

## THEOCRITUS AND PRIAPUS' EARS

IN Theocritus, *Epigr.* 4. 1-4, we read:

Τήναν τὰν λαύραν, τόθι τὰι δρύες, αἰπόλε, κάμψας  
 σύκκινον εὐρήσεις ἀρτιγλυφές ξόανον  
 τρισκελές αὐτόφλοιον ἀνούατον, ἀλλὰ φάλητι  
 παιδογόνῳ δυνατὸν Κύπριδος ἔργα τελεῖν.

Professor Trypanis has recently (*Class. Philol.* lxx [1970], p. 51) suggested changing ἀνούατον into ἀνούατον. Since the problem has not been dealt with satisfactorily by any commentator,<sup>1</sup> I should like to clarify the matter by demonstrating that the text is sound: the adjective ἀνούατον is, in fact, not only morphologically impeccable, but, in particular, singularly pointed. From the morphological point of view, the *Hinterglied* -ούατος is paralleled (and therefore supported) by δολιχούατος (Opp. *Cyn.* iii. 186), μονούατος (*A.P.* v. 135. 1), and χρυσούατος (Hom., *fr.* 17 Allen): these adjectives occur in hexameter poetry, and each of them is attested once, exactly as is the case with Theocritus' ἀνούατος. The *Vorderglied* αὐ- is defended by the context: ἀνούατον ('without ears') expresses a negative notion; αὐτόφλοιον ('with the bark on') also expresses a negative quality, because it denotes that the image of the god was a mere *truncus*<sup>2</sup> (to be more exact, a *truncus dolatus*, as we shall see); ἀλλά introduces a contrast with, an opposition to, the negative predicament conveyed by the epithets αὐτόφλοιον and ἀνούατον.

The point brought out by ἀνούατον is extremely felicitous: statues of Priapus could be either of an elaborate type, in which the god was represented as having *two* protruding physical features, namely his ears<sup>3</sup> and his *mentula*, or of a more uncouth type, which consisted of a '*truncus dolatus*', i.e. a *truncus* whose *only* protuberance was the '*mentula edolata*'.<sup>4</sup> The statue described by Theocritus belongs to the latter type: it is uncouthly hewn<sup>5</sup> and devoid of one of the two protruding features (ἀνούατον), but (ἀλλά) it does possess the other one.

Conclusion: Theocritus' ἀνούατον is morphologically impeccable, perfectly appropriate to the genre (hexameter poetry), and, last but not least, adroitly humorous.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gow, in his commentary on Theocr., ad loc.; Gow-Page, *Hell. Epigr.*, on lines 3474 ff.; Fritzsche-Hiller, ad loc.; Dübner, ad loc. In *Class. Philol.* lxxvi (1971), p. 113 W. O. Moeller defends the ms. reading, but entirely misses the poet's point by stating that Priapus was normally 'earless'.

<sup>2</sup> The parallel negative force of ἀνούατον and αὐτόφλοιον has, of course, already been stressed: cf., e.g., Fritzsche-Hiller, ad loc.: 'Priapi statua haud affabre facta erat. Lignum erat rude, cortice non detracto, nec aures erant expressae.' What the critics have so far been unable to see is the *relevance* of Priapus' being without ears within the

context of the epigram.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Herter, *De Priapo*, Giessen, 1932, pp. 186 f.: 'aures . . . in acutum surgunt aut praeter humanam naturam dilatantur'; p. 293: 'aures grandes . . . longe prominentes'.

<sup>4</sup> Herter, op. cit., pp. 168 f.

<sup>5</sup> The adjective ἀνούατον 'indicates extreme roughness of execution': Gow, in his commentary on Theocritus, ad loc. For a discussion of τρισκελές cf. Herter, op. cit., pp. 171 f.: the adjective, whatever it may mean, does not express a notion of 'elaborateness of execution', and is therefore not in contrast with the other two epithets αὐτόφλοιον, ἀνούατον.