Hellenistic Homosexuality: Theocritus' pederastic Idylls and the poetics of reversal[1]

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Introduction

This paper argues against two commonly accepted ideas concerning Theocritus' homoerotic idylls: first, that they can be taken as evidence to argue that the Greek institution of pederasty was ridiculed and/or perceived to be obsolete in Hellenistic times; and second, that the power differential intrinsic in Greek classical pederasty had been lost in the passage to Hellenistic times. Opposing this developmentalist view, the paper argues that Theocritus' idylls elaborate on the same tropes, themes, and structural devices as archaic and classical homoerotic poetry. The seemingly peculiar characteristics of Theocritean homoeroticism derive in fact from previous pederastic poetry. Among the recurrent features in common with the pederastic poetic tradition, the frequent power reversal of Theocritus' idylls apparently subverting the erastes-eromenos hierarchy typical of classical pederasty is not specific to Hellenistic poetry, but is rather part of the legacy of the homoerotic poetry of Theognis, Anacreon, and other archaic poets. Therefore, it cannot be taken as evidence to argue that archaic or classical pederasty is ridiculed or 'deconstructed' in Hellenistic poetry. Such a reversal, both in archaic and Hellenistic homoerotic poetry, does not correspond to an actual degree of flexibility or a potential evolution in the power dynamics of pederasty. Instead, the imagined and feigned inferiority of the erastes further substantiates the thesis that a real, extra-literary hierarchy persisted in structuring homoerotic relationships in the world of Theocritus' contemporaries. Theocritus' wit and irony hinge upon the subversion of this hierarchy separating 'man' and 'boy', and much of it would be lost if we assumed that homoerotic relationships in his time had lost the power differential that shaped the dynamics of pederasty in classical Athens.

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The frequent methodological approach to representations of (homo)sexuality in classical literature since Dover and Foucault is the so-called 'penetration model'. For Dover, erotic relationships in classical Athens revolved around the existence of a power differential between the penetrative 'lover' and the penetrated 'object of desire' reflecting existing hierarchies in classical Greek society.[2] Some scholars, however, have reasonably objected that Dover's model mostly relies on the evidence for classical Athens, and that other contexts, periods, or environments might not as easily reflect this model.[3] Theocritus' homoerotic poems, for instance, seemingly 'take for granted' the *absence* of a power differential and present a new type of homoeroticism that diverges from pederasty.[4] In what follows, I evaluate this 'developmentalist' possibility, asking how well these poems capture dynamics of mutuality and reciprocity, and whether the relationship between ἐρώμενος and ἐραστής has adopted a different 'ethos' from archaic and classical times. I will argue that Theocritean poetry is not unique in representing the older man's sexual desire, his conceptualisation of the relationship in terms of equality and mutuality, and in emphasising the older man's erotic dependence on the boy. While Theocritus constantly subverts the hierarchy inherent in the pederastic relationship, this procedure of reversal is not uniquely 'Hellenistic'. Hence, these features cannot be taken as evidence to argue that Theocritus is deconstructing or ridiculing pederasty. For reasons of space, I will focus in my analysis on *Idylls* 13, 29, 12, 30 (in this order). Examining *Idyll* 13 and the portrayal of the relationship between Heracles and Hylas, I will argue that a disbalance in the power dynamics of pederasty is conceptually fundamental to grasp the irony of the poem. The reversal of the hierarchy, I argue, is a literary phenomenon that does not correspond to any level of flexibility or diachronic development in the erotic relationship in the extraliterary world; rather, it illuminates the persistence of the traditional hierarchy in the reality existing outside literature. By looking at *Idyll* 29, I will also consider other elements that potentially differ from archaic and classical representations of pederasty in Greek literature, and will argue that the similarities between them make it difficult, if not impossible, to sustain a developmentalist thesis. One important element which is shared by the previous and the later homoerotic poetic tradition is indeed what I call the 'poetics of reversal': the brief analysis of *Idyll* 12 and 30 shows that

[2] Dover (1978), 84, 100-9; Skinner (2005), 7; Foucault (1985), 35 et passim.
[3] Lear (2013), 116, 120.
[4] Lambert (2004), 82; Lear (2013), 120.

such poetics is again fundamental to Theocritean humour, but was equally vital to archaic pederastic poetry. With reference to Greek epigram, I will reiterate my argument about the paradoxical persistence of an extraliterary hierarchy that is to be grasped through the 'poetics of reversal'.

Idyll 13, the ironies of power dynamics, and the illusion of reversal

Idyll 13 presents the relationship between Heracles and Hylas as undeniably pederastic,[5] and thus constitutes a promising starting point for discussion. Theocritus seemingly sets out to ennoble and legitimise the experience of human *eros* through the parallel provided by Heracles' love for a boy (ἤρατο παιδός, 'he loved a boy', 6), described in ways and tropes that make it sound like a typical pederastic relationship of the archaic and classical periods. The paternal role that Heracles assumes is in line with the pederastic tradition,[6] as well as the didactic function that is notably a feature of archaic and classical pederasty as glorified in the elegies of Theognis and in the dialogues of Plato (καί νιν πάντ' ἐδίδασκε, πατὴρ ὡσεὶ φίλον υἱόν, / ὅσσα μαθὼν ἀγαθὸς καὶ ἀοίδιμος αὐτὸς ἔγεντο, 'and he taught him everything which had made him noble and glorious, as a father teaches his beloved son', 8-9).[7] The poem reflects a transitional passage from adolescence to manhood, from ἐρώμενος to ἐραστής.[8]

Lines 14-15, however, might seem to refute this reading and instead be nuanced with a sense of mutuality and equality within the pederastic relationship of Heracles and Hylas. Theocritus contextualises the relationship by expanding on Heracles' hopes that Hylas might strive to emulate his heroic example (ὡς αὐτῷ κατὰ θυμὸν ὁ παῖς πεπoναμένος εἴη, 'so that the boy might be fashioned to his mind', 14), and so reach 'true manhood' αὐτῷ δ' εὖ ἕλκων (15). The expression has been diversely obelised or explained with Σ Theocr. 13.15b Wendel as implying the word ζυγόν, 'yoke'. The metaphor of the 'yoke of love' has been identified as a '*Lieblingsmetapher*' frequently found in Theocritus,[9] strongly pointing towards a shared and mutual experience of love.[10] Giubilo reasonably points out that the metaphor of the yoke of love is deprived

[5] Pulbrook (1983), 28.
[6] Hunter (1999), 268.
[7] Dover (1987), 182.
[8] Hunter (1993a), 38-41.
[9] Yet cf. infra.
[10] Rumpel (1961), 94; Giubilo (2015), 256. Cf. Skinner (2005), 64.

of its vehicle in no other locus. Even Giubilo, while interpreting εὖ ἕλκων absolutely ('taking the right direction with him'), maintains that the tradition is correct in interpreting it as an allusion to 'sharing a life journey together'.[11]

It is likely, however, that the scholiast was influenced in his interpretation by ἴσῳ ζυγῷ in the preceding *Idyll* 12 (cf. *infra*). I accept Gow's emendation of the syntagm to οὕτω δ' ἐϋκλειῶς ('so [as a result of his teaching] gloriously'): Theocritus would be alluding to Heracles' wish that Hylas might reach manhood by attaining κλέος, 'glory'.[12] If anything, the expression reinforces the idea of a precise pederastic hierarchy. Moreover, the shared life of Heracles and Hylas (χωρὶς δ' οὐδέποκ' ἦς, 'he never parted from him', 10) is not particularly representative of an equal relationship. A life of communion does not necessarily reflect any 'Hellenistic' desire to equate the atypical 'blessed couple' of Plato's *Phaedrus* who enjoy an everlasting, balanced, and reciprocal union.[13] In fact, undermining his previous claim, Theocritus introduces Telamon as the loyal ἑταῖρος, 'companion' of Heracles (38), the one who is at his side while Heracles' boy has gone to fetch water for them.

Pederasty is still present in its traditional form, and it is exactly upon its power differential that the poem relies. Much of Theocritus' irony lies in the subversion of this hierarchy. At the beginning of the poem, Heracles wishes to teach Hylas how to attain glory by following his example (9), but he ends up ruining his heroic reputation when the Argonauts call him a λιποναύτης, a 'deserter' (73). Theocritus began his *Idyll* by drawing attention to Heracles' immortality – crucially adumbrated in the *Argonautica* (1.1315-20).[14] Here, instead, it is Hylas who attains immortal status (72),[15] and Theocritus deliberately and humorously juxtaposes his fate with Heracles' (note the antithesis: οὕτω μὲν κάλλιστος Ὕλας...Ἡρακλέην δ', 'thus fairest Hylas... while Heracles', 72-73).

Equally telling is the simile likening Heracles to a lion. The generic Apollonian τις θὴρ ἄγριος, 'some wild beast', hearing the sound of μήλων, 'sheep' (1.1243-44) becomes in Theocritus specifically an

[11] Giubilo (2015), 262: 'condivisione di un percorso di vita'; cf. Gow (1938), 13-14.
[12] Gow (1938), 14.
[13] Hunter (1996), 181.
[14] Hunter (2021), 200.
[15] Griffiths (1996), 104.

ὠμοφάγος λίς, a 'carnivorous lion' hearing a νεβροῦ φθεγξαμένας, a 'crying fawn' (62) (a metaphor which conjures up also a specifically pederastic intertext, namely Thgn. 949-54).[16] The humorous simile works through a procedure of reversal: the irony of the poet lies in the realisation that love has not only turned the civiliser Heracles into a beast,[17] but into the same animal that he had killed (ὃς τὸν λῖν ὑπέμεινε τὸν ἄγριον, 'he who withstood the wild lion', 6). Hierarchic play appears then to have a fundamental role in Theocritus' structural strategy of the poem. As Konstan concludes, 'Hylas would henceforward be reckoned among the blessed ones, while the Argonauts sneered at Heracles' dereliction. Heracles is thus diminished in the degree that Hylas is elevated'.[18]

Such reversal, however, is by no means a signal of diachronic change. According to the developmentalist view of Theocritus' poems, 'we have moved outside the city-state into a world where the neat binaries between older and younger, powerful and powerless, seem to have unravelled and where male same-sex relationships seem to have lost their social function and legitimacy'.[19] The story of Hylas, however, hinges just upon the existence of such a power differential. Theocritus' poem derives its wit from the reversal of this hierarchy; the poem would lose much of its humour if we assumed that the conception of 'homoeroticism' encapsulated in the poem aligned with a model deprived of such hierarchy. Of course, this does not exclude the possibility that this kind of erotic relationship was perceived as obsolete by Theocritus' contemporaries and that Theocritus' hierarchical reversal humorously poke fun at its outdatedness. As we will see, however, this option has to be discarded.[20]

New representations of homoeroticism? *Idyll* 29 and the similarities with traditional homoerotic poetry

Idyll 29 might appear potentially different from common representations of pederasty. In this poem, an ἐραστής in the throes of love laments being emotionally subjugated to a fickle and faithless παῖς.

[16] Dover (1987), 187.
[17] Griffiths (1996), 103; Mastronarde (1968), 278.
[18] Konstan (2021), 527.
[19] Lambert (2004), 82.
[20] Gutzwiller (1991), 108 argues that the deflation of Heracles' heroism produces amusement but never reaches the levels of derision and ridicule of Polyphemus in 11.

Intercalating his lamentation with paraenetic advice, the lover warns the boy in traditional terms about the precariousness of young age and lectures him on social approval and reputation. Hunter argues that there is an archaicising tone in the idealisation of pederasty of the ἐραστής: οἶνος, ὦ φίλε παῖ, λέγεται, καὶ ἀλάθεα ('wine, dear boy, and truth, the saying goes', 1) echoes a famous sympotic (and pederastic) motto of Alcaeus (fr. 366 Voigt); αἰ γὰρ ὦδε πόῃς, ἄγαθος μὲν ἀκούσεαι / ἐξ ἄστων ('for if you do so, you shall gain a good reputation in town', 21-22) recalls the pivotal role of civic reputation in Theognidean elegy; in ἀλλ᾽ αἴ μοί τι πίθοιο νέος προγενεστέρῳ ('listen to me, as you are young and I am older', 10), he appeals to his wisdom and age to advise the young man; finally, the lover wishes that they could become like Achilles and Patroclus after the ἐρώμενος' coming of age (ἀλλάλοισι πελώμεθ᾽ Ἀχιλλέιοι φίλοι, 'we might be Achillean friends', 34). According to Hunter, however, the ἐραστής' seriousness and appeal to the 'archaic nobility' of pederasty are seemingly trivialised and undercut throughout. Hunter even envisages a 'deconstruction' of pederasty when the lover's self-debasement is paralleled with the Heraclean labours (νῦν μὲν κἀπὶ τὰ χρύσια μᾶλ᾽ ἔνεκεν σέθεν / βαίην καὶ φύλακον νεκύων πεδὰ Κέρβερον, 'now I would even go and seek the golden apples or fetch Cerberus, guardian of the dead', 37-38), and when the physical component of the lover's desire emerges as opposed to a supposedly de-eroticised archaic concern for the boy's paideia.[21] Importantly, Lambert and Hunter argue that it seems uniquely Hellenistic for the mature lover to expect to be reciprocated in a form of mutual and symmetrical relationship, like in Plato's *Phaedrus*.[22]

Besides Theognis, however, the poetry of Theocritus is equally redolent of Anacreon.[23] For the pederastic lover frequently takes the stance, in archaic as in Hellenistic Greece, of a helpless lover that yearns for or envisions the reciprocation of his passion. For instance, Anacreon is helpless in *PMG* 357, where he begs Dionysus to let Cleobulus reciprocate his love: Κλεοβούλῳ δ᾽ ἀγαθὸς γένεο / σύμβουλος, τὸν ἐμόν γ᾽ ἔρωτ᾽, ὦ Δεόνυσε, δέχεσθαι ('to Cleobulus, Dionysus, give good advice, and tell him to accept my love'; 9-11).[24] The lover's ironic portrayal, marked by a helpless yearning for erotic reciprocity and an almost crude

[21] Hunter (1996), 170, 179-80. There is some evidence that pederasty was problematised and/or ridiculed in the course of the classical period, as suggested by some passages in Aristophanes, Plato and Aristotle: cf. Kanellakis (2021), 9. It is far from certain, however, that the evidence can be taken as signs of a shift in the general conception of homosexuality and pederasty.
[22] Ibid., 181; Lambert (2004), 77.
[23] Ibid., 188. Cf. Pretagostini (2007), 11 et passim.
[24] Skinner (2005), 69-70.

element of desire for the boy, would seemingly contribute to Theocritus' departure from archaic pederastic values.[25] All these themes, however, already found expression in Anacr. *PMG* 378: ἀναπέτομαι δὴ πρὸς Ὄλυμπον πτερύγεσσι κούφῃς / διὰ τὸν Ἔρωτ'· οὐ γὰρ ἐμοὶ <παῖς ἐ>θέλει συνηβᾶν ('I fly up to the Olympus on light wings because of my passion: <the boy> does not want to enjoy youth with me'; cf. the Theocritean συνέραν, 32).[26]

The aspiration to mutuality, most importantly, cannot be regarded as typical of and specific to Hellenistic poetry. As demonstrated by Davidson, the rhetoric of χάρις was central to archaic homoerotic Greek poetry: in pressuring their beloved to remember their 'favours', poets-ἐρασταί constantly framed their relationship with them in terms of a reciprocal and symmetrical exchange, even when they expressed their disappointment for having such expectations unmet (cf. Thgn. 1263-66, 1331-33, 1339-40; Pi. fr.123 Snell-Maehler).[27] The idea of mutuality is specifically homoerotic, with Theognis, most eminently, theorising it in 1367-68 (παιδός τοι χάρις ἐστί· γυναικὶ δὲ πιστὸς ἑταῖρος / οὐδείς, ἀλλ' αἰεὶ τὸν παρεόντα φιλεῖ, 'gratitude is the virtue of boys, while a woman can never be the loyal companion of anyone, for she will always love whoever is at hand').[28] Theognis again offers a relevant parallel in a pederastic poem where the ἐραστής puns on the ambiguity inherent to the word χάρις: ὦ παῖ, ἐπεί τοι δῶκε θεὰ χάριν ἱμερόεσσαν / Κύπρις, σὸν δ' εἶδος πᾶσι νέοισι μέλει, / τῶνδ' ἐπάκουσον ἐπῶν καὶ ἐμὴν χάριν ἔνθεο θυμῷ ('boy, since the goddess of Cyprus gave you a charming *kharis* and every young man is thinking about your beauty, listen to my words and put my *kharis* in your heart', 1319-21).[29] These three lines not only further suggest that homoerotic χάρις was conceptualised as 'reciprocal exchange' as early as Theognis, but also that the ἐραστής was capable of perceiving the erotic and sexual side of the relationship.[30]

Similarly, following Selle's recent emendation, 1384-85 also 'wink to an audience of experienced *erastai*' and derive their wit from Theognis' sexual innuendo: γίνεται ἀνθρώποισιν ἔρως χαλεπώτατον ἄχθος / ἂν μὴ

[25] Cf. Hunter (1996), 189.
[26] Cf. also Anacr. PMG 407.
[27] Hubbard (2013), 94; Davidson (2007), 42, 45-46. Cf. Golden (1984), 316; Calame (1999), 24.
[28] Lear (2011), 392. Cf. Hubbard (2002), 289.
[29] MacLachlan (1993), 67-69 for Theognidean homoerotic χάρις; cf. 56-72 for the erotic meaning of χάρις.
[30] The same erotic meaning transpires from Thgn. 1299-1304, 1329-34. Palmieri (2019), 132ff. comments on Id. 30.1-4, and believes that the meaning of χάρις differs from its 'ethical' archaic connotation. Given the Theognidean specimen, one feels compelled to re-evaluate the 'distancing effect' that Palmieri, in agreement with Hunter, senses here.

Κυπρογενὴς δῶ λύσιν ἐκ χαλεπῶν ('if the goddess of Cyprus does not release them from its pain, love becomes a most painful burden for men').[31] A similar, almost vulgar wink can be detected in 1267-70, where Theognis compares the proverbial infidelity of παῖδες to that of a horse that remains indifferent to his rider's fall and would easily carry another man on his back (cf. also 1249-52). Writing about book 2 of the Theognidean corpus, Vetta once observed: 'the fundamental parenetic intonation would scarcely be comparable to the distinctly different atmosphere that can be felt, for instance, in the Theocritean παιδικά'.[32] The reason why Vetta envisions the paraenetic and the erotic (or Hunter the 'physicality of the lover's desire and [...] the archaic ethos')[33] as contrasting elements is unclear; both are present in Theognidean poetry.[34]

Most importantly, what breathes life into the Anacreontic, Theognidean, as well as the Theocritean poems is the reversal of the traditional hierarchy intrinsic in the pederastic relationship.[35] Anacr. *PMG* 360 is evidence of this systematic process of inversion: the poet describes his desire for a boy that has no regard for him and 'holds the reins of his soul' (ὦ παῖ παρθένιον βλέπων / δίζημαί σε, σὺ δ' οὐ κλύεις / οὐκ εἰδὼς ὅτι τῆς ἐμῆς / ψυχῆς ἡνιοχεύεις, 'oh boy with the girlish glance, I am seeking you, but you do not listen, unaware that you hold the reins of my soul'). As has been noted, the poem does not merely constitute a parallel to the πῶλε Θρηκίη, the Thracian filly of *PMG* 417, but rather belongs to a typically archaic τόπος of horse-riding in lyric poetry that expresses the desire for (sexual) domination of the male or female love object (cf. *supra*, Thgn. 1267-70).[36] 'The point of 360' – Lear writes – 'resides in the reversal of terms, which emphasises the power of the *eromenos*, not that of the *erastes*'.[37]

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[31] Selle (2013), 467.

[32] Vetta (1972), 285: 'la [...] fondamentale intonazione parenetica si lascerebbe difficilmente accostare all'atmosfera ben diversa che si respira ad esempio nei παιδικά teocritei'. Vetta even explains the simile comparing the boy to a horse in pedagogical terms: cf. Vetta (1980), 57.

[33] Hunter (1996),180.

[34] Lear (2011), 385. Palmieri (2019), 133 follows Hunter and argues that Idyll 30, discussed below, clearly toys with the archaic 'version' of pederasty and exploits the ambiguity of the term.

[35] Skinner (2005), 68. Moreover, if one accepts Gow's reading of lines 19-20 in 29 (Gow 1952, 508), namely that the boy is accepting the love of men of a higher social stand to make his way into the upper classes of society, this corroborates the hypothesis that the poem is playing with social hierarchies.

[36] Lear (2008), 63.

[37] Ibid.

We should also note that such close re-creation of the dynamics inherent in Anacreon's poetry does not contribute to a sense of historicising distance that allows us to 'deconstruct' pederasty, as Hunter argues.[38] Acosta-Hughes, for instance, has highlighted how some of Theocritus' non-homoerotic poems (3,11) re-create the typical Anacreontic scenario of a man addressing the absent, distant, or unwilling woman.[39] This does not necessarily entail that Theocritus was highlighting the difference between Anacreon's heterosexual liaisons and the heterosexual 'ethos' of his time.

Finally, we should also note that Theognis' elegies and the *Theognidea* focus on the poet's concerns about the possibility of being erotically subjugated by the ἐρώμενος.[40] As Edmunds observes, one of the poet's crucial concerns 'is the dread of domination by his passion';[41] but in fact Theognis constantly presents such domination as a fact. In 1235-38, for instance, Theognis laments being mentally enslaved to his beloved boy (ὦ παῖ, ἄκουσον ἐμεῦ δαμάσας φρένας, 'boy, you who have overpowered my mind, please listen to me'). δαμάσσειν, employed in the same manner in 1341-44[42] and 1345-50, has in itself an erotic connotation: it was used by Homer and Hesiod in reference to mythical rapes, where women were 'overpowered' by either men or gods, or to erotic subjugation in general.[43] Perhaps we should not go as far as saying that Theognis represents himself as 'effeminised' by the boy, but it is significant to detect the poetics of reversal at work in these lines. One of his distichs, 253-54, encapsulates well such 'poetics of reversal': αὐτὰρ ἐγὼν ὀλίγης παρὰ σεῦ οὐ τυγχάνω αἰδοῦς / ἀλλ' ὥσπερ μικρὸν παῖδα λόγοις μ' ἀπατᾷς ('yet I receive no respect from you, and you deceive me with your words as if I were a little child'). The behaviour of the ἐρώμενος turns the tables, rendering Theognis a 'little child'. As Lear writes, 'these lines contain several of the key themes of the pederastic elegies: exchange between man and youth, the youth's betrayal of the man, and the reversal of power roles between them'.[44]

[38] Hunter (1996), 179 et passim.
[39] Acosta-Hughes (2006), 46; Acosta-Hughes (2010b), 154-8.
[40] It is hard to distinguish between authentic Theognidean poems and later Theognidea. Book 2, however, which contains the majority of the pederastic elegies, seems virtually authentic: Lewis (1985), 197; West (1974), 43; Vetta (1980), xi-xii. Cf. Selle (2013), 472; Lear (2011), 379.
[41] Edmunds (1988), 81-82.
[42] Lewis (1985), 217.
[43] Cassidy (2019), 447-48; Lewis (1985), 212-13.
[44] Lear (2011), 381.

In fact, poem 29 also enacts such reversal. While the ἐραστής is clearly subjugated from the beginning of the poem, the *Idyll* starts with the lover dispensing advice and wisdom to the younger boy. In the end, however, the lover imagines that in the future the boy will pursue him, and threatens him that he will not 'come out to the door' (τότα δ' οὐδὲ κάλεντος ἐπ' αὐλείαις θύραις / προμόλοιμί κε, παυσάμενος χαλέπω πόθω, 'then, I will not come out to the door, should you call me, once my burdensome desire ceases to exist', 39-40). Paradoxically, the lover's imagined 'empowered' condition is what sanctions the power reversal in the poem. In his imagined *paraklausithyron*,[45] προμόλοιμι means not simply 'to come', but specifically 'to come out':[46] the speaker is casting the boy into the role of the *exclusus amator* and himself into that of the *dura puella*, so to say. Such reversal hardly mirrors developments in the proper hierarchic structure of pederastic relationships, nor is it symptomatic of a Hellenistic perception of pederasty as 'ridiculous' or 'obsolete'. It is rather part of a homoerotic poetics of reversal that dates back to archaic Greece, [47] which Theocritus expands and elaborates on in typical Hellenistic guise.

A 'modern' gay couple in *Idyll* 12: the only exception?

Idyll 12, however, seems to voice explicit desires of equality and reciprocity. Konstan, for instance, perceives Theocritean love poetry to be essentially structured according to a power dynamic by which the lover's position becomes necessarily inferior to the condition of the beloved.[48] However, he admits that *Idyll* 12 seems to be the only poem in the corpus to depict a mutual and equal relationship, which also happens to be pederastic. To this effect, he believes, Theocritus jettisons the traditional 'hierarchical' terminology and vocabulary of archaic pederasty, substituting ἐραστής with εἴσπνηλος ('inspirer') and ἐρώμενος with ἀίτης ('hearer')[49] to make the scenario more plausible.[50]

In this ἐπιβατήριον, the lover welcomes back his beloved boy after his two-day absence, and prays that Loves might breathe 'equally' on them, so as to render them the subject of future renown. Through an

[45] Or, to be more precise, komos: Cairns (2020), 262-71.
[46] Hunter (1996), 176-77; Gow (1952), 510.
[47] Golden (1984), 312-17.
[48] Konstan (2021), 524-26; cf. Skinner (2005), 233.
[49] The translation of the two terms is from Gow (1952). While the translation and etymology of the former are quite evident, those of the latter are uncertain and remain speculative.
[50] Konstan (2021), 529.

apparently Pindaric flight, the speaker addresses the Megarians of Nisaea and praises them for having established a kissing contest as a ritual in honour of their guest Diocles of Athens. Mutuality is explicitly and strongly evoked between the speaker and the beloved through the constant use of the dual (δίω δή τινε τώδε μετὰ προτέροισι γενέσθην / φῶθ', 'these two, among those who lived in the past, were excellent', 12-13). φιλεῖν and ἀντιφιλεῖν here ('loving' and 'loving back', 15,16), as well as φιλότης ('love', 20), substitute for ἐρᾶσθαι and ἔρως, which are instead usually employed for unrequited passion in the Theocritean corpus.[51]

Such mutuality may be especially suggested through the apparently Theocritean *Lieblingsmetapher* of the shared yoke (ἀλλήλους δ' ἐφίλησαν ἴσῳ ζυγῷ, 'they loved each other under an equal yoke', 15), as Giubilo says.[52] However, this is by no means a favourite metaphor of Theocritus pointing towards 'la condivisione di una medesima condizione'. Giubilo mentions '17, 20-21' [*sic*] and '30, 28-29'. Yet 27 appears as spurious,[53] and χρή με μάκρον σχόντα τὸν ἄμφενα / ἕλκην τὸν ζύγον ('I must drag the yoke, stretching forth my neck') in 30.28-29, which does constitute a relevant intertextual parallel given its pederastic content, hardly alludes to an equal experience of love: quite the opposite, indeed. It has escaped scholarly notice that ἄμφενα and ζυγόν resound with a Theognidean reminiscence: cf. αἰεὶ παιδοφίλῃσιν ἐπὶ ζυγὸν αὐχένι κεῖται / δύσλοφον ('the neck of those men who love boys is always weighed down by a heavy yoke', Thgn. 1357-58). Notice how Theognis defines the ill-fated yoke as a unique prerogative of the lover, with no corresponding counterpart for the beloved. The same metaphor occurs again with the same value alongside the horse-riding τόπος in Ibyc. *PMG* 287 in a possibly homoerotic context: ἦ μὰν τρομέω νιν ἐπερχόμενον / ὥστε φερέζυγος ἵππος ἀεθλοφόρος ποτὶ γήρᾳ ἀέκων σὺν ὄχεσφι θοοῖς ἐς ἅμιλλαν ἔβα ('how I tremble at the thought of his assaults, as a victorious horse unwillingly takes part in the race with swift chariot still bearing the yoke, even if old', 5-7).[54] This renders the exclamation in Theocritus 30 further disconsolate and casts doubt on the optimism of the lover in 12.

[51] Lambert (2004), 76.
[52] Cf. supra, n.10.
[53] Dover (1987), xviii.
[54] Palmieri (2019), 145.

In fact, such rhetoric of mutuality and equality is constantly undercut. For *Idyll* 12 casts doubt on the boy's behaviour and feelings: he has been away for 'two days and nights' (τρίτῃ σὺν νυκτὶ καὶ ἠοῖ, 1) – to be paralleled with the suspicious absence of Delphis in 2.155-58[55] and that of Aeschinas' beloved, symptomatic of her disregard for him in 14.44-49 – and the εἴσπνηλος feels compelled to defend his eulogy of the boy (23-26). The delusional nature of the lover's reverie appears clear especially through the overheated enthusiasm that permeates the poem.[56] Considering Giangrande's persuasive hypothesis that the speaker is a ludicrous rustic who tries conjuring up Hellenistic γλῶσσαι such as the obscure Amyclean and Thessalian words (nowhere else attested) and that distorts his aetiological account of the ritual in honour of Diocles,[57] the picture of the pathetic lover in poem 12 appears gradually less serious and more delusional. Again, as in *Idyll* 29, mutuality and equality are never actualised; they remain unattainable ideals of the abject lover, once again dethroned from his naturally superior position in Greek society to one of subordination and ridicule in poetry.

The deployment of Theognidean imagery is palpable in the poem and it contributes to its allusivity.[58] The Theocritean lover envisions a final, puzzling scenario, the Megarian kissing competition, in which a man's skill in judging boys' kisses parallels the precision of a Lydian touchstone (Λυδίᾳ ἶσον ἔχειν πέτρᾳ στόμα, χρυσὸν ὁποίᾳ / πεύθονται, μὴ φαῦλος, ἐτήτυμον ἀργυραμοιβοί, '[he prays that he might] have lips just like the Lydian touchstone, by which moneychangers test true gold to make sure that it is not false', 36-37), distinctly echoing Theognis' preoccupation with δόλος, 'deceit' (cf. 117-18; 1013-16).[59] Theognis compares testing a friend's intentions with discovering counterfeit gold, in a striking parallel to the *Idyll* (119-28).[60] The ambivalence of Theognis' feelings about the relationship is even more substantial than in Theocritus, with Theognis' ambitions 'appearing impossible against such a dark background' of doubt and concern.[61] Theocritus is clearly using the allusion to undercut his speaker's enthusiasm. In light of Theognis'

[55] XII and II are juxtaposed in the Antinoë codex of Theocritus (P.Ant): Hunt & Johnson (1930). Gutzwiller (1996),139-42 has demonstrated that this section of the codex shows 'strong indications of editorial design' palpable in the thematic arrangement of the poems.
[56] Verity and Hunter (2002), 101
[57] Giangrande (1971), 103-4 et passim.
[58] Hunter (1996), 191-92.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., 190; Hejduk (2019), 37.
[61] Hejduk (2019), 38.

continuous presentation of the boy's faithlessness, however, such an allusion makes Theocritus align with Theognis, rather than demystify or deconstruct archaic pederasty. Theocritus is elaborating, with wit, irony, and allusivity, on a trope that archaic poets had already explored and presented repeatedly. There is nothing here for Theocritus to 'deconstruct': the archaic poets showed themselves extremely aware of the downsides of pederasty, as well as of the power reversals that it entailed (at least in their own imagination).

Idyll 30: an effeminate *erastes*?

Such poetics of reversal is also to be detected in *Idyll* 30. The poem opens with the assimilation of the passion of the ἐραστής to a disease that has struck the speaker for two months (Ὤαι τὼ χαλέπω καὶνομόρω τῶδε νοσήματος· / τετόρταιος ἔχει, παῖδος ἔρος μῆνά με δεύτερον, 'Ah! This burdensome and deadly sickness! A quartan passion has been holding me in its grip for two months', 1-2). As Hunter rightly notes, this intermittent fever, as well as the deployment of the word δεύτερον, recall Callimachus' description of Cydippe's illness (ἑπτὰ τεταρταίῳ μῆνας ἔκαμνε πυρί, 'she was ill with a quartan fever for seven months'; Callim. *Aet*. fr. 75.16 Pf.).[62] Yet surely this also ought to recall Simaetha's ἀλλά μέ τις καπυρὰ νόσος ἐξεσάλαξεν / κείμαν δ᾽ ἐν κλιντῆρι δέκ᾽ ἄματα καὶ δέκα νύκτας ('but a burning sickness shook me, and I lay for ten days and ten nights on the bed', 2.85-86) – an intertextual parallel to which we should add the description of both Simaetha and the pederastic speaker in 30 falling in love at the sight of Delphis and the unnamed boy and hardly managing to return home (οὐδ᾽ ὡς πάλιν οἴκαδ᾽ ἀπῆνθον / ἔγνων, 'I could not tell how I got back home again', 2.84-85; εἰς οἶκον δ᾽ ἀπέβαν ἔλκος ἔχων καῖνο⟨ν ἐν ἤπατι⟩, 'I went back home, with a fresh wound inside of me', 30.10).

Because of its Sapphic meter and Aeolic inspiration, moreover, the theme of the malady of love most probably evokes Sappho's 'jealousy ode' (fr. 31 V.), which had been a clear antecedent to the Hellenistic literalisation of the trope of erotic sickness.[63] This is also suggested by the sparse references to Sapphic poetry scattered throughout the poem,[64] and by the fact that the same poem by Sappho was indeed already

[62] Hunter (1996), 185; Palmieri (2019), 22.
[63] Palmieri (2019), 11, 131; Pretagostini (2007), 18; Fassino and Prauscello (2001), 19. Note that the Asclepiadeus maior was also known as Σαπφικὸν ἑκκαιδεκασύλλαβον.
[64] Palmieri (2019), 134, especially on the smile of the boy and the smile of Aphrodite in Sapph. fr.1 V (p.138), and the fawn simile shared with the new 'senility' fragment (p.148).

echoed in *Idyll* 2.[65] The triangular relationship of intertextuality suggests that Theocritus intends both Simaetha and the Sapphic persona to be evoked by the pederastic lover here. A less direct but still likely intertext is Euripides' *Hippolytus*: again, the Ἀφροδίτας νόσῳ ('sickness of Aphrodite', 765-66) striking Phaedra ill seems to be a female prerogative in its exacerbated and literal form.[66] The gendered erotics of νόσος then appear to give this ἐραστής in 30 interestingly feminine connotations, potentially subverting established traditional hierarchies of pederasty through feminisation. The nosological definition of lovesickness is not unprecedented in previous Greek erotic poetry: the equation of 'erotic seizure' and 'illness' was already a well-established one in early Greek lyric.[67] While the broader *topos* of the 'pathology' of love was widespread in all kinds of erotic poetry in ancient Greece, both homoerotic and heteroerotic, the literalisation of the metaphor (not 'love is like illness', but 'love is the cause of literal illness') with a consequent exacerbation of the emotion conveyed, is part of what looks like a predominantly female tradition.

Theocritus' lover explicitly elaborates on the trope, re-writing at once his Simaetha, 'arguably the most important milestone [*sc*. in the development of the trope of *Liebeskummer*] after Sappho fr.31',[68] as well as Callimachus' Cydippe and Euripides' Phaedra.[69] As Hunter also notices, the lines are redolent of Pindar's skolion (fr. 123 S.-M.) about the powerful effects of Theoxenus' gaze on a crowd of potential ἐρασταί.[70] Yet Theocritus capitalises on and exaggerates the precedent, and the event constitutes the starting point for the lamentation of the ἐραστής, who might even become effeminised in the process allowed by the poetics of reversal.[71] If we accepted this reading, the poetics of reversal would acquire a particularly pronounced aspect: as has been noted, the boy's description is emphatically feminising (especially in the application of

[65] Palmieri (2019), 131; Pretagostini (2007), 18; Acosta-Hughes (2010b), 110. Palmieri believes that Callimachus might have been a stronger influence on the idyll than Sappho, but the Aeolic inspiration of the poem as a whole warns us to take the 'jealousy ode' seriously as a fundamental model.
[66] With Cydippe, Callimachus may be re-writing Euripides' Phaedra: cf. Rynearson (2009), 347.
[67] Faraone (2001), 44.
[68] Kanellakis (2021), 10.
[69] Ibid., 7.
[70] Hunter (1996), 184.
[71] The beginning of 11 does introduce the motif of the sickness of love, yet Polyphemus' passion is never framed in such 'medical' terms.

the gendered ὑμαλίκων in 20).[72] This emphasis would then be explained by the humorous contrast with the older lover's effeminacy.

While the use of the 'pathology of love' in a literal sense in poem 30 *might* effeminise the older man by reference to Sappho, Phaedra, and Simaetha, Calame importantly notes that the 'pathology of love' – broadly meant – fundamentally affected anyone, of any gender, expressing feelings towards an individual of any gender in archaic melic poetry.[73] It is completely possible that the reader of poem 30 might have not perceived the speaker as specifically effeminate. At the same time, however, Calame is quick in pointing out that the *topos* of the pathology of love seems to be constantly employed in melic poetry in the (literary) exploration of asymmetrical relationships.[74] According to Calame, this intense expression of feelings might be used to fill up the power gap between older and younger, 'this décalage, this constant erotic asymmetry'.[75] A quick look at *Idyll* 30 shows that Calame is right in detecting a connection with power dynamics. The lover's speech to his soul in 30 fundamentally hinges on the age gap between him and his beloved boy: he emphasises his age by mentioning his grey hair (λεύκαις οὐκέτ' ἴσαισθ' ὅττι φόρης ἐν κροτάφοις τρίχας, 'don't you know that you have grey hair on your brow?', 13), the inappropriateness for a person of his age to be unwise (ὥρα τοι φρονεήν, 'it is time for you to be wise', 14) and associate with younger men (τὸ δ'ἄρ' ἦς λώιον ἔμμεναι / ξέννον τὼν χαλέπων παῖδος ἐρώ⟨των προγενέστερον⟩, 'for an older man it is better to be alien to the burdensome love of boys', 16-7), who in the end conduct a different type of life (τῷ μὲν γὰρ βίος ἔρπει ἴσα γόννοις ἐλάφω θόας, 'a boy's life passes like the running of a swift deer', 18) and will prefer to be around other young men (τὸ δ'αὖτε γλυκέρας ἄνθεμον ἅβας πεδ' ὑμαλίκων / μένει, 'the flower of his sweet youth stays with his companions', 20-1). The same *topos* of the inappropriateness of loving in connection to age appears in a homoerotic context in Simon. *IEG*^{2} 21= fr. 8 G.-P. and Ibyc. *PMG* 287, as well as the Theoxenus ode of Pindar, and all are likely intertexts.[76] Again, those who have seen the reflection of the

[72] Palmieri (2019), 153-4.
[73] Calame (2021), 48.
[74] Calame (2021), 47, 57.
[75] Calame (2021), 57. Admittedly, it is difficult to ascertain here whether Calame means that the asymmetry puts older or younger on top of the hierarchy. From Calame 1999, 24, it seems that Calame regards the young individual to be generally in a privileged position and that the act of song is an equalising element for the older lover. In the new article, however, he talks of 'an asymmetrical relationship in terms of age' (p. 47).
[76] Kyriakou (2018), 76; Palmieri (2019), 141; Pretagostini (2007), 18; Catenacci (2000), 60.

ἐραστής on the inappropriateness of loving a younger boy as the sign of a critique of archaic pederasty do not consider the similarities between Theocritus and his precedents.[77] Theocritus, then, might have been less interested in characterising the older man in 30 as effeminate than in depicting him in a condition of exacerbated inferiority – a condition that he takes from archaic pederastic poetry without deconstructing it. The poignance of such a condition of 'exacerbated inferiority' lies in the contrast with the theoretical power dynamics of the pederastic relationship. Again, reversal of power is at the core of Theocritus' literary representation of (homo)eroticism.

One could draw a parallel with Hellenistic epigram to gauge how such poetics work: the homoerotic epigrams, especially those of book 12 of the Anthology, connect the male gaze of the lover to an experience of suffering.[78] Like Theocritus 30, they have also appeared to be part of a tradition that dates back to Pindar's Theoxenus.[79] The epigrams bring the motif to exhaustion, obsessively concentrating on feelings of helplessness and on the bittersweet suffering of the lovers at the sight of their boys. Yet, as cinematic and feminist theory demonstrate, the gaze itself is a concrete tool of power over an objectified reality.[80] In fact, as Fountoulakis proves, the experience of apparent subordination of the lover in Greek epigram betrays its fictitiousness exactly through the homoerotic gaze.[81] Paradoxically, it is through these subversions that we realise that a type of hierarchy must have structured the extra-literary dynamics of homoeroticism experienced by these poets' contemporaries.

What is new to Hellenistic homoerotic poetry?

As Dover himself stated, 'the least profitable way of attempting to characterise Hellenistic poetry as a whole is [...] to omit to ask to what extent archaic and classical poetry bear out the same generalizations'.[82] 'New words and new senses of words', 'the incorporation of epic words and phrases', 'the use of epic

[77] Pretagostini (2007), 110-1. Contra, cf. Palmieri (2019), 147.
[78] Fountoulakis (2013), 297.
[79] Ibid., 298-99.
[80] The term was famously coined by Mulvey (1975) and adopted to fuel critical reflection in feminist studies on the gendered dynamics that are inherent in the way men look at women. For further references on the male gaze and on the 'homosexual gaze', cf. Fountoulakis (2013), 312 n.4.
[81] Ibid., 306. Hubbard (2002) reaches opposite conclusions on the homoerotic male gaze in Pindar.
[82] Dover (1987), lxvii.

material to a different point', 'mythological allusions', 'humanization of the gods' – all these generalisations which might be conjured up when speaking of Hellenistic poetry could as well be applied to archaic poetry.[83] To this list, I suggest, the treatment of pederastic themes should be added. What is instead typical of Hellenistic poetry is its *doctrina*, a profound knowledge of the literature of the past, its tight connection with scholarship and the formation of a literary canon.[84] Peculiar to the homoerotic poems of Theocritus are in fact the awareness and deliberate recreation of themes, structural patterns, and even verbatim expressions, that belonged to a tradition of homoerotic poetry.

Hunter is persuasive in tracking down echoes of pederastic precedents in Theocritean homoerotic poetry. Rather than taking these, however, as evidence for a different or critical attitude towards pederasty, it is important to gauge the process of allusivity at work in these poems, the *arte allusiva* and *doctrina* of the Hellenistic poet living in a world where poetry was being systematised and canonised. When *Idyll* 29 begins with the opening line of a homoerotic poem of Alcaeus, when the speaker of *Idyll* 12 conjures up the pederastic parallel of the burdensome ζυγόν or of counterfeit gold,[85] when *Idyll* 30 revives Pindar's Theoxenus, and in the recreation of the 'poetics of reversal' that confuse the social status of older and younger, Theocritus can count on his reader's erudition, evoke literary precedents of pederasty, and imbue his poems with humour and sarcasm without necessarily deconstructing pederasty or challenging its hierarchy. Instead, recreating and reproposing the dynamics of previous homoerotic poetry, Theocritus evokes literary precedents, breathing new life into them, developing the introspective and individualistic dimension of his models,[86] and exacerbating their condition of helplessness.

This does not mean that Theocritus only imbues the homoerotic idylls with pederastic tropes / allusions and the heterosexual ones with *topoi* / references derived from archaic heterosexual poetry: besides *Idyll* 30, for example, *Idyll* 12 also opens with an allusion to archaic lyric like 29. This time, however, the allusion is clearly not pederastic: it is most likely Sapph. fr. 48 V.[87] The metaphor of the 'yoke of love', which

[83] Ibid., lxvi-lxvii. Cf. Acosta-Hughes (2010a), 81-91; Nelson (2018), 225-71.
[84] Ibid., lxxii; Cairns (1979), 11-12.
[85] Cf. Hunter (1993b) for the possible imitation of a pederastic poem of Simonides (fr. 22 West) in Lycidas' propemptikon for Ageanax.
[86] Palmieri (2019), 7.
[87] Gow (1952), 222; Kyriakou (2018), 57. Contra, Hunter (1996), 186.

probably activates an allusion to a specific pederastic intertext in 12 and 30, is nonetheless hardly exclusive to pederastic poetry (cf. Eur. *Med*. 241-3; Eur. *Tro*. 669-70), and is used in a heterosexual context at *Id*.27.21.[88] The trope, fundamental to the poetics of reversal, which makes the theoretically empowered lover a little child (cf. *supra*), evokes Theognis but is also applied to the 'heterosexual' Bucaeus in 10.[89] The simile comparing Hercules and Hylas to a lion and a fawn alludes to Theognis,[90] but it can hardly not evoke also the long tradition of the association between fawns (or young animals at large) and virgins.[91] The speaker's emphasis in 30 on the contrast between young and old might seem to belong to the world of male pederasty, but the New Sappho encourages us to rethink the assumption.[92] Therefore, while the reverberation of previous 'iconic' pederastic models is important to Theocritus' process of allusion and elaboration, these pederastic echoes are juxtaposed with equally important references to tropes of previous non-pederastic poetry. What seems, then, to be fundamental to the aim of these poems is not the straightforward evocation of an exclusive pederastic literary history. In the intricately wrought web of literary allusions, both 'heteroerotic' and 'homoerotic', the reader must feel less compelled to reflect on 'homoeroticism' as a whole than to appreciate the dynamics that such allusions (pederastic and non-pederastic) evoke – dynamics which, I have argued, are carefully constructed with past echoes to reach an impressive depth of psychological 'exacerbation'.

The same procedure of psychological 'exacerbation' and the exaggeration of the 'poetics of reversal' itself are not exclusive to the homoerotic *Idylls* and cannot be taken as the sign of Theocritus' will to ridicule a previous model of eroticism.[93] 'Heterosexual' speakers are also emphatically abject, degraded, and ridiculous, from Polyphemus in 11 and the delusional Bucaeus in 10 to the suicidal speaker of 3 who claims that he is 'entirely dependent' on his beloved girl but she 'does not care about him' (ἐγὼ μὲν / τὶν ὅλος ἔγκειμαι, τὺ δέ μευ λόγον οὐδένα ποιῇ, 32-3). The humour inherent in these poems is not understandable if

[88] Giubilo (2015), 256.
[89] Kyriakou (2018), 46.
[90] Dover (1987), 187.
[91] Battezzato (2018), 84.
[92] Acosta-Hughes (2010b), 122.
[93] Cf. Hunter (1996), 179 on irony in pederastic Idylls: 'we may suspect that this kind of irony was not one which Theocritus found in his archaic models'.

we allowed a higher degree of flexibility or equality to be present in the extra-literary (homo and non-homo)erotic reality: hierarchy and power, instead, are fundamental to the Theocritean conception of love.

This, of course, is not to exclude the possibility that the hierarchy and ethos of pederasty might have developed and changed in Hellenistic times. It is reasonable to believe that Dover's model might have obscured important aspects of homoerotic representation in Hellenistic times. Contemporary sociological studies urge us to consider the rapidity of diachronic change in sexuality throughout human history, thus making it desirable to reevaluate Dover's approach.[94] It is clear that Theocritus' poems do not share with Theognis an emphasis on the socio-political relevance of pederasty. But it is important to see that the gulf between Theocritus and archaic pederastic poetry is not as wide as has been thought, and Theocritus' *Idylls* do not 'deconstruct' or 'ridicule' a form of obsolete homoeroticism. I have argued that features of Theocritus' homoerotic *Idylls* that have appeared to be 'Hellenistic' are no less 'archaic' than they are 'Hellenistic'. Among these features, Theocritean wit crucially derives from the constant subversion of the hierarchy inherent in the pederastic relationship. Such poetics of reversal, far from reflecting any flexibility in the pederastic relationship, is exactly what illuminates the presence of a hierarchy that structured the relationship between a man and a boy in the extraliterary world, in both the archaic and the Hellenistic periods.

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[94] Hubbard (2016), 363.

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