Lycidas and Apollo in Theocritus’ *Thalysia*

In a lucid and closely-argued paper published in 1971, Frederick Williams¹ showed that Lycidas, though he is presented as a goatherd, is none other than the god Ἀπόλλωνος, at whose hands Simichidas-Theocritus receives his investiture as a bucolic poet. Though one may reasonably question the legitimacy of Williams’s use of the term ‘mock-investiture’⁵ to describe this scene of poetic consecration, imbued as it is with sophisticated irony, I wish now to add two new arguments that put his actual identification beyond all doubt, especially when we bear in mind that Ἀπόλλωνος ἐπιφάνειαι were a subject of discussion among Alexandrian scholars: indeed, Ister, a pupil of Callimachus, devoted a monograph to the subject (*FGrHist* 334 F 10).

Lycidas’ clothing seems to be described realistically, but the realism is only apparent (Theocr. 7,15-18): a hairy goatskin thrown over his shoulders (in fact this is hardly realistic in the noontide heat of a midsummer day), and an old peplos round his chest, held together by a broad belt:

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\text{ἐκ μὲν γὰρ λασίοιο δασύτριχος ἐίχε τράγοιο κνακόν δὲ ρόμοι στεφάνι νέας ταμίσοιο ποτόσδον,}
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² On this cult, Arcadian in origin, see the passages collected and discussed by E. Livrea (on Ap. Rh. IV 1218) 344f., adding that in the temple of Apollo Nomios founded by Medea at Oricus in Epirus there was an altar dedicated to the Nymphs who represent an important poetological symbol in the *Thalysia* (7,137, 148).

³ The term was applied by G. Giangrande, *Théocrite, Simichidas et les Thalysies*, «AC» XXXVII (1968) 491-533 = *Scripta Minora Alexandrina*, I, Amsterdam 1980, 119-161. If one may venture a criticism of Williams’s otherwise admirable article, it is his excessive deference towards Giangrande’s reductionist views, which are ultimately incompatible with his own far-reaching interpretation of *Idyll* 7.

⁴ *Pace* S. Hatzikosta, *A Stylistic Commentary on Theocritus’ Idyll VII*, Amsterdam 1982 ad l. 48, the tautology of λασίοιο δασύτριχος remains difficult (for a gloss which has infiltrated the
A close parallel for this apparel is, surprisingly, revealed by an Orphic text, fr. 238 Kern; for convenience, I cite this in full:

ταύτά τε πάντα τελείν ἢρι σκευὴ πυκάσαντα σώμα θεοῦ, μίμημα περικλύτου ἑλλίοιο· πρῶτα μὲν οὖν φλογεῖαις ἑναλίγκιον ἀκτίνεσιν πέπλον φοίνικεον πυρὶ εἰκελον ἀμφί βαλέσθαι· αὐτάρ ὑπερθε νεβροῖο παναίολον εὐρύν καθάψαι· 5 δέρμα πολύστικτον θηρός κατὰ δεξιῶν ϊμον, ἀστρων δαιδαλέων μίμημ’ ἱεροῦ τε πόλοιο· εἰτα δ’ ὑπερθε νεβρής χρύσεον ζωστήρα βαλέσθαι, παμφανόντα, πέρι εὐρυν φορεῖν, μέγα σῆμα, εὐθύς ὅ’ ἐκ περάτων γαίς Φαεθόνων ἀνορούν, 10 χρυσείαις ἀκτίσι βάλη ρόδον Ωκεανοίο, αὐγῆ δ’ ἀσπετοὺς ἦ, ἀνὰ δὲ δρόσῳ ἀμφιμιγείσα μαρμαίρη δίνησιν ἐλισσομένη κατὰ κύκλον, πρόσθε θεοῦ· ζωστήρ δ’ ἅρ’ ύπο στέρνων ἀμετρήτων φαίνεται Ἡκανοῦ κύκλος, μέγα θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι. 15

This text, attributed by Macrobius (Sat. I 18,22) to the cult of Dionysus-Sun (= Apollo), contains a description of a special garment to be worn at an initiation: it is rich in astrological symbolism, and could have been intended for a statue of the god, for a priest, or for the initiate: even if this has to be assigned to the Hellenistic or Imperial period\(^5\), like all the Orphic texts it undoubtedly embodies a ritual and cultic core going back to remote antiquity; it may indeed be related to the lost poems Ἱεροστολικὸν and Καταζωστικὸν\(^6\). The similarities to the garb worn by Lycidas are strikingly obvious: 1) the nebris or deerskin thrown over Apollo’s right shoulder has its counterpart in the goatskin on Lycidas’ shoulders; 2) Apollo’s purple peplos corresponds to the old peplos worn by Lycidas; 3) even the great belt

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\(^6\) This is the weighty judgement of C.A. Lobeck, Aglaophamus, Königsberg 1829, I 727-730.
across Apollo’s chest has its equivalent in Lycidas’ broad belt, and the resplendent fiery markings mentioned in the Orphic text have an analogue in Theocritus’ κνακόν (‘ruddy’). In short: in the god’s bucolic epiphany all the distinctive features of the epiphany of Dionysus/Apollo are preserved, but all the elements are very carefully given a pastoral twist; for example, the fragrance of the god becomes the disagreeable stench of rennet (16), and the uncannily silent hour of midday, frequent in divine manifestations, is re-expressed in utterly rustic, earthy terms (22f.). The ability of Theocritus’ public unhesitatingly to recognize and appreciate all of this Apolline imagery need not be doubted; one has only to compare the similar motif of special clothing in at least two other texts. In Pindar P. 4,78-83, Jason’s epiphany in the agora of Iolcus is marked by the same features which are found again in the iconographical type of Apollo «völlig bekleidet, sehr häufig mit Chitoniskos und Tierfell»:

ο δε' ἄρα χρόνῳ
ὶκετ' αἴχμαισιν διδύμαισιν ἀνήρ ἐκ-
παγκλος' ἐσθας δε' ἀμφοτέρα μιν ἔχεν,
ά τε Μαγνήτων ἐπιχώριος ἀρμό-
ζοισα θαντοίσι γυίοις,
ἀμφὶ δὲ παρδαλὲς στέγετο φρύσσοντας ὄμβρους,
οὔδε κομάν πλάκαμοι κερθέντες ὀξοντ' ἁγλαιοί,
ἀλλ' ἀπαν νῶτον καταίθυσι-
σον.

No one can doubt the close analogy between the initiate’s two garments (purple peplos and fawnskin) and the two garments of Jason (Magnesian robe and leopard’s skin), or between the dazzling splendour of the initiate’s belt and the brilliant light radiating from the unshorn blond hair that flows down the young hero’s back – the selfsame ‘solar’ hero who will go on to tame the fiery nature of the bulls οἱ φλόγῃ ἀπὸ ξανθῶν γενότο πνέων καιομένοιο πυρός (P. 4,225), divesting himself of his

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7 On Apollo’s ζώμα in Callim. fr. 114,7 Pf. see Massimilla (on fr. 64,7) 379f.
10 On this passage see my article Pindaro enigmatico: contributi alla IV Pitàca, «Hermes» (forthcoming).
12 Both the deerskin and the leopard’s skin, with their dappled markings, are often invested with astrological symbolism, as representing the starry sky and suggestive of divine kingship: see the impressive material discussed by R. Eisler, Weltenmantel und Himmelszelt, München 1910.
κρόκεν έιμα (v. 232) only at the moment of his trial by ordeal. Jason’s appearance is felt to be so closely akin to that of Apollo that the incredulous crowd in the square fail to recognize him, and wonder οὐ τι ποι οὐτος Ἀπόλλων (P. 4,87)\textsuperscript{13}.

These texts cast light on a fragmentary passage of the Dream of Herodas, where a mysterious character, whose presentation is suggestive of divinity, appears among a group of αἰπόλοι in an identical outfit (8, 30f.):

\[ \sigma[. . . . .]\z \delta νεβρο\rho υ \chiλαν[i]\deltaιω[i] \kappaατέξω[στ]\o \k[. . . . .].\nu \kυπα[σσι]\nu \ομ[φ]\i \τοι[\z] ομοίς. \]

Now that Lycidas’ Apolline nature has been identified under his goatherd’s attire, it is astonishing that none of the commentators on Theocritus has seen fit to draw a comparison with another memorable epiphany of the pastoral Apollo, that narrated by Callimachus in his Branchus (fr. 229 Pf.). While the boy Branchus was pasturing his goats near Miletus, Apollo, disguised as a herdsman, appears to him: he first tries to help him with the milking, only to reveal his incompetence by milking a billy-goat (fr. 217 Pf.); then he reveals his true intentions as sexual in nature by snatching a kiss from him; he then confers the art of divination on Branchus, who accepta corona virgate vaticinari coepit (Varr. ap. [Lact.] ad Stat. Theb. VIII 198). When due allowance has been made for the differences in their narrative techniques, and for the badly mutilated condition of P.Oxy. 2172, the points of contact between Callimachus and Theocritus, are not merely evident but numerous and compelling: 1) the consecration of Simichidas as a poet by Lycidas-Apollo in Theocritus, of Branchus as a seer by Apollo in Callimachus; 2) the sophisticated irony that accompanies the two epiphanies of Apollo; 3) the handing over of the λαγωβόλον in Theocritus (7,128f.), and of the virga in Callimachus (perhaps one might posit ἐπι δῳ[ροίς] at fr. 229,8?); 4) the topos of the locus amoenus is found in both passages (Theocr. 7,7-9, 133ff.; Callim. fr. 229,10 Pf. τέμ[ε]ν[ο]ς [κα][λ]δόν ἐν ὑλή, τόθι πρῶτον ωφθης); 5) there are two springs in Theocritus 7,6: Burina and the spring of the Castalian Nymphs on Phrasidamus’ and Antigones’ farm in vv. 136f.; perhaps these are meant to be understood as separate from each other (note that in l. 142 Theocritus writes πίδακας, plural)\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} The point of the comparison seems not to have been appreciated: Apollo tended the cows of his ἔρωμενοι Admetus precisely in the vicinity of Magnesia, where Jason has come from, cf. Nonn. D. X 321-324 οὐχ οὕτω λασίης Μαγνησίδος ἐνδοθεν ὑλής / βουκόλος Ἀδμητοι βόας ποιμαίνειν Ἀπόλλων, / παῖδος ἑρωτοτόκου λελιημένος ἥδει κέντρῳ, where see Crétien, adding Williams (on Callim. H.Ap. 49) 49f.

as there are in Callimachus\(^\text{15}\) (fr. 229,11 Pf. κρηνέων διόμοιων), where they serve to provide the aetiology of the temple of Apollo Didymus at Miletus, which was rebuilt after the Celtic invasion and was the seat of the priestly clan of the Branchidae, famous for their mantic skills. The fact that this same temple plays a part in Iamb. 1, as the place where the cup of Bathycles was deposited (fr. 191,76f. Pf., v.d. Dieg. VI 18f.), certainly attests the interest of Ptolemy II Philadelphus in Miletus and its cults; but it points to a significance for Callimachus in poetological terms, all the more profound if Iamb. 1 and the Branchus (Iamb. 17) form the opening and closing poems respectively of the Book of Iambi\(^\text{16}\). Williams has already drawn attention to the numerous and striking points of contact between the Prologue to the Telchines (fr. 1 Pf.) and the Thalysia: if we add to these the analogies between Theocritus’ poem and the Branchus, it becomes virtually impossible to feel any doubt that both works have a programmatic dimension.

Clearly, though, the hypothesis of the Lycidas-Apollo identification needs to be tested by reference to the sophisticated μελοδριτον (vv. 52-89) that he offers to Simichidas, though this aspect of the question has not been previously investigated. Does this pass muster as the virtuoso performance of a god, albeit in disguise? Undoubtedly Theocritus was recalling that the creation and performance of poetry are not exclusively human activities, but can also be practised by gods, above all by Apollo, as when, in Homer\(^\text{17}\), he and the Muses entertain the gods at their banquet with singing to the music of the cithara (ll. I 603f.); in the words of the H. Hom. Ap. 188 αὐτίκα δ’ άθανάτοις μέλει κίθαρις και άοιδή. The situation of Idyll 7 is strikingly paralleled by the poetic gift that Apollo presents to Hebe in Callimachus’ Iamb 12 (fr. 202,47-70 Pf.). The constant use of the future (52 ἐσσεται, 57 στορεσεύντι, 65 ἀφυξώ, 66 φρυξεί, 67 ἐσσεῖται, 69 πίσσαι, 71 αὐλησεύντι, 72 ἀισσεί) projects the whole song into a distinctive mode of longing and prophecy.

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\(^{15}\) Callimachus’ Dream also mentions two springs, Aganippe and Hippocrene, whatever the force of the distinction between these, on which see the extremely plentiful evidence assembled by G. Massimilla, Callimaco, Atit. Libri primo e secondo, Pisa 1996, 231-246.


and sets it in a wintry milieu (cf. the astronomical indications of 53f., the lighted fire of 66) which stands in sharp contrast to the summery context of the *Thalysia* within which it is performed; this is reinforced by the northern geography of the simile in 76f., perhaps a glance at Apollo’s Hyperborean connections. The song’s homoerotic subject-matter is of course entirely consistent with the stories of Apollo’s θητεία to Admetus, Branchus, and other youths; some of its details call for special notice:

1) the remarkable oracular form of the προσεμπτικόν for Ageanax (52 ἐσσεταί), who is assured of a successful outcome of his voyage, in midwinter, to Mitylene on the sole condition that he sets his lover free (56 ρύσηται) from his burning passion: only a god could so express his good wishes in the certainty that they would be fulfilled (even if here, ironically, this is brought about by his departure, which will cure the malaise).

2) Lycidas’ foreknowledge: who, except a god, could possibly learn of Ageanax’s arrival in Mitylene within the same day (63 τῆνο κατ’ ἄμαρ)19?

3) Lycidas drinks alone (69), not in the company of fellow-drinkers at a symposium: this accords with iconographical representations of divinities.

4) The tales of Daphnis and of Comatas, that Tityrus is to sing to cheer Lycidas’ solitary drinking session (72-89), recall, in the names of their two protagonists, well-known attributes of Apollo, the laurel and his uncut hair.

5) The consolatory tendency of the song, which aims to quench Lycidas’ love and replace it by a form of ἀσυχία such as Simichidas yearns for in his song (126), encourages – given the aspirations to εὐδαιμονία common to the philosophical sects of the Hellenistic period – the perception of Lycidas as ἱσος θεοίσιν.

6) The problematic placenames in Lycidas’ song, which have given headaches to commentators from the scholiast on, can be explained by the Apollo identification: thus the wine of Ptelea (65) takes us back to Miletos21, the site of the celebrated cult.

18 For the Caucasus (which Theocritus mentions as a κλίμαξ ἐξοκεκανισμοῦ) and its relation to the Hyperboreans see E. Delage, *La géographie dans les Argonautiques d’Apollonios de Rhodes*, Bordeaux 1930, 197-199.

19 Otherwise we should need to correct to ἐκ Μυτιλήνας in line 61, postulating dittography from line 52, and a return journey by Ageanax to his presumed base (in Cos?).

20 Hunter (p. 71) refers to M. Steinhart-W. Slater, *Phineus as monoposiast, «JHS»* CXVII (1997) 203-211; one might add, in the προσεμπτικόν for Corinna, Ov. Am. II 11,47-49 inque tori formam molles sternentur harenae ... adposito ... Lyaeo.

21 ἔστι δὲ ὁ τόπος μέσον Ἑφέσου καὶ Μιλήτου Σχολ., after the note ἦ Ἑφέσιον: Πτελέα γάρ ἦ Ἑφέσου ἐκαλέστο. For the close links between Cos and the temple of Apollo at Didyma see the Coan inscription SIG 590 = R 10 Fontenrose, datable to 205-200 B.C. Other explanations are offered by the scholiast (Coan, Thessalian, or of a vine supported by an elm); some scholars have favoured the first (though there is nothing in the topography of Cos to back it up, pace Wilamowitz, *Hellenistische Dichtung in der Zeit des Kallimachos*, II, Berlin 1924, 138) and the last (e.g. Gallavotti prints πτελεατικόν), which enjoys a measure of plausibility from the high quality of vines grown over elms, cf. *e.g.* Herm. *Past.* 51,1-4 (pp. 214-216 Joly).
of Apollo Didymaeus; the Ἀχαρνεύς shepherd (71) recalls the Attic deme famous for its worship of Apollo Áγιεύς (Paus. I 31,6), and his Λυκωπίτας colleague’s ethnic (72) contains the same transparent allusion to Apollo’s epithet Λύκτος as has been demonstrated in the name Lycidas and possibly also for Lycopeus (4).

All these considerations combine to establish that the identification of Lycidas with Apollo is much more than an ingenious hypothesis: it confers on the consecration of Simichidas-Theocritus as a poet a striking originality while at the same time linking it to the tradition.

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22 The deme of Halasarna in Cos, despite its important cult of Apollo (S. Sherwin-White, Ancient Cos, Göttingen 1978, 61-63, 300), does not seem to have any linguistic connection, unless we postulate an ancient corruption in Theocritus’ text. Lycidas’ cosmopolitan entourage is yet another reflection of his divinity.

23 ἔστι δὲ Ἀχαρναὶ δήμος· οὗτοι θεόν Ἀπόλλωνα τιμῶσι Ἀγαμέμ.

24 If this ethnic adjective has any connection with Lycopeus, the father of Phrasidamus and Antigenes (line 4), there would be a link between Lycidas’ entourage and that of the leading aristocratic family of Cos at whose farm the harvest festival is being held. This would account for the fact that, at the realistic level of ordinary life, Simichidas and Lycidas know each other (21, 27), quite apart from the narrative convention of the Significant Encounter, in which a mortal is met by a disguised god, for which see A. Cameron, The form of the Thalysia, in «Miscellanea Rostagni», Torino 1963, 291-307, F. Williams, Scenes of encounter in Homer and Theocritus, «MPhL» III (1978) 219-225.

25 Williams (ref. in n. 1) has similarly accounted for the mention of the mountain (H)oromedon (45) and of P(h)yxa (145), both of them connected with cults of Apollo, for which see Sherwin-White 302. For Apollo Ἀυκάρευς or Ἀυκάρειος, see Williams (on Callim. H.Ap. 19) 30 and Vian (on Ap. Rh. IV 1490) 133.