

## Eros, again, is Looking at me Meltingly: The Role of Vision in Archaic Greek Lyric and Hellenistic Epigram

Vision is a crucial, motivating aspect of erotic encounters in archaic lyric and Hellenistic epigram, and poets depict it as a compelling, agential force as well as a communicative tool in erotic encounters and relationships. The genres' methods of dissemination (lyric's performance in archaic symposia as opposed to epigrams' elite, scholarly transmission in anthologies as well as Hellenistic symposia) allow for distinct representations of erotic encounters and amatory narratives as they are punctuated and enabled by vision. Indeed, much scholarship exists regarding the importance of vision in lyric and epigram as separate genres (Spatharas 2024; Fountoulakis 2013), but this approach neglects thematic similarities, similar performative contexts (symposia), and intentional Hellenistic reception of archaic lyric. I put forward a united reading of the genres that allows for a contextualized understanding of vision across historical and cultural settings.

Across genres, the beloved's gaze stokes the lover's desire and communicates a willingness to engage in a relationship (*PMGF* 287; *PMGF* 360; *Anth. Pal.* 12.93; *Anth. Pal.* 12.110). This aspect of vision is dually significant for archaic lyric, where the sympotic performance of an amatory poem (e.g., *PMGF* 360) speaks to the communal experiences of symposiasts and provides didactic models of pederastic relationships, governed by *charis* – an ideal of non-exploitation and mutual benefit (Spatharas 2024, 222-3, 216; Glazebrook 2015, 161-2). Poems of this type depict the beloved's gaze as powerful enough to compel the lover to desire even against his will – Ibycus, for example, provides the startling image of an aged racehorse being dragged unwillingly to the racetrack (Cairns 2011, 1-3; *PMGF* 287). Here, the communicative aspect of vision confers agency to the beloved, offsetting some of the inequality

inherent to pederastic relationships – so much so that the beloved is uniquely situated in proximity to Eros, which is also evidenced in sympotic vase painting. In the Hellenistic period, however, the symposium is structured around hierarchy rather than *charis*, and readers of book epigram are also not beholden to its authority. This allows for the depiction of the lover in far more powerful, aggressive terms, styling him as a hunter whose gaze is armed with birdlime and as vengeful enough to curse anyone who gazes at his beloved (*Anth. Pal.* 5.100, *Anth. Pal.* 12.94). The hierarchical settings of epigram’s dissemination, then, allow the lover’s gaze to communicate power and compulsion that is not constrained by the beloved’s agency.

Given this context, the depiction of vision as an agential force that incites the uncontrollable agonies of erotic love must be interpreted communally in archaic lyric. Following scholarly articulation of both archaic and classical symposia as emotional communities (Lynch 2018, 236-8; Spatharas 2024, 228-9), depictions of vision as inciting the uncontrollable compulsions of erotic love (e.g., *PMGF* 287, *PMGF* 31) serve to inspire communal bonding through recognition of shared experience. The social nature of lyric’s performance thus enhances the symposium’s relational and didactic benefits. The dissemination of epigram in the Hellenistic period, both in anthologies and sympotic contexts, forces a reading of epigram that is attuned to the individual experience of reading as well as the socially stratified nature of the Hellenistic *andron*. The *paraklausithyron* theme in erotic epigram, in particular, centers an individual relationship between the lover and beloved which extends beyond the symposium and focuses the lover’s attention on the beloved as opposed to Eros more broadly (e.g., *Anth. Pal.* 5.145). This individualizing phenomenon is so prolific that it even finds a physical parallel in contemporary erotic statuary that entices the viewer into an imagined relationship.

## Works Cited

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