

A NOTE ON ANTHOLOGIA GRAECA 9.286.

In this poem, Marcus Argentarius reproaches a cockerel who has woken him up, thus driving away the sweet dream he was having of his beloved, Pyrrha. Angrily he reproaches the bird: „Is this all the thanks I get for raising you and making you lord over all the hens in my household?“ — then threatens to sacrifice him to Serapis and so put an end to his crowing. The poem is an elegant imitation of another by Meleager¹. There, the cockerel is more elaborately cursed, but the same reproach — „are these your loving thanks to him who reared you?“ — appears, and an oath, sworn by the Dawn, that this will be the last time the bird sings. Antipater of Thessalonica also has a poem in much the same vein², although he has had the benefit of a real woman not a dream, and albeit he curses the fowl roundly, he does not threaten to kill it. Perhaps dissatisfaction sharpens the edge of vindictiveness.

Apart from these three epigrams the theme of being woken — cursing — threatening appears very rarely in Greek literature. Anyte writes with satisfaction that a cock will no longer wake her because he has been killed by a fox³; Alciphron curses the bird who roused him from a pleasant dream about wealth and honours⁴; and Lucian goes into elaborate cursing details about the cock who woke him up, promising that he will beat the bird to death with his stick⁵. The original conceit, however, seems to belong to Meleager.

It is interesting, therefore, to find a close parallel in the *Diary* of Izumi Shikibu, a Japanese author of the Heian period⁶. According to this story a Prince and a Lady have had difficulty in finding the way to spend a night together. At last, however, they succeed and when the dawn comes they are disturbed by the crowing of a cock.

„He escorted her home and returned, and shortly afterwards his message arrived: ‘I hated the cock whose crowing startled us out of our sleep this morning and have killed it’⁷. The note was attached to a cock’s feather. With it was the poem:

Killed, but still
I am not satisfied!

That wretched rooster
With its ill-timed
Cry this morning!«

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1. *Anth. Graec.* 12.137. — 2. *Ibid.* 5. 3.— 3. *Ibid.* 7.202. — 4. *Epist. Agric.* 2.2.
5. *Gallus* 1. Only one person seems to have found the cock’s voice pleasing; see Simonides fr. 80b.

6. Trans. E. A. Cranston, Harvard 1969, 145.

7. Commentators are agreed that the Prince is being ironical, so the tone here is the same as Argentarius’s.