

APPLES AND ACORNS: ADDRESSING A PROBLEM IN THEOCRITUS 5.92-95

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Theocritus' *Idyll* 5 details an amoebaeon singing contest between two herdsmen in which the goatherd, Comatas, sings an opening couplet and the shepherd, Lacon, replies with a second. This paper considers one exchange between the competitors which has been the cause of particular frustration to readers of the poem due to an obscure, and likely obscene, pastoral analogy offered by Lacon at lines 94-95. After a consideration of evidence drawn from the text, Theocritean scholia and Greek lyric and elegiac poetry, an interpretation of the exchange is offered which may provide some clarity to a much-cited problem in *Idyll* 5.

Keywords: Bucolic poetry; amoebaeon verse; obscene analogy; sexual preference; literary criticism.

Theocritus' *Idyll* 5 is a short poem by Classical standards, a mere 150 lines long, 60 lines of which are taken up by an amoebaeon singing contest between the goatherd, Comatas, and the shepherd, Lacon. It is, however, a dense poem, containing a great many instances of idiomatic language, irony, euphemism and allusion. It is due to this density that I maintain it can be an unexpectedly difficult poem, whether read in Greek or in translation. One can, in fact, read it many times in both languages, understand the Greek on the page well, and still find that there are several instances in *Idyll* 5 that seem close to interpretively impenetrable.

Perhaps the most prominently discussed of these concerns is the reason for Comatas' victory over Lacon in the singing contest which is the focus of the poem. Since the rules of the contest are at no point explicitly given, nor an explanation of Lacon's deficiency provided by the judge, critics have had to search the text for clues regarding both of these, and, in doing so, have produced a number of suggestions staggering in quantity and diversity,¹ particularly in the 1970s and 80s, when Köhnken described the phenomenon as a veritable 'flood of speculation' (1980:122). However, while considering this very large, very central problem in *Idyll* 5, one naturally encounters some smaller interpretive puzzles that are quite as compelling as that of Lacon's defeat. This paper will consider one such problem,

¹ For a brief but even-handed account of the critical debate surrounding Lacon's defeat, see Crane 1988, particularly 107 note 1. Cf. Giangrande 1976 for an example of the belligerence the subject has evoked among certain of its interpreters.

which concerns just four lines from *Idyll 5*, but which has caused critics some difficulty in its attempted solution.

The singing contest in *Idyll 5* is, as has already been noted, amoebaeon, with Comatas giving an opening couplet on a particular subject, and Lacon answering with a matching couplet, subtly altering the original image. There are fourteen exchanges, a statement from Comatas and an answer from Lacon, before the contest ends and Comatas is declared the winner. The exchange on which I will focus is the fourth, occurring specifically at lines 92-95, given here with the previous exchange (88-91) for context:

ΚΟ. βάλλει καὶ μάλοισι τὸν αἰπόλον ἅ Κλεαρίστα
τὰς αἴγας παρελᾶντα καὶ ἀδύ τι ποπυλιάσδει.

ΛΑ κήμὲ γὰρ ὁ Κρατίδας τὸν ποιμένα λεῖτος ὑπαντῶν
ἐκμαίνει· λιπαρὰ δὲ παρ' αὐχένα σεῖετ' ἔθειρα.

ΚΟ. ἀλλ' οὐ συμβλήτ' ἐστὶ κυνόςσατος οὐδ' ἀνεμόνα
πρὸς ῥόδα, τῶν ἄνδηρα παρ' αἵμασιᾶσι πεφύκει.

ΛΑ. οὐδὲ γὰρ οὐδ' ἀκύλοις ὀρομαλίδες· αἶ μὲν ἔχοντι
λεπτὸν ἀπὸ πρίνοιο λεπύριον, αἶ δὲ μελίχροι.

CO. Clearista throws apples at the goatherd too,
As he drives his goats past her, and she whistles some sweet tune at him.

LA. Smooth Cratidas drives me frantic as he comes
To meet the shepherd, and upon his neck his oiled hair bounces.

CO. Yet neither the wild dog-thorn nor the anemone is comparable
With the rose, whose beds bloom by the drystone wall.

LA. Nor indeed wild apples with acorns, for from the oak acorns
Get their slender rind, while the apples are honey-yellow.²

Here the competitors are, as in several instances in *Idyll 5*, comparing lovers: Comatas' is the girl Clearista, Lacon's the boy Cratidas. At lines 88-89, Comatas describes how his lover pelts him with apples as an erotic gesture, and Lacon responds with a description of his own lover arousing him, not with showy flirtation, but merely by his appearance as he approaches.

² All translations from the Greek are my own unless otherwise stated.

In a rare instance of Comatas starting a fresh exchange directly picking up from Lacon's previous response,³ he offers a counterpoint to Lacon's insistence that he too is familiar with teasing, erotic interactions. In Comatas' denial that wildflowers can be compared to roses in a flowerbed, he appears to suggest that Lacon's feelings for his young man are all well and good, but that the love of boys, rough and at liberty, is not to be compared with the love of women, delicate and domesticated. This is the interpretation of Comatas' allegory that has been most widely accepted, by Cholmeley (1912:232), Gow (1950:108), Lawall (1967:59) and Gutzwiller (1991:140), among others. It is Lacon's response to this comparison that offers interpreters a considerable problem. For he replies, in paraphrase: *nor indeed should wild apples be compared with acorns, for acorns get their slender rinds from oak trees, and wild apples are honey-yellow.*

Concerning Lacon's response, there has been lengthy debate and notable uncertainty regarding, firstly, which lover is being compared to which fruit; secondly, what the grounds for the comparison are, for example: appearance or taste; and, thirdly, which fruit is meant to be viewed as the superior in the comparison. As evidence of this interpretational difficulty, one may consider several prominent critical discussions on the subject. Thus, in his commentary on the fifth idyll, Cholmeley (1912:232) attempts to clarify the comparison like this:

Comatas had said 'dog-roses are not to be compared with roses, because dog-roses are inferior'. Lacon alters the order of comparison awkwardly and says, 'medlars are not to be compared with acorns, because medlars are superior'. [...] The comparison in both cases refers of course to Clearista and Cratidas, in the first couplet to appearance, in the second to disposition.

In other words, Cholmeley believes Lacon is comparing his lover favourably to a wild apple and Comatas' unfavourably to an acorn, and that the comparison is based on taste, analogous to disposition: *your lover is as bitter and hard as an acorn, mine is as sweet as an apple.* He notes, particularly, an awkwardness in the phrasing of this. Edmonds (1919:72-73) follows suit, arguing that *λεπτόν* at line 95 is used here 'of taste', and translating the couplet accordingly:

There's no better likeness, neither, 'twixt fruit of pear and holm;

The acorn savours flat and stale, the pear's like honeycomb.

Likewise, in his seminal edition of the *Idylls*, Gow (1950.2:109) claims the comparison is based on taste, that the acorns are inferior to the wild apples and

³ There is only one other instance of Comatas offering a couplet in direct reply to Lacon during the contest, rather than vice versa, at lines 120-121, in which he observes, self-flatteringly, that he has angered Lacon and hopes the judge has recognised it.

that, accordingly, Clearista is being compared to an acorn and Cratidas to a wild apple:

Sense can be extracted from the text — acorns derive a thin rind from the holm oak and therefore have one quality of a good fruit: they are however harsh and unpleasant to the taste, whereas the ὀρομαλίδες are honey-sweet — in other words Clearista has nothing but her looks to show compared with Cratidas.

Gow also observes, significantly, that ‘the second sentence is obscure since it is not plain in what points the two fruits are compared’ and that the Greek text is uncertain at a crucial point in the line and may read either that the wild apples are μελιχραί, honey-sweet, or, as I take it in my translation, μελίχροι, honey-coloured.

In accepting the interpretation of the couplet offered by Cholmeley, Edmonds and Gow, one must read a notable clumsiness into Lacon’s couplet. Comatas has said: *B cannot be compared to A because A is superior*, and in order to read the wild apples as superior, we must maintain that Lacon has indeed altered the order of comparison awkwardly with: *B cannot be compared with A because B is superior*. Cholmeley notes this but accepts it, and a suspicion regarding the quality of Lacon’s response at lines 94-95 persists even in more recent examinations of the poem. Hopkinson (2015:95), for example, is unwilling to offer any advice concerning the interpretation of the comparison, and suggests only that:

The point of comparison is unclear. Comatas was comparing Clearista with Cratidas, but Lacon seems to continue only the botanical theme.

There is a distinct possibility that Lacon’s eventual defeat in the contest of *Idyll* 5 has contributed to this willingness on the part of critics to accept the reading of Lacon’s response as merely an inept attempt at matching Comatas’ couplet at 92-93. However, if Theocritus has here purposefully composed a clumsily obscure, unpolished couplet in order to suggest Lacon’s inferiority as a poet, I argue that it would be the only instance of this technique in *Idyll* 5. Many hypotheses concerning the reason for Lacon’s defeat have been put forward,⁴ but those that indicate an issue in the quality of Lacon’s responses suggest the fault lies not in one or two instances of an obvious poetic inelegance or inability to match Comatas, as Cholmeley’s interpretation suggests is the case at 94-95, but rather in a subtle but consistent technical flaw, which gradually becomes more conspicuous as the contest goes on.

Pagliaro, in his argument for a slow-growing tendency on Lacon’s part to imitate Comatas by means of metrically identical repetition of words or phrases,

⁴ See *supra* n. 1.

insists that ‘Theocritus is not representing a single transgression of the rules as much as a gradual decline in Lacon’s improvising powers’ (1974:71). Furthermore, Pagliaro argues that Lacon’s unseemly imitation of Comatas does not even begin to manifest in his responses until twenty-five lines into the competition, at line 104 (*ibid.*: 70).⁵ Gow (1935:70) notes, regarding the possibility of Lacon’s poetic incompetence, that ‘Lacon claims, and Comatas admits, that the fight has been hard’,⁶ and that, if the judge had sensed an obvious deficiency in Lacon’s early replies, ‘he ought to have intervened much earlier’. This, I suggest, is also true of the above reading of lines 94-95. Neither the judge nor Comatas, who gleefully takes every opportunity to deride and humiliate his opponent, comment on the quality of Lacon’s offering here: the contest moves on as though it were a successful, or at least perfectly acceptable, reply.⁷

Thus, I intend now not only to critique the interpretation offered first by Cholmeley, but furthermore to offer several observations on Lacon’s couplet which may contribute to a fresh interpretation of lines 94-95, not as an error on Lacon’s part, but rather as an instance of a successful, matching comparison, which is predictably favourable to his own lover and unfavourable to Comatas’.

Firstly, with only the smallest amount of imagination, it is certainly possible to question the identification of the acorns with Clearista and the wild apples with Cratidas. *Idyll* 5 is perhaps Theocritus’ most obscene poem. Comatas reminds Lacon of his past violent sexual assaults of him with truly brutal language, so explicit that Edmonds in 1919 and Gow in 1950 both insist on translating exchanges like the following (39-44) into Latin rather than English:

ΛΑ. καὶ πόκ' ἐγὼν παρὰ τεῦς τι μαθὼν καλὸν ἢ καὶ ἀκούσας
 μέμναμ', ὃ φθονερὸν τὸ καὶ ἀπρεπὲς ἀνδρίον αὐτως;
 ΚΟ. ἀνίκ' ἐπύγιζόν τυ, τὸ δ' ἄλγεες· αἱ δὲ χίμαιραι
 αἶδε κατεβληχῶντο, καὶ ὁ τράγος αὐτὰς ἐτρύπη.

⁵ Schmidt 1974 and Giangrande 1976, who both maintain that Lacon loses due to a moral failing, likewise argue that evidence of this failing is only gradually revealed in Lacon’s replies and it is only at the very end of the contest, when Lacon admits that the pipes he has accused Comatas of stealing were really given away as a gift to his lover (134-135) that the flaw is considered obvious enough to cost him the prize.

⁶ Gow is referring to lines 110-111, in which Lacon compares himself to cicadas who rouse labourers in the fields to work without yielding, even though it is the hottest part of the day and they may very much wish to.

⁷ Cf. lines 120-121, in which Comatas asks the judge, gloatingly, if he has noticed how embittered Lacon is becoming, and, crucially, lines 136-137, in which, as argued by Deicke 1912, Gow 1935, Schmidt 1974, Giangrande 1976 and Gutzwiller 1991, Comatas recognises a critical mistake in Lacon’s reply at lines 134-135 and assumes his victory at once.

- ΛΑ. μὴ βάθιον τίνω πυγίσματος, ὕβέ, ταφείης.
ἀλλὰ γὰρ ἔρφ', ὧδ' ἔρπε, καὶ ὕστατα βουκολιαξῆ.
- LA. When can I recall learning anything of worth from you, or hearing it either?
Oh, but you're as jealous and embarrassing a little man as ever.
- CO. Perhaps when I screwed you, and you were in pain. And the nanny-goats
Were bleating aloud, and the billy-goat humped them.
- LA. May your grave be no deeper than that screw, hump-back.
But come, get over here and you'll sing bucolics for the last time.

There is also a great deal of subtler obscene allusion and innuendo. In one notable example (112-115), Comatas accuses Lacon of being a κίμαιδος, or passive receiver of homosexual penetration, which Lacon rebuffs successfully by accusing Comatas of being a cunnilinguist. Both of these insults are conveyed by obscene analogy, the first of foxes and grapes and the second of cantharis beetles and figs.⁸ With instances like this in mind, it is difficult not to suspect that Lacon may be making use of similar obscene analogies in his couplet at lines 94-95.

For example, the word he uses for 'acorn' is ἀκύλος, but a better-known synonym is βάλανος, which may mean both 'acorn' and 'glans penis'. Indeed, the term 'glans penis' is itself derived from the Latin *glans*, meaning 'acorn'. Penella notes of this meaning of βάλανος that 'if the nut itself resembled the *glans*, the husk may have looked like the foreskin, especially the woody cup-like encasing of the acorn' (1974:297). Rufus of Ephesus uses βάλανος anatomically of the *glans* penis (*Onom.* 102), and, far less technically, in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* the same word, apparently also used of the rounded bolt-pin of a necklace, is a comic analogy for the penis in a description of husbands encouraging their wives' lewd habits (407-415). However, of discussions concerning Lacon's couplet at lines 94-95, only Schmidt (1974:223) considers this likely analogy of the acorn with the *glans* penis and suggests that, accordingly, the acorns in Lacon's couplet are meant to represent Cratidas and not Clearista.

If the acorns are here representing Cratidas due to their resembling male genitalia, it stands to reason that the wild apples represent Clearista, and, indeed, there is some evidence in favour of this. Winkler discusses the euphemistic use of the Greek word μῆλον, commonly translated 'apple', as signifying 'various clitoral objects' (1990:183). The apple, quince, or, as Winkler notes, any 'fleshy fruit', are

⁸ The Theocritean scholia first offer the obscene interpretation (Wendell 1914:179), and examples of its modern consideration may be found in Lawall 1967:59, Schmidt 1974:228 and Gutzwiller 1999:140.

all commonly used in erotic analogies for women.⁹ An analogy like this is used, for example, by Sappho (*fr.* 105a) as follows:

Οἶον τὸ γλυκύμαλον ἐρεύθεται ἄκρῳ ἐπ' ὕσδῳ
 ἄκρον ἐπ' ἀκροτάτῳ λελάθοντο δὲ μαλοδρόπνες,
 οὐ μὲν ἐκλελάθοντ', ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐδύναντ' ἐπίκεσθαι.

Just like the sweet apple reddens upon a high branch,
 The top of the highest branch, and the apple-pickers have missed it,
 Surely not overlooked it but could not get to it.

Winkler suggests that the γλυκύμαλον here is a 'sexual metaphor' for a bride on her wedding day, with specific connotations of the bride's clitoris, due to the fruit's position 'high up on the bare branches of a tree' (1990:183), just as the clitoris is positioned above the vaginal opening. The verb ἐρεύθομαι, to be reddened, is particularly suggestive of the erotic, due to its connection to the vasocongestion, or flush,¹⁰ that is characteristic principally of female sexual arousal,¹¹ in which blood infuses the skin of the torso, face and genitals, and coincides with the darkening and stiffening of the clitoris.¹²

The term μῆλα and other words for fleshy fruit are also frequently used of women's breasts, as discussed at length by Gerber in a 1978 article. Aristophanes (*Lys.* 155-156) uses it notably of Helen's breasts, the sight of which prevent Menelaus from violence against her, and Daphnis caresses a girl's μᾶλα or breasts in an erotic scene in Theocritus' *Idyll* 27 (49-50).

However, if Cholmeley and Gow's identification of fruit with lover is reversed, as consideration of the fruits' respective obscene connotations suggests, so that the acorns represent Cratidas and the wild apples Clearista, the problem of which fruit is meant to be superior, and why, remains. Since Comatas' statement, that roses, or female lovers, are superior to wildflowers, or male lovers, flatters his female lover, we expect Lacon to counter the remark with a reversal of this binary

⁹ See Littlewood 1968:149-159 for a thorough review of apples as symbols of the erotic, including women's breasts, in Greek and Roman literature.

¹⁰ The image of the maidenly blush, complicated by its erotic connotations, is used notably in Latin literature. Virgil includes it in the *Aeneid* during a particularly fraught description of Lavinia and her erotic effect on Turnus (12.64-71). See Lyne 1983 and Dyson 1999. In Statius' *Achilleid*, the young Achilles, significantly while in disguise as a girl on Scyros, blushes at the moment he sees himself reflected in a shield (864-866), an image Chinn 2014:179-180 argues entangles themes of violence and the erotic, and simultaneously the epic and the elegiac.

¹¹ According to Bullough & Bullough 2014:31, 'seventy-five percent of women have a sexual flush', as opposed to only twenty-five percent of men (Oakley 2015:79).

¹² Hyde & DeLamater 2013:187-188.

so that his own, male lover is the flattered party. Happily, the structure of Lacon's first line, if compared to Comatas', does seem to set the *ἀκύλοι*, or acorns, in the same position at Comatas' *ρόδον*, or rose:

- ΚΟ. ἀλλ' οὐ συμβλήτ' ἐστὶ **κυνόσβατος** οὐδ' **ἀνεμόνα**
πρὸς ῥόδα, τῶν ἀνθηρα παρ' αἰμασιαῖσι πεφύκει.
 ΛΑ. οὐδὲ γὰρ οὐδ' ἀκύλοις **ὄρομαλίδες**· αἱ μὲν ἔχοντι
 λεπτὸν ἀπὸ πρίνοιο λεπύριον, αἱ δὲ μελίχροι.¹³

In Comatas' couplet, the inferior flowers in the comparison are the subjects of the sentence, and in the nominative accordingly: *κυνόσβατος* and *ἀνεμόνα*: *neither dog-thorn nor anemone are comparable* [...]. The superior flower is in the accusative, *ρόδα*, governed by *πρὸς*, indicating the comparison: [...] *comparable to the rose*. In Lacon's couplet, it is the wild apples that are in the nominative: *ὄρομαλίδες*. The acorns are in the dative to indicate the comparison: *ἀκύλοις*. While there is here an instance of chiasmus, in which Lacon places the subject of his sentence after the object of comparison, rather than before it as Comatas does, the order of comparison has not, as Cholmeley suggests, been altered. The line should, therefore, be translated in a way that structures Lacon's comparison just as Comatas' earlier one is structured. Comatas says: *Neither dog-thorn nor anemone are comparable to the rose*. Lacon responds: *Nor are wild apples [comparable] with acorns*. If translated like this, true to the grammar of the Greek, the acorns are clearly placed in the favourable position, matching that of the rose in Comatas' comparison.

The unwillingness of previous critics to place acorns as the superior fruit and wild apples as inferior is perhaps understandable, particularly if their text, like that of Cholmeley, Edmonds and Gow, takes *μελιχραί*, honey-sweet, of the wild apples as preferable to *μελίχροι*, honey-coloured. 'Honey-sweet' seems far more obviously appetizing a quality than the acorn's subtler description as *λεπτός*: slender, delicate or refined. However, here an examination of the Theocritean scholia is of great use, as not only do the scholiast's notes on Lacon's couplet suggest that the acorns are meant to be taken as both the superior fruit and representative of Cratidas, they also favour the adjective *μελίχροι*, honey-coloured, of the wild apples. Thus, the note at 94/95c (Wendel 1914:175) gives the following explanation:

αἱ μὲν ἔχουσι λεπτὸν λέπυρον· αἱ δὲ μελίχροι, ἤγουν χροῖαν ἔχουσαι μέλιτος, κτρινοειδεῖς· ὁ δὲ καρπὸς τῆς πρίνου κοκκοειδῆς ἐστί. ποιεῖ οὖν ὁ

¹³ Emphasis here is my own.

Λάκων τὴν μὲν Κλεαρίσταν κιτρινοειδῆ καὶ οἶονεῖ ἄμορφον, τὸν δὲ Κρατίδαν κοκκοειδῆ καὶ οἶονεῖ εὖμορφον.

On the one hand, these have thin rinds; on the other, those are honey-coloured, in other words they have skins that are honey-like in colour, yellowish. Meanwhile, the acorn from the oak is nutty. So Lacon represents Clearista as yellowish and, because of this, ill-looking, while Cratidas he represents as nut-brown and, because of this, good-looking.

In this way, Lacon is imagined as boasting, using possibly obscene imagery of acorns and wild apples, that his youth is sun-tanned and slender, while Comatas' maiden is pale and yellow. She is not, as Cholmeley and Gow maintain, an appetising fruit like an apple or a medlar, but an undomesticated, hard, yellow fruit like that of the *Malus sylvestris* or European crab-apple.

Regarding this, it is of interest to compare Sappho's likening of a bride to a γλυκύμαλον, or 'sweet apple', to Lacon's likening of Clearista to ὄρομαλίδες, or 'wild apples'. Not only is Clearista not 'sweet', like the bride, but also, in terms of complexion, where Sappho's bride is the subject of the verb ἐρεῦθομαι, 'to be reddened', which holds striking erotic connotations, Clearista is μελίχροος, honey-yellow, or, as the scholia has it, κιτρινοειδεῖς, the greenish-yellow colour of citron fruit. For greenness or pallor as an unappealing complexion, often suggesting physical illness or lovesick wasting, there are multiple examples.¹⁴ The wild apple, therefore, is as disagreeable in Lacon's comparison as the ἄχρᾶς or 'wild pear' in the following fragment from Archilochus (CURFRAG.tlg-0232.124), concerning a sexual preference a young woman over her mother:

πῶς δὴ τοιαῦτα βήσομ' ἀγκαλίσματα;
οὐ σῦχ' ἔλωμαι πρότερον ἀχραδινέων;

Indeed, how could I step into the embrace of such arms?
Wouldn't I choose figs over wild pears?

Moreover, that a suntan was a particularly attractive feature in a youth is fervently implied in an erotic epigram by Antipater of Sidon (*Anth. Graec.* 12.97), which mourns the fact that the complexion of a boy's lower parts does not match the handsome ruddy gold of his torso:

¹⁴ Simaetha in Theocritus' *Idyll* 2, pining for the youth Delphis, burns with fever, loses hair and weight, and turns the sickly yellow colour of fustic (85-90). Similarly, the lovesick narrator of Sappho 31 is famously 'χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίᾳς' [paler than grass] and feels she is near death. The cursed Socrates in Apuleius' *The golden ass* becomes as pale and cheesy as boxwood before dying appallingly (1.19). Further references may be found in Rynearson 2009, Caston 2006 and Toohey 1992.

Εὐπάλαμος ξανθὸν μὲν ἐρεύθεται, ἴσον Ἔρωτι,
 μέσφα ποτὶ Κρητῶν ποιμένα Μηριόνην·
 ἐκ δὲ νυ Μηριόνεω Ποδαλείριος οὐκετ' ἐς Ἡὸ
 νεῖται· ἴδ' ὡς φθονερά παγγενέτειρα φύσις.
 εἰ γὰρ τῷ τά τ' ἔνευθε τά θ' ὑπόθεν ἴσα πέλοιτο,
 ἦν ἂν Ἀχιλλῆος φέρτερος Αἰακίδεω.

Eupalamos is sun-kissed auburn, like Eros,
 Down to his Cretan Captain Nethers:
 But from Nethers, Lily-foot harkens back to Rosy Dawn
 No longer. See, then, how jealous Mother Nature is?
 For if his bottom were equal to his top,
 He would best Aeacean Achilles.

While the epigram is almost certainly obscene in its use of Μηριόνην for μηρόν,¹⁵ and the likely implication of erectile dysfunction suggested by Clack (2001:124), the good looks of the youth in question are clearly reliant on his skin tone, described at ξανθός, the ‘reddish-brown complexion and tan of a young man’ (Maxwell-Stuart 1975:13). That Lacon may be comparing Cratidas’ complexion very favourably to the nutty, reddish brown of an acorn, as maintained by the scholia, is thus worthy of consideration.

Finally, the scholiast’s note at 94/95d (Wendel 1914:175) claims the point of the comparison in Lacon’s couplet concerns a preference in physical build:

ἄκυλος ὁ καρπὸς τῆς πρίνου. ὀρμαλίδες ὄρεια μῆλα. λεπτὸν ἀπο πρίνοιο,
 παχὺ δὲ πρὸς τὰς ὀρμαλίδας.

The acorn is the fruit of the oak. Wild apples are undomesticated apples.
 Slenderness from the oak, and fat on the part of the wild apples.

Lacon is thus suggesting that his lover has the slender firmness of a youth, while Comatas’ is fat and formless.¹⁶ Indeed, it is possible that this note from the scholia

¹⁵ μηρόν meaning not ‘thighs’ here but ‘anus’ as proposed convincingly by Maxwell-Stuart (1975). See the same and Clack 2001 for a full commentary on obscene analogy and allusion in *Anth. Graec.* 12.97, and its past misreading.

¹⁶ A reader familiar with the first fragment of Callimachus’ *Aetia*, in which Apollo instructs the poet: ‘τὸ μὲν θύος ὄντι πάχιστον / θρέψαι, τῆν Μοῦσαν [...] λεπταλέην’ [to rear his sacrificial victim as fat as possible, but keep [...] his Muse slender], may well suspect the scholia is suggesting an additional, meta-poetic significance to Lacon’s comparison here, privileging the ‘slender acorn’, representing the short, self-contained Callimachean style, over the ‘fat crab-apple’, representing over-burdened epic verse. See Berman 2005:239f. for a very brief consideration of Callimachean poetics in *Idyll* 5.

may be identifying the same idea behind Lacon's reply as that at 94/95c: the unfortunate appearance of Clearista. Lacon's couplet could then be read: *My youth, like an acorn, is firm and brown, and not to be compared to your girl, who, like a crab-apple, is fat and yellow.*

In conclusion, I argue that there is adequate evidence from an examination of the poem's use of obscene analogy, the grammar of the couplet, and Theocritean scholia that a revision of the reading of lines 94-95 of *Idyll* 5 offered by Cholmeley (1912:232), Edmonds (1919:72-73), Gow (1950.2:109) and Hopkinson (2015:95) may well be considered. Not only can the ἄκυλοι or acorns be taken to represent Cratidas, and the ὀρμαλίδες or wild apples to represent Clearista, but the qualities ascribed to each of these by Lacon in attempting to flatter his own lover over his competitor's allude to recognisable images of the erotically desirable and the undesirable drawn from Greek Old Comedy, lyric and elegiac poetry.¹⁷

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