

REVIEW OF BOOKS

THALMANN (W.G.) **Theocritus: Space, Absence, and Desire**. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. xxii + 232. £54. 9780197636558.
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William Thalmann has already enriched classical scholarship with a study of space in Apollonius (see T. Kenny, *JHS* 133 (2013), 192–93); the idle would be tempted to think of this book as the sequel. They would be wrong; this is a book informed by Thalmann's work on space, but has a good deal more to offer. Were I teaching a course on Theocritus, I would set this as a 'short introduction' to the poet's work; it will be required reading for scholars of Hellenistic poetry. It charts a course through the subgenres of the Theocritean corpus (mime, encomium, bucolic proper, 'epyllion' (but see below), etc.) in courteous conversations with Thalmann's colleagues and (usually immediate) predecessors; Thalmann characteristically refers to his work as 'adding' to existing scholarship. The result is a compact, rich book which models a number of different ways to read Theocritus; this review aims to follow Thalmann's lead by continuing the process of addition.

Thalmann's view of space, divided into two chapters, strikes a good balance between empiricism and theoretical information: various spatial theories are canvassed and used where relevant, but we get masses of textual detail as well (sometimes conveniently tabulated). The notion of a 'separate world' constructed by bucolic, but which bears some relationship to reality, is teased out, poem by poem, with a good deal of finesse. Endless references to *Eclogues* might have been out of place, but some contrasts with Virgil could have been brought out. I was struck by Thalmann's discussion of mountains (13–16), for example, which, while present (if distant, cf. *Ecl.* 1.83) in Virgil, are replaced by *silvae* as the main stage of bucolic performance (cf. M. Lipka, *Language in Vergil's Eclogues* (Berlin 2001), 30ff.). Thalmann does not shy away from technical details: 36 n.95 gives us a full account of the poetic stakes of textual intervention (very valuable for students; it would be churlish to mind that a conclusion is not reached). But Theocritus' dialect is rather neglected (38 n.103 argues with Hinge, 'Language and Race: Theocritus and the Koine Identity of Ptolemaic Egypt', in G. Hinge and J. Krasilnikoff (eds), *Alexandria: A Cultural and Religious Melting Pot* (Aarhus 2009), 66–79; the literature on the question is extensive). One wonders if dialect, too, bears some sort of relationship to spaces in the poetry, given the corpus' varied dialectal affiliations; Thalmann might also have integrated the 'dialect problem' into his reflections on identity in the conclusions (194).

The second chapter deals with 'mythological space' (covering what is usually termed 'epyllion', a term which Thalmann, perhaps wisely, avoids) and encomium. The analysis of *Idyll* 16 (73–85) is perhaps unsurprisingly the most 'intertextual' section of the book. Thalmann considers, in addition to the well-documented Hesiodic intertext (*Op.* 225–37), *Od.* 19.87–114 as a model for 16.88–97. Oddly, he remarks that poetry, unlike in Theocritus, is missing from the *Odyssey's* view of the 'ideal city'; but κλέος ούρανὸν εὐρὺν ἰκάνει ('your reputation reaches the broad heaven', *Od.* 19.108) surely refers to poetry (cf. *Od.* 8.74, 9.20). By contrast, poetry *does* seem to be missing from Hesiod's just city, presumably because *Hesiodic* poetry is not needed in a world where justice already reigns. This consideration might, weakly, argue in favour of the Homeric, over the Hesiodic, intertext.

The discussion of space is complemented by a powerfully integrated chapter on desire and absence: absence is absence from a space, and desire, like song, is consequent on that absence. Perhaps the overarching outcome of Thalmann's analysis is that the purely

literary motivations of Theocritus, so often emphasized, are subordinated to wider aspects of experience in both the political and social arenas; the link is not a mimetic one, naturally, but a provision of paradigms for understanding life. Theocritus constructs both the poet (83) and the herdsman (99) as types; comedy's 'stock characters' are not so distant. Thalmann's account of *Idyll 7* in this framework is particularly convincing, but all work on Theocritus' erotics will need this chapter.

The final chapter is a slightly mixed bag, unified by the examination of 'non-bucolic' poems (Gifford's 'anti-pastoral' and 'post-pastoral' might have been stimulating ideas to bring in here, as theoretical conceptions of the 'boundaries' of pastoral; see T. Gifford, *Pastoral* (London 1999)). Thalmann refers briefly to the issue of Theocritus' 'original poetry book' (154); we might have been treated to reflections on how different orderings of poems in our manuscripts result in different connections between poems becoming more salient for the reader. The conclusion sets Thalmann's study against earlier monographs on Theocritus.

To end with a personal reflection: Thalmann's preface refers to his first (not entirely happy) encounter with Theocritus in a university course. I encountered the poet after my formal studies were ended; I am a self-taught Theocritean. For those in this situation, this volume will be invaluable; it will also stimulate reflection in students and scholars.

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