

# Theocritus' *Idyll* 14

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**S**YMP TOMS OF LOVE is the name which Francis Cairns has recently given to a genre of ancient poetry, examples of which were first collected and discussed by Felix Jacoby:<sup>1</sup> Callimachus, *Ep.* 30 and 43; Catullus 6 and 55; Propertius 1.9; Horace, *Odes* 1.27; Rufinus, *AP* 5.87; Maecius, *AP* 5.130; Asclepiades, *AP* 12.135; Theocritus, *Idylls* 10 and 14. Instances from drama are found at Menander, *Hero* 4–39, and, possibly, *Dyscolus* 50–56. The recurring *topoi* are familiar. A lover displays certain symptoms (pallor, unkempt hair, thinness, sighing, an unsteady gait); he is interrogated by a second speaker as to the cause of these symptoms and the identity of his beloved; this interlocutor typically mocks the distressed lover and at times may attempt to extract a confession from him. The beloved is normally presumed to be unworthy of the lover, who sometimes seeks a cure for his distress in the advice which the *irrisor amoris* offers. A symposium is in some examples the setting, and the symposiastic custom of toasting the beloved is taken by both Jacoby and Cairns<sup>2</sup> as a possible origin of the genre.

In Cairns' analysis Theocritus' *Idyll* 14 affords not one, but two typical instances of this genre. In what he calls the 'overall example' (1–11; 43–70) it is Aeschinas who displays the symptoms (pallor, leanness, unkempt hair) and Thyonichus, the non-lover, who jokingly interrogates, extracts the confession of unworthy love, and eventually acquiesces in Aeschinas' resolve to find a cure for his love in becoming a soldier. In the 'included example' (12–42) there is a reversal of rôles: it is now Cynisca, Aeschinas' false mistress, who shows the typical symptoms of love (blushing, inability to speak); Lycus, the Wolf, who is beloved; and Aeschinas who violently scorns, if not all love, at least the particular love of Cynisca and Lycus.

<sup>1</sup> F. Cairns, *Generic Composition in Greek and Roman Poetry* (Edinburgh 1972) 76, 171f; F. Jacoby, "Drei Gedichte des Properz," *RhM* 69 (1914) 393–413. Cf. F. Cairns, "Theocritus *Idyll* 10," *Hermes* 98 (1970) 38–44. The text used here is *Theocritus*, ed. A. S. F. Gow (Cambridge 1952), the second volume of which is hereafter cited as Gow.

<sup>2</sup> The suggestion appears earlier in P. Troll, *De elegiae Romanae origine* (Göttingen 1911) 82.

We may rely on Cairns' analysis that in structural terms this idyll is a recognizable genre-piece. Elements of diction confirm the impression: Aeschinas' 'trouble' is a μέλημα (2);<sup>3</sup> he is λεπτός (3), wears κίκινοι (4), and presumably resembles the ὠχρός Pythagorist (6).<sup>4</sup> In the diction of the *sermo amatorius* Cynisca's 'insult' is ὕβρις (9);<sup>5</sup> her passion for the rival Lycus is fiery (κῆφλέγετ' 23; κατεφρύγετο 26), implicitly exemplified by the usual tokens (μᾶλα 38),<sup>6</sup> and pictured in an appropriate setting (νυκτὸς ἀνῶκται 47). Aeschinas himself is to find the cure (φάρμακον 52) for this unfortunate love and return healthy (ύγιής 54).<sup>7</sup> Yet the full sense in which these traditional elements of structure and language are presented has not been appreciated by the critics. The intention is not simply to string together recognizable *topoi*, but more precisely to demonstrate the hollowness and superficiality of these conventions by counter-balancing each with an unexpected reality. In many ways the poem's overall technique is the same as that found in *Idyll* 23, where, as Copley has shown,<sup>8</sup> there is a pattern of making violently literal and exposing as ugly the quaint conventions of the *paraclausithyron*. A comparable, and more humorous, counterpointing of convention and reality can also be found in *Idylls* 3 and 11. Yet it is unclear whether, like the Cyclops of *Idyll* 11,<sup>9</sup> Aeschinas in *Idyll* 14 ever appreciates the difference between the superficial convention and the reality of his situation. Nonetheless, we shall see that such self-awareness is at least urged upon him by his comrade, Thyonichus.

<sup>3</sup> As noted by schol. *ad loc.*, *Scholia in Theocritum vetera*, ed. C. Wendel (Stuttgart 1914), the amatory sense is not inevitable; Gow, *ad loc.*, suggests that the sense of 'darling' "fits the case." Cf., however, G. J. de Vries, "Theocritea," *Mnemosyne* 20 (1967) 436.

<sup>4</sup> For leanness and pallor see, e.g., Alcaeus 347.5; Callim. *Ep.* 30.3, 46.5; Theoc. 1.37f, 2.89f, 10.57, 11.69; *AP* 5.242.1, 259.4; and further *Sex. Propertii Elegiarum Liber I*, ed. P. J. Enk (Leiden 1946) *ad* 1.1.22.

<sup>5</sup> See K. Preston, *Studies in the Diction of the Sermo Amatorius in Roman Comedy* (Chicago 1916) 58f.

<sup>6</sup> The precise meaning of line 38 is much vexed and many emendations have been offered: see J. Sitzler, *Bursians Jahresh.* 133 (1907) 277; 178 (1919) 128; and Gow *ad loc.* But at least the erotic *topos* in μᾶλα can hardly be doubted; see, e.g., Theoc. 5.88, 6.6, 11.10; Rufinus, *AP* 5.60, 62; Plato, *AP* 5.79, 80; and in general B. O. Foster, "Notes on the Symbolism of the Apple in Classical Antiquity," *HSCP* 10 (1899) 39–55, esp. 48, where line 38 is rendered: "These tears of thine are flowing as love-tokens for him." Cf. schol. *ad loc.*

<sup>7</sup> A commonplace metaphor; see, e.g., Theoc. 11.15; Callim. *Ep.* 43.1, 46.4f; Maecius, *AP* 5.130.4; Hor. *Carm.* 1.27.22.

<sup>8</sup> F. O. Copley, "The Suicide-Paraclausithyron," *TAPA* 71 (1940) 52–61.

<sup>9</sup> See E. Holtzmark, "Poetry as Self-Enlightenment: Theocritus 11," *TAPA* 97 (1966) 253–59.

We may begin with a simple example: the unkempt hair of the lover is a recurrent *topos*, an obvious indication of the lover.<sup>10</sup> Aeschinas follows the convention: he wears *μύσταξ πολύς* (4); his hair is *ἀϋσταλέοι κίκιννοι* (4). His beloved, so he presumes, does not even know of these tokens: for all she knows *Θρακιετὶ κέκαρμαι* (46); I might have a gauche 'crew-cut' instead of the locks of the lover.<sup>11</sup> Even one of Aeschinas' endless proverbs is in this pattern: he is only 'a hair away from madness', *θρήξ ἀνὰ μέσσον* (9). A conventional *topos* is thus clearly established, but in the last lines of the idyll (68–70) Thyonichus will emphatically indicate the oncoming reality:

*ἀπὸ κροτάφων πελόμεσθα  
πάντες γηραλέοι, καὶ ἐπισχερῶ ἐς γένυν ἔρπει  
λευκαίνων ὁ χρόνος.*

The impersonal form of expression in these lines leaves in doubt whether we are to presume that Aeschinas himself is in fact already turning gray; but even if we do not, the simple picture of a love-lock threatened by advancing whiteness provides an instance in which convention is contrasted with reality. At one point, to be sure, Aeschinas himself indicates at least a partial self-awareness when he states *μάταν εἰς ἄνδρα γενειῶν* (28). Yet this remark refers only to the fact that he had failed to note that Cynisca was in love with someone else. Awareness of the more critical reality pointed out by Thyonichus he never does demonstrate.

A second instance of such counterpointing in the idyll involves an extensive pattern which has to do with food, eating and hunger. The belief of Jacoby and Cairns that the origin of this genre may be in the conventions of the symposium has already been indicated: *cf.* Horace, *Odes* 1.27; Callimachus, *Ep.* 43; Asclepiades, *AP* 12.135.<sup>12</sup> In Theocritus'

<sup>10</sup> Emphasis on the lover's hair (whether disheveled, adorned or cut off) is frequent: Anac. (Page, *PMG*) 2; Eur. *Cyc.* 501; Ar. *Eccl.* 955; Men. *Pk.*; Callim. *Ep.* 30.3; Maecius, *AP* 5.130.1; Meleager, *AP* 5.175.2; Theoc. 1.34, 2.89, 5.91, 11.10. That the lover's lock turns gray, as in the present poem, is also common: Anac. 13.6; Theoc. 30.13; Philodemus, *AP* 5.112.

<sup>11</sup> "I might have shaved my head . . . for all she knows." This meaning, suggested secondly by Gow *ad loc.*, and implied, although through a misunderstanding, by schol., seems preferable.

<sup>12</sup> For comparable settings see Alciphron 4.8, 11; Luc. *DMeretr.* 15. The connection of wine and love is common: e.g. Callim. *Ep.* 42.3; Theoc. 2.151f; Rufinus, *AP* 5.12; Marcus Argentarius, *AP* 5.110; Meleager, *AP* 5.136, 137; Hedylus, *AP* 5.199. It is well noted by T. Rosenmeyer, *The Green Cabinet* (Berkeley 1969) 141, that the detailed description of a meal in 14.14–17 has no parallel in the bucolic idylls; it is a 'grosser occupation' excluded from the pastoral setting.

*Idyll* 14 we find an even fuller description of this conventional feast than in the other examples. The critical element, wine, is present, and with it the expected toasting of the beloved. In addition, there are found on the menu chickens, pig, onions and snails. These foods are presumed to represent Theocritus' effort to translate into rustic terms the finer delicacies of an urban feast;<sup>13</sup> the latter two, in particular, like the traditional wine, are aphrodisiacs and thus also part of the generic convention.<sup>14</sup> The consuming of onions, snails and wine is thus meant to indicate a fullness, a feast of love. Yet as they partake of these traditional aphrodisiacs, the unexpected reality emerges: not a consummation of love for Aeschinas, but the love of Cynisca for Lycus and the violent stupidity of Aeschinas himself. When truth is forced upon it, the feast of love proves hollow, and in this case even Aeschinas seems to have gained some awareness: *τήνῳ τεὰ δάκρυα; μᾶλα ρέόντω* (38).<sup>15</sup> This remark of Aeschinas, which is sarcastically couched within the pattern of foods acting as love-tokens, indicates his momentary realization that the *topoi* are empty when the reality is patently different.

Yet the lesson is short-lived for Aeschinas. The love-feast of the past proved useless, so now in the present he plays yet another traditional rôle; he becomes the emaciated, hungry lover: *ταῦτ' ἄρα λεπτός* (3).<sup>16</sup> Yet just as the reality of whiteness behind his love-lock was pointed out to Aeschinas by Thyonichus, the man of reality, so too the truth about his 'thinness' is indicated by the joking Thyonichus: his emaciation is as artificial as that of an ascetic who longs for a delicacy, *ὄπτῳ ἀλεύρω* (7).<sup>17</sup>

A third instance of Aeschinas' shallowness is found in his habit of speaking in proverbs and animal fables. It is not, as were the two previous examples, a convention of the genre, but instead an idiosyncrasy of Aeschinas himself. It is clear that Aeschinas does habitually

<sup>13</sup> See Ph.-E. Legrand, *Étude sur Théocrite* (Paris 1898) 137, and Cairns, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 173. The technique of transference from urban to rustic setting is familiar from *Idyll* 3 (see Gow 64).

<sup>14</sup> Athen. 2.63B, 64A,B; for *βολβός* cf. Ar. *Eccl.* 1092, and in general Gow *ad loc.* We may reject the ingenious justification for reading *κολχᾶς* by O. Immisch, "Zu Theokrits Kyniska," *RhM* 76 (1927) 344.

<sup>15</sup> As is acknowledged in n.6, the text of line 38 is in doubt; I am here accepting the reading which Gow presents.

<sup>16</sup> See n.4; at opposite extremes are Phaedra, Eur. *Hipp.* 136f, and Catullus 6.13. Cf. also among longing animals *Id.* 4.15–16, 20.

<sup>17</sup> See Gow *ad loc.*

speak in proverbs and fables, apparently believing that in them the truth can be discovered: he is 'a hair's breadth' from madness (*θριξ ἀνὰ μέσσον* 9); like the 'wretched Megarians' (*δύστανοι Μεγαρηῆες* 49); his mistress Cynisca flees the brawl like a swift *χελιδών* (39); or a 'bull to the woods' (*αἰνός θην λέγεται τις "ἔβα ποκὰ ταῦρος ἀν' ὕλαν"* 43); he himself, in his inability to fall out of love, is like a 'mouse in pitch' (*μῦς . . . γεύμεθα πίσσας* 51).<sup>18</sup> So consistent is this manner of thinking in Aeschinas that he is apparently the last person at the symposium to appreciate the idyll's main joke. When he hears *οὐ φθελγῆ; λύκον εἶδε*; (22), it sounds, presumably, like merely another fable;<sup>19</sup> indeed, he admits that he had heard it before and had not bothered to investigate (27). That there was a reality behind this fable, that Lycus was a man, not a wolf, he had perceived only after the jest was repeated; even the fact that Wolf's father has a canine name, Labes,<sup>20</sup> had not helped Aeschinas to immediate awareness.

Whereas in the case of Lycus the human reality is hidden behind the animal fable, in the case of Cynisca it is the other way round. To Aeschinas she is still *χαρίεσσα* (8); but the *double-entendre* of her name is as obvious as with Lycus, son of Labes: Cynisca is Lycus' bitch.<sup>21</sup> The relationship of human to animal in *Idyll* 14 is not unlike what Lawall has demonstrated in *Idyll* 4.<sup>22</sup> Whereas in *Idyll* 4 animals show human emotions, in *Idyll* 14 humans are identified as animals. The

<sup>18</sup> A. Griffiths, "Notes on the Text of Theocritus," *CQ* 22 (1972) 103–06, discovers a further 'proverb' in line 26, where, following a hint in the marginalia of the Antioque papyrus (Pack<sup>2</sup> 1487), he would read: *τούτω τὸν Κλυμένειον ἐφρύγετο τῆνον ἔρωτα.*<sup>3</sup> he's the one that roasting, Clymenus-like passion was for" (106). The reference will now be to the mythological Clymenus, "the very archetype of the mortal cherishing, and struggling . . . to resist and conceal, a forbidden passion" (105). It is clear that such a 'proverb' would not be of a kind with the others found in the speech of Aeschinas, and, far from demonstrating his 'shallowness', would be the sole instance of such an "out-of-the-way reference" (106) in his narrative. On the other hand, no one could deny that Theocritus is capable of such an allusion. I can only indicate that I find the emendation improbable, and that, if it is accepted, it would be but a single counter-example to the generally simple quality of Aeschinas' speech.

<sup>19</sup> "According to a well known superstition if a wolf saw a man before the man saw the wolf, the man became dumb." *The Idylls of Theocritus*, ed. R. J. Cholmeley (London 1901) 288; nonetheless, his assertion is unnecessary that the words *λύκον εἶδε* must be a statement, not a question; see Gow *ad loc.*

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Ar. Vesp.* 895f.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Ar. Ran.* 1360; juxtaposed to 'Lycus', the name can hardly fail to call to mind *κύων*; as Gow notes *ad* 21 she is an *ἑταίρα*. See further *Herodas, the Mimes and Fragments*, ed. W. Headlam and A. D. Knox (Cambridge 1922) *ad* 4.20: *Κύννα. ὄνομα πόρνης* (Hsch.).

<sup>22</sup> G. Lawall, *Theocritus' Coan Pastorals* (Washington 1967) 43–47.

irony is that apparently the last person to appreciate the truth about Wolf and his Bitch is the very one whose language is superficially permeated with proverbial references to swallows, bulls and mice. The central, humorous episode of the idyll thus once again demonstrates the overriding theme: behind the superficial way of speaking is a reality not immediately perceived by Aeschinas.

But if the simple proverb and rustic fable are typical of Aeschinas' narrative style, in two instances his language becomes more expansively metaphoric. Cynisca, he says, suddenly breaks into tears (32–33):

θαλερώτερον ἢ παρὰ ματρὶ  
παρθένος ἑξαετῆς κόλπῳ ἐπιθυμήσασα.

And later, after she has been struck by Aeschinas, she flies off more quickly than a swallow (39–40):

μάστακα δοῖσα τέκνοισιν ὑπωροφίοισι χελιδῶν  
ἄφορρον ταχινὰ πέτεται βίον ἄλλον ἀγείρειν.

We note in these two metaphors, placed only six lines apart, a similarity of theme: the relationship of mothers to helpless children. In the former lines these are human; in the latter, animal: initially, the metaphors thus give a further illustration of the interchangeability of human and animal which has already been found typical of the idyll. Yet it must be remembered that the narrator here is not only Theocritus but also Aeschinas: to complain, as Legrand does,<sup>23</sup> that the second metaphor “*détonne étrangement*” and lacks “*vraisemblance*” is to miss the point. More accurate is the perception of R. W. Garson that Theocritus frequently uses metaphors as characterizing devices: “Their very inappropriateness contributes to his gently humorous sketches of rustics.”<sup>24</sup> For Aeschinas the fanciful inappropriateness of the lines is particularly suitable. On the surface, in fact, the metaphors are successful: she wept like a child, fled more swiftly than a bird. It is in the extraneous details that the ‘inappropriateness’ appears. The reader is led, almost helplessly, to draw out the paradigm: absurdly Cynisca becomes a six-year-old *παρθένος* or a mother swallow busily bringing food to her nestlings beneath the eaves. At the climax of his narrative Aeschinas is making an effort to create lyrical grandeur, but he succeeds only in creating artificiality. The

<sup>23</sup> Legrand, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.13) 138.

<sup>24</sup> “Formal Aspects of Theocritean Comparisons,” *CP* 68 (1973) 58; he is speaking of a number of passages, not including the lines at hand.

over-wrought metaphors show an unnaturalness in expression which is comparable to the unnatural rôle Aeschinas had played as the lean, love-locked lover.

One final *topos* appears in the idyll: Aeschinas decides to seek the cure for his helpless love by sailing away and enlisting in a foreign army. Examples of this motif, the journey as a cure for love, are also fairly common.<sup>25</sup> Within the idyll itself Aeschinas' own friend Simus provides a conventional precedent; he too had traveled away from home and had, says Aeschinas, returned 'cured' of his love. Of Simus we learn that his unfortunate passion had been for a girl whom Aeschinas refers to as τὰς ἐπι(ὑπο-)χάλκω (53): the adjective may well imply one whose surface conceals a base interior.<sup>26</sup> The nickname here, like the name 'Lycus', becomes thus an epitome of the idyll's main theme: the superficial exterior is belied by the reality behind it. But Simus had returned cured, and now at the end of the narrative, with Aeschinas' suggestion of travel and enlistment, there is a hint that in his case too a clearer sense of reality is beginning to assert itself. The soldier Aeschinas proposes to become is an 'average' man, admittedly not outstanding in any way: οὔτε κάκιςτος | οὔτε πρᾶτος ἴσως, ὁμαλὸς δέ τις ὁ στρατιώτας (55f).

Yet whatever sense of self-awareness this line might contain is clouded by the conventional nature of the proposed journey itself; and it is to this point that Thyonichus addresses himself. He accepts Aeschinas' suggestion but at the same time imposes on the *topos* a particular and somewhat unexpected reality. It must not be simply a journey to escape an unfortunate love-affair but specifically an enlistment in the army of Ptolemy Philadelphus, whom Thyonichus then proceeds briefly to portray. Lines 61–64 of the idyll have not, in fact, been adequately understood by critics. To some this final portrait of

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Prop. 1.1.29, 3.21.1f; Ov. *Rem. Am.* 213f; Archias, *AP* 5.59; Alciphron 4.11 (τὸν ἄθλιον χλαμύδιον ἀρπάσαντα καὶ πέλτην οἴχεσθαι στρατευόμενον). In Plut. *Amat.* 759b τόπου μεταβολή is mentioned along with other accepted cures of love. An inverse of the *topos* appears at Men. *Sam.* 283f: love forbids a pretended journey.

<sup>26</sup> The suggestion of schol. *ad loc.* that the adjective means 'shield' (apparently based on Sophron) is rightly rejected by Immisch, *op. cit.* (*supra* n.14) 338, and others. Those who read ἐπιχάλκω explain variously: G. Vollgraff, "Theocritea," *Mnemosyne* 47 (1919) 353 ("immitis et inexorabilis"); L. Radermacher, "ἐπίχαλκος," *RhM* 88 (1939) 188f ("quadrantaria . . . die ἐπὶ χαλκῷ zu haben ist"); Gow *ad loc.* ("brazen nature"). But ὑποχάλκω in the sense of 'base coin' seems preferable; see Immisch, above: "oben gleissendes Gold und darunter Kupfer." The marginalia of the Antinoe papyrus at least confirms the similarity to Cynisca: λ. πόρνης.

Ptolemy is merely an undramatic digression:<sup>27</sup> how could Theocritus so completely forget the 'chagrin' of Aeschinas? To others it is apparently the encomium of Ptolemy which represents the poet's main purpose.<sup>28</sup>

But to understand the rôle of this eulogy of Ptolemy within rather than without the rest of the idyll we must appreciate the consistency of method. With this final *topos*, precisely as with the others discussed here, first we are offered, through the example of Simus and the suggestion of Aeschinas, the conventional motif: set out on a journey to escape an unfortunate love. But then through the voice of Thyonichus, who throughout has revealed the truth behind the affectation,<sup>29</sup> a specific reality is imposed: not any journey, but particularly to Ptolemy in Egypt. The poem fails to return to the theme of Aeschinas' love precisely because, having exposed the artificiality of that 'chagrin', Theocritus desires to leave us in the world of reality: with Thyonichus and Ptolemy we have left rôle-playing behind. To stress this point Theocritus has chosen to portray a real man, rather than a character of mime, at the end of the idyll. The particulars of the portrait confirm the interpretation: Ptolemy, we are told, is ἐρωτικός (61), but with exactly that ability to discriminate which Aeschinas lacked: εἰδὼς τὸν φιλέοντα, τὸν οὐ φιλέοντ' ἔτι μᾶλλον (62). So too Ptolemy will give when asked; however, αἰτεῖν δὲ δεῖ οὐκ ἐπὶ παντί (64). Moderation and the ability to distinguish truth from false show—these are what, by his portrayal of Ptolemy, Thyonichus recommends for Aeschinas.

THE CITY COLLEGE OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK  
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<sup>27</sup> E.g. Legrand, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.13) 139; cf. *Bucoliques Grecs* I, ed. Ph. E. Legrand (Paris 1953) 108: "les vers 61-64 forment . . . une sorte de parenthèse; l'auteur y parle pour son propre compte"; M. Sanchez-Wildberger, *Theokrit-Interpretationen* (Zürich 1955) 36: ". . . aus seiner anonymen Rolle zu fallen scheint."

<sup>28</sup> E.g. Vollgraff, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.26) 347: "Theocritus autem hoc carmen scripsit, ut stipendia Ptolemaei commendaret"; Lawall, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.22) 122: "a new purpose: flattery of Ptolemy." A. Körte, *Hellenistic Poetry*, trans. J. Hammer and M. Hadas (New York 1929) 310, notes that the "effectiveness is enhanced because the speech is put into the mouth of a simple man." The critical attempt to see a masquerade by identifying Thyonichus with Theocritus is rightly rejected by A. Couat, *Alexandrian Poetry under the First Three Ptolemies*, trans. J. Loeb (London 1931) 41; a similar view of references to Ptolemy in Herodas 1 is rejected by the most recent editor: *Herodas, Mimiambi*, ed. I. C. Cunningham (Oxford 1971) 57.

<sup>29</sup> ". . . the contrast between the sad and deferential melancholy of Aischinas . . . and the lively banter of Thyonichus" is indicated by R. M. Ogilvie, "Theocritus, Idyll 14.1.2," *RBPhil* 41 (1963) 110.