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978-0-521-86577-7 - Theocritus and the Invention of Fiction

Mark Payne

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction: In the realms of the unreal*No, shepherd, nothing doing.<sup>1</sup>

The studies of Theocritus' bucolic poems in this book have grown out of the mixture of puzzlement and curiosity that I felt when I first read them. On the one hand, they seemed to me to lack the pointed vigor of expression that I admired in Greek lyric and tragic poetry. On the other, they were devoid of the attractions of plot and character that make rereading Homer so rewarding. I tried to map the appeal that I nonetheless felt in them onto that of the later pastoral tradition. But here again I found that, despite the resonant names of the later literature – Lycidas, Comatas, Damoetas – their allure did not reside in the kind of verbal magic that attracted me there. In the plainness of their poetic language, they read more like William Carlos Williams than the *Eclogues*, or *L'après-midi d'un faune*. What began to occur to me as a result was that the appeal of the poems did not in fact consist in any of the traditional resources of lyric and narrative poetry but in something rather less concrete, and more difficult to place, which I here call the world of the poems. By this I mean a complex of elements that embraces the physical characteristics of the places the herdsmen inhabit, their nature and behavior as fictional characters, and the positioning of them and their fictional world in relation to the reality of the reader. In each of these areas the bucolic poems manifest themselves as neither making present the world of myth, nor offering an imitation of life. Their world is the first fully fictional world in Western literature, and the pleasures of this fiction are so great that the poems can do without most of what is a source of delight in earlier poetry: vigorous and stimulating language, engaging plots, absorbing characters. Their appeal lies instead in fiction's ability to reveal to us a world that we have not encountered or imagined before.

At this point then I want to distinguish between two kinds of fiction: on the one hand, fictions that are a useful model for understanding the

<sup>1</sup> William Carlos Williams' translation of *Idyll* 1.15; Williams (1986–88) II.268.

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reality that we ourselves inhabit, and, on the other, fictions that offer an alternative to it. This does not map exactly onto the distinction between realist and fantastic literature. *The Lord of the Rings* and *Star Wars* function just as well as *War and Peace*, or the *Iliad* and *Oedipus Rex* (Aristotle's preferred examples) in the first category, even though they feature non-human characters in a world other than our own. Because their agents are recognizably motivated by factors that determine human action in the real world, these narratives quite easily fulfil the function mimetic theory envisages for fiction as a cognitive tool for understanding and reflecting upon real-world behavior. On the other hand, works that contain human agents in real-world locations, such as the chivalric romance, may be useless as mimetic fiction because of the kinds of character and behavior these agents exhibit, or because they do not engage in activities that would allow us to recognize patterns of real-world possibility and necessity. I have indicated my reasons for not wanting to call such fictions "fantastic," and I am also hesitant to call them "ideal," because of the moral or metaphysical baggage this would saddle them with. I have opted therefore for the less loaded "fully fictional" to describe them.

The distinction between mimetic and fully fictional fictions is a theoretical one. Most fictions offer the reader the opportunity to engage with a world that is, for the duration of the reading, an alternative to reality, while at the same time allowing this reader to reflect upon some aspect of his or her real-world experience by comparing it with the fiction. Instantiations of the extremes do exist, however, and there is a well-known mimetic literature that explores the consequences of preferring its fully fictional sibling. *Don Quixote* and *Madame Bovary*, for example, tell of a self that falls under the spell of such fictions, which do not elucidate reality, but rather dim its allure in comparison with themselves. In Theocritus' time too, this polarization of fiction into mimetic and fully fictional kinds is clearly visible, in the contrast between, on the one hand, dramatic poems that offer small-scale vignettes of everyday life (mime and its literary derivatives) and, on the other, Theocritus' pastoral fiction, dramatic poems that offer an alternative to it. The visibility of this theoretical distinction in the period may well be the result of crises in the status of literary representation brought about by the birth of the Library at Alexandria and the systemization of discursive knowledge this entailed. As well as the polarization of fictional worlds, there is an emergent poetry of fact in the period, whose truth claims rest upon objective witnesses and a marked change in the panegyric use of myth. Various responses to the suddenly urgent question "What are poets for?" can be discerned, and I shall argue that the fully fictional world of the

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bucolic poems is not the least of these. By demonstrating so clearly in these poems that a fictional world may occasion our assent to its existence and even our desire to belong to it, even though it manifestly lacks any true being as the presence of myth, history, or even contemporary reality, Theocritus rewrites the agenda for poetic invention, and so makes his bucolic poetry visible as a new possibility for literature. Aligning the emergent genre with the possibility of pure, or absolute, fiction, Theocritus invests its world with the ontological prestige in respect to everyday human reality that had once belonged to myth. Before looking more closely at this valorization of pure fictionality in relation to Theocritus' contemporaries, however, I want first to look briefly at a modern fiction that will help to clarify what I mean by a fully fictional world, and the kind of appeal that is inherent in it.

*The Story of the Vivian Girls, in What Is Known as the Realms of the Unreal, of the Glandeco-Angelinian War Storm, Caused by the Child Slave Rebellion*, to give it its full title, is, at 15,145 single-spaced typewritten pages, almost certainly the longest work of prose fiction ever created. It was written over the course of several decades by Chicago janitor and dishwasher Henry Darger (1892–1973), and illustrated by him both in the course of its creation and after the manuscript was complete and the author had moved on to other projects.<sup>2</sup> Darger's story is the chronicle of a war waged by the Christian nations of Angelinia, Abbieannia, and Calverinia against the rebel, slave-owning state of Glandelinia and its allies. The primary model is clearly the American Civil War, with children taking the place of African Americans as both the cause of the war and its most important protagonists, but this real-world source in no sense inhibits our recognition that the resultant world is fully fictional in nature. So too, plot structures, objects, and named characters from (among others) Mark Twain, Longfellow, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and the Oz stories of Frank Baum all find their way into the *Realms of the Unreal*, where they become part of the new fictional world.<sup>3</sup> This is not intertextuality – appropriation is not intended to establish a relationship between the new work and the old, any more than the book is intended as a commentary on the Civil War. It is rather what theorists of fiction have called transduction – the process by which characters and

<sup>2</sup> The best introductions to Darger's work are Bonesteel (2000) and MacGregor (2002). Both consider Darger under the rubric of outsider artist, Bonesteel emphasizing the artist, MacGregor the outsider. John Ashbery's volume of narrative poetry, *Girls on the Run* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1999), a free fantasy on the adventures of the Vivian Girls, did much to popularize Darger's work in poetry circles, and Jessica Yu's 2004 film, *In the Realms of the Unreal*, has brought it to the attention of a still larger audience.

<sup>3</sup> Bonesteel (2000) 34 gives details of Darger's library, and which parts of it ended up in his own work.

situations can be transported from preexisting fictional worlds into new ones, where they are fully independent of their predecessor.<sup>4</sup>

What is true of Darger's use of literary and historical sources is no less true of his appropriations of contemporary imagery to illustrate his work. Since he never learned to draw, the thousands of figures who populate his world – the little girls, winged dragons, and winged little girls who are the heroines of the story, as well as the adult armies who are their adversaries, and the landscapes of gigantic flowers, trees, birds, and storms where their battles are fought – were not drawn freehand, but created by techniques of collage, tracing, and photographic enlargement that Darger evolved over the course of his life as a means of realizing ever more grand and fantastic compositions. His sources were primarily newspapers and popular magazines, with favorite images retraced time and again to make intricate compositions in which dozens of figures are distributed over a picture plane, at times carefully articulated to give an illusion of naturalistic depth, at times treated as a pure visual surface.<sup>5</sup> His own additions are limited to details of hairstyle and dress in the case of his story's human protagonists, and (male) genitalia when they appear unclothed.<sup>6</sup> More dramatically, the beings known as Blengins, who start out as winged serpents but later appear in human form, have the bodies and faces of little girls, but are adorned with rams' horns and fantastically colored butterfly wings. While the material is appropriated from the real world, its ontological transformation is absolute; all connections to its source are severed, and this sampled material manifests a new, fully fictional creation.

Darger seems to have responded to the presence of this invented world in two ways. Detailed accounts of battles, with casualty lists that supplement them, give the author the air of a journalist reporting on a world that is ontologically independent of the writer even as he reflects on his efforts as its creator: "I have here written as far as I was able, in unusually long details to make the scenes more striking, but even then even I have not succeeded in accomplishing what should have been done, as it is impossible to describe them as they really are."<sup>7</sup> Here the author doubts his successful realization of a world that is independent of him, yet, at other times, his work manifests that world to him with such intensity that its very presence appears proof of its independence. It is a remarkable feature of his large-scale compositions that, of the dozens of figures they contain, almost

<sup>4</sup> See Dolezel (1998) 199–226.    <sup>5</sup> On the sources, see Bonesteel (2000) 29.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. MacGregor (2002) 520–37 on the "fantasy phallus" in the artwork. Whatever its origins in Darger's creative personality, its addition explicitly marks the independence of fictional image from real-world source.

<sup>7</sup> Citation from *In the Realms of the Unreal* in Bonesteel (2000) 44.

all are oriented towards the viewer, and many make eye contact with their observer from within the fictional picture space they occupy.<sup>8</sup> Their gaze denies the ontological boundary that separates their world from ours, as if we could simply walk out of our own world and into the fictional world of *In the Realms of the Unreal*. In a scene that rivals the metafictional gusto of the most daring postmodern novel, Darger's characters within the fiction comment upon this aspect of the way they are portrayed in its illustrations. At one point in the story its protagonists, the Vivian Girls, come across some old books that contain a detailed history of the war in which they are presently participating, and which are signed "Henry J. Darger, author." The girls become the first readers, and the first critics, of the book in which their story is told:

"Every picture seems to look you straight in the face as if you had some secret to tell them, or as if you suspected them of knowing your thoughts." "And probably he had to use them as company, as he was childless." "Maybe that is so, and he wanted them all to look as if they were paying attention to him," said Jennie. "He must have been a very odd man." "I wouldn't mind seeing him," said Violet.<sup>9</sup>

This is fiction's version of creation's primal scene. The invented world appears so undeniably alive, it is only fit that it should acknowledge the creator who made it. Since this is impossible in his own world, he inscribes this desire for recognition within his invention. Parallels abound in religious literature, where the first duty of created beings is to praise their creator,<sup>10</sup> and in the postmodern novel the scene in which the author (impossibly) confronts his own creations has become something of a cliché.<sup>11</sup> Just like the real world, fully fictional worlds provoke ontological wonder because they cannot be reduced to, or contained within, our own. The more palpable their presence as they stand over against the real world as something not obviously derived from it, the more attention they draw to the threshold that separates the two, and the more their illusory presence and uncanny (in)existence seems like a call for mutual recognition directed at us, their

<sup>8</sup> For example, "At Jennie Richie," Bonesteel (2000) 150–51, contains eighty figures, seventy in the foreground, ten in the background, and of these all but two face forward, with about twenty breaking the picture plane with their gaze.

<sup>9</sup> Citation from *In the Realms of the Unreal* in MacGregor (2002) 20–22, with good discussion. This incident seems to have caught John Ashbery's attention. In *Girls on the Run*, his versions of the Vivian Girls speak to him directly, and instruct him to tell their story (p. 3): "Write it now, Tidbit said, before they get back. And, quivering, I took the pen."

<sup>10</sup> The Mayan creation myth is remarkable in this respect in that the gods require several attempts to make beings who are sufficiently intelligent to praise them correctly. See Tedlock (1985) 69–86.

<sup>11</sup> McHale (1987) 213–14. Remarkably, this very scenario is the subject of a flight of fancy on the part of Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (9.7.3–4, 1167b34–1168a4): "Every artist loves his own work more than that work would love him if it were to come to life. And this is perhaps especially the case with poets, for they dote upon their own poems and love them as if they were children."

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observers. It is with this concern for fictional presence in mind that I want to approach the bucolic world and its place in Hellenistic poetry.

The distinction between truth and deceptive semblance appears early in Greek literature, in the mouth of Hesiod's Muses, who, in the opening lines of the *Theogony*, speak of their ability to tell "many lies resembling the truth," but also to give voice to "true things" when they wish. Pindar gives a polemical edge to this distinction in his seventh *Nemean*, when he blames Homer for creating a version of the Trojan War in which Odysseus is just such a deceptive phantom. An august presence dwells in Homer's words, he claims, so that they have the power to induce men's assent to palpable untruth, leading their minds aside from reality (*Nem.* 7.20–23). Plato, in his own way, echoes Pindar's concerns about the truth status of Homeric narrative, and it is not until Aristotle that we have a discussion of fiction that endeavors to find a value for it that lies beyond the distinction between truth and falsehood.<sup>12</sup> For Aristotle, the value of poetic narrative is unrelated to the question of whether or not it is a true account of past events, and he gives the poet full freedom and full responsibility for the creation of his stories. The poet invents these first, then assigns names to the characters that enact them, which in the case of comedy he invents along with the plot, while in tragedy, by custom, though not by necessity, he uses those of the legendary families of the heroic age, the Homeric heroes and Theban kings. In either case, the bearers of these names are fictions; their function is not to refer to the mythical bearers of their names, but to be the agents of actions that model universal behaviors in the world of the fiction's audience (*Poetics* 9).<sup>13</sup> Because (ideally) chance has been eliminated from the plot of poetic fictions, so that they unfold according

<sup>12</sup> The transition from an archaic "poetics of truth" to a post-Aristotelian "poetics of fiction" is traced in Finkelberg (1998). Various positions have been taken on the degree to which Aristotle's account may have been anticipated by sophistic discussions of deception, and its part in literary experience, particularly that of Gorgias (on which see Gill [1993] 74–75, who would minimize it, and, in the same volume, Morgan [1993] 180–81, who would give it a larger role). Cf. Ford (2002) 231, who notes the use of *plassein* in reference to poetry by Xenophanes and Gorgias but concludes that "in neither case do the emotionally powerful and persuasive 'made-up things' belong to a special realm of literary discourse that is distinct from ordinary lying." What I would emphasize here is that Gorgias' account of deception is closely tied to the notion of imaginary presence created through speech, and that this emphasis on speech as the most immediate form of imaginary presence is retained in Aristotle's discussion.

<sup>13</sup> See the account of mimesis as fiction in Halliwell (2002) 166–68, a thorough exposition of the brief notes on this topic in Halliwell (1987) 72–78, 172. Cf. Ford (2002) 231: "The Greek word that can be said to express a concept of fiction is Aristotle's *mimesis*." As the excellent discussion of Aristotle *Poetics* 9 and Antiphanes *Poesis* fr. 189 in Lowe (2000) 260–61 makes clear, Old Comedy's contribution to the poetics of fiction (and here we see its continuity with the fictive speakers of archaic iambic poetry) was made-up characters, not made-up worlds. Even the most fantastic comic fiction takes place in a world that is recognizably a version of Athenian reality.

to strict rules of possibility and necessity, they allow us to recognize general patterns of human life and behavior in them, and so provide a valuable cognitive tool for understanding the world in which we actually live and act. Aristotle, by contrast, would have had little time for the ancient novel, in which contingent detail, chance events, and perfect heroes and heroines who make no mistakes we could learn from are the primary sources of interest,<sup>14</sup> and still less for fictional worlds peopled by beings who are not recognizably moral agents like ourselves, for such worlds would have no efficacy in orienting our behavior in our own world. It follows from this argument, then, that the more fictional the fictional world is, the more its interest is intrinsic to it, and does not consist in its relation to our own world, with regard to which it can only appear as an alternative, and not as a model.

The question of degrees of fictionality is not broached in the *Poetics*, where differences between mimetic genres are explained by reference to the ethical character of the agents they portray – tragedy and epic depict superior people, comedy inferior, and so on; all are equally fictional (*Poetics* 2–5). Distinctions appear later, however, in literary scholarship derived from the *Poetics*. A well-known example is the (bT) scholion to *Iliad* 14.342–51, in which the commentator remarks upon the scene in which Zeus wraps Hera in a cloud of gold and makes love to her within it while golden raindrops fall to the ground, and grass, lotus flowers, crocuses, and hyacinths spring up beneath them:

τρεῖς δέ εἰσι τρόποι, καθ' οὓς πᾶσα ποίησις θεωρεῖται· ὁ μιμητικός τοῦ ἀληθοῦς, φιλοπάτωρ, μισογύνης, ἀπιστος, παρρησιαστικής· ὁ κατὰ φαντασίαν τῆς ἀληθείας, ὃν δεῖ μὴ κατὰ μέρος ἐξετάζειν, οἶον, ὅτι ψυχαὶ γεύονται καὶ λαλοῦσι, πάντως ἔρεϊ τις καὶ γλῶσσαν ἔχουσι καὶ βρόγχον· τρίτος δὲ ὁ καθ' ὑπέρθεσιν ἀληθείας καὶ φαντασίαν, Κύκλωπες, Λαιστρυγόνες καὶ ταῦτα τὰ περὶ θεῶν.

There are three rubrics under which all poetry may be considered. The first represents reality directly, for example when it portrays “the man who loves his father,” “the misogynist,” “the untrustworthy man,” or “the loudmouth.” The second proceeds by way of fantasy upon reality, and one should not probe the details of this type too closely, as when, for example, someone claims that because souls eat and talk they must surely have a tongue and throat. The third exaggerates and goes beyond reality, as is the case with the Cyclopes, the Laistrygonians, and these things [Zeus and Hera’s lovemaking] that have to do with the gods.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Argued with humor by Morgan (1993) 182–83 and with a wealth of detail in what follows.

<sup>15</sup> My interpretation follows Meijering (1987) 68–69. The threefold division resembles the Latin forensic distinction between the true, the fictive that resembles the true, and the fictive that does not resemble the true; see Morgan (1993) 188–91, who notes how well these categories map onto literary genres – history, New Comedy, tragedy – and suggests an origin in Peripatetic literary theory.

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Since *The Misogynist* and *The Untrustworthy Man* are known to be the titles of plays by Menander (the latter is also the title of one of Theophrastus' *Characters*), it is evident that the scholiast has in mind New Comedy, with its representation of universality through omnipresent human types, as his example of poetry that represents reality directly. On this understanding, the human characters and actions of the *Iliad* would constitute a mimetic bedrock that epic poetry shares with more truthful kinds of poetic representation, to which various kinds of additions have been made by the fantasy of the poet. Thus, his second kind of poetry is designed to accommodate those moments in epic where beings from another world (such as the world of the dead) are presented as a kind of fantastic double of actual human beings; while anthropomorphic in general outline, their component parts should not be examined too closely. His final category would explain the monsters of epic, and the marvels that surround the gods, as pure products of the poet's invention that are not modeled on reality at all, but are conceived by a free fantasy that departs from them.

Myth is decaying before our very eyes here, as its once unitary world is parceled out among the mutually exclusive categories of realism, fantastic realism, and fantasy. The ontological status of literary representations is essentially labile, and subject to revision as a result of pragmatic, non-literary developments. If readers no longer believe in actual gods who make love in golden clouds, then gods that do so in literature can only be understood as fictions.<sup>16</sup> From the perspective of the *Poetics*, the *Iliad* scholion is a face-saving strategy. By relegating certain aspects of the text to the category of poetic invention, it allows the remainder to retain the cognitive value that mimetic theory claims for literature as a tool for interpreting real-world experience. Conversely, while the banishment of the gods is not a necessary outcome of the adoption of a mimetic theory of literary value, it is a likely one. Because the gods are not subject to the same laws of probability and necessity that govern human beings, stories in which they are significant agents in their own right are unlikely to offer much in the way of a model of human life. While Aristotle focuses his discussion of poetic fiction on Homer and tragedy, for the scholiast it is evidently New Comedy that functions best as mimetic art, both because its agents are character types who are easily recognizable as universals of real-world human behavior and because these types are presented within a fictional world that has minimal deviation from the real world. As Aristophanes of Byzantium so famously put it, "O Menander and Life, which of you imitated the other?" Realistic

<sup>16</sup> Pavel (1986) 39–42; cf. Schmidt (1976) 161–78 on how pragmatic considerations constrain readers' understanding of fictionality.



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literature simply works better as mimetic fiction, because there is so much less in it that is extraneous to this function and which has to be bracketed out in its reception.<sup>17</sup>

Hellenistic poetry has been particularly well served by formalist criticism. From the early interest in its mixture of genres<sup>18</sup> to more recent attention to allusion and intertextuality,<sup>19</sup> classical scholarship has constructed a minutely detailed picture of the Alexandrian poets' response to their own literary history. What is needed now is an equally detailed account of the kinds of world-making that are the outcome of this activity – how formal innovations are related to fictionality and the mimetic function. Manifest differences in content with regard to archaic and classical poetry may not be indications of the author's agonistic relationship to his predecessors, but extensions and developments of the repertory of fictional worlds available to him. Bucolic poetry, for example, may be less about demonstrating an oppositional response to epic by portraying low-class or marginal figures in the meter (hexameter) that had been the preserve of their betters,<sup>20</sup> and

<sup>17</sup> Aristotelian critical terminology in the prologue to one of Menander's plays explicitly invites the audience to acknowledge the validity of its theoretical concepts in the action of the drama itself. The prologue to the *Perikeiromene* is spoken by Agnoia (Ignorance) who talks about her role in the story; cf. *Poetics* 11, where Aristotle discusses recognition as a change from ignorance to knowledge that contributes to a satisfying plot. For the metatheatrical effect, see Gutzwiller (2000) 116–17.

<sup>18</sup> For “la confusion des genres” in the *Idylls*, see Legrand (1898) 413–36; for “die Kreuzung der Gattungen” exemplified by bucolic, see Kroll (1924) 203–207. For Rossi (1971a) 84, Theocritus is “an illustrious, perhaps the most illustrious, example of this new approach to poetry,” and “what is most striking in his poetry is its mixture of genres.” For Fantuzzi (1993a) 59, the *Idylls* remain “the most approved and most cited example of the contamination of genres.” In a refinement of his earlier position that uses a model of the “literary system” derived from the linguistics of Saussure, Rossi (2000) 149–54 claims that generic mixing is a “functional expedient” by which this system renews itself under altered conditions of literary production. Much of the appearance of hybridization that is supposed to prove generic mixing in fact comes from the hybrid vocabulary of the commentators. Kroll (1924) 203–207 mixes metrical, thematic, and formal observations with terms derived from rhetorical handbooks, dramatic criticism, and ordinary language. Rossi (1971a), likewise, gives the impression that Theocritus is deliberately experimenting with established genres. Wilamowitz (1924) II.141 warned against the misperceptions that result when terminology from late imperial rhetorical handbooks is used to describe poetry, but his warning has largely gone unheeded. For a recent overview of this question that emphasizes both the pragmatic and literary historical constraints upon a purely ludic conception of the Hellenistic poet's relationship to tradition, see Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004) 37–40.

<sup>19</sup> For the demonstration of intertextual mastery as the organizing force of Hellenistic poetry, see Seiler (1997). Hubbard (1998) is a history of pastoral poetry as revisionary intertextuality. Callimachus' acme as scholar poet is perhaps reached in Bing (1988). Notably dissenting voices are Fraser (1972) 1. 618–74 and Cameron (1995), to which Bing (2000) acerbically responds.

<sup>20</sup> So Halperin (1983) and Effe (1977, 1978), in their development of the work of Van Sickle (1976). As other scholars have pointed out, this not only makes the category of bucolic so large as to be devoid of descriptive value, but also ignores the reference to a particular represented world (the world of herdsmen) that is inscribed in the category name. Cf. Alpers (1996) 145–47, Gutzwiller (1991) 7 and (1996) 121.

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more, as the name suggests, about creating a new fictional genre whose characters are herdsmen (*boukoloí*).<sup>21</sup>

Along with fictionality itself, the investigation of fictional presence – the mediation of the world of the poem by the formal structures that reveal it – will figure largely in the readings in this book. Formal structures are most productively analyzed in close relationship to the fictional worlds they transmit rather than as items in a catalogue of generic innovations. In particular, while formalist criticism approaches the poem as an object of study, I try here to give due attention to the ways in which our relation to it seems, as we read it, to be intersubjective. I look at how its world and the fictional beings who inhabit it present themselves to us, how the poems create the illusion of a living presence.<sup>22</sup> My aim is not therefore to construct an empathetic reader who can (all too easily) be contrasted with his formalist counterpart. For the presence of the bucolic characters is not like our access to the interiority of characters in the modern novel. Just as much as the Homeric characters, the characters of Hellenistic “literary drama” present themselves rhetorically,<sup>23</sup> through speeches, and we can only guess at the inner life that lies behind these speeches, just as we can only guess at the inner life of the writer that is exteriorized through the invention of characters. It is not empathy, or identification with characters, that I will be concerned with – putting ourselves into them – but rather with how they come to presence before us, with the ways in which they appear to us and seem to be before us as fictional beings. In this regard, as I hope to show, Theocritus’ bucolic poetry differs in important ways from other Hellenistic literary drama, and from the performed drama that it took for its model.

<sup>21</sup> Fantuzzi (2004) 141–67 is a very thorough analysis of the stylization that creates the internal coherence of the bucolic world. As a “selective mixture of idealization and reality” (148), bucolic poetry, like other literary genres, has a particular synecdochic relationship to the real world by virtue of which its fiction is recognizable as a possible version of the extraliterary reality it models. In particular, the abundant reality effects in the fictional modeling of bucolic poetry allow its miniature dramas to stand alongside the well-established image of the real in contemporary mime. Cf. the discussion of genres as possible worlds in Edmunds (2001) 95–107. See Chapter 4 of the present book for a detailed discussion of the role of reality effects in the bucolic fiction of *Idyll* 7, where I argue that here, as elsewhere, these effects help to manifest the blatant fictionality of a world that, like its characters, is deliberately inconsistent from one poem to the next.

<sup>22</sup> My approach is thus very much in keeping with Philip Hardie’s remarkable study of Ovid’s “poetics of illusion,” in which, Hardie (2002) 6, “the emphasis . . . is on presence and illusion rather than on fictionality and authority, but these two areas are inextricably connected.”

<sup>23</sup> I borrow the term from Bulloch (1985) 6, where it denotes poems in dramatic form that were not, it seems, intended for dramatic performance. Comparing the hymns of Callimachus that are spoken by a dramatic character with the dramatic poems of Theocritus and Herodas, he calls them “a distinct class of Alexandrian experimental poetry.”