

## Theocritus, *Idyll 6: Country Singing Match*

Translation from J. M. Edmonds, *The Greek Bucolic Poets* (London: Heinemann, 1912). Public domain.

*Introduction (from Edmonds):* Theocritus dedicates the poem to the Aratus of whom he speaks in the Harvest-Home. The scene is a spring in the pastures, and the time of summer noon. The theme is a friendly contest between a certain Damoetas and 'the neatherd Daphnis.' This is probably the Daphnis of the Thyrsis. If so, the two singers are meant to be contemporary with the persons of whom they sing, as are the singers of IV, V, and X. Each sings one song. Daphnis, apostrophising Polyphemus, asks why he is blind to the love of the sea-nymph Galatea. Damoetas, personating him, declares that his apathy is all put on, to make her love secure.

[1] Damoetas and neatherd Daphnis, Aratus, half-bearded one, the other's chin ruddy with the down, had driven each his herd together to a single spot at noon of a summer's day, and sitting them down side by side at a water-spring began to sing. Daphnis sang first, for from hi came the challenge:

[6] See Cyclops! Galatea's at thy flock with apples, see!  
The apples fly, and she doth cry 'A fool's-in-love are ye';  
But with never a look to the maid, poor heart, thou sit'st and pipest so fine.  
Lo yonder again she flings them amain at that good flock-dog o' thine!  
See how he looks to seaward and bays her from the land!  
See how he's glassed where he runs so fast i' the pretty wee waves o' the strand!  
Beware of he'll leap as she comes from the deep, leap on her legs so bonny,  
And towse her sweet pretty flesh – But lo where e'en now she wantons upon ye!  
O the high thistle-down and the dry thistle-down i' the heat o'the pretty summer O! –  
She'll fly ye and deny ye if ye'll a-wooing go,  
But cease to woo and she'll pursue, aye, then the king's the move;  
For oft the foul, good Polypheme, is fair i' the eyes of love.

[20] Then Damoetas in answer lifted up his voice, singing:

[21] I saw, I saw her fling them, Lord Pan my witness be;  
I was not blind, I vow, by this my one sweet – this  
Wherewith Heav'n send I see to the end, and Telemus when he  
Foretells me woe, then be it so, but woe for him and his! – ;  
'Tis tit for tat, to tease her on I look not on the jade  
And say there's other wives to wed, and lo! she's jealous made,  
Jealous for me, Lord save us! and 'gins to pine for me  
And glowers from the deep on the cave and the sheep like a want-wit lass o' the sea  
And the dog that bayed, I hissed him on; for when 'twas I to woo  
He'd lay his snout to her lap, her lap, and whine her friendly to.  
Maybe she'll send me messages if long I go this gate;  
But I'll bar the door till she swear o' this shore to be my wedded mate.  
Ill-favoured? nay, for all they say; I have looked i' the glassy sea,  
And, for aught I could spy, both beard and eye were pretty as well could be,  
And the teeth all a-row like marble below, – and that none should o'erlook me of it,  
As Goody Cotyttaris taught me, thrice in my breast I spit.

[42] So far Damoetas, and kissed Daphnis, and that to this gave a pipe and this to that a pretty flue. Then lo! the piper was neatherd Daphnis and the flute-player Damoetas, and the dancers were the heifers who forthwith began to bound mid the tender grass. And as for the victory, that fell to neither one, being they both stood unvanquished in the match.