GENDER AND RELIGION IN THEOCRITUS,  
_IDYLL 15: PRATTLING TOURISTS  
AT THE ADONIA*

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ABSTRACT

Modern scholars such as Davies, Griffiths and Burton, influenced by feminist literary criticism, have argued that Theocritus' _Idyll 15_ is an exploration of the experience and attitudes of two Syracusan women at an Alexandrian version of the _Adonia_. In this paper, I argue that Theocritus, as a male poet inheriting, from comedy and mime, a tradition of representing women at religious festivals, does not give us the women's perspective, but constructs a parody of women's perspectives of a religious festival, which extends to the hymn performed at the _Adonia_ as well, perhaps for the entertainment of his cultured audience. In short, Theocritus sends up the women's superficial religiosity, rather than uses the poem as a means to express genuine female religious experience. It is also suggested that Theocritus, acutely aware of the cultural tensions generated by the Ptolemies' flirtation with Egyptian cultural practices, does not offend Arsinoe with his parody, but attempts to be as subtle and diplomatic as possible.

'It is a page torn fresh out of the book of human life. What freedom! What animation! What gaiety! What naturalness!' The rapturous response of Matthew Arnold (1910:205) to _Idyll 15_ finds many echoes in the work of some modern scholars who, anxious to flesh out the lives of Greek women in antiquity, use the poem as if it were papyrological evidence; even

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1 Thus Davies 1995:152: '... the poem is second only to Euripides' _Bacchae_ as a document revealing the ways in which religion in the ancient Greek world could offer women an escape (however temporary) from the drab banalities of their everyday existence.' Cf. Perpillou-Thomas 1993:65-66 and Pomeroy 1984: 94, 142, 161, 165, 170-71. For a more sensible, literary view of the 'realism' in _Idyll 15_, 'which may only pretend to present what is real', see Zanker 1987:10-18, 50.
perceptive and sophisticated scholars, like Griffiths\(^2\) and Burton,\(^3\) argue that in this poem Theocritus gives us the ‘women’s perspective’, as if the poet had recreated the subjective experiences of two Syracusan women at an actual religious festival in Ptolemaic Alexandria.

It is the contention of this paper that Theocritus, as a male poet inheriting, from comedy and mime,\(^4\) a tradition of representing women at religious festivals, does not give us the women’s perspective, but constructs a parody of women’s perspectives of a religious festival, in which the hymn performed at the *Adonia* is parodied as well, perhaps for the entertainment of his cultured audience.\(^5\)

In *Idyll* 15, the broad brushstrokes of mime and comedy paint the backdrop to the characterization of the two Syracusans. Praxinoa’s stereotypic abuse of her slaves (27-33, 53-54, 76),\(^6\) punctuated by a series of insults focussing on the slave’s laziness (27), stupidity (30), clumsiness (31) and lack of initiative (53), can be paralleled in Herodas’ mimes.\(^7\) Duplicitous women gossiping about their husbands (with a baby as prop) are essentially Aristophanic.\(^8\) Obsessed with the superficiality of appearances

\(^2\) Griffiths 1981:247-73 cannot help paying lip-service to this tradition (258), despite his convincing argument that neither *Idyll* 2 nor 15 yields much of ‘direct documentary value’ (270).

\(^3\) Burton 1995:134 regards *Idyll* 15 as ‘our most important witness’ for the *Adonia* in the Hellenistic age.

\(^4\) For Theocritus’ acquaintance with mime and comedy, see Hunter 1996a:111; for Menander’s possible visit to the court of Ptolemy, see Arnott 1979:xvi-vii; for his popularity in Egypt (ibid. xx); cf. Hunter 1996a:2.

\(^5\) We know almost nothing about the audience for which Theocritus’ poems were performed or perhaps written. For the ‘sophistication’ of Theocritus’ audience and problems with this ‘commonplace of modern criticism’, see Goldhill 1991:246-47, 272 n. 126; for problems with the performance context of the mimes of Herodas, see Mastromarco 1984:95-96. For recitation as the mode of performance in the 4th and 3rd centuries, see Hunter 1996a:4-5; for the audience, 7.

\(^6\) All line references are to Gow 1973, Vol. 1.

\(^7\) All line references are to Cunningham 1971.

\(^8\) Lys. 515-22; Ec. 37-39, 55-56, 225 (Mnesilochus plays on women’s deceitfulness in *Th.* 478-519; 737-38). All line references are to Hall and Geldart 1967. Comic scenes involving babies seem inspired by the hilarious scene featuring Kinesias, Myrrhine and howling baby in *Lys.* 845-908. In the play, the baby is used by the sex-starved father as erotic blackmail, which momentarily succeeds; Myrrhine comes down from the Acropolis, criticises her husband whilst holding the child (889), and then cock-teasingly refuses to ‘lie down’ in front of the
(21, 39-40, 70-71), prone to exaggeration (4-6), incorrigible chatter-boxes (87-95), pretentious (91-93) – precedents in Aristophanes and Menander immediately spring to mind. Tantalizing titles of Sophronian mimes, ‘The Women Quacks’ and ‘The Women Visitors to the Isthmia’, and indications that Theocritus’ other compatriot, Epicharmus, parodied spectators gazing at and commenting on votive offerings at Delphi, suggest that festival-going, especially by women, provided male writers of mimes and comedies with material for burlesque. The fact that the titles Adonis and Adoniazousai are attested for no less than seven different comic poets in the 5th and 4th centuries indicates that this women-only festival was the special butt of male laughter.

What male comic dramatists may have found so funny is perhaps conveyed by the angry civic official in Aristophanes’ Lysistrata. The male actors dressed as women have stormed the Acropolis; the bureaucrat bustles on and attacks the unbridled wantonness of women, nurtured by rituals like

baby (907). In Idyll 15, however, the silent child is used as a foil to highlight the women’s stereotypic deceitfulness and stupidity, for Praxinoa continues criticising her absent husband, despite Gorgo’s warning about the child’s understanding (14). For the use of the child in Hellenistic poetry, see Horstmann 1976:23.

9 Like the man-hunting old woman in Aristophanes, Ec. 878-80; 447-48 (what women lend to each other); for female obsession with clothes and adornments/appearances, see Lys. 42-45, 449-51, 408-19. For superficiality, Lys. 108-10 (obsession with the availability of dildoes in times of war and revolt); note Praxagora’s list of goods to be shared in her communist utopia (Ec. 606).

10 Like Simiche’s (the old female slave’s) tragic cries in Menander, Dyskolos 574, 620-21. Line references are to Lloyd-Jones 1960.

11 Like the prattling Metrotime in Herodas, Minimbi 3, or the two temple tourists in Minimbi 4. Cf. Aristophanes Th. 393 (a stereotype blamed on Euripides).

12 See White 1980:61-67 for Theocritus’ comic characterization of Praxinoa, focussing on the pretentiousness of her language; cf. Fantam’s comments (1975:73-74) on the pretentiousness of Crobule in the fragments of Menander’s Plokion. Praxinoa’s pretentious speech climaxes in a suitably domestic cliché (95); she has a penchant for expressing her feelings in pithy proverbs (24, 40, 45, 58, 64, 70-71, 73, 77, 83), the homely earthiness of which undercuts her pretensions: for instance, those involving animals or insects: horse (40), ants (45), horse and snake (58), pigs (73). Interestingly, Gorgo’s reactions to the singer are positively Praxinoan (145-46), suggesting her typically ‘feminine’ sponge-like nature which uncritically soaks in her more garrulous companion’s cliché speech (24, 64, 83).

For similarity between the characters in Idyll 15 and those in the pastoral Idylls, thus highlighting their non-realism, see Whitehorne 1995:63-75.

14 *OCD* 3 s.v. mime; cf. Hunter 1996a:118.

15 Athen. 8.362b; Gow 1973:II, 265).

16 Kock 1880-1888. Plato clearly regarded the Adonia as not especially serious (Phdr. 276b).
those of Sabazius and the Adonia, which disrupted a serious debate on the Sicilian expedition in the ἐκκλησία with roof-top cries of σιωπὸς 'Ἀδωνίς (393) and κῶπτεσθ' 'Ἀδωνίς (396), uttered by a dancing, drunken citizen-wife, impersonated by the bureaucrat. Wine, women, song, dance, sex—all coalesce in the Adonia, which becomes the concentrated symbol of female ἀκολοχία, packed into one ritual, subverting the serious political business of the assembly. That the rites were Eastern in origin and strictly unofficial raises the spectre of the nasty, barbarian, lawless ‘Other’; the older goddess and the younger man at the core of the festival myth introduce the possibility of a comic reversal of the sexual status quo. No wonder so many male comic poets turned the Adonia into an ancient sitcom.

In Menander’s Samia, the Adonia acquires darker hues. Moschion returns home and finds his father’s partner from Samos, and the next-door neighbour’s wife and daughter celebrating the festival (38-41). Moschion joins them as a spectator, Menander informs us (43); there is the general παιδιά (41), the noise which keeps him awake (43-44), the carrying of the gardens up to the roof-tops, the dancing and revels associated with a rollicking παννυχίς (45-46). With some shame, Moschion confesses that he got his neighbour’s daughter pregnant (49), presumably by rape, a familiar enough occurrence in the comedies of Menander. Pamphile raped at the Tauropelia in the Epitrepontes (453); Phanias’ daughter at a deipnophoria for Artemis in the Kitharistes (93-96). The ἀκολοχία of women in Aristophanes, at worst typified by drunken partying, rebounds violently on Menander’s women at rituals—a crudely logical development of the comic stereotype that women are inherently corruptible, especially when drunk.

With such a literary tradition for the depiction of women at religious festivals, Theocritus, no stranger to intertextuality, had a great deal to which to allude, as he beavered away, perhaps in the Ptolemaic library. To comedy and mime, Gorgo and Praxinoa are indebted, but the Adonia of Theocritus...
does not hark back to those of Aristophanes and Menander. His version of the festival is markedly different. It is not for women only; there are men present (72-75; 87-95), as there were men present at the festivals to which Menander refers; there is no πανύχια with wild parties on the roof-tops of the city and the seductive aroma of clouds of incense. No wine, no dancing, no sex; this Adonia is positively puritanical; in broad daylight, before lunch, the two chaperoned married women behave as they might at the British Museum. The singer does refer to a procession of women at daybreak, which will carry Adonis to the seashore (132-35), as was the tradition, but there is no indication that Praxinoa and Gorgo intend to participate in the procession. Papyrus Petrie 3.142 (from the Fayum) lists purchases of wine, nuts, figs, olive oil, garlands for Adonis; clearly these are the ingredients for a good party, suspiciously absent in Idyll 15. Theocritus is clearly not reflecting a version of the Adonia which actually took place in private throughout the Greek world of his day. In the poem, Gorgo mentions that the queen, Arsinoe, is staging the Adonia (23-24). Did Arsinoe suggest a public, sanitised version of the Adonia for political and cultural reasons and is Theocritus here engaging with his patrons’ propaganda? If so, how does he achieve this?

Griffiths’ excellent and persuasive analysis of Theocritus’ court poetry is well known (1979). Like Griffiths, Goldhill (1991:223-83) speaks of Theocritus’ polyphonic voices, of his search for new discourses of praise, as he comes to terms with a political reality, not only remote from the democratic πόλις, but anathema to its spirit. Royal tyranny, incestuous marriage, apotheosis, a Berenikeion and festivals like the Απρασινώτρια not far off in the future; all this is essentially un-Greek. Philadelphus had made a point of transforming Greek festivals into massive public displays of extravagant wealth and bizarre ‘special effects’; it is entirely possible that

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23 Gow 1938:180-82; Gow 1973:1.262-64.
24 For the pervasive influence of the ‘remarkable Arsinoe’, see especially Griffiths 1981:251, 253, 259. For her interest in the arts and her patronage of Theocritus, see Pomeroy 1984:20, 59. For a more restrained view of this influence, see Burstein 1982. For propagandistic artistic representations of Arsinoe, see Thompson 1973: 32-33, 58.
25 For his lavishly vulgar Dionysus parade, see Athen. 5.196a-203b. For Philadelphus’ vast wealth, 203c-d; for his literary interests 203e. For the public display, see especially Rice 1983, passim.
his sister-consort may have desired to emulate him with the transformation of a popular festival like the *Adonia*, characterised not by intimate roof-top parties, but by public displays of elaborate art works and the performance of an ornate hymn. But, if we are to believe Herodotus, Egyptian festivals, like the Bubasteia, for instance, were every bit as abandoned as Aristophanes’ and Menander’s *Adonia*; women at this festival even hitched up their skirts and exposed themselves. As I come from a former colony of the British Empire and from a country recently decolonised, the psychology of the colonial classes, as they use public rituals to negotiate identity, is especially striking; in the first generations of colonial rule, the colonials consciously distance themselves from the ‘natives’. ‘Going native’ is an ever-present fear. Zanker (1987: 19-22) has shown how tenaciously upper-class Greeks in Alexandria clung to their social and religious institutions, in reaction to the culture shock experienced in Egypt. You would not catch Theocritus’ Praxinoa behaving (48). So perhaps the *Adonia* had to be purged of any elements which would smack of the wild excesses of the local festivals; yet Philadelphus and Arsinoe, with their Egyptian-style incestuous marriage, were more than flirting with native traditions of rule and behaviour. To be and not to be Egyptian; such is the tricky dilemma with which Theocritus’ patrons seem to have presented him. How is the *Adonia* knitted into this new, slippery discourse of praise?

In Herodas’ first mime, the bibulous old bawd launches into an encomium of Egypt and the Ptolemies; she begins her list with wealth, and includes spectacles and the *temenos* of the *Theoi Adelphoi* (26-35). In Theocritus *Idyll 14*, Thyonichus gives his would-be mercenary friend advice for a broken heart and recommends relocation to Egypt under the Ptolemies – Ptolemy is *φιλόμουσος*, *ἐρωτικός*, kind, generous, rich (59-64).

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27 Montserrat 1996:168, figure 11 obliges with a representation of a Ptolemaic terracotta engaged in this ‘cultic gesture.’
28 For the hostility of the Greek settlers to this marriage, transformed into a *ιερός γάμος* by Theocritus (17.131), see Fraser 1972:117, 217; Burstein 1982:210-11. According to Athenaeus (14.620f-621a), Sotades attacked this marriage in an obscene verse, was arrested by Patroclus, Ptolemy’s general, thrust into a lead jar and tossed into the sea (for the verses, see Powell 1970:238, Sotades, fr. 1). If Theocritus knew about this incident, he had every reason to be especially careful; however, the execution of Sotades probably took place in 266 (Launey 1945: 33-45), at least two years after the death of Arsinoe (Burton 1995:224 n. 21, 225 n. 27), before which *Idyll 15* had to be composed (23-24).
Similarly in *Idyll 15*, Theocritus makes Praxinoa compliment Ptolemy on the crime-free streets of Alexandria (46-50); Gorgo is impressed by his riches; she wants a good show from the queen (22-24); Praxinoa is overwhelmed by the skill of the artists and the lavishness of the display (80-86); the singer at the festival, the Argive woman’s daughter, compliments Berenice (divine) and Arsinoe, an Aphrodite in the wings (106-11). These are indeed new discourses of praise; the view of the top echelon of society from the bottom rungs; discourses which presumably entertained the learned royal audience (φιλόμονος indeed) and gave the lowly genres of mime and comedy a touch of Pindaric class. But if the *Theoi Adelphoi* smiled indulgently at the chorus of chatty praise from the lower middle classes, what are we meant to make of the hymn? Does Theocritus suddenly become serious and present us with a hymn of ‘noble and delicate pathos’ as Hutchinson has suggested (1988:150-53), which contrasts with the banal chatter and humdrum domesticity of the women? Or do we have Gow’s mediocre composition (1938:202), or the sly parody which Helmbold (1951:17) and Dover (1971:209) suspected?

If parody is to work, there must be something to parody. As Goldhill has reminded us, parody requires similarity to some perceived model as well as difference from that model (1991:207-08). This is precisely where Hunter has the most difficulty with Theocritus’ Adonis hymn; there is no perceived model (Hunter 1996a:127). Bion’s lament for Adonis is completely different. But Theocritus’ hymn does bear similarities to traditional hymnic forms: the opening parade of Aphrodite’s cult places in Cyprus and Sicily (100-01); the decorative epithets (101, 109); the closing farewell line (149). The hymn is framed by generic markers; the content is markedly different and this is where, I believe, the parody lies. Intratextuality, I think, is the key to tuning in to the hymn’s tone; for Theocritus seems to use in the Adonis hymn language which resonates suggestively with Gorgo’s and

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Praxinoa’s conversation. Theocritus’ singer is giving the women exactly what they have come to hear; after all, Gorgo heard it the year before and knows that it is going to be good (96-99). The singer was a hit then; why should she alter the formula? In the poem, the Adonia has become an Alexandrian showpiece, a consumer spectacle for women like the two Syracusans, colonials proud of their roots in a strange and hostile land. Theocritus has to be careful though; there is a very powerful woman listening. Encomium in mime and comedy is possible; but encomium and immortalising Berenice in a parody are decidedly tricky.

Before the hymn is performed, Theocritus makes Gorgo, who issued the invitation to go to the Adonia (22-24) and who has attended the previous year, comment on the ποικίλα. She raves thus (HomERICally, it seems):

λεπτά καὶ ὡς χαρίεντοι θεῶν περονόματα φασεῖς (79), using of the gods the very word she uses of Praxinoa’s outfit (34). Praxinoa then responds, to what she perceives as the life-like realism of the tapestry designers, in the style of Gorgo’s rave: ὡς ἔτυµ’ ἐστάκαντι ... ὡς ἔτυµ’ ἐνδινέοντι (82), continued with ὡς θαητός (84), used of the pretty Adonis on his silver couch. During the performance of the hymn, Theocritus makes the singer ‘cap’ the women’s raving with an extravagant apostrophe of the materials of which the couch and its legs were composed: ὃ ἔβενος, ὃ χρυσός, ὃ ἐκ λευκῶ ἐλέφαντος αἰετοὶ (123-24), teasingly reminding the women that any life-like realism is actually the product of artifice and the Ptolemaic treasury. The third member of the tricolon throws the emphasis onto the αἰετοὶ, birds of Zeus and symbols of Ptolemaic rule, engaged in the rather effete action of carrying the king of the gods’


33 For the intense interest of Alexandrian poets in pictorial realism, see Zanker 1987:39-54. For the popularity of the theme of aesthetic reception amongst artists and writers in the fourth century and later, see Burton 1995:93-94; for the value attached to realism as a mode of representation and the consequent claim that Praxinoa and Gorgo offer an integrated vision of the art, even perhaps echoing the ‘discourse of the academy’, see Burton 1995:101-08. My parodic interpretation would doubtless earn Burton’s scorn, as it seems to be characteristic of the ‘complacency of an unreflecting mocking reader’s stance’ (1995:108). If Theocritus’ female creations are indeed echoing the ‘discourse of the academy’, Theocritus is, in my opinion, parodying this discourse (the discourse of trendy art criticism) as well.

34 For Ptolemy Philadelphus and Zeus, see Griffiths 1979:62-63, 73, 101. For the eagle of Zeus at Ptolemy’s birth, see Theoc. Id. 17.71-75. For eagles on the coins of Ptolemy I and II, see Rostovtzeff 1964:184, 188.
wine-dispensing catamite to him, hinting at a relationship between a deity and a young man of a different kind, before the romanticised heart of the hymn. But before that, a digression on the origins of the wool, used for the couch’s coverlets (125-27), deliberately resonant with the domestic preoccupations of the women, who have, in the opening scene of the mime, complained about wool and weaving (19-21; 27-28; 36-37). Compliments to the sphere of Ptolemaic influence are doubtlessly present in the reference to Miletus and Samos (126), but the mock-epic periphrasis and contrived variatio used to express this (the speaking Miletus and the Samian shepherd) must surely be tongue-in-cheek.

To return to Praxinoa’s comments before the hymn. How wonderful Adonis is, she exclaims, lying in his silver chair, with the first down (יווולוכ) spreading from his temples: ὁ τριφίλητος Ἄδωνις, ὁ κήν Ἀχέροντι φιληθεὶς (84-86). Praxinoa noticed the silver couch; in the hymn, the singer, as if in response, creates a rich scene of silver baskets and gold flasks of Syrian perfume (113-14). The colour contrasts in line 114, the interlacing of nouns and adjectives, the rare παλαρίσκος, the dismantling of ἄκροδρως (112) and the epic cakes (εἴδαντα 115) mimetically reflect the delicacy and intricacy of the scene, worthy of the demigod, instantly undercut by the very prosaic γυναίκες ἐπὶ πλαθάνω πονενταύ (115). Gorgo has to rush home to give her husband lunch (147); these women know about women’s work and the staple foods the singer enumerates, the wheat meal, the honey, the olive oil (which features on the list of purchases in P. Petrie 3.142), prosaic everyday foods transformed by the rich poetic colour of ἀνθεσθα (116). The epic and the prosaic cheek by jowl contribute to the singer’s parodic tone here.

Praxinoa noted the first down spreading from Adonis’ temples (85). As if in response, the singer uses of Adonis an epithet (φοινικὸς 128) not used of men elsewhere and feminises the young lover at the hymn’s

35 See Whitehorne 1995:73.
36 LSJ s.v. ταλάριον.
37 Gow 1973:2.294-95; Dover 1971:212.
38 LSJ s.v. εἴδαντα.
39 Gow 1973:2.296; LSJ s.v. πλαθανίτης. The baking woman in Aristoph. Ra. is named Πλαθάνη.
40 Gow 1973:2.262.
41 LSJ s.v. ἀνθεσθα III.
42 Gow 1973:2.301.
most erotic moment\textsuperscript{43} — a touch of rosy-coloured romance for a woman who has already used the word τρισκαδεκάπαχυς (17) of her dolt of a husband. Both women have thus displayed a pedestrian concern with numbers (17, 19-20), expressed in polysyllabic combinations (17, 19); Theocritus cannot resist hinting at Adonis’ age with the vaguely tantalising οκτωκαδεκατεσσαρών ἡ ἐννεακοιδβος’ (129), which would presumably have had especial resonance with Theocritus’ two women who were probably married at that age,\textsuperscript{44} and with Arsinoe who was, after all, eight years older than her brother-lover.\textsuperscript{45} Praxinoa has already referred to Adonis’ first down spreading from his temples (85); in the hymn the singer eroticises the image further with the mention of τοι φιλημα (130), followed suggestively by χείλεα and πυρρόξ which intensifies Praxinoa’s ήνγκλος.\textsuperscript{46} After building up to this erotic high,\textsuperscript{47} the singer immediately manipulates the emotions of her audience with a peremptory νον μέν (131), which jolts her audience back to the realities of the festival; separation, loss, mourning. At the moment of parting, the singer transforms the youth into a man, a husband (τὸν ... ὀνδρο 131), using the very word Praxinoa and Gorgo use of their husbands (17, 148). The romanticised, feminised youth is a husband to die for, in contrast to the unromantic brutes who chart the courses of their circumscribed lives.\textsuperscript{48} The singer echoes Praxinoa’s ὃ τριφίλητος ’Ἀδωνις (86) with ὁ φίλ’ Ἀδων (136); Acheron is mentioned too (136), but deliberately to highlight the fact that Adonis is the only demigod to move between life and death. So they say: ὅς φανταί (137) is not inevitably ironic or parodic, but here, at this moment of extravagant claim (μνώτατος), it may well be

\textsuperscript{43} For the sexual ambiguity of Adonis and the tendency in Hellenistic art and literature to accentuate feminine attributes in young men, see Burton 1995:57-58, 61, 83, 85.

\textsuperscript{44} For the average age of marriage for Greek girls in Greco-Roman Egypt (16-18 years), see Pomeroy 1984:107.

\textsuperscript{45} Pomeroy 1984:17. Arsinoe married her first husband, Lysimachus, at about 16; he was 60 (Pomeroy 1984:14) or 61 (Burstein 1982:198). The reversal of a situation like this may well have made the relationship between Aphrodite and the younger Adonis all that more interesting for Arsinoe.

\textsuperscript{46} Significantly, Ptolemy Philadelphus was ξανθοκόμης (17.103).

\textsuperscript{47} For the erotic possibilities of down for men and women, see Burton 1995:85-87.

Gorgo has described the singer as πολύσωρος (97); she now parades her learning with a list of macho heroes (137-42), who were not blessed with Adonis’ upward and downward mobility. The witty old woman, emerging from the palace, had introduced the exemplum of the Greeks taking Troy in the context of what may well be a playfully suggestive allusion (61-62). Theocritus makes his singer develop that allusion with an alphabetically arranged list of heroes (as far as Pyrrhos), none of whom would naturally have featured in a hymn sung by a group of women about to toss Adonis into the sea. In fact, the very list has nothing to do with Aphrodite and Adonis; that some of these heroes feature in cult (like Adonis) and are great macho warriors (unlike Adonis, but like Aphrodite’s more martial lover) may be a point of connection, but the very inappropriateness of the impressive-sounding list is surely Theocritus’ point. Gorgo and Praxinoa would not have known any better. Hecuba had nineteen sons, not twenty; a deliberate error perhaps to suggest that the singer’s scholarship is a little sloppy. The Theocritean invention Δευκαλίωνες (141) foregrounds the chronological confusion in the line. However, the final line of this list, οὐ Πελοπηνάδαι τε καὶ Ἄργαος ᾐκρα Πελασγοῖ (142), must have been intended to strike a chord in the hearts of the two women proud of speaking Πελασγονασσοί (92). The singer is giving the Syracusans the sort of chauvinistic rodomontade they would surely have loved. After the parade of heroes, the closing couplet of the hymn is strikingly prosaic, apart from the conventionally hymnic τὰ αὐτὰ. The singer leaves the women with words which would resonate with their everyday conversation: ὃν Φίλον.
(143) evokes the kind of chatty familiarity Praxinoa and Gorgo use when addressing one another (1, 11), or Praxinoa uses when speaking to the strange man (52, 74).

It thus seems possible that Theocritus deliberately constructed an Adonis hymn which would have appealed to his tasteless, pretentious female creations and would have flattered and amused his presumed audience. The hymn is as much of a parody as his fictive Syracusans. But what of the references to Berenice and Arsinoe in the hymn? How could these possibly be part of the ‘sly parody’? Hunter (1996a:131-32) suspects that the ‘jingle effect’ of ὀθανάταν ὀπὸ θυατής (106) and the ‘mannered quasi-chiastic interplay of mortal and immortal’ in ἄνθρωπων ... γυναικός (107-08), as well as ἄνθρωπων ὡς μοθος (107) and ὡς φαντί (137) at these moments of high praise, could possibly be parodic. Any hint of parody here, however, is cushioned by the elaborate encomium worked into the immortalising process. Patroclus’ nostrils in the Iliad (19.39); Aristaios’ lips in Pindar (Pythian 9.63), but here dropping ambrosia on to Berenice’s breast, as if Aphrodite ‘dabbed it on like a perfume’, comments Dover (1971:211); Arsinoe was especially interested in perfumes and unguents; Kύρι τινα Γυναίκα (106) is thus made to immortalise Berenice in a manner special to the βερενικεία θυατήρ (110), assimilated to the goddess by the imitative adjectival matronymic. στήθος (108) is more clinically anatomical than the more sensual κόλπος εὐώδης used of Berenice’s breast in Idyll 17.37 and thus may well be an allusion to Ptolemaic funerary practice, as Hunter has suggested, but one should not forget the sensual nature of Philadelphus ἑρωτικός (Id. 14.61), as his mother’s bosom becomes the focus of Aphrodite’s attention. The discreet flash of incest may glimmer

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41 Hunter’s suggestion (1996a:134) that Theocritus may be evoking Ptolemaic funerary practice and that this would be ‘encomiastic of Arsinoe as well as her mother’, as Arsinoe is credited with the deification of her mother and thus fulfils at the “real” level the function of Thetis and Aphrodite in Homer and of Aphrodite at the most straightforward level of Thetis’ poem is an ingenious suggestion, which could be indicative of a subtle attempt to ‘Egyptianize’, yet tactfully incorporating the Greek literary tradition at the same time, so as not to alienate the audience.

42 Pomeroy 1984:27; Fraser 1972:2.296 n. 337.

43 See note 55 above.
momentarily; certainly the myth of Adonis is fashioned by it.57 This section of the hymn would be highly flattering to a Ptolemaic audience, but the reference to Berenice's bosom seems to reflect Theocritus' parodic touch.

As interesting is the comparison 'Ελένη υἱή Περσίκης (110), which also arouses one's suspicions, despite the cult of Helen in Egypt, with which Arsinoe was identified.58 'Strong language', comments Dover (1971:211), 'It is to be hoped that Arsinoe was at any rate attractive enough to prevent the comparison from sounding absurd.' Even if Helen were rehabilitated in Alexandrian poetry,59 as she certainly is in Idyll 18, where she is the shimmering golden bride, daughter of Zeus (significant for the Ptolemies), skilled in striking the lyre (significant for the culture-loving Arsinoe), it cannot be avoided that the singer's audience could not possibly have forgotten that Arsinoe was no beauty60 and that Helen was (a) unfaithful and (b) the cause of a dire and destructive conflict.61 The comparison is a dangerous one, which may well have been designed to appeal playfully to the likes of Gorgo and Praxinoa, since Helen was, like them, a Greek woman (of Doric origins!) stranded in the colonies, according to the most popular tragedian in Egypt, whose work had been brilliantly burlesqued by Aristophanes. Theocritus does indeed tread carefully in this section of the hymn, but there are enough deft touches to suggest that the parodic tone has not been abandoned.

To conclude. The Theocritean hymn does indeed seem to be a parody of the kind of hymn which would have been a hit with Gorgo and Praxinoa.62

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57 According to Ovid (Met. 10.431-71), the first sexual contact between Myrrha and her father, Cinyras, the parents of Adonis, took place at a women's festival (that of Demeter/Ceres). The Adonis myth thus features not only festival sex, but also incest, making it especially relevant to Theocritus' audience.

58 Griffiths 1979:53, 68, 88, 90-91; cf. Basta Donzelli 1984:308-09; for the Dioscuri and Helen as protectors of sailors, see ibid. 310-11. The 'amelioration of myth' by the Ptolemaic encomiasts, to which Griffiths refers, may well have bleached Helen of her sordid past, but the 'soap-opera' past is precisely what would have appealed to (and been remembered by) the likes of Gorgo and Praxinoa.

59 And in poetry as early as Stesichorus, as Basta Donzelli 1984:309-10 demonstrates.

60 Basta Donzelli 1984:306 n. 3.

61 Basta Donzelli 1984:310, 314, 316 argues that, especially in Doric-speaking areas, Helen was honoured as the model of a wife and mother ('casta Elena, fedele sposa di Menelao') and, consequently, the comparison between Arsinoe and Helen is most appropriate. Her discussion rests upon the premise that the hymn is intended to be serious; I would argue that there are enough clues in the hymn to suggest that this is not the case.

62 Cf. Griffiths 1979:256: 'The rococo flamboyance of the festival symbolises bad taste, and
As the earlier compliment to Ptolemy is embedded in the clichéd chit-chat of Praxinoa pushing her way through the streets (Theocritus is indeed experimenting with new discourses of praise), so the compliments to Berenice and Arsinoe are embedded in the kind of puffed-out parade of otiose mythologising perhaps indulged in by singers at the Alexandrianised Greek rituals. Theocritus’ parody of women at the Adonia extends to the organizers of such rituals as well. Arsinoe, we are to imagine, put on the show (23-24); she clearly seems to understand what Greek women in Alexandria want. In Theocritus’ Idyll the colonisers seem to have rooted out the wilder aspects of women’s rituals which Aristophanes and Menander parodied, but Theocritus still finds something to parody in the banal spectacle the Adonia will or has, in all likelihood, become. He parodies the women attending; he parodies the woman performing; he implies humorous connivance with the woman organizing the imagined festival (‘How clever you are! You understand just what these colonials want!’) and with other members of the royal audience, whom the poet presumably attempted to entertain. He constructs an image of women not taking part in a significant women’s ritual, but behaving like vapid, prattling tourists at an equally vapid performance which has replaced a participative ritual. Theocritus does not take on the women’s perspective in Idyll 15, as Griffiths has persuasively argued (1979:119-20); he presents us with a male perspective of women’s perspectives on a women’s festival, with a comic literary pedigree, which would not have been unfamiliar to his cultured audience. The comic poets of the πόλις did not have to contend with powerful Hellenistic queens who were patrons of

therefore Theocritus can share a laugh with his patron by memorializing the masses’ susceptibility to such vulgarity in his own impeccable refined verse.”

Griffiths 1979:83: ‘The Adonitzausae demonstrates that the patrons were capable of humor, at least when it was not directed at themselves.’ Cf. Zanker 1987:12.

In contrast to Burton’s interpretation, which reads ‘against the grain’ as it were, and argues that Theocritus ‘projects himself into a female’s subjective consciousness’, thus making ‘female sensibilities public and also part of the public discourse’ (1995:148). Doubtlessly, my interpretation could be dismissed as ‘masculinist’, but I find difficult to take seriously the notion that in a mime, rooted in an entertainment-oriented tradition of mime, and especially comedy, in which the Adonia was consistently parodied, Theocritus ‘projected himself into a female’s subjective consciousness’ to explore the issues of gender and power Burton painstakingly uncovers. The stereotypic feminine traits, which the women incarnate, are surely the objects of Theocritus’ ironic collusion with the audience and the reader, not the subjects of Theocritean empathy. Theocritus does not speak for the Syracusan women; he cannot. See N. Hopkinson’s review of Burton’s work, CR 46 (1996) 223-24.
the arts and on the road to apotheosis. Theocritus finds subtler ways to have fun at the expense of women, fun which has become more recherché, more intellectualised, especially in the context of Ptolemaic patronage, and consequently, more devious.

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