

## THEOCRITUS

TRANSLATED BY J. M. EDMONDS

### IDYLL 2: THE SPELL

*This monologue, which preserves the dialogue-form by a dumb character, consists of two parts; in the first a Coan girl named Simaetha lays a fire-spell upon her neglectful lover, the young athlete Delphis, and in the second, when her maid goes off to smear the ashes upon his lintel, she tells the Moon how his love was won and lost. The scene lies not far from the sea, at a place where three roads meet without the city, the roads being bordered with tombs. The Moon shines in the background, and in the foreground is a wayside shrine and statue of Hecate with a little altar before it. Upon this altar, in the first part of the rite, the poor girl burns successively barley-meal, bay-leaves, a waxen puppet, and some bran; next, the coming of the Goddess having been heralded by the distant barking of dogs and welcomes with the beating of brass, amid the holy silence that betokens her presence Simaetha pours the libations and puts up her chief prayer; lastly she burns the herb hippomanes and a piece of the fringe of her lover's cloak. The incantation which begins and ends the four-line stanza devoted to the burning of each of these things, as well as two central stanzas belonging to the holy silence and the libation, is addressed to the magic four-spoked wheel which still bears the name of the bird that was originally bound to such wheels, and which is kept turning by Simaetha throughout the rite. When Thestylis withdraws with the collected ashes in the libation-bowl, her mistress begins her soliloquy. This consists of two halves, the first of which is divided, by a refrain addressed to the listening Moon, into stanzas, all, except the last, of five lines; then instead of the refrain comes the climax of the story, put briefly in two lines, and the second half begins, with its tale of desertion. In the latter half the absence of the refrain with its lyric and romantic associations is intended to heighten the contrast between then and now, between the fulness of joy and the emptiness of despair. Towards the end both of the first and of the second parts of the poem there is a suggestion that Simaetha only half believes in the efficacy of her spell; for she threatens that if it fails to bring back Delphis' love to her, poison shall prevent his bestowing it elsewhere.*

[1] Where are my bay-leaves? Come, Thestylis; where are my love-charms? Come crown me the bowl with the crimson flower

o' wool; I would fain have the fire-spell to my cruel dear that for twelve days hath not so much as come anigh me, the wretch, nor knows not whether I be alive or dead, nay nor even hath knocked upon my door, implacable man. I warrant ye Love and the Lady be gone away with his feat fancy. In the morning I'll to Timagetus' school and see him, and ask what he means to use me so; but, for to-night, I'll put the spell o' fire upon him.

[10] So shine me fair, sweet Moon; for to thee, still Goddess, is my song, to thee and that Hecat infernal who makes e'en the whelps to shiver on her goings to and fro where these tombs be and the red blood lies. All hail to thee, dread and awful Hecat! I prithee so bear me company that this medicine of my making prove potent as any of Circe's or Medea's or Perimed's of the golden hair.

*Wryneck, wryneck, draw him hither.*

[18] First barley-meal to the burning. Come, Thestylis; throw it on. Alack, poor fool! whither are thy wits gone wandering? Lord! am I become a thing a filthy drab like thee may crow over? On, on with the meal, and say "These be Delphis' bones I throw."

*Wryneck, wryneck, draw him hither.*

[23] As Delphis hath brought me pain, so I burn the bay against Delphis. And as it crackles and then lo! is burnt suddenly to nought and we see not so much as the ash of it, e'en so be Delphis' body whelmed in another flame.

*Wryneck, wryneck, draw him hither.*

[28] As this puppet melts for me before Hecat, so melt with love, e'en so speedily, Delphis of Myndus.<sup>1</sup> And as this wheel of brass turns by grace of Aphrodite, so turn he and turn again before my threshold.<sup>2</sup>

*Wryneck, wryneck, draw him hither.*

[33] Now to the flames the bran. O Artemis, as thou movest the adamant that is at the door of Death, so mayst thou move all else that is unmovable. Hark, Thestylis, where the gods howl in the town. Sure the Goddess is at these cross-roads. Quick beat the pan.

*Wryneck, wryneck, draw him hither.*

[38] Lo there! now wave is still and wind is still, though never still the pain that is in my breast; for I am all afire for him, afire alas! for him that hath made me no wife and left me to my shame no maid.

*Wryneck, wryneck, draw him hither.*

[43] Thrice this libation I pour, thrice, Lady, this prayer I say: be woman at this hour or man his love-mate, O be that mate forgotten even as old Theseus once forgot the fair-tressed damsel in Dia.<sup>3</sup>

*Wryneck, wryneck, draw him hither.*

[48] Horse-madness is a herb that grows in Arcady, and makes every filly, every flying mare run a-raving in the hills. In like case Delphis may I see, aye, coming to my door from the oil and the wrestling-place like one that is raving mad.

*Wryneck, wryneck, draw him hither.*

[53] This fringe hath Delphis lost from his cloak, and this now pluck I in pieces and fling away into the ravening flame. Woe's me, remorseless Love! why hast clung to me thus, thou muddy leech, and drained my flesh of the red blood every drop?

*Wryneck, wryneck, draw him hither.*

[58] I'll bray thee an eft to-morrow, and an ill drink thou shalt find it. But for to-night take thou these ashes, Thestylis, while 'tis yet dark, and smear them privily upon his lintel above, and spit for what thou doest<sup>4</sup> and say "Delphis' bones I smear."

*Wryneck, wryneck, draw him hither.*

[64] Now I am alone. Where shall I begin the lament of my love? Here b't begun; I'll tell who 'twas brought me to this pass.

[66] One day came Anaxo daughter of Eubulus our way, came a-basket-bearing in procession to the temple of Artemis, with a ring of man beasts about her, a lioness one.

*List, good Moon, where I learnt my loving.*

[70] Now Theumaridas' Thracian nurse that dwelt next door, gone ere this to her rest, had begged and prayed me to gout and see the pageant, and so – ill was my luck – I followed her, in a long gown of fine silk, with Clearista's<sup>5</sup> cloak over it.

*List, good Moon, where I learnt my loving.*

[76] I was halfway o' the road, beside Lycon's, when lo! I espied walking together Delphis and Eudamippus, the hair o' their chins as golden as cassidony,<sup>6</sup> and the breasts of them, for they were on their way from their pretty labour at the school, shone full as fair as thou, great Moon.

*List, good Moon, where I learnt my loving.*

[82] And O the pity of it! in a moment I looked and was lost, lost and smit i' the heart<sup>7</sup>; the colour went from my cheek; of that brave pageant I bethought me no more. How I got me home I

know not; but this I know, a parching fever laid me waste and I was ten days and ten nights abed.

*List, good Moon, where I learnt my loving.*

[88] And I would go as wan and pale as any dyer's boxwood; the hairs o' my head began to fall; I was nought but skin and bone. There's not a charmer in the town to whom I resorted not, nor witch's hovel whither I went not for a spell. But 'twas no easy thing to cure a malady like that, and time sped on apace.

*List, good Moon, where I learnt my loving.*

[94] At last I told my woman all the truth. "Go to, good Thestylis," cried I, "go find me some remedy for a sore distemper. The Myndian, alack! he possesseth me altogether. Go thou, pray, and watch for him by Timagetus' wrestling-place: 'tis thither he resorts, 'tis there he loves well to sit.

*List, good Moon, where I learnt my loving.*

[100] "And when so be thou be'st sure he's alone, give him a gentle nod o' the head and say Simaetha would see him, and bring him hither." So bidden she went her ways and brought him that was so sleek and gay to my dwelling. And no sooner was I ware of the light fall o's foot across my threshold, –

*List, good Moon, where I learnt my loving –*

[106] than I went cold as ice my body over, and the sweat dripped like dewdrops from my brow; aye, and for speaking I could not so much as the whimper of a child that calls on's mother in his sleep; for my fair flesh was gone all stiff and stark like a puppet's.

*List, good Moon, where I learnt my loving.*

[112] When he beheld me, heartless man!<sup>8</sup> he fixed his gaze on the ground, sat him upon the bed, and sitting thus spake: "Why, Simaetha, when thou bad'st me hither to this thy roof, marry, thou

didst no further outrun my own coming than I once outran the pretty young Philinus.<sup>9</sup>

*List, good Moon, where I learnt my loving.*

[118] "For I had come of myself, by sweet Love I had, of myself the very first hour of night, with comrades twain or more, some of Dionysus' own apples in my pocket, and about my brow the holy aspen sprig of Heracles with gay purple ribbons wound in and out.

*List, good Moon, where I learnt my loving.*

[124] "And had ye received me so, it had been joy; for I have a name<sup>10</sup> as well for beauty of shape as speed of foot with all the bachelry o' the town, and I had been content so I had only kissed thy pretty lips. But and if ye had sent me packing with bolt and bar, then I warrant ye axes and torches had come against you.

*List, good Moon, where I learnt my loving.*

[130] "But seeing thou hadst sent for me, I vowed my thanks to the Cyprian first – but after the Cyprian 'tis thou, in calling me to this roof, sweet maid, didst snatch the brand from a burning that was all but done; for i' faith, Cupid's flare oft will outblaze the God o' Lipara<sup>11</sup> himself, –

*List, good Moon, where I learnt my loving –*

[137] "And with the dire frenzy of him bride is driven from groom ere his marriage-bed by cold, much more a maid from the bower of her virginity." So he ended, and I, that was so easy to win, took him by the hand and made him lie along the bed. Soon cheek upon cheek grew ripe, our faces waxed hotter, and lo! sweet whispers went and came. My prating shall not keep thee too long, good Moon: enough that all was done, enough that both desires were sped.

[145] And till 'twas but yesterday, he found never a fault in me nor I in him. But lo! to-day, when She o' the Rose-red Arms began her swift charioting from sea to sky, comes me the mother of Melixo and of our once flute-girl<sup>12</sup> Philista, and among divers other talk would have me believe Delphis was in love. And she knew not for sure, so she said, whether this new love were of maid or of man, only "he was ever drinking" quoth she "to the name of Love, and went off in haste at the last saying his love-garlands were for such-and-such a house." So ran my gossip's story, and sure 'tis true; tor ah! though time was, i' faith, when he would come thrice and four times a day, and often left his Dorian flask with me to fetch again, now 'tis twelve days since I so much as set eyes upon him. I am forgot, for sure; his joy doth lie otherways.

[160] To-night these my fire-philtres shall lay a spell upon him; but if so be they make not an end of my trouble, then, so help me Fate, he shall be found knocking at the gate of Death; for I tell thee, good Mistress, I have in my press medicines evil enough, that one out of Assyria<sup>13</sup> told me of. So fare thee well, great Lady; to Ocean with thy team. And I, I will bear my love as best I may. Farewell sweet Lady o' the Shining Face,<sup>14</sup> and all ye starry followers in the train of drowsy Night, farewell, farewell.

## NOTES

1. "Myndus" : a town of Caria, opposite Cos.
2. "Turn and turn again before my threshold" : waiting to be let in; *cf.* 7.122.
3. "Dia" : Naxos where Theseus abandoned Ariadne.
4. "Spit for what thou doest" : to avert ill-luck.
5. "Clearista" : perhaps her sister.
6. "Cassidony" : the Everlasting or Golden-Tufts.
7. "smit i' the heart" : or perhaps 'and my heart pierced with fire (metaph. from fire-darts used in war).
8. "Heartless man" : to behave so and then desert me.
9. "Philinus" : of Cos, here spoken of as a youth; he won at Olympia in 264 and 260.
10. "I have a name" : the self-complimentary details of Delphis' speech are due to the reporter.
11. "God of Lipara": the Liparaean Islands contain volcanoes.
12. "Our flute-girl" : the girl who used to play to him and me'; the same is still employed by Delphis, and it is through her mother that Simaetha learns that he loves another, a second daughter of the same woman being one of Simaetha's serving-maids.
13. "Assyria": the land of magic herbs.
14. For "Shining Face" there was an ancient variant 'Shining Throne.'