

Theocritus and the Dioscuri

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THE TWENTY-SECOND IDYLL of Theocritus has never received much comment, possibly because its subject is anything but bucolic. "To fight with the Tyndaridae is no light matter," declares the poet near the end (212); after the account of Pollux's boxing victory over the savage Amykos and the exploit of the Dioscuri with the Apharidae, the reader is likely to agree. But what is not so clear is Theocritus' intention in writing this poem in the first place. It is styled a hymn (the reminiscences in 1–26 of *Hymn. Hom. 33* have long been recognized), and the story of Pollux drumming manners into the savage Amykos is praiseworthy enough. But when we come to Castor, who is given the leading rôle in the second half of the poem, we have a most peculiar story. For here the Dioscuri seem to be behaving quite as despicably as Amykos. They are on a 'road trip', arbitrarily decide to abduct the fiancées of the Apharidae, ignore Lynceus' conciliatory speech, and fight for the girls.¹ Castor kills Lynceus; as the slain man's brother-in-law Idas is about to hurl a stone, Zeus intervenes and strikes him dead with a thunderbolt.

That this is not a very satisfactory encomium was the opinion of Gow, who twice discussed what he took to be the poem's shortcomings.² It is convenient to adopt here his division of the poem into four sections: part 1 (lines 1–26, the prologue), part 2 (lines 27–134, the episode of Pollux and Amykos), part 3 (lines 135–211, the story of the Apharidae), and part 4 (lines 212–23, the epilogue). Gow objected to parts 3 and 4. In the first place, the story of the Apharidae was unsuitable as it stood for an encomium; besides, in every other version but one of the story Castor was killed.³ Stylistically, Gow found this part much inferior to the earlier lines; the particularly large number

¹ Unfortunately, the lacuna at 170 prevents us from knowing what Castor said in full in his reply to Lynceus. But since the latter tries to avoid the fight at 154ff, it is safe to assume that the speech was aggressive. It would be interesting to know if Castor attempted to justify the acts of the Dioscuri and what arguments he used.

² See A. F. S. Gow, "The Twenty-second Idyll of Theocritus," *CR* 56 (1942) 11–18; *Theocritus*, ed.² with transl. and commentary, II (Cambridge 1952) 382–407, esp. 384–85 [hereafter Gow, *Commentary*].

³ Hyginus 80 for Castor's survival; see also Pind. *Nem.* 10.60ff, *Apollod.* 3.11.2, and *Ov.*

of Homeric words and phrases suggested a pastiche hastily thrown together.⁴ The epilogue was equally censured, in that Theocritus' reference to the Trojan war (215ff) and to Homer (218) seemed "untimely"; the Dioscuri are mentioned only once in the *Iliad*, and in no very prominent connection.⁵ Gow concluded that parts 1 and 2 were written first and were meant to stand as separate poems. For whatever reason, Theocritus later joined them, hastily composed parts 3 and 4, appending them with two perfunctory transitional lines (135–36) and thereby spoiling the artistry of the whole.⁶

This view has gone unchallenged, although I think it open to some objection.⁷ Gow was right to draw attention to the disparity of style and contrast in subject matter in part 3, but we may perhaps find an explanation of the peculiarities he noted without assuming that Theocritus did not know what he was doing. The key, I think, lies in the mysterious reference to Homer at the end of the poem. Here are the last ten lines (214–23):

χαίρετε, Λήδας τέκνα, καὶ ἡμετέροις κλέος ὕμνοις
 ἐσθλὸν αἰεὶ πέμπετε. φίλοι δέ τε πάντες ἀοιδοὶ
 Τυνδαρίδαις Ἐλένη τε καὶ ἄλλοις ἠρώεσσιν
 Ἴλιον οἱ διέπερσαν ἀρήγοντες Μενελάω.
 ὑμῖν κῦδος, ἄνακτες, ἐμήσατο Χίος ἀοιδός,
 ὑμνήσας Πριάμοιο πόλιν καὶ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν
 Ἰλιάδας τε μάχας Ἀχιλλῆά τε πύργον ἀντήης·
 ὑμῖν αὖ καὶ ἐγὼ λιγεῶν μειλίγματα Μουσέων,
 οἷ' αὐταὶ παρέχουσι καὶ ὡς ἐμὸς οἶκος ὑπάρχει,
 τοῖα φέρω. γεράων δὲ θεοῖς κάλλιστον ἀοιδαί.

Fasti 5.693ff. For the account in the *Cypria*, see Proclus' summary in T. W. Allen, ed. *Homer V* (OCT 1946) 103.

⁴ See Gow, *Commentary* 383, and nn. on vv.153, 175ff, 184, 188, 189, 195, etc. Ph.-E. Legrand's word lists may also be consulted for some rough indications; while he finds Homeric borrowings spread fairly equally throughout the poem, he identifies far more words and phrases not used in Homer in parts 1 and 2. See *Étude sur Théocrite* (Paris 1898) 357 n.1 and 263–64. A few of Legrand's examples were criticized and invalidated by G. Perrotta, "Studi di poesia ellenistica," *StItal* n.s. 4 (1925) 202ff.

⁵ *Il.* 3.236ff; cf. Gow, *Commentary* 406–07.

⁶ Gow, *Commentary* 385.

⁷ Legrand comments on "le défaut d'unité"; see his edition, *Bucoliques grecs I* (Paris 1925) 179, and cf. *Étude* (*supra* n.4) 91. E. Bignone also remarks on the contrast between the poem's two main sections, *Teocrito, Studio critico* (Bari 1934) 320–22. The most recent edition, that of K. J. Dover (London 1971), does not comment on the problem (though for the reference to Homer, see the note at 250); similarly silent is H. Fritzsche/E. Hiller, *Theokrits Gedichte* (Leipzig 1881) 231. For the problem of ὑμῶν in 218 and 221 see *infra* n.13.

First, a salutation to the Dioscuri, and a prayer that κλέος may attach to the poet's hymns. Second, a recommendation of the special relationship of ἀοιδοί to the pair's famous relatives and to the heroes who helped regain Helen from Troy. This is made more precise in 218–20 with the mention of Homer, the subject of the *Iliad*, and Achilles. Then the poet mentions his personal inspiration from the Muses and his own resources (221–22). Finally, a gnomic statement (at least since Pindar): songs are the best prizes for the gods.

Now this is a strikingly personal conclusion. The hymn could perfectly well end (and many of the hymns we have *do end*⁸) with a brief version of 212–15. Instead, Theocritus goes out of his way to mention Homer, who is seldom mentioned elsewhere in the *Idylls*,⁹ and to compose an elaborate allusion to the *Iliad*. Why? Surely, Theocritus knew that the Dioscuri occupied a very minor place in that poem; yet, just as surely, he can hardly be undercutting them, or his poem, by asking his readers to think about insignificance. That the story of Castor and the Apharidae figured in some way in the *Cypria* is irrelevant; Theocritus' reference is plainly to the *Iliad*, and, as Gow notes, Theocritus elsewhere shows that he does not think of Homer as the author of the *Cypria*.¹⁰ We may explain the passage, I think, by regarding it as a coda to the poem as a whole and as a comment on poetry, which it plainly is, rather than by continuing the attempt forcibly to link it with Castor and Pollux. The passage essentially remarks on literature, not on heroic cult.

In fact, the poem as a whole is a very consciously 'literary' piece. There is the relation between the prologue and *Hymn. Hom.* 33; for part 3, Theocritus knew of the version in the *Cypria*, and doubtless of Pindar, *Nem.* 10.60ff. But most importantly, part 2 is related to the account of Apollonius, *Argon.* 2.1–97, which also tells the story of Pollux and Amykos. Gow thought the resemblances too close to be fortuitous and advanced the theory that Theocritus' version was the

⁸ Compare *Hymn.Hom.* 33.18–19 (χαίρετε, Τυνδαρίδαι), though the hymn itself is very brief. The last line is a formulaic close which concludes many of the hymns; few have an epilogue of more than two lines (cf. *Hymn.Hom.* 3, 4, 5, 7, 19, 27, 28). Callimachus' conclusions can be equally brief (cf. *Hymn.* 2, 4, 5).

⁹ References to Homer in Theocritus are otherwise limited to 7.47 and 16.20, both in unflattering or controversial contexts. Homeric *echoes* are, of course, far more common; see Legrand and Perrotta, *opp.citt.* (*supra* n.4). Amykos himself generally recalls the Cyclops in *Od.* 9; he is, for example, the son of Poseidon (22.97) and swears his oath by him (133). For a comparison of 22.44ff with *Od.* 9.182ff, see Bignone, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.7) 308 n.3.

¹⁰ See *Id.* 16.49 and Gow, *Commentary* 316.

later and was intended as a critical rewriting of Apollonius.¹¹ Since this may well be the case with *Idyll* 13, the story of Hylas (cf. *Argon.* 1.1207ff), and since the episode of Pollux immediately follows that of Hylas in Apollonius, Gow is likely to be right.¹² But even if he is not, the correspondences suggest that *Idyll* 22 may correctly be placed in the context of Alexandrian literary debate.

May we not see the references to Homer also in this context? The differences in style and subject matter which part 3 displays may be quite deliberate, in other words, and summed up under a Homeric rubric at the end of the piece. Theocritus, I suggest, is showing that he can write not only in the elegant new style associated with Callimachus and his adherents but also in the more conventional Homeric fashion which Apollonius retained. This thesis is supported by the emphasis of the last three lines of the epilogue: "But I also offer to you sweet strains of the clear-voiced Muses such as they themselves provide and as my own ability affords."¹³ We may, most simply, take the mention of the Muses and the poet as supplementary; we may also take it as a subtle implication of contrast, especially if we notice the playing off of Achilles' war cry in 220 (*ἀντῆς*) with the sweet songs in 221 (*μελιόγματα*). One of the clearest echoes in the

¹¹ See Gow, *Commentary* 382–83.

¹² On *Id.* 13 see Gow, *Commentary* 231–32. H. Traenkle argued the reverse in "Das Graslager der Argonauten bei Theokrit und Apollonios," *Hermes* 91 (1963) 503–05; so too A. Koehnken, *Apollonios Rhodios und Theokrit* (Goettingen 1965), who bases his judgement on what he takes to be Theocritus' more 'traditional' representations in *Id.* 13 and 22 (118ff). But that Amykos, as far as we know, was traditionally portrayed in humorous contexts (Epicharmus, Sophocles satyr-play), and that Theocritus lends him a grimly humorous side (e.g. 22.55) is not a decisive argument for Apollonius' relatively more serious version being the later. Similarly, that Apollonius presents the traditionally immortal Pollux as an ordinary human being whose victory over Amykos is unexpected is no conclusive argument for the departure from tradition post-dating Theocritus' poem. It is the opinion of D. Hagopian, *Pollux' Faustkampf mit Amykos* (Wien/Stuttgart 1955), that Apollonius' is the more traditional of the two versions (65), since he regards Theocritus' account as an innovative attempt to incorporate the motivational structure of a five-act drama into an epyllion (37, 57–60). Priority of the Apollonius passage is not necessary for my argument; all I wish to point out here is that *Id.* 22, as well as 13, may reflect an Alexandrian literary disagreement. If it was Apollonius who rewrote the Hylas story, it is easy enough to imagine Theocritus replying by choosing the next episode of the *Argonautica* as the theme for a *riposte*. But that is mere speculation.

¹³ The word *ὑμῖν* at 218 and 221 posed a problem for Gow; he thought the context demanded that it refer to the Dioscuri but complained of the untimeliness of the Homer reference (*Commentary* 407). Dover suggests that the heroes and gods in general are meant here (250–51), a view close to that of Fritzsche and Hiller (231).

poem of traditional epic style has been the invocation to the Muse in 115ff:

πῶς γὰρ δὴ Διὸς υἱὸς ἀδηφάγον ἄνδρα καθεῖλεν;
εἰπέ, θεά, σὺ γὰρ οἶσθα· ἐγὼ δ' ἑτέρων ὑποφήτης
φθέγξομαι ὅσσ' ἐθέλεις σὺ καὶ ὅπως τοι φίλον αὐτῇ.

That Theocritus should regard himself as a mere ὑποφήτης of the epic Muse is scarcely credible; this is imitation, but imitation for a definite purpose.¹⁴ He is not a mere interpreter, as the penultimate line of the poem makes clear; he has his own οἶκος, his own stock of poetic ability.

That ability is exhibited to impressive advantage in the first two parts of the poem. The description of the storm in part 1 is ornate but effective. In part 2 Theocritus takes a rare step, so far as we know, in employing *stichomythia* in epic hexameters (54–73); 34–53 are particularly carefully wrought verses, displaying elaborate effects of word order, sound and rhythm.¹⁵ The boxing match itself is dramatic and filled with veristic detail. In contrast to all this, part 3 is comparatively plain. But, if I am right in my interpretation of the final lines, the plainness is intentional; having produced his own version of an Apollonian subject, Theocritus appends a second episode in a style much like that Apollonius might have used. From this point of view one might conclude that the choice of the Dioscuri as a theme, affording the opportunity for a diptych, was ideal.

Gow objected, however, not only to the style of part 3, but, more importantly, to its content. I am not convinced that this version of Castor's exploit is inappropriate because in every other version save that of Hyginus Castor is killed. After all, we allow Euripides to choose his mythological variants. More serious is the plain fact that

¹⁴ That the passage occurs in part 2, the Amykos section, is a reminder that Gow's confinement of Homericisms to part 3 is too rigid. It should be clear that the passage was intended to be read with the balancing reference to poetic inspiration at the end of the poem, where, as I argue, Theocritus unmistakably advances his own claim to originality, which goes far beyond that of the mere rhapsode. For conceptions of the rhapsode's 'possession' while he is reciting poetry and for the idea of him as an interpreter, see Pl. *Ion* 533D–535A. Gow recognizes that the two passages in *Id.* 22 are linked and that the second limits the first (*Commentary* 407), but he does not draw the proper conclusion; cf. Legrand, *Bucoliques* (*supra* n.7) I.182–83.

¹⁵ For example, note word order of 35, sound in 39–41, word order in 42, chiasmus in 46 and 52, alliteration in 47 and 53, rhythm of 51; on 30ff see Bignone, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.7) 306 n.3.

the story is most unflattering. The Dioscuri, though divine, are flagrantly in the wrong, and their injustice appears to receive support from Zeus himself.

But the stylistic explanation I have offered for the poem may also be in point here, for the moral values at stake in the story of Pollux have a curious reverse echo in that of Castor. In part 2, Pollux is shown as merciful, sparing the defeated Amykos on condition that he swear a great oath "never again to be willingly a molester of strangers" (134). Pollux, it is implied, has done a great service, since it is the claims of *ξενία* that are threatened by the barbarous Amykos.¹⁶ In the Castor episode, it is not the rights of guests and strangers that are threatened; it is those of hosts and relatives (the Apharidae have a contract, made under oath—*cf.* 148—to marry their cousins). On the contrary, it is the guests who abuse justice on their raiding expedition. Now raiding other regions for women may have been a praiseworthy heroic activity in Homer,¹⁷ but Theocritus, in the age of Queen Berenice, can hardly have thought it so. The new status of women in Alexandria must have made Castor's acts seem quite discreditable from a contemporary moral point of view, and the speech of Lynceus in the poem doubly insures that our sympathy is drawn to the Apharidae. I suggest, in short, that Theocritus has deliberately accompanied his stylistic contrast between the two major sections of the poem with a moral contrast: Pollux is the vehicle for civilizing values, Castor the representative of the old heroic *mores*, a code of force which Theocritus, no doubt, found quite as objectionable as the old-fashioned poetry which embodied it.

If we regard the reference to Homer in this framework, *Idyll* 22 as a whole can be interpreted as commenting on both the style and subject matter of traditional epic; one need not, with Gow, concur that it is hopelessly broken-backed. Indeed, one should more probably speak here of Theocritean originality than carelessness. The Dioscuri appear to have been inseparable previously. Theocritus' boldness is his venture to split them, under the title of a hymn to both, and to

¹⁶ See Pollux's greeting (*χαίρε, ξέν'*) at 54, his promise of gifts (*ξενίων*) should Amykos visit his country (60), Amykos' rejection of the guest-host relationship (*μήτε κύ με ξένιζε*) at 61, and the language of the great oath that Amykos must swear at 134: *μήποτ' ἔτι ξένοιαιν ἐκὼν ἀνηρόσ ἔσεσθαι*.

¹⁷ Women, naturally, are part of the booty of a fallen city (*Il.* 9.128–30); *cf.* M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (London 1956) 56, *Od.* 9.39–42.

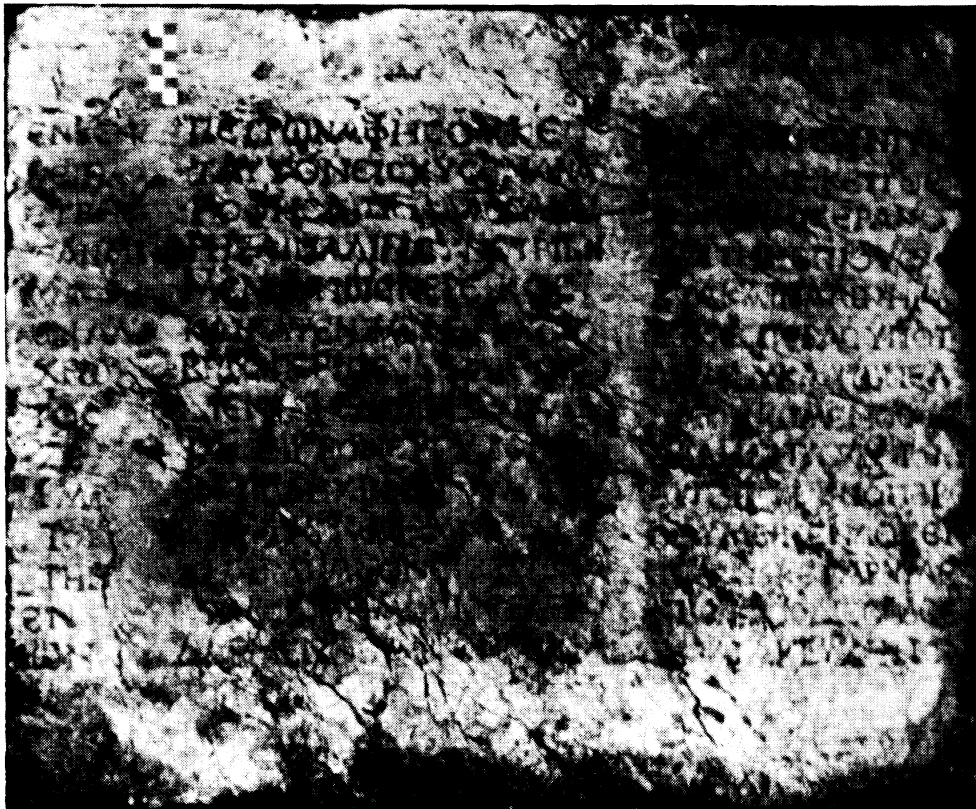
give each brother a story. The stories are markedly different in substance and tone, but each, I think, contributes to a unified, essentially literary point.¹⁸

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¹⁸ My thanks are due to Professor H. Lloyd-Jones for helpful discussions and suggestions regarding this paper.

CLAY PLATE 1



OENOANDA, DIOGENES INSCRIPTION, NEW FRAGMENT 7

(H. 0.585m., W. 0.685m., Depth unknown)