

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-43219-2 - A Translation of the Idylls of Theocritus

R. C. Trevelyan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

THE  
IDYLLS  
OF  
THEOCRITUS

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-43219-2 - A Translation of the Idylls of Theocritus

R. C. Trevelyan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-43219-2 - A Translation of the Idylls of Theocritus  
R. C. Trevelyan  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

R. C. TREVELYAN

A TRANSLATION  
*of the*  
IDYLLS  
*of*  
THEOCRITUS



CAMBRIDGE  
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
1947

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-43219-2 - A Translation of the Idylls of Theocritus  
R. C. Trevelyan  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107432192](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107432192)

© Cambridge University Press 1947

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1947

First paperback edition 2014

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN 978-1-107-43219-2 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-43219-2 - A Translation of the Idylls of Theocritus

R. C. Trevelyan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

*To*

ELIZABETH MUNTZ

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-43219-2 - A Translation of the Idylls of Theocritus

R. C. Trevelyan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	ix
IDYLLS:	
I: Thyrsis	3
II: The Sorceress	8
III: The Serenade	13
IV: The Herdsmen	15
V: Komatas and Lakon	18
VI: Daphnis and Damoetas	23
VII: The Harvest-home	25
VIII: Daphnis and Menalkas	30
IX: Daphnis and Menalkas	33
X: The Reapers	35
XI: The Cyclops	37
XII: The Beloved Youth	40
XIII: Hylas	42
XIV: The Love of Kyniska	45
XV: The Syracusan Women at the Adonis Festival	48
XVI: The Graces, or Hiero	53
XVII: An Encomium of Ptolemy	57
XVIII: An Epithalamium for Helen	61
XIX: The Honey-stealer	63
XX: The Young Cowman	64
XXI: The Fishermen	66
XXII: A Hymn to the Dioskuri	69
XXIV: The Infant Herakles	75
XXV: Herakles the Lion-slayer	79
XXVII: The Lovers' Talk	86
XXVIII: The Distaff	89
XXIX, XXX: Two Aeolic Love-poems	90, 91
The Epigrams	93

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-43219-2 - A Translation of the Idylls of Theocritus

R. C. Trevelyan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---



Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-43219-2 - A Translation of the Idylls of Theocritus

R. C. Trevelyan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION

WE know scarcely anything about the life of Theocritus except what we are able to infer from his own poems. He would seem to have been a Syracusan, and to have been born somewhere about 310 B.C. It is probable that he spent several years between 290 and 283 B.C. in the island of Kos, as the pupil of the elegiac poet and critic, Philetas, and that he there became one of a literary circle which included Leonidas of Tarentum, Asklepiades and Nikias, the Milesian physician and poet. We have no evidence as to where he spent the next period of his life, between 283 and 275 B.C.; but his sixteenth Idyll, in which he courts the patronage of Hiero, the despot of Syracuse, was probably written in Sicily about the year 275. Part at least of the years between 274 and 270 B.C. would seem to have been spent at Alexandria, and Idylls xv and xvi would belong to this period. We know nothing of the closing years of his life, nor of where and when he died. The twenty-eighth Idyll is evidence that he once visited Miletus, and the fourth and fifth show that he was familiar with the neighbourhood of Croton in Southern Italy.

Apart from these few meagre conjectures and inferences, nothing more can be said about his life. Of the man himself, something, though not very much, is revealed in his seventh and sixteenth Idylls, and in the three lyrics at the end of the collection. For the artist, the poems themselves must speak. Although it is impossible to assign dates to any of the Idylls, except the sixteenth, it nevertheless seems likely that most of the pastoral poems were written during his Koan period, or at least before his residence at Alexandria. The eleventh Idyll is sometimes supposed to be his earliest; but the eighth and ninth, if, as I believe, they are his genuine work, may be still earlier. The more realistic and dramatic Idylls, such as II, XIV and XV, probably belong to his maturity, and the same may be said of his epic experiments.

It is difficult to say how close a relation the pastoral poems of Theocritus bore to the songs of the Sicilian, South Italian and Koan country-folk of his day, because scarcely anything remains of Greek popular poetry and folk-song. Yet the realistic pastoral Idylls, such as IV, V and X, seem to show a direct acquaintance with the life of shepherds and herdsmen such as we very seldom find in the poems of later pastoral writers, whether classical or modern. Even the more artificial poems, such as the first and third, may well be literary refinements of peasant singing-matches and serenades, heard by Theocritus in his youth. Almost as important must have been the influence of Sophron, a Syracusan writer of the fifth century, whose prose mimes, now lost except

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-43219-2 - A Translation of the Idylls of Theocritus

R. C. Trevelyan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

## INTRODUCTION

for a few fragments, are known to have suggested to Theocritus both the form and the material for several of his pastoral Idylls, as well as for the *Sorceress* and the *Syracusan Women*, which are poems describing town life.

I have translated all the admittedly genuine Idylls, and such of the doubtful poems as seem to me to possess literary value. I have omitted Idylls xxiii and xxvi, because they are dull, stupid and worthless poems, and certainly not by Theocritus.

I have found it impossible to make my translation from any one of the published texts, and so have been obliged to form my own text, choosing, in corrupt passages, what appear to me to be the most plausible among the various readings proposed by scholars.

The metre which I have used, as the best equivalent for the hexameter, is an unrimed verse of seven accents. Its structure is the same as that of the normal half-stanza of the Scottish ballad, such as:

And mony was the feather bed  
That flattered on the faem;  
And mony was the gude lord's son  
That never mair came haem.

It was also used in the form of rimed couplets by Chapman in his translation of the *Iliad*, and by other Elizabethan poets and translators. Blake, in his *Book of Thel*, was the first to dispense with rime, and vary the position of the *cæsura*.

I have found that a close translation of a Greek hexameter proves, on the average, to be of about the same length as this English verse, and so have been able to translate line for line with very little omission or expansion. The hexameter of Theocritus is undoubtedly a more beautiful, subtle and expressive medium; but the English metre has at least the merit of swiftness of movement, and can be given considerable variety by frequently changing the place of the chief *cæsura*, which naturally follows the fourth metrical accent. Sometimes I have omitted the syllable that should carry the fourth accent, as in the line:

Sweet is the whispering music of yonder pine that sings.

This is an easy and natural variation of the metre, because there is a tendency in a line of seven accents for the first, third, fifth and seventh stresses to be slightly more prominent than the second, fourth and sixth, so that if the weak fourth stress be dropped, and compensated for by a slight pause, the fundamental rhythm is not impaired. This alternation of stronger and weaker stresses also causes a kind of undulation in the rhythm, which gives lightness and swiftness of movement to the verse.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-43219-2 - A Translation of the Idylls of Theocritus

R. C. Trevelyan

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## INTRODUCTION

xi

It is no doubt always best to translate poems into poetry; but that is an ideal which is sometimes difficult of attainment; and so, in the case of two of the epic Idylls, and a number of the epigrams, I have preferred a faithful prose rendering to an unsatisfactory attempt in verse.

In the matter of transliterating the Greek proper names, I have found it impossible to be consistent. I myself prefer the Greek to the Latinised forms. Simaitha and Lakinion seem to me at least as beautiful as Simaetha and Lacinium, and just as harmonious in English verse. Where however our ears are so familiar with the Latin forms, that they have practically become English by adoption, as in the case of Syracuse, Cyclops, Cyprian, Lycidas, etc., I have thought it would be pedantical to insist on the Greek pronunciation. Whatever course I might take would be certain to displease somebody, so I have decided to make no attempt to please anyone except myself.

R. C. TREVELYAN

1925.