

BOOK REVIEW

Reading Voices: Five Studies in Theocritus' Narrating Techniques. By J. ANDREW FOSTER. Lang Classical Studies v. 21. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2016. Pp. xiv+ 259. Hardcover, \$88.95. ISBN 978-1-4331-3249-0.

Why does Theocritus use narrative frames, and how do these frames condition the reading and reception of the *Idylls*? In this volume Andrew Foster, the author of the Oxford online guide to Theocritus (*Theocritus of Syracuse*. Oxford: Oxford Bibliographies Online Research Guide, 2011), shows how Theocritus constructs multiple reception environments that not only draw on existing traditions but also authorize their transformation. In his view the voices in *Idylls* 6, 11, 13, 24, and 15 are constructed in ways that encourage readers to incorporate the explicit discourse of the poems within the framework of larger metanarratives.

In terms of critical methodology, Foster combines a narratological approach with reader response (Iser) and theories of allusion, intertextuality, and reception (Conte, Hinds). The writing is clear and generally avoids overly schematic analyses and jargon; he consistently explains and contextualizes the terms he uses (discourse, focalization, supplemental narrative, etc.). Foster tailors his arguments to the narrative techniques specific to each poem, but notes that the *idylls* are generally characterized by semantic openness and resistance to the closure associated with archaic and classical models. This resistance, in his view, is a function of narrative frames that produce multiple voices and internal audiences, all of which are less aware and informed than an external audience is likely to be. Foster rather unexpectedly attributes the manipulation of these voices and audiences not to the poet but to the text, with the claim that Theocritus intentionally uses allusions (both inter- and intra-textual) that invite and even necessitate the collaboration of the reader. The reader thus participates in the formation of what Foster calls “metanarratives” (Iser’s “virtual dimension”) that are presupposed by the discourse of the poems themselves. Foster consistently emphasizes the discontinuity and lack of resolution of these conflicting frames as well as the indeterminate ambiguity of the *idylls*’ characters and tone, and concludes that the poet authorizes any number of possible presentations and receptions (237).

Foster's thought-provoking analysis should appeal to specialists in Hellenistic poetry as well as those encountering Theocritus for the first time. Those who are reluctant to apply modern critical theory to ancient texts are unlikely to find all of these arguments persuasive, but most readers will benefit from Foster's detailed examinations of the Cyclops in *Idylls* 6 and 11, Heracles in *Idylls* 13 and 24, and the Syracusan women attending the Adonia in *Idyll* 15.

In the first two chapters Foster concentrates on the complexity of Theocritus' Polyphemus: in *Idyll* 6 his conflicting representations by the herdsmen Daphnis and Damoetas resist synthesis, while in *Idyll* 11 his putative cure from erotic suffering is unlikely, given what Foster sees as the unreliability of the primary narrator. In Chapter 3 ("Heracles the Symptotic Argonaut: Allusion, Emulation, and Narrative Innovation in *Idyll* 13") I particularly enjoyed Foster's discussion of the description of celandine, a light-colored plant near the spring of Hylas' abduction, as "dark hued" (*kyaneon*). Foster draws our attention to the identification of the mythical Symplegades with the historical Cynaeon Rocks and the nearby Chelidonian Islands (Herod. 4.85.1), arguing that Theocritus uses this adjective not in error but rather as an intentional relocation of heroic trials from the traditional epic landscape to the bucolic *locus amoenus*, a world from which Heracles is ultimately barred (129–135).

Other highlights include sections on Theocritus' destabilization of Pindar's heroic Herakles in Chapter 4 ("*Nemean* 1 and *Idyll* 24: The Poetics of Heroic Revisionism"), and the influence of Homeric hospitality scenes on the image of Arsinoe in Chapter 5 ("Arsinoe as Epic Queen: Hosts, Hospitality, and Their 'Reception' in *Idyll* 15"). I did note a number of editorial slips, such as the absence of some publication dates from the bibliography and other minor errata (e.g. page 13 the the; page 37 herdsmen who sings; page 79 primary narrator *Idyll* 11; p. 88 Khalkas; pages 19, 114, 138, 142, 143 Kholchis: cf. the correct spelling Kolchian on page 219).

ANATOLE MORI

University of Missouri, MoriA@missouri.edu