each speaker attempts to quiet someone: the stranger Praxinoa, Praxinoa the stranger, and Gorgo Praxinoa. It is an interesting reversal of the bucolic shepherds, who competitively adjure one another to sing,<sup>2</sup> but the result is the same—silence falls just in time for a pleasant song.

This song is the second tie between *Idyll* 15 and the bucolic works, reminiscent particularly of Thyrsis' song in *Idyll* 1. Both songs are ekphrastic, performative, and skillfully carried out by singers who have proved their ability in competitions (Hunt 2011: 388). Clearly, the singers are similar to one another: the girl who sings to Adonis, on the one hand, has renown for her performative skill, having excelled the year before (15.97-98), just as Thyrsis is recognized by the

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<sup>2</sup> See Pretagostini 2006, specifically pages 57-58, for explanation of the pattern of rhetorical competition that leads up to song competitions. Note also that in this *Idyll*, the competitive ribbing throughout does not lead up to the main characters performing, *per se*, but rather to an external songstress, proved by previous competition, singing.

goatherd for having proved his mettle through defeating a Lydian poet in a poetry contest (1.24). Both *Idyll* 1 and *Idyll* 15 build up to their ultimate songs, carefully introducing the singers, their repertoire, and the quality of their compositions.<sup>3</sup>

In terms of content, too, there are some parallels between the girl's work and Thyrsis'. Both songs mention Aphrodite and Adonis by name, although her song explores at length the divine love story of Aphrodite and Adonis. Although her song does not describe the unfulfilled love of Daphnis, it does center on the relationship of Aphrodite with her mortal lover, and death is as present in her song as it was in Thyrsis'. Daphnis, although clearly comfortable among and known to the gods, chooses to deny his love and dies because of it; Adonis, in spite of Aphrodite's love, dies and thereby renders Aphrodite's desire unfulfillable, except on the festival of the *Adonia*. Her song, though neither set in a pastoral locale nor regaling a bucolic myth, weaves together the mortal cycle and the devastating power that love has over both humans and gods with a standing mythological tradition.

Lastly, the manifest presence of divinity brings to mind Theocritus' bucolic works. Although the majority of the poem details the mundane conversation of Praxinoa and Gorgo, the entirety of the poem takes place on the day of the *Adonia*, the religious festival to Adonis observed annually by Greek women. Adonis himself is described in myth as the most beautiful boy who was seduced by Aphrodite and later

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<sup>3</sup> For the intratextual connections between *Idylls* 1 and 15, particularly as concerns Aphrodite's role in apotheosis and the possible linkage between Thyrsis' and the Argive singer's songs, see Hunt 2011.

slain by a boar.<sup>4</sup> The *Adonia* is the cult event marking the death, rebirth, and second death cycle of the young paramour of Aphrodite. In many ways, the festival emulates a large-scale funeral: to accompany the theatrical displays of mourning which more than likely designated this holiday to women and their tears in the first place, the cultic celebrations culminated in the water “burial” of Adonis in the sea—that is to say, the participants in the ceremony would throw his effigy into the ocean to mark his return to the underworld (Keuls 1993: 25). With some minor Alexandrian changes to the Attic rituals (Reed 200: 323), Theocritus integrates the divine into the mundane by positioning his song on such a festival day, specifically choosing women who may participate in the celebration to act as the vehicle through which readers encounter this women’s ceremony.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Adonis further represents the passive, luxuriant consort-lover more familiar in Eastern myths, and his death in hunting indeed marks him as less than a man (compare, for example, his experience with that of Odysseus in his youth, wherein he is gored but survives his own first hunt (*Od.* 428-454)). Aphrodite, rather, is the dominant in their intercourse, and the dominant in his festival; only in his death does she return to one of the traditional roles of women, that is of mourning (Shapiro 1991: 629; Simms 1998: 134). Traditionally, Adonis returns from the Underworld for a single day, which marks the agricultural changes of spring, possible early summer in the East, and is celebrated in the climax of the *Adonia* (*idem*: 128; Dillon 2003: 1,5,7).

<sup>5</sup> One of the few public religious festivals open to and dominated by women, some have argued that the *Adonia* in fact represents an overhaul of the typical male-female sexual dynamic of ancient Greece (Keuls 1993: 28, 30; Griffiths 1981: 255; Lambert 2001: 90). At its core, the *Adonia* marks a reversal of the natural order of life: the woman acting as a sexual aggressor seduces the boy; the boy is safe in his position as paramour, but once he attempts to secure his manhood in hunting, he is killed; and finally, death itself opens its gates because of the request of a goddess. These inversions are appropriate for the festival’s function as the marker of the return of spring and fertility, but are striking nevertheless, especially because the manifestation of these reversals of nature are also reflected in society, with wives on the street and in the palace, and above all with common women entrusted with the pious task of pleasing the godhead (Simms 1998: 122). The *Adonia* itself has thus been proposed as a manifestation of rebellion against female repression, or, more likely, as a release valve for any social discontent women may have felt (Keuls 1993: 23, 25, 30).

This archetypical urban mime thus still holds some continuity with Theocritus' bucolic *opera*, and the similarities between the climactic songs should, especially, warn readers to relate *Idyll* 15 with *Idyll* 1. I would further argue that the oblique similarities that *Idylls* 2 and 15 share with *Idyll* 1, compounded with the clear similarities that they share as urban mimes focused on women, connect Simaetha with Praxinoa and Gorgo more closely than Theocritus' other stock female main characters, such as the Nymphs of the bucolics. Simaetha was a quotidian woman, and regardless of the divergent nuances of their characterization—such as their identities as respectable Alexandrian wives and matrons with children—Praxinoa and Gorgo serve as further examples of this new archetype.

#### *Praxinoa and Gorgo as Mothers: The Household of Idyll 15*

Examining Praxinoa's and Gorgo's roles as matrons is a task somewhat complicated by the actions of the women themselves. At the start of the poem, not only do the women gladly slough off their husbands and the domestic responsibilities entrusted to them for the workday, but they also abandon their own children to domestic servants in order to attend and enjoy the festivities of the *Adonia*. The tasks of the loom and the distaff, so long attached to wives and explicitly mentioned by Praxinoa (15.27-28), are locked up and left behind for a single day in the house as the women seek the streets and, seemingly, the leisure and awe of a religious festival.

However, in spite of their departure from their normative environment, the housewives have left only in person, not in spirit. When at Praxinoa's house, the

women discuss their absent husbands, clothes, and domestic struggles (especially those complicated by said husbands); when in the street, they cope with the vicissitudes of the outdoors by relating them to their lives: at the rearing horse, Praxinoa declares her gratitude that she left her baby at home (15.55); in the crowd, she objects to the cloak that is torn in the hubbub (15.69-70); reaching the festival, Praxinoa remarks that the shut gates are much the same at a wedding (15.77); finally, at the palace, they notice the tapestries, but focus on the handiwork rather than the subject (15.82-83; Griffiths 1981: 255). From the text it becomes immediately apparent that they are outsiders, naïve and awestruck, hazards to themselves and even obstacles to those men thronging around them at their daily grind. Reminding themselves of the securities of the homestead seems to console them; the household is the frame of reference which reorients them in the outside world.

It is clear from these instances that the women find their identity in their positions as matrons and wives; this stands in juxtaposition with Simaetha, who identified herself foremost as a witch in the tradition of Medea and Circe. These roles seem opposite, the former a paradigm of womanly virtue, the second an example of a feminine threat to society. Yet the household and magic, if viewed as environments, can also be viewed as two domains over which women are preeminent.<sup>6</sup> Simaetha's resorting to magic is, thus, a parallel action to Praxinoa's focus on domestic cares in

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<sup>6</sup> See Parry 1988 for the tradition of female witches in literature. For women in the *oikos*, see Cohen 1996, whose discussion of the parallel between the women's sphere and the men's is particularly insightful.

the crowd, and both are strategies employed by women in an attempt to gain control over masculine threats.

The *Adonia*, too, affords Praxinoa and Gorgo a proverbial safe house within the gates of the palace. Mystical in its own way,<sup>7</sup> the *Adonia* festival allows Praxinoa and Gorgo to enter the Ptolemaic palace in Alexandria as more than subjects or suppliants, but as celebrants and worshippers. The religious rites of the festival would have afforded women chief authority for this festival, and thus Praxinoa and Gorgo find themselves back in a position of influence, like that which they had at home. The palace's threshold, too, seems to allow the women to readjust themselves into their earlier masterful roles—a sensible transition, as the indoors were typically women's domain (Cohen 1996: 135-136). Inside the palace, they no longer shrink back from horses, snakes, and masculine (even erotic<sup>8</sup>) threats; here they are free to praise (15.80-86, 96-99), and they are free to chastise at length (15.89-95).

It is notable, however, that although women traditionally carry out the rites of the *Adonia*, Praxinoa and Gorgo are, at most, spectators, not participants in this stage of the festival (Reed 2000: 324). They maintain their focus on the *oikos*, too, marveling at the decorations of Arsinoe's palace, the quality of her tapestries—

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<sup>7</sup> Burton argues that there is a reference to Circe in the language that Gorgo uses to describe the tapestries: τὰ ποικίλα πρᾶτον ἄθρησον, λεπτὰ καὶ ὥς χαρίεντα: θεῶν περονάματα φασεῖς (15.78-79; Burton 1995: 174). The inclusion of Circe here only further underlines the supernatural scene and emphasizes the power of women on the occasion of the *Adonia*, but it also calls to mind Simaetha's upholding of Circe as an ideal.

<sup>8</sup> Snakes can serve as phallic symbols in art and literature, but horses, too, seem to denote a specific male-erotic/sexual metaphor in the encounters of the women in the streets (Burton 1995: 53).



especially how lifelike they are, a focus which reminds the reader of Praxinoa's and Gorgo's fixation on reality and on manual work (Whitehorne 1995: 72). They similarly hone in on the quality of the singer, discussing with the air of experts her success of the year before, and mentioning her descent from a Greek woman, possibly analyzing her citizenship status. They effectively turn the religious festival into a competition, focusing on the unparalleled skill of the tapestry-makers, trading arguments and insults with the stranger they encounter, and recounting the previous accomplishments of the Greek singer in competition. Praxinoa and Gorgo thus reduce the royal, religious, and divine atmosphere of the *Adonia* to an especially grand household tour, complete with the edge of polite, domestic competition that was incorporated into their own houses in the beginning of the poem; in doing so, they integrate themselves into the environment and they deal with the foreign elements that meet them there.

Reconciling these women's roles as mothers and wives with the quotidian woman's aspects, however, is considerably less difficult than reconciling it with Simaetha's role as a sorceress. Making Praxinoa and Gorgo successful, hen-pecking wives makes them more anonymous than excluding these details would have. Simaetha was a single girl whose helplessness negated the threat of her witchcraft; Praxinoa and Gorgo are spirited women whose cooperative positions in society similarly neutralize any menace lingering in their confrontational speeches with the various strangers they meet.

### *Praxinoa (and Gorgo) as Quotidian Women*

The majority of the action and dialogue of *Idyll* 15 is carried out by Praxinoa, though she shares her experiences with Gorgo, her peer and friend, whose prompting originally begins the *Idyll* and initiates their narrated journey to the *Adonia*. However we characterize Praxinoa should be similarly reflected by Gorgo, although in a lesser degree. It has been noted that both figures are used by Theocritus in order to contrast their lot with the position and affluence of Arsinoe Philadelpha (Griffiths 1981: 257; Davies 1995: 155). I argue that, as quotidian women, Praxinoa and Gorgo would accomplish this more effectively, not only as foils for the royal queen, but as independent narrators unaware of their position, and therefore best able to appreciate Arsinoe's skill as a wife and woman, and entirely incapable of appreciating her actual political power or value for artists.

Just as the first and seventh *Idylls* are filled with rustic vocabulary regarding plants and animal life in the bucolic setting, the fifteenth *Idyll* is filled with urban language<sup>9</sup> that centers on the lives of Praxinoa and Gorgo. The vernacular of their conversation enhances their setting, adding realism to the *Idyll* and intensifying the poem's mundanity.

The introductory setting, too, is designed to ground the poem in an everyday location, introducing our characters within the women's quarters of a suburban house

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<sup>9</sup> These words, such as νίτρον and φῦκος, are rare occurrences in Greek literature, and scholars have worked to unravel their meaning and usage in the household. The *nitron* seems to have been used much like modern baking soda as a cleaning agent (Whitehorne 1995: 65), the *fukos* was a dye, and could either have been used as rouge in makeup or as a coloring agent for wool and fabrics (*ibid*: 66).

in Alexandria. Although the city is explicitly named, the status of the women is not. Theocritus specifically keeps the two women's position in society ambivalent. John Whitehorne notes that Praxinoa's and Gorgo's comparison of their husbands' respective failures in shopping may in fact be a boast of their income: Praxinoa's husband mistakenly buys salt (a costly commodity) in a gross amount, while Gorgo's purchases useless fleeces for an incredible mark-up (1995: 67-69; 15.17, 19-20). The husbands' mutual disregard for price would hint at a total carelessness with money, and because the women are complaining, rather than worrying, at such waste, it can only be assumed that the family income is secure enough to support such indulgences (*ibid*: 69). Nevertheless, Praxinoa and Gorgo do not behave with the composure that would be expected of a noble woman, and moreover they are, for the most part, ignored or mistreated in the crowd. Based on Theocritus' other works, as well as what little information we can glean about their circumstances here, we should assume them to be wealthy but not privileged, an ancient version of the *nouvelles riches* (*ibid*: 69-70).

Yet in spite of their unprivileged status, and despite the constraints of being a woman even in Alexandria, they leave their traditional roles behind and confront circumstances and strangers with assertiveness. The dealings of the women with the men they meet on the street confirm that they are emboldened by some exterior motivations, such as the woman's right to celebrate the *Adonia*, or by their cultural pride as Greeks, intensified by the holiday. Burton marks these dealings as the latter, motivated by ethnic identity threatened by the cultural melting pot of the newly-

founded Alexandria: the women, challenged by a man of a different ethnicity, are able to rebut his mockery by pride in their own cultural background, as well as a certain disdain for the stranger's own heritage (1995: 62). However, the women may also have been emboldened by the festivities and by the safety of its transience and hubbub. The women's authority seems as ephemeral as the *Adonia*, but the crucial aspect of the festival is that it imbues two ordinary housewives with an environment over which they can express authority and hold opinions. Although Praxinoa and Gorgo are the type of women able to be lost in the crowd of other festival-goers, Theocritus does not overlook them, and instead uses them as his narrators.

Their anonymity is set in total opposition with the hierarchy of the *Adonia* which they step into at the palace of Arsinoe II. Here within Arsinoe's court of Arsinoe Philadelpha—arguably one of the most influential Ptolemaic queens—Praxinoa and Gorgo pale in comparison to the majesty and power of the Ptolemaic dynasty, clearly embodied in the person of the affluent ruling queen. Arsinoe's political power and sway were such that she married three different kings in her lifetime, received laudation for her support of Ptolemy II's war efforts, and was commemorated far and wide at her death (Thompson 1955: 199-200). There has even been evidence to suggest that she may have been deified—worshipped alongside both Isis and Aphrodite—within her lifetime, rather than posthumously as Egyptian custom would engender (Nock 1930: 5-6, 21). To celebrate the *Adonia* in a young metropolis like Alexandria and in the court of so eminent a queen as Arsinoe would, perhaps,

have been the nearest opportunity to freedom imaginable for women of the age, but it would have also put most in their place.

The awe that Praxinoa and Gorgo feel in the palace seems to reinforce the authority of the Ptolemies, and the good taste and piety of Arsinoe II are praised by the women in terms equal to their praise of Ptolemy Philadelphus as the one who stopped “Egyptian” robberies, though her praise is indirect, echoed in their compliments of the festival and the decorations of the palace (15.46-50; Whitehorne 1995: 73). Here, Theocritus can use the quotidian women as his mouthpiece once more, providing brief, snippet-like encomiums to his patrons. The very commonality of Praxinoa and Gorgo stands out all the more against the royal setting of the poem’s conclusion (Reed 2000: 346). Their shallow concerns and slighting conversation—their attempt to make the foreign and grand domestic and homely—becomes laughable in the austere festival.

Arsinoe, on the other hand, seems to represent the traditional, expected role of an epic queen. Although the housewives enter her palace and marvel at the festival that she has sponsored, the queen herself makes no appearance; furthermore, their praise makes it clear that such religious piety and material grandeur is only possible because of Arsinoe’s skill in managing her royal household. By not physically including some fictional persona of Arsinoe with strangers yet praising her throughout their conversation, Theocritus further separates the women from the queen, and

perhaps even conflates the boundary between his mimetic work and epic literature.<sup>10</sup>

He clearly renders the royal Arsinoe as the former female typecast, such as the “paradigmatic” Queen Arete of the *Odyssey* (Foster 2006: 137), or even Penelope (Griffiths 1981: 258-259). She thus symbolically emphasizes the contrast between previous women in poetry and the quotidian woman presented by the Hellenistic authors with a clear delineation between the housewives, the main characters with their silly but moderately independent lives, and the queen, absent because of traditional decorum and the *gravitas* of her position in the Ptolemaic court. Just as Circe and Medea were the unattainable ideals for Simaetha casting her spell, Arsinoe II is the distant paragon for Praxinoa and Gorgo in terms of ordering the household and duly revering the gods.

The *Adonia* itself also underscores the “banality” of Praxinoa and Gorgo as main characters (Davies 1995: 152). The two housewives are not so much impressed by the festival as they are overawed: every aspect of the festival leads the women to exclaiming, whether the size of the crowd it attracts, the beauty of the tapestries and the skill of the artisans who contributed to its grandeur, or the loveliness of the Adonis himself. They are as aware as the reader that they do not belong in the ceremony, and

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<sup>10</sup> Arsinoe II may even represent the genre of epic poetry altogether, given the latent praise that Theocritus spread throughout the poem and the Homeric vocabulary that is similarly distributed throughout *Idyll* 15 (see Foster 2006 for a full discussion of *Idyll* 15’s Homeric language as relates to Arsinoe II; see Garson 1973 for an overview of Theocritus’ comedic use of Homerisms throughout the *Idylls*). The quotidian women, Praxinoa and Gorgo, would then symbolize the new works of the Hellenistic period, different from their paradigm due to their mundanity, and yet similar in nature and enveloped by a similar subject, simply viewed from a different perspective.

Theocritus uses their mundanity to frame a mythic song, much as he did with the first *Idyll*'s conversation between Thyrsis and the goatherd culminating in the song about Daphnis and the gods. Praxinoa and Gorgo act in a similar fashion, the prelude to the religious hymn at the close of *Idyll* 15. The very language of the women, so filled with colloquialisms and slang as to strongly jar with the cryptic speech of the woman at the gate and the lofty hymn to Adonis, builds up to the hymn and returns us to the moment, recalling the goatherd's address to the nanny goat, Kissaita, in *Idyll* 1 (*idem*: 153; 1.151-152). Any religious or political purpose motivating the *Adonia* seems lost on Praxinoa and Gorgo, and though the two appreciate the talent of the singer before she performs, they are equally content to return to their domestic spheres at the poem's close without mentioning the beauties of the *Adonia* again.

Yet it is from the perspectives of the housewives that Theocritus chooses to unfold his fifteenth *Idyll*. We may ask why—if he wanted spectators, he included plenty of male figures from whom we could have heard the praises of Ptolemy and the ekphrasis of the song to Adonis. If he wanted a female to be his lead, why not the singer, or Arsinoe herself? Now that we have examined Praxinoa's and Gorgo's complete mundanity as compared with the other figures of this poem, we must turn to the question of why Theocritus here utilized such commonplace figures for such a lofty, encomiastic setting.

### *Conclusion: How the Quotidian Women of Idyll 15 Function*

One of the probable causes for Theocritus' employment of the quotidian woman in this *Idyll* is the poem's supernatural occasion. Relaying his narrative through the perspective of women allows him to invade the women's festival more intimately, and allows the reader to experience the *Adonia* from the viewpoints of women who could participate in the festival at any moment. Praxinoa and Gorgo, it is true, do not seem to actively involve themselves in the performance of the *Adonia*—unless one views the women as initiates (Burton 1995: 15-17; Hansen 2010: 60-66; Krevans 2006: 144)—but there are no physical boundaries preventing their participation, simply the constraints of their homes and husbands (15.147-148).

Furthermore this *Idyll*, much more than the other urban mimes and even more so than the bucolics, treads on dangerous ground in dealing with the Ptolemies. Looking back on Alexandria in this period, praising a king who married his sister must have been a difficult task for a Greek poet to accomplish among his fellow peers; on the other hand, criticizing so powerful a ruler as the Ptolemies blatantly was forbidden, and met with harsh consequences (recall the death Sotades suffered due to his mockery of the royal marriage). Joseph Reed presents an interesting argument that in Theocritus' description of the Alexandrian *Adonia*, we see Arsinoe's blend of a Greek festival with Egyptian elements and aggrandizement (2000: 321-322). If so, then surely Theocritus too, by including his thorough description of the event, is offering a beautiful account of Alexandrian culture, appealing to his whole audience and adhering to the agenda of his patrons to unite a diverse community, though his



Greek characters and Greek names—as well as his disparaging remark about Egyptian criminals (15.46-50)—reveal a certain bias toward Hellenism (*idem*: 333-334; Lambert 2001: 92).

*Idyll* 15 is also very indirect in its praise, in keeping with Theocritus' other laudatory works. Even *Idyll* 17, the encomium to Ptolemy, is carefully pieced together, beginning with his father and focusing foremost on the glory imparted to him by his birth (17.13). *Idyll* 18 is purported to praise Arsinoe II, but does so in an epithalamium to Helen (Foster 2006: 142-143). Theocritus seems hesitant to praise openly his current rulers; his political savvy enables him to conceal or complicate his compliments to the rulers in the speech of the women (*idem*: 134-136; Reed 200: 320), and his skill appeals to the Hellenistic aesthetic, for he weaves his tribute into new and unexpected formats.<sup>11</sup>

By disguising his words and thoughts with a feminine mask, Theocritus disarms them, especially behind such masks as Praxinoa and Gorgo provide. These housewives, even in the modern day, are frequently interpreted as ditzy, helpless women whose bickering and “twittering” are the stuff of sheer comedy (15.87, 89; see, for example, Lambert 2001). Perhaps there is some credence to this view, which reminds us that Theocritus' poem belongs to the condescending genres of comedy and mime. Theocritus is, after all, a male author who must not be seen as championing women's rights in this poem. Michael Lambert would argue that the poem does quite

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<sup>11</sup> Recall that Callimachus adopted the same strategy in his Hymn to Zeus, which manages to flatter the Ptolemaic king in the midst of a hymn while simultaneously worshipping Zeus as the ruler of all rulers (*H.* 1.87-88).

the reverse, in fact, utilizing female characters at the *Adonia* specifically to parody housewives and a lesser festival; he even calls the *Adonia* a “special butt of male laughter,” a judgment which he bases on the popularity of Adonis and the *Adonia* in the titles of other, lost Hellenistic poems (2001: 89).

Setting aside the risk of judging content by title, Lambert raises a good point: the Syracusan housewives of *Idyll* 15 are spouting the words of a male author (*idem*: 100). Focusing on this dynamic of the poem leads to the realization that these women are not genuinely women: they are men in dresses, speaking for a male author and with a male agenda. It is important to remember this facet, but it is equally as important not to deny the window into Greek culture that this poem nevertheless provides. Marilyn Katz provides the best insight into this aspect of ancient literature when she argues:

The notion that texts authored by men represent a “male” point of view...not only introduces an artificial distinction between text and culture, but also implicitly relegates women to an entirely passive role in patriarchal society—a view which could hardly be substantiated with reference to our own culture, and which is furthermore easily discredited through the comparative study of women in contemporary traditional, patriarchal societies (79).

Seeing Praxinoa and Gorgo as a safety valve for Theocritus’ praise of the royal family does not by necessity do away with the humor inherent to *Idyll* 15, but it does challenge reading the poem without consideration of the patterns of other Hellenistic literature. In many respects, Praxinoa and Gorgo are almost “too-quotidian”: Theocritus takes great pains to make it clear to the reader that these women are obsessed with the day-to-day problems and habits of their lives throughout

their conversation in the first half of the poem.<sup>12</sup> As main characters, they are so foreign and separate from our idea of the author as to discredit somewhat the opinions that Theocritus has the express. This very disconnect, I believe, is a crucial reason why Theocritus took such pains to enclose this poem—among the few that overtly mention Ptolemy<sup>13</sup>—in the *Adonia* among women whose words can be as easily dismissed as heeded, depending on the auditor.

Yet there are emotional repercussions to Theocritus' casting of women as his leads. Just as his use of Simaetha caused *Idyll* 2 to be either comic or pitiable in her pathetic plight, his housewives Praxinoa and Gorgo change the narrative description of a Ptolemaic festival, littered with encomiastic elements, into a funny and, above all, relatable poem. Brief insights into the most personal and mundane aspects of familial life, such as Praxinoa's insistence that a horse-bogey, Mormo, will bite or maim her son (15.40), offer to the reader nothing except a humorous digression and a glimpse at the genuine humanity that makes the two women relatable. This relatability is manipulated by Theocritus to make the praise of the Ptolemies more natural, as if it is an opinion shared by even the most naïve and politically-disinterested groups. The quotidian woman is thus, again, an optimal character type due to her vulnerability,

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<sup>12</sup> Praxinoa does not even seem to know or remember that the *Adonia* is happening: Gorgo reminds her and has to prompt the woman to leave her house. Praxinoa responds at first to this prompting with a fairly enigmatic response that "all things are wealth for the wealthy" (15.24), as if the festival excludes her because of her status as a common woman.

<sup>13</sup> Others to explicitly mention Ptolemy by name include *Idylls* 14 and 17.

which makes her either hilarious and laughable in and of herself, or comprehensible and emblematic, the example that her superiors have to adhere to or outstrip.

The mimetic relationship of the tapestries to the garments worn by Praxinoa and to the song to Adonis should also not be overlooked. Here, Theocritus employs similar word choice to reveal more clearly the pragmatic mindset of his two female characters, both of whom focus keenly, but narrow-mindedly, on the skill with which the separate fabrics are created. Both Praxinoa's clothing and the tapestries are, to some degree, imbued with a life-force. In the case of Praxinoa's gown, she claims that she poured her soul, her ψύχη into its creation (15.37), and in that of the tapestries, she exclaims twice about how ἐμψύχα the figures depicted on the canvas are (15.83). This word, so hard to render literally into English, implies that the tapestries are somehow imbued with life, which has led to scholarship focusing on the pseudo-ekphrasis that Praxinoa awkwardly assembles here, later to be much more skillfully rehashed in the official hymn to Adonis and Aphrodite (Lambert 2001: 94-97).

Yet perhaps, in Praxinoa's eyes, the figures are filled not with a life of their own, but rather with the life of the workers who toiled over the threads, hence explaining the previous two lines which speak of said craftsmen, and which finds its parallel in the hymn when the singer describes the Miletan woman who worked to create the blankets for Adonis' bed (15.125-126; *idem*: 94-95, 98). One cannot help but view these two expositions—Praxinoa's and the Argive singer's—as opposing halves that reveal two divergent insights on the same subject. The Adonis song is

vivid in its portrayal of Adonis, who actively embraces his lover and is, indeed, filled with a life of his own (15.128-129). Although the Greek singer makes mention of the workers who contributed to the festival, both food and cloth (15.115-118, 125-126), the core of her song is devoted to the vivification of Adonis (15.119-131), and the emphasis is clearly on his cult statue assuming a brief, poignant life of its own, with the climax of her song the moment when Adonis and Aphrodite mutually embrace (15.131; Lambert 2001: 96; Davies 1995: 153).

Praxinoa and Gorgo, in their commentary on the art, have been analyzed as art critics, viewers who are designed to legitimately reflect the mindset of a middle-class woman (see Griffiths 1981 and Skinner 2001). Yet the Argive woman who sings is not limited by her class, her gender, or even by her intelligence in ability to interpret the beauty of a veristic image. The statue and the tapestries are both designed to imitate life within the framework of *Idyll* 15, and, as an urban mime, the characters participating in the *Adonia* should, theoretically, imitate life themselves too. If we see these three women, then, as readers instead of art critics or worshippers, we can see a sub-message within the various admiring remarks: that marveling at craftsmanship and understanding its purpose may be two separate ways that art is appreciated. The first is technical, and it takes a skilled critic to identify and effectively praise the work of another (as Praxinoa, a wife and seamstress, clearly qualifies to be for the tapestries); the second is a much rarer ability, and depends on the insight of the viewer.

Thus we find another function of the quotidian woman, who reflects not only the mimetic principals that dictate the flow and humor of this poem, but who also embodies the shallow reader of the *Idyll* itself. Theocritus, by parodying these women in their semi-intellectual praise, concurrently mocks his own critics, those who entirely miss the beauty of instilling characters with a realistic life of their own, and invites his readers to take a closer look at the dynamics of his poem.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Quotidian Woman in Elegy, Virgil, and the Augustan Age

#### *Introduction to Conclusions*

In the previous chapters, I have argued that understanding the characterization and usage of the quotidian woman informs how we read the urban mimes, and even, to some extent, the *Idylls* as a whole. As noted in the introduction, the development of the quotidian woman can be traced from Archaic Greek literature up to the Hellenistic period, with each successive generation of authors contributing some new element to the representation of female personas in fiction and poetry in a manner reflecting the social pressures of their respective times. Yet the Hellenistic period, in many ways, marks the end this continuous development of women in Greek poetry. It would not be long after the death of Theocritus that Rome would take over the Mediterranean world, forcefully introducing her own culture into the older traditions, literary and otherwise, of the rest of the ancient world. Though Greek literature would continue to flourish even under Roman rule, the legacy of the Hellenistic and lyric poets would be picked up predominantly by Roman authors, and the burden of adding to this repertoire of female archetypes would be resumed by poets under the reign of Augustus. It is thus pertinent to this discussion to consider whether the quotidian woman adapted by the Roman poets, and in what way: whether Roman poets simply repeated her archetype in similar genres of poetry, such as the *Eclogues*

of Virgil, or if the dynamics of female characterization shifted still further, with poets either imbuing her with more control over the narrative, or reducing her to the objectified status of previous females in literature.

This chapter will selectively examine the portrayal of women in Golden Age poetry, particularly in Augustan bucolic (namely, Virgil's *Eclogues*) and in elegy. These two genres are the most likely to yield similarities to the Hellenistic archetypes in their portrayal of women, since elegy fashioned its motifs based on those of mimes,<sup>1</sup> and Virgil's *Eclogues* were deliberately modeled after Theocritus' *Idylls* (Moritz 1969: 190; Thomas 2007: 50; Van Sickle 1979: 49, 72). After a succinct discussion of the relation between Augustan and Hellenistic poets, then, I will describe the relationship between the women of elegy, commonly referred to as *dominae*, and the quotidian woman. The following section will discuss the women of Virgil's *Eclogues*, or, more particularly, the woman of *Eclogue* 8; because *Eclogue* 8 itself is clearly modeled off of *Idyll* 2, this section will compare Virgil's protagonist to Simaetha as a quotidian woman. The final section of this chapter will summarize the conclusions of my thesis project as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> Not only elegy, but satire as well, owe much of their comedy and plot to Roman mime, which was in turn based on the mimes of Alexandrian poets (Fantham 1989: 160); I do not here analyze Roman satire, as the genre extends beyond the time scope of this project and involved highly polemicized aspects that would make methodological overview difficult; however it would be interesting in future to examine the female figures of satires as compared with the women of Theocritus' *Idylls*. Roman mime itself probably emulated New Comedy (*idem*: 156), and as such may have contained figures like the quotidian woman, or her Menandrian or Herodean precursors; however, the surviving literature is insubstantial, and conclusions drawn from what remains (which are mainly titles) would be moot (*OCD*).



## *The Changes of the Augustan Age*

Rome took the world by force. From her first moments as an empire until the sacking of Rome by the Goths in the fifth century CE, Rome left a wake of influence across the Mediterranean world and beyond. Yet in spite of the language barrier, the war between the Greeks and the Romans, and the subsequent servile status of many Greeks in Rome, poets and orators turned to the Greeks as models for their compositions. There are similarities between the Hellenistic and Augustan periods that made many Roman authors (such as Horace, Catullus, Ovid, and, of course, Virgil, among others) look back to the Hellenistic era for inspiration and, perhaps more importantly, for direction.<sup>2</sup> Many of these correspondences involve aesthetics, as with the Callimachean ideal expressed in *tenuis* poetry (Farrell 2012: 19; Van Sickle 1979: 72). Moreover, poets in the Augustan age, benefiting from advances in literary transmission and enjoying Rome's first public library (*OCD*), would have had a (now for the most part lost) multitude of earlier authors to draw from (Edmunds 2001: 103), and indeed, many authors variegated their verses with a wide selection of models.<sup>3</sup> Beyond aesthetics and availability, however, there are also many aspects of the political environment that align between the two periods, which made the works

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<sup>2</sup> This is a well-established tenet of intertextuality. For aspects that particularly relate to this thesis, however, see the following works: Fantham 1989 for the influence of mimes on Horace, and possibly, Catullus and Ovid; Lowrie 1995 for an overview of lyric influence on Horace; Van Sickle 1979 for Virgil's Hellenistic aspirations.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Horace, a contemporary of Virgil, made it his goal in writing poetry to integrate the tradition of Greek lyric poets with Roman culture; as such, he purposefully emulated ancient authors such as Anacreon, Alcaeus, Sappho, and other, later poets, especially Callimachus (Lowrie 1995: 43-44).

of Hellenistic poets paradigms for the authors working under Augustan. I will briefly describe these now.

Romans living in the Augustan age found themselves living in a similar political environment to that which Greeks in the Hellenistic period faced: one of an absolute ruler, whose new rule has displaced a form of republic. In Greece, this overhaul was brought about by the conquest of Alexander the Great and, after his death in 323 BCE, by the new dynasties of his generals in Macedon, Palestine, and Egypt; in Rome, decades of intermittent civil war cleared the way first for the dictator Julius Caesar, whose murder would justify the very war that put the Emperor Augustus in the newly-fashioned position of *princeps*. Augustus, careful not to overreach himself in his quest for and use of power, reformed the government of Rome and crafted a new image of rulership: Julius Caesar, his adopted father, was deified, and Augustus both in life and in death would be worshipped in cult as well (Boatwright et al. 2006: 197-198). Once established as a ruler, Augustus divorced his wife and married the recently-divorced Livia, adopting her two children Tiberius and Drusus (Suet. *Tib IV*). Furthermore, Augustus became one of the chief patrons of the arts, personally funding the work of poets such as Virgil or Horace. Of course, the support of the arts goes hand in hand with the censorship of them, and so this involvement of the *princeps*—the same man who had arranged for the deaths of his political enemies, some poets, like the governor of Egypt and early elegist, Cornelius Gallus—with poetry would likely have been disconcerting, perhaps even threatening,

to the poets of the age, who now had to watch their words and fear political suppression to a greater degree than in the Republic.

The importance of these features of Augustus' life become striking when compared to what we know of Ptolemy Philadelphus' life. Like the later Augustus, Ptolemy Philadelphus struggled to adapt his people to the aspects of his rule. It was the Ptolemies who, conforming to Pharaonic tradition, enshrined their deceased parents—note the famous apotheosis by Aphrodite of Berenice, for example, or the temple sharing of both Ptolemy II and his wife Arsinoe II that occurred in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE (Nock 1930: 5-6, 21).<sup>4</sup> Finally, as has been discussed in previous chapters, the Ptolemies established the Museum and the Library of Alexandria, employed court poets (including Callimachus and Theocritus), and suppressed dissenting or subversive poetry (as proved by Sotades, who took his jests too far).

The correspondence is clear, and we can imagine that poets found some comfort and wisdom in the works of their predecessors, especially those who lived through a similar time of such political upheaval. The parallels in the new regimes are reflected in the parallels to be found in poetry: intertextuality between Augustan and Hellenistic poets has become so widely accepted, it is practically accepted as a

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<sup>4</sup> This is not an action encouraged by Greco-Roman religions until the Hellenistic period; until this point in history, only gods and heroes were worshipped, with heroes being a relatively late addition themselves (Bremman 2006: 18). Though the rituals involved in reverencing heroes seems to have been uncannily similar to those involved in worship of the gods (*idem*: 20), even Heracles, a son of Zeus who in later tradition was welcomed into Olympus on his death, was not revered as a god, but simply as a mythic figure, especially important at Athens and in Sparta (see Boardman 1972 for an analysis of Greek vases which supports the political adaptation by the Peisistratids of Heracles as a specifically Athenian hero).

rule in modern scholarship.<sup>5</sup> The replication of Hellenistic themes in Augustan poetry may not, as is sometimes disparagingly noted, reflect a lack of creativity in Latin poets (noted as a trend among other scholars by Fantham 1989: 159), but instead seems to reflect the poets choosing the “safer route.”

Such close correspondences between social circumstances and between poetic responses to change encourage us to examine the women of Augustan poetry carefully. If Joan Burton is right in positing that cultural shifts caused by these political changes in the Hellenistic period fueled the motifs of Theocritus’ urban mimes (1995: 7,10), then it seems probable that similar changes and innovations will be apparent in the Augustan period, the quotidian woman possibly among them.<sup>6</sup> If the quotidian woman as a trope persists anywhere else in poetry beyond the Hellenistic, she should be found in the poetry of the elegists and of Virgil, who based their Augustan poetry on the previous innovations and aesthetics of the Hellenistic age, and allowed women key roles in their works.

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<sup>5</sup> The adaptation of Greek themes in Latin literature is not uncommon, especially in the years just before and within the Augustan age. The trend of adapting Greek literature began in earnest with the so-called “neoteric” poets. The pattern continues in the works of Horace and Ovid, and Virgil too takes up the themes of Greek poetry, though in a different aspect, for Virgil in particular will carry the various themes of the neoterics into a new genre, that of epic, and adapt them there for his own purposes.

<sup>6</sup> One aspect to mention, however, that provides a crucial difference between the effects of the reigns of Ptolemy Philadelphus and Augustus Caesar as regards the quotidian women is that Augustus took great pains to reinstate and enforce traditional domestic values on aristocratic women, issuing the *Lex Iulia*, and making particular example of his own daughter, Iulia, for her sexual deviances (Boatwright et al. 2006: 186). These laws emphasized female purity and restricted the freedom of movement of upper-class women in an attempt to protect their virtue; Roman women were thus not enjoying newfound freedom in the Augustan period, as were women in the Hellenistic—in fact, it was quite the reverse.

### *The Quotidian Woman and the Domina of Elegy*

It first has to be stated that Roman elegy is a clearly defined genre with poorly defined roots (see Farrell 2012). Its name is based off a type of meter, whose original use seems to have been related to laments (*idem*: 16); eventually, however, this usage was uprooted, adapted to serve for other themes by Greek authors (such as the lyric poets Archilochus or Mimnermus, whose themes were far from sorrowful, or later Callimachus, who used the meter in his Hymn to Athena). Thus, the identifying attributes of Greek elegy are ambiguous. Roman poets, however, pared the genre down to a core idea: Latin elegy is defined by a lover who pines for or obsesses over his beloved in a straightforward narrative, lacking framework and presented in first person (*idem*: 13-14). Because the beloved has such power over the lover, and because these beloved are often women, elegy has been studied at length for its depiction of women (Drinkwater 2013; Keith 2012).

The women of elegy are clearly marked figures, known for their flippant cruelty toward their devoted poet-lovers. These women, known as *dominae* because of their sway over the poet, vary in temperament and attributes depending on the poem and on the poet (Keith 2012 gives a good overview of the treatment of *dominae* by the main Roman elegists, Propertius, Tibullus, Gallus, and Martial included). However, at the core of the *domina*'s nature there lies a fundamental antithesis: the reversal of gender roles under the influence of love which permits the woman to control the man, alongside the continuing societal expectations for a woman to

passively accept the desires of her lover with silence.<sup>7</sup> The beloved woman is therefore desirable because of her femininity, and powerful simply for her ability to deny her lover or to be unfaithful to him. Alison Keith remarks the following (concerning Albius, a friend of Horace's):

“[She] bears the speaking name Glycera, ‘Sweetie,’ which appears nowhere in extant Latin elegy but which, in conjunction with the adjective ‘harsh,’ sums up the arrogant appeal of the beautiful, but unyielding, elegiac mistress (*domina dura*)” (2012: 294).

This mixture of sweetness and harshness reflects the duality of the *domina* herself: she is sweet insofar as she accepts the poet's advances, and bitter once she asserts her own desires. This paradox is fundamental to the poet's agonies, and to the depiction of the *domina* as either a blessing or a curse. The good female beloved, then, in elegy, is not assertive, but passive; the bad beloved will be the reverse, but women can be depicted in either way, depending on the nature of the elegy (rejoicing, pining, or regretting).

In examining the *domina* against the quotidian woman then, there are at once both clear similarities and clear differences. Both archetypes share peripheral positions in society, lacking clear status or nobility, and yet with enough means to allow her some independence and, usually, the aid of a servant or two to foster their love affairs (James 2010: 316). Furthermore, the *dominae* are similarly anonymous

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<sup>7</sup> As established by Megan Drinkwater, elegiac *dominae* rarely have active speaking roles, regardless of their sway over the man (2013: 329, 333); Sharon James, however, argues that the women of elegy have significant speaking parts, shared between servants and *puellae* (2010: 315-316).

(by which, I refer to their lack of mythological precedents).<sup>8</sup> Her opinions matter, too, as it is based on her whims that she chooses either to honor her poet-lover or spurn him. Lastly, the *domina*, like the quotidian woman, and indeed, like all her literary precursors, is able to bring about pain and difficulties for the male lover, and—perhaps more after the example of the goddesses and lyric love objects of Archaic literature—their power is closely linked to her sexual role.

But the similarities stop here, and a number of overwhelming differences must be noted. First of all, unlike the quotidian woman, the *domina* is frequently characterized by her wit, or cleverness—this intelligence, in fact, is the basis of some of her appeal (James 2012: 261-262); the quotidian woman, on the other hand, was frequently characterized by naïveté, even foolishness, that made her at once foreign, mockable, and pitiable depending on context. It is hard to imagine mocking the *domina*, just as it is difficult to imagine the *domina* carrying out mundane tasks, placed as she is on the pedestal of the poet’s affections. Also, there is no element of “otherness” such as there was in the expression of the quotidian woman; instead, the *domina*, as the poet’s love interest, is designed to resemble the normal hetaera with whom a man could expect to connect and engage emotionally and even intellectually. The quotidian woman, whether a wife or a brief affair, is not relatable to her lover,

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<sup>8</sup> The question of the identity of *dominae* as lovers is somewhat complicated, however, by the question of whether the elegies are pure fiction, or based on actual experiences. The love affair of Catullus and Lesbia, for example, one of the first *amator-domina* relationships explicitly named in elegy, seems based on real encounters (Keith 2012: 285-287). If we treat these women as based on historical contemporaries of the poets, with whom they shared real love affairs, then there is a clear discrepancy between the clearly fictive quotidian women of Theocritus’ *corpus*.

and she is specifically used as a figure distant from the author and the reader, rather than her nearness, her tangibility, to him. The *domina* has to be somewhat close to the author, the quotidian woman has to be distant. Her relation to the poet thus marks the *domina* as no quotidian woman.

Ironically, it is the very distance which marks the quotidian woman as separate from the poet that allows her to control the narrative, whereas the *domina*'s relation to the poet robs her of her voice. The *domina* is relegated to the role of desired, and as the poems describing her occur in the first person narrative of the poet, she cannot be the mistress of the narrative, only of the narrator. According to James, what words she does say do not mark her as an independent figure, but rather as a part of a larger whole, such as courtesans (2010: 315). The quotidian woman, disassociated as she is from Theocritus, can speak her mind and can act as the lens through which we interpret the *Idylls*. In elegy, one is rarely, if ever, invited to view the affair from the *domina*'s perspective: her domination conceals her humanity.

Therefore, in spite of the power that the *domina* holds over her poet-lover in elegy, her independence is in many ways inferior to that of the quotidian woman. Unlike the quotidian woman, whose point of view relates the entirety of the action of the poem, the *domina*'s perspective is secondary to her actions, and the focus of the poem is not on what her viewpoint can reveal, but rather on what pain her choices can evoke. She has inherited some forms of literary freedom from the quotidian woman, but the author no longer uses her as his chief mouthpiece because he is himself again the speaker. Because the *dominae* themselves rarely have speaking parts (Drinkwater



2013: 329, 333), the independence of their desires is constrained by the societal expectations of their gender. The appearance of independence is just that, and in the taciturnity of these women, and in their rigid conforming to traditional gender roles in spite of their unorthodox relationships, it becomes apparent that the *domina* of elegy is more closely related to the distant lovers of lyric poetry, or, in Theocritus' corpus, to the non-speaking women who, in his bucolic mimes, snub lovers pining for them (such as *Idyll* 4's Amaryllis, or 11's Galatea). Their role in the plot of elegies, too, reminds us of earlier precedents, especially that of New Comedy (see James 2012), where women have the right of choice up to a point (see Konstan 1987), but serve primarily as the motivation and catalyst of the decisions of the heroes in spite of, or even because of, this illusion of self-sufficiency.

With this in mind, I do not argue that these women are later, Roman revisions of the quotidian woman—there are too many differences between their characterizations to make this a plausible step. However, the innovations made by Roman elegists in female characters—the creation of the *dominae*, who control, if not the narrative, at least their lovers—nonetheless owe a debt to the quotidian woman in Theocritus. If Theocritus and his peers in the Hellenistic period invested literary women with voice and perspective, the elegists later manipulated them, granting them personal desires and reestablishing the sexual power of the woman.

### *The Quotidian Woman and Virgil's Eighth Eclogue*

By the late 40's BCE, when Virgil was writing his *Eclogues*, almost two hundred years had passed since the publication of Theocritus's corpus. Virgil's works, written for a different culture and in a different time, cannot be expected to align precisely with the motivation and execution of Theocritus' poetry. Theocritus' poems were written under the auspices of the Ptolemies, reflect the social changes of the Hellenistic period, and programmatically reassign elements of epic and mime to the new bucolic genre (Burton 1995: 1-2; Hunter 1999: 61; Pretagostini 2006: 53; Van Sickle 1970: 50, et al.). Virgil, though he too is introducing a new type of poetry (bucolic being new to the Romans, see Breed 2000), has an entirely different political agenda compared to his Hellenistic forebear, and creates an overt social commentary, perhaps even a critique, of the drastic changes and displacements brought about by the downfall of the Roman Republic and the ascendance of the Julio-Claudians (Clausen 1995: xix-xx). Nevertheless, Virgil clearly based his bucolic works on those of Theocritus, and so it is possible that the quotidian woman carried over along with other, more pastoral, elements that he borrowed from Theocritus for his *Eclogues* (Moritz 1969: 190; Thomas 2007: 50; Van Sickle 1975: 49, 72).

Of the ten *Eclogues*, the eighth poem is by far the most applicable to this study, since this is the bucolic poem that would be the most likely to employ the quotidian woman. This poem's entire second half emulates the second *Idyll* of Theocritus, depicting within a song a spurned sorceress who casts a spell to renew the desire of her absent lover. The spell contains a refrain much like that of Simaetha's,

and there are clear verbal echoes between the poems, including an invocation of Circe as a role model, the barking of a dog at the close, and the advanced application of ring structure to imitate the thought processes of the spell-crafter (Macdonald 2005: 19, 23). But there are equally as many differences between the narratives. The sorceress of *Eclogue* 8, who is left unnamed, is not the singer of the poem, as Simaetha is of *Idyll* 2; she is the character of a rustic song, and the suffering that her lover has brought her, though driving her to magic, has not brought her to the same level of agony as it has Simaetha, who wishes either to regain or kill her lover. Also, her spell seems to be genuine in its goal to summon her lover's return, and furthermore appears successful (Gibbs-Wichrowska 1994: 254). But, as with elegy, the witch no longer can stand alone as both subject and singer: the relegation of a female to secondary position in voice within a bucolic poem does not mark the quotidian woman, but rather a somewhat hollow imitation of her. Virgil's enchantress may attain the happy ending that Simaetha could not, but she also seems to need it more, unable to persevere with the bittersweet closing that Theocritus entrusts to Simaetha (Griffiths 1981: 268).

Virgil's female characters are thus quotidian women reduced, with newfound freedoms from the Hellenistic period—the trappings of the quotidian woman—but without her independent thoughts. Virgil purposefully takes away the parodies latent in Theocritus' depictions of Simaetha, Praxinoa, and Gorgo, and he recasts women as

serious figures, whether in *Eclogues* or in his later epic, the *Aeneid*.<sup>9</sup> Dido should not be a Praxinoa, and she cannot even be a Simaetha. We do not expect an epic heroine to conform to the principles of the quotidian woman, because her royal status and role in legend defies one of the quotidian woman's defining aspects. What is interesting, however, is that even the unnamed sorceress who suffers from an unfaithful lover in *Eclogue* 8 does not conform to the characteristics of the quotidian woman.

### *Conclusions*

In this thesis, I have proposed a new way to view the women of the urban mimes: as an emerging archetype, prompted by New Comedy and Mime, but reaching her poetic climax in the works of Theocritus. This figure, the quotidian woman, is designed to mirror everyday life, and is kept mundane by her non-elite status, her lack of any relationship to mythical or divine precedents, and her own want of cunning, which leads her to make novice mistakes, or utter laughably inane comments. But she is a unique literary figure because, although he undercuts her with the aforementioned features, Theocritus also grants the quotidian woman power over the narrative, positioning her as the main character of his *Idylls*, and allowing her to become his mouthpiece, rather than using her simply for the sake of parody, as was the tradition with mime. The quotidian woman is thus at once both shallow and complex, both laughable and intriguing: the aspects that make her ordinary invite the casual reader to

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<sup>9</sup> Virgil had other literary models, however, upon which to base the heroine of his epic, employing in particular Hypsipyle and Medea from Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica*, and Circe from epic (see Krevans 2003 and Henry 1930).

overlook her at a glance, but the marks that betray her as the poet's voice, her relatability and her personal observations and opinions, entice the more careful reader to reevaluate not only her role in the poems, but his own interpretation of what is being stated within them.

In *Idyll 2*, the character Simaetha conformed to this figure, fulfilling the requisites of mundanity in her position as a woman of unmentioned status in society and her lack of mythical forebears. The mistakes of her incantation and, more significantly, the indecision of the spell as a whole, mark a naïveté—or perhaps, even, carelessness—about the outcome of the magic; Simaetha, ignoring the dangerous exemplars of Circe and Medea, which she herself invoked, is less threatening than she is pathetic. Her soliloquy to Selene particularly emphasizes her ultimate harmlessness and vulnerability, and the juxtaposition against the goddesses throughout the *Idyll* not only reflects the stages of love that Simaetha has passed through in the recent weeks, but also restates vividly her own helplessness compared to the potency of the goddesses she invokes. Here, Theocritus' employment of the quotidian woman recasts the epic sorceress into a different mode, and makes the spurned lover who willingly resorts to magic at once laughable and pitiable, both tragic and comic while simultaneously connecting his own reductive works with the great works of previous generations.

In *Idyll 15*, Theocritus presents us with not one but two quotidian women, Praxinoa and Gorgo, housewives whose attendance to the mystical *Adonia* seems at first unremarkable. The two matrons thoroughly ground themselves as mundane

figures, filling the first half of the *Idyll* with mimetic vignettes of daily life—getting dressed, washing up, ordering around slaves. Their economic security is evident from their conversation (Whitehorne 1995), but their ignorance of the palace and of the festivities marks their lack of elite prestige. Neither Praxinoa nor Gorgo have legendary namesakes: they have the novelty of the quotidian woman instead. As housewives, they attend the festival and proceed to make vapid comments, narrowly praising only the workmanship of the setting, comically overlooking the obvious mystical material upon which they could easily comment. However, hidden within these shallow outbursts is a subtle encomium to Arsinoe, placed in the mouth of an unexpected expert: because Praxinoa and Gorgo are such typical housewives, a compliment on decoration and piety from them means more than it would from a masculine source. It takes one to know one, as it were, and as wives Praxinoa and Gorgo recognize Arsinoe's masterful ordering of her household. Praxinoa and Gorgo also, in their preoccupation with craftsmanship and oversight of meaning, seem to reflect a manner of reading poetry for the sake of its composition without understanding its purpose. Just as it took an experienced housewife to praise Arsinoe well, Theocritus hints that it takes an experienced reader to interpret his poetry and appreciate more than its fashioning.

However, it seems that the quotidian woman as a literary figure in and of herself stops in the Hellenistic period, and dies with Theocritus. Looking to the Augustan period and Theocritus' literary successors, there does not seem to be any true Roman version of the quotidian woman, despite the numerous parallels between

the Hellenistic and Augustan periods and regardless of the myriad borrowings of Roman poets from their literary forefathers. She is replaced, for all intents and purposes, by the *domina* of elegy and by a return to epic and lyric heroines. However, this loss does not imply that she was unimportant, or was applicable only to authors in Alexandria because women enjoyed some kind of brief heyday under the Ptolemaic regime that is reflected in the writings of court poets like Theocritus. Instead, her brief climax in the urban mimes of Theocritus reflects an innovation that is at once recognizable and specific, a distinguishing feature of literature that is unique to the atmosphere of the Hellenistic Age.

The quotidian woman is not, then, a self-aware figure: she does not realize the contradiction of being at once mundane and profound, and simultaneously laughable and pitiful. Her role is tied utterly to the narrative, and she is restricted to the poems in this sense. However, her genuine concerns and her surprisingly challenging comments suggest the paradox inherent to this new archetype, which is at once as simple as the women of mimes, from whom they often take their names (Lambert 2002: 80; Gagarin and Fantham 2010: 440), and yet complex enough to carry the perspective of the poem and convey the author's position among his forebears and contemporaries. Understanding this Hellenistic figure helps us to determine how Theocritus wished his poetry to be viewed and gives us new ways to examine the urban mimes in the broader context of his corpus.

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