Fantasy and Metaphor in Meleager

KATHRYN GUTZWILLER
University of Cincinnati

Meleager of Gadara is one of those increasingly rare Greek authors whose works are somewhat known to many classicists but whose influence on ancient and later literature remains underappreciated. Meleager’s anthology of Greek epigrams called the Garland produced Latin imitations shortly after its creation in the early first century B.C.E., and allusions to Meleager’s own, mostly erotic poems are found in prominent programmatic passages of Latin poetry. Examples include the first three poems and the last poem of the Catullan liber, the opening of Propertius’s Monobiblos, the first speech in Vergil’s Eclogue 1, and the opening lines of Tibullus 1.2.¹ I would assert that as a model for Latin erotic poetry Meleager rivals Callimachus in both direct allusions and as a source of topoi and imagery. Alessandro Barchiesi has spoken of the Garland as a model for elegant poetry books because of its careful arrangements,² but what was it about Meleager’s own poetry that appealed to Roman poets? Pointing toward an answer to that question, I here examine


some unique features of Meleager’s poetry involving his use of fantasy and metaphor, which distinguish him from the epigrammatists he anthologized.

When poets of the third century B.C.E. adapted verse inscriptions to book epigrams, the most paradoxical new type of epigram was the erotic, because there was no tradition of lover’s speech versified for inscription. To cite a motif shared by Meleager and Catullus, a lover’s words are written not on stone, but on wind and water (Anth. Pal. 5.8; Catull. 70). In the erotic section of the Garland Meleager worked variation after variation on the tropes of Asclepiades, Callimachus, and other epigrammatists; by grouping these poems in short sequences on related themes, he gave his own compositions an intertextual context through juxtaposition with his models. But despite persistent, acknowledged borrowing, Meleager’s epigrams have a different texture and effect. He takes his amatory mode to a place far from inscription, to a place of interiority where image and fantasy interact to convey the felt experience of desire. Like other emotions, desire cannot be seen directly, but may be intuited by those with similar experience. Callimachus explains in one epigram that he can spot the hidden heartache of a fellow symposiast just as a thief recognizes a thief (Anth. Pal. 12.134). For Meleager it is not enough to know it when you see it. He is rather concerned to convey directly to the reader’s senses, through words and imagery, what it is like to be a desiring self, someone who cannot escape the cycle of desire and longing for some delicate youth or some charming woman. His method of doing so is to concretize in image, and even to site in the body, eros itself in the form of god and feeling and beloved, all together. For Meleager, the truth of the soul’s experience of desire can only be told through metaphor, dream, and fantasy.

A long sequence of epigrams by anthologized poets from the erotica section of the Garland is preserved in the Greek Anthology. As I showed some years ago, it begins with an epigram cluster thematizing a symposium setting with wine, garlands, love, and song. There we find a pair of poems on Meleager’s beloved Heliodora (Anth. Pal. 5.136):

\[
\text{ἐγχει καὶ πάλιν εἰπέ, πάλιν πάλιν, Ἡλιοδώρας·}
\text{εἰπέ, σὺν ἀκρήτῳ τὸ γλυκὺ μίσγ', ὀνόμα.}
\text{καὶ μοι τὸν βρεχθέντα μύροις καὶ χθιζὸν ἐόντα,}
\text{μναμόσυνον κείνας, ἀμφιτίθει στέφανον.}
\]

Although Planudes attributes Anth. Pal. 5.8 to Philodemus, the attribution to Meleager in the Palatine Anthology is undoubtedly correct, since the thematic sequence of Anth. Pal. 5.6–8 was almost certainly extracted from the Garland.

Pour and say again, again and again, “for Heliodora.”
Say it, mingling her sweet name with pure wine.
And crown me with that garland soaked in scent, the one
from yesterday, in remembrance of her.
Look, a rose, the friend of lovers, weeps because it sees
her not in my arms, but elsewhere.

The companion epigram is as follows (Anth. Pal. 5.137):

Pour a cup for Persuasion and Cypris Heliodora,
and again for the same sweet-speaking Grace,
since for me she is written as one goddess. Her much-longed-for
name I will drink down, mixed with pure wine.

The call for the slave to pour wine, an old poetic motif, signals the symposium
setting. Yet the dramatized speech act is not quite what it seems, but unstable,
filled with symbols and duality. The symposium, a place where erotic epigrams
were likely recited, may be read here as an image of the amatory collection
itself, which presumably filled a whole bookroll of epigrams. The neat wine
mixed not with water but with Heliodora’s name evokes the custom of toasting
the beloved, but what matters here is the sound of the name, the synaesthesia
of the word Heliodora, sweet as wine. The symposium act of putting on the
garland points to the anthologizer taking up his own place as poet within
his Garland—yet with a wreath that is faded, soaked with scent, resonant of
yesterday—that is, a trope of love’s loss. Meleager thus begins his erotica with
the beloved absent, untrue, as Propertius begins his Monobiblos with the year-
long torments of loving Cynthia (1.1). Drifting into fantasy, Meleager’s lover
conceives the perfume dripping from a flower in the garland as sympathetic
tears, shed because the rose—a Sapphic image—has the capacity to visual-

5 The text of Meleager printed throughout is based on that of Gow-Page 1965; deviations, apart from the retention of manuscript readings and differences in punctuation, are discussed in the notes.
6 All translations are my own.
7 E.g., Sappho fr. 55.2–3; cf. Philostr. Epist. 51, ἡ Σαπφώ τοῦ ῥόδου ἔραι (“Sappho loves the rose”). For allusions to Sappho in Meleager, see Citti 1978–1979.
ize Heliodora in the arms of another. In the second epigram, she is toasted as a Muse-like goddess, synonymous with persuasion, sexiness, and “sweet-speaking” charm, the χάρις that elsewhere characterizes Meleager’s style.\(^8\) As a written goddess, the precursor of Propertius’s *scripta puella*, Heliodora in her absence provides the “longed-for” (ποθεινόν) name that the poet/lover will take into his body, mixed in wine. At the beginning of the *erotica*, in this symposium elevated to the imaginary, Meleager internalizes what is permanent about Heliodora, that is, the vocalic flow of her name that will dwell within him as the matrix of qualities informing his verse.

Versions of fantasy return again and again in Meleager’s erotic epigrams, as in a poem that continues the leitmotif of longing for Heliodora (*Anth. Pal*. 5.166):

\[
\text{ὦ Νύξ, ὦ φιλάγρυπνος ἡμοί πόθος Ἡλιοδώρας}
\text{καὶ σκολιῶν ὥρκων\(^9\) κνίσματα δακρυχαρῆ,}
\text{ἆρα μὲνει στοργῆς ἡμᾶ στεργάνα, κάτι\(^10\) φίλημα}
\text{μνημόσυνον ψυχρὰ θάλπετ᾽ ἐν εἰκασίᾳ;\(^11\)}
\text{ἆρα γ᾽ ἔχει σύγκοιτα τὰ δάκρυα, κάμον ὄνειρον}
\text{ψυχαπάτην στέρνοις ἀμφιβαλοῦσα φιλεῖ;}
\text{ἡ νέος ἄλλος ἔρως, νέα παίγνια: μὴ ποθεινόν, ἰθυχνε,}
\text{ταῦτ᾽ ἐσίδῃς, εἰς δ᾽ ἡς παρέδωκα φύλαξ.}
\]

O Night, O longing for Heliodora that adores sleeplessness, and you torments that joy in my tears over her false oaths, are there still remnants of her devotion to me, and is a kiss as a remembrance still warmed in her cold fancy? Does she have tears as a bedpartner? Does she pull to her breast and kiss a soul-deceiving dream image of me? Or is there some new love, a new dalliance? Don’t gaze, lamp, upon that, but guard the girl I entrusted to you.

Meleager apostrophizes Night as our only clue to the setting and objectifies his own longing and mental torments as if they were internal demons that

---


\(^9\) The reading ὥρκων is my own conjecture; the Palatine manuscript had ὥρθων before correction and has ὥρθρων after correction. For the theme of betrayal by false swearing in Meleager, see *Anth. Pal*. 5.8, 5.175 (κενὸς ὥρκος, 1), 5.184 (ἐπίορκε, 3).

\(^10\) κάτι is an emendation by Purgold 1802: 289 for a corrupt text in the Palatine Codex; καὶ τι, printed by Gow-Page, descends from a 17th c. apographon *Parisinus gr*. 2742.

\(^11\) I print the conjecture ἐν εἰκασίᾳ made by Graefe 1811: no. 103, with discussion 123–24.
rejoice in torturing him. Revealing the fantasies that constitute these torments, he wonders whether Heliodora’s love remains, whether she too is wakeful, dreaming of his kiss, weeping.\textsuperscript{12} Imagining Heliodora longing as he longs, the poet creates a fancy of a fancy, which restores the two lovers to emotional oneness despite their separation. Then suddenly the possibility of a new lover dawns, and in panicked reaction, he commands the lamp to cease its watch, not only suggesting the usual presence of the lit lamp in sexual intimacy but also activating his own mental darkness—and so the end of the epigram.\textsuperscript{13} The role of the lamp, given sentence like the rose, and impossibly existing both here and there, illustrates how Meleager’s erotic poetry transforms the material objects of his lived world into objective correlatives, symbolic sympathizers for his feelings and experiences.

In other examples, the fantasy of sympathy from nature’s creatures takes a humorous turn, as in an epigram where the poet engages in role-playing with a mosquito (\textit{Anth. Pal.} 5.152):

\begin{quote}
πταίης μοι, κώνωψ, ταχυς ἄγγελος, οὐδεὶς δ’ ἄκροις
Ζηνοφίλας ψαύσας προσψηθύριζε τάδε.
“ἄγρυπνος μίμης σε- σύ δ’, ὦ λήθαργε φιλούντων,
εὐδεῖς.” εἰς, πέτευ- ναί, φιλόμονας, πέτευ-
ήσυχα δὲ φθέγξαι, μη καὶ σύγκοιτον ἐγείρας
κινήσεις ἐπ’ ἔμοι ζηλοτύπους ὀδύνας.
ἡν δ’ ἄγάγης τὴν παίδα, δορᾷ στέψω σε λέοντος,
κώνωψ, καὶ δώσω χειρὶ φέρειν ῥόπαλον.

Fly for me, mosquito, swift messenger, and just grazing the tip of Zenophila’s ears, whisper this,
“Awake, he waits for you. But you, forgetful of your lovers, just sleep.” Come now, friend of the Muse, fly, fly.
But do speak softly, so that you don’t wake her companion and provoke painful blows of jealousy against me.
If you manage to bring the girl, I’ll crown you, mosquito, with a lion skin and give you a club for your hand.
\end{quote}

The poet, alone, imagining a rival in bed with Zenophila, seeks help from a stray mosquito, who is sent off as a ταχυς ἄγγελος (“swift messenger”), a formula applied by Homer to Zeus’s eagle (\textit{Il.} 24.292, 310) and Apollo’s hawk.

\textsuperscript{12} On dreams and images as fantasies in the Anthology, see Plastira-Valkanou 1999: 276–77; on dreams in Meleager, see Susanetti 1999, esp. 50–51.

\textsuperscript{13} For the motif of the extinction of the lamp as a presumed hindrance to lovemaking, see Asclepiades \textit{Anth. Pal.} 5.7, with the discussion of Sens 2011: 57–59, 62.
(Od. 15.526). The epic parallel sets up the mock-heroic parody that informs the poem. Meleager is fond of role-playing, by himself and others, as another method of giving real-world concreteness to emotion-driven fantasies. Here the mosquito mimics not just divinely favored birds but also magic messengers known from erotic incantations. In these, a demon or often Eros himself is dispatched by a lover to lead a woman from her home to his bed; the technical term for such an incantation was ἀγωγή, suggested by the verb ἄγαγης (“you bring”) in the last couplet. In the poet’s dream of nature’s sympathy, the mosquito is also addressed as φιλόμουσε (“friend of the Muse”). That expression typically designates lovers of music and poetry, often patrons of the arts, and the poetic quality of the insect’s whispered buzz in Zenophila’s ear is made clear in the sibilant sounds of the opening couplet (πταίης …, κώνωψ, ταχὺς ἄγγελος, οὖσα δ’ ἀκροι | Ζηνοφίλας ψαύσας προσψιθύριζε). In Meleager’s vivid imagination the mosquito as messenger becomes a supporter and devotee of his poetry. The concluding promise to crown the little insect with the garb of Heracles reinforces the mock-heroic mode with yet more complex associations. The figure who takes away Heracles’ accoutrements in Hellenistic art is Eros, a small winged creature like the mosquito. This intertwining of associations so that the mosquito plays the role of poet, hero, god, and demonic messenger all at once showcases Meleager’s love of patterned meaning, all in the interests of staging the mad fantasies of a desperate lover.

In the recent awakening of interest in epigram as a genre, one of the most fruitful concepts has been Peter Bing’s discussion of what is called “Ergänzungsspiel,” meaning literally “play with completion.” Many epigrams of the

---

17 In two ecphrastic epigrams of the first century c.e. (Tullius Geminus, Anth. Plan. 103 and Philip, Anth. Plan. 104), a viewer of a Lysippan statue of a weary Heracles without his usual attributes (cf. the Farnese type, LIMC "Herakles" nos. 681–737) asks the hero where his equipment has gone, only to be told or to realize that Eros has taken it away. Figures of Eros with Heraclean attributes descend from the late-classical or Hellenistic periods, e.g., an Eros sitting on a lion skin and holding a club on a later fourth-century B.C.E. Attic vase (LIMC “Eros” no. 950 = Louvre, CA 627; cf. nos. 951–54) and a sleeping Eros lying on a lion skin and with a club (LIMC “Eros” no. 781). Roman examples with Cupid or multiple Cupids (LIMC “Eros/Amor, Cupido” nos. 613–20; “Herakles” nos. 3419–49) are reflected in imperial epigrams (Secundus, Anth. Plan. 214; Philip, Anth. Plan. 215).
Hellenistic period advance the literary character of their new book contexts by encouraging the reader to visualize an inscriptive site or to imagine speech or thought in a specific time and place; such a process of filling in the gaps is widely recognized as a feature of reading with literary purpose. In Meleager’s epigrams, however, what matters tends to be the speaker’s state of mind, presented in the form of a “dramatized fantasy.” In the persona of himself as lover, Meleager often conveys the intensity of his feelings by entering an imaginary world of unreality.

In a poem with surrealistic aspects, Meleager dramatizes a voyager’s arrival on shore, melding it with sea-of-love imagery to convey the onset of desire (Anth. Pal. 12.84):

Help me, men! Just as I’ve reached land from my sea voyage and steadied my foot on the ground, Eros now drags me by force. As if shining forth a torch, he flashes a boy’s beauty, desirable to see. I match my step to his, and seizing his image sweetly molded in the air, I sweetly kiss it with my lips. Have I then escaped the bitter sea to traverse on dry land the much more bitter wave of Cypris?

To evoke a setting, the poem begins with the vivid immediacy of a cry for help. A scene of disembarkation, the transition from sea to solid earth, normally signifies safety. Here, though, danger awaits as the traveler is forcibly dragged away, not by brigands, but by Eros. Destabilizing the dramatic reality, the word Ἐρως (3) reveals that the danger is only emotional, the kidnapping being, again, just imagistic role-playing. The likening of Eros to someone “shining forth a torch” (3) confounds the figure of a torch-bearing Eros with the everyday occurrence of a torchbearer meeting a night-arriving passenger. Eros’s torch morphs into the flashing face of a beautiful boy, whom the speaker follows,
seizing his image in the air and kissing it sweetly. Is there here a boy, or the boy-god, or a fantasy of both melded as desire personified?

The surrealistic aspects of the epigram suggest that Meleager presents himself as the victim of a magical ἀγωγή, a spell to entice another person for sexual purposes. Some of these spells preserved in magic books specify that a little image of Eros holding a torch is to be made and sent as a messenger to burn the victim’s soul and bring the victim to the lover. In our epigram Meleager represents, from the point of view of the person succumbing to such a spell, the seductive confusion of torch-bearing Eros and seductive boy. The spell may include a dream vision in which the victim has erotic fantasies, just as here Meleager grasps for some insubstantial image of the boy in the air. The intended effect of the spell is often a violent one, involving “dragging” by the hair or vital organs, and this crucial action appears in the same words in this epigram and a companion piece (ἐλκεῖ τῇ δ’ ὁ βίαιος Ἔρως, Anth. Pal. 12.84.3, 12.85.4). In the companion epigram, which is a continuation of the story of the speaker’s arrival, Meleager admits that he is “against his will swiftly (ταχύς) transported by uncontrollable feet” (Anth. Pal. 12.85.6). The practitioner of a magic spell is generally in a hurry, wanting his victim to visit him ταχύ ταχύ.21 The unusual aspect of Meleager’s fantasy of being a victim to magic is the reversal of the normal roles, since the spells found in the magic papyri are usually directed by men at women or, more rarely at boys.22 Casting the boy/Eros as the instigator of the magic only increases the unreality of the event. In the end, it all serves to communicate in yet another form the poet’s persistent state of pathetic longing.

While other erotic epigrammatists were generally content with commonplace images of Eros’s torch and arrows, Meleager was particularly creative in his imagery for the physical effects of the god—his wounding of the body and shaping of the soul. One epigram concerns the wounds to his heart from the scratch (κνίσμα) of Heliodora’s fingernail (Anth. Pal. 5.157):

τρηχὺς ὄνυξ, ὑπ’ Ἐρωτός ἀνέτραφες, Ἡλιοδώρας
tαύτας γὰρ δύνει κνίσμα καὶ ἐς κραδίην.

It was Eros who nourished you, jagged nail of Heliodora.
For her scratch plunges even to the heart.

22 See Winkler 1990: 90 who points out the disjunction between the actual use of the spells and literary depictions where women are more often the practitioners (e.g., Simaetha in Theoc. Id. 2).
The association of the verb κνίζω, *scratch* or *scrape*, with erotic irritation, a sexual itch, is found as early as the fifth century. In Meleager the scratch is more concrete, since it comes from a woman’s nail that is apostrophized as a sentient being, trained by Eros to harm. Though the reader may imagine an actual scratch that happened during sexual play, the plunge to the heart remains entirely metaphorical. In a related couplet, the heart as the seat of the soul is physically molded by Eros, that is, by the poet’s desire for Heliodora (*Anth. Pal.* 5.155):

\[
\text{έντος \ ἐμῆς κραδίας τὴν εὐλαλον Ἡλιοδώραν}
\]
\[
ψυχὴν τῆς ψυχῆς ἐπλασεν αὐτὸς Ἔρως.
\]

Within my heart Eros himself molded Heliodora, the sweet-speaking one, as soul of my soul.

The epithet “sweet-speaking” suggests that it is the *sound* of Heliodora’s voice that has possessed the lover. But since the phrase εὐλαλον Ἡλιοδώραν here represents what Eros has molded in Meleager’s heart, in some sense it is Heliodora’s name that has become the soul within his soul, poised to come forth as her poetic equivalent.

Another poem plays on the name of another beloved, Phanion, which as a common noun meant *little torch* or in Meleager’s day *lamp* (*Anth. Pal.* 12.83):

\[
\text{o̜u̜ \ μ’ \ έτρωσεν \ Έρως \ τόξοις, \ ο̜u̜ \ λαμπάδ’ \ ἀνάψας}
\]
\[
\text{ώς \ πάρος \ αἰθομέναν \ θήκεν \ υ̜π̜ο̜ \ κραδία-}
\]
\[
\text{σύγκωμον \ δὲ \ Πόθοισι \ φέρων \ Κύπριδος \ μυροφεγγές}
\]
\[
\text{φανίον, \ ἀκρον \ ἐμοῖς \ ὑπ̜ο̜ \ έβαλεν-}
\]
\[
\text{ἐκ \ δὲ \ μη \ καιόμενον \ κραδία.}
\]

Not did Eros wound me with his arrows, nor kindling a torch as before hold it aflame under my heart.

But he brought Cypris’s little lamp shining with fragrant oil as a fellow-reveler for the spirits of longing, and he cast a ray of its fire into my eyes. The light from it dissolved me, and that little lamp became visible as my soul’s fire blazing in my heart.


24 Elsewhere in Meleager (*Anth. Pal.* 5.178.3–4, 12.126.2) it is Eros who scratches with his nail to induce passion. Höschele 2009: 121, 2010: 215, reading the Heliodora epigrams as a poetic biography, points out that in the *Garland’s* erotic section this epigram is the first to mention any painful aspects of their relationship.


26 *UPZ* 5.18, 6.15, where the meaning *lamp* for φανός is guaranteed by the demotic paraphrase.
The purpose of the wordplay, also appearing in Anth. Pal. 12.82, is to blend the one who is desired with the force of desire. Eros has wounded Meleager unconventionally, not with arrows or burning with a torch, but by casting the tip of the fire from Aphrodite’s phanion into the lover’s eyes. The meaning lamp is guaranteed here because this phanion is not Eros’s usual torch but an object that gleams with fragrant oil (μυροφεγγέςς, 3). Since the lamp is also the girl, the setting becomes completely metaphorical, except that the entrance of desire through the eyes suggests an actual glance at Phanion as the origin of the poet’s love. The light from the lamp has now possessed him, so that the lover becomes the type of lantern that holds a lamp (phanion) within, as the fire of his soul, discernible in his heart. The internalization of Phanion as visible fire, like Heliodora within his heart in Anth. Pal. 5.155, suggests that such physical modifications of the poet’s body manifest themselves through the language of the poem itself.

Despite the uniqueness of Meleager’s imagery for the physical effects of Eros, there is good reason to think that he was motivated by Hellenistic philosophical ideas about the interrelationship of body, soul, and emotion. The soul was generally conceived as breath (πνεῦμα), the component extending throughout the body that processes sensation as emotion and also engages in rational thought. In an amusing poem that illustrates this concept (Anth. Pal. 12.117), Meleager presents an argument between two parts of his soul, as his spirit or θυμός, impaired by wine and driven by desire to go on a komos, resists the urgings of his λογισμός or reason. In Hellenistic thought passions like erotic desire were believed to attack specific bodily organs—the heart or other internal parts; the soul in turn was affected by “impressions” called φάντασιαι made from these physical encounters. The Stoics defined such a physical impression as a τύπωσις ἐν ψυχῇ, a “stamp on the soul,” and the Epicureans spoke in terms of τύποι, or simulacra, images of solid bodies that impact the senses. By supplementing the conventional imagery of erotic verse with images of wounding, burning, scratching, and molding (for which there are parallels in the visual arts of the day), Meleager produces a poeticized psychology of love that is in conformity with contemporary theories of human emotion.

The interrelationship between visual and poetic representations of the soul in love is explored by Meleager in an epigram on the sculptor Praxiteles, who...

---
27 E.g., Diog. Laert. 7.45, 50; Plut. Mor. 1084F.
gave shape to lifeless stone, and a living boy named Praxiteles, who shaped Eros in his own heart (Anth. Pal. 12.57):

Πραξιτέλης ὁ πάλαι ζωογλύφος ἀβρόν ἀγαλμα ἄψυχον μορφᾶς κωφὸν ἔτευξε τύπον, πέτρον οὐκ ἐδεξιοφορῶν· δε νόον ἐμψυχα μαγεύων τὸν τριπανουργὸν Ἐρωτὲ ἐπλασεν ἐν κραδίᾳ. ἢ τάξα τούνου ἔχει ταύτὸν μόνον, ἐργα δὲ κρέσσω, οὐ λίθον ἀλλὰ φρενῶν πνεῦμα μεταρρυθμίσας. ἦ τάχα τοὔνομ’ ἔχει ταύτων μόνον, ἐργα δὲ κρέσσω, οὐ λίθον ἀλλὰ φρενῶν πνεῦμα μεταρρυθμίσας.

Praxiteles, the sculptor of old, fashioned a delicate statue, lifeless, a dumb image of form, by bringing shape to stone. But today’s Praxiteles, by bewitching the living, has molded that ultimate rogue Eros in my heart. The name is perhaps the same but his accomplishments greater, since he has shaped not stone but mind’s breath. Kindly may he mold my character so that now that he’s shaped my soul within, he may possess a temple of Eros.

Meleager is here working with the anecdotal tradition about Praxiteles who was famous for his ability to give his statues the appearance of human emotion. Praxiteles’ statue of Eros at Thespiae was considered such an accurate representation of that erotic deity that it produced desire in its viewers. Praxiteles had reportedly managed to sculpt such an image by using as his model his own passion for his mistress Phryne. This story suggests the concept of phantasia, conceived as an impression in the soul that might then become manifest as artistic or poetic expression. An epigram of uncertain authorship makes just this interpretation (Anth. Plan. 204.1–2):

Πραξιτέλης ὁν ἔπασχε διηκρίβωσεν ἔρωτα, ἐξ ἰδιῆς ἐλκὼν ἀρχέτυπον κραδίης.

Praxiteles imaged altogether accurately the passion he felt, drawing the model for it from his own heart.


30 For the manifestation of phantasia as language, see Diog. Laert. 7.49 (on the Stoic theory of perception) and [Longinus] Subl. 15.1.

31 It is attributed to Simonides (impossibly) in Planudes and to Praxiteles (improbably) in Athenaeus (13.591a). See too Tullius Geminus, Anth. Pal. 6.260.5–6; Leonidas [of Alexandria?], Anth. Plan. 206; Julianus 203.
What Meleager does in his epigram is to remodel the role played by his sculpting Praxiteles to illustrate not the making of a physical image of desire—a statue—but the effect of an Eros-like boy on the material of his soul. The boy Praxiteles has given new shape to the lover’s “mind’s breath” (φρενῶν πνεῦμα, 6). The epigram, like the others describing erotic desires, can be read as a reflection of this breath, the πνεῦμα that runs throughout his body and can issue forth as λόγος, a rationalized form of emotion in speech.

As Meleager’s erotic encounters multiply, the mild discomfort of Eros’s scratch or the fire of a small lamp is replaced by images of painful suffering, as Meleager blames his own soul or bodily components for their inability to resist the force of desire. In a particularly complex poem he explores the long-standing idea that the eyes are the entry point through which desire flows into the soul (Anth. Pal. 12.92):32

ὦ προδόται ψυχῆς, παιδῶν κύνες, αἰὲν ἐτ’ ἰξῷ33
Κύπριδος ὀφθαλμοὶ βλέμματα χριόμενοι,
ἡπάσατ’ ἄλλον Ἐρώτ’, ἄρνες λύκον, οία κορώνη
σκορπίον, ὡς τέφρη πῦρ ὑποθαλπόμενον.
δράθ’ ὁ τι καὶ βουλέσθε· τί μοι γενοτισμένα χείτε
δάκρυα, πρὸς δὲ δίκην αὐτομολεῖτε τάχος,34
ὀπτᾶσθ’ ἐν κάλλει, τύφεσθ’ ὑποκαόμενοι νῦν,
ἄκρος ἐπεί ψυχῆς ἐστι μάγειρος Ἐρώς.

Betrayers of the soul, dogs of boys, eyes whose glances
are always smeared with the Cyprian’s birdlime,
you’ve caught another Eros, a sheep taking a wolf, like a crow

33 The reading αἰὲν ἐτ’ ἰξῷ is my correction of the unmetrical αἰὲν ἰξῷ in the Palatine Anthology, our only manuscript source for this poem. Previous editors have accepted the supplement ἐτ’, which apparently descends from Saumaise. The construction is then ἐτ’ ἰξῷ | … χριόμενοι in tmesi, a complicated construction involving βλέμματα as an internal accusative; the tmesis is surprising in Meleager.
34 I write δὲ δίκην for P’s δικητήν. The reading δ´ ἱκητήν has been accepted by most recent editors, though it is entirely unclear who the supplicant is, Eros or the lover. Gow-Page mark the lines as corrupt. With my emendation, the eyes are being told that they are now paying for their uncontrolled gaze, an idea paralleled in Anth. Pal. 12.132.11–14, quoted below. For the “code of δίκη,” which usually involves vengeance upon one who betrays a lover, see Falivene 1981.
Fantasy and Metaphor in Meleager

Do whatever you like. Why, I ask, do you shed storms of tears, and then straightway go off for punishment? Be roasted in beauty, be smoked now from the fire beneath, since Eros is a consummate cook of the soul.

Meleager chastises his own eyes as betrayers of his soul because they doggedly seek out beautiful boys. The initial image of the eyes as dogs or as objects smeared with birdlime—hunting companions or tools that have gone rogue—gives way in the second couplet to the consequences of their betrayal. A series of appositional similes explain how the desiring eyes become prey to each “Eros” caught, like lambs catching a wolf, a crow a scorpion, or, with a different sort of metaphor to anticipate the final image, ash seizing fire. Since love is always painful, the eyes now weep in regret even as they willingly engage in behavior that will be punished. The eyes above will be roasted in boys’ beauty, smoked from the fire below, as Eros cooks the soul within the body. As often, the soul suffers because it fails to control the appetites of its bodily organs, particularly the eyes that scan for objects of beauty. The poet who speaks in the voice of the whole self complains bitterly, piling up images, because his innermost self is tortured as the eyes repeatedly allow desire to enter. Meleager’s concluding image of Eros as an expert chef of the soul, not found earlier, is yet another version of metaphorical role-playing, here bringing all the imagery of the poem into a coherent whole by explaining how desire bedevils the inveterate erastes.

The longest of Meleager’s erotic poems, a signature composition, is a litany of complaints about the soul’s lack of resistance to desire. Though forewarned, she has again been caught by Eros’s snare and endures torment (Anth. Pal. 12.132):

οὐ σοι ταῦτ’ ἐβόων, ψυχή, “ναι Κύπριν ἀλώσει, ῦ δύσερως, ἵξω πυκνά προσπιταμένη”; ὦν ἐβόων; εἰλέν σε πάγη· τί μάτην ἑνὶ δεσμοῖς σπαϊρείς; αὐτὸς ἦσε τὰ πτερὰ σου δέδεκεν, καὶ σ’ ἐπὶ πῦρ ἔστησε, μύροις δ’ ἔρραν λιπόπνουν, δοκεῖ δὲ δυσώσῃ δάκρυα θερμὰ πιεῖν. ἄψυχη βαρύμοχθε, σὺ δ’ ἄρτι μὲν ἐκ πυρὸς αἰθή, ἄρτι δ’ ἀναψύχεις, πνεῦμ᾽ ἀναλεξαμένη. τί κλαίεις; τὸν ἄτεγκτον ὅτ’ ἐν κόλποις ᾧ Ἐρωτα ἔτρεφες, οὐκ ἦδες ως ἐπὶ σοι τρέφετο; οὐκ ἦδεις; νῦν γνώθι καλὸν ἀλλαγμα τροφείων, πῦρ ἄμα καὶ ψυχρὰν δεξαμένη χύνα. αὐτὴ ταῦτ’ ἐλεύθη· φέρε τὸν πόνον· ἀξία πάσχεις ὠν ἔδρας, ὀπτῷ καιομένη μέλιτι.
Didn’t I shout to you, soul, “You’ll be caught, love’s sufferer, if by Cypris you keep flying to the birdlime”? Didn’t I shout it? The snare’s got you. Why do you bother to pant, uselessly, in your bonds? Eros himself bound your wings, held you to the fire, sprinkled perfume when you fainted, and gave your thirst warm tears to drink.

O suffering soul, now you burn with fire and now find rest, your breath recovered.

Why weep? When you nursed cruel Eros in your breast, didn’t you know he was nursed for you?

Didn’t you know? Understand now that fire and icy snow are the payment you got for good nursing.

You chose this. Endure the pain. You’ve got what you deserve for your deeds, to burn in roasted honey.

A division of the poem into two sections (1–6, 7–14) became the consensus among twentieth-century scholars, but seems to me entirely unnecessary. The length, though beyond the norm, is not unprecedented either in the epigrams of earlier Hellenistic poets or among Meleager’s own epigrams. The first three couplets detail the speaker’s previous warnings to his soul, which have now come true through Eros’s various torments. The apostrophe to the soul in the fourth couplet is not a new beginning but a marker of the speaker’s summary of the cycle of torture and rest that the god affords his psyche. The last three couplets explain that his soul deserves this treatment because she nurtured Eros on her lap when she should have known his nature and the pain he would bring. Meleager berates his soul elsewhere as well (Anth. Pal. 12.80, 12.125.7–8), but the greater length here is a sign that the poem played a summary role of some sort in the Garland sequence.

The poem’s imagery may seem excessive and even distancing, and nineteenth-century scholars associated Meleager’s tendency to excess with his Syrian heritage. But far from being aberrant, his poetry preserves cultural

---

35 Meleager’s corpus includes a proem of 58 lines (Anth. Pal. 4.1) and poems of twelve (Anth. Pal. 12.256, Anth. Plan. 134), fourteen (Anth. Pal. 7.421), and twenty (Anth. Pal. 7.428) lines. Among earlier long epigrams are Posidippus 19, 74, 78 AB, all fourteen lines (from the Milan Papyrus), 118 AB of twenty-eight lines, and 142 AB of twelve lines; Callimachus 14 Gow-Page, twelve lines, and Anth. Pal. 7.89, sixteen lines; Leonidas of Tarentum Anth. Pal. 7.472, sixteen lines; Antipater of Sidon Anth. Pal. 7.427, fourteen lines, and 6.219, twenty-four lines. On long epigrams, see Cairns 2008.

36 E.g., Ouvré 1894: 39–42. Nisbet 2013 discusses at length the orientalizing view of Meleager through the lens of nineteenth-century political and sexual views (see Index s.v. “Meleager, as Easterner”).
commonplaces concerning erotic life that existed in the late Hellenistic and imperial periods. For instance, as scholars have pointed out, a faded painting from Pompeii depicts just the same actions as in the epigram\(^{37}\): one Cupid thrusts a burning torch into the chest of a bound Psyche figure, while another revives her with a liquid poured from above. Other images in Meleager’s poem also find parallels in artistic representations of Eros. Eros as fowler catching the soul in the form of an insect appears incised on a gemstone,\(^{38}\) Eros burning the butterfly Psyche is a common image,\(^{39}\) and a personified Psyche with a baby Eros on her lap occurs on a grand cornelian of the Augustan age.\(^{40}\) By the late Hellenistic period such visual images were worn on rings, painted on walls, and sculpted as miniature statues. The Latin poets who imitated Meleager would surely have made the connection between his imagery and the visual vocabulary of the minor arts that were visible everywhere in their world.

Finally, I draw attention to metaphorical use of sleep in two poems that apparently occurred in the closing sequence of Meleager’s *erotica*. In the first, the poet declares that his insomnia, caused by repeated bouts of desire, has become a permanent condition (*Anth. Pal.* 5.212):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{αιεί μοι δύνει μὲν ἐν οὖσαιν ἥχος Ἄρωτος,} & \quad \text{οὐδ᾽ ἡ νύξ, οὐ φέγγος ἐκοίμισεν, ἀλλ᾽ ὑπὸ φίλτρων} \\
\text{ὁ δὴ ποιήσας γνωστός ἔνεστι τύπος.} & \quad \text{ὡ πτανοί, μή καί ποτ᾽ ἐφίπτασθαι μὲν, Ἐρωτες,} \\
\text{οἴδατ᾽, ἀποπτῆναι δ᾽ οὐδ᾽ ὅσον ἱσχύετε.}
\end{align*}
\]


\(^{39}\) A list can be found in *LIMC “Eros/Amor, Cupido”* nos. 98–105.

\(^{40}\) *Antike Gemmen in deutschen Sammlungen* IV, 853 = LIMC “Psyche” no. 162; similar figures appear in a Hellenistic statue group found at Baiae and now in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale at Naples (LIMC “Psyche” no. 163).

\(^{41}\) I conjecture Πόθος for the Πόθοις of the manuscripts and print γλυκόδακρυ, the reading in the Palatine, rather than Planudes’ γλυκό δάκρυ, which is accepted by other editors. When Πόθος is read as an indirect object of φέρει with δάκρυ as direct object, an ambiguous meaning results, usually explained as a libation of tears (“caloribus libat,” Manso 1789: 120 on 55.2). But the idea of enduring desire is more typical of Meleager; cf. σιδά σε [sc. Eros], ναί μὰ θεοῦς, καὶ βαρόν ὄντα φέρειν, *Anth. Pal.* 12.48.2. For the importance of the concept of sweet tears in Meleager, see Konstan 2009: 322–33, who points out that Meleager coins the adjective γλυκόδακρυς as an epithet of Eros; it appears in *Anth. Pal.* 5.177.3, 7.419.3, and 12.167.2.
Always the sound of Eros enters my ears, and in silence
my eye endures, with sweet tears, bouts of longing.
Neither night nor day brings me sleep, but from love’s charm
there perhaps already resides in my heart a known image.
Winged Erotes, surely it’s not that you ever know how to light
but lack any strength to fly away.

The physical effects of desire are now relentless. What is meant by the “sound
of Eros” that forever penetrates his ears is perhaps deliberately unsaid, for
generalizing effect, but the phrase also recalls an epigram from the opening
sequence of the erotica where the poet wishes to hear Heliodora’s voice by his
ear more than the sound of Apollo’s lyre (θέλω τὸ παρ’ οὖσιν Ἡλιοδώρας |
φθέγμα κλύειν ἣ τὰς Δατοῖδεο κιθάρας, Anth. Pal. 5.141).42 This whispering
of the Muse-like Heliodora near the beginning of his erotic book as a substi-
tution for the god of poetry, is here, in the final sequence, replaced with the
cacophony of never-ending desire, as the lover’s eyes endure multiple bouts
of longing (Πόθοι) with sweet tears. These bodily effects are quelled neither
night nor day, since love’s magic spell has placed in his heart a known image
(γνωστὸς … τύπος, 4), a familiar stamp. The lack of a named beloved suggests
that this impression is either that of Eros himself or—what is basically the
same thing—made by repeated passions for serial beloveds. Justifiably, the poet
suspects, and fears, that multiple Erotes alight one after the other and never
leave, so that the weight of passion deepens the shaped image in his heart.

The final epigram in the long sequence of Meleager’s erotica, and so likely
the concluding poem in that Garland section,43 continues the emphasis on
the image of sleep, or lack thereof. In an epigram that was likely the first
poem by Meleager in the Garland’s erotic section (Anth. Pal. 12.49), the
poet asks Bacchus, as the god who can “put to sleep” (κοιμάσει, 2) the flame
of boy-love, to strike hateful care from his heart. This call for a temporary
release from love’s pain at the beginning of the collection is picked up at the
end as Meleager prays for a permanent solution for his wakeful longing for
Heliodora (Anth. Pal. 5.215):

42 Cf. Cox 1988: 50–51. In 1.12.6 Propertius echoes Meleager’s Heliodora couplet,
with reversal, to signal his estrangement from Cynthia: nec nostra dulcis in aure sonat;
see Fedeli 1980: 292.
I beg you, Eros, put to sleep my sleepless passion for Heliodora, and show respect for my suppliant Muse. Or else, by your bow that has learned to strike no other, that always casts its winged barbs against me, even if you should kill me, I’ll leave behind writings that project my voice: “Observe, stranger, the murderous act of Eros.”

Wakefulness, or ἀγρυπνία, was presented earlier by Callimachus as a punning symbol of the erudition acquired by Aratus in order to describe the night skies in verse (Anth. Pal. 9.507). By thematizing the lover’s insomnia at the very end of his erotica, Meleager marks the conjunction of wakefulness caused by erotic longing with the creative wakefulness of the poet. Through Eros’s persistent wounding, the raw material for this poetry has penetrated and reshaped his emotional core. Putting to sleep his longing for Heliodora, the beloved mentioned first and now last in the erotica, signals the end both of passion and of the poetry it inspires, as if Meleager or his Muse will now pass on to other subjects. But the poem projects an alternative ending as well, that is, that Eros will continue to torment the poet to the point of death, an end to love-longing but not to the verse it inspired. In the last couplet of the last erotic poem, Meleager adopts conventional epitaphic form as he quotes the inscription to be placed on his tombstone, identifying Eros as his murderer. Having begun as a prayer, this poem ends with a tomb inscription that is more threat than epitaph. In a final fantasy Meleager imagines that in death he will triumph over the god who tortured him, through the lasting projection of his own voice from stone. If that is but a fancy, the survival of the poem through successive anthologies is yet a pleasing reality.

With most editors (though not Gow-Page), I accept the reading φωνήν προϊέντα found in the epigram’s first appearance in the Palatine and in Planudes (where the poem is wrongly ascribed to Posidippus), as opposed to φωνεῦντ ἐπὶ τύμβῳ (undoubtedly originating as a gloss) found in its second appearance in the Palatine (after Anth. Pal. 12.19).
WORKS CITED
