

THREE PROBLEMS IN THEOCRITUS XXII

Three passages in Theocritus' *Idyll* XXII which had hitherto caused difficulties to the critics reveal themselves to be, in the light of Hellenistic poetic technique, perfectly sound and congruent with Hellenistic literary conventions.

This poem is a hymn to Castor and Polydeuces. After the introduction, in which the poet states his intention to praise the two heroes, there follow two incidents in which first Polydeuces and then Castor is the main actor. It is with the second incident, the duel between Castor and Lynceus, that I am now concerned (lines 137-211).

Three problems have been read into this *Idyll* by critics such as Wilamowitz and Gow. I should like to show that these three problems do not exist: features which puzzled Gow and Wilamowitz reveal themselves, when examined in the light of Hellenistic epic technique, as typical ingredients of such a technique.

The first problem is the simplest. Gow and Wilamowitz, followed by Dover, seem astonished to see that Lynceus' speech «shows the Dioscuri as wantonly aggressive»¹. Dover appears unable to account for the fact that «Theokritos seems to accept the lawless brutality of the Dioskouri as a datum»². The perplexity expressed by Gow and Dover derives from their having forgotten that the poem which we are examining is an epyllion, i. e. it is concerned with an epic subject, and, in particular, that there was one school of Hellenistic epic which, in pointed contrast with Apollonius, regarded the very qualities objected to by these critics as an essential element in the characterization of heroes³, in strict adherence to the Homeric canons of morality: according to Homer, the Dioscuri were «of the same clay as other heroes», as none other than Gow himself underlines⁴, and in epyllion XXII the Dioscuri are therefore characterized exactly as Homeric heroes.

¹ So Gow, *Theocritus*, vol. II, p. 383.

² *Theocritus*, London 1975, p. 246.

³ This point has been recently clarified by G. Giangrande in *AC* 41, 1972, p. 131.

⁴ *Ad* lines 218-20, p. 407.

In other words: the feature which perplexes Gow and Dover, is, of all things, typical of Hellenistic epic.

The second problem concerns an alleged lacuna inserted into the text by Wilamowitz after line 170: (lines 169-180):

- σφῶ γὰρ ἀκηλήτω καὶ ἀπηνέες. ἄλλ' ἔτι καὶ νῦν
 πείθεσθ'· ἄμφω δ' ἄμμιν ἀνεψιῶ ἐκ πατρός ἔστων.
 171 εἰ δ' ὑμῖν κραδίη πόλεμον ποθεῖ, αἵματι δὲ χρῆ
 νεῖκος ἀναρρήξαντας ὁμοῖον ἐγχεα λοῦσαι,
 Ἴδας μὲν καὶ ὁμαιμος ἐμός, κρατερὸς Πολυδεύκης,
 χεῖρας ἐρωήσουσιν ἀποσχομένω ὑσμίνης·
 175 νῶϊ δ', ἐγὼ Κάστωρ τε διακρινώμεθ' Ἄρηι,
 ὀπλοτέρω γεγαῶτε. γονεῦσι δὲ μὴ πολὺ πένθος
 ἡμετέροισι λίπωμεν. ἄλις νέκυς ἐξ ἑνὸς οἴκου
 εἰς ἄτάρ ἄλλοι πάντες ἐυφρανέουσιν ἐταίρους,
 νυμφῖοι ἀντὶ νεκρῶν, ὕμεναιώσουσι δὲ κούρας
 τάσδ'. ὀλίγῳ τοι ἔοικε κακῶ μέγα νεικος ἀναιρεῖν.

He found himself compelled to insert it into the text in order to postulate that our lines 171ff. were not spoken by Lynceus, but part of an incomplete reply made by Castor. An analysis of the context shows that the lacuna postulated by Wilamowitz and accepted by Gow has no justification.

Gow offers two reasons for the alleged lacuna. First of all, he objects to the fact that Lynceus' speech is not followed by a reply from Castor. The objection is unfounded, as is clear from, of all things, Hellenistic technique: epyllia were, as is well known, a «genre de composition fragmentaire»¹: not only were they abrupt at the beginning and at the end², but also the unfolding of the story in the middle of the epyllion was characterized by gaps and jumps «senza i traspassi convenzionali dell' epopea»³: in the very epyllion XXII, lines 135ff. have «no con-

¹ Legrand, *Buc. Grecs*, 1946, vol. II, p. 68.

² Cf. Legrand, *op. cit.*, p. 167; Giangrande, *CR* 18, 1968, p. 165.

³ So Pasquali, quoted by Giangrande in *JHS* 89, 1969, p. 146; on the «truncated» structure of epyllia as an «intentional feature», cf. *JHS* 89 1969, pp. 150 and 151. As for *Idyll* XXII, it is obvious that Theocritus was concerned with describing, by means of Lynceus' *oratio*, the *affectus* of this hero, after which he jumped *saltuatin*, «sprungweis» to the episode of the duel: on this technique, cf. J. Heumann, *De epyll. Alexandrino Diss.*, Leipzig, 1904, pp. 53-56. Further bibliography on the genre in F. M. Pontani, *L'epyllio greco*, Florence, 1973.

nexion with the preceding»¹, so much so that Gow sees himself compelled to accuse Theocritus of «careless writing», or to suggest that «part i» of the Idyll «was originally a separate poem»². To conclude: the lack of connexion noted by Cholmeley between lines 135ff. and the previous ones is, exactly like the jump from Lynceus' speech to the duel, without Castor's reply, a characteristic trait of epyllia: epyllia consisted in «scene scelte»³, not necessarily connected by narration.

The second reason for Gow's insertion of a lacuna after line 170 is that (as he notes *ad* lines 171ff.), if ὁμαίμος means not 'brother' but 'kinsman' (cf. Cholmeley *ad* line 173 and e. g. Opp. *Cyneg.* III, 242): «it would be absurd for Lynceus to describe Polydeuces in relation to Idas either as 'his' or 'my kinsman' when his relationship to them both is the same». In reality, an analysis of the context, bearing in mind the point which Lynceus is trying to make — i. e. that there should be no fighting, or as little as possible, between blood-relations —, and the application of the «utrum in alterum» criterion shows that there cannot be a lacuna. The contiguity of ἀνεψιώ and ὁμαίμος shows that no gap is admissible. Lynceus is anxious to avoid as much blood spilling as possible between blood-relations: he insists that the two opposing pairs are blood-relations, i. e. cousins (ἀνεψιώ, line 170). Therefore he says Idas with reference to the person everybody knew to be his brother, and for whom he evidently was expected to nurture anxiety; with reference to Polydeuces he says ὁμαίμος ἐμός 'my blood-relation', to underline that he is concerned about the latter, *qua* his blood-relation. If, on the other hand, it were Castor that was speaking, the emphasis which fits into the context, as I have just explained, would be entirely lost: ὁμαίμος, in other words, must be said of the opponent, to stress the fact that the fight is between blood-relations (ἀνεψιώ ἐκ πατρὸς), and therefore must be limited to a minimum. For the same reason, in order to adopt a conciliatory tone aimed at reducing the blood-spilling, Idas is left by Lynceus with no laudatory epithet, whereas his opponent's brother, Polydeuces, is praised by means of the word κρᾶτερὸς. If the speech were made by Castor, the conciliatory tone at the end (176ff. γονεῦσι κτλ.) would ill fit the fact that Castor had rudely left his opponent's brother Idas without any laudatory epithet, whereas Castor's own brother Polydeuces received the laudatory term κρᾶτερὸς. The criterion «utrum in alterum» confirms our considerations:

¹ Cf. Cholmeley, *Theocritus*, London 1930 *ad* line 135.

² *Theocritus*, vol II, p. 384.

³ Giangrande, *JHS* 89, 1969, p. 151.

Λυγκεύς in line 175 can be explained as having been inserted in place of the correct Κάστωρ by somebody who mistook ὁμαιμος in line 173 to mean «brother», whereas one could not understand why somebody, finding Κάστωρ in the mss., should have thought of replacing it by Λυγκεύς.

After having proposed that the Dioscuri give up their claim to the girls, Lynceus now suggests another plan (lines 171ff.). If, he says, you want to fight, then let Idas and my kinsman Polydeuces stand and watch, while Castor and I, the two youngest, fight a duel. In this way we shall spare our parents great sorrow. Let it be enough for just one of us to die: (line 178):

ἄλις νέκυς ἐξ ἑνὸς οἴκου / εἷς.

These words are thought by Gow to be ambiguous, and he is not sure whether Theocritus means that there should be one corpse from a single house or one corpse from each house (*op. cit.*, p. 403). There is no ambiguity: what Lynceus is suggesting is that there should be only one corpse from one family, i. e. that one or the other of the two cousins should die in the duel so that only one family will suffer grief. All the others (ἄλλοι πάντες), i. e. the remaining three will live to gladden their parents as bridegrooms, rather than becoming corpses, and will marry the girls. Thus a great quarrel will be ended with the minimum of ill, i. e. by the death of only one, rather than of possibly all of the suitors. Now that we have understood the passage it becomes instantly clear that the word πάντες is not, as Gow thought, «flat and superfluous» but particularly pointed — it refers to the fact that Lynceus hopes that only one of the four will die in the duel and that there will therefore be three survivors, all of whom will still be able to marry. These are Lynceus' suggestions as to how the trouble can be ended with the loss of only one life.

However, Gow and the commentators see another problem in the words ἄλλοι πάντες in line 178. Gow is reduced to proposing a choice between the excision of lines 178-180, and saddling Theocritus with a «careless conception of the situation which he is describing». Once more, Theocritus is perfectly careful: Lynceus had just underlined that, besides the two Leucippides κόραι (line 138), there are many other (μυρία) beautiful κόραι (lines 159f.), who could be married by the contending heroes (lines 159-161). The words κούρας τάσδε, in lines 179-180, cannot therefore possibly mean «the two Leucippides

κόραι» only: according to Greek, and indeed Theocritean, usage¹ the words signify «the κόραι I have been just talking about», i. e. the Leucippides κόραι and the μυρίαί κόραι. All of the three survivors of the duel, that is, will marry the girls Lynceus had been talking about, i. e. the victor in the duel and his brother will marry the Leucippides, whilst the surviving brother of the hero who is killed in the duel will marry one of the girls mentioned together with the Leucippides by Lynceus. That the two Leucippides will be married by the victor in the duel and his brother, whilst the surviving brother of the hero killed in the duel will have to content himself with one of the other κόραι mentioned by Lynceus — an obvious result of the duel — is made in any case explicit by the words μέγα νεῖκος ἀναιρεῖν in line 180.

Thus we may conclude that an examination of the wording in the poem, as well as of the way in which the story unfolds in the epyllion, shows that Theocritus was never less than accurate.

I shall now proceed to explain the third problem which has unnecessarily puzzled Gow. Once more, an analysis of the wording will show that Theocritus is completely accurate. Gow (ad lines 218-20) criticizes Theocritus for not realizing that the Tyndaridae never were at Troy since at the time of the Trojan war they lay dead and buried in Lacedaemon: he is led to this difficulty by his mistranslation of line 216 at the end of the poem: (lines 212-223):

Οὕτω Τυνδαρίδαις πολεμιζέμεν οὐκ ἐν ἐλαφρῶ·
αὐτοί τε κρατέουσι καὶ ἐκ κρατέοντος ἔφυσαν.
χαίρετε Λήδας τέκνα, καὶ ἡμετέροις κλέος ὕμνοις
ἔσθλόν ἀεὶ πέμποιτε. φίλοι δέ τε πάντες ἀοιδοί
Τυνδαρίδαις Ἑλένη τε καὶ ἄλλοις ἡρώεσσιν,
Ἴλιον οἳ διέπερσαν ἀρήγοντες Μενελάω.
ὕμιν κῦδος, ἄνακτες, ἐμήσατο Χίος ἀοιδός,
ὕμνήσας Πριάμοιο πόλιν καὶ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν
Ἰλιάδας τε μάχας Ἀχιλλῆά τε πύργον αὐτῆς·
ὕμιν αὖ καὶ ἐγὼ λιγεῶν μειλίγματα Μουσέων,
οἳ αὐταὶ παρέχουσι καὶ ὥς ἐμὸς οἶκος ὑπάρχει,
τοῖα φέρω. γεράων δὲ θεοῖς κάλλιστον ἀοιδαί.

Gow mistranslated lines 215-217 as 'All bards are dear to the sons of Tyndareus, to Helen, and to the other heroes that aided Menelaus to sack Ilium'. However, as can be seen from such standard dictiona-

¹ Cf. Rumpel, *Lex. Theocr.*, Hildesheim 1960, s. u. ὁδε II, 2.

ries as Capelle, *Vollständiges Wörterbuch*, or LSJ s. u., ἄλλος can mean in Homer 'as well, besides': cf. e. g. *Od.* VI 84.

ἅμα τῇ γε (κούρῃ) καὶ ἀμφίπολοι κίον ἄλλαι,

auch gingen mit ihr Dienerinnen' (Capelle, *op. cit.*). Therefore, the sense of lines 215ff. is, according to Homeric usage, as accurately followed by Theocritus in his epyllion, 'All bards are dear to the sons of Tyndareus, and to Helen, and also to the heroes who sacked Ilium, helping Menelaus'. ὑμῖν, in line 218, refers to the heroes who sacked Ilium (last mentioned in line 216, ἄλλοις ἡρώεσσιν), and who were praised by Homer. On the other hand, ὑμῖν in line 221, as the particle αὖ clearly shows, refers not to the heroes who were at Troy but to the Tyndaridae, the sense being 'but to you, on the other hand (αὖ), I, the poet, offer my songs of praise (just as Homer had praised the heroes who sacked Troy)'.

Conclusion: an analysis of the context and wording has shown that the critics are unjustified in accusing Theocritus of carelessness: he is, in fact, accurate down to the minutest detail, as befits a Hellenistic poet.

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