

escapades; the local gossip who can be relied on to come running with her latest news and views straight to those whom they may concern; her daughter who earns pin money by playing background music on the flute when Simaetha entertains Delphis—a touch of sophistication Simaetha would not deny herself. The gently satiric strokes with which these personages and Simaetha herself are presented in all their dear vulgarity connect this poem with the mimes, Idylls XIV and XV.

We may further notice the impartial realism with which Theocritus treats men and women alike. True, his women may come, in one sense, less well out of the comparison; they are hardly forces to be reckoned with, as are the women of his great predecessors in realism, Aristophanes and Euripides. Perhaps Theocritus was too much of a realist to portray heroic women in his day and age, though he might flatter the memory of a great lady, Berenice (as a great lord, Ptolemy) for politic reasons. So the legendary mother of Heracles is introduced in homely wise, putting her babies to bed and rousing her husband in the night with agelong verisimilitude, despite a veneer of heroic convention. Even Helen of Troy, in a formal epithalamium, is seen chiefly as a Spartan girl preeminent among her comrades, and is praised for her domestic skills. In Simaetha, as in Praxinoa and Gorgo of Idyll XV, Theocritus accords women the tribute of being human characters and intrinsically interesting. In Simaetha, moreover, he exposes and inveighs against the Eros idolatry to which our own age is as prone as any, and of which he himself well knew the deception and frustration, even as it captivated him through the beauty of boys (see Idyll XXX). Though Plato and the Platonic tradition before and after him taught that the psychic drive of Eros might, by a rational asceticism, be directed onto an ultimately satisfying, self-transcending object, Theocritus found, it seems, no solution but submission.

The Spellbinders

(Simaetha and her maid)

Where are the laurels? Bring them me, Thestylis. Where are the philtres?

Wreath crimson wool, the choicest, round the bowl;
charms I'll bind on the man, my lover and my bane!

Twelve days I've waited and the brute has not come
near me,

and whether I'm dead or alive he hasn't cared to discover;
not so much as a knock at the door, so monstrous is he!

So Eros has gone and taken his fickle fancy elsewhere!
Aphrodite too! Tomorrow I'll to Timaagetus' palaestra,
to let him know to his face how ill he uses me;

but first, today, I'll bind him fast with my fire-sorcery. 10

Shine clear, Moon: low, in your hushed ears,
shall my spells be sung, goddess, and to her, the earthbound
Hecate, before whom the dog-pack cowers
when she comes among the tombs for the black blood of
corpses.

Hail, dread Hecate! Attend us to the close,
working direr magic than any Circe worked;
than any of Medeia, or blonde-haired Perimede.

Bird-wheel, turn, and hale him home, my man!

First your barley chaff on the fire: scatter it on,
Thestylis! Scared, are you, like a bird, out of your wits? 20
What, are you out to make a fool of me, wretch—you too?
Scatter the barley and say, 'I am scattering Delphis' bones.'

Bird-wheel, turn, and hale him home, my man!

Delphis has made me smart, so I make laurel blaze,
and turn the blaze on Delphis. As it catches fire and crackles,

and all at once is gone, not even ash to see—
so may the flesh of Delphis fall away in flame!

Bird-wheel, turn, and hale him home, my man!

30 Now I'll fire the husks. You, Artemis, move
the iron gates of hell, or any stronger bar!
Thestylis, all the dogs in the city give us tongue:
the goddess, at the three ways! Quickly, clash the brass!

Bird-wheel, turn, and hale him home, my man!

Behold! The sea is silent and silent are the winds;
but not stilled the tempest raging in my breast!
My whole being burns to be avenged on him
who has cast me no wife's, but a spoiled virgin's lot.

Bird-wheel, turn, and hale him home, my man!

40 I pour the three libations, and three times, mistress, cry:
Whether another woman lies beside him, or a man,
may he of Lethe have as much as once, in Naxos,
Theseus took, they say, to forget fair Ariadne.

Bird-wheel, turn, and hale him home, my man!

In Arcady there grows a plant, hippomanes; it maddens
all the colts on the mountainsides, with the fleet mares.
Thus might I see Delphis, and he bolt here home,
like a mad thing loosed from the slippery palaestra.

Bird-Wheel turn, and hale him home, my man!

50 As I wax waste by the power of the fire god, so
straightway, by Eros' power, may Myndian Delphis waste;
and as this bronze rhombus spins Aphrodite's dance,
so may that same dance spin Delphis to our doors.

Bird-wheel, turn, and hale him home, my man!

This fringe of his cloak has Delphis lost in forfeit!
I'll tear it like a beast, and throw it on the fire.
Aiai, tormenting Eros! Why have you clamped on my veins
like a marsh leech, and drained the dark blood out?

Bird-wheel, turn, and hale him home, my man!

Tomorrow I'll pound a lizard and bear you the noxious
brew;
now—Thestylis, take these preparations. While it is night, 60
smear them on his door, the parts above the jambs,
and whisper these words the while, 'I smear Delphis' bones.'

Bird-wheel turn, and hale him home, my man!

Now that I am alone, how to begin to tell
my woeful love story? Who brought this curse on me?
It all happened when Euboulus' daughter, Anaxo, was
going
as basket bearer to Artemis' grove; they were staging a
procession—
leading all kinds of animals round, among them a lioness.

Tell, how fell Eros on me, Lady Moon!

And Theumarida, the Thracian nurse—God rest her soul! 70
She lived next door—she begged us almost on her knees
to be spectators at the show, and I, misguided that I was!
tagged along with her, trailing my best linen dress,
topped off with a wrap I borrowed from Clearista.

Tell, how fell Eros on me, Lady Moon!

Hardly half way along the road—about at Lycon's—
I saw Delphis: he was walking with Eudamippus.
Their beards were more golden than curling honeysuckle,

and their chests had such a sheen—brighter than you,
 Moon,—
 for they were fresh returned from the genteel toil of the
 80 gym.

Tell, how fell Eros on me, Lady Moon!

The moment my eyes lit on them, madness lit on me,
 and fire was laid to my heart, poor wretch that I am!
 My looks were a faded flower; I took no more note of
 processions,
 and I know not how I got home; a burning fever was
 shaking me,
 and I lay in my bed for all of ten days and nights.

Tell, how fell Eros on me, Lady Moon!

And my flesh, more often than not, was the colour
 of boxwood,
 and every last hair fell out of my head; I was reduced
 90 to skin and bone. What dame's establishment did I not visit?
 Did I omit the house of a single crone that crooned?
 But I found no cure, and time went running on to the
 close.

Tell, how fell Eros on me, Lady Moon!

So I told the whole truth to my slave. I said, 'Thestylis,
 listen, you must find me some cure for this disease;
 it's killing me: my poor soul's all possessed by the Myndian.
 So go and keep a lookout near Timaegetus' palaestra,
 for that's his favourite haunt; that's where he suns himself.

Tell, how fell Eros on me, Lady Moon!

And when you learn that he's alone, beckon to him, and
 100 say—

discreetly, mind—"Simaetha calls you," and lead him here.'
 No sooner said—she was gone, and returned to the house
 with Delphis,
 the sheen on his skin! And I, as soon as I was aware,
 by the light footfall, it was he crossing the threshold—

Tell, how fell Eros on me, Lady Moon!

I froze, through and through, to the bone, colder than
 snow,
 and the sweat ran from my forehead, more like a heavy
 dew.
 I couldn't utter a word, not so much as the broken word
 children whimper in sleep to their mother. My once fresh
 complexion became like a wax doll, exactly!

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Tell, how fell Eros on me, Lady Moon!

After a glance, the unnatural man stared at the floor,
 and sat on the bed and made me a speech: 'Simaetha,
 I swear
 you've outstripped me by no more than the edge I had on
 the fair
 Philinus lately in the race! There was not *that* between
 your sending for me to your home here, and my coming
 myself.

Tell, how fell Eros on me, Lady Moon!

I was about to come—in fact, this very night;
 I swear it by sweet Eros—with two or three friends to
 back me,
 and all got up—Dionysus' apples hidden in my cloak,
 120 and on my head a sprig of Heracles' own tree,
 the white poplar, wound round with a crimson ribbon.

Tell, how fell Eros on me, Lady Moon!

And if you had opened to me, it would have been
 becoming,
 for I'm thought handsome and athletic as any of the boys.
 I'd have slept in peace if I'd only kissed your pretty mouth.
 But if you'd turned me away and barred your door, against
 you
 axes and torches were ready to advance on every side.

Tell, how fell Eros on me, Lady Moon!

130 Now first I declared my debt to Cypris and, madam, you
 are second only to Cypris, for you hauled me out of the
 fire
 when you sent for me here to your residence, already half
 consumed as I was—and Eros' blaze can surely scorch
 fiercer than the glare of Liparos, Vulcan's mountain;

Tell, how fell Eros on me, Lady Moon!

and with his wicked ravings he hounds virgins, even,
 from their chambers—even brides to leave their husbands'
 beds

still warm.' These were his words and—gullible me!—
 I took his hand and lay back on the yielding bed.

140 Soon skin warmed to skin, and our faces grew
 hotter than before; we exchanged thrilling whispers.

Not to detain you with babble of intimate matters, Moon,
 the great rite was performed, and we both attained our end.
 He found no fault with me, nor I with him, till yesterday.
 But as soon as Dawn's horses went racing up the sky
 today,

bearing her all rosy from Ocean's bed, the mother
 of Melixo and Philista—she who played the flute for us—
 came with the latest, and told me Delphis, if you please,
 is in love! Whether it was a woman this time, or a man,
 150 she didn't rightly know, but she knew he kept on toasting
 Eros in potent cups, and finally rushed out shouting

that he'd festoon his object's doors with the garlands he
 was wearing.

That was my neighbour's story, and she would tell what
 she knew.

Besides, he used to visit me three or four times a day
 and often he left his flagon,* as he called it, in my keeping.
 Today's the twelfth that I've not set eyes on him. What can
 that mean,

but that he's taking his pleasure elsewhere, and I'm
 forgotten! Well,

for today I'll bind him with spells, but if he should cross
 me still,

by all the Fates, I swear, it's the gates of hell he shall
 hammer on:

such unholy elixirs—I don't mind telling you, Mistress— 160

as I've stored in my coffer for him, that I had from a gypsy.

Now, Lady, fare you well; your foals fare on to the ocean.

As for me, I will bear my yearning—as I must bear it.

Farewell, Moon, on your gleaming throne; attendant stars,
 revolving in the train of tranquil Night, fare well.

*The flask containing the oil Greek athletes used to anoint themselves. This custom gives part of its sense to the expression 'slippery palaestra' (wrestling school) above, 1. 47. Simaetha uses the dialect word she has heard from Delphis.