

### Plain and Simple: Marcus Argentarius IV G-P (A.P. 5.89)

I begin with Tueller's text in Volume I of the new Loeb *Greek Anthology*, which is the same as Gow and Page's except for the punctuation:<sup>1</sup>

Οὐκ ἔσθ' οὗτος ἔρωσ, εἴ τις καλὸν εἶδος ἔχουσιν  
 βούλετ' ἔχειν, φρονίμοις ὄμμασι πειθόμενος·  
 ἀλλ' ὅστις, κακόμορφον ἰδὼν, πεφορημένος οἴστρω,  
 στέργει, μαινομένης ἐκ φρενὸς αἰθόμενος,  
 οὗτος ἔρωσ, πῦρ τοῦτο. τὰ γὰρ καλὰ πάντας ὁμοίως 5  
 τέρπει τοὺς κρίνειν εἶδος ἐπισταμένους.

3 οἴστρω Pl : ιοῖς Π

The first paragraph of Gow and Page's commentary summarizes the epigram:

“Reason plays a part in desire for a beautiful girl; unmixed passion is experienced only by the lover of a plain girl.”

The next paragraph offers a brief evaluation of the poem:

“The theme is original, the style is remarkably plain; there is hardly a word which is not at home in the most ordinary prose . . . and there is no attempt at clever phrasing.”

Although Gow and Page do not connect the statements of the two paragraphs quoted, it seems to me that we should do just that, and that Argentarius illustrates his recommendation of plain girls by writing it in an uncharacteristically plain style. So much is fairly obvious. In a further twist, it is not at all clear whether the poet is in love with a plain girl himself. The plain, prosaic, entirely undithyrambic style of the epigram suggests not only the plainness of its subject(s) but the sanity and levelheadedness of the speaker. If he is totally sober and sensible, he presumably prefers beautiful girls after all. It seems that Argentarius, in his usual evasively witty way, leaves us guessing as to whether he loves plain girls himself, and thus whether he is to be counted among the wise or the unwise.

<sup>1</sup> *The Greek Anthology, Books 1-5*, translated by W. R. Paton, revised by Michael A. Tueller, Harvard, 2014; *The Greek Anthology: The Garland of Philip*, edited by A. S. F. Gow and D. L. Page, 2 vols., Cambridge, 1968. Page was primarily responsible for Argentarius (I, vii). It is conceivable that the puzzling variant ιοῖς (3) originated as a misguided gloss Ἴοῦς on οἴστρω: certainly the myth of Io combines a gadfly and love, in a way that few others do.