

VI.—Theocritus XXV

IVAN M. LINFORTH

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

The second paragraph may be read as a summary of the article.

The poem which is numbered xxv in the Theocritean corpus, and which by a modern tradition bears the title "Heracles the Lion-slayer," has long held its position on very uncertain tenure.¹ Indeed, by some critics it has been bodily thrust out of the family of Theocritus' legitimate children. Many, besides, look on it pityingly as an ill-conditioned thing, whether Theocritus wrote it or not. They cannot be sure whether it is one poem or three poems, or a fraction of one poem or three fractions of one or more poems. At the same time they find real beauties in it and admit that it would be presentable if it had ever been completed or had not been mutilated. It has long been the subject of controversy in these two points: is it an authentic poem of Theocritus, and is it a finished

¹ Here, as always, the voices of scholars of the past rise in a clamor around one when he undertakes to study an ancient work of art. But, as Charles Dickens says on the first page of his *Pictures from Italy*, "I make but little reference to that stock of information, not at all regarding it as a necessary consequence of my having had recourse to the storehouse for my own benefit, that I should reproduce its easily-accessible contents before the eyes of my readers." But still some bibliographical information may be acceptable. The most important titles of the last fifty years are as follows.

Carolus Prinz, "Quaestiones de Theocriti carmine xxv et Moschi carmine iiii," *Diss. Philologiae Vindob.* 5 (Vienna, 1895) 67-105. Prinz gives a full review of earlier studies. Ph. E. Legrand, *Étude sur Théocrite* (Paris, 1898). Max Rannow, "De carminum Theocriti xxiv et xxv compositione," *Festschrift Johannes Vahlen* (Berlin, 1900) 89-104. Johannes Heumann, *De epyllio Alexandrino* (Leipzig diss. 1904). U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, ed. *Bucolici Graeci* (Oxford, 1905); "Die Textgeschichte der griechischen Bukoliker," *Philologische Untersuchungen*, 18 (Berlin, 1906) 218-223. Ericus Frohn, *De carmine Theocriteo quaestiones selectae* (Halle diss. 1908). Otto Koennecke, ed. *Bucolici Graeci* (Brunsvigae, 1914). Augusto Rostagni, *Poeti alessandrini* (Torino, 1916). R. J. Cholmeley, ed. *The Idylls of Theocritus* (new ed., Oxford, 1919). Wilamowitz, *Hellenistische Dichtung* (Berlin, 1924). A. Körte, *Die hellenistische Dichtung* (Leipzig, 1925). G. Perrotta, "Studi di poesia ellenistica," *Studi italiani di filologia classica*, Nuova Serie, Vol. iv (1927), Chap. ix, "Teocrito e il poeta dell' Ἡρακλῆς λεοντοφόρος," 217-279. Ph. E. Legrand, ed. *Bucoliques Grecs*, Tome ii, Pseudo Théocrite, Moschos, Bion, divers (Paris, 1927; Budé edition). Ettore Bignone, *Teocrito. Studio critico* (Bari, 1934). J. M. Edmonds, ed. *The Greek Bucolic Poets* (London, 1938; Loeb edition). I have not seen Angelo Taccone, *Gli idilli di Teocrito* (Torino, 1914).

work as the author intended it? Critics are still divided on both questions. Wilamowitz, in the Oxford edition, relegates it to the Appendix. Legrand, in the Budé edition, prints it among the pseudo-Theocritean poems, but refuses to be dogmatic concerning its authenticity. Edmonds, in the Loeb edition, is content to remark that "it has been doubted whether the poem is by Theocritus," though doubt is a mild word for the settled opinions of some critics. But whether it is a genuine work or not, it is a poem whose beauties are admired by all critics, almost without exception, and, in my opinion, deserve admiration. The uncertainty about its completeness is caused by its undoubtedly abrupt beginning, by what some regard as too abrupt an ending, and by the discontinuity of the narrative, which is broken in two places, so that the poem actually falls into three parts.²

It is not my present intention to renew the controversy concerning authorship and to review the evidence of all sorts that has been assembled. Nor is it my intention to examine the question of completeness in a controversial spirit. I propose that we study the poem on the hypothesis that we have the whole poem as the author wrote it; that nothing has been lost; that the three parts are not disconnected scraps torn from a longer poem, or bits of verse separately composed and not yet fused into a finished poem; that, in fact, the three parts form an organic whole as they are. If, studying the poem so, we can recognize a plan and purpose, executed with effective and successful art, we may be disposed to think that the hypothesis is sound.

To study a poem fairly we must approach it without prejudice. We must, as far as possible, take the standpoint of the author and of the reader for whom he wrote. If it has universal qualities which make it acceptable from any standpoint, so much the better. But even the greatest poetry is greater in its own setting. In assuming the proper standpoint we must not only do the negative thing and clear our minds of prejudice, but we must also take into

² The title of the whole poem, *Ἡρακλῆς λεοντοφόνος*, was almost certainly supplied by Calliergis in his edition of 1516. Similarly, the title of the first part, *Ἡρακλῆς πρὸς ἀγροῖκον*, and the title of the second part, *ἐπιπώλησις* (borrowed from early editions of *Iliad* iv), must have been introduced by an early editor. It is impossible to believe that they originated with the poet himself. Wilamowitz, however (*Textgeschichte*, 221), maintains not only that these two subtitles were original, but that there was also a subtitle for the third part, now lost.

our minds, if we can, such positive knowledge and ideas as we may suppose to have belonged to the poet and his readers.

The present poem is an Alexandrian epyllion. The authors of these epyllia dealt with mythological subjects drawn from the ancient stock, generally with erudition, always with sophistication. Happily, in our poem there is hardly a trace of erudition. The author does not produce recondite personages and incidents of myth. But we can be sure that there is sophistication: the author is not retelling an old story for children, but for an intellectual élite. If we are to appreciate the sophistication, we must know the myth as men of the third century B.C. knew it. We cannot trust our own knowledge of mythology, which is drawn mostly from modern handbooks which, in their turn, are based largely on Ovid and the mythographers and provide us with a factitious and encyclopedic assemblage of mythological lore of all ages. We must first see what the poet himself could assume that his readers knew.

The poem is concerned with two incidents in the myth of Heracles, the story of the slaying of the Nemean lion and the story of Heracles and Augeas. The first of these stories is told with great skill, but the subject is so well known in classical literature and art, and the narrative is so lucid and straightforward, that we can read it and enjoy it easily without special preparation. But neither of these things can be said of the story of Heracles and Augeas, which occupies three quarters of the poem. If we are to appreciate what the poet has done with this, we must first review the mythological material which he had to work with.

Whatever there may have been in the epics of Panyasis or Pisander or Rhianus or other lost works on the myth of Heracles, no connected account of the relations between Heracles and Augeas survives in any writer earlier than the mythographers and the scholiasts.³ But we can see that the story was known in substantially the final form two or three hundred years before our poem was written. The pertinent evidence is supplied, first, by two passages in the *Iliad*, a brief statement in the Catalogue of the

³ Diod. Sic. 4.13.3, 4.33.4; Paus. 2.15.1, 5.1.9, 5.10.9; Apollod. 2.5.5, 2.7.2; Hyginus, *Fab.* 30; Schol. *Il.* 2.629, 11.700; Schol. Pindar, *Ol.* 10.28 ff.; Schol. Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.172. It appears from Schol. *Il.* 11.700 that Callimachus also told the story of Heracles in some form. See also Wilamowitz, *Heracles*, 1 (Berlin, 1895) 60; Wernicke in *RE* s.v. Augeias (1896); Paul Friedländer, "Herakles. Sagengeschichtliche Untersuchungen," *Philologische Untersuchungen*, 19 (1907) 128-134; Gruppe in *RE* s.v. Herakles, Supplementband 3 (1918); Preller-Robert, *Griech. Myth.* 2.2 (1921) 453-456.

Ships, and one of Nestor's long stories about his own youthful prowess; second, by the tenth Olympian ode of Pindar; third, by a fragment of Pherecydes; and, fourth, by one of the metopes from the east end of the cella of the temple of Zeus at Olympia, which survives in mutilated form and is mentioned by Pausanias.⁴ From these sources the following story can be reconstructed.

Augeas, son of Helios, was king of Elis and enormously rich in flocks and herds. Heracles, at the command of Eurystheus, did him a menial service by cleaning his stables with his own hands. Augeas agreed beforehand to pay him for his work; but when the work was done, he failed to keep his promise. His son Phyleus, indignant with his father, left his home and went to live in the island of Dulichion, whence his own son Meges sailed to Troy with forty ships. To obtain his rights Heracles invaded Elis with an army, but he was defeated by the twin Moliones. Later, however, he lay in wait for the brothers near Cleonae, when they were on their way to the Isthmus, and slew them. Then he invaded Elis again and destroyed Augeas' city with fire and sword.

An interesting variant appears in the later versions. Apollodorus (2.5.5) says that Heracles was ordered to carry out the dung in a single day — *ἐκφορῆσαι* is the word — and made his engagement with Augeas on these terms. Then he actually accomplished the task by diverting the rivers and sluicing out the stables. So Augeas lost what he thought was a sure bet and refused to pay. Diodorus (4.13.3) tells the same story, adding that Eurystheus' purpose was to insult Heracles (*ὑβρεως ἐνεκεν*) and that Heracles avoided the disgrace of carrying out the dung on his own shoulders by diverting the rivers. Thus he was not forced to submit to an indignity which would have rendered him unworthy of immortality.

It looks as if the operation by hand had been the earlier form, and that the engineering feat had been invented to save Heracles' reputation. We do not know when this was done, or whether the device of diverting the rivers formed part of the story as it was known to the poet and his readers. It is a significant fact, however, that the labor of the Augean stables, except for the discreet sugges-

⁴ *Il.* 2.625-630, 11.670-761; Pindar, *Ol.* 10.24-34; Pherecydes, *Fragm.* 79 Jacoby; Paus. 5.10.9 (on the metope). That the service was a menial one appears from the word *λάτριον* in Pindar; that Heracles did the work with his own hands is shown in the metope; that the task was imposed by Eurystheus may be inferred from the fact that the Olympian metopes represent the Twelve Labors.

tion in Pindar, does not appear anywhere in classical poetry, probably because it was too unsavory. Even in the *Trachiniae* and the *Hercules Furens* there is no mention of it.

Now, assuming that we are acquainted with the story of the relations between Heracles and Augeas as the poet and his readers may have known it, let us review the poem as if we were reading it for the first time. If a title was supplied by the author himself, we do not know what it was. We must not allow ourselves to be prejudiced by the title printed in our editions, which was probably introduced by a sixteenth century editor, and which may be misleading. As we unroll the manuscript for a first reading, we must assume that we do not know the subject of the poem, and we must allow the poet to tell his story in his own way.

So we begin to read:

"And the old ploughman, stopping his work, said to him (τὸν δ' ὁ γέρον προσέειπε)."

Thus the poem begins, abruptly; but we see that we are in the midst of a conversation between a ploughman and some person unknown, in the open fields.

"I shall be glad to answer your question, stranger," the old man says. "Hermes is angry when one refuses information to a wayfarer about his road. King Augeas' flocks are scattered all over the country, some here, some there."

With this we learn that the unknown is a wayfarer and a stranger to the old man, inquiring about the locality. The name of King Augeas taps our memory, and we wonder if this may not perhaps be Heracles, who is Augeas' most famous visitor. But we cannot be sure. If it is Heracles, it is his first visit to the land of Augeas, and the service which he is to do for the king still lies in the future. Is it possible, we ask, that the poet is going to deal with that intractable material?

The old man now goes on to tell about the great wealth of king Augeas in flocks and herds and about life on the farm — all this with the charming garrulity of an old man who is proud of his master's estate and contented with his own lot. It may occur to us that this is all an introductory setting of the scene for what Heracles is to do in the stables.

But the old man continues:

"Tell me what you have come for. I can be more helpful if you will tell me. Are you looking for Augeas? Or one of his men?"

I will tell you anything you wish to know, because I can see from your appearance that you are a person of distinction. You look like the sons of the gods in comparison with other men."

Now we know for certain, seeing the stranger through the old man's eyes, that he is indeed none other than Heracles. In the next line we read: "the valiant son of Zeus made reply (Διὸς ἄλκιμος υἱός)." The poet does not pretend that the identity of the wayfarer is a secret any longer, but still he does not explicitly name Heracles. Observe that the old man who reveals the truth about Heracles to us does not know it himself. The poet knows, the reader knows, but the old man does not know; and, as we shall see, no one in the poem knows, from beginning to end. This delightful and sustained irony is one of the bonds establishing the unity of the poem.

"Yes," says Heracles, "I wish to see Augeas. It is a matter of some importance. If he is not on the farm, you might take me to see the manager or overseer, with whom I could talk."

With this, of course, no doubt remains in our minds as to what Heracles' important business is. We are actually going to hear the story of the cleaning of the Augean stables. Not pleasant, we say, but let us see what the poet does with it.

"As a matter of fact," says the old man, "Augeas and his son came from town yesterday to inspect the farm. I will take you directly to him."⁵

On their way he covertly eyes Heracles' lion-skin and stout club, which are now mentioned for the first time, and yearns to ask him where he came from, but he does not quite dare.

As they draw near the farm-yard, the dogs, hearing their steps and scenting the stranger, make a fierce rush at him. And now the poet names Heracles openly for the first time — Heracles, a son of Amphitryon (Ἀμφιτρωνιάδῃ Ἡρακλεῖ). Heracles' proper business is with fierce animals, but there is something amusing in the juxtaposition of a barking cur and the ringing patronymic. However, there is no trouble. The old man drives off the dogs by pretending to pick up a stone, and they arrive safely at the farm-yard.

Here comes the first interruption in the poem, and we hear no more of the old ploughman. The next part is entirely descriptive

⁵ Perrotta (*op. cit.* 226, 228; see note 1) disapproves of the conversation between Heracles and the ploughman: "Sembran discorsi di gente che ha poco o nulla da dirsi, ma che parla perchè si compiace di parlare, e, naturalmente, di ascoltarsi . . . E un bamboleggiare." And yet Perrotta contemns aesthetic judgments based on intuition.

and narrative. We read of the return of the countless flocks and herds to their folds at evening and of the busy activity of the farm-hands. It appears that Heracles has joined Augeas and his son and is now inspecting the farm with them. The impression of Augeas' vast wealth which has been produced by the old man's geographical account is made more precise and vivid by the actual defiling, before Heracles' eyes, of the animals which Augeas had received from his father Helios, and which had multiplied by Helios' favor. Heracles is a hero of stout heart, we are told, but he is fairly staggered at the numbers. To us, and (we may imagine) to him, though not a word is said about it, the business of cleaning the stables on such an estate is beginning to look appalling.

After the general account of the returning herds, we are told of twelve choice bulls that were sacred to Helios and of one among them in particular which was preëminent in size and strength. This bull no sooner catches sight of Heracles' lion-skin than he charges at him with lowered head. Heracles seizes one of his horns and by sheer strength forces him to his knees. This is no encounter with farm-dogs, but a match worthy of the hero. He must master the animal, but he must not destroy his host's prize bull. Once more the ringing patronymic is heard: Augeas and his son are struck with amazement at the overwhelming strength of the son of Amphitryon — *Ἀμφιτρωνιάδαο βίην ὑπέροπλον ἰδόντες*.

With the overthrow of the bull the second part of the poem closes, as the first part closed with the discomfiture of the dogs. Still not a word has been said about cleaning stables. The scene is set, brilliantly and elaborately, for the well-known labor, and we still wait.

The third part begins abruptly with the statement that Phyleus and Heracles left the farm and went to town. We know who Phyleus is because his name has been mentioned at the very end of the preceding part. The friendliness between the two men reminds us that in the old story Phyleus subsequently took Heracles' part against his father, and we suspect that a liking had sprung up between them at the very beginning. But we do not know why they left the farm, or when. We find ourselves wondering when Heracles is going to begin on the stables. But we forget all about it in the charming account of the walk through the woods and along the highway and the conversation between the two men on the road.

Phyleus, who apparently does not know who Heracles is any more than the old man did, is, like him, greatly interested in the lion-skin.

"Stranger, I have been thinking," says he. "There was a man here the other day who told us that an Argive had slain a ferocious lion near Nemea — some one of Perseus' family, I believe he said. I am sure it must have been you, and this must be the lion's skin. Tell me, was it you? And if it was, how did you do it?"

Heracles admits the truth of the report and proceeds to tell the story of his contest with the Nemean lion, superbly. The poem closes with the close of the story, and no more is said. So, like the first two parts, the third also ends with an encounter between Heracles and an animal, and the three encounters make a grand crescendo.

And what about Augeas' stables?

"Augeas' stables?" the poet might say, with a grin. "Do you think I would tell a story like that of Heracles? Perhaps he did have to perform that disgraceful and degrading labor, but it should not be held against him. And surely it is not a subject for poetry. But the setting of country life is charming, and I could not resist that. Besides, I thought it would be fun to tease you a bit. Of course, I gave you Heracles at his best."

There should be no need of saying more. The devices of art by which the poem is bound together as a whole are manifest. But a conscientious reader may still be troubled about the apparent lack of unity. The last quarter of the poem is devoted to the Nemean story, and the other three quarters are concerned with something altogether different. The poem tells of two separate and distinct adventures, which actually have no connection with one another. In this respect it undoubtedly lacks unity. Whether this is a blemish or not is a matter of taste. But there is an unmistakable unity in the poem of another kind, a unity of form and technique, the unity of a triptych. Binding the three parts together is the theme of Heracles' prowess in his conflicts with animals, which was the hero's greatest glory. This theme plays over the implication of the Augean story, in his encounter with the dogs in the first panel of the triptych, and in his subjugation of the bull in the second panel, and finally, in the third, is presented with full

force and glory in the tremendous conflict with the lion. This is enough to show that the poem is an artistic whole and so conceived.⁶

But still one wonders how the poet came to cast his poem in this form. Was it his prime purpose to tell the Nemean story, and did he plan the first two parts simply as a fable in which Heracles could tell his own tale? Or was he first tempted by the challenge of the Augean story?

"It is difficult to know what is in another man's mind," says the old ploughman somewhat wistfully to himself, as he looks into Heracles' face, wondering who he is. It is more than difficult to know what is in the mind of a poet when a poem is germinating in his fancy. We must take the finished work and see what he has made of it.

In the poem as we have it both stories receive their due. The story of the lion is told by Heracles himself, in full detail, straightforwardly, and without vanity; the Augean story is told at greater length, but allusively, by suggestion, with all its engaging features, but without the repugnant ones. And by a pretty trick of surprise the Augean story issues in the Nemean. But in whatever order the fancies came to the poet's mind, we cannot think that the first story is merely a setting for the second. It is a thing perfect and complete in itself. Actually the whole story is *recalled* to the reader's mind by implication. As we have seen, he is not told, but he must be aware, that Heracles has come at the command of Eurystheus; that without divulging this fact, and without giving his name, he offers to clean Augeas' stables for a price, and that a contract is made between him and Augeas; that Phyleus, who has conceived a liking for him, takes him to town for a night's lodging before the task is begun, and will later testify in his behalf when Augeas fails to keep his promise. All this, I say, is recalled by implication. Even the sordid business in the stables, whether by hand or by sluice, is in the background of the reader's mind. But in the poet's telling none of the unpleasant features appear — the actual process of cleaning, Heracles' sharp practice in demanding pay for what he must do in any case, Augeas' breach of promise. A novelist of

⁶ As an example of a very different opinion the following may be quoted from Perrotta (*op. cit.* 225; see note 1): "Anzi, un altro poeta più fine che non fosse l'autore del carne 25 (che è pur sempre, si badi, un poeta degno della massima considerazione) avrebbe certo soppresso uno di questi episodi che si rassomigliano troppo; forse quello dei cani, artisticamente più debole, che è tolto di peso dall' Odissea."

today might choose to enlarge upon the gross and unseemly details, but here the unsavory word *κόπρος* is avoided as carefully as the comparatively harmless *mouchoir* was avoided by the courtiers of France. The wholesome charm of the story keeps these features from coming forward and growing too vivid in the reader's mind. All is contrived with delicacy and beauty, and the shame which Diodorus feared would endanger Heracles' ultimate immortality is quite absent. So the reader at one and the same time recollects the whole and forgets the objectionable parts, and it is only upon subsequent reflection that he appreciates the sophistication.

These are the things that I would bring to light in the present study. One cannot believe that they have not been perceived by countless appreciative readers. But they have not been given their fair share of attention in the recorded criticism of the poem. All the critics, almost without exception, following the lead of Calliergis, who, in all probability, gave the poem the title of "Heracles the Lion-slayer," have regarded the Nemean story as its chief subject and have seen in the first three quarters of the poem merely a setting for it.⁷ To them it would seem to resemble a Venetian or Florentine painting in which a powerful portrait is set against a slight, but lovely background of landscape. What I have sought to emphasize, on the other hand, is the parity in importance between the Nemean story and the Augean story.⁸ The Augean story does indeed pro-

⁷ E.g., Legrand (*Bucoliques Grecs* 2.68) says this concerning the story of the lion: "Ce récit est le point d'aboutissement où tendait tout ce qui précède; en inscrivant en tête des trois morceaux, pour servir de titre general, *Ἡρακλῆς λεοντοφόνος*, Calliergis ne fut pas si mal inspiré."

⁸ A suggestive remark of Gottfried Hermann in his "Scholae Theocriteae" (1840) — *Opusc.* viii, 317 — seems to have been overlooked by most later critics. Rejecting the opinions of earlier scholars that the poem was part of a Heraclea by Panyasis or Pisander of Camirus, and holding that it was a work of Theocritus, he conjectured that whether it consisted of two fragments of a complete poem or two parts of a poem not yet completed, the longer poem was not a Heraclea, but an Augeis, in which Heracles' arrival at Augeas' farm and his cleaning of the stables were described. Rannow, too, expressed a somewhat similar opinion (*op. cit.* 102; see note 1). It is clear, he says, that the poem was written not only for the Nemean incident; the poet wished to tell the story that everyone knew about what Heracles did for Augeas' stables; since this has not been done, we must conclude that the poem is incomplete. Thus he recognizes the true proportions in the poem but fails to understand the art that makes the poem complete. Heumann (*op. cit.* 27; see note 1) explains the lack of unity thus: "Fabulam enim sibi elegit, qua vitae rusticae describendae ei data erat occasio, ipsam rem apud Augiae gestam narrare eius non interfuit. Hanc utpote minime aptam, quae exponatur, leviter significare satis habuit (vs. 114), et pro ea aliam fabulam studiis aequalium magis accommodatam posuit."

vide a setting for the clear and open narrative of the Nemean story, but it is told at greater length and with a very different literary technique. Deceptively simple, it is so contrived that by means of implication and suggestion, and with the aid of the roused recollection of the reader, the whole unseemly story is told without offence. It may even be, as I have hinted, that the Augean story was first in the poet's mind, and that he included the Nemean story to give the poem some solid epic substance after the airy allusiveness of the first story. However this may be, the poet would have been sad, one must think, or amused, to see how some of us have failed to discern the subtlety of his art.