

FRUSTRATED DESIRE AND CONTROLLING FICTIONS:
THE NATURAL WORLD IN ANCIENT PASTORAL LITERATURE AND ART

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines three intersections of plants and desire in the pastoral literature of Theocritus, Virgil, and Longus. First, the *locus amoenus* describes a pleasing botanical place that can create a narrative frame around depictions of desire or can inspire desire itself. The visuality of the descriptions of *loca amoena* is then compared with examples from Roman landscape wall painting, which provide fictional representations of plants that can physically create a space in which desires can be inspired, enunciated, or acted upon. Second, inversions of nature, *adynata*, in pastoral literature offer a way for the herdsmen to imagine an impossible botanically based desire being fulfilled when their actual (usually erotic) desire cannot be. *Adynata* can be expanded to impossible ultra-lush Golden Age imagery. This imagery reminds the reader of the Roman wall paintings at Prima Porta and Oplontis, which are reconsidered as *adynata*. The final intersection of desire and plants occurs in a pastoral and botanical variation on magic, by which the practitioner can attempt to alleviate a desire. This chapter, which culminates in a reevaluation of *Idyll* 11, shows that although plants and desire are intimately linked with magic, the one true way to remedy a desire is to take control of one's own emotions and not dwell on what is not attainable. The botanical world, then, functions alongside the frustrated desires and within the controlling fictions of *loca amoena*, *adynata*, and magic in the pastoral literature of Theocritus, Virgil, and Longus.