

# Meaning and Material Presence: Four Epigrams on Timomachus's Unfinished *Medea*\*

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**SUMMARY:** This essay contains readings of four epigrams by Antipater, Antiphrilos, and Philip on Timomachus's painting of Medea. This work was unfinished, and I argue that its fragmentary condition plays a crucial role in the epigrams' poetics. Specifically, the painting's incompleteness disrupts the usual conventions and capacities of ekphrastic epigram and induces a crisis in poetic speech. To illustrate this, I rely on the distinction between presence and meaning developed by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht.

Method of this project: literary montage. I needn't *say* anything. Merely show.

Walter Benjamin (1999: 460)

illud vero perquam rarum ac memoria dignum est, suprema opera artificum imperfectasque tabulas, sicut Irim Aristidis, Tyndaridas Nicomachi, Mediam Timomachi et quam diximus Venerem Apellis, in maiore admiratione esse quam perfecta, quippe in iis liniamenta reliqua ipsaeque cogitationes artificum spectantur...

But this is especially unusual and worthy of memory: artists' last works and unfinished paintings—like the *Iris* of Aristides, the *Tyndaridae* of Nicomachus, the *Medea* of Timomachus and the so-called *Venus* of Apelles—are held in higher esteem than finished works, since in them can be seen the last lines and the very thoughts of the artists...

Pliny, *Natural History* 35.145

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WITH THESE WORDS PLINY GIVES NOTICE THAT THE FIRST-CENTURY WORLD of the visual arts shared a fascination with autographs and fragments that can be traced in literary spheres to at least the century after Plato's death and continued unabated into late antiquity.<sup>1</sup> Little or nothing is known about three of the paintings named here,<sup>2</sup> but more is known about the fourth: Timomachus's *Medea*, acquired by Caesar and housed in the temple of Venus Genetrix,<sup>3</sup> was addressed by a suite of epigrams preserved in the *Anthology of Planudes* (henceforth *API*).<sup>4</sup> In four of these poems – one each by Antipater and Antiphilus and two by Philip<sup>5</sup>—the fact that the painting was unfinished creates a compelling presence that disrupts ekphrastic interpretation and pushes the conventional resources of art-epigram to their limits.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The history of this fascination is the subject of a broader research project. I mention here as examples the recurrent story of the tablet containing Plato's revisions of the first sentence of the *Republic* (according to Dionysius Halicarnassus, Plato's φιλοπονία was so famous that "every philologist knows" the story about the tablet's posthumous discovery: words from the first sentence of the *Republic* were scattered about in various orders as he searched for the most euphonic combination of its elements [*De Comp* 25; see also Quintilian *Inst.* 8.6.64, Diogenes Laertius 3.37]); the fascination among scholars of Roman literature for texts emanating from the hands—or the households—of Virgil and Cicero, evidenced especially in Aulus Gellius (see Zetzel 1973), and Suetonius's interest in the autographs of Nero (*Nero* 52). In the visual arts, the most famous example of an unfinished work of art is fictional: the frieze of Daedalus viewed by Aeneas in book six of the *Aeneid* (22–33). I discuss the role of incompleteness in Cicero's literary project in Gurd 2007.

<sup>2</sup> On the *Venus* of Apelles there is a small amount of supplementary information, discussed below.

<sup>3</sup> Dedicated as part of Julius Caesar's triumphal celebrations in 46 BCE. On the Forum Iulium and the Temple of Venus Genetrix, see Elderkin 1938, Westall 1983, Ulrich 1984, Ulrich 1994.

<sup>4</sup> *API* 135–143, recently the subject of a major study by K. Gutzwiller (Gutzwiller 2004). I use the text of Aubreton and Buffière (1980) throughout. The "Anthology of Planudes" is otherwise known as AP 16, a modern editorial invention to gather the poems in Planudes' collection not also found in the tradition of the Palatine Anthology.

<sup>5</sup> *API* 136, 137, 141, 143. *API* 138 mentions it as well. *API* 136, 137, 141 and 143 were collected in the *Garland* of Philip, and can also be found in Gow and Page 1968 (referred to below as GP: 136=GP Antiphilus 48; 137=GP Philip 70; 141=GP Philip 141; 143=GP Antipater 29).

<sup>6</sup> It has been remarked many times that the general term for verbal descriptions of art works, *ekphrasis*, is a very late development and in its contemporary sense is modern (See Lauxtermann 1998: 526–29). Ekphrasis in antiquity referred to any verbal description of a visual scene; within this a number of subcategories could be distinguished, including, in Greek rhetoric, ἐκφράσις ἀγαλμάτων (See Hagstrum 1958, Benediktson 2000, Zanker 2004: 6–26). On ekphrasis generally, see Fowler 1991, Goldhill 1994, Graf 1995, Gutzwiller 2002.

In tracing the disruptive force of Timomachus's fragment I will rely on the distinction between "presence" and "meaning" elaborated by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (2004). According to Gumbrecht, presence relies on a non-linguistic, bodily engagement with objects and texts and resists the discursive attribution of meaning, which always occurs through verbal narrative. For Gumbrecht, fragments play an important role in the production of presence, since they require that we "suspend our automatic habit of deciphering": "instead of constituting the meaning that an absent author wanted to convey, we [...] concentrate on the sensual qualities of the text as a materially present object" (2003: 15). Gumbrecht avoids discussing genetic fragments that, like Timomachus's *Medea*, are the result of the sudden stoppage of artistic production,<sup>7</sup> but his approach is easily supplemented by the observation that to perfect a work means to make it fully recognizable and therefore meaningful to a viewer or reader. To fail to finish, by contrast, is to leave the work unrecognizable as a meaningful entity and consequently a stronger material presence.<sup>8</sup> Still, a fragment cannot simply be resolved to presence: rather, it produces a tension between the demands of presence and meaning. Faced with an incomplete work, we want to know what might have emerged if it had been finished (we want to state its possible though unrealized final forms); but we also want to contemplate the unfinished object *qua* unfinished. The impulse to imaginative completion evokes an act of meaning-attribution, but the desire to halt this movement and face the fragment as such discloses the summons and challenge of presence.

The particular arena in which this tension emerges in the epigrams on Timomachus's *Medea* is the confrontation between visual objects and verbal performances. In her magisterial treatment of the epigrams, Kathryn Gutz-

<sup>7</sup> I am going to use the adjective "genetic" throughout this paper to refer to the process by which a work of art is conceived, elaborated, and revised—that is, to the genesis of the work of art—because I want to retain a linguistic link with genetic criticism, which has evolved in the last forty years as the study of modern authors' processes. For a general introduction and retrospective on genetic criticism, see Depmann, Ferrer, & Gordon 2004. Hay 1986 contains relevant reflections on the nature and the problems presented by genetic fragments like Timomachus's *Medea*.

<sup>8</sup> That is, I assume that artistic completion can be measured by its ability to assume a position within a given culture's horizon of intelligibility (which surely implies that most great works are in some way incomplete). For the concept of a "horizon of intelligibility" and important related commentary on its role in constituting materiality, see Butler 1993. A warning: Butler's analysis of materiality does not coincide perfectly with Gumbrecht's notion of presence, though I will not be able to follow this dissonance in any detail here.

willer emphasizes that the interaction between the painting and its poems must be understood as a function of the specific possibilities and constraints imposed by ancient constructions of the relationship between visual and verbal media, observing that “despite the degree to which the painting and its ekphrases may exemplify the essential qualities of the visual and the verbal, effective communication is, for both, dependent on audience recall of the other medium” (2004: 341). But the incomplete *Medea* makes the epigrams about it reveal a relationship close to the one identified in Karen Bassi’s analysis of the role of objects in narrative: for Bassi, *resistance* is an important part of the interaction. More than simply colluding with narrative, “visible objects [...] both demand and defy a coherent story” (Bassi 2005: 5). Put differently: the *Medea* and its epigrams collude by a paradoxical process of mutual undoing. Taken to extremes, verbally telling about the object would do away with its sheer presence. But this is countered by the fact that the fragment’s demand to be “merely” shown exerts a strongly disruptive force, interrupting language and resisting narrative domestication.

The epigrams I address here are shaken by the possibility that the narrative temporality of their verbal medium violates the *Medea*’s inchoate viscosity. This produces a crisis within the genre of art-epigram: while ekphrastic epigrams usually celebrate the poet’s ability to convert visual experience into verbal meaning, our epigrams respond nervously to those aspects of aesthetic experience that cannot be conveyed by interpretive, meaning-oriented acts. Two stakes thus emerge in the epigrammatic responses to Timomachus’s painting. First, there is the need to respond to the fraught demands of the fragment, which wants both to be supplemented with meaning and attended to as a presence. Second, and intimately intertwined with the first, is an insistent question about the degree to which a verbal art can respond to a visual one, and whether, indeed, the utterance of ekphrastic poetry does not somewhere betray the presence it aims ultimately to praise.

#### TIMOMACHUS’S UNFINISHED *MEDEA*

At *In Verrem* 2.4.135, Cicero includes the *Medea* in a list of artworks prized by their cities. The text is obscure, but if recent editions are correct the painting was originally housed in Cyzicus, a major port opposite Byzantium on the southern Propontus. Caesar was in this region shortly after his victory at Pharsalus, and may have acquired the *Medea*, together with its companion *Ajax*, then. Pliny’s report that he paid 80,000 talents for the diptych confirms their status as major monuments (*NH* 7.126).<sup>9</sup> The painting itself has escaped

<sup>9</sup>The *Medea* is also alluded to at Ovid *Tristia* 2.526 and Plutarch *Moralia* 18a.

us: it was destroyed by fire in 80 CE (see Ulrich 1984: 255–56), but it has been linked to a group of paintings preserved at Pompeii and Herculaneum which may have been inspired by it (see figures 1 and 2 for two examples. Both are discussed below). The composition showed a pause, a moment of radical suspense: sword in hand, Medea watched her children and struggled with her intention to slaughter them in revenge for Jason's betrayal.<sup>10</sup> With the exception of the Herculaneum version (figure 1), which survives today in fragmentary state, the other examples of the scene all include Medea's children, more or less in the configuration exhibited by figure 2.

Enough of the methods of ancient painters can be reconstructed to allow a tentative hypothesis about the condition of Timomachus's piece. Painters began by drawing an outline directly onto their material: this was the περιγραφή or τύπος.<sup>11</sup> Color was then added above the outline.<sup>12</sup> An unfinished painting, it seems very likely, will have had the initial outline and some but not all of its color applied. If Timomachus's Medea was a fresco, the outline would have been visible only as etching in the plaster. If on the other hand it was encaustic and painted on a wooden *pinax*,<sup>13</sup> then the outline would have

<sup>10</sup> See Schmidt 1992, with further bibliography. Once she is shown sitting, but this painting (in the "House of Jason" at Pompeii) belongs to a triad of images of "tragic women" (Phaedra and Helen are the others), each of whom is portrayed seated. The room clearly has an overarching formal program, and it is likely that this program led the painter to alter Medea's pose. There is a reading of this sequence of images in Bergmann 1996.

<sup>11</sup> On τύπος to describe the preliminary outline of a painting, see Adamantius, *Physiognomonicon* 2.61 (Förster 1893 1:425–26), Plato *Laws* 816c, *Resp.* 403d, 414a, 491c.

<sup>12</sup> Pollux (*Onomasticon* 7.128) calls this part of the process ὑποτυπώσασθαι or ὑπογραφή. See also Plato, *Politicus* 277b–c (ὁ λόγος ἡμῖν ὥσπερ ζῶον τὴν ἔξωθεν μὲν περιγραφὴν ἔοικεν ἱκανῶς ἔχειν, τὴν δὲ οἶον τοῖς φαρμάκοις καὶ τῇ συγκράσει τῶν χρωμάτων ἐνέργειαν οὐκ ἀπειληφέναι πω), Philostratus, *vita Apoll.* 1.2 (Πλάτων τε βαδίσας ἐς Αἴγυπτον καὶ πολλὰ τῶν ἐκεῖ προφητῶν τε καὶ ἱερέων ἐγκαταμίξας τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ λόγοις καὶ καθάπερ ζωγράφος ἐσκιαγραφημένοις ἐπιβαλὼν χρώματα οὐπω μαγεῦειν ἔδοξε καίτοι πλεῖστα ἀνθρώπων φθονηθεὶς ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ), Reinach 1985: 17, 60, Rouveret 1996: 102. The process of painterly composition was used very frequently as a metaphor to describe literary processes. See Plato, *Phil.* 32b, 61a, Aristotle, *De part. an.* 676b, *NE* 1094b, 1094a; Photius, *Bibliotheca*, *Cod.* 265 p. 491b, Dionysius Halicarnassus, *De Iseo* 4, Tacitus, *German.* 16.2, *Dial.* 33.1, Quintilian, *Inst.* 2.6.2, 4.2.120. Aulus Gellius uses it to describe the composition of the *Aeneid* at 17.10.3 and to describe his own translation of a passage in Plato at 17.20.8.

<sup>13</sup> τύπος appears in two epigrams on the painting: (*API* 143.1) and (*API* 136). τυπώσμενος is used to describe Timomachus's work at *API* 138.2 (not discussed below). Gow & Page 1968 2.44 believe that τύπος "usually implies relief or intaglio," but that the Medea was encaustic; this is inferred from 137. But 137 may not refer to the same painting, and the wax may have another significance. See below.



Figure 1. Fragmentary fresco of Medea from Herculaneum  
Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples

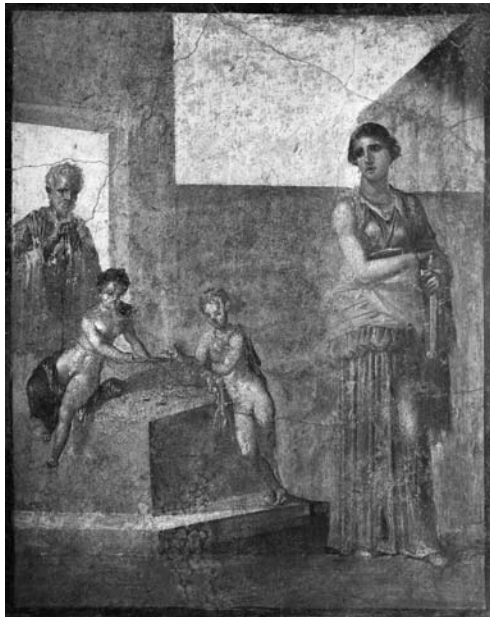


Figure 2. Medea contemplating the death of her children, from the House of the  
Dioscuri, Pompeii Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples

been visible as a simple painted line.<sup>14</sup> I speculate that Timomachus completed his coloration on Medea's head but left only an outline of the rest. In this he would have repeated the process that led to the incomplete *Aphrodite* of Apelles. According to Pliny this work, unfinished at Apelles' death, was even more famous than the *Aphrodite Anadyomene* (NH 35.92).<sup>15</sup> Cicero informs us that Apelles inscribed the full outline but colored only the goddess's head and shoulders (*Ad Fam* 1.9.15),<sup>16</sup> doing such a beautiful job that his students refrained from attempting to finish the piece (*De offic.* 3.2.10).<sup>17</sup> Timomachus, following the practice of the master Apelles, might also have begun colorizing at his heroine's head. He, too, was interrupted, leaving an undeterminable portion of the rest without color.<sup>18</sup> That Medea's face was colored is supported by the fact that several of the epigrams on the painting emphasize the realism and expressivity of her eyes (*API* 138.2; 139.4; 140.1; 143.2).<sup>19</sup>

What portion of the rest was colored cannot be determined. One poem describes the painting as showing "the sword in her hand" (*API* 138.3), while another makes note of "the hand of a mother and bitterly grieving wife" (*API* 140.3; more on this below). The former poem explicitly associates its object with Timomachus, a fact that prompts the conclusion that her hand and sword were visible, though it is less clear whether this was in outline or full

<sup>14</sup>Rouveret 1988: 16–64 contains a detailed discussion of the technique and its treatment in ancient theory; important also are Reichhold 1919, Courbett 1965, Barbet & Allay 1972.

<sup>15</sup>"Apelles inchoaverat et aliam Venerem Coi, superaturus fama illam suam priorem; invidit mors peracta parte, nec qui succederet operi ad praescripta liniamenta inventus est." On Apelles in general, see Overbeck 1868: 344–58, Robertson 1975: 492–95.

<sup>16</sup>"Nunc, ut Apelles Veneris caput et summa pectoris politissima arte perfecit, reliquam partem corporis inchoatam reliquit, sic quidam homines in capite meo solum elaborarunt, reliquum corpus imperfectum ac rude relinquerunt."

<sup>17</sup>"Ut nemo pictor esset inventus qui in Coa Venere eam partem quam Apelles inchoatam reliquisset absolveret (oris enim pulchritudo reliqui corporis imitandi spem auferbat)..." The source of this story—an anecdotal comment on an unfinished work by the Stoic scholar Panaetius—does not suggest an art-theoretical attempt to grasp the singularity of Apelles but a broader engagement with incompleteness in art and elsewhere.

<sup>18</sup>There is no evidence that I am aware of to suggest that Timomachus or Apelles deliberately left these paintings unfinished. These are not examples of an ancient *non finito*, but, as Pliny himself suggests (see above), works whose completion was forestalled by the death of the artist.

<sup>19</sup>Timomachus's ability to paint expressive eyes is also emphasized by an epigram on his *Iphigenia* and *Orestes*, *API* 128. It may be, however, that the emphasis on eyes also comes in part from an understanding that the eyes were particularly important for the representation of character (ἦθος). See my comments below.

color. It is impossible to say how much of Medea's children was also visible. While preliminary outlines could be very detailed, they could also be very vague, identifying no more than the central axis of a figure or its placement in a composition.<sup>20</sup> Another *Medea* by Aristolaos of Sicyon (fourth century) may have been an additional source of inspiration to the patrons and artists responsible for the fresco recreations of Timomachus's work at Pompeii and Herculaneum (NH 35.137; see Charbonneaux, Martin, & Villard 1973: 118, Croisille 1982: 44). If it was, there is no need to suppose that Timomachus's painting was complete enough to show this part of the scene in any detail. What does seem sure is that the painting kept in the temple of Venus Genetrix from 46 BCE until its destruction was both remarkably vivid and notably incomplete.

### EKPHRASIS, MEANING, AND PRESENCE

The painting is thought to allude to a scene towards the end of Euripides' *Medea*, when Medea's murderous intention is momentarily checked by the sight of her children (see Callistratus *Statuarum descriptiones* 13.3 and Gutzwiller 2004: 348).

φεῦ φεῦ· τί προσδέρκεσθ' ἐμ' ὄμμασιν, τέκνα;  
 τί προσγέλᾳτε τὸν πανύστατον γέλων;  
 αἰαῖ· τί δράσω; καρδία γὰρ οἴχεται,  
 γυναιῖκες, ὄμμα φαιδρὸν ὡς εἶδον τέκνων.  
 οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην· χαίρέτω βουλευέματα  
 τὰ πρόσθεν· ἄξω παῖδας ἐκ γαίας ἐμούς.

Pheu Pheu—why do you look at me with your eyes, children?  
 Why do you laugh at me with your last laughter?  
 Alas, what shall I do? For my heart leaves me,  
 women, as soon as I see the gleaming eye of my children.  
 I couldn't. Farewell, my earlier  
 plans. I will take my children from this land.

(1040–45; I cite from Diggle 1981)

In what follows, Medea debates her resolution out loud; and though the sequel is never really in doubt, the story's forward impulse momentarily pauses. Recalling this highly charged tragic episode, ancient viewers saw profound psychological tension in Timomachus's painting. The anonymous author of one epigram, for example, briefly and eloquently portrays Medea's complex inwardness as follows:

<sup>20</sup> See the examples gathered in Barbet & Allag 1972: 1027–28.



τέχνη Τιμομάχου στοργὴν καὶ ζῆλον ἔμιξεν  
 Μηδείης, τέκνων εἰς μόρον ἔλκομένων.  
 τῇ μὲν γὰρ συνένευσεν ἐπὶ ξίφος, ἣ δ' ἀνανεύει,  
 σφάζειν καὶ κτείνειν βουλομένη τέκεα.

The art of Timomachus mixed the love and the jealousy of Medea together, as the children are dragged to their fate. On one side she has consented to the sword, but on the other she is discontented, wishing to save and kill her children. (APL 135; see also APL 136, 138, 139 and 140)

There is no mention of the fact that Timomachus's painting was unfinished in this poem, and the poet's choice to ignore this, or perhaps his/her ignorance of it, has allowed the composition of a conventional art-epigram. It has become commonplace to claim that art-epigrams and ekphrastic texts in general do not *describe* their objects so much as *narrate* complex acts of viewing, marveling, instructing, or recollecting. Simon Goldhill sees the Hellenistic art-epigram as representing "not merely a work of art but also *the poet as seeing subject*" (1994: 205); Gutzwiller sees "a viewer working through the powerful emotive impact of art so as to tame it in articulation of thought" (2002: 87). In this case, the epigram narrates the movement of the viewer's interpretation by temporalizing the image. As the change of tense from συνένευσεν to ἀνανεύω suggests, Medea does not plan murder and pity her children at the same time, but passes from one resolution to the next in a sequence that mimes the linear sequentiality of verbal narrative and the specific sequentiality of the Euripidean scene.

Art-epigrams, in other words, are supposed to supplement images with narratives. Indeed, some commentators go further: as Jas Elsner describes it, the speaker of an ekphrasis aims to replace a *seen object* with a *way of seeing*. "A work of art," he writes,

aroused in the mind a vision, *phantasia*, which in its turn gave rise to an utterance, ekphrasis. The person who heard that ekphrasis received through it the vision, the *phantasia*, which the work of art had originally inspired in the speaker. (1995: 26)

This *phantasia* was, in fact, an intelligible truth far more important or compelling than either the original work of art or the verbal ekphrasis that purported to describe it,<sup>21</sup> and consequently Elsner's view of ekphrasis ultimately does away with the material artifact in the name of a radically more complete idealizing mental perception. Elsner draws the remarkable conclusion that "reading

<sup>21</sup> On the stoic theory of mental images, see Bundy 1927, Onians 1980, Watson 1988, Ioppolo 1990.

ancient ekphrases is not a good way of exploring what particular paintings or sculptures were actually like for the reason that ekphrasis competes with the actual image or sculpture in attempting to evoke *phantasia*. [...] This is why it does not matter in the slightest whether or not the paintings which appear in [ekphrases] actually existed. On the contrary, what matters [...] is how such paintings were viewed” (1995: 27–28). In the case of *APL* 135, what matters is that the image has functioned as an occasion for the recollection of a scene from Euripides’ play.

The imperative to imaginative supplementation may have been a central part of the aesthetics of some Hellenistic art works. One characteristic mode of painting and sculpture was to represent single figures devoid of narrative context, requiring viewers to fill in the rest of the scene.<sup>22</sup> A defining example of this technique was Theon’s painting of a hoplite, described by Aelian in some detail:

Θέωνος τοῦ ζωγράφου πολλὰ μὲν καὶ ἄλλα ὁμολογεῖ τὴν χειρουργίαν ἀγαθὴν οὖσαν, ἀτὰρ οὖν καὶ τόδε τὸ γράμμα· ὀπλίτης ἐστὶν ἐκβοηθῶν, ἄφνω τῶν πολεμίων εἰσβαλλόντων καὶ δηούντων ἅμα καὶ κειρόντων τὴν γῆν· ἐναργῶς δὲ καὶ πάνυ ἐκθύμως ὁ νεανίας ἔοικεν ὁρμῶντι εἰς τὴν μάχην, καὶ εἶπες ἂν αὐτὸν ἐνθουσιᾶν, ὥσπερ ἐξ Ἄρεος μανέντα. γοργὸν μὲν αὐτῷ βλέπουσιν οἱ ὀφθαλμοί, τὰ δὲ ὅπλα ἀρπάσας ἔοικεν ἢ ποδῶν ἔχει ἐπὶ τοὺς πολεμίους ἅττειν. προβάλλεται δὲ ἐντεῦθεν ἤδη τὴν ἀσπίδα καὶ γυμνὸν ἐπισειεῖ τὸ ξίφος φονῶντι εἰκῶς καὶ σφαγὴν βλέπων καὶ ἀπειλῶν δι’ ὅλου τοῦ σχήματος ὅτι μηδενὸς φείσεται. καὶ πλέον οὐδὲν περιεργασταὶ τῷ Θέωνι, οὐ λοχίτης οὐ ταξιάρχος οὐ λοχαγὸς οὐχ ἱππεὺς οὐ τοξότης, ἀλλ’ ἀπέχρησέν οἱ καὶ ὁ εἷς ὀπλίτης οὗτος πληρῶσαι τὴν τῆς εἰκόνης ἀπαίτησιν.

Many works indicate that the technique of Theon the painter was very fine, and especially the following painting: a hoplite coming to the rescue, when the enemy suddenly invades and is wasting and ravaging the land. The young man clearly seems to be rushing eagerly into the battle, and you would say that he was possessed, as though Ares had driven him berserk. His eyes flash terribly, and having snatched his weapons he seems to be charging upon the enemy with all speed. He already has his shield thrown forward on one side, and he brandishes a drawn sword like one ready to kill and he looks murderous, showing by his whole form that he will spare no one. Theon added nothing around him, no comrade or general or adjutant, no horse- or bowman, but this one hoplite completed the demand of the work.

(*Varia Historia* 2.44; I cite from Wilson 1997)

<sup>22</sup> See Stewart 1993, Bing 1995. Zanker 2004: 72–102 provides a fascinating study.

G. Zanker (2004: 72–102) points out that although single hoplite representations in sculpture are much older than Theon, classical viewers of painting would have been accustomed to fuller narrative representations. The startling effect of Theon's work may thus have been due to his pointed omission of the rest of the scene. Tellingly, Aelian adds that Theon himself was unable to let the picture stand on its own: at its unveiling he had a military air played, as though the purity of his painterly project compelled even the artist to complete the fragment he had produced. Interpellating a transfiguring imaginative response could be described as a crucial element in the visual rhetoric of works like this. The result was a paradoxical situation in which presence sought to efface itself before the viewer by summoning him/her to add an overlay of meaning.

The *Medea* of Timomachus was an image of this type; its depiction of a moment of high crisis in Medea's story invited readers to supplement it with knowledge about the sequel from Euripides and other sources. In the process of attributing meaning through the narration of viewing, however, Antipater, Antiphilus and Philip stumbled on a series of analogies between the painting's subject, its medium (the fact that it is a painting), and its genetic condition (the fact that it was unfinished) that caused the material presence of the piece to assert itself against the ekphrastic attribution of verbal meaning. Reflecting on the analogy between Timomachus's subject and his medium, Gutzwiller comments: "Poised in indecision, this Medea seems to exemplify the essential qualities of art itself—its spatial fixity and indeterminacy of signification" (2004: 340). That is to say, the subject of this painting becomes like the painting itself; her conflicting emotions freeze Medea before her children, just as every painting freezes its subject. But this analogy, by which both the subject and the medium can be seen as species of interruption, extends also to the material condition of the painting. Like Medea, *Timomachus* paused, and his painting hangs forever suspended before the moment of its completion just as Medea stands forever contemplating her future act. Drawing out the implications of this triple analogy, these poets configure the material presence of Timomachus's unfinished work with compulsive regularity and offer meditations on the danger of imaginative supplementation. In its stead they seek to valorize the fragmentary state of Medea's thoughts in which bloody action is permanently deferred, the fragmentary painting in which the final splashes of color are not yet applied, and, finally, the *actual image*, the fragmentary painting itself, over its narrative supplementation. If it is the role of an ekphrasis to replace a seen object with a way of seeing, these are ekphrases that speak *against ekphrasis*: even as they perform the act of narration characteristic of art-epigram, they also express longing for the material image

not transfigured by the imagination, the forcible and insistent presence of an unfinished work.

### ANTIPATER

The earliest datable epigram on Timomachus's painting was composed by Antipater of Macedonia at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE (see Gow & Page 1968: 2.18–20). It does not refer to Timomachus by name but is linked to him by Gow and Page, who point to the representation of conflicting emotions and to the use of *τύπος*, both of which it shares with several other Timomachus-epigrams.<sup>23</sup>

Μηδείης τύπος οὗτος· ἴδ' ὥς τὸ μὲν εἰς χόλον αἶρει  
ῥμμα, τὸ δ' εἰς παίδων ἔκλασε συμπάθην.

This is the sketch of Medea. Observe how she raises one eye to anger, and softens the other towards sympathy for her children.

(*API* 143)

Like Medea's glance, the poem moves along two conflicting trajectories: one a movement of meaning-attribution away from the painting, the other towards it and towards presence.

Away from it, it imaginatively imputes emotions to the painted scene: "observe," Antipater says, "how she raises one eye to anger and softens the other towards sympathy for her children." None of this can be properly said to be *in* the image. The agency implied by Antipater's use of finite verbs is foreign to it. Nor can one paint anger or sympathy; these emotions "appear" only after a mental transfiguration, in this case by recalling the moment toward the end of Euripides' *Medea* when the heroine's vengeful intentions are interrupted by the trusting gaze of her children. It is not uncommon in the ancient world for eyes to be seen as the locus of character in artistic representations. This does not mean, however, that eyes *are* the locus of character; it means, rather, that they furnish one site where ancient interpretive régimes allowed character to be read. But reading character, for ancient regimes, often meant constructing or contemplating a broader narrative context. In Aristotle, for example, ἦθος is inextricably linked to action and thus implicitly dependent on narration. As Stephen Halliwell puts it, "the basis of character in Aristotle is constituted by developed dispositions to act virtuously or otherwise. These dispositions are both acquired and realized in action; they cannot come into existence or continue to exist for long independently of practical activity"

<sup>23</sup> "It would be unreasonable to doubt that the couplet refers to Timomachus's picture;" Gow & Page 1968: 2.44.

(1986: 151). Agnès Rouveret argues that representing character in painting was historically linked to fifth-century depictions of multiple human figures in a quasi-narrative interaction (1988: 134 *et seq.*). If so, then the Hellenistic style of *omitting* narrative context and demanding that the viewer imagine the rest is linked internally, and not just accidentally, to the often remarked increase in expressivity in painting and sculpture in the fourth-century and later; imaginatively supplementing a painting from which narrative context has been removed means imagining the ἦθος of the represented character in the same stroke.

On the basis of these observations, a detailed reconstruction of the extraordinarily complex act of “seeing” narrated in Antipater’s epigram becomes possible. The viewer recalls the scene in Euripides’ tragedy where Medea debates her resolution aloud, and this passage allows him/her access to two possible narrative outcomes: the one s/he knows will be actualized at the tragedy’s end and the counterfactual possibility voiced at *Medea* 1040–46 that she would pity her children and take them with her from Corinth. Imagining two narrative end-points, the viewer then reads two conflicting ethical dispositions into the painting. The vision that “sees” Medea’s divided psyche in the lines and colors of Timomachus’s painting is therefore better described as a form of narrative memory that overlays a recollected story onto the seen thing, while the poem that utters this vision accomplishes a performance of cultural competence emphasizing knowledge of Greek literature and elegant verbal expression. In conjuring Medea’s struggling ἦθος, Antipater thus contests the immediacy of the visual and asserts the meaning-attributing power of language.

But the first three words balance this movement away from the painted object with a counter-movement *towards* it: Μηδεῖης τύπος οὔτος. The act of deixis—*this* is the τύπος of Medea, this painting *here* and no other—designates a specific site for the poem’s performance, grounding it in a time and place and insisting on the object’s material presence. (Gumbrecht argues that the apparently simple act of pointing to aesthetic objects allows them to resonate in ways that stronger interpretive acts do not [2004: 130]). Not only, however, does the poem emphasize the presence of the artwork by pointing. In addition, Antipater’s choice of diction is exact. From the various words available to describe a painting (for example εἰκόν or ἄγαλμα) Antipater chose a word that could also be used to describe both the initial outline of a painting and an unfinished draft. Though τύπος is a usual word for painted images, and appears frequently in ekphrastic epigrams,<sup>24</sup> it is also commonly

<sup>24</sup> For τύπος as “image,” see *APL* 30.4; 32.1; 72.2; 149.1 (also Antipater); 219.2. The term is discussed with further bibliography by Pollitt 1974: 272–92.

used to describe a text or an image that is only “blocked out” (to use a modern metaphor) and still awaits the further precision (ἀκριβεία) that would come with revision (see above n13 and n14). It was a felicitous choice, since the *Medea* actually was unfinished, and it emphasizes the very thing the epigram’s evocation of psychological depth is supposed to move beyond; that fragment of substance that is the object itself. In “this is the sketch of Medea,” Antipater narrates a moment when the viewer, like Medea before her offspring, is interrupted, pulled up short, by a weighty material presence.

## ANTIPHILUS

Writing in the next generation, Antiphilus of Byzantium expanded Antipater’s couplet into a major epigram, exploiting τύπος’s association with incompleteness and draft-work and connecting Medea’s hesitation to the painter’s suspension of work through a celebration of artistic tact.

Τὰν ὀλοὰν Μήδειαν ὅτ’ ἔγραφε Τιμομάχου χεῖρ  
 ζάλῳ καὶ τέκνοις ἀντιμεθελκομέναν,  
 μυρίον ἄρατο μόχθον, ἴν’ ἦθεα δισσὰ χαράξῃ,  
 ὧν τὸ μὲν εἰς ὀργὰν νεῦε, τὸ δ’ εἰς ἔλεον.  
 ἄμφω δ’ ἐπλήρωσεν· ὅρα τύπον· ἐν γὰρ ἀπειλᾷ  
 δάκρυον, ἐν δ’ ἐλέῳ θυμὸς ἀναστρέφεται.  
 ἀρκεῖ δ’ ἃ μέλλῃσις, ἔφα σοφός· αἶμα δὲ τέκνων  
 ἔπρεπε Μηδεῖη, κοῦ χερὶ Τιμομάχου.

When the hand of Timomachus painted that destructive Medea, torn between jealousy and her children, he took up a limitless toil, intending to sketch out her two states of mind—of which the one assents to wrath, the other to pity. He completed both. Behold the sketch. For a tear dwells in her menace, and rage in her pity. Hesitation suffices, says the sage. The blood of children befitted Medea, but not the hand of Timomachus.

(*API* 136)

Commentators have underplayed the genetic implications of Antiphilus’s use of τύπος. But the unfinished nature of the painting lies at the poem’s figurative core, and missing that τύπος can mean “sketch” elides this core. Antiphilus is arguing that incompleteness befits the painting in subject, medium, and material.

His concern with the painterly process is immediately expressed in the first couplet, where the syntactical subject is the hand (χεῖρ) of the painter. As Gutzwiller puts it, emphasizing the hand of the painter “reads action and temporality into Timomachus’s work by creating for the reader a complicated picture framing a picture, a mental image of the artist painting his Medea” (2004: 368–69). This marks the major difference between Antipater and

Antiphilus. The former only supplemented the image with a recollection of Medea's divided *ethos*, but Antiphilus adds a second supplementary narrative that asks us to imagine the painter at work. This could well have been prompted by the painting's unfinished status, since (as Pliny informs us) unfinished works were valued in part because they offered a glimpse into the working habits of their painters. But the work's fragmentary status means that for the reader of Antiphilus's poem, as for the speaker within it, Timomachus is permanently frozen in the act of composition.

In the second couplet the claim that Timomachus "sketched out" Medea's divided state of mind (ἦθεα δισσὰ χαράξει) begins to produce dissonance between the poem's attribution of meaning and the painting's presence. Χαράζω is at one and the same time physical and psychological. It connotes a process of carving and scraping, but the related noun χαρακτήρ also denotes a person's ethical quality.<sup>25</sup> In our poem, the double force of the word allows it to attribute meaning to the painting (Medea's character is not "in" the image but is brought to it by the speaker's narrative supplementation) at the same time as it points to the unfinished painting's physical presence: since it primarily exists as an outline, it is indeed scratched more than it is painted. The job of inscribing her state of mind is then described as nearly impossible: μύρον ἄρατο μόχθον (3). And so it is: no amount of scraping, cutting, painting or coloring will be able to put the emotions the viewer narrates into the physical object. At the same time, to characterize this work as an immense toil inevitably reminds the reader that the task remains to be completed, since Timomachus left the painting unfinished.

The second half of the epigram starts with a remarkable juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory short sentences: "He completed both. Behold the sketch" (ἄμφω δ' ἐπλήρωσεν ὄρα τύπον).<sup>26</sup> What he completed, as we have seen, was probably Medea's face and eyes, where her emotional tension may have been felt to reside (see Gutzwiller 2004: 350 and n24). But here Antiphilus connects the completion of the ethical portrayal with a remarkably physical focus on its material condition, just as he did in verse 3: behold the sketch, he says, echoing Antipater (5). Having drawn the viewer's attention to the

<sup>25</sup> On the etymology, see the insightful comments of Goldhill 1994: 213–14.

<sup>26</sup> Here the extra significance of τύπος has been utterly missed by the commentators. Gow-Page *ad loc.*: "τύπος, without qualification, is likelier to mean a particular figure in a painting than the painting as a whole." Goldhill 1994: 213–14; "So τύπος, the word I translated as 'image,' ('Look at the image!'), also implies both a 'type,' a 'model,'—like *charasso* its etymological connections are with striking, 'impressing' an image—and also the general character of a person. The ambiguity is significant, since the instruction here is precisely to see the character in the image, the image as a mark of character."

fragmentary panel, Antiphilus extracts a lesson in the form of an aphorism: hesitation suffices, ἄρκεῖ δ' ἅ μέλλησις (6). Gutzwiller connects this with the stoic understanding of μέλλησις and shows that the epigram transforms ethics into aesthetics.

The phrase [...] prepares for Antiphilus's resolution of the painting's tension, where it refers both to Medea's shrinking from slaughter and Timomachus's hesitation before painting slaughter. By allotting to Medea the inevitable choice of murder and to Timomachus a freezing of the action that will save the children, Antiphilus not only reads the known course of the narrative into the depicted moment of hesitation but also exonerates the painter from responsibility for the reprehensible decision Medea has yet to make. (2004: 368)

While Gutzwiller eloquently captures the analogical relationship between subject and medium (Medea pauses, and Timomachus chooses to represent this moment of pause), the economy of her study does not allow her to emphasize the third term in the analogy. Timomachus did not just choose not to depict the slaughter, seeing that the moment of calm that preceded it was sufficiently powerful; he also left the painting unfinished, pausing just as Medea had done. The painting's material presence embodies the hesitation that permeates this scene to its very core, and the striking unity of subject, medium, and matter in the unfinished painting means, in effect, that incompleteness completes the work. The fragment whose painter has permanently hesitated before the addition of pigment stands in its incompleteness as a self-sufficient image of its theme.

To be sure, Antiphilus does not praise Timomachus for leaving the *Medea* unfinished. But the attribution of praiseworthy tact to Timomachus's choice of subject is programmed by a discourse that figured the limits of artistic representation through images of incompletion and visual aposiopesis.<sup>27</sup> Cicero, for example, illustrates the importance of decorum in oratorical performance by invoking the celebrated example of the *Iphigenia* of Timanthes. In depicting the sacrifice of Iphigenia, says Cicero, Timanthes recognized that while Calchas and Odysseus could be shown grieving, the *summum luctum* of Agamemnon was inimitable. He chose, therefore, to veil the father's face (*Orator* 74).<sup>28</sup> Timanthes' was not a fragmentary painting, but its dramatic

<sup>27</sup> For a fuller statement on the inappropriateness of representing Medea as an infanticide, see Plutarch, *How a Young Man Should Listen to Poetry* 18A, where Timomachus's painting is mistakenly charged with choosing just this subject. Plutarch's error is due, no doubt, to the fact that the painting was lost by the time he wrote.

<sup>28</sup> A repetition of the scene, complete with a veiled Agamemnon, has been preserved in the "house of the tragic poet" at Pompeii.



refusal to figure Agamemnon produced a quasi-incompletion that left its emotional climax obscured from view. The fictional frieze on the doors of the temple to Apollo in *Aeneid* 6 (14–41) offers a more literal link between the limits of representation, parental grief, and artistic incompleteness. Here Daedalus inscribed his artistic autobiography in a series of panels but left the panel that was to show the fall of Icarus blank (32–33). In the *Aeneid* Aeneas does not read the whole work: he is distracted by the more pressing business of visiting *his* father in the underworld. The result is that the great doors are neither fully made nor fully viewed, a double incompletion that prefigures the programmatic incompletion of the *Aeneid* as a whole.<sup>29</sup> While the incompleteness of Timomachus's work is not directly related to the difficulties of portraying its subject (as was the case with Timanthes' *Iphigenia* and Daedalus's "autobiography"), the fragmentary state of the work could have stimulated a chain of associations that prompted Antiphilus's own reflections on the limits of art, underwriting his praise of Timomachus's tact much as the initial outline of every painting underwrites the color that is subsequently added to it.

But in his celebration of the unfinished painting, this careful attention to both the scene represented (the "meaning") and the genetic condition of the work (the "presence"), Antiphilus betrays himself, and his poem collapses right when it seems most to have succeeded. For Antiphilus cannot deliver his final line-and-a-half without emphatically and forcefully providing a strong narrative supplement to a scene whose primary strength he himself sees to lie in its resistance to supplementation. When he announces, triumphantly, that "the blood of children befitted Medea, but not the hand of Timomachus" (αἷμα δὲ τέκνων ἔπρεπε Μηδείῃ, κοῦ χερὶ Τιμομάχου: 7–8), he celebrates Timomachus for having the artistic intelligence to recognize the limits of representation: he chose a scene *before* the atrocity, portraying and enacting the far more effective moment of pause. But Antiphilus, to see this and to celebrate it, must rush on and violate the very limit Timomachus respected. If it did not suit the hand of Timomachus, the blood of children *did* suit the mouth (or the pen) of Antiphilus. The deferral of crime that is represented in the image and symbolized by its genetic condition is cancelled by the speaking of the poem.

#### PHILIP

A final pair of epigrams develops Antiphilus's self-indicting discourse into a full-fledged critique of supplementation. Both come from the hand of Philip,

<sup>29</sup> On this ekphrasis and its important role in the poetics of the *Aeneid* as a whole, see Fitzgerald 1984, Putnam 1987, and Cato 1988.

the 1st-century CE anthologist who gathered Antiphilus and Antipater's poems in a garland. Since it is very likely that Philip organized his collection alphabetically,<sup>30</sup> the following epigram would have been located very close to the *Medea*-poem of Antiphilus (both begin with τ) (Gutzwiller 2004: 372–73). It replies directly to it by deepening the problematic relationship between the material presence of the painting and the necessity of supplementation and interpretation imposed by the act of poetic utterance. Here there is no trace of Medea's conflicted soul; she is wholly intent on slaughter. Philip implies, however, that this is the product of the ekphrastic compulsion to complete.

Τίς σου, Κολχίς ἄθεσμε, συνέγραφεν εἰκόνι θυμόν;  
 τίς καὶ ἐν εἰδώλῳ βάρβαρον εἰργάσατο;  
 αἰεὶ γὰρ διψᾷς βρεφέων φόνον. ἦ τις Ἰήσων  
 δεύτερος ἢ Γλαύκη τις πάλι σοι πρόφασις;  
 ἔρρε, καὶ ἐν κηρῷ παιδοκτόνε. σῶν γὰρ ἀμέτρων  
 ζήλων εἰς ἃ θέλεις καὶ γραφίς αἰσθάνεται.

Who, lawless Colchian, wrote your rage into the image? Who rendered you a barbarian, even in effigy? For you always long for the murder of your children. Or is some second Jason, some Glauke again your excuse? To hell with you, child-killer even in wax. Even the brush (γραφίς) perceives your immoderate yearning for what you want.<sup>31</sup>

(*API* 137)

The interrogative is repeated twice in the first couplet: this unnamed someone is the immediate focus of the speaker's viewerly anxiety because s/he put rage into the image and portrayed a barbarian. Philip emphasizes Medea's total lack of ambiguity here; she *always* longs for the death of her children. Who is queried after by this "who?" A painter perhaps, someone who has reproduced the scheme of Timomachus's composition but lessened its ambiguities. It is unknown if Philip's epigram shares its object with the poems of Antipater and Antiphilus (see Gow and Page 1968 *ad loc.*, Aubreton and Buffière 1980 *ad loc.*, Gutzwiller 2004: 373 n81): Gutzwiller argues that we cannot decide for certain what physical object, if any, it actually concerns (2004: 373). But let us imagine for a moment that it addresses a *completed* version of what in Timomachus was fragmentary. In this case the epigram would constitute a critique of that completion: this painter has defiled the latter's balanced suspense.

<sup>30</sup> On the arrangement of the garland of Philip, see Gow & Page 1968, Cameron 1993: 34–40.

<sup>31</sup> I translate συνέγραφεν "wrote" in order to capture a crucial double meaning; see below, note 32.

Antiphilus may have been able to perceive the aesthetic self-sufficiency of Timomachus's unfinished painting, but the wealthy Romans who commissioned imitations of the piece couldn't, and while the subject was frequently repeated, its incompleteness was not. It was accordingly inevitable that other paintings on the same theme contained details not legible in the original (see Gutzwiller 2004: 374–76). But an artist's choice of details can build meaning into a composition, and in a number of cases what might be called the supplement in pigment was contaminated by a prior imaginative supplement. A detail could place a heavier weight on the maternal love that momentarily checks Medea, or on the murderous rage that propels her, shifting attention toward or away from the scene's terrible sequel. Particularly interesting in this regard is the variation in the sword: it may be sheathed or unsheathed, and its orientation may be altered for narrative effect. A fragment of one version of the scene recovered from Herculaneum (figure 1) has Medea cradling a sheathed sword in both hands; the sword is shielded from the children and inclined slightly away from them, as though to suggest a mind still balanced between rage and love. By contrast, the version in the House of the Dioscuri at Pompeii presents the sword as unsheathed (figure 2). Here Medea holds its tip down in a manner strongly suggestive of a mind bent on its active use, and the weapon's open menace telegraphs the children's impending end. Both paintings tilt the portrayal of their subject towards a single narrative potentiality and hence towards a single ethical representation. In comparison, Medea's sword in Timomachus's piece was viewed by at least one epigrammatist as delicately balanced between rage and love. *APL* 140.3 remarks the “hand of a mother and a bitterly suffering spouse” (μητρὸς παλάμην ἀλόχοιό τε πικρὰ παθούσης), identifying in this part of the composition the same conflicting passions usually seen in Medea's eyes. Perhaps Philip has his speaker denounce some such suddenly unequivocal version of the scene.

It is tempting to speculate that Timomachus's version contained an unpainted sword, to suggest that the frescoes from Pompeii and Herculaneum betrayed Timomachus's incompleteness by the necessarily interpretive addition of color, and to locate an answer to Philip's wrathful question (“who?”) here. More important than the specifics of any reconstruction, however, is the ever-present potential for a gap between the περιγραφή or τύπος and the image that emerged with the application of color. Painters not uncommonly departed from the prescriptions of the initial sketch. In the symposiastic composition that occupies the walls of the “Tomb of the Diver” at Paestum, for example, one painter diverged from his outline by changing the positions of several figures' heads and arms and shifting the legs of the couches (see Holloway 2006: 371, Napoli 1970: 167–71). A similar divergence from the

inscribed outline can be seen in the “rape of Persephone” in the so-called “tomb of Persephone” at Vergina, where the painter raised and shifted the position of Hades’ head (see, for an overview, Andronikos 1994). A Pegasus in the “house of the small fountain” at Pompeii shows traces of coloration on the creature’s wing that amply betray a painter who felt free to elaborate and extend what was stated in adumbrated form by the inscribed outline (reproduced in Ling 1991: 203, Barbet & Allag 1972: 1030). To the extent that every act of coloration adds detail to the outlined image, any colored image is already an interpretation. Philip’s complaint about the painter who put rage in Medea’s image could speak to the divergence between Timomachus’s unfinished image and some other fuller (and hence more precise) version, or it could speak to the difference between the outline and the color in any version, including Timomachus’s own (to the extent that this was colored). In both cases, the complaint would be over an act of supplementation, a stacking of the narrative deck that prompted viewers to see more rage than maternal care in the portrayal of Medea. Whether we imagine the movement of supplementation to have been lateral, from Timomachus’s fragmentary painting to some other more complete one, or vertical, from outline to final image, the epigram’s central affect stems from a comparison of sketch and color, fragment and finished form.

It is equally possible that no particular painting is intended here. After all, Medea’s rage, like her pity, comes from the imaginative supplementation of a viewer who couples a recollection of Euripides’ tragedy with the image before him/her. We have noted Elsner arguing that ekphrases are not about *seen* objects but embody *ways of seeing*. And Philip’s poem was not inscribed next to any painting but circulated in an anthology, and was therefore read without an image before the reader. When these considerations are taken into account the indictment in this poem seems even more extreme. No painter would be blamed for adding details that betray the scene’s sequel and ruin its emotional balance; rather, the unnamed someone denounced in the first line is the viewer him/herself, accused for insisting on imaginatively supplementing the scene, destroying the Timomachean fragment’s elegant tensions by supplying narrative context and imputing to the central figure a barbaric infanticidal rage.

But who is this viewer other than the speaker of a poem in which the fragment’s supplement is imagined and narrated? Not only would a completed image betray the fragmentary logic of Timomachus’s piece: but so also does the epigrammatist, who, even in decrying the action permanently deferred by Timomachus’s conceit, finds himself forced to represent it. Much of Philip’s language points in two directions at once: both συγγράφω (1)

and γραφίς (6) can refer either to painting or writing.<sup>32</sup> The same applies to that “child-killer even in wax” in line 5: certainly Philip could be referring to an encaustic version of the scene, but he could just as easily be referring to the imaginary murderess who emerges when the epigrammatist presses his γραφίς into his wax tablet to write his poem. As a proponent of the tradition of literary epigram that is forced, by reflecting on the fragmentary poetics of Timomachus’s painting, to supplement and thus to betray it, Philip betrays his own assertion of Timomachus’s work as an object absolutely resistant to any “way of seeing.” But in this stroke it is not just Philip’s engagement with the fiction of viewing that submits to a contradiction between meaning (“ways of seeing”) and the presence that resists it. The rage against betrayed presence that erupts in Philip’s poem inevitably turns against the poems to which he is responding, since before him it was they who gazed on the fragment of Timomachus and violated his tact by a poetic reading. Through Philip’s working of the space that separates fragment and completion, viewing and narration, the rift between meaning and presence afflicts the whole string of epigrams he both anthologized and sought to outdo.

Philip’s final epigram imagines the opposition between the ekphrastic attribution of meaning and the call of presence by staging a confrontation between a speaker viewing the *Medea* and a swallow which has nested above it. While the human viewer compulsively rushes from the material image to its imaginative completion, the swallow simply sees an advantageous site to build a nest. The poetic energy of the epigram comes from this coincidence of two diametrically opposed ways of interacting with the object.

Κολχίδα, τὴν ἐπὶ παισὶν ἀλάστορα, τραυλὲ χελιδών,  
 πῶς ἔτλης τεκέων μαίαν ἔχειν ιδίων;  
 ἦς ἔτι κανθὸς ὕφαιμος ἀπαστράπτει φόνιον πῦρ,  
 καὶ πολὺς γενύων ἀφρὸς ἄπο σταλάει·  
 ἀρτιβρεχῆς δὲ σίδηρος ἐφ’ αἵματι. φεῦγε πανώλη  
 μητέρα, κὰν κηρῷ τεκνοφονοῦσαν ἔτι.

How, twittering swallow, did you dare to have as the nurse of your offspring the Colchian who takes her vengeance out on her children? Her bloodshot eyes still flash with murderous fire, and grey foam drips from her mouth; her sword is freshly steeped in blood. Flee the thoroughly destructive mother, still murdering her children even in wax.

(*API* 141)

<sup>32</sup> According to LSJ, συγγράφω seems to mean “write” far more often than it means “paint,” while the primary sense of γραφίς is not “brush” but “stylus”—which could describe either the instrument used for writing or for working on an encaustic image.

While the speaker expresses dismay at the swallow's inability to *read* the image, the swallow (if she could reply, which crucially she cannot) might reproach the speaker for failing to *see* the painting: the emotional fury he imputes to the piece is a product of the inevitable ekphrastic compulsion to complete. The swallow, on the other hand, suffers no such compulsion. Driven by impulses that are both mute and unreflecting, she exploits a nook, a ledge, a sheltered place, without caring for or responding to the object's signifying capabilities. The swallow represents the limit of the response to presence in the sense that her interest completely sidesteps any concern with meaning, emotion, or narrative. She doesn't know, or care, whether her new home is the *Medea* of Timomachus, a free recomposition of that painting, or some other image. Though she surely has her own interests in the site, from our perspective she sees without linguistic mediation. In this sense the speaker's final injunction to her, "flee the child-slayer, even in wax," (5–6) is wasted advice: *Medea* has no substantial reality for her.

The epigram's opposition between mediated or ekphrastic viewing and simply seeing facilitates a set of analogous oppositions. First, the swallow and the horrified speaker represent externalizations of the two impulses presumably present in *Medea*'s mind: the swallow's motherly love confronts the speaker's visions of murder as *Medea*'s own mind confronts itself in frozen debate. The fundamental opposition between narrative or imaginative integration and merely seeing that is embodied in the contrast between the epigram's speaker and its swallow thus replicates the conflict in Euripides' *Medea* between a progressively developed and meticulously motivated narrative intention (the revenge plot) and a sudden encounter with her children whose effects are immediate and devastating. When Euripides' *Medea* is faced by the gaze of her children, the broad narrative arc that extends from the destruction of Creon and his daughter through the slaughter of *Medea*'s own offspring is temporarily interrupted by nothing less than a brute and undeniable presence. *Medea* simply looks at her children looking at her, and, as she puts it, her heart leaves her. This moment in which *Medea* is interrupted by the pure gaze thus shows her at her most human and her most strange: she finally shows traces of maternal sentiment, but these sentiments are provoked by a moment of perception that escapes language.

The analogy between the swallow and *Medea*-as-mother can be extended to a third level. In her sudden response to the sight of her children, Euripides' *Medea* emerges as both very familiar and very strange (familiar, because this is how she is supposed to act; strange, because the provocative sight of her children is an effect of presence and therefore seeks to elude the domesticating forces of narrative). Likewise Philip's swallow does nothing surprising

(she just builds a nest), but the simplicity of her action defies narration (all we can say is that she just builds a nest: everything else, including everything I am currently saying, is “reading in”). Because she avoids narration in this way, the swallow is not only a symbol for “simply seeing,” but also embodies what “simple seeing” purportedly sees: the object in its concrete presence. The simplicity of her action escapes my ability to narrate it just as every object, at some level, resists narrative integration. From this perspective the injunction in lines 5–6 (“flee the child-slayer even in wax”) again seems superfluous. Whether “even in wax” designates an encaustic version of the scene or a tablet that receives a poem, it refers to an attribution of meaning, just the thing by which viewers and interpreters domesticate feral objects. And it is this domestication that the swallow, by being “just” a swallow, always evades. Because it is I (in this case) who supplements and interprets, the swallow escapes me (in every sense), in the same way that the *Medea* of Timomachus, which is after all “just” an unfinished painting, also escapes me.

The epigrams addressed here develop a way of speaking that, while never ceasing to imaginatively supplement the painting, nevertheless clear a space for its material presence. My reading of Philip's swallow makes an analogous attempt to imagine the brute simplicity of the swallow's presence. True, she *just* sees a ledge to nest on. But I find that just as difficult to conceive as the fact that the *Medea* of Timomachus is *just* an unfinished painting. If the epigrams on Timomachus's *Medea* pose a question to their readers, it is how a habituation to presence could actualize itself in literary study. The means by which they have survived, however, might already offer an answer. Philip's attempt to work presence into his *Medea*-poems comes in the context of a kind of philological activity, the production of the *Garland* that preserved the epigrams on Timomachus's painting for later anthologists and thence for us (see Cameron 1993: 33–48). In this philological work, perhaps, an effect is conjured that responds in its own way to Philip's insistence on presence in the *Medea*-poems. Gumbrecht advocates presence as an alternative to the focus on interpretation that, in his view, characterized scholarship in the humanities for most of the twentieth century. He turns for a practical example to the work of philology, which he understands exclusively as “the identification and restoration of texts from the past” (2003: 3), that is, editorial work and textual criticism. Philology, in Gumbrecht's view, generates “desires for presence, desires for a physical and space-mediated relationship to the things of the world (including texts), [which are] the ground on which philology can produce effects of tangibility” (2003: 6). Gumbrecht finds in these effects of tangibility the possibility of “escap[ing] the long shadow of the humanities as *Geisteswissenschaften*, that is, as ‘sciences of the spirit,’ which dematerialize the



objects to which they refer and make it impossible to thematize the different investments of the human body within different types of cultural experience” (2003: 8). Like Gumbrecht’s radical vision of philology, anthologization relies on practices that seem scrupulously to avoid the imposition of meaning: the anthologist finds, copies, and arranges disparate texts in a procedure that dissimulates his/her own voice to the point of silence. These acts, with which Philip the editor was intimately familiar, might be seen as additional manifestations of the concern with presence that plays such a disruptive role in the epigrams I have discussed here.

But Philip was not wholly silent. He wrote epigrams of his own into the *Garland* which responded to and expanded on the texts he incorporated, and his epigrams function as readings and variations of the poems he anthologized.<sup>33</sup> As a consequence, Philip’s art of anthologization could be said to re-instate the tensional relationship between presence and meaning that pulses through his epigrams on Timomachus’s *Medea*. Indeed, the “art of variation” in Hellenistic epigram, which in the hands of anthologists like Meleager and Philip began to produce larger textual fabrics out of the micro-utterances preferred by the form (see AP 4.2.6), sees and treats each individual poem as a fragment needing both further elaboration and integration into a greater whole.<sup>34</sup> The challenge to the reader confronted with such thematically-linked strings of epigrams and to the editor who creates them is not only to appreciate the variations that lead from one to the next but also, in a contrary and more difficult movement, to have the strength of mind to pause with each and defer his/her movement forward through the collection, to conscientiously *fail* to see how the next poem further elaborates and verbalizes the implicit meanings of the one before his/her eyes. Philip’s apparently innovative principle of organization—he set the epigrams in his anthology in alphabetical groupings, so that all the epigrams beginning with τ appeared together, for example—might be seen as an attempt to scramble the thematic associations typical of Meleager’s *garland*. Alphabetical sequencing provided Philip with the opportunity to create multiple configurations involving epigrams on the same topic, but it also compelled the poems to stand apart from each other, as it were, exerting a stronger individual presence than they do when they stand together: while Antiphrilos’s epigram on

<sup>33</sup> Compare Gutzwiller 1998: 236 on Antipater’s variations: “The connecting theme of Antipater’s epigrams, which must have come together at some point in a collection, is the process of reading as interpretation, with the reading of epigram functioning as a symbol for the interpretive reading of the cultural past.”

<sup>34</sup> On the “art of variation” see Tarán 1979. Gutzwiller 1998: 227–332 discusses its relation to anthologization.



the *Medea* and Philip's first began with τ and thus appeared close together as part of a sequence, Philip's second epigram, which begins with κ, came earlier in the collection and thus produced its own force-field of meanings. The relationship between Philip-as-poet and Philip-as-editor might thus be read as a further permutation of the relationship between the speaker of *API* 141 and the *Medea* of Timomachus: the longing for presence that led him to reproduce and set the poems of Antipater and Antiphilus in his anthology conflicted with the inevitable necessity of re-articulating them in further acts of meaning-attribution. Its result could be characterized as an early example of the method of constellating fragments that in the twentieth century was explored most deeply in Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, also incomplete (see Benjamin 1999).

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