THE USE OF PARADOX IN THE AMATORY EPIGRAMS
IN THE GREEK ANTHOLOGY

A number of amatory epigrams in the fifth book of The Greek Anthology rely on paradox for their effectiveness, and the more elaborate applications of it will here be examined. There is no need to dwell on the simplest instances, such as the oxymoron γυναικός ἀγάπη (bitter-sweet Love; 134, and cf. 163 for the same idea expanded), or the appeal to Cypris, sea goddess and love goddess, to save a lover shipwrecked on land (11). Rufinus' epigram 22 is, also, fairly straightforward: γυναικός Ἀργός (Love, the giver of sweet gifts) has yoked the poet to Desire as a bull come of its own accord and a willing slave never likely to ask for πρόδρομο ἀνέθρετην (bitter freedom). The character sketch of the flighty girl in poem 247 by Macedonius the Consul derives its point from her name, Παρμενίς (Constance), and the notions that perfume is less fragrant than its recipient (91, anon.), or a garland less beautiful than its wearer (143, Meleager) have become commonplaces. Unexpected reversals of fortune lie at the heart of several poems. Agathias Scholasticus in 299 relates how his own haughtiness was transmitted to a previously obliging girl, and Paulus Silentiarius in 300 describes the humiliation of a previously proud lover, now lamenting like a girl, while the girl has assumed the anger of a man. Finally, one may compare Rufinus’ poem 19 dealing with his unexpected switch of preference from boys to girls and ending with the “bucolic” conceit about nature gone topsy-turvy:

λοιπαν τινος κυμα δοξά ἀνέθρετην.

Marcus Argentarius in epigram 127 has left us an amusing anecdote with a surprising ending. Having persuaded Alcippe to make love in secret, he evokes all the lovers’ tensesness as they fear interruption. Their worst fears are realised, yet when Alcippe’s mother bursts in, she expresses not indignation but, in a wittily oblique way, a desire to participate: Ἐρμής κοινός (the uox propria applied to treasure trove).

From Paulus Silentiarius we have, in poem 286, an impassioned description, rich in diverse metaphors, of the joys of lovemaking. He allows himself to be so carried away that he says any one may, for all he cares, witness the proceedings, and his list of possible intruders progresses from the relatively harmless stranger via a priest to his own wife! Somewhat more laboriously he explains in epigram 281 how he was inflamed by water: as he was hanging a wreath on his mistress’ door, she poured water on his head from a jug which retained the fire of her lips. He explores imaginatively in poem 230 the consequences of Doris’ binding his hands with a hair from her head. His mood passes from merriment to lamentation as he finds he cannot shake off the fetters. Hung on a hair he is χαλκεῖν σφιγκτὸς ἀλυκτοπέδη (held fast by bronze fetters) and τρισάμοι (thrice-wretched). Doris’ apparently light-hearted pretence of imprisoning him has become a grim reality. The outcome is as surprising as the grandiloquence.
Macedonius the Consul's epigram 231 explores a similar idea in more general terms:

Τὸ στόμα ταῖς Χαρίτεσσι, προσώπατα δ' ἀνθετεί ἡλλει,  
οἴματα τῇ Παρθήνῃ, τῷ χέρε τῇ κιθάρῃ,  
συλεύεις βλεφάρων φάος ὁμασίν, οὐδας ἄοιδής,  
pάντοθεν ἀγερεύεις τῇμοναὶ ημὲνος.  

The accumulation of beauties in the first couplet gives way to a sinister note in the last line, the verb συλεύεις (lit. despoil) containing the first hint of the transformation about to take place.

Among Meleager's most vivid poems are 177 and 178. In the former we have the imaginary situation of Eros' being lost, which gives a town-crier the opportunity of proclaiming his characteristics quite openly in an effort to find him:

ἐστι δ' ὁ παῖς γλυκύδακρυς, δεῖλαλος, ὕκυς, ἀδαμβής,  
συμα γελῶν, πτερόεις νάτα, φαρετροφόρος.  

The surprise comes in the last couplet. Eros is spotted in his lair, which turns out to be the eyes of Zenophila, Meleager's beloved. The following poem is based on the idea of selling Eros at market, with his less attractive attributes sketched rather wittily by Meleager. Again the situation is resolved in the last couplet when Eros tearfully begs not to be sold and is, after all, allowed to remain as a close companion of Zenophila.

Asclepiades casts epigram 185 in the form of a shopping list for a party, and what is presumably the main point is put as if it were an afterthought, with additional humour deriving from the juxtaposition of disparates. Various types of fish are to be bought as well as wreaths of roses, and—the last item—as the shopper will be passing Tryphera's place, she should be invited along. If, unlike Gow and Page, we accept the manuscript reading in epigram 162, also by Asclepiades, we have an instance of the surprise being confined to one word. The poem is one of complaint about the fatal bite of Philaenion. When half asleep Asclepiades trod on a ἄτατρα (whore). In the context ἄτατρα (viper) would have been expected.

Marcus Argentarius bases poem 110 on a somewhat sophistic argument. Although he toasts Lysidice ten times and Euphrante only once, he denies the reasonable inference that he prefers the former. One Euphrante is worth ten Lysidices to him and he adduces the parallel that the moon outshines all the stars put together. A comparably original turn of thought is introduced into Marcus Argentarius' epigram 102. When the scrawny Dioclea is commended to him, he concludes that he will be all the closer to her in spirit because of the lack of flesh between them when they lie together.

The above examples illustrate a pleasing diversity in the use of paradox but some recognisable similarities within the work of individual poets.
NOTES

1. Dolphins shall feed in the forests of Erymanthus, and fleet deer in the grey sea.
2. Thy mouth blossoms with the graces, thy countenance with flowers, thine eyes with Aphrodite, thy hands with the lyre. Thou takest captive eyes with eyes and ears with song; with every part thou trappest unhappy young men.
3. The boy is thus,—sweetly tearful, ever chattering, quick and impudent, laughing with a sneer, with wings on his back, and a quiver slung on it.

R.W. GARSON

University of Adelaide

A NOTE ON GEORGICS 2,83–102

This passage presents a short catalogue of wild and fruit-trees culminating in a laudation of the vine. Its obvious function is to enhance the theme of variety dominating in the first part of the second book, which is devoted entirely to the arborum cultus. It is not, however, my intention to elaborate on this important aspect, but rather to focus the attention on the interpretation of three passages in this catalogue, which in fact require closer examination.

The first of these appears at line 87, where we read: 'pomaque et Alcinoi silvae'. The issue here, of course, is the interpretation of 'poma', which some commentators and translators apparently have rendered incorrectly with 'apples'.¹ For, if Vergil in fact had only apples in mind, he probably would have written 'mala', which fits just as well as 'poma' into the metre of this line. Why, then, 'poma'? 'Poma', to be sure, is a collective referring to various kinds of fruit, amongst others apples in particular.² By using 'poma' instead of 'mala', Vergil obviously states more emphatically the vast variety of fruit-trees cultivated in Italy, a fact which is specifically borne out by the addition of 'Alcinoi silvae'. For, as we know from Homer,³ this legendary Phaeacian king was famous for his orchards, where next to pears, pomegranates, figs and grapes, apples in particular could be found. And so, without using the usual word for apples, Vergil in the first place could have implied apples. As a matter of fact, the apple-tree is one of the oldest and most useful trees in the history of mankind,⁴ and therefore one would expect it to be included in a catalogue like this. However, that it is not mentioned here by name, surely does not detract from this fact. I therefore suggest that 'poma' be here rendered by 'fruit-trees', as Vergil indeed uses it elsewhere in this book.⁵ Otherwise the reference to Alcinous' orchards in this specific context has, in my opinion, very little sense.

The second problem is raised by lines 95–96, where the vitis Rhaetica is at issue. Here it strikes one immediately that Vergil does not comment on the quality of this vine, which was especially cultivated on the southern slopes of the Alps, and naturally also in the vicinity of his homeland city Verona.⁶ In fact,
Acta Classica is published annually by the Classical Association of South Africa. The journal has been in production since 1958. It is listed on both the ISI and the SAPSE list of approved publications.

For further information go to: http://www.casa-kvsa.org.za/acta_classica.htm