

Theocritus' Idylls and the Serenading of Mystical Women: Toxic Modes of Seduction in Pastoral Literature

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Abstract : Theocritus' use of near-pastoral motifs in creating the lamenting narrative in "The Sorceress" idyll suggests a link between Simaetha and the quintessential shepherd that ultimately transcends the bucolic serenading structure, evident in "The Serenade", as it pertains to depictions of women. In Theocritus' "The Serenade", an anonymous goatherd serenades his beloved, Amaryllis, in hopes of persuading her to reciprocate his love. This serenade soon turns into a vicious lament where all hope for reciprocation dissolves, leaving the goatherd severely melancholic and malignant. In "The Cyclops' Serenade", the cyclops, Polyphemus, sings of Galatea in solitude; in so doing, he negotiates between feelings of heartache and anger that eventually subside. His depiction of Galatea, in being less vindictive than the goatherd's, manifests less toxicity. In adopting, and essentially creating, this serenading structure, Theocritus illustrates his ability to alter portrayals of women while maintaining the premise of the pastoral serenade; that is the shepherd's lament of his indifferent beloved. A thematic intertextual analysis of the idylls reveals a variety of ways in which the toxicity of the goatherd's relation to Amaryllis is mutated or even inverted. In "The Sorceress", a powerful witch named Simaetha spellbinds her unfaithful lover and angrily laments his betrayal in a way that is reminiscent of the goatherd's harmful behavior towards Amaryllis.

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