

# [Theocritus], *Idyll* 23: a stony aesthetic\*

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## ABSTRACT

The pseudo-Theocritean *Idyll* 23 is frequently criticized as a wretched and unattractive poem. In this article, I argue that such allegedly ‘unattractive’ qualities do not betray the shortcomings of its poet, but are rather part of a distinctive aesthetic strategy. The *Idyll* embraces the murky, the hard, and the stony to construct an alternative aesthetic mode opposed to the traditional ‘sweetness’ of Theocritean bucolic and to the slender ‘refinement’ of Callimachus and Posidippus. First, I explore the poem’s knowing engagement with epic, tragedy, and epigram to demonstrate its familiarity with the common aesthetic strategies of Hellenistic poetics, whose rules it can both follow and break. Second, I analyse its ‘stony aesthetic’: the poem is dominated by both the literal and figurative language of hardness through its stone-hearted *eromenos* and lithic landscape. I argue that this stony environment is pointedly set against the ‘sweetness’ of the Theocritean countryside. The poem’s urban landscape both reflects and embodies its distinctive aesthetic.

**KEYWORDS:** Aesthetics, *paraclausithyron*, stoniness, sweetness, Theocritus

**ABBREVIATIONS:** A–B: Austin, C. and G. Bastianini 2002: *Posidippi Pellaei quae supersunt omnia*, Milan; AP: *Anthologia Palatina* (*Palatine Anthology*); BNJ: Worthington, I. ed. 2006–2021: *Brill’s New Jacoby*, <https://scholarlyeditions.brill.com/bnjo/>; GVI: Peek, W. 1955: *Griechische Vers-Inschriften. Bd. 1, Grab-Epigramme*, Berlin; Harder: Harder, M. A. 2012: *Callimachus, Aetia: Introduction, Text, Translation, and Commentary*, 2 vols, Oxford; Lightfoot: Lightfoot, J. L. 2009: *Hellenistic Collection: Philitas, Alexander of Aetolia, Hermesianax, Euphion, Parthenius*, Cambridge, MA; LSJ: Liddell, H. G., R. Scott, and H. S. Jones 1996: *A Greek–English Lexicon*, 9th edn with revised supplement by P. G. W. Glare, Oxford; Pf: Pfeiffer, R. 1949–1953: *Callimachus*, 2 vols, Oxford; SGO: Merkelbach, R. and J. Stauber 1998–2004: *Steinepigramme aus dem griechischen Osten*, 5 vols, Stuttgart; TrGF: Snell, B., R. Kannicht, and S. L. Radt 1971–2004: *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, 5 vols, Göttingen.

*in memoriam Neil Hopkinson*

The pseudo-Theocritean *Idyll* 23 is a murky and morbid poem: a perverted *komos* that narrates the deaths of both a spurned *exclusus amator* and his hard-hearted *eromenos*.<sup>1</sup> Within its sixty-three verses,

\* This article is dedicated to the memory of Neil Hopkinson; I use his 2015 text and translation of Theocritus, Moschus, and Bion throughout (other translations are my own unless indicated otherwise). For helpful comments and advice on earlier drafts, I would like to thank Matthew Chaldekas, Kathryn Gutzwiller, Nita Krevans, Max Leventhal, Joshua Thomas, Alan Woolley, and the anonymous referees of the *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*. For other suggestions and feedback, I am grateful to the audiences of a 2021 Oxford seminar on Hellenistic poetry (organized by Sarah Cullinan Herring and Lena Barsky) and the 2022 SCS panel on Hellenistic aesthetics. The research for this article was supported by the British Academy and Wolfson College, Oxford.

<sup>1</sup> See Cairns 2020 for the terminological distinction between the *komos* (the entire sequence of events surrounding an excluded lover) and the *paraclausithyron* (which technically refers only to the lover’s lament by the door, *i.e.* 19–48 in this poem).

the poem begins with an opening description of the unrequited lover's plight (1–18) before recounting his lament by the door (19–48) and swiftly building to the climax of a double death: the lover hangs himself in the boy's doorway, but the boy ignores his corpse and heads instead to the baths, where he is promptly crushed by a statue of Eros (49–63). The poem closes with the eerie words of the dead boy's disembodied voice, acknowledging his just deserts: ὁ γὰρ θεὸς οἶδε δικάζειν ('the god knows how to dispense justice', 63).

Given its many verbal echoes of Theocritus, Moschus, and Bion, *Idyll* 23 is clearly a post-Theocritean composition.<sup>2</sup> Yet the story it tells fits within broader Hellenistic tastes. Like Theocritus' 11th and 14th *Idylls*, it is concerned with finding a release from love, although here the solution is rather different: not song or military service, but death.<sup>3</sup> The boy's unhappy end in the pool fits into a broader pattern of watery 'deaths' within the Theocritean corpus (especially Hylas' in *Idyll* 13: in both cases, the youth's voice lingers on).<sup>4</sup> And with its urban setting, this *Idyll* re-embeds the *komos* into its traditional city landscape, countering the bucolic *komos* of *Idyll* 3, where the herdsman had incongruously lamented before an open cave 'door'.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the basic story pattern of a hard-hearted beloved being punished for their intransigence is well paralleled in other Hellenistic and Roman tales, including Hermesianax's Arsinoe, transformed to stone after her spurned lover starved himself to death (fr. 2 Lightfoot = Ant. Lib. *Met.* 39), and Ovid's Anaxarete, who was turned into a statue after her admirer Iphis hanged himself at her door (*Met.* 14.698–758).<sup>6</sup>

Despite this broader literary context, *Idyll* 23 has been roundly criticized by modern scholars, who find fault with its style, language, and narrative, considering it 'not [...] particularly engaging', 'so atrocious in its contrivance', and a 'third-rate work'.<sup>7</sup> The most damning criticism of all comes in A. S. F. Gow's commentary: for him, the 'writing' is 'wretched', 'the standard of this poet is low', and 'the poem is the least attractive in the whole Theocritean corpus'.<sup>8</sup> However, such subjective value judgements deserve interrogation. *Idyll* 23 is very badly transmitted, which raises an irresolvable 'chicken and egg' question: poor poem, so poor transmission; or poor transmission, hence poor poem? Either way, it seems that modern judgements have been unduly prejudiced by this *Idyll's* state of transmission.<sup>9</sup>

In this article, I argue that *Idyll* 23 is far from as 'bad' or as 'wretched' as commentators have made out: the poem's allegedly 'unattractive' qualities do not betray the shortcomings of its poet, but are rather part of a distinctive aesthetic strategy. This *Idyll* pointedly embraces the murky, the hard, and the stony to construct an alternative aesthetic mode at odds with both the traditional 'sweetness' of Theocritean bucolic and the aesthetics of scale endorsed by the likes of Callimachus and Posidippus. Scholarly unease with the poem has stemmed from a fundamental misunderstanding of these aesthetic strategies, fuelled in part by the *Idyll's* inclusion in the Theocritean corpus. *Idyll* 23's position alongside Theocritus' genuine bucolic poems raises preconceived expectations of its manner and style that the poem fails to fulfil. But this 'failing' is an intentional choice: the *Idyll* draws on traditional models and techniques to achieve a new kind of 'stony' aesthetic, establishing a harsh and grim environment which is reflected both in the poem's hard-hearted *eromenos* and in its hard, urban landscape.

<sup>2</sup> See Legrand 1946: II 58–59; Gow 1952: II 408; Radici Colace 1971: 326–27. A late Hellenistic date (c. 150–50 BCE) is suggested by possible echoes of the poem in the poetry of Catullus (*Carm.* 60 ~ *Id.* 23.19–20; Trovati 2001: 44) and Ovid (*Met.* 14.698–758; Copley 1956: 138–39; Hardie 2024: 222–26); cf. Wilamowitz 1906: 81–82; Reed 2006: 210.

<sup>3</sup> φάρμακον: *Id.* 23.23–24 ~ *Id.* 11.1–3, 14.52; cf. Hopkinson 2015: 314; Kyriakou 2018: 131. The lover's desire for the boy is introduced in the same manner as Polyphemus' for Galatea in *Idyll* 11 (ἦρατ' ἐράβω, 23.1; ἦρατο τὰς Γαλατείας, 11.8). The hapless *erastes* also resembles the frustrated pederast of *Id.* 12 and the rejected *erastes* of Call. *Ia.* 3. On the pederastic poems of the Theocritean corpus more generally, see Lambert 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Lingering voice: *Id.* 13.59–60, 23.61 (though Hylas does not simply die; he gains immortality: 13.72). See Segal 1974: 36–37, who also compares Daphnis' death (*Id.* 1.140–41). On the erotics of water, see Sissa 2017 ('Love is liquid', p. 128).

<sup>5</sup> Trovati 2001: 43 with n. 35; Reed 2006: 219.

<sup>6</sup> Ovid's tale may allude to *Idyll* 23: see n. 2 above. Cf., too, Asander and Gorgo (Plut. *Amat.* 766d) and Ameinias and Narcissus (Conon 24): Copley 1940: 53; Hunter 2002: 101. Hunter speculates that the *Idyll* may be 'part of an attempt by the narrator to persuade a young man to yield to his desires' (p. 105); *Met.* 14 supports this suggestion, since Vertumnus tells the story of Anaxarete in an effort to win over Pomona.

<sup>7</sup> Kyriakou 2018: 122; Pasquali 1920: 434 ('così atroce nell'invenzione'); Legrand 1946: II 58 ('cette oeuvre de troisième ordre').

<sup>8</sup> Gow 1952: II 413, 412, 408.

<sup>9</sup> Thus Hunter 2002: 99–105; cf. Canevaro 2023: 29–32. More charitable readings of the poem have increased in recent years: e.g. Sistakou 2016: 206–11 and 2022; Kyriakou 2018: 122–32; Canevaro 2023: 120–33 (earlier, cf. Radici Colace 1971; Giangrande 1992: 213–20); but even here we find continued aesthetic censure: e.g. Kyriakou 2018: 122: 'it is undeniable that the linear structure, explicitness, didacticism and quite plodding, piling style of the poem do not make it particularly engaging, at least to modern audiences.'

My argument will proceed in two stages. First, I will expose the poem's sophisticated manipulation of its literary heritage to demonstrate that scholars' accusations of shoddy composition are misplaced. In particular, I will focus on its engagement with a range of generic paradigms (epic, tragedy, and epigram) to argue that the poem is familiar with the common aesthetic strategies of Hellenistic poetics, whose rules it can both follow and break: intertextuality is a cornerstone of mainstream Hellenistic literary aesthetics,<sup>10</sup> and this poem is very much au fait with its techniques. Second, after establishing the poem's literary awareness, I will then interrogate what I call its distinctively 'stony aesthetic'. The poem is dominated by both the literal and metaphorical language of hardness through the unflinching stoniness of its *eromenos* as well as its stone scenery. This harsh lithic landscape, I will argue, is set against both the traditional 'sweetness' of Theocritus' bucolic world and the slender 'refinement' of Callimachus and Posidippus. In an implicit denunciation of mainstream Hellenistic aesthetics, the poem and its author reject the very attractiveness that Gow so longed for, and instead embrace the hard, the stony, and the wretched—a very different vision of Hellenistic poetics.

## 1. GENERIC BLENDING

Despite its critics, *Idyll 23* is an elaborate poem that creatively manipulates its literary heritage. Already in 1940, Frank Copley highlighted its adaptation of the *paraclausithyron* motif: the lover's threats of suicide are here actualized, as he lies not asleep but dead at the door; it is not a garland but a body that hangs in the doorway; the lover's gifts are not an apple, but a noose; and in place of a lover's inscribed note, we have an inscribed epitaph to be written on the wall.<sup>11</sup> The result, as Copley showed, was a paradox: the stylized ideals of the *paraclausithyron* blended with morbid reality. Copley's analysis already gives us a good sense of how the poem adapts its literary heritage to achieve something new. But we can see this literary sophistication even more clearly in the poem's engagement with a wide range of different genres. Here I will focus on its appropriations of epic, tragedy, and epigram.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.1 Epic

Given its hexameter form, the epic tradition is a natural counterpoint for *Idyll 23*, as it was for many of Theocritus' own *Idylls*.<sup>13</sup> From its opening words, the poem evokes Homeric tradition (1):

άνηρ τις πολύφιλος ἀπηνέος ἤρατ' ἐφάβω

A man liable to love fell for a cruel youth

The verse-initial *άνηρ* and *πολύ-* compound recall the start of the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus was described in similarly anonymous terms (*άνδρα [...]* *πολύτροπον*, *Od.* 1.1).<sup>14</sup> This echo marks verse 1 as a strong moment of beginning, but it also inaugurates a broader intertextual comparison, especially with the remainder of the Odyssean proem (*Od.* 1.1–9):

άνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλά  
πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσεν·  
πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἶδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω,  
πολλὰ δ' ὅ γ' ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα ὄντα κατὰ θυμόν,

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Bing 1988; Cusset 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Copley 1940. Threats: *Id.* 3.9, 25, 53. Sleeping before the door: Ar. *Eccl.* 960–62; Pl. *Symp.* 183a; Callim. *AP* 5.23; Theoc. *Id.* 7.122–24; Meleager *AP* 12.23.3–4, 72.1–2. Hanging garland: στεφάνους [...] ἐκκρεμάσωμαι (Rufinus, *AP* 5.92.3); στέφανοι [...] κρεμαστοί (Asclepiades, *AP* 5.145.1); cf. ἐκρεμάσθη | νεκρός, *Id.* 23.52–53. Gifts: e.g. πλείστα δῶρα, Ant. Lib. *Met.* 39.3; cf. δῶρα [...] τὸν ἐμὸν βρόχον, *Id.* 23.20–21. Inscribed note on a garland (ἐπιγράψας, Meleager, *AP* 5.191.7) or statue (ἐπιγράψας, Meleager *AP* 12.23.4); cf. Plaut. *Merc.* 409; Prop. 1.16.10; Ov. *Am.* 3.1.53–54.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Sistakou 2022, a complementary study of *Idyll 23*'s blending of various 'speech genres' (*paraclausithyron*, lament, epitaph, parænesis); contrast Kyriakou 2018: 126, who claims that the *Idyll* lacks 'intertextual depth', resulting in 'an impression of reductiveness'.

<sup>13</sup> See Halperin 1983; Hunter 1996; and e.g. Foster 2006 on *Id.* 15; Nelson 2020b on *Id.* 2.

<sup>14</sup> For such incipit-allusion, see Nelson forthcoming a, and cf. §2 below on the reception of *Idyll 1*'s incipit. The adjective *ἀπηνέος* may also carry an epic ring, given the word's frequency in archaic epic and relative rarity elsewhere: cf. LSJ s.v. ἀπηνής.

ἀρνύμενος ἦν τε ψυχὴν καὶ νόστον ἐταίρων.  
 ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὡς ἐτάρους ἐρρύσατο, ἰέμενός περ·  
 αὐτῶν γὰρ σφετέρησιν ἀτασθαλίησιν δλοντο,  
 νήπιοι, οἱ κατὰ βοῦς Ὑπερίονος Ἥελίοιο  
 ἦσθιον· αὐτὰρ ὁ τοῖσιν ἀφειλετο νόστιμον ἡμαρ.

Tell me, Muse, of the man of many turnings, who wandered far and wide after he had sacked the sacred city of Troy. Many were the men whose cities he saw and whose minds he learned, and many the woes he suffered in his heart upon the sea, seeking to win his own life and the return of his comrades. Yet even so he did not save his comrades, for all his desire, for through their own blind folly they perished—fools, who devoured the cattle of Helios Hyperion; whereupon he took from them the day of their returning.<sup>15</sup>

Odysseus' sufferings (πάθεν ἄλγεα, *Od.* 1.4) map onto the erotic pains of the *Idyll*'s unnamed ἀνήρ, who is 'wretched' (τλάμονα, 37) like 'much-enduring' Odysseus (πολύτλας). Both stories, moreover, involve a failure of comradeship: the Odyssean proem's focus on the failed relationship between Odysseus and his companions (ἐταίρων, *Od.* 1.5; ἐτάρους, *Od.* 1.6) establishes an ominous precedent for the dysfunctional *hetaireia* between the *erastes* and *eromenos*, which lacks any sense of proper reciprocity (ἐταῖρος, 45; ἐταῖρον, 48). After all, Odysseus' comrades die at sea (*Od.* 1.7–9), an eerie precedent for the *eromenos*' watery death in the *Idyll* (60–61).

Given this opening Odyssean echo, we can also make more of another parallel that scholars have previously noted. The lover asks his beloved to call out to him three times as he departs (κῆν ἀπίης, τὸδε μοι τρίς ἐπάουσιν, 44), recalling the practice of Odysseus and his crew, who set sail from the land of the Cicones after thrice calling on each of his companions who had died there (τινα τῶν δειλῶν ἐτάρων τρίς ἕκαστον ἄυσαι, *Od.* 9.65).<sup>16</sup> The opening Odyssean framework is here flipped on its head: the *erastes* is aligned with the dead companions, the boy with Odysseus. But through these echoes, the relationship of man and boy is again mapped onto that of Odysseus and his men: a flawed and ultimately unhappy partnership, an inauspicious sign for the outcome of the present relationship.

Nor is the *Odyssey* the only epic paradigm at play in this *Idyll*. The relationship between *erastes* and *eromenos* is also a perverted refraction of that between Achilles and Patroclus in the *Iliad*. The claim that the boy was reared by a lioness (κακᾶς ἀνάθρεμμα λεαίνας, 19) draws on a tradition of inhumane parentage that goes back to Patroclus' complaint against Achilles (*Il.* 16.33–35): Achilles must have been born from the 'grey sea' and 'sheer rocks' because he is so 'unyielding' (ἀπηνής, *Il.* 16.35 ~ ἀπηνέος, 1; ἀπηνέα, 48).<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the lover's claim that even in death he will not lose his passion (25–26) recalls Achilles' promise to remember Patroclus even in death (*Il.* 22.389–90).<sup>18</sup> More generally, the *Idyll*'s recurring language of *hetaireia* and *philia* twists the Homeric idiom φίλος ἐταῖρος ('dear companion'), which is most frequently applied to the relationship of Achilles and Patroclus in the *Iliad*, especially after the latter's death.<sup>19</sup> The Homeric duo were a familiar paradigm for pederastic love by the Hellenistic age, which makes them an apt analogue for the *erastes* and *eromenos* here. But in addition, their tragic and unfulfilled relationship offers a further ominous model for the events of this *Idyll*.<sup>20</sup>

Ultimately, however, these epic parallels only serve to point up the difference between this mundane and anonymous account of frustrated love and Homer's Muse-inspired epics. Unlike the Odyssean ἄνδρα, the *Idyll*'s *erastes* is never named and remains a mere τις ('somebody', 1).<sup>21</sup> At one level, this may again play with the *Odyssey* and the anonymity of Odysseus' Οὔτις pseudonym in the Cyclops

<sup>15</sup> Trans. adapted from Murray and Dimock 1995: 113.

<sup>16</sup> Radici Colace 1971: 333–34; Hunter 2002: 102–03. Cf., too, φίλους [...] ἐταίρους (*Od.* 9.63) ~ ὦ φίλε (*Id.* 23.44).

<sup>17</sup> This 'inhumane parentage' trope had a long history: see §1.2 below on tragedy, and cf. *Id.* 3.15–16 (Eros suckled by a lioness).

<sup>18</sup> Kyriakou 2018: 131. The boy's 'anger' (ὀργᾶς, 14, 15) further recalls a defining trait of the Iliadic Achilles; cf., too, χόλον, the transmitted reading in 23.26.

<sup>19</sup> φίλε, 44; καλὸς [...] ἐταῖρος, 45; ἀπηνέα [...] ἐταῖρον, 48. Cf. Homeric φίλος ἐταῖρος: *Il.* 1.345 = 9.205 = 11.616, 17.642, 18.80, 19.345, 22.390, 23.152, 23.178 = 24.591, 24.4, 24.51, 24.416. Cf. Fantuzzi 2012: 194–95.

<sup>20</sup> Pederastic Achilles and Patroclus: e.g. Aesch. *Myrmidons*, esp. fr. 135–36 TrGF; Pl. *Symp.* 179e–180a; cf. Fantuzzi 2012: 187–266.

<sup>21</sup> This anonymity is reinforced by a further allusive contrast with Bion's *Lament for Adonis*: καλὸς δέ μοι ὄλεθ' ἐταῖρος, 45 ~ ἀπώλετο καλὸς Ἀδωνίς, *Ep. Adonis* 5; cf. Radici Colace 1971: 333. Unlike Adonis, this *hetairos* is unnamed.

episode.<sup>22</sup> But it also marks this urban story as fundamentally different to the world of myth; there is no fixed or pre-existing *fabula* here, so neither the audience nor internal characters can be certain of the final outcome (despite the lover's ironic assertion otherwise: οἶδα τὸ μέλλον, 'I know what will happen', 27).<sup>23</sup> The poem's gnomic and didactic close reinforces this lack of specificity, evoking the generalizing and moralizing feel of fable. The *Idyll's* evocations of epic only highlight the vast chasm that exists between the heroes of myth and this anonymous and inconsequential episode.

## 1.2 Tragedy

The pathetic nature of the whole poem is strengthened by its tragic flavour. Evina Sistikou has noted a number of general connections between *Idyll* 23 and tragedy: the opening lines perform the role of a dramatic prologue, with a detailed exposition of past events (1–15) followed by a brief transition (16–18); the central monologue (19–48) mirrors a dramatic speech; the tragic motif of a single day is here adapted to a single night of suffering; and we end with a sense of divine justice akin to a tragic *deus ex machina* resolving the action.<sup>24</sup>

This link with tragedy can be reinforced by more specific details. At a basic linguistic level, we can note the adjective τλάμουνα (37). The word's root may evoke Odyssean endurance, but the adjective itself features most frequently in tragedy, giving it a particular association with the genre.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the claim that the boy was reared by a lioness (19) has a more precise tragic antecedent beyond the *Iliad*: the Chorus' claim in Euripides' *Bacchae* that Pentheus must be the offspring of some lioness (λαίνας δέ τινος [...] γένος, *Bacch.* 990–91).<sup>26</sup> More thematically, the boy's resistance to *eros* and his eventual undoing by vengeful Love have the feel of a tragic plot, closely paralleled by the fate of Euripides' Hippolytus.<sup>27</sup> That tragedy involves two similar deaths: a scorned lover hangs herself and leaves a written note, while her resistant love interest is ultimately punished with a death that comes from water.<sup>28</sup> As in the *Idyll*, the events of the play serve as a moral lesson on the power of love (cf. *Hipp.* 525–64, 1268–81).

However, the deaths in the *Idyll* also have broader tragic associations. Hanging is an archetypically tragic way to die, especially for female characters: not only Euripides' Phaedra (Eur. *Hipp.* 767–83, 802), but also Antigone (Soph. *Ant.* 1221–22) and Jocasta (Soph. *OT* 1263–64).<sup>29</sup> In choosing this form of death, the anonymous but emphatically male ἀνὴρ with whom we began ends his life in a quasi-feminized state, ceding control to the unrelenting *eromenos*.<sup>30</sup> Nicole Loraux has connected such suicide by hanging with marriage, and it is frequently the kind of death that serves as a substitute for the consummation of love, part of the wider tragic motif of 'marriage to death'.<sup>31</sup> Here, too, the lover's death acts as an alternative for the union he so desired, even despite his necrophiliac wish for the boy to give his dead corpse a final kiss (38–41).<sup>32</sup> His demise fulfils the broader tragic expectations of the poem.

The boy's closing death also has a larger tragic resonance: being crushed by a falling statue of Eros (59–60).<sup>33</sup> This is precisely the kind of death that Aristotle mentions in his *Poetics* as an exemplar of a fine tragic plot, one in which events seem not to happen randomly, but by design (*Poet.* 9.1452a4–10):

<sup>22</sup> For similar play, cf. *Id.* 11.38 (οὔτις), 11.79 (τις). Given *Id.* 23's deep engagement with Theocritus elsewhere (nn. 2–5 above), it is possible that this Odyssean allusion is refracted through *Id.* 11 in a kind of 'window allusion'.

<sup>23</sup> The lover's prediction that the boy will one day become a lover himself (23.33–34) is explicitly proven wrong by the poem's end; cf. Kyriakou 2018: 126 and 2021: 671 n. 41.

<sup>24</sup> Sistikou 2016: 206–11, further noting the mixing of the seen and unseen, and the boy's possible *hamartia/hybris* (23.58).

<sup>25</sup> Instances of τλάμων: over 110 in Euripides; over thirty-five in Sophocles; eleven in Aeschylus; contrast four in Homer and one in Pindar.

<sup>26</sup> Cf., too, Eur. *Med.* 1339–43, where Medea is described as a 'lioness, not a woman' (λαίαννα, οὐ γυναῖκα, 1342; cf. λαίανης, *Med.* 187, 1407). The boy's terrible glare 'like a wild beast' (*Id.* 23.10–12) also parallels Medea's fierce bull-like glances (*Med.* 92–93, 187–89).

<sup>27</sup> Kyriakou 2018: 125 notes how the absence of other characters in the poem renders the boy 'an enraged Hippolytus' type 'rather than a disloyal Cynrus or the fickle beloved of [*Idyll*] 29'.

<sup>28</sup> Hippolytus' death further takes place in a rocky landscape (πέτρας, *Hipp.* 1230; πέτρῳ, 1233; πέτραις, 1238), which parallels the stony environment of the *eromenos*' death (on which, see §2 below).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 874–76, *Suppl.* 457–65; Loraux 1987: 7–30. In Homer, cf. Epicasta's suicide by hanging (*Od.* 11.271–80) and the unfaithful Ithacan maidservants' punishment by hanging (*Od.* 22.462–73; Fulkerson 2002).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Loraux 1987: 16: 'A man never hangs himself, even when he has thought of doing so'.

<sup>31</sup> Loraux 1981 and 1987: 14; cf. Seaford 1987; Rehm 1994; Swift 2010: 250–55. See e.g. Soph. *Ant.* 1221–25, 1236–43.

<sup>32</sup> There may be a ritual element to this kissing of a corpse: cf. for other times and cultures, Nyrop 1901: 98; Davidson 2005: 107 with nn. 45–46.

<sup>33</sup> For Eros' association with the gymnasium, cf. Ath. *Deipn.* 13.561d; Scanlon 2002; Stafford 2013. For extant Eros statues from gymnasias, see von den Hoff 2007: 381 with nn. 59–60, 391 with n. 127.

τὸ γὰρ θαυμαστὸν οὕτως ἕξει μᾶλλον ἢ εἰ ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτομάτου καὶ τῆς τύχης, ἐπεὶ καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ τύχης ταῦτα θαυμασιώτατα δοκεῖ ὅσα ὥσπερ ἐπιτηδὲς φαίνεται γεγονέναι, **οἷον ὡς ὁ ἀνδριάς ὁ τοῦ Μίτυος ἐν Ἄργει ἀπέκτεινεν τὸν αἴτιον τοῦ θανάτου τῷ Μίτυι, θεωροῦντι ἐμπεσῶν**· ἔοικε γὰρ τὰ τοιαῦτα οὐκ εἰκῆ γίνεσθαι· ὥστε ἀνάγκη τοὺς τοιοῦτους εἶναι καλλίους μύθους.

The awesome will be maintained in this way more than through show of chance and fortune, because even among chance events we find most awesome those which seem to have happened by design (**as when Mitys' statue at Argos killed the murderer of Mitys, by falling on him as he looked at it:** such things *seem* not to occur randomly). And so, such plots are bound to be finer.<sup>34</sup>

In incorporating a vengeful statue of its own, *Idyll* 23 sticks to this approved Aristotelian script.<sup>35</sup> The boy's death does not seem to happen by chance (εἰκῆ), but forms part of a causal chain of logic. His death offers a fitting close to the poem, sealing its tragic affiliation. Indeed, part of the *Idyll*'s 'wretched' flavour might stem in part from these various tragic resonances, constructing a gloomy world of reciprocal suffering.

### 1.3 Epigram

Besides epic and tragedy, *Idyll* 23 also recalls the world of inscribed and literary epigram. The lover describes himself in verses 46–48 as writing an inscription on the boy's walls, and asks for it to serve as his own epitaph:

γράψον καὶ τόδε γράμμα τὸ σοῖς τοίχοισι χαράσσω·  
 'τοῦτον ἔρωσ ἐκτεινεν· ὀδοιπόρε, μὴ παροδεύσης,  
 ἀλλὰ στὰς τόδε λέξον· "ἀπηνέα εἶχεν ἐταῖρον"

The inscription should be the words I am writing on your house wall:  
 'Love was the death of this man. Wayfarer, do not pass by;  
 stop and say, "His companion was cruel!"

The language here evokes common features of inscribed epigram, especially in the imagined address to a wayfarer (ὀδοιπόρε, 47).<sup>36</sup> Crucially, the proposed epitaph fails to supply the name or identity of the deceased, subverting epigrammatic conventions in order to maintain the anonymity of the whole poem. But it also plays with the transferability of epigram across space and medium: the *erastes* asks the boy to copy this graffito and reinscribe it on his future tombstone—a wish that we know will prove tragically unfulfilled by the end of the poem, since the boy, too, has died.

More generally, the whole *Idyll* draws on epigrammatic motifs and elements, as if it is one epigram writ large. Joseph Reed perceptively remarks that '*Id.* 23 can almost be read as an extended, compound erotic epigram.'<sup>37</sup> He does not substantiate this claim, but we can identify many points of connection between the *Idyll* and amatory epigram. The opening description of the boy draws on common tropes of erotic epigram, especially with its fire imagery (πυρσῶν, 7);<sup>38</sup> the *carpe diem* motif on the transience of beauty and life (28–32) is a recurring refrain of sympotic and amatory epigram;<sup>39</sup> the complaints of a 'locked-out lover' are a familiar feature of epigram (particularly those by Asclepiades);<sup>40</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Trans. Halliwell 1995: 63.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Legrand 1946: II 57; Gow 1952: II 414. For this Mitys anecdote, cf. Plut. *Mor.* 553d; Ps-Aristot. *De Mir. Ausc.* 156, 846a22–24 (where he is called 'Bitys'). Cf., too, the statue of Theagenes (Paus. 6.11.6) and other lethal falling objects, such as tombstones (of a stepmother: Callim. (?) *AP* 9.67), boat parts (Eur. *Med.* 1387; Staphylus of Naucratis, *BNJ* 269 F 11) and boar heads (Diod. Sic. 4.22.3); cf. Mastronarde 2002: 55.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. e.g. Heraclitus *AP* 7.465, Nicaenetus *AP* 7.502, Theoc. *AP* 7.658, etc. For the sentiment, cf. Prop. 2.1.78: *huic misero fatum dura puella fuit*. This imagining of a posthumous tombstone also reworks epic tradition (e.g. *Il.* 7.89–91: Canevaro 2023: 126–27) and foreshadows a common hope of the elegiac amator (e.g. Prop. 2.1.71–78, 2.13.31–36: Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004: 186).

<sup>37</sup> Reed 2006: 219.

<sup>38</sup> e.g. Callim. *AP* 5.6.5, 12.139.2; Dioscorides *AP* 5.138; Anon. *AP* 12.61; Antip. Sid. *AP* 16.167; Meleager *AP* 5.176.6. The 'fire' of love is also frequent in Theocritus: *Id.* 2.40, 82, 133–34, 7.55, 102, 11.52, 14.26; cf., too, the idea of being 'roasted' by love (ὀπτεύμενος, 23.34 ~ ὀπτεύμενον, *Id.* 7.55).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Rohland 2022; e.g. Rufinus *AP* 5.74; Marcus Argentarius *AP* 5.118; *AP* 12.29–33. Cf., too, *Id.* 7.120–121, 27.8, and 29.25–30.

<sup>40</sup> Asclepiades *AP* 5.64, 145, 167, 189; cf. Copley 1956.

and the image of violent love evokes another epigrammatic motif, especially the following couplet by Meleager (*AP* 5.215.5–6):<sup>41</sup>

εἰ καὶ με κτείναις, λείψω φωνὴν προίεντα  
γράμματ'· Ἔρωτος ὄρα, ξεῖνε, μαιφονίαν·

Even if you slay me, I will leave letters projecting my  
voice: 'Look, stranger, on the foul murder done by Love.'<sup>42</sup>

Like Meleager, *Idyll* 23 focuses on Love as a killer (καὶ με κτείναις ~ τοῦτον ἔρωσ ἔκτεινεν, 47) and the memorialization of his deeds in writing (γράμματ' ~ γράμμα, 46). In addition, the enduring projection of a posthumous voice aligns this epigram with the end of the *Idyll*, where the boy's 'voice' similarly asserts Love's power (φωνήν ~ φωνά, 61); indeed, the boy's final gnomic words (62–63) have the feel of yet another 'embedded epigram.'<sup>43</sup> From its opening to its close, *Idyll* 23 draws on familiar motifs of amatory epigram to construct its narrative of unrequited love.

Yet more than that, the poem can also be understood as an extended, compound *funerary* epigram. We have already noted the lover's unfulfilled desire for an epitaph, but sepulchral motifs thread through the *Idyll* more widely. The address to a lying corpse (κεῖσαι, 'there you lie', 44) is a frequent feature of sepulchral epigram,<sup>44</sup> as is the motif of the 'draught of oblivion' (23–26).<sup>45</sup> In addition, the lover's requests to the boy evoke many familiar epitaphic tropes: he asks for a final act of service (πανύστατον, 35), for the boy to 'stop and weep a while' (σῆθη δὲ καὶ βραχὺ κλαῦσον, 38), and for a proper burial (χῶμα δέ μοι κοιλον, 43).<sup>46</sup> Given this profusion of sepulchral motifs, we could even read the whole poem as a large-scale epitaph, a substitute for the lover's longed-for but nonexistent memorial (46–48).

\* \* \*

As a whole, therefore, this *Idyll* knowingly and carefully reworks elements from a range of different genres. The poem is not as dire or uninspired as has often been argued. Rather, the poem is familiar with the common intertextual strategies of Hellenistic poetry, which form a key component of mainstream Hellenistic literary aesthetics.<sup>47</sup> The poem can very much exploit these traditional rules and patterns, but it can also—as we shall now see—break them.

## 2. A STONY AESTHETIC

*Idyll* 23 is dominated by both the literal and metaphorical language of hardness.<sup>48</sup> The elusive *eromenos* is a 'stony child' (λάινε παῖ, 20), who is 'unyielding' (ἀτειρής, 6), 'savage' (ἄγριε, 19), 'hateful' (στυγνέ, 19), and 'harsh' (ἀπηνέος, 1; ἀπηνέα, 48), with 'savage lips' and a 'terrible look' (ἄγρια [...] χεῖλεα, 11–12; δεινὸν βλέπον, 12).<sup>49</sup> Such hardness may even be reflected in the hiatus of verse 48 (ἀπηνέα

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Gow 1952: II 413.

<sup>42</sup> Trans. Paton and Tueller 2014: 351–53.

<sup>43</sup> On 'embedded epigram' in Hellenistic poetry, see Bing 2022, and the responses to his article in *Aevum Antiquum* 22.

<sup>44</sup> Adaeus *AP* 7.51.4; Plato *AP* 7.99.5; Leonidas *AP* 7.163.1; Antip. Thess. *AP* 7.286.2; Perses *AP* 7.501.4. Sistakou 2019: 299 suggests an ambiguity here: "lying in death" or "lying in bed", though the accent is clearly on the former. For such ambiguity, cf. Moero *AP* 6.119.1, with Nelson forthcoming b.

<sup>45</sup> Thus Hunter 2002: 104, seeing a reflection of 'epitaphic, rather than initiatory or philosophic ideas'; he compares SGO II 08/01/45.10 (πανσιπόνω Λάθας λουσαμένα πόματι) and SGO I 01/01/07.11 (οὐκ ἔπιον Λήθης Αἰδωνίδος ἔσχατον ὕδωρ); cf., too, *AP* 7.346.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Jolowicz 2021: 45, citing Lattimore 1942: 220–22 (the final gift of burial: cf. πανύστατα δῶρα, *GVI* 1543.5) and 234–35 (tears).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. n. 10 above. These aesthetics are not simply 'Alexandrian'; they form part of a larger, elite poetic *koinē* that stretched far and wide across the Hellenistic world: Nelson 2020a: 192.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Hopkinson 2015: 314: 'Hardness is the organizing theme.' In what follows, I expand on and develop the significance of Hopkinson's observation; cf. Canevaro 2023: 120–33 for a complementary response to Hopkinson's statement through a material-ecocritical lens.

<sup>49</sup> For ἀτειρής used explicitly of stone, cf. ἀτειρέας οὄρεσι πέτρας, 'unyielding rocks on the mountains', Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.26; Radici Colace 1971: 337. Cf. Canevaro 2023: 121–22 for the adjective's material connotations ('something that cannot be rubbed away'). The boy's description as 'savage and hateful' also aligns him with Hades (ἄγριε παῖ καὶ στυγνέ, 23.19 ~ στυγνὸν βασιλῆα καὶ ἄγριον, Bion, *Ep. Adonis* 52); Radici Colace 1971: 332; Trovati 2001: 43.

εἶχεν ἑταῖρον, ‘he had a harsh companion’). Rather than dismissing this hiatus as a sign of shoddy composition, we could see it as mimetically reflecting the boy’s harsh and rough nature.<sup>50</sup> In addition, the negatives that accompany the boy’s first description convey a sense of absence and lifelessness from the start of the poem (7–9):

οὐδέ τι τῶν πυρσῶν παραμύθιον, οὐκ ἀμάργμα  
 χεῖλεος, οὐκ ὄσων λιπαρὸν σέλας, οὐ ρόδα μάλων,  
 οὐ λόγος, οὐχι φίλαμα, τὸ κουφίζει τὸν ἔρωτα.

There was **no** consolation for love’s fires, **no** flashing smile  
 about his lips, **no** bright glance from his eyes, **no** blush on his cheeks,  
**no** word, **no** kiss to make the passion easier to bear.

Such an insistent string of negative clauses might appear ‘artless’, but here it has a powerful effect: it presents the boy as a lifeless figure, deprived of colour and vivacity, as if almost a statue himself. His blanched complexion renders him not just figuratively, but almost literally ‘stone’ (λάινε, 20).

Yet it is not just the boy who is stony and hard. The surrounding scenery is also dominated by a strong emphasis on the materiality of stone. The lover writes on the boy’s stone wall (τοίχοισι, 46), hangs himself from the lintel by kicking away a stone support (λίθον, 49; λίθον, 50), and expects an inscribed gravestone to affix his tomb (43–48).<sup>51</sup> In turn, the boy jumps into the pool from a stone platform (λαϊνέας [...] κρηπίδος, 58–59) and is killed by a falling stone statue (τῶγαμμα, 60).<sup>52</sup> The repeated references to stone, alongside the mention of the gymnasium and baths (56–57), make it clear that this is a man-made, urban landscape. Notably, this environment is described with many of the same words that are applied to the boy. Both he and his house are ‘hateful’ (στυγνοῖσι μελάθοις, 17 ~ στυγνέ, 19) and he and his urban setting are ‘stony’ (λάινε, 20 ~ λαϊνέας, 58). In addition, the boy and the falling stone statue of Eros are doublets of each other: both ‘leap’ into the water one after the other (ἵπτατ’, 59 ~ ἄλατο, 60).<sup>53</sup> Throughout the *Idyll*, the boy is aligned with the stony and lifeless landscape of his city as a reflection of his unyielding heart. The poem combines the literally and metaphorically ‘hard’, which is all the more striking when we compare the boy’s disembodied voice that lingers at the end, a mere voice detached from material form (61).

Of course, there are various precedents and parallels for this play with ‘hardness’ in amatory contexts. ‘Stoniness’ was an established metaphor to describe those who were impervious to love: Telemachus accuses his mother Penelope of having a ‘heart that is harder than stone’ when she initially refuses to receive the returned Odysseus (κραδίη στερεωτέρη [...] λίθοιο, *Od.* 23.103); Herodas’ cobbler Kerdon pretends to be ‘stony’ when flirting with one of his clients, Metro, implying that her beauty is so great that it pierces his usually impenetrable heart (λίθινον, 7.109); and Propertius later describes a girl as ‘more resistant even than Sicilian stone’ (*et saxo patientior illa Sicano*, 1.16.29).<sup>54</sup> *Paraclausithyra* are a particularly common occasion for this blurring of the boundary between real and

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Sapph. fr. 31.9 (γλῶσσα ἔαγε), where the hiatus has been thought to enact the disruption of Sappho’s speech: Nagy 1974: 45; Ford and Kopff 1976; Budelmann 2018: 135–36. The *Idyll*’s verbal stumble could also perhaps mark the disrupted step of the passing wayfarer (cf. the immediately preceding σταῖς τόδε λέξω, ‘stop and say this’, 48); alternatively, it could be emended away: ἀπηνέ’ ὄδ’ εἶχεν ἑταῖρον (thus Ewen Bowie, pers. comm.).

<sup>51</sup> Walls of ancient Greek houses were generally made of stone or mudbrick, depending on the owner’s socio-economic status, environmental conditions, and the availability of local resources: Nevett 2023: 5–12, with 217–56 on Hellenistic housing. The double mention of λίθον (49, 50) encourages us to think of a stone wall here, though a wall of any material provides a firm and hard obstacle.

<sup>52</sup> Statues in gymnasia were made of both marble and bronze: see e.g. von den Hoff 2007. Cf. the inventories of the Hellenistic gymnasium at Delos: Hamilton 2000: 193, 216–18. Given the broader lithic context of this *Idyll* and the statue’s immediate context (λαϊνέας, 58), it is natural to think here of a marble statue (as e.g. Hunter 2002: 103; Hopkinson 2015: 314). Even if it were made of bronze, however, this material would still convey an unfeeling hardness: cf. n. 54 below.

<sup>53</sup> As Gow 1952: II 414 notes, ἵπτατ’ is strictly ‘more appropriate to the winged god than to the boy’; rather than seeing this as a sign of sloppiness, we can see its application to the *eromenos* as further blurring the identity of the two. This alignment is reinforced by other descriptions of the boy earlier in the poem that evoke bucolic images of Eros, including those of Bion (23.2 ~ fr. 14.5: Radici Colace 1971: 334) and *Idyll* 3 (23.19 ~ 3.15–16: Trovati 2001: 43–44).

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Ov. *Met.* 14.713 (*saxo*); Lucian, *Dial. Het.* 12.2 (λίθος, οὐκ ἄνθρωπος ἔστω). The idea extended to other ‘hard’ materials such as oak (*aesculo*, Hor. *Carm.* 3.10.17; *quercu*, Ov. *Met.* 13.799) and iron or steel (*ferro durior et chalybe*, Prop. 1.16.30; *ferreus*, Ov. *Am.* 1.6.27; *ferro*, *Met.* 14.712). For stoniness marking a lack of emotion generally, cf. Aesch. *PV* 242 (κάκ πέτρας εἰργασμένος); Finglass 2018: 278–79 on Soph. *OT* 334–36.

metaphorical ‘stoniness’. We have already encountered the case of Ovid’s Anaxarete and Hermesianax’s Arsinoe, where the heartless beloved is transformed into physical stone, aligning their exterior form with their interior character. But we could also cite *Idyll* 3, where the goatherd addresses the ‘entirely stony’ nymph Amaryllis (τὸ πᾶν λίθος, 3.18) who—it has been plausibly suggested—may actually be a voiceless statue herself.<sup>55</sup> In an epigram by Meleager, meanwhile, the *exclusus amator* presents himself as fixed like stone (AP 12.23.3–4):

καί μ’ ἐπὶ σοῖς ὁ πτανὸς Ἔρως προθύροισι, Μυῖσκε,  
στήσεν ἐπιγράψας Ἑκὼλ’ ἀπὸ Σωφροσύνης’.

And winged Love has fixed me before your door,  
Myiscus, inscribing on me ‘Spoils won from self-control’.

The speaker has been set in place (στήσεν) and inscribed, as if a statue or *stèle*. The imagery is flipped here: now it is the lover who has been rendered mute and stone-like by his unrequited desire. But as with the previous examples, this stoniness reflects the absence of fulfilled passion. Like in *Idyll* 23, these poems all play with the blurred line between figurative and physical ‘hardness’.

However, I would suggest that there is something more going on in *Idyll* 23, especially given the pervasiveness of its stony imagery. The language of stoniness is not only literal and metaphorical, but also metapoetic: it establishes a kind of aesthetic ‘hardness’ more familiar to us from Latin poetry. Ovid’s account of Anaxarete plays extensively with the literal, metaphorical, and metapoetic senses of *duritia* (‘hardness’).<sup>56</sup> I would argue that *Idyll* 23 engages in similar play, but in a more extreme form. Not only does stoniness pervade the poem’s characters and landscape; it also serves as an aesthetic leitmotif for the poem as a whole, conditioning the reader’s affective experience of the text.

In part, this aesthetic ‘stoniness’ is established through what Gow and others have identified as the *Idyll*’s ‘wretched writing’: its apparent departures from stylistic regularities, like the rough hiatus that we encountered above.<sup>57</sup> But this ‘stoniness’ is also articulated conceptually through the implicit rejection of other aesthetics modes. We have already encountered the abundance of negatives in the opening description of the boy (7–9), which forms part of a broader pattern of negation in the *Idyll*’s opening lines (nine negatives in as many verses).<sup>58</sup> Such negation comes to a head later in the poem when the boy spurns the lover’s request to do ‘something sweet’ (ἄδύ τι, 35). This is a loaded phrase: ‘sweetness’ is a regular aesthetic mode endorsed by Hellenistic poets, who celebrate their own and others’ poetry as ‘sweet’ and ‘pleasurable.’<sup>59</sup> However, the specific phrase ἄδύ τι is particularly evocative of bucolic poetry, since these are the very words that open Theocritus’ first *Idyll* (1.1–3):

ἄδύ τι τὸ ψιθύρισμα καὶ ἄπιτυς, αἰπόλε, τήνα,  
ἀποτὶ ταῖς παραῖσι, μελίσδετα, ἄδύ δὲ καὶ τὸ  
συρίσδεξ·

**A sweet thing** is the whispered music of that pine by the springs, goatherd, and **sweet** is your piping, too.

Theocritus’ double repetition of ἄδύ (‘sweet’), alongside the evocation of ‘honey’ (τὸ μέλι) in μελίσδετα, foregrounds ‘sweetness’ as the ‘key quality’ of Theocritus’ bucolic verse.<sup>60</sup> Notably, such

<sup>55</sup> Chaldeckas 2021: 63–64. Cf. Hunter 1999: 116 on *Id.* 3.18.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Myers 2009: 178–79 on *Met.* 14.693, 182 on *Met.* 14.704.

<sup>57</sup> For ancient texts’ aesthetic valorization of non-normative styles and of potentially disparaging concepts, cf. Telò 2019 on iambic horror; Nelson and Molesworth 2021: 209–15 on ‘frigidity’ in Lycophron’s *Alexandra*.

<sup>58</sup> οὐκέθ’, 2; οὐδέ, 3; κοῦκ, 4; οὐδέ, 7; οὐκ, 7; οὐκ, 8; οὐ, 8; οὐ, 9; οὐχί, 9. Cf., too, the alpha privative ἀπειρής, 6.

<sup>59</sup> e.g. Callim. *Aet.* fr. 1.11 Harder (γλυκύς), fr. 1.16 Harder (μελιχρότερα), *Epigr.* 27.2 Pf. (μελιχρότατον); Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.1774 (γλυκερώτερα); Asclepiades *AP* 7.11.1 (γλυκύς [...] πόνος). See, too, Nelson 2019 on elegiac sweetness, esp. §§87–91. For pre-Hellenistic literary and philosophical precedent, see Sistakou 2021: 336–40.

<sup>60</sup> Thus Hunter 1999: 70–71 on *Id.* 1.1 and 1.2; cf. Σ Theocr. 1.2b; Sistakou 2021: 331. For the interplay of honey and sweetness, cf. *Id.* 20.26–28. On Theocritean ἄδύτης generally, see Sistakou 2021. Cf. Donnet 1988: 159–63 on the ‘verbal sonority’ of these opening lines.

sweetness is rooted in both the sound of the pine tree and the piping of the goatherd, marking the complementarity of natural and human music.<sup>61</sup> And after this beginning, the idea of ‘sweetness’ recurs throughout *Idyll* 1, embracing both bucolic song and the bucolic landscape. It describes not only the sounds of the pine tree (ἀδύ, 1), piping (ἀδύ, 2), and pouring water (ἄδιον, 7–8), but also Thyrsis’ voice (ἀδέα, 65) and singing (ἄδιον, 7; ἄδιον, 145), and even the rewards for his performance: the wax that seals the prize cup (ἀδέι, 27) and the delicious figs that his song deserves (ἀδείαν, 148). In a lexical ring composition that frames this programmatic *Idyll*, Theocritus offers a synaesthetic image of ‘sweetness’ through taste, hearing, and touch, marking the harmony of the human and natural worlds.<sup>62</sup>

The phrase ἀδύ τι also has a broader purchase within the bucolic tradition as a recurring aesthetic motif—no doubt influenced by its prominent and programmatic position at the start of *Idyll* 1.<sup>63</sup> In *Idyll* 5, Comatas imagines his girl Clearista ‘whistling something sweet’ (ἀδύ τι πομπυλιάσδει, 5.89); the goatherd judge in *Idyll* 8 describes Daphnis’ voice as ‘something sweet’ (ἀδύ τι τὸ στόμα, 8.82); a Theocritean epigram invites the reader to ‘sing something sweet’ (ἄεισαι | ἀδύ τι, *Epigr.* 5.1–2 = *AP* 9.433); and the pseudo-Moschan *Lament for Bion* ends by bidding Bion ‘bucolicize something sweet’ (ἀδύ τι βουκολιάζευ, *Ep. Bion* 120).<sup>64</sup> Throughout the bucolic tradition, ‘something sweet’ serves as a positive emblem for bucolic song and poetry. And as in *Idyll* 1, this poetic sweetness is repeatedly aligned with the sweetness of nature itself: in *Idyll* 8, Daphnis’ sweet voice parallels the sweet lowing and breath of a heifer and the sweetness of a riverside rest (ἀδέι [ ... ] ἀδύ [ ... ] ἀδύ, 8.76–78), while in *Idyll* 9, the sounds of the calf, cow, oxherd, and Daphnis are all described as ‘sweet’ (ἀδύ [ ... ] ἀδύ [ ... ] ἀδύ, 9.7–8). Lacon even turns this parallel into a causal correlation in *Idyll* 5 (5.31–34) by suggesting that the natural surroundings of trees, water, grass, and insects will result in a sweeter song (ἄδιον ἄσῃ, 31). The ‘sweetness’ of bucolic song derives from the ‘sweet’ landscape in which it is performed, as well as the ‘sweet’ pleasures of love that take place within that world.<sup>65</sup>

Returning to *Idyll* 23, the boy’s failure to do ‘something sweet’ (ἀδύ τι, 35) thus marks the poem’s aesthetic divergence from the traditional bucolic world. In spurning the lover’s request, not only does the boy avoid his sexual advances, but the poem itself avoids the normal aesthetic mode of bucolic poetry. Such a divergence correlates directly with the *Idyll*’s urban and lithic landscape. We have seen the intimate Theocritean connection between the sweetness of song and the sweetness of the natural world; in the hard and stony environment of *Idyll* 23, by contrast, there is no room for anything sweet or pleasurable.<sup>66</sup> The resulting dichotomy (‘sweetness’ versus ‘hard stone’) is alien to Theocritus’ own poetry. Sweetness was still present in his urban *Idylls*, even if only temporarily: in *Idyll* 2 the ‘sweet whisperings’ of lovemaking directly parallel the ‘sweet whisperings’ of the pine in *Idyll* 1 (ἐψιθυρίσδομες ἀδύ, 2.141 ~ ἀδύ τι τὸ ψιθύρισμα, 1.1).<sup>67</sup> By contrast, the aesthetic perspective of *Idyll* 23 spurns even the very prospect of sweetness, both amatory and aesthetic.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>61</sup> As *Payne 2007*: 25 notes, Theocritus’ choice of language reinforces this blurring: ‘the pine tree is the subject of a verb of human song, μελιόδετα, “sings,” and the noise it produces, “whispering,” is reminiscent of the human voice. The effect is emphasized by the subsequent echo of the sound it makes, ψιθύρισμα, in the word for human music, συρισδες, “you pipe.” Cf., too, *Worman 2015*: 197: the *Idyll* ‘articulates a signature style (“naturally” sweet and melodious) that is made up of the very setting itself.’ On bucolic space, see now *Thalmann 2023*.

<sup>62</sup> Note, too, the ‘sweetly breathing pipe’ (μελίπνον [ ... ] σύριγγα, 128–29) and fragrant cup (ὡς καλὸν δοδεῖ, 149); cf. *Sistakou 2021*: 330–36 on the synaesthesia of Theocritean sweetness.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *Schmidt 1972*: 29–32; *Bernsdorff 2006*: 201–02; *Sistakou 2021*. *Idyll* 1’s programmatic significance is reinforced by its consistent position at the opening of Theocritus’ poetry book: *Gutzwiller 1996*.

<sup>64</sup> Cf., too, *Id.* 6.9 (sweet piping), 10.22–23 (sweeter work from a lovely song), 11.3 (Muses as sweet remedy), 20.28 (sweet music); also *Bion fr.* 2.2 (τί τοι ἀδύ, ‘what is sweet to you?’), *fr.* 3.3 (τὰν γλυκερὰν μολπὰν, τὰς φάρμακον ἄδιον οὐδὲν, ‘sweet song, no remedy sweeter’). Cf., too, the Latin tradition: *Virg. Ecl.* 1.3 (*dulcia*), 2.55 (*suavis*), 3.82 (*dulce*), 3.110 (*dulcis*), 5.47 (*dulcis*), 7.37 (*dulcior*); *Calp. Ecl.* 2.6 (*dulci*), 3.54 (*dulcia*), 3.56 (*dulcia*), 4.9 (*dulce*), 4.55 (*dulcia*), 4.61 (*dulcissima*), 4.150 (*dulce*), 4.160 (*dulce*), 5.52 (*dulces*), 6.82 (*dulce*), 7.20 (*dulce*); *Nemes. Ecl.* 1.22 (*praedulcis*), 1.82 (*dulce*), 2.15 (*dulci*), 2.83 (*dulce*), 4.13 (*dulces*). Cf., too, sweetness in Longus’ bucolic novel, *Daphnis and Chloe*: *Hunter 1983*: 92–98.

<sup>65</sup> Sweet love: *Id.* 20.1 (sweet kiss), 20.21 (sweet beauty); *Bion fr.* 9.5 (sweet song in throes of love); cf., too, *Asclepiades AP* 5.169, comparing the sweetness of nature with the sweetness of lovemaking (ἡδὺ [ ... ] ἡδὺ [ ... ] ἡδίων) and *Nossis AP* 5.170.1 (ἄδιον οὐδὲν ἔρωτος, ‘nothing is sweeter than love’). For the etymological association between sweetness and pleasure (ἡδονή), see *Sistakou 2021*: 326–27.

<sup>66</sup> These differing aesthetic modes for different spaces (‘stony city’ versus ‘sweet countryside’) align nicely with the concept of ‘situational aesthetics’ developed by Bing and Höschele, this volume.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. *Edquist 1975*: 102. *Idyll* 2 also includes the Doric -σδ- here, evocative of bucolic poetry: *Molinos Tejada 1990*: 128–31; *Reed 2006*: 214.

<sup>68</sup> Of course, in promoting this antithesis, *Idyll* 23 engages in a partial and tendentious reading of the bucolic tradition: the Theocritean countryside is not entirely devoid of less ‘sweet’ elements, such as the harsh, thorny landscape of *Id.* 4.50–57 or the graphic sexuality and mean-spirited competition of *Idyll* 5. *Idyll* 23’s innovation lies in its association of such harsh elements with a specifically hard, urban landscape.

*Idyll* 23 thus avoids the sweetness of both the natural world and of consummated passion. In doing so, *Idyll* 23 diverges from Theocritean ‘sweetness’, but also from another major Hellenistic aesthetic, Callimachean λεπτότης (‘slenderness’/‘refinement’). When the lover hangs himself by a ‘slender rope’ (λεπτὴν σχοινίδα, 51), we can see a perversion of Callimachean language: in the *Aetia* prologue, Callimachus famously trumpeted the ‘slenderness’ of his Muse (λεπταλέην, *Aet.* fr. 1.24 Harder), but rejected the σχοῖνος as an inappropriate means of measurement (fr. 1.18 Harder). By paradoxically combining these same words here (and employing a diminutive form of σχοῖνος), the *Idyll* seems to challenge and deconstruct Callimachus’ aesthetic polarities: the un-Callimachean rope now exhibits Callimachean ‘slenderness’, but only unproductively, since it leads to death. In addition, the stoniness of this poem is starkly at odds with that of Posidippus’ *Lithika* (1–20 A–B), where beautiful, miniature, and highly crafted stones serve as an analogue for Posidippus’ refined, slender, and leptotic epigrams (cf. λεπτή, 1.4 A–B).<sup>69</sup> *Idyll* 23, by contrast, dwells on the hard and fatal materiality of stone and explicitly turns away from the Callimachean and Posidippian aesthetic of scale in favour of a more sensuous contrast between the sweet and the hard.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

*Idyll* 23 revels in a stony hardness that stretches across its characters, landscape, and aesthetic. As we saw in Section 1, the poem employs many intertextual strategies familiar to more mainstream Hellenistic aesthetics, but as I have shown in Section 2, it exploits these strategies to achieve a novel aesthetic mode: antibucolic ‘stoniness’. Such stony hardness might even extend to the *Idyll*’s didactic frame, which reduces the typically emotional motif of the *exclusus amator* to a moral object lesson, blunted of its emotive force. The poem envisages readers who will allow themselves to be instructed rather than moved, and who will take note of the two lovers’ deaths with as stony an expression as the *eromenos* himself.<sup>70</sup> The *Idyll*’s external readers—as much as its characters, landscape, and aesthetic—are defined by a harsh and hard stoniness.

In many respects, this article’s analysis coheres with Sistakou’s exploration of the ‘un-Callimachean’ ‘morbidity’ and ‘sensuality’ of post-Theocritean bucolic.<sup>71</sup> But my crucial point here is that the morbidity of *Idyll* 23 is grounded above all in its stony, urban landscape and that it is figured as a direct response and foil to the sweetness of the natural bucolic world and to the slender refinement of other Hellenistic poets. Ultimately, the poem and its author employ traditional techniques to promote an alternative aesthetic mode, one that embraces the hard, the stony, and the wretched. When studying post-Theocritean ‘bucolic’, we need to be prepared to rethink and reset our aesthetic expectations.

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<sup>69</sup> e.g. Bing 2005: 120–21; Prioux 2008: 159–252, esp. 173–77; Elsner 2014; Calderón Dorda 2019: 32–33. Contrast, too, those poets who employed the imagery of stone as a parallel or foil to the idea of poetic permanence: Porter 2010: 453–523.

<sup>70</sup> I thank an anonymous reader for suggesting this point. On the *Idyll*’s didactic elements, see Kyriakou 2018: 122–23 and 2021: 671. The *Idyll*’s anonymity contributes to this stony dehumanization: the characters serve as deindividuated vehicles for moral claims.

<sup>71</sup> Sistakou 2019, discussing *Idyll* 23 on pp. 298–99.

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