

POULHERIA KYRIAKOU, *Theocritus and his native Muse. A Syracusan among many*, Series: Trends in Classics - Supplementary Volumes 71, Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter, 2018, 368 pp., ISBN 978-3-11-061460-2.

The book examines the unique and non-competitive way in which Theocritus engages with previous and contemporary poetry, presenting himself through his narrators as a poet not necessarily better than others, but simply *new*. According to P. Kyriakou (hereafter K.), this non-antagonistic attitude is related to the awareness of the limits of language: the power of word and song is not absolute, especially in the case of unrequited love, which represents a typical situation for Theocritean characters.

After a short Introduction (pp. 1-11), in which K. briefly outlines the main issues of her research and its most significant results, the book is divided into five chapters devoted to the analysis of almost all of the extant Theocritean corpus¹. In Chapters I-IV K. examines genuine and non-genuine Idylls together, grouping them by thematic similarities, without taking into consideration the urban mimes *Id.* 2 and 15, the spurious *Id.* 19 and 25 and the dedicatory poem *Id.* 28. In the last chapter she then analyses Theocritus' epigrams on poets, treating them as genuine.

Chapter I, "Lovers and friends: lovesickness, advice and illusion" (pp. 12-121) is the longest one and examines eleven poems that can be divided into three groups.

The first is a heterogeneous group of five mimes in which different situations (mainly an unhappy love in *Id.* 14 and 10, vain dreams of athletic success in *Id.* 4², an aggressive attitude that results in a singing contest in *Id.* 5) generate a lack of harmony. The sense of failure concerning the characters' life is enhanced by the inappropriate advice they receive. The only exception is the spurious *Id.* 21, in which the poet describes two fishermen who support each other sympathetically.

The paederastic Idylls form the second group³. These poems take the form of a speech addressed by the lover to the beloved boy (*Id.* 12 and 29) or to his own heart (*Id.* 30) and are rich in intertexts thoroughly investigated by K. In

¹ The text of Theocritus is cited from A.S.F. Gow, *Theocritus*, Cambridge 1952 (= 1950²). Having at hand Gow's two volumes could make the reading easier, since the text of the poems is often summarised by K. for reasons of space.

² In regard to *Id.* 4, one should only note that taking into consideration the meta-literary interpretation given by N. Piacenza, "Leonida, Callimaco e la rivincita del rovo: per l'interpretazione e la datazione dell'*Idillio* 4 di Teocrito", *ARF* 8, 2006, 85-108, would have enriched the discussion.

³ However, K. rightly observes that "there is no reason to read the Theocritean paederastic pieces as a group in an echo chamber. There seems to be better justification in reading them as windows, which include window references" (p. 81).

this respect, the most intriguing piece is *Id.* 12, which describes an – at least potentially – egalitarian and reciprocal relationship. K. also compares this poem to Call. *AP* 12.230 = 52 Pf., showing the completely different way in which the two poets treat the subject and reach originality.

In the third group *Id.* 3, in which an anonymous goatherd sings his unfortunate love and contemplates suicide, is associated with the so-called Cyclopean pieces (*Id.* 11 and 6, not necessarily to be read in parallel): K. considers the goatherd as Polyphemus' double, although much more lonely and pessimistic. This is one of the most interesting part of Chapter I, in which K. provides an in-depth analysis of the bucolic heroes Daphnis and Polyphemus, arguing that the latter definitely outdoes the former in several respects. She also emphasises Theocritus's prowess in depicting some of his characters in different ways within the same collection of poems, which generates indeterminacy over their identity and time frame.

In Chapter II, "Success and failure in love and song" (pp. 122-61), K. discusses the spurious *Id.* 23, 20, 27, 8 and 9, offering some original interpretations.

Id. 23 is often considered mediocre, but is here reevaluated. This piece deals with an unfulfilled paederastic love that tragically leads to the suicide of the lover and the death of the loved one at the hands of Eros, who punishes him for his cruelty. According to K.'s reading, "the lover's hope and attempt, however desperate, to have his fantasy of a relationship memorialized and thus glorified in and by posterity [...] is the poem's main original and noteworthy element" (pp. 131-2). This desire is expressed by the lover through the following epitaph, which he writes on the wall of the loved boy's house before hanging himself on the doorway, asking to have it copied on his tomb: "τοῦτον ἔρωσ ἐκτεινεν ὀδοιπόρε, μὴ παροδεύσης, / ἀλλὰ στὰς τόδε λέξον ἀπηνέα εἶχεν ἑταῖρον" (vv. 47-48). This is a very interesting point of the text, not only because, as K. rightly observes, it depicts the relationship between the two in a misleading way (the boy *de facto* was never an ἑταῖρος for the deceased), but also because it represents an example of auto-epitaph composed by a person who committed suicide⁴.

Another unfortunate relationship is the one described in *Id.* 20, which K. contrasts to the one in *Id.* 27. Although the feminine characters of these two poems, Eunica and Acrotime, have some affinities, the former spurns the oxherd who is pursuing her, while the latter finally gives in to Daphnis' wooing. This successful outcome is an *unicum* in the entire collection, but K. highlights the open-endedness of the piece, identifying the first meeting of Jason and Medea narrated in *Ap. Arg.* 3.956 ff. as an intertext: the tragic development of their relationship sheds a grim light also on the love story between Daphnis and Acrotime.

The theme of love takes a back seat in *Id.* 8 and 9, which feature singing contests between Daphnis and Menalcas. These Idylls are examined together at the end of Chapter II.

⁴ On the theme of suicide in funerary epigrams see e.g. A. Kotlińska-Toma, "Is Ending a Wretched Life Pardonable? Attitudes Toward Suicide in Greek Funerary Epigrams", *Eos* 101, 2014, 169-85.

Chapter III, “Chambers of echoes: bucolic song and little epics” (pp. 162–238) is devoted to the analysis of the two programmatic poems *Id.* 1 and 7 and of the non-bucolic epyllia *Id.* 13, 24 and 22.

In regard to the first two pieces, K. offers some interesting insights, especially on *Id.* 1. In its frame, Thyrsis and a goatherd exchange compliments on their singing skills in a friendly atmosphere: this scene well exemplifies the lack of hostility and arrogance that K. sees as a distinctive element of Theocritus’ poetry. However, the harmony is melancholically disturbed by the assertion that Thyrsis will not be able to take his song, “The sorrows of Daphnis”, to Hades (vv. 62–63: τὰν γὰρ αἰοιδᾶν / οὐ τί πα εἰς Αἴδαν γε τὸν ἐκλελάθοντα φυλαξεῖς). This seems an echo of the story of the hubristic singer Thamyris, who is punished by the Muses with blindness and forgetfulness of his musical abilities (cf. Hom. *Il.* 2.597–600). The poem is thus pervaded by “the prospect of imminent failure or loss”, which is “a trademark, perhaps the major one, of the bucolic experience” (p. 174).

In the epyllia, in which the main characters are Heracles (*Id.* 13 and 24) and the Dioscuri (*Id.* 22), the discussion is primarily focused on the research of intertexts. These reveal the complex reworking of the tradition made by Theocritus, who always shows modesty through his narrators.

In Chapter IV, “Once upon a time and nowadays: song and patronage” (pp. 239–99), K. first examines the two other Theocritean mythological pieces together (*Id.* 18 and 26), and then focuses on the theme of patronage that informs *Id.* 16 and 17.

K. considers “the elision of the background and sequence of the events narrated” as “arguably the boldest choice in Theocritus’ treatment of mythology” (p. 238): this can be found in the epithalamium for Helen and Menelaus (*Id.* 18) and in the story of Pentheus’ tragic death (*Id.* 26, the only Idyll cited in full in the book).

The discussion of *Id.* 16 and 17 provides the occasion for interesting parallels with Callimachus’ poetry. In *Id.* 16 Theocritus complains about the general stinginess of patrons, but finally identifies Hiero II as his prospective patron and expresses confidence – albeit with his usual modesty – that he will not be the only one in need of his poetic services. In K.’s view, the spiritual journey of the narrator differentiates him from his counterpart in Call. *Iamb.* 3, who similarly condemns his contemporaries’ avarice. *Id.* 17 consists in an encomium of Ptolemy II which never becomes unctuous, thanks to some ambiguities detectable in the text. K. focuses her analysis on the envoi (vv. 135–7), where Theocritus urges the king to ask Zeus for ἀρετή, and compares it by contrast with the end of Call. *H.* 1. She concludes that what truly distinguishes Callimachus and Theocritus is their attitude toward other poets, the former being polemical and self-promoting, the latter non-competitive.

Chapter V, “Masters and colleagues: epigrams on poets old and new” (pp. 300–42), moves to a different literary genre cultivated by Theocritus, *i.e.* the epigram. Consistent with the perspective adopted throughout the book, K. focuses

on the epigrams on poets⁵, in which once again one can find the modesty that characterises Theocritus' attitude toward his colleagues. The chapter opens with the analysis of the spurious *AP* 9.434 = [27] Gow, from which the volume's subtitle is taken: Theocritus, who is the *persona loquens*, calls himself "a Syracusan among many" (v. 2: εἷς ἀπὸ τῶν πολλῶν εἰμι Συρακοσίων), and these words represent a paradigmatic statement of his modesty. The same attitude emerges from the epigrams on old masters such as Archilochus (*AP* 7.664 = 21 Gow), Pisander (*AP* 9.598 = 22 Gow), Epicharmus (*AP* 9.600 = 18 Gow), Anacreon (*AP* 9.599 = 17 Gow) and Hipponax (*AP* 13.3 = 19 Gow), elegantly laudatory, and from those on votive dedications by contemporary intellectuals Xenocles (*AP* 6.338 = 10 Gow) and Nicias (*AP* 6.337 = 8 Gow), slightly ironic. The examination of these texts is enriched by the comparison with other Hellenistic poems, *in primis* Callimachean, suggesting interpretations – some more convincing than others – which are always discussed thoroughly.

A vast and up-to-date Bibliography (pp. 343-55), with only a few mistakes⁶ and omissions, is followed by two indexes, the Index of passages (pp. 357-363) and the Index of names (pp. 365-8), which properly end the book.

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⁵ Maybe a reference to M. Gabathuler, *Hellenistische Epigramme auf Dichter*, St. Gallen 1937, would have been convenient. On Theocritean epigrams see pp. 72-76.

⁶ One can find some inconsistencies and some slips in the use of upper- and lowercase letters and italics, as well as some misprints in the spelling of foreign languages.