CUSTOMISING THEOCRITUS: POEMS 13 AND 24

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> 'What the hell are you getting so upset about?' he asked her bewilderedly in a tone of contrite amusement. 'I thought you didn't believe in God.'
> 'I don't,' she sobbed, bursting violently into tears. 'But the God I don't believe in is a good God, a just God, a merciful God. He's not the mean and stupid God you make Him out to be.'
>
> Joseph Heller, *Catch-22*, Ch. 18

We all have irrational likes, dislikes, and beliefs, even when (as in the case of Lieutenant Scheisskopf's wife) we half-recognise them to be indefensible, and disclaim responsibility for them. This is especially the case, perhaps, with literature. Our mental images of authors, including ancient authors, are formed on first acquaintance by the prejudices of our teachers, our natural reactions to those (whether positive or negative), by our own experiences, or our projected wishes. Texts are out there to act as mirrors of private concerns; we choose the ones which seem to reflect back the most comforting images, which best reinforce our sense of self-identity. Later, as our reading grows more experienced and our need for external reassurance less insistent, we may do our honest best to correct these factors, coming perhaps in time to allow a grudging modicum of respect to Nonnus, or even Apollonius of Rhodes; but we usually remain pretty closely fixated, like one of Konrad Lorenz's geese, on those templates which first presented themselves to us.

The spectacle of other people's struggles to bring their internalised ideal images into conformity with the apparent evidence of texts or traditions provides endless fascination, and a good deal of amusement. Pindar could not bring himself to swallow the story of Demeter swallowing portions of the young Pelops, and opted for, or invented, a more genteel version of the story. Wilamowitz, editing Theoc. 22, was incapable of believing that the poet could have put in the mouth of Lynceus a 35-line speech of blistering condemnation, which utterly discredits the behaviour of Castor and Polydeuces in seizing their cousins' brides at the wedding feast, without having composed a balancing rebuttal of Lynceus' tirade; so to salvage the reputation of the Dioscuri, who were after all the Greek equivalent of blond young Prussian cavalry officers, he boldly declared open a lacuna in the middle of the devastating attack, after verse 170, and donated the second half of the

Griffiths (1996)

speech to Castor, so that he should jolly well have something to say in his defence, whether he liked it or not.[1]

Specially good opportunities to savour the conflict between entrenched prejudice and unwelcome data are provided, of course, by new papyrological discoveries. When the Cologne Archilochus epode burst upon the world in 1974, there was inevitably someone on hand to pronounce it a forgery of the imperial period, and another to diagnose the poet as suffering from a severe psychopathic disorder.[2] But to conclude these opening reflections I must mention two cases in which the 'private view' I have been talking about broke free of all the usual restraints and attained its idiosyncratic, eccentric apogee. First, the learned Father Hardouin, whose numismatic researches at the end of the seventeenth century drove him to the conclusion that all the major (and minor, for that matter) texts of Latin literature had been forged in the late middle ages. Well, nearly all—Vergil's *Georgics* were OK, and Horace's *Satires* and *Epistles* seemed genuine, as well as the complete works of Cicero and Pliny the Elder. Still, a pretty radical curtailment of the canon.[3]

Then, a little later, there is Bentley's notorious edition of *Paradise Lost*, published in 1732. Bentley ruthlessly imposed his own taste, style and logic on Milton's text, deleting at least 66 lines which he was able to identify (Jebb 1882: 182) by "their own silliness and unfitness" and emending away more than eight hundred supposed 'corruptions'. What is more interesting for our present purpose is that he elaborated an ingenious theory to account for the degradation and interpolation of the printed text. In Bentley's paranoid fantasy, not only had the old blind poet's work been corrupted by a deaf and ignorant scribe who took down the dictation, but, still worse, a friend to whom Milton had entrusted the MS for publication—a friend who, as Jebb says (1882: 181), "owes his existence to Bentley's vigorous imagination"—this friend took advantage of his position by mangling and rewriting the poem on a wholesale basis.

I am going to spend the rest of this paper shamelessly indulging my own ideal Theocritus. Inspired by the example of Bentley and, before him, Procrustes, I am going to hack and dock, with the aim of bringing the text of poems 13 and 24 into forcible conformity with my idea of what they ought to be saying. And I am going to fabricate some villains (mostly unwitting villains, actually) whom I can hold responsible for the damage that I am claiming at last to make good. Let nobody say I haven't been open and above board in declaring my methodological position.

So: *my* Theocritus is a poet who developed his full-blown bucolic manner relatively late, arriving at that new genre as the logical destination of a long search for credible form, credible situations and, perhaps most important, credible characters. How can rustics be 'credible' personnel for poetry in the Hellenistic world? Because they represent the final and definitive dethronement of the hero. For at least two hundred years the hero had been

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1 On this question see most recently Kurz (1991) and Sens (this volume).

2 Respectively, Gelzer (1975) and Merkelbach (1974).

3 On Hardouin see Sandys (1920: 298); Traube (1909: 41-2); Momigliano (1955: 89).

an embarrassment to Greek culture, discredited, abused and finally mocked, but in spite of Euripides' efforts he simply refused to leave the stage, or the page. In Apollonius, he tries to justify his existence by masquerading as his anti-type—the hero as nerd, the warrior as wimp. Callimachus affected to pretend that the problem of character and morality was now irrelevant—the hero was value-free, simply one more neutral ingredient in his witches' brew. But for Theocritus neither of these solutions was satisfactory. Of course his whole corpus is imbued with the Callimachean ideals of brevity, wit and scholarship, yet he created a mode in which these soulless virtues could co-exist with a warmth and humanity which were alien to Callimachus' own desiccated, over-cerebral temperament. He still believes it possible to work in the great tradition of Euripides and Menander: literature still has a duty to present important issues of human behaviour, and to subject inherited or fashionable assumptions to sceptical cross-questioning.

Which brings us to the Hylas story, Poem 13 (I dislike that misguided and misleading word 'Idyll'). I take it for granted, though nothing here necessarily depends on this, that the poem was written in response to the *Argonautica*'s handling of the story; and that its aim was to show how narrowing the focus, and sharpening up the writing, could breathe new life into the tired old epic format. How does he go about demonstrating this? The introduction stresses the nature of the relationship between Heracles and his young disciple Hylas. Although the notional reason for citing the story is the universality of Eros, sex is apparently the last item on the agenda for these two; the emphasis is all on spirituality. 'Like a father to his son, he taught him everything that had gone to make himself into a noble and famous hero, never leaving his side in his determination to form Hylas' character after his own heart' (8–15). Heracles is presented as a kind of semi-divine educationalist. Yet what happens when the lad is dragged down into the pool by the apparently 'terrible' (δειναί, 44) nymphs? Far from raping him or sucking his blood, they dandle the boy on their knees and dry his tears. The poem has passed its *peripeteia*, when all our expectations are confounded. So what of Heracles, the unctuous Moral Tutor? That disguise is now stripped away to reveal a brutal underlying reality. Now Heracles is a beast:

Passage A

> τρὶς μὲν Ὕλαν ἄυσεν, ὅσον βαθὺς ἤρυγε λαιμός·
> τρὶς δ' ἄρ' ὁ παῖς ὑπάκουσεν, ἀραιὰ δ' ἵκετο φωνὰ
> ἐξ ὕδατος, παρεὼν δὲ μάλα σχεδὸν εἴδετο πόρρω.
> [ὡς δ' ὁπότ' ἠγένειος ἀπόπροθι λὶς ἐσακούσας]
> νεβροῦ φθεγξαμένας τις ἐν οὔρεσιν ὠμοφάγος λὶς
> ἐξ εὐνᾶς ἔσπευσεν ἑτοιμοτάταν ἐπὶ δαῖτα ... (13.58–63)

'Three times he shouted for Hylas, as loud as his deep throat could belch'—deliberately vulgar language. He charges after the boy like a lion after its prey. He forgets all his

responsibilities to the crew of the Argo, rushing off aimlessly like a madman, μαινόμενος (71). The poem ends:

Passage B

οὕτω μὲν κάλλιστος Ὕλας μακάρων ἀριθμεῖται·
Ἡρακλέην δ' ἤρωες ἐκερτόμεον λιποναύταν,
οὕνεκεν ἠρώησε τριακοντάζυγον Ἀργώ,
πεζῇ δ' ἐς Κόλχους τε καὶ ἄξενον ἵκετο Φᾶσιν. (13.72–5)

Not surprising, then, that the crew cursed him as a deserter before being forced to sail without him. In Theocritus' version it is not Heracles who joins the immortals, but Hylas.

It seems clear to me, then, that this is designed as a deliberately shocking piece, one in which the figure of Heracles is first built up and then brought crashing down in a humiliating παρὰ προσδοκίαν; a kind of miniature version of what happens in Euripides' *Heracles*, in which the hero has barely returned in triumph to save his family from the tyrant when he massacres them in a fit of madness. The difference is that here there is no suggestion of hope or future redemption. Or is there? The very last line of the poem can be interpreted as attempting to rescue something from the wreckage:

'But on foot he came to the Kolchians and the inhospitable Phasis.'

That's all right, then—he missed the bus, so he walked it! All is forgiven, and we can forget all the beast imagery, all the irresponsibility, all the jeers of the crew. A single line is supposed to cancel all that out.[4] I have to say that I cannot swallow the last line of the poem, or square it with my view of what I take this poem to be about; ἀφίσταμαι. I do not believe Theocritus wrote it, and I believe it should be deleted.[5]

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4 See Mastronarde (1968: 288 n.33), advocating a colon at the end of v.74 because of "the necessity of restoring Heracles to his epic-heroic stature after the mocking tone of earlier sections and the abuse of 73–74"; which begs the question. Gow preferred a comma, so that the hero's undignified arrival acts as a further reason for his comrades' jeers, and this suits Bonanno's odd conception that the conclusion should be categorised as Bakhtinian carnivalesque (Bonanno 1986, with further bibliography). Campbell (1990: 118) says of Gow's punctuation, and the sense it implies, "It is hard to believe that the poem was meant to end on this weak note"; I differ from him only in finding the positions of both factions in this quasi-theological dispute—a punctuation mark being an even less substantial entity than an iota—equally untenable.

5 The verbal parallel offered by *Il.* 11.230 might seem to offer a kind of defence: Iphidamas arrived from Thrace, having at last escaped from his family, to seek fame; he brought twelve ships with him, which he left at Perkote; αὐτὰρ ὁ πεζὸς ἐὼν εἰς Ἴλιον εἰληλούθει. But all this means is that he had parked his ships and walked up to Troy, not that he had legged it all the way; see Leaf *ad loc.*

Back to Bentley's Milton, or rather to Bentley's Milton's treacherous friend, who meddled with the poet's copy on his way to the printers. Whodunit? Let's track him down, beginning with Passage A, cited above.

It's lucky that I have at least some firm ground to start from. Line 61 appears in all texts in square brackets, because it is universally agreed to be spurious. Neither the fifth-century $\mathcal{P}4$, nor K, nor the scholia know of it. It owes its existence to that fact that Theocritus wrote a bold, experimental kind of simile in asyndeton with the action to which it relates.[6] Someone found this too difficult, and had a stab at rewriting it in a more conventional manner. Who, and for whose benefit? It sounds like a schoolteacher's version, simplifying the structure for the students; not of course intended actually to replace the original, merely to elucidate it. But it has somehow insinuated itself into the text of most of our MSS.

If there is one clear example of this kind of didactic supplementation, perhaps there are others, less clear. Look at the previous two lines. 'Three times the boy replied, but faint his voice came back ... *from the water, and though he was very near at hand he seemed a long way away*.' My Theocritus is a tight and economical writer who does not waste words. That line, on the contrary, looks a prime candidate for the award which Clive James proposed as a complementary booby-prize to the Golden Rose of Montreux—the Tin Bum of Rangoon. It adds nothing. It is a versification of another bit of prosaic help (πόρρω is *unpoetisch*) from our fusspot teacher, trying to make explicit for the dimmer students what was rather telegraphically expressed by the poet.

Another section of the poem shows signs of a rather different kind of interference—different, but still compatible with what we have seen so far. The text is corrupt, but what we have runs as follows:

Passage C

τὰ δ' Ἰάσονος ὕστερα πάντ' ἦς.
ναῦς †μεν ἄρμεν' ἔχοισα μετάρσια τῶν παρεόντων,
ἱστία δ' ἡμίθεοι μεσονύκτιον ἐξεκάθαιρον,
Ἡρακλῆα μένοντες. (13.67–70)

'All Jason's business took second place [this of Heracles' obsession for the lost boy]. As for the ship [notice that the metre is missing a syllable], with all her gear raised ... of those that were present, while the heroes [or 'youths', if you prefer ἠίθεοι as I think I do] in the middle of the night were cleaning out the sail, as they waited for Heracles.'

'Cleaning out the sail?' And where has Argo's verb gone? And what does τῶν παρεόντων mean? To start with the first of these problems: the things that ships have which need cleaning out so that you can get under way are *slipways*: οὔρους

6 See Bernsdorff (this volume).

ἐξεκάθαιρον (same verb, same form, same position), says Homer at *Il.* 2.153, as the Achaeans rush to sail away home. Apollonius, describing the initial launch of the Argo at 1.375, uses a different noun, ὀλκός, for the trench leading down to the water. Theocritus must have chosen the verb as a deliberate allusion to the Homeric hapax; but with what noun did he couple it? The Argonauts have here made only an overnight stop, and hauling the boat out, followed by 'clearing a channel' for a re-launch, will not have been necessary; let alone with the mast already raised (68). Kurt Latte thought ἱστία made a satisfactory object, leaning heavily on a lone passage in Xenophon (*Cyn.* 6.6) to support a translation 'Um Mitternacht begann die junge Mannschaft die Segel klarzumachen' (Latte 1956: 27). I am doubtful about this, and prefer the line of approach suggested by Gaetano Santangelo, that ἱστία is a gloss on ἄρμενα in the line above, a remnant of a marginal or interlinear commentary that has displaced the original reading.[7]

The puzzling and redundant τῶν παρεόντων has also, I think, crept in to supplant words that we need—the Argo's missing verb. Here is a sketch of the kind of situation I envisage:

τὰ δ' Ἰάσονος ὕστερα πάντ' ἦς.
ΤΩΝ ΠΑΡΟΝΤΩΝ ΚΑΚΩΝ
ναῦς ⟨γε⟩ μὲν ἄρμεν' ἔχοισα μετάρσια ⟨θυΐε νέεσθαι⟩,
ΙΣΤΙΑ
⟨ἴκρια⟩ δ' ἡμίθεοι μεσονύκτιον ἐξεκάθαιρον,
Ἡρακλῆα μένοντες.

At bottom left stands ἱστία, intended as a gloss on ἄρμενα but destined to displace *e.g.* ἴκρια, as we have seen. At top right is a phrase meant to explain the line above: 'All Jason's affairs took second place to his own current troubles, τῶν παρόντων κακῶν.'[8] A minimally versified version of that has pushed out some such expression as θυΐε νέεσθαι; the ship 'was raring to go'.[9]

7 See Santangelo (1971). I am less enamoured of his proposal that the word for which the intrusive gloss has been substituted was δίκτυα—that the heroes were preparing themselves for departure by cleaning out their fishing nets. The English idiom 'clearing the decks' suggests ἴκρια as a possibility.

8 This is a common prose expression; cf. Plut. *Pyrrh.* 15.7 φοβερώτερον ἐφαίνετο τῶν παρόντων κακῶν; Thuc. 3.113.5, 7.71.1; Paus. 3.23.3. Latte tried palaeographical manipulation, but his τὸν παρεόλπει, 'waited in vain for him' (1956: 26–7) is unconvincing.

9 Cf. A.R. 1.525, where Argo is ἐπισπέρχουσα νέεσθαι; 3.685 θυΐεν ἐνισπεῖν. Or perhaps μέλλε νέεσθαι, 'was delaying her departure'.

Here is a further problematic section of the text:

Passage D

ἀλλὰ διεξάιξε βαθὺν δ' εἰσέδραμε Φᾶσιν,
αἰετὸς ὥς, μέγα λαῖτμα, ἀφ' οὗ τότε χοιράδες ἔσταν. (13.23–4)

These lines are from a preliminary anticipation of the Argo's trip, and describe her passage through the Clashing Rocks. 'She did not touch them,' (says the previous line)

'but shot out through, and ran on into the deep Phasis
eagle-like the mighty ocean (since when then they stood fast, reefs).'

So much is wrong with these two lines that it is difficult to know where to start.

First, if you shoot through the Symplegades, you run not into the Phasis, the Argonauts' destination at the far end of the Black Sea, but the Pontus itself, which is indeed what Apollonius says in his equivalent passage.[10] Secondly, διεξαίσσω doesn't naturally take an object of the space rushed into, as seems to be required here—for μέγα λαῖτμα can only be construed in the sentence as the object of that verb. Thirdly, μέγα λαῖτμα itself is an Apollonian phrase for the open sea,[11] and could hardly refer to a river, however large. Fourthly, 'since when then' is no more Greek than '*ex quo tunc tempore*', with which Rumpel glosses it in his Lexicon, is Latin. Fifthly, the Phasis is never 'deep' in Apollonius ('broad': 2.401, 1261). Sixthly and finally, the whole sentence is a hyperbatic jumble.[12]

A solution adopted by some editors (e.g. Wilamowitz) is to adopt the clever, if desperate, suggestion of Jacobs and transpose the second halves of the two lines after their caesurae. 'But she shot out through, since when then they stood fixed as reefs, like an eagle into the vast ocean, and ran into the deep river Phasis.' This does not seem to me much of an improvement.

If we keep the text as it is transmitted, surely, for starters, Πόντον should replace Φᾶσιν at the end of 24. The Black Sea is indubitably deep, and the Black Sea is what you enter when you pass the Clashing Rocks. 'Since when then they stood firm as fixed rocks', with its horrible Greek, looks to me like another remnant of annotations. ἀφ' οὗ itself might be all right—at least, Simaetha is twice allowed to use the expression in poem

10 A.R. 2.579: as the heroes are in the middle of the rocks, 'already the broad Pontus was visible on either side'. Cf. also Theoc. 22.27–8.

11 4.980, 1694; cf. Lobeck on S. *Aj.* 475.

12 Campbell (1974) explicates the main structure as follows: Argo 'shot through and clear of (–εξ–) <the rocks> and so ran into Phasis' deep water [reached her destination], like an eagle <soaring over> a vast expanse of sea'. Wonderful things can be demonstrated with the help of three kinds of brackets.

2—but it requires a present verb, not an aorist,[13] and can hardly cohabit with τότε. *Koine*, however, uses the barbarous phrase ἀπὸ τότε, 'from that point on' (three times in Matthew); that is what I think appeared in the interlinear commentary, and it has taken advantage of its position at the end of the paragraph to tag itself on. Once there, the new line needed to be filled out. What of the rest? 'Like an eagle a mighty ocean' looks poetic enough—μέγα λαῖτμα is an Apollonian phrase, as we have seen, and the eagle sounds like the one in B. 5.16–9—but it might just as easily be someone's stopgap. After all, eagles may soar over great tracts of earth and sea, but they hardly dash into them. As for μέγα λαῖτμα, my Theocritus would have avoided the use of the phrase precisely because it had been used by Apollonios, whom he is here putting right. I prefer to believe that Theocritus wrote

> ἀλλὰ διεξάιξε βαθὺν δ' εἰσέδραμε Πόντον.
> 'but she shot out through, and ran on into deep Pontus.'

—that and no more; finishing the paragraph, and the introductory section of the poem, with a straightforward image of triumphant liberation.

There may be another example of the Hellenistic commentator in his would-be helpfully versificatory, rather than helpfully exegetic, mode:

Passage E

> κῳχεθ' Ὕλας ὁ ξανθὸς ὕδωρ ἐπιδόρπιον οἴσων
> αὐτῷ θ' Ἡρακλῆι καὶ ἀστεμφεῖ Τελαμῶνι,
> οἵ μίαν ἄμφω ἑταῖροι ἀεὶ δαίνυντο τράπεζαν,
> χάλκεον ἄγγος ἔχων. (13.36–9)
> 'Blondie Hylas was off to fetch water for dinner,
> for Heracles himself and unbudging Telamon, comma,
> mates who always used both to banquet a single table, comma,
> carrying a bronze bucket.'

I don't like the third line. I don't specially object to the expression 'banquet a table', though that seems to be new; LSJ gives δαῖτα, γάμον, τάφον, as well of course as the food consumed, as regular objects, and cites this passage as unusual—it does rather sound as if they were gnawing at the furniture, like refugees from the *Aeneid*. What I dislike is that it is slack, explaining something to us that we do not need explained. More seriously, it seems to me to interpose too much material between the two participles referring to Hylas, breaking the back of the sentence with a second end-stopped line; we thought the narrative

13 On the form ἔσταν see Veitch (1887: 300): Pi. (Doric!) *N*. 1.19; *Il*. 1.533 ἀνέσταν | 'stood up', resumed two lines later with the simplex form (see Renehan 1985:28–9, with references to his earlier work) ἔσταν ἅπαντες.

was taking a different direction, only to be jolted back to the boy with the bucket after an interval of two lines. And it repeats a verbal conceit that was used only five lines before, where πολλοί heroes shared a single, μίαν, bed.[14] Here again, then, I suspect the interfering presence of our A-level tutor making explicit and wordy what had been terse and allusive in Theocritus' original; he has recycled the 'many sharing a single' idea from line 33, explaining to his class exactly what Telamon's relationship with Heracles was.

There is at least one other case where a long-recognised problem looks explicable on the assumption of intrusive paraphrase—verse 15, which seems to be an explanatory alternative to 14. But I don't wish to push the argument further, for fear of undermining my own case. Obviously the last example is less strong than the others, and perhaps the Bentley in me is beginning to get out of hand. I hope though that A, B and C have established a *prima facie* case for the hypothesis of interference with the author's text, a case strong enough to enable us to return to my main target, the last line of Passage B:

πεζῷ δ' ἐς Κόλχους τε καὶ ἄξενον ἵκετο Φᾶσιν. (13.75)

It will be remembered that the whole thrust of the second part of the poem seems to be to shatter the image of the tutorial Heracles we met at the outset, and replace it with a beast-Heracles, reviled by his shipmates. This last line seems to want to correct that picture, but succeeds only in leaving behind an impression of half-cocked and half-hearted confusion.[15] Now that we have evidence for the intrusion of prosaic material elsewhere in the poem, are we any further on? Yes, because the adverb πεζῷ, 'on foot', is an *unpoetisches Wort*.[16] Poets use the adjective πεζός—32 times in Homer, 23 in Nonnus, again at Theocritus 17.99. Poets never use the adverb—that is, not proper poets. The *TLG* provides two fragments from Attic comedy, and one example in Kerkidas, writing in that most prosaic of all verse-forms, skazons. (Callimachus, incidentally, would have savoured the fact that πεζῷ is not only the prosaic expression for 'pedestrian' but also the technical Greek for the word 'prosaic' itself.)

Now, it would be easy enough to emend -ῷ to -ός, but I'm not proposing that solution. I'm proposing to delete the line, not this time as an accidental intruder, but as a quite deliberate interpolation.

But who could possibly have had a motive for tacking this feeble appendage on to the poem? Let us take a short break from the programme and watch some more commercials for the general idea of idiosyncratic visions of texts and authors. This time, though, I want

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14 Cf. too 22.30, also Argonautic: 'many came down a single ladder', μιᾶς πολλοὶ κατὰ κλίμακος. The conceit is examined by McKay (1991).

15 See the discussion in Mastronarde (1968: 287-8 with n.33), arguing against Gow's comma, in favour of a colon.

16 Caution is needed in deploying this criterion, for the poet certainly admits prose words and idioms to some degree, in some cases; see e.g. Mastronarde (1968: 282 n.22), on ὧν ὄφελός τι. I have tried to employ it only as an *ancillary* argument.

to emphasise not private obsessional visions but public, shared ones, in which critics and editors collude with their audience to produce sometimes bizarre distortions of familiar texts.

In 1826, Thomas Bowdler produced his edition of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. The title page identified the market he was aiming at:

FOR THE USE OF FAMILIES AND YOUNG PERSONS,
REPRINTED FROM THE ORIGINAL TEXT
WITH THE CAREFUL OMISSIONS OF ALL PASSAGES
OF AN IRRELIGIOUS OR IMMORAL TENDENCY

Bowdler had predecessors. Nahum Tate's perversion of *King Lear*, which he brought out in 1681, remained the standard British performing version until W.C. Macready restored Shakespeare's text in 1838. It reflected the fact that the meat of Lear was too strong for eighteenth century taste. To correct this, it omits the Fool, introduces a love affair between Edgar and Cordelia, and finally commits Lear, Gloucester, and Kent to peaceful retirement.

Staying with Shakespeare, back to Bowdler's edition.[17] He offers us a Bard (the title page again)

IN WHICH
NOTHING IS ADDED TO THE ORIGINAL TEXT
BUT THOSE WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS
ARE OMITTED WHICH CANNOT WITH PROPRIETY
BE READ ALOUD IN A FAMILY

Our ancient lecturer on Theocritus, it seems, was not so scrupulous. He was quite prepared to 'add to the original text', in order to present a less shocking picture of Heracles to his students. In fact, oddly enough, he seems precisely to invert Bowdler's estimation of the offence involved in editorial tinkering—he leaves the objectionable lines standing, but appends an apologetic afterthought. Heracles is still a deserter, a raging lunatic—but later on he calmed down and returned to the colours. At any rate, what is involved here is clearly anxiety about ἀπρεπές, improper activity, behaviour unbecoming to gods and heroes. My Theocritus, I conclude, has been interfered with by some busybody of the school of Aristarchos, forever fretting about poetic propriety, and not caring whether the poem's point was destroyed in the process. Nor indeed about its elegance: it meant nothing to him that verse 74 was cruelly deprived of its position as last line, a fine, weighty verse that

17 Twenty plays had been edited by his sister Henrietta in 1807; the rest were completed by him for the second edition in 1818.

rounds off its paragraph (and the poem) with a οὕνεκεν-clause, a common terminating device in Hellenistic poetry.[18]

I leave 13 leaner, fitter and sharper than I found it and pass on to poem 24, in which the baby Heracles strangles the murderous snakes sent by the jealous goddess Hera.

This is a piece in which The Greek Hero is seen at bay in his last defensible redoubt—infancy. The poem's adult hero, the cuckolded Amphitryon, is presented as an ineffectual character; it is not the head of the household to whom Teiresias issues his instructions, but his wife Alcmene. Amphitryon's great moment comes when the cries of the servants are heard during the night and it becomes obvious to Alcmene that something is up. She digs her husband in the ribs and tells him to get up and sort out whatever is wrong. The king gets out of bed, reaches for his inlaid sword, grabs his sword-belt in one hand, his scabbard in the other, and is all set to face the putative burglars when, suddenly, the magic light with which the palace had been mysteriously filled vanishes, and Amphitryon is plunged into obscurity. There is no-one to fight, and no light to see by. All that remains for him to do is to admire the baby's deed, pull Heracles' blanket back over him, and return to bed. There is no longer a role for swashbuckling heroes in Theocritus. The monstrous baby, the mother and the geriatric prophet Teiresias have squeezed him out.

Our next passage establishes that this poem has been subjected to the same kind of attentions that we saw in the case of 13. Teiresias is forecasting Heracles' future to his mother, and has been saying unsurprising things like 'he will be a broad-chested hero, a match for any monster or human warrior; he will perform twelve labours and go to heaven from a pyre on Trachis; there he will become the son-in-law of the gods who have sent these snakes'. (That is, Hera, though Zeus is rather oddly included.) The peroration of this prediction comes at 86–9:

Passage F

> ἔσται δὴ τοῦτ' ἆμαρ ὀπηνίκα νεβρὸν ἐν εὐνᾷ
> καρχαρόδων σίνεσθαι ἰδὼν λύκος οὐκ ἐθελήσει.
> ἀλλά, γύναι ...
> 'Yea, that day shall come, when the razor-fanged wolf, catching sight of a fawn in its bed, shall have no desire to harm it.'

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18 Cf. Theoc. 7.82, the bees brought food to Comatas οὕνεκα οἱ γλυκὺ Μοῖσα κατὰ στόματος χέε νέκταρ; Call. *h.* 3.45, the river Caeratus was glad, and so was Tethys, οὕνεκα θυγατέρας Λητωίδι πέμπον ἀμορβούς; Call. fr. 51 (probably the last line of *Aetia* 2), οὕνεκεν οἰκτείρειν οἶδε μόνη πολίων; A.R. 3.470 (end of a seven-line speech by Medea) οὕνεκεν οὐ οἱ ἔγωγε κακῇ ἐπιγαίομαι ἄτῃ; cf. 1.615, 3.246. At Call. *h.* 4.247f., Hera is cross with Delos, but still respects her οὕνεκ' ἐμεῖο | δέμνιον οὐκ ἐπάτησε, Διὸς δ' ἀνθείλετο πόντον. As Ewen Bowie points out to me, the pair of clauses in this last passage would offer a formal parallel to the text here as punctuated by Gow; but there the clauses offer each other reciprocal reinforcement rather than making two separate points.

And he goes on to tell Alcmene how to dispose of the dead dragons. But what of rock or stone is all this about wolves and fawns? It has nothing whatsoever to do with the future of Heracles, or anything else, and I am surprised that some critics are still prepared to give it house-room.[19] It is a typical all-purpose fragment of Sibylline prophecy, which had no doubt been quoted in a Hellenistic commentary for illustrative purposes. Actually, since Teiresias had just been praising Alcmene by saying 'Aristotokeia, you will become an object of reverence for all Argive women', it may be that the similarity to the wording of Gabriel's annunciation to Mary there caused a later *Christian* reader to append the couplet, with its Isaiah-like prophecy. Either way, note once again that it is at the end of a speech or paragraph that new material finds it easiest to gain a foothold, as in Passages B and D.[20]

Earlier in the poem come a couple of lines of which I am also suspicious:

Passage G

τᾶμος ἄρ' αἰνὰ πέλωρα δύω πολυμήχανος Ἥρα,
κυανέαις φρίσσοντας ὑπὸ σπείραισι δράκοντας,
ὧρσεν ἐπὶ πλατὺν οὐδόν, ὅθι σταθμὰ κοῖλα θυράων
οἴκου, ἀπειλήσασα φαγεῖν βρέφος Ἡρακλῆα.
τὼ δ' ἐξειλυσθέντες ἐπὶ χθονὶ γαστέρας ἄμφω
αἱμοβόρους ἑκύλιον· (24.13–8)

'That was the hour at which much-machinating Hera sent two awful monsters, snakes bristling with dark-blue coils, to attack the broad doorstep, where the hollow posts of the doors are, of the house, threatening to eat the baby Heracles', etc.

It is the fourth line, 16, that is problematic. ἀπειλήσασα φαγεῖν, 'threatening to eat' has to be interpreted 'ordering them with threats to eat', for which the best parallel that Gow can offer is again koine (*Act.Ap.* 4.17). Unless, that is, the words are supposed to bear their obvious meaning; in which case Hera would be threatening to eat Heracles herself, as Hecabe and Hecale wish to devour their enemies. οἴκου, at the beginning, seems quite redundant; rather than emend it to οἴγεν, with Platt, or ὅρκῳ (Legrand), why don't we just throw the whole line out, as Paley suggested? And while we're about it, verse 14, the line about the snakes, can join it in the bin. More than twenty years ago I objected in print (Griffiths 1972: 107–8) to the expression 'bristling underneath with dark coils', when all you can legitimately bristle with in Greek is hair or scales. Then, I tried to emend; now, I am inclined to delete the line.

But enough of fiddling with a line here and a line there. This is small potatoes. Why not go for broke?

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19 E.g. Griffin (1978: 246); Stark (1963: 365-6).

20 It is even easier to tack on additions to entire books or poems; for Hellenistic texts, cf. e.g. the supposititious end of Nicander's *Alexipharmaka* or, at the slighter end of the spectrum, *SH* 335.6–7, and *AP* 9.570.7–8 This poem is itself a case in point; see below.

The transmission of poem 24 is peculiarly interesting. The MS X breaks off at verse 87, at the conclusion of Teiresias' prophecy to Alcmene. The other MSS soldier on until 140, but Musurus already recognised in the Renaissance that that did not make a satisfactory ending. Then the Antinoe papyrus surfaced, continuing the story (in a battered and mostly illegible form) up to verse 172. So where did Theocritus' own MS finish? 172? Why then did two ancient, or at least medieval, traditions, stop short? Presumably because they recognised that the end was spurious, but disagreed where the line was to be drawn. Let us re-run the argument, and consider the various options.

Line 140 certainly won't do, as Musurus saw. 'His simple tunic hardly reached below the knee ... ' Neither his nor my Theocritus was the sort of poet who would regard hemline-length in heroic-age Thebes as an appropriate closure motif.

What about 87, then? Or rather 85, since we have already seen that the couplet featuring the vegetarian wolf was an addition. This is more attractive. Alcmene called in the local prophet to ask him how the snake incident was all going to end (66–7); and at 85 he has finished doing just that. 'Your child will finish his career as son-in-law to the immortals.' This is just where Pindar's *N.* 1, the model for this poem, stops. Yet even my taste for crispness and conciseness has its limits. Although I think this was an intelligent cut-off point for the ancestral editor of X to choose,[21] it is just too curt. We need something to end the scene properly, and bring the final curtain down on the poem.

That leaves 172, the long version offered by the papyrus. But this is even worse. We have already seen that it was ostracised by the medieval MSS. What aroused their suspicions? Of the traces that remain, the last lines seem to be spoken by a poet who 'hopes that he will win the prize for his performance'. Prize? Performance? This is not my Theocritus. My Theocritus would not have submitted his art to the judgment of some Booker Prize coterie or Eisteddfod jury. It looks as though the various editors of our MS tradition felt the same way: the end of the poem was spurious.

If not 172, or 140, or 85, where? At verse 104:

Passage H

δυσμενέων αἰεὶ καθυπέρτεροι ὡς τελέθοιτε."
φῆ, καὶ ἐρωήσας ἐλεφάντινον ὤχετο δίφρον
Τειρεσίας πολλοῖσι βαρύς περ ἐὼν ἐνιαυτοῖς·
Ἡρακλέης δ' ὑπὸ ματρὶ νέον φυτὸν ὣς ἐν ἀλωᾷ
ἐτρέφετ', Ἀργείου κεκλημένος Ἀμφιτρύωνος.
...
γράμματα μὲν τὸν παῖδα γέρων Λίνος ἐξεδίδαξεν ... (24.100–5)

21 *If* it was an editorial decision; this manuscript (Vat. 1311) gives badly defective texts of other poems too, as Peter Hicks reminds me. Yet while elsewhere its stops and starts look random, as if the result of physical damage, this is a clear section-end.

Teiresias, the ancient ecclesiastic near the end of his days, finishes his speech, pushes back his chair, and totters off into the Theban sunlight. As he departs, we return for a moment to the infant hero with all his future before him: 'While as for Heracles, he grew up at his mother's knee like some young plant in a garden, known to the world as the son of Amphitryon the Argive.' A perfect note on which to end the poem, recalling (just in case we had forgotten) the dominant mother and the helpless pseudo-father. Here at last he is given the prominence due to a hero—but it is, of course, tongue-in-cheek and ironical. This μέν ... δέ type contrast (old Teiresias, young Heracles) is exactly the way (as we have seen) in which Theocritus brought poem 13 to a close: 'That's how Hylas comes to be ranked among the immortals; but as for Heracles, the heroes reviled him as a deserter, because he abandoned the thirty-benched Argo.'[22]

It is also the technique that became standard for ending a poem in what I may cautiously call the genre of 'Hellenistic epyllion'. We know how abruptly Apollonius snips off the narrative thread at the end of the *Argonautica*. Two similarly crisp closures come to mind. First, the Pasiphae story in Book 1 of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, where a 36-line story is briskly concluded at 325–6 by a birth-announcement:

> hanc tamen impleuit, uacca deceptus acerna,
> dux gregis, et partu proditus auctor erat.

And second, Moschus' *Europa*, which is rounded off not just with a birth but the prophecy of a birth:

> τὴν δ' ὧδε προσεφώνεεν ἠύκερως βοῦς·
> "θάρσει παρθενική· μὴ δείδιθι πόντιον οἶδμα.
> αὐτός τοι Ζεύς εἰμι, κεἰ ἐγγύθεν εἴδομαι εἶναι
> ταῦρος, ἐπεὶ δύναμαί γε φανήμεναι ὅττι θέλοιμι.
> σὸς δὲ πόθος μ' ἀνέηκε τόσην ἅλα μετρήσασθαι
> ταύρῳ ἐειδόμενον. Κρήτη δέ σε δέξεται ἤδη
> ἥ μ' ἔθρεψε καὶ αὐτόν, ὅπῃ νυμφήια σεῖο
> ἔσσεται· ἐξ ἐμέθεν δὲ κλυτοὺς φιτύσεαι υἷας
> οἵ σκηπτοῦχοι ἅπαντες ἐπιχθονίοισιν ἔσονται."
> ὣς φάτο· καὶ τετέλεστο τά περ φάτο. φαίνετο μὲν δὴ
> Κρήτη, Ζεὺς δὲ πάλιν σφετέρην ἀνελάζετο μορφήν,
> λῦσε δέ οἱ μίτρην, καί οἱ λέχος ἔντυον Ὧραι.
> ἡ δὲ πάρος κούρη Ζηνὸς γένετ' αὐτίκα νύμφη,
> καὶ Κρονίδῃ τέκε τέκνα καὶ αὐτίκα γίνετο μήτηρ. (153–66)

22 Of course such pairs of opposed subjects may act merely as strong markers of a section-end: cf. e.g. 7.86–9 and 122–7 (where 125 is to be deleted), as well as 155–7 which ends the poem.

This was altogether too much for Wilamowitz. It wasn't enough for the poet to get Europa to Crete, and get her pregnant: "totum versum del. Valckenaer," he observes of the last line; "sed suppleta est lacuna. dicendum erat de filiorum dignitate regia, cf. 161 et de terra Europa," he splutters, "He should have gone on to talk about her royal offspring, and the new continent of Europe!" (*OCT* app. crit.). But he didn't. That wasn't the way he had learnt from Theocritus to do it.

Verses 105 to 172 of poem 24 are in fact a wretched droning catalogue of Heracles' supposed teachers, added by someone who thought that Heracles' teachers ought to have been mentioned.[23] I expect the author was probably someone not unconnected with the teaching profession, who hoped to win a prize for his efforts. His tedious appendage, which elevates γράμματα to first and music to third position in the young Heracles' educational programme (while primly avoiding any mention of the notorious fate of Linus), adds an unwanted third component to the poet's favourite diptych structure.[24]

It is possible that the reader may have agreed with every suggestion made so far, while still harbouring some residual, lurking hesitation about the mechanism which brought about all this textual disruption. What kind of transmissional scenario could account for the kind of interference that I suppose to have taken place?

Before the 1970's, one would have been hard put to construct a model. But now we have the Lille Callimachus papyrus, definitively edited with a *tersus atque elegans* commentary (Parsons 1977b). The papyrus contains a text of of what Parsons establishes to be the beginning of *Aetia* Book 3. What is remarkable is that the transcription of Callimachus' text is regularly interrupted by wodges of commentary, four or five lines long in some cases. Thus we get verse 1, then a line of observations; verse 2, then four lines of notes; verses 3 and 4, with one line; verse 5, plus one line; verses 6 and 7, with two, and so on.

Let me quote three passages from Professor Parsons' initial notes on this peculiar format (1977b: 4–5):

> (1) The commentary has only discreet ambitions. Occasionally it is informative beyond the immediate needs of verbal comprehension [he gives two examples of historical and linguistic material]. But in general it limits itself to simple gloss or paraphrase. (...) I wonder whether this elementary production really had a substantive history in the book-trade: apart from the careful book-hand, which gives a professional look, it might be the private preparation of a Fayumic schoolmaster.

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23 Compare the similar list in Apollodorus 2.4.9; and that of Alexander's teachers in the *Alexander Romance* (1.13). The closest parallel in poetry is perhaps Pi. *O*. 10.60–73, ticking off the victors in each of the events at the inaugural Olympic Games; Farnell *ad loc*. calls it "a flat and dull list of names", but at least it is short.

24 See in general Pretagostini (1980); though I of course reject his analysis of this poem (1980: 24–5), which rolls up the snake scene into a bundle with the Teiresias interview and makes this catalogue the second compositional element.

(2) Lines of scholia are indented by three letters. Otherwise, verse and commentary look exactly alike; and if the line-beginnings are lost, only content makes the distinction.
(3) [The] indications speak for a date in the late third century. This copy of Callimachus was written within a generation of the poet's death.

I suggest that the Theocritus tradition passed through a similar textual phase. A Hellenistic professor could hardly hope to write up his lecture notes on the *Iliad* at this level of detail, but these modern poets had the advantage of composing conveniently short poems, for which a full commentary was quite practicable and not too damaging to the college's papyrus bill.[25] I suggest that the standard late Hellenistic version of the poet—or at least of these two epic poems, which were the most likely ones to have attracted the exegetic attentions of teachers—was based on, or reconstituted from, an annotated copy of the Lille type. 'Verse and commentary look exactly alike'—a perfect opportunity for confusion to arise, and a situation which necessitated, at the clean-up stage, the confection of verses like 13.24 (Passage D) to accommodate remnants of commentary which had been mistakenly drawn into the verse. I add that it would be much easier for this kind of osmosis from commentary to text to take place in a hexametric tradition than in a copy of the *Aetia*, or, say, Archilochus; infiltration of extraneous material into an elegiac text is limited by the fact that hexameter and pentameter must necessarily alternate, while *epos* has no such built-in protective constraint.[26]

I conclude with a brief summarising sketch of my private vision of the *Textgeschichte* of Theocritus. In the middle of the third century BC Theocritus put together a collection of short poems which ranged widely across the stylistic spectrum of Greek tradition: scenes from epic, hymns and panegyrics which drew on Pindaric and Simonidean praise poetry, pastiches of Lesbian lyric, transpositions of New Comedy and mime into hexameter form and his own distinctive bucolic mode. His work achieved the status of a modern classic, and his new miniaturised epics, in particular, were prescribed as part of the college syllabus. Annotated copies of the *Hylas* and the *Herakliskos*, of the Lille type, circulated among teachers and students. Some of the notes just glossed difficult words (Passage B, ἰστία for ἄρμενα); others provided alternative, simplified constructions to clarify Theocritus' occasional abruptnesses (Passage A, the simile introduction). Parallels were cited in the usual scholiastic fashion (Passage F, the oracular prediction). All these were liable to get confused with the text itself, and some successfully insinuated themselves into it. A more sinister development was the deliberate toning down of some of the poet's more radical ideas in the interests of that anodyne blandness which is universally regarded as

25 Compare *PLouvre* inv. 7733, preserving a six-line riddling epigram (to which the answer is: 'An Oyster') together with fifty-odd lines of scholiastic explication. The papyrus is not much later than that containing the *Victaria Berenices* (second century BC). See Parsons (1977a) for full analysis; *SH* 983–4 for text and commentary.

26 Still less a prose tradition: McGuinness (1988: 297) reports of the first (German) printing of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: "In one or two places instructions to the typist, or even handwritten queries by Russell, were incorporated into the text."

suitable to the educational process; hence the addition of line 75 at the end of poem 13, to rescue the reputation of Heracles from damaging criticism. Further, some poetaster had the not very good idea of 'completing' the story of Heracles' childhood in poem 24 with his own version of the young hero's education—this too got tacked to the poem, no doubt for the sake of its improving character. Pity the poor editors who were faced, at various times from the late Hellenistic to the Byzantine periods, with the problem of establishing and handing on the text of Theocritus. I am sure they did their best. The manuscripts seem to reflect their awareness that it was by no means clear just where poem 24 ended. Elsewhere, there was just too much accumulated clutter for them to be able to clear it all away; they seem to have decided to err on the generous side, including any material that looked as if it might be genuine, padding out incomplete lines where necessary.

The Aristophanic Euripides claimed to have put the tragic Muse on a diet: ἴσχναν μὲν πρώτιστον αὐτὴν καὶ τὸ βάρος ἀφεῖλον (Ar. *Ra.* 941). My personally-customised Theocritus also presents a slimmer, lighter figure to the world. Others will have their own views; but our individual perspectives need not be utterly solipsistic, and perhaps by comparing them we may reach a more generally agreed view of the poet's ideal weight.