

ARCHIAS, MELEAGER, TYMNES: DEAD BIRDS IN CONTEXT

Ἄ παρος ἀντίφθογγον ἀποκλάγξασα νομεῦσι
πολλάκι καὶ δρυτόμοις κίσσα καὶ ἰχθυβόλοις,
πολλάκι δὲ κρέξασα πολύθηρον οἷά τις ἀχῶ
κέρτομον ἀντιφδοῖς χεῖλεσιν ἁρμονίαν,
νῦν εἰς γὰν ἄγλωσσοσ ἀναύδητός τε πεσοῦσα
κείμαι, μιμητᾶν ζᾶλον ἀνημαμένα.

This poem (A.P. 7.191), one of thirty-seven in the Greek anthology attributed to the poet Archias¹, appears among a fairly large group of epitaphs or *epicedia* for dead animals. The particular segment of that group in which we find this poem can actually be more narrowly defined. For one thing that segment, variously identified as extending from 7.189, 190 or 194 to 198 or 201², has been identified as part of a ‘Meleagrian sequence’, so designated because it consists of works by authors who were either named in Meleager’s own programmatic poem on the *Garland* (A.P. 4.1) or who, on chronological grounds, could have been represented in that collection. This Meleagrian segment, in other words, is a group of poems that was assembled by Meleager from among the works of his predecessors or contemporaries to which he added a couple of poems of his own (195 and 196). I here identify the sequence as a panel of sixty-six verses comprised of epigrams 189–201. These are predominantly for dead insects, specifically for cicadas and grasshoppers, although there are two anomalous poems, the Archias epigram quoted above and one by Tymnes (199), which are both for dead birds rather than insects. It is a curious fact that these two poems are placed symmetrically within

1) The poems are assembled in one place by A. S. F. Gow & D. L. Page (edd.), *The Greek Anthology: the Garland of Philip and some Contemporary Epigrams* (Cambridge 1968) vol. I 400 ff.

2) See A. Wifstrand, *Studien zur griechischen Anthologie* (Lund 1927) 46; A. S. F. Gow & D. L. Page (edd.), *The Greek Anthology: Hellenistic Epigrams* (Cambridge 1965) vol. II 108 & 605; P. Waltz (ed.), *Anthologie grecque, tom. IV* (Paris 1960) 23; other earlier literature cited in R. B. Egan, *Two Complementary Epigrams of Meleager* (A.P. vii 195 and 196), *JHS* (1988) 24–32; A. Cameron, *The Greek Anthology from Meleager to Planudes* (Oxford 1993) 26 & 29.

the panel; 191 beginning eight lines after the beginning of the panel and 199 ending eight lines before the end of the panel. There is, moreover, an interval of twelve lines between each of these poems and the two poems by Meleager. The bird poems themselves are not the same length, 191 being six verses and 199 four verses. This means that in the panel as it stands there are two more verses preceding the two poems by Meleager than there are following them. Without the two bird poems, however, there would be a panel of fifty-six verses of which the sixteen composed by Meleager are symmetrically bracketed by twenty verses of insect poems by other authors as in the following schema.

Beginning of Panel

8vv.	Insect epitaphs (189, 190)	
	BIRD EPITAPH (191)	6 vv.
12vv.	Insect epitaphs (192, 193, 194)	
	MELEAGER'S INSECT EPIGRAMS (195, 196)	
12vv.	Insect epitaphs (197, 198)	
	BIRD EPITAPH (199)	4 vv.
8vv.	Insect epitaphs (200, 201)	

End of Panel

The presence of two bird epigrams, apparently anomalous as far as their subject matter is concerned but schematically in balance, invites some explanation; particularly since by another criterion, that of shared vocabulary, at least one of them (191) seems to belong in the context as suggested by the words which I have underlined in the text of that poem, words which closely match vocabulary in one or both of Meleager's own poems. Moreover, despite being anomalous vis-à-vis the insect poems, the two bird poems have a common feature inasmuch as each of the dead birds was, in life, an imitator or rival in song of other birds. A complete and conclusive explanation for all of this seems out of reach on the strength of existing evidence which, for one thing, offers no information on the relative chronology of poems by Meleager and Archias. I shall, nonetheless, venture a couple of hypotheses.

Where the insect poems are concerned I believe that I have demonstrated in another article that Meleager not only assembled earlier epigrams and added two of his own, but that he actually bound his own poems into context with those of other poets by adapting and incorporating themes, poetic motifs and vocabulary

from his predecessors' works as he composed his own³. If it is correct to see Meleager's two insect poems along with nine other insect poems comprising a unified poetic panel that comes virtually intact from an earlier phase in the evolution of the *Anthology*, that is from Meleager's *Garland*, the two anomalous bird poems might be seen as emplacements by a later anthologist or later anthologists. On chronological grounds of course it is possible that 199, a poem for a dead thrush by Tymnes, was entered by Meleager, and the same might even be said for Archias' poem since Meleager and Archias were probably contemporaries, but there is no apparent thematic reason for Meleager putting them into context with insect poems. If Archias' work had been available to Meleager, as some have thought⁴, we might have expected the anthologizing poet to have used Archias' own poem on the cicada, which appears later in Book 7 (213), in this context. On the other hand it is difficult to imagine why he would have included either Archias' poem addressed to a jay or Tymnes' poem addressed to a thrush here amid the Meleagrian insects.

The fact that the epigram by Archias shares several items of vocabulary with the poems of Meleager leads me to postulate a reason for the placement of Archias' jay there. It has to do with the jay being proverbially, like the parrot, a mimicking bird. Archias himself has been recognized as a mimicking poet, specifically as one who imitated the poems of Meleager's *Garland*⁵. But within the confines of this poetic panel Meleager himself offers a truly virtuoso performance in poetic mimicry. It will be appropriate now to digress from Archias for a while to review the extent of Meleager's imitation of other poets' insect epitaphs by demonstrating his redeployment of the vocabulary of the other eight poets in their nine poems.

A.P. vii 195

Ἄρκις, ἐμῶν ἀπάτημα πόθων, παραμύθιον ὕπνου,
 ἄρκις, ἀρουραίη Μοῦσα λιγυπτέρουγε,
 αὐτοφυῆς μίμημα λύρας, κρέκε μοί τι ποθεινὸν
 ἐγκρούουσα φίλοις ποσσὶ λάλους πτέρουγας,
 ὧς με πόνων ῥύσαιο παναγρόπτιοιο μερίμνης,

3) Egan (above, n. 2).

4) E.g. Gow & Page (above, n. 1) vol. II 433.

5) J. Hubaux, *Les thèmes bucoliques dans la poésie latine* (Brussels 1930) 28; A. A. Day, *The Origins of Latin Love Elegy* (Oxford 1938) 104; G. Luck, *The Latin Love Elegy* (London 1959) 41.

ἀκρί, μιτωσαμένη φθόγγον ἐρωτοπλάνον.
 δῶρα δέ σοι γήτειον ἀειθαλές ὀρθρινὰ δῶσω
 καὶ δροσεραῖς στόμασι σχιζομένας ψακάδας.

A.P. vii 196

Ἀχῆεις τέτιξ, δροσεραῖς σταγόνεσσι μεθυσθεῖς
 ἀγρονόμαν μέλπεις μοῦσαν ἐρημολάλον
 ἄκρα δ' ἐφεζόμενος πετάλοις πριονώδεσι κώλοις
 αἰθίοπι κλάζεις χρωτὶ μέλισμα λύρας.
 ἀλλά, φίλος, φθέγγου τι νέον δενδρώδεσι Νύμφαις
παίγνιον, ἀντιφδὸν Πανὶ κρέκων κέλαδον,
 ὄφρα φυγῶν τὸν Ἔρωτα μεσημβρινὸν ὑπνον ἀγρεύσω
 ἐνθάδ' ὑπὸ σκιερά κεκλιμένος πλατάνῳ.

The underlined words or parts of words, many of them rather unusual or distinctive lexical items, all occur in at least one of those nine poems. It goes without saying that the vocabulary is itself a reflection of the thematic borrowings from the same poems. But Meleager's poems imitate, not just other poems or poets, but the natural sounds of the insects themselves, particularly in the final couplet of the first poem and the opening couplet of the second one where the predominating sibilance mimes the cicada and the cricket. Then, too, the entire second poem mimics or echoes the first one both thematically and phonetically⁶. In his repetition of the words and sounds of his fellow poets, of the singing insects and of his own poem, Meleager is a jay among poets. But even jays can be imitated, by other jays, and that brings us back to Archias.

My first working hypothesis is that Archias, recognizing what Meleager has done in imitating the other poets' epitaphs for dead insects, writes an epitaph for the jay Meleager in which he mimics some of Meleager's vocabulary, most noticeably those items which have to do with poetic responson, or with echoing or with mimicking, such as (ἀντί)φθογγον, ἀχώ, ἀντιφδοῖς, and μιμητᾶν but other vocabulary as well such as κρέξασα that answers to κρέκε (195.3) and κρέκων (196.6) which have in turn answered to κρέκουσα (192.4). The jay, it should be noted, is the speaker of its own mimetic epitaph. This suggestion requires that Archias had read the Meleagrian panel, taken note of Meleager's poetic mimicry, and then composed his own epigram specifically for insertion into this particular context. Such a scenario is at least consistent with

6) All of this Meleagrian mimicry is discussed more fully in Egan (above, n.2).

the belief that Archias knew and imitated Meleager's work. On the other hand, it leaves us to explain Tymnes' poem differently. Chronologically, that poem will have been antecedent to both Archias and Meleager's anthology. If, however, it were placed by Meleager in the context in which we have received it, it would not only have disrupted the insect sequence but would have done so without the structurally balancing effect of Archias' epigram which would have been inserted later. An alternative (within the same general hypothesis) is that some later anthologist, recognizing Archias' assessment of Meleager as a jay, used a pre-existing epigram on the dead thrush to counter Archias. Tymnes' epigram will have done this not only in terms of the spatial or numerical arrangement of the panel, but thematically as well, for the thrush is also a 'talking' bird (if it can be identified with the *turdus* of Pliny, NH 10.120), though one noted more for its melodious voice than for its garrulity. In counterpoise with the jay it would perhaps represent a more complimentary view of Meleager's poetic attributes, including his mimicry.

A second hypothesis rests on the possibility that both Archias' epitaph for the jay and Tymnes' epitaph for the thrush were placed in the panel by Meleager himself as a sort of self-commentary on what he is doing here. At the same time that he is mimicking the vocabulary of Archias' poem, – for in this scenario the relationship of Archias to Meleager is reversed – he is using that poem as a commentary on his own mimicry of Archias and the other poets whose insect epitaphs he is capping in 195 and 196. But just as Meleager places the Archias epigram shortly after the beginning of the panel and twelve lines before his own imitative work begins, he places the Tymnes epigram twelve lines after his own poems as he approaches the end of the panel. It is as if to say "Jay though I might be in my mimickings, I am a melodious thrush in the execution of my poems that recapitulate the work of my predecessors here." Pointedly, the thrush of Tymnes' poem is a favorite of the Graces (Χάρισιν μεμελημένον, v. 1) and an emulator of another song bird, the halcyon⁷ (παρόμοιον ἀλκυόσιν τὸν σὸν φθόγγον ἰσωσάμενον, vv. 1 f.).

For reasons already noted neither hypothesis admits of final proof. I would therefore emphasize, by way of justifying such hypotheses at all, that the symmetrical placement of the bird

7) For a selection of texts on the halcyon's song see D. W. Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Birds* (London 1936) 47.

poems within the panel of insect poems is not likely to be fortuitous. This is particularly so when one of those poems is a mimicking, or mimicked, epitaph for a notorious mimic placed amid a group of poems that shows an exceptional mimic in action. There is surely some poetic game being played here. Significant questions remain, though, as to how many players are involved and the order in which they have been playing. We can see the pieces deployed on the gaming board but we can not be sure who has made the final move. The symmetry of the panel in terms of the situating of the bird epitaphs and the balanced perspectives on poetic mimicry that they represent incline me towards the second hypothesis which would make the compiler-poet Meleager responsible for the whole construction. In that case the relationship between Meleager and Archias becomes even more intricate, for Meleager, even as he himself mimics Archias' poem, is using that same poem of Archias, along with the one by Tymnes, as a means of assessing and commenting on his own mimicry.

If the jay of Archias' epigram represents a poet, then that epigram anticipates in one important respect Ovid's poem on a dead parrot (*Amores* 2.6) and a later one by Statius (*Silvae* 2.4). Interpreters of the Ovidian poem have recognized that the parrot is really an imitative poet, possibly Ovid himself⁸. They have also recognized that in composing his parrot poem Ovid is in various ways indebted to the Hellenistic authors of animal epitaphs⁹, and something similar has been acknowledged for Statius¹⁰. To my knowledge, however, no one has entertained the possibility that a mimetic bird as a figure for a mimetic poet had itself been exploited by any of Ovid's Hellenistic forerunners. The possibility or, as I would say, the likelihood that the birds represent a human poet, suggests that there might have been an extra dimension or point of reference, now well obscured, for more than one of those many Greek epitaphs for dead animals, particularly for all the musical and eloquent dead birds and insects of the *Greek Anthology*¹¹. In light of that it seems equally likely that Ovid was indebted

8) See K. S. Myers, Ovid's *Tecta Ars: Amores* 2.6: 'Programmatic and the Parrot', EMC/CV n.s. 9 (1990) 367-374; B. W. Boyd, The Death of Corinna's Parrot Reconsidered: Poetry and Ovid's *Amores*, CJ 80 (1987) 199-207.

9) See Myers (above, n.7) 368. T. G. O. Gollnisch, *Quaestiones Elegiacae* (Diss. Breslau 1905) sees traces of A.P. 7.189, 7.190 and 7.194 in *Amores* 2.6.

10) See H.-J. van Dam, P. Papinius Statius *Silvae* Book II: a Commentary (Leiden 1984) 336 ff.

11) Most such poems have been isolated by G. Herrlinger, *Totenklage zum Tiere in der antiken Dichtung* (Stuttgart 1930).

ed to Hellenistic poets, not only in the use of the sepulchral animal epigram but also for the conceit which represents a poet through a parroting dead bird.

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