

1 *The Passion of Daphnis*

THYRSIS

That pinetree by the spring and your touch on the pipe:  
Both whisper a music to draw the listener in  
With its sweetness, goatherd. Only Pan plays sweeter.  
If he chooses the horned goat, you shall take the she-goat  
For your prize. If he takes the she-goat, the kid shall be yours.  
It tastes delicious, the flesh of an un milked kid.

GOATHERD

Your song is sweeter, shepherd, than the waternoise  
Made by the stream tumbling from its rocky spout.  
If the Muses claim the ewe as a gift, you shall have  
The plump pet lamb. If they want the plump pet lamb  
You shall take the sheep, and be second only to them.

THYRSIS

Sit down now, goatherd, (think the Nymphs had asked you)  
And play your pipe, here where the hillside steepens  
And tamarisks grow on the slope. I will watch your goats.

GOATHERD

There must be no piping at midday, shepherd, none:  
We are scared of Pan. Now is the time when he rests  
Tired out from the morning's hunting. He can turn nasty,  
Tilting his nose at us, quick to take offence.  
But, Thyrsis, you have composed 'The Passion of Daphnis'  
And have made yourself a master of herdsmen's song.  
Let's sit underneath this elm, with the glade before us:  
There Priapus stands, there water spreads and gushes  
By the oaks and the shepherds' bench set into the hill.  
If you sing as you did in the match with Libyan Chromis  
I will let you have a goat that can suckle twins  
And fill two pails besides, to be milked three times;  
And will give you a deep, two-handled cup, new-made,  
Washed in fresh wax, still fragrant from the knife.  
About the lip of the cup an ivy pattern  
Is carved, with golden points among the leaves:  
A fluent tendril flaunting its yellow bloom.  
Beneath is a woman's figure, delicately worked:

Theocritus, *The Idylls*, trans.  
Robert Wells (London: Penguin,  
1989)

She is robed and wears a circlet to keep her hair.  
 On either side of her stand two bearded suitors  
 Arguing their claim. But she takes no notice,  
 Looks smilingly at one man, or so it appears,  
 Then at the other; while, hollow-eyed with love,  
 They struggle against her kindly indifference.  
 Beside these is carved an aged fisherman.  
 On a jutting rock. He strains at the very edge  
 Of his strength to draw in a net with its heavy catch.  
 You can see the effort bunching in each tense limb  
 And in his neck as he gives himself to the task.  
 He has white hair, but his strength is supple and fresh.  
 A little distance from the old man's sea-labour  
 There is a vineyard hung with darkening clusters.  
 A small boy perches on a dry stone wall to guard them.  
 Two foxes shadow him. One sneaks along the rows  
 For plunder; another has fixed her tricky eye  
 On the quarter-loaf the boy keeps for his breakfast  
 And will not let him alone till she has snatched it.  
 Blithely intent, he shapes a cage for a cricket  
 From asphodel stalks and rushes. The bag with his food  
 Is forgotten; so are the vines. The toy absorbs him.  
 The base of the cup is overspread with acanthus.  
 A goatherd's treasure! It is too fine a thing.  
 I paid the Calydna ferryman a good price for it,  
 A goat, a large cheese made of the best milk.  
 It felt too precious to drink from; I put it away  
 Unused. But how cheerfully I would part with it  
 For that beautiful elegy. Do you think I mock you?  
 No holding back! You cannot take your song with you  
 In the end. Hades and forgetfulness are the same.

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THYRSIS

Muses, sing for a herdsman, sing me your song.

Thyrsis from Etna asks you. Listen to his voice.

Where were you, Nymphs, when Daphnis came to grief?

What distant valley or mountain gave you delight?  
 You could not be found beside Anapus, the great river,  
 Nor by the water of Acis, nor on Etna's height.

Muses, sing for a herdsman, sing me your song.

Jackals and wolves howled their lament for Daphnis.  
 The lion wept in its forest-bound retreat.  
 Many the cattle that watched about him dying,  
 The bulls and cows and calves couched at his feet.

Muses, sing for a herdsman, sing me your song.

Hermes came from the mountain, said to him, "Daphnis,  
 Tell me what passion hurts you. Who is to blame?"  
 The cowherds, shepherds and goatherds gathered round him,  
 "Tell us your trouble," they asked. Old Priapus came.

Muses, sing for a herdsman, sing me your song.

"Daphnis," he said, "an unhappy girl goes searching  
 Each glade and spring for the one on whom she dotes.  
 Are you her lover, incompetent, feeble-hearted?  
 You should change your cattle and take a flock of goats;  
 You are no better than a goatherd, watching and pining  
 While the billy does his work and the nanny bleats.

Muses, sing for a herdsman, sing me your song.

"In tears you watch the girls, you hear their laughter;  
 Poor hobbledehoy, you long to join their dance."  
 But the cowherd drew near the limit of his passion,  
 Deaf to taunts, absorbed in a bitter trance.

Muses, sing for a herdsman, repeat your song.

Next came Cypris, her smile sweet and empty;  
 Her heart was heavy, her cheerfulness a pretence.  
 "You boasted you were a match for Love in wrestling;  
 You lie there overthrown for your offence."

THE IDYLLS OF THEOCRITUS

Muses, sing for a herdsman, repeat your song.

Daphnis answered her, "Tormenting Cypris,  
Hateful to all men, goddess of jealous pride,  
Do you think my last sun is sinking? Even in Hades  
Daphnis will be the thorn in Love's sleek side.

Muses, sing for a herdsman, repeat your song.

"They say that a certain cowherd . . . Hurry to Ida,  
Anchises lies there on a bed of galingale;  
The oaks will screen you, the humming bees tell no tale.

Muses, sing for a herdsman, repeat your song.

"Adonis the shepherd-boy needs to take a lover.  
He hunts the hare and chases all kinds of prey.  
Go set yourself before Diomedes, and tell him  
'Daphnis paid for his boldness. You too must pay.'

Muses, sing for a herdsman, repeat your song.

"Goodbye, you wolves and jackals, you skulking bears.  
The forest-glades and thickets where you hide  
Shall never see me again. Goodbye, Arethusa,  
Goodbye, you streams that pour down Etna's side.  
Here Daphnis fed his cattle, here he watered them:  
Remember him in the place where he lived and died.

Muses, sing for a herdsman, repeat your song.

"O Pan, are you ranging the long hills of Lycaeus  
Or the heights of Maenalus? Leave your ground and come  
To Sicily. Leave Helice's peak and the mountain,  
Cherished by the gods, where Arcas has his tomb.

Goodbye to the herdsman, Muses, goodbye to the song.

"Come, master, and take this pipe of mine, sweet-smelling,  
Fastened with wax, the lip-piece delicately bound.

THE PASSION OF DAPHNIS

Love drags me into the darkness where no songs sound.

Goodbye to the herdsman, Muses, goodbye to the song.

"Bear violets now, you bramble-bushes and thorn-trees,  
Let the world turn cross-natured, since Daphnis dies.  
Let the prickly juniper bloom with soft narcissus,  
The pine be weighed with pears. Let the stag hunt the hounds,  
Let the nightingale attend to the screech-owl's cries."

Goodbye to the herdsman, Muses, goodbye to the song.

He said nothing more. Aphrodite struggled to raise him,  
But the thread allowed by the Fates had run to its end.  
Daphnis drew near the water and the current took him,  
Unhappy child of the Muses, the Nymphs' lost friend.

Goodbye to the herdsman, Muses, goodbye to the song.

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Now give me the goat and the carved cup. Let me milk her  
And drink to the Muses.

Muses, goodbye, but only  
For the moment! In time I shall sing you a sweeter song.

GOATHERD

Then, Thyrsis, you must stop your mouth with sweetness,  
Eat only honeycomb and the best dried figs,  
Since, even as it is, you out-sing the cicada.  
Here is the cup. Smell the scented wood, so fresh  
You would think it had been dipped at the well of the Hours.  
Cissaetha!

Yours for milking!

Gently, my goats,  
Down! or you'll have the billy force you down.