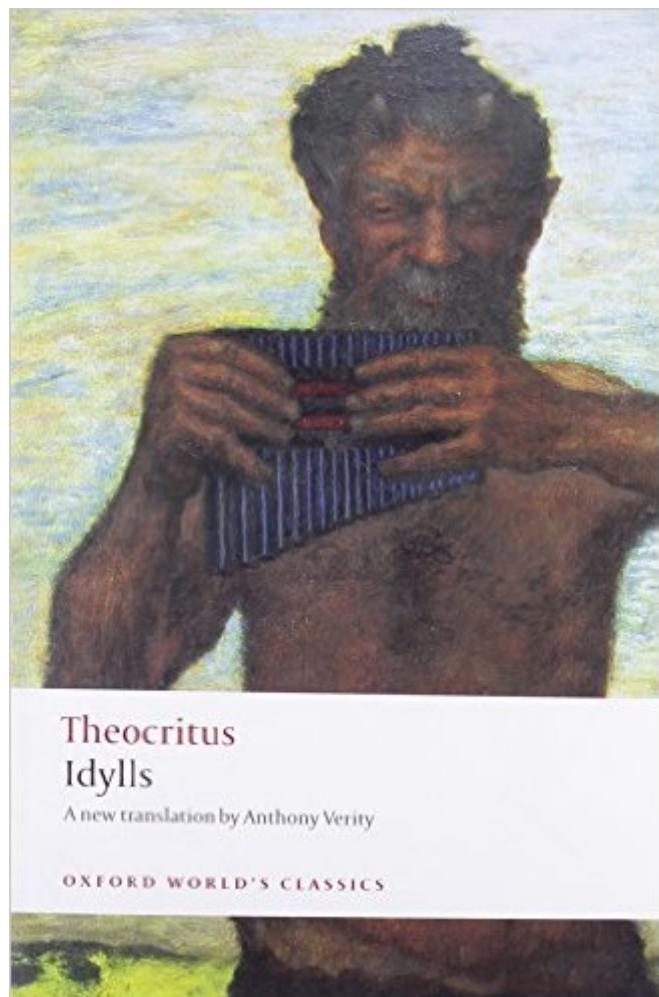


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Idylls (Oxford World's Classics)



Synopsis

A key figure in the development of Western literature, the Greek poet Theocritus of Syracuse, was the inventor of "bucolic" or pastoral poetry in the first half of the third century BC. These vignettes of country life, which center on competitions of song and love are the foundational poems of the western pastoral tradition. They were the principal model for Virgil in the Eclogues and their influence can be seen in the work of Petrarch and Milton. Although it is the pastoral poems for which he is chiefly famous, Theocritus also wrote hymns to the gods, brilliant mime depictions of everyday life, short narrative epics, epigrams, and encomia of the powerful. The great variety of his poems illustrates the rich and flourishing poetic culture of what was a golden age of Greek poetry. Based on the original Greek text, this accurate and fluent translation is the only edition of the complete Idylls currently in print. It includes an accessible introduction by Richard Hunter that describes what is known of Theocritus, the poetic tradition and Theocritus' innovations and what exactly is meant by "bucolic" poetry.

About the Series: For over 100 years Oxford World's Classics has made available the broadest spectrum of literature from around the globe. Each affordable volume reflects Oxford's commitment to scholarship, providing the most accurate text plus a wealth of other valuable features, including expert introductions by leading authorities, voluminous notes to clarify the text, up-to-date bibliographies for further study, and much more.

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Customer Reviews

Theocritus was a bucolic poet and native of Syracuse who has often been credited, by both ancient and modern critics, as being the inventor of the genre of pastoral poetry. However, there are also those who argue that while there are poets attributed to Theocritus the bucolic poems in question are from another ancient edition of dubious authorship. Today, Theocritus is primarily of interest to those looking for the historic antecedents of homoerotic poetry; the poet wrote the 14th, 15th, and 17th Idylls in honor of his patron, Ptolemy Soter. There is also a poem to a beautiful youth that is considered from that perspective. My interest in his "Idylls" stemmed from Theocritus being one of only two other classical writers to talk about the murder of Pentheus depicted in Euripides's tragedy "The Bacchae," the other being Ovid in the "Metamorphoses." This particular poem is neither pastoral nor part of the bucolic tradition, so it may well have been written by the actual Theocritus. For those interested in pastoral poems about shepherds and their ilk, the most famous Bucolics are: I, where Thyrsis sings to a goatherd the story of Daphnis, the herdsman who died rather than yield to the power of Aphrodite; VII, "The Harvest Feast," which features a gathering of poets on the island of Cos; and a set of Idylls, VI and XI, which has Polyphemus, the cyclops from the "Odyssey," in love with the sea-nymph Galatea. There is also a marriage song for Helen that will be of passing interest to teachers and students of mythology. The rest of the poems are of lesser interest both from the perspective of mythology and, I would think, of those who study ancient poetry, although several are interesting in that they were apparently commissioned by rather ordinary folk for loved ones.

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