# Part VII: **Fable and Christian Genres**

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# St. Gregory of Nazianzus and Fables: Between Epistles and Epigrams

**Abstract:** This paper aims to examine the impact of ancient fables on the Christian literature of the East, with special reference to Gregory of Nazianzus' epistolography and epigrams and the interplay of genres. In Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistle* 114.2–5, there is a fabulistic dispute between swans and swallows. And one of Gregory's series of epigrams in the *Palatine Anthology* (*Anth. Pal.* 8.156–158), on Naucratius' death while fishing, is noteworthy and perhaps related to fable themes. A reference to several instances of burying a dead man (Gregory, *Anth. Pal.* 8.210) may be of the same spirit as a fable about a man rewarded for burying a dead body. Further, the smallness and preciousness of a pearl (μάργαρος) in Gregory's *Anth. Pal.* 8.21 might be envisaged as the philosophical distinction between εἶναι and φαίνεσθαι, similarly treated in ancient fables. Finally, in *Anth. Pal.* 8.178, Gregory may be alluding to Aeschylus' *Ag.* 717–732.

## 1 Introduction: theoretical background

Like the taste of the madeleine in Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, ancient fables popped up and reminded me of my childhood readings as I was preparing my thesis on epigrams from the early Imperial period. While composing a commentary on Apollonides the epigrammatist, dating to the 1st century CE, I came upon μακαριστὸς Rodríguez Adrados' *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable*, which traced a couple of reminiscences of fables in Apollonides' epigrammatic corpus.[1] Other scholars connecting fables and epigrams, such as Silvia Mattiacci, Margot Neger, and Lukas Spielhofer, have inspired me to search for connections between these two genres.[2]

In this paper, I continue the survey that I published in 2020 on "Fables in Epigrams of the Greek Anthology" covering Greek epigrams of the Hellenistic and early Imperial period and their relationship with the Graeco-Latin fable.[3] Thus, I

1 "Λάρος καὶ ἰκτῖνος", or Aesop. 139 P. [= 144 Hsr.; 194 Ch.], and "Ἀετός" from Aeschylus' *Myrmidons*, *fr.* 139 *TGF*; cf. Adrados 1999–2003.

2 See, for example, Mattiacci 2011 and the contributions by Neger and Spielhofer in this volume.

3 See Christodoulou 2020.


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investigate the existence of fable motifs and material in the corpus of Christian epistles and epigrams by Gregory of Nazianzus. It is widely agreed that Christian epigrams, at least those by Gregory of Nazianzus, have a strong relationship to ancient, though pagan, literary production.[4]

At least at first glance, book 1 of the *Greek Anthology*, the so-called "Τὰ τῶν Χριστιανῶν Ἐπιγράμματα" ("Christian Epigrams"), does not have any reminiscence of ancient fables. Interestingly, Rodríguez Adrados' *History of the Graeco-Latin Fable* refers to Gregory of Nazianzus' *Epistle* 114 as a paradigm of the embedded fable. I hence decided to investigate this epistle and then to survey book 8 of the *Greek* or *Palatine Anthology*, entitled "Εκ τῶν ἐπῶν τοῦ Ἁγίου Γρηγορίου τοῦ Θεολόγου" ("Part of the poems of Saint Gregory the Theologian"). It has been observed that Gregory of Nazianzus' epigrams were the only genre in his poetry where he followed a purely Greek tradition.[5] This would suggest the use of ancient Greek themes in his epigrams. Therefore, I tended to search for fables or 'anti-fables' in Gregory's epistolography and epigrammatic corpus.[6] In parallel, I began to investigate the interplay of genres, in other words the question of what happens to a fable when it is incorporated into a letter or an epigram, and what effect the fable has on the other genre.

## 2 Gregory of Nazianzus, swans, and swallows: *Epistle* 114

My starting point is not an epigram but an epistle. This is not the only case of an epistle where fables are embedded or at least alluded to; this fact is connected to the rhetorical effect of fable material on epistolography.[7] The epistle goes as follows:

**4** See Simelidis 2019, 636.

**5** See Vertoudakis 2019, 625–626.

**6** I take the term 'anti-fable' as suggested in Carnes 1992.

**7** There are more examples of fables in Late Antique Greek and Latin epistolography: cf. Basil of Caesarea, *Ep.* 334 beginning with Aesop. 322 P. [= Babr. 109] — "Καρκίνος καὶ μήτηρ" — to illustrate a scribe's tendency to write slantwise; cf. Antonopoulou 2019, 204–205; Horace, *Epist*. 1.1.73–75 (cf. Hopkinson 1994, 213–214); 1.3.18–20; 1.7.29–33; 1.10.34–41; 1.20.14–16; Fronto, *Ep*. 152 van den Hout.

Τῷ αὐτῷ (sc. Κελευσίῳ)
(1) Ἐπειδή μοι τὴν σιωπὴν ἐγκαλεῖς καὶ τὴν ἀγροικίαν, ὦ λάλε καὶ ἀστικέ, φέρε σοι διαμυθολογήσω μῦθον οὐκ ἄμουσον, εἴ πως, ἀλλὰ ταύτῃ γε, δυναίμην ἐπισχεῖν σε τῆς φλυαρίας. (2) Ἐπέσκωπτον αἱ χελιδόνες τῶν κύκνων τὸ μὴ ἐθέλειν ὁμιλεῖν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις μήτε δημοσιεύειν τὴν μουσικήν, ἀλλ' ἀμφὶ τοὺς λειμῶνας διάγειν καὶ τοὺς ποταμούς, καὶ τὴν ἐρημίαν ἀσπάζεσθαι, καὶ βραχέα μὲν ᾄδειν, ἃ δὲ καὶ ᾄδοιεν ᾄδειν ἐν σφίσιν αὐτοῖς, ὥσπερ αἰσχυνομένους τὴν μουσικήν. (3) "Ἡμῶν δε, ἔφασαν, αἱ πόλεις καὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ οἱ θάλαμοι, καὶ περιλαλοῦμεν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ τὰ ἡμέτερα διηγούμεθα, ταῦτα δὴ τὰ ἀρχαῖα καὶ ἀττικά, τὸν Πανδίονα, τὰς Ἀθήνας, τὸν Τηρέα, τὴν Θρᾴκην, τὴν ἀποδημίαν, τὸ κῆδος, τὴν ὕβριν, τὴν ἐκτομήν, τὰ γράμματα, καὶ ἐπὶ πᾶσι τὸν Ἴτυν, καὶ ὡς ἐγενόμεθα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ὄρνιθες." (4) καὶ οἳ μόλις μὲν αὐτὰς ἠξίωσαν καὶ λόγου τῆς ἀδολεσχίας μισήσαντες, ἐπεὶ δὲ ἠξίωσαν· "Ἀλλ' ἡμῶν μὲν ἕνεκεν, ὦ αὗται, κἂν εἰς τὴν ἐρημίαν ἀφίκοιτό τις ὥστε ἀκοῦσαι τῆς μουσικῆς, ὅταν ἀνῶμεν τῷ Ζεφύρῳ τὰς πτέρυγας ἐμπνεῖν ἡδύ τι καὶ ἐναρμόνιον· ὥστ' εἰ μὴ πολλὰ καὶ ἐν πολλοῖς ᾄδομεν, ἀλλ' αὐτὸ δὴ τοῦτο κάλλιστόν ἐστιν ἡμῶν ὅτι μέτρῳ φιλοσοφοῦμεν τὸ μέλος καὶ οὐκ ἀναμίγνυμεν θορύβοις τὴν μουσικήν. (5) Ὑμᾶς δὲ καὶ εἰσοικιζομένας οἱ ἄνθρωποι δυσχεραίνουσι καὶ ἀδούσας ἀποστρέφονται· καὶ μάλα ἐν δίκῃ, αἵ γε οὐδὲ ἐκτμηθεῖσαι τὴν γλῶτταν δύνασθε σιωπᾶν, ἀλλ' αὐταὶ τὴν ἀφωνίαν ὑμῶν ὀδυρόμεναι καὶ τὸ ἐφ' ὑμῖν πάθος, ἔπειτά ἐστε λαλίστεραι τίνος οὐχὶ τῶν εὐγλώττων καὶ μουσικῶν;" (6) Σύνες ὅ τοι λέγω, φησὶν ὁ Πίνδαρος, κἂν εὕρῃς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀφωνίαν ἀμείνω τῆς σῆς εὐγλωττίας, παῦσαι καταφλυαρῶν ἡμῶν τῆς σιωπῆς· ἃ σοι παροιμίαν ἐρῶ μάλα μὲν ἀληθῆ, μάλα δὲ σύντομον, ὅτι τότε ᾄσονται κύκνοι ὅταν κολοιοὶ σιωπήσωσιν.

(Greg. Naz. *Ep.* 114 Gallay)

To Celeusius.
(1) Since you prosecute my quietude and rusticity, you chatty and sophisticated man, come and let me tell you a not unrefined fable, if I could somehow hold you back from prattling on about this, at least. (2) Swallows laughed at swans for not wanting to converse with humans and publicize their music, for instead spending their time around meadows and rivers, for embracing isolation, and for singing just a few notes while singing what they do sing among themselves, as if they're ashamed of their music. (3) "The cities, the human beings, and the bedrooms are ours," [the swallows] would say, "and we speak to humans and tell them our stories, these being indeed ancient and Attic: Pandion, Athens, Tereus, Thrace, the departure, the anxiety, the violence, the excision, the letters, and above all Itys, and how we became birds from humans." (4) And the swans thought little of the swallows, abhorring the glibness of their speech. When they deemed it right, they would say, "O Swallows, it's because of us that, when we allow our wings to blow something sweet and harmonious to the western wind, someone comes upon our isolated spot, that they may listen to our music. Therefore, not singing many songs and <not being> in the presence of the masses is best for us, because we treat each part of the song philosophically, with due measure, and we refrain from mixing our music with noise. (5) But human beings bring difficulties to you who dwell among them, and they turn away from your singing — and rightfully so, since you cannot cut out your own tongue to keep quiet! Don't you lament your dissonance and the suffering you've caused? Aren't you still noisier than good speakers and musicians?" (6) "Realize what I'm telling you," says Pindar <Pind. *fr.* 105a Maehler>, and if you find my voicelessness to be better than your sweet-sounding tongue, stop prating against my quietude, or I'll utter an especially true and especially concise proverb to you: the swans will sing their songs when the jackdaws keep quiet.

(Transl. Storin, slightly altered)

This epistle begins with a fable and ends with a παροιμία which Gregory saves for us. In terms of pragmatics, this is apparently the last of three epistles that he addressed to Celeusius the judge (*Ep.* 112–114). All three epistles are dated to 382 CE, during Easter Lent. Through all three letters, it can be assumed that Gregory must have accepted Celeusius into his house while keeping silent for Lent. The first two letters to Celeusius are short and appropriate to Gregory's programme of silence, after his retirement from the episcopal throne in 381.[8] If all three letters were composed for real correspondence (in other words, if none of them is fictitious or a rhetorical 'exercise'), one may guess that Celeusius insisted on communicating his displeasure at Gregory for not welcoming him with spoken expressions. This annoyance would then have forced Gregory to reply with a larger and argumentative letter. He introduces it with the rhetorical *terminus technicus* (δια)μυθολογέω, which is found in at least one other 'fable' narrated by him.[9]

Secondly, it is interesting that Gregory adopts the balanced tripartite construction (exposition, action proper, closing remark) of fables in later collections such as the *Augustana*.[10] Thus, his embedded fable starts with the exposition of the situation: "Swallows laughed at swans […]" (paragraph 2 of the epistle). Then, instead of a proper plot, the *agon* between the two groups is dramatized: see the boastful argument by the swallows in par. 3; the moderate defensive answer by the swans in par. 4; and the lesson of par. 5 uttered by the swans. In sum, there is no action, but only a contest of words between two avian species (swallows and swans), with each one of them explaining and defending its own attitude to song.

Each of these species is representative of a certain singing behaviour in the fabulistic continuum, as we will see below. In other terms, this fable is of a purely 'agonistic' type. Such mythological 'disputes' between animals or plants or natural elements flourished in the Near East (in Mesopotamia, e.g. in the collection of Ahiqar, and Egypt). In Greek literature, debate-fables appear from Hesiod onwards.[11] Interestingly, Gregory's fable in question has much in common with Callimachus of Cyrene's *Iambi* 4, the expanded debate-fable between the laurel and

**8** Vertoudakis 2019, 145.

**9** See Greg. Naz. *Carm. mor.* 873.11–13: πρὸς ταῦτα καί τι μυθολογῆσαί σοι θέλω, | εἰ δεῖ τι παίζειν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν συμφορῶν, | μῦθον πρέποντα τοῖσδε τοῖς σοφίσμασι ("in addition to these, I want to recite you — if we must play somehow in the middle of calamities — an adequate fable for these arguments"): a fable for wicked people who manage to avoid difficulties is recalled. An owl manages to "justify/sanctify" every reproach uttered against her body, but she then leaves humiliated (*PG* 37.873.14–874.10).

**10** See Holzberg 2002, 86–87.

**11** On Hesiod's fable of "The Hawk and the Nightingale" (*Op.* 202–212), see the contribution by Currie in this volume.

the olive tree. The resemblance between these two masterpieces consists in their length, the rhetorical vigour of the contestants' arguments, as well as in the Oriental provenance of both fables. Callimachus claims that οἱ πάλαι Λυδοὶ ("the ancient Lydians") recite this story. Would it not have been plausible for Gregory to be familiar with and have a predilection for this type of Eastern fables due to his Anatolian (Cappadocian) origins? If this is true, then the structure and layout of Gregory's fable mark the continuation of a rich tradition.[12]

Thirdly, in terms of rhetoric, Gregory writes that he will narrate a fable to Celeusius the judge, to avert him from his φλυαρία ("garrulity"). In a philosophical and theological context, he aims to teach Celeusius an Orthodox ideal, namely σιωπή, via a fable. This epistle with its biting language indicates that Gregory built relationships with others using his eloquence.[13] Birds and insects are a frequent theme in Gregory's writings, some with positive, others with negative connotations. Ethical parameters and metapoetic comments emerge from Gregory's pen through the reference to birds. In this fable, there is a dispute between swans and swallows; this could be seen as one in a series of singing competitions between birds, which go as far back as Hesiod's poems.[14]

'Music battles' between different species of animals are a favourite practice with fabulists and a suitable way for them to stress the tensions in human relationships. Gregory's rhetorical studies in Athens would have justified the reference to this city as his inspiration for the use of fable material in his communications with other people. In *Ep.* 114, the embedded fable could be either one he remembered, or a fable he created, on the basis of traditional patterns of the genre. While blending Oriental and Greek features, Gregory suggests the 'Atticism' of this fable by the utterance of swallows: "we speak to humans and tell them our stories, these being indeed ancient and Attic: Pandion, Athens, Tereus, Thrace, the departure, the anxiety, the violence, the excision, the letters, and above all Itys, and how we became birds from humans." Wittig claims that the swallow's reproaches against the swan are based on the myth of Procne and Philomela, narrated in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; as Spielhofer notes, this myth is also reworked in the fables of Babrius (*Fable* 12).[15] It is likely that Gregory improvised on

**12** On the Anatolian provenance of such 'debates', see Adrados 1999, 303–305, 350–351, 354, 356. On the characteristics of Callimachus' *Iambi* 4, see Clayman 2022, 421. On Callimachus' *Iambi* 4, see also the contribution by Bottini in this volume.

**13** See Storin 2019b, 81, 86 n. 47.

**14** On such competitions in poetry, see Christodoulou 2020, 93 n. 38; on fables in Hesiod, see Bruno Currie's paper in this volume.

**15** See Wittig 1981, 249 n. 241, on the narration in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* about Tereus, Procne, Philomela, and Itys (*Met.* 6.412–674), with the metamorphosis into birds narrated in 6.667–674. On

Babrius' fable, or that he playfully adapted a well-known myth from Ovid to suit his intentions.

Gregory compares himself to a swan and likens the judge Celeusius, his interlocutor, to a swallow. The silent swan recalls Gregory's ascetic ἀφωνία, his silent Lenten fasting, and the fable of the swan who sang its song only when its masters threatened to kill it.[16] On the other hand, the swallow is the bird most characteristic for seeking mutuality with people and building its nest on humans' roofs, as ancient fables point out, seeking the aetiology of this avian habit.[17]

It is time to ask why Gregory chooses to present this fable in his *Epistle* 114. He is supposed to remain silent; he hesitates to expand his argumentation, yet he uses a fable, a rhetorical device, like an orator. This oxymoron is solved when he equates himself with the swan, which rarely sings (= speaks). Additionally, by 'having' a fable 'told' by birds, he cannot be accused of chatter, since he lets birds 'play' the story and transfer the moral. Even the emphatic utterance to his correspondent, "Realize what I'm telling you", is borrowed from Pindar. Gregory caps his letter with a proverb, a concise anonymous wisdom text ("the swans will sing their songs when the jackdaws keep quiet"). Thus, he does not have to speak for himself and can remain true to his attitude.

Additionally, it is appropriate to investigate the poetics of this choice, in other words, whether the epistle becomes more theatrical and richer in content and ideas through its fable content. Most scholars explain the swan's utterance μέτρῳ φιλοσοφοῦμεν τὸ μέλος ("we treat each part of the song philosophically, with due measure") as a reference to the "poetic and moral μέτρον" of Gregory, in De Blasi's words.[18] Interestingly, Gregory makes use of a similar stock fable about the swan and nightingale's song again in a friendly epistolary poem (2.2.7.306–313) addressed to another legal figure, Nemesius the governor of Cappadocia (*terminus ante quem* of this poem is 384 CE).[19] Gregory is clearly referring to these birds'

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Babr. 12, the swallow's calling towards the nightingale to abandon solitude, and the similar answer of the nightingale, see Spielhofer 2023, 236 and 240–244.

**16** Cf. Aesop. 233 P. [= 247 Hsr.; 175 Ch.; 1081 RA= VD 2015] with Christodoulou 2020, 92 n. 35. The swan also appears as a metapoetic symbol in Vergil's *Eclogue* 9.35–36, where it is compared to the goose, a less talented singer; see Clausen 1994, 279–280. Vergil's passage is also quoted in a letter by Symmachus, *Ep.* 1.1.4.

**17** See Aesop. 39 P. [= Hsr.; 350 Ch.; RA= 351 and 359 VD 2015] with Christodoulou 2020, 91 n. 32 and Holzberg 2021, 413 (on the reception of Aesop. 39 P. down to La Fontaine).

**18** Ruether 1969, 126; Constas 1995, 256, 260–262; Børtnes/Hägg 2006, 125 n. 48; Storin 2019, 148; De Blasi 2020, 262–263.

**19** On Nemesius as a correspondent of Gregory, see Gallay 1967, 90; on this poem and its context, see Bénin 2021, 147–148, 158 and 177–178.

song, among many references to ancient Greek myths, in a metapoetic sense; he speaks of his poem as a Christological gift and as a call to conversion for the pagan Nemesius:

> Ἀλλὰ φίλων ὄχ' ἄριστε Νεμέσσιε, τοῦτο δέδεξο
> δῶρον ἐμῆς φιλίης, πάντων γλυκερώτερον ἄλλων,
> μοῦνον ἀφ' ἡμετέρων κτεάνων καὶ μοῦνον ἔμοιγε,
> οὐ κύκνου λιγυροῖο μόρον γοάοντος ἀοιδὴν
> γηραλέαις πτερύγεσσιν ὅτ' ἐμπίπτῃσιν ἀήτης.
> Οὐδ' ἄρ' ἀηδονίδος στυγνὸν μέλος, ἡνίκα χεῖμα
> δεσμὰ φέρει πάντεσσι καὶ ὀρνίθεσσιν ἀοιδοῖς,
> ἀλλὰ Χριστοφόρων στομάτων θεοτευχέα μολπήν.
> (Greg. Naz. *Carm.* 2.2.7.306–313)

> But now, Nemesius, you, the best of my friends, accept this gift of my friendship, the sweetest [gift] of all, the only remains of my family's and my own possessions, [which song is] neither a shrill swan's song, who bewails his destiny when the wind falls in his old wings, nor a nightingale's gloomy song, when winter casts his chains on everything, and on singing birds, but a song of God's fashioning, from a mouth of one of those who bear the name of Christ.
> (Transl. M.Chr.)

It is worth noting that birds are not always presented as fable characters in Gregory's writings. In an epigram of his, from the *Greek* (or *Palatine*) *Anthology*, nightingales play another role; they are used to evoke a bucolic scene, at least at first sight.

> Κρῆναι καὶ ποταμοὶ καὶ ἄλσεα καὶ **λαλαγεῦντες**
> ὄρνιθες λιγυροί καλὸν ἀπ' ἀκρεμόνων
> αὖραί τε μαλακὸν συρίγμασι κῶμα φέρουσαι,
> καὶ κῆποι Χαρίτων εἰς ἓν ἀγειρομένων,
> κλαύσατε· ὦ χαρίεσσ' Εὐφημιάς, ὥς σε θανών περ
> Εὐφήμιος κλεινὴν θήκατ' ἐπωνυμίῃ.
> (*Anth. Pal.* 8.129)

> Springs, rivers, and groves, and singing birds that twitter sweetly on the branches, and breezes whose whistling brings soft sleep, and gardens of the linked Graces, weep. O charming Euphemias, how Euphemius though dead has made your name famous.
> (Transl. Paton, slightly adapted)

The passage refers to λαλαγεῦντες | ὄρνιθες λιγυροὶ καλὸν ἐπ' ἀκρεμόνων. The melodious birds are a part of this *locus amoenus*, with a borrowing from Theocritus (*Anth. Pal.* 9.437.9–12). The poem by Theocritus describes the scenery around a ξόανον for Priapus:

[…] εἰαρινοὶ δὲ λιγυφθόγγοισιν ἀοιδαῖς
κόσσυφοι ἀχεῦσιν ποικιλότραυλα μέλη·
ξουθαὶ δ' ἀδονίδες μινυρίσμασιν ἀνταχεῦσι
μέλπουσαι στόμασιν τὰν μελίγαρυν ὄπα …
(*Anth. Pal.* 9.437.9–12)

In spring the shrill song of the blackbirds echoes here with its varied notes, and the brown nightingales pour from their throats their honeyed voice in response.

(Transl. Paton)

Yet this earthly paradise is cleverly twisted at the end of Gregory's epigram, where it is revealed that this harmonious place surrounds Euphemius the Cappadocian's tomb.[20] It can easily be seen that there is a great antithesis between the singing creatures and the instruction κλαύσατε, on behalf of Gregory. Our poet at the same time both recalls and 'breaks' the norms of Hellenistic epigrams.

Concluding this first part, we may notice that Gregory addresses his embedded fables to educated correspondents, who would have had the *paideia* to recall recurring fables and to follow the connections between different ones used or alluded to by the Nazianzene. The rhetorical and poetical scope encompasses Gregory's joyful interplay of genres.

## 3 Epigrams by Gregory of Nazianzus: animal and non-animal fables?

After commenting on this promising fabulistic epistle by Gregory, it is interesting to investigate the possible reminiscence of fables in his epigrams. Before discussing individual epigrams, let us however stress that the material questioned below does not actually allude to specific fable narratives. Rather, the epigrams portrayed can be read and understood — to varying degrees — in the context of the ancient fabulistic tradition.

Gregory's epigrams in book 8 of the *Greek Anthology* are either sepulchral or related to stories of death. One of Gregory's series of epigrams (*Anth. Pal.* 8.156–158) relates Naucratius' unfortunate death while fishing. One of Basil the Great's brothers, the monk Naucratius, drowned when he got tangled in fishing nets while trying to draw them out of a river. The first epigram in the sequence is more elaborate and narrative, while the next two epigrams on the same subject are

**20** See Waltz 1960, 116; Simelidis 2019, 642.

more concise variations of the first one. All three epigrams stress that death in water is feared, and that men are in danger in water, since we are not marine creatures — remember the Stoic motto ὁμολογουμένως τῇ φύσει ζῆν, which finds application in numerous fables.

Ἰχθυβόλον ποτ' ἔλυε λίνον βυθίης ἀπὸ πέτρης
Ναυκράτιος δίναις ἐν ποταμοῦ βρυχίαις·
καὶ τὸ μὲν οὐκ ἀνέλυσεν, ὁ δ' ἔσχετο. πῶς ἁλιῆα
εἵρυσεν ἀνθ' ἁλίης δίκτυον εἰπέ, Λόγε,
Ναυκράτιον, καθαροῖο βίου νόμον, ὥσπερ ἐίσκω, 5
καὶ χάριν ἐλθέμεναι καὶ μόρον ἐξ ὑδάτων.
(*Anth. Pal.* 8.156)

Naucratius was once freeing his fishing-net from a sunken rock in the roaring whirlpools of the river. He did not free the net but was caught himself. Tell me, O Word, how did the net land the fisherman instead of the fish? Naucratius was an example of pure life, and I trust that both grace and death came to him from the water.

(Transl. Simelidis)

This group is noteworthy for its content. The phrase "how did the net land the fisherman instead of the fish?" is the expression of a rhetorical paradox, that is an epideictic trait. Simelidis remarks that the theme of the strange death of a fisherman is popular with Hellenistic epigrammatists and their successors.[21] For example, in a Hellenistic epigram by Leonidas of Tarentum, we read:

Πάρμις ὁ Καλλιγνώτου ἐπακταῖος καλαμευτής
ἄκρος καὶ κίχλης καὶ σκάρου ἰχθυβολεὺς
καὶ λάβρου πέρκης δελεάρπαγος ὅσσα τε κοίλας
σήραγγας πέτρας τ' ἐμβυθίους νέμεται,
ἄγρης ἐκ πλωτῆς ποτ' ἰουλίδα πετρήεσσαν 5
δακνάζων ὁλοὴν ἐξ ἁλὸς ἀράμενος
ἔφθιτ'· ὀλισθηρὴ γὰρ ὑπὲκ χερὸς ἀίξασα
ᾤχετ' ἐπὶ στεινὸν παλλομένη φάρυγα.
χὠ μὲν μηρίνθων καὶ δούνακος ἀγκίστρων τε
ἐγγὺς ἀπὸ πνοιὴν ἦκε κυλινδόμενος, 10
νήματ' ἀναπλήσας ἐπιμοίρια· τοῦ δὲ θανόντος
Γρίπων ὁ γριπεὺς τοῦτον ἔχωσε τάφον.
(*Anth. Pal.* 7.504)

**21** See epigrams by Leonidas of Tarentum, *Anth. Pal.* 7.504 [= 66 HE]; Apollonides, *Anth. Pal.* 7.702 [= 12 GP], of the early Imperial period, and 'Sappho' III (Page 1981, 185–186) on the same subject; cf. Simelidis 2019, 639–640. It is interesting to see this epigram by Gregory as a consolation for Naucratius' family, as hope for Naucratius' baptism through water surrounding him during his accident, according to Simelidis *l.c.*

> Parmis, Callignotus' son, the shore-fisher, a first class hand at catching wrasse and scaros and the perch, greedy seizer of the bait, and all fish that live in crevices and on the rocky bottoms, met his death by biting a rock-dwelling iulis from his first catch of the day, a fish he lifted from the sea for his destruction; for slipping from his fingers, it went wriggling down his narrow gullet. So breathed he his last, rolling over in agony, near his lines, rod, and hooks, fulfilling the doom the destinies spun on him, and Gripo the fisherman built him this tomb.
>
> (Transl. Paton)

The fisherman of this story accidentally swallows a fish that he has caught and chokes. Such stories are called 'anecdotes' by Page, following the paradoxical motif of 'the killer killed by his victim'.[22] By mentioning the story behind Leonidas' epigram, I do not suggest an allusion by Gregory to the fable of the fisherman who chokes on the fish he has caught, since Naucratius' accident was real and does not involve choking by swallowing fish. Gregory's rhetorical question, "Tell me, O Word, how did the net land the fisherman instead of the fish?", could rather be interpreted as expressing his concern about Naucratius' paradoxical fatal accident. All in all, Gregory 'Christianizes' the topic of the strange death of a fisherman; he apostrophizes the Lord (εἰπέ, Λόγε) asking Him to justify Naucratius' calamity. Gregory then receives the 'illumination' that Naucratius' passing away served as his baptism (see n. 21 above).

If we view the motif another way, namely as the topic of fishing in fables, chance is connected to (un-)successful fishing in the fables "Ἁλιεῖς καὶ θύννος" (Aesop. 21 P. [= Hsr; 22 Ch.]) and "Ἁλιεῖς λίθον ἀγρεύσαντες" (Aesop. 13 P. [= Hsr.; 23 Ch.]). The topic of fishing may have been introduced into fable literature by Babrius.[23] However, in Babrius the point of the fable does not concern misfortune.

In Gregory's *Anth. Pal.* 8.21, the smallness, rareness, and excellence of a pearl (μάργαρος) is the first of three elements in a simile (pearl, Bethlehem, Nazianzus).

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**22** On the term *anecdote*, see Page 1981, 546; see also Gow/Page 1968, II,128. See the discussion of such epigrams in Vertoudakis 2019, 634; Christodoulou 2020, 86 n. 15. An attempt is made in Christodoulou 2020, *l.c.*, to relate these epigrams to Aesop. 139 P. [= 144 Hsr.; 194 Ch.], "Λάρος καὶ ἰκτῖνος" or "Sea-gull and Kite". In this fable, a gull is choked by eating a fish, and a kite reproaches the gull for trying to feed from the sea despite being a winged creature whose realm is the sky. As for the kite in 139 P., the bird is perhaps authorized to give the gull a moral lesson since Aristophanes in *Birds* grants this bird a royal past; the aetiology for this honour is that people bow before it when it first arrives in spring. See Ar. *Av*. 499–503 with ancient scholia on *Av*. 501. Additionally, the motif of 'the killer killed or defeated by his victim' is popular in fable. For instance, in the fable "Κόραξ καὶ ὄφις" or "Crow and Snake" (Aesop. 128 P. [= 130 Hsr.; 168 Ch.]), a crow grasps a sleeping snake, but the snake bites the crow to death.

**23** See Babr. 4; Babr. 6; Babr. 9.

This comparison could remind Classicists of the fable theme of the philosophical distinction between εἶναι and φαίνεσθαι.[24]

> Τυτθὴ μάργαρός ἐστιν, ἀτὰρ λιθάκεσσιν ἀνάσσει·
> τυτθὴ καὶ Βηθλέμ, ἔμπα δὲ χριστοφόρος.
> ὣς δ' ὀλίγην μὲν ἐγὼ ποίμνην λάχον, ἀλλὰ φερίστην
> Γρηγόριος, τὴν σύ, παῖ φίλε, λίσσομ' ἄγοις.
> (*Anth. Pal.* 8.21)

> Small is the pearl, but the queen of jewels; small is Bethlehem, but yet the mother of Christ; so a little flock was mine, Gregory's, but of the best; and I pray, my dear son, that you may lead it.
> (Transl. Paton, slightly altered)

Μάργαρος, a Gregorian *hapax* in the *Greek Anthology*, is praised elsewhere in Gregory: Μάργαρος ἐν λάεσσιν, ἐν ἀστράσι φωσφόρος ἄλλος, | Εἴαρ ἐν ὥρῃσιν, ἐν δὲ φυτοῖσι ῥόδον ("a pearl amid stones, another Phosphoros (Morning Star) amid stars, spring amid seasons, rose amid plants", Greg. Naz. *Carm.* 37.1460.13–14), referring to a certain Cledonius.[25] On the other hand, Gregory advises a virgin not to be adorned with pearls, a sign of luxury: Μάργαρος ἄλλην | Κοσμείτω, καὶ χρυσὸς ἐπαστράπτων μελέεσσιν ("A pearl, as well as gold which lightens upon body parts, should adorn other than you", Greg. Naz. *Carm. mor.* 585.3–4). In fables too, smallness and preciousness are more important than abundance. In its relevance to pearls and in terms of metapoetics, Phaedrus 3.12 Z. [= G.] is instructive: a hungry cockerel finds a pearl, rates its price for men, but finds it useless for himself. According to the epimythium, the poet addresses this poem to those who do not understand him. Additionally, Avianus elaborates on the fable "The Turtle and the Eagle" (Avian. 2.1–8) to include as a detail the turtle's vanity in wishing to travel to the Red Sea to collect pearl shells.[26] Of course, if we take into consideration the theological context of Gregory's set of themes, the image of the pearl is more likely to be taken from Scripture, for example from Jesus' parable of the pearl merchant in *Matthew* (*Ev.Matt*. 13.45–46), than from the classical fable corpus. Μαργαρίτης is then the most precious stone, a token of the Kingdom of Heaven.[27]

**24** This epigram is commented upon by Cerroni 2020, who does not mention any fable allusion.

**25** Cf. Greg. Naz. *Carm. dogm.* 37.500.2–4.

**26** Mann 2015, 146–147, 284–286.

**27** *Ev.Matt*. 13.45–46: Πάλιν ὁμοία ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν ἀνθρώπῳ ἐμπόρῳ ζητοῦντι καλοὺς μαργαρίτας· ὃς εὑρὼν ἕνα πολύτιμον μαργαρίτην ἀπελθὼν πέπρακε πάντα ὅσα εἶχε καὶ ἠγόρασεν αὐτόν ("The Kingdom of Heaven also resembles a merchant who sought good pearls. When he found a precious pearl, he went and sold everything he had and bought it", Αποστολική

Criticism of the temptations of wealth is also omnipresent in numerous epigrams by Gregory included in the *Palatine Anthology* under the category "κατὰ τυμβωρύχων" ("against tomb desecrators"). It is well known that this category comprises one third of the whole corpus of book 8, suggesting the gravity of the issue and probably indicating the purpose of composing such epigrams to be inscribed on tombs.[28] These epigrams often stress the ill consequences of gold for the wicked: desecration of tombs is the result of avarice. For example, Gregory's epigram 8.209 closes — in a fabulistic manner — with an epimythium: χρυσοῦ δεύτερα πάντ' ἀδίκοις ("for wicked men everything is lesser than gold", *Anth. Pal.* 8.209.6). A similar epimythium closes an early Imperial epigram by Antiphilus of Byzantium: ἦς ἄρα κὴν ἀλόγοις, χρυσέ, κακοῦ πρόφασις ("thus even to brutes, Gold, you are a cause of evil", *Anth. Pal.* 9.310.6 [= 41 GP]; transl. Gow-Page 1968). We could call Antiphilus' epigram a versified fable: a mouse swallows gold; its belly then gets too heavy to move onward; therefore, the mouse is caught and dissected by men because of the gold. One can see that animals can find their place even in sepulchral epigrams.[29]

In other epigrams, Gregory stresses the pious custom of burying the body of a stranger who has died away from his homeland, presumably due to difficult travel conditions and constant wars. In *Anth. Pal.* 8.213.1–2, he crafts a hyperbole: the deceased begs the passers-by to throw his corpse in a river (Λίσσομαι· ἤν γε θάνω, ποταμῷ δέμας [...] | ῥίψατε, "I beseech you, if I die, throw my body into a river"; transl. Paton, adjusted). The other two options that he gives is for the body to be given to dogs, or to be burnt, for fear of being destroyed by tomb desecrators. Gregory's scenario of a dead man's corpse ending up in a river is not unparalleled in Hellenistic epigrams — even if this does not imply a direct intertextual link. As an example, let us mention a 'new fable', Ἰχθύας τις βάλλων καὶ ναυαγοῦ κάρα ("The Fisherman and the Shipwrecked Man's Head"), that is put in verse by Carpyllides, probably a Hellenistic epigrammatist:

Ἰχθῦς ἀγκίστρῳ τις ἀπ' ἠόνος εὔτριχι βάλλων
εἵλκυσε ναυηγοῦ κρᾶτα λιποτριχέα,
οἰκτείρας δὲ νέκυν τὸν ἀσώματον ἐξ ἀσιδήρου

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Διακονία [Apostolikē Diakonia] 2005, 30; transl. M.Chr.). See also Strong's contribution in this volume, who compares fables to biblical parables.

**28** See Waltz 1960, 25; Vertoudakis 2019, 636–637.

**29** *Anth. Pal.* 9.310 [= 41 GP] is not mentioned as a fable paradigm by RA-VD. A negative depiction of gold is recurrent in ancient fable literature (Phaed. 1.27 Z. [= G.]; 5.20 Z. [= 4.21 G.]; Babr. 119; 123; Avian. 33; also, Aesop. 225 P. [= 253 Hsr.; 345 Ch.]; 24 P. [= Hsr.; 30 Ch.]). On the criticism of love for gold and gluttony in the *Augustana*, see Zafiropoulos 2001, 147–153.

χειρὸς ἐπισκάπτων λιτὸν ἔχωσε τάφον,
εὗρε δὲ κευθόμενον χρυσοῦ κτέαρ. ἦ ῥα δικαίοις 5
ἀνδράσιν εὐσεβίης οὐκ ἀπόλωλε χάρις.
(*Anth. Pal.* 9.52 [= 2 HE; RA III, S. 157 VD; 1099 VD 2015])

A man, angling on the beach with a hook attached to a fine hair line, brought to shore the hairless head of a shipwrecked man. Pitying the bodiless corpse, he dug a little grave with his hands, having no tool, and found there hidden a treasure of gold. And so, righteous men lose not the reward of piety.

(Transl. Paton, slightly adjusted)

I have suggested that Carpyllides' fable corresponds to another 'new fable', named "Cyclops and Man", found in two Greek epigrams of early Imperial period by Statilius Flaccus and which inspired Ausonius in one of his epigrams.[30] Even if Gregory does not actively allude to the above two fables ("The Fisherman and the Shipwrecked Man's Head" and "Cyclops and Man"), he artfully reverses the motif of a corpse thrown into a river and presents it as fortune instead of misfortune, as a way to avoid desecration. His concern is again to teach pious burial of the dead and to warn against violating tombs.

Finally, in other epigrams about tomb desecrations, there may be an allusion to a famous lion fable about betrayal by one's kin, another significant fable motif. In Gregory's *Anth. Pal.* 8.210.3–4, a γείτων, a neighbour, is the one who violates the tomb.

Πολλάκι ναυηγοῖο δέμας κατέχωσεν ὁδίτης
κύμασι πλαζόμενον, πολλάκι θηρολέτου,
ἤδη καί πολέμῳ τις ὃν ὤλεσεν· ἀλλ' ἐμὲ **γείτων**
χωσθέντ' ἀλλοτρίαις χερσὶν **ἔπερσε τάφον**.
(*Anth. Pal.* 8.210.3–4)

Many times a traveller has buried the body of a shipwrecked man found tossing on the waves, many times one <has buried> the body of a man slain by beasts, often has one <buried> him whom he slew in war, but **a neighbour pillaged me, the tomb** that was piled by foreign hands.

(Transl. Paton, adjusted)

More vividly, θὴρ […] ἐφέστιος is the metaphor used for the impious neighbour in Gregory's *Anth. Pal.* 8.178:

**30** On Carpyllides' epigram, see van Dijk 1997, 28F1, 266–267; on Statilius Flaccus *Anth. Pal.* 9.44–45 [= 8–9 GP] and Ausonius *Epigr.* 23, see Kay 2001, 125–127; on both fables discussed, see Christodoulou 2020, 86 n. 17. Statilius Flaccus and Ausonius narrate how a poor and pious man is rewarded by finding a rich man's (or Cyclop's) gold, while the rich man loses his gold and commits suicide.

Ἦν ὅτε ἦν ἀτίνακτος ἐγὼ τάφος, οὔρεος ἄκρην
πουλὺς ὑπερτέλλων τηλεφανὴς σκόπελος·
νῦν δέ με **θὴρ** ἐτίναξεν **ἐφέστιος** εἵνεκα **χρυσοῦ**·
ὧδε δ' ἐτινάχθην **γείτονος ἐν παλάμαις**.
(*Anth. Pal.* 8.178)

I was once an undisturbed tomb, like a rock rising high above the mountain summit, and conspicuous from afar; but now a beast from my own house has destroyed me for the sake of gold, and thus I was demolished by the hands of my neighbour.

(Transl. Paton)

Waltz, in his edition, believes that an antithesis and a simile are hidden here. He thinks that θὴρ ἐφέστιος is an antithesis indicating that, in the past, the desecrator had been ἐφέστιος to the deceased, since the neighbour must have enjoyed hospitality from the now dead person. Now, the desecrator acts as a θήρ, like a beast which unearths carcasses — does he mean 'to feed itself'? This would suggest an allusion to animalism of human beings, even cannibalism. I would propose that θὴρ […] ἐφέστιος recalls the well-known Aeschylean fable about a man who raised a lion cub that ultimately devoured his master's house.[31]

ἔθρεψεν δὲ λέοντος ἴ-
νιν δόμοις ἀγάλακτον οὔ-
τως ἀνὴρ φιλόμαστον […]
πολέα δ' ἔσχ' **ἐν ἀγκάλαις**
νεοτρόφου τέκνου δίκαν, […]
χρονισθεὶς δ' ἀπέδειξεν ἦ-
θος τὸ πρὸς τοκέων· χάριν
γὰρ τροφεῦσιν ἀμείβων
μηλοφόνοισι σὺν ἄταις
**δαῖτ'** ἀκέλευστος ἔτευξεν·
αἵματι δ' οἶκος ἐφύρθη
(Aesch. *Ag.* 717–732)

Even so a man reared in his house a lion's whelp, robbed of its mother's milk yet still desiring the breast. […] Much did it get, held in arms like a nursling child […] But brought to full growth by time it showed the nature it had from its parents. Unbidden, as payment for its fostering, it prepared a feast with ruinous slaughter of the flocks.

(Transl. Smyth)

**31** A connection between the passage and Aeschylus' fable (*Ag.* 717–736 [= RA III, S. 18 VD; 1235 VD 2015]; "Ἀνὴρ καὶ λέοντος ἴνις") follows Christodoulou 2020, 94 n. 43. On the rhetorical simile/fable of beast and feast in the *Iliad* (24.31–45 and elsewhere) as well as its connection to Aesch. *Ag.* 717–736 and to the need of special treatment of the dead, see also Keating McKeon's paper in this volume.

It is attractive to think of Gregory as a reader of Aeschylus. First, Gregory's *Anth. Pal.* 8.178 recalls the Aeschylean fable through the phrase θὴρ [...] ἐφέστιος, which could be reminiscent of the lines ἔθρεψεν δὲ λέοντος ἴ-| νιν δόμοις [...] ἀνήρ. Further, he creates an antithesis between the past (Ἦν ὅτε [...]), when the tomb was ἀτίνακτος, and the present (νῦν δέ), when με θὴρ ἐτίναξεν ἐφέστιος. There is a similar structure in *Agamemnon*'s passage (ἔθρεψεν δὲ [...] ἀνήρ ~ χρονισθεὶς δ' ἀπέδειξεν [λέων] ἦθος τὸ πρὸς τοκέων). A repetition of the verb τινάσσω in the last verse (ὧδε δ' ἐτινάχθην γείτονος ἐν παλάμαις) sets the two situations in parallel (devouring beast and violent desecrator). Finally, the affectionate prepositional phrase ἐν ἀγκάλαις in Aeschylus (showing man's love for the lion cub) could be echoed in Gregory's γείτονος ἐν παλάμαις. Although such a comparison cannot be supported with exact verbal parallels between these texts, the aforementioned indications make this relationship at least plausible. Of course, such ironic wordplay would suggest the betrayal of the deceased by the neighbour. All in all, this intertextual allusion would perhaps imply Gregory's wish to render the act of tomb desecration as something tragic, to scare off future desecrators.

## 4 Conclusions

What should be the conclusion of this survey? I believe that I have managed to prove, to a certain extent, that Gregory of Nazianzus inserted into his writings some themes and practices from ancient fables. First, Gregory's *Epistles* mentioned above make use of fables as *exempla* through the poetological comparison between the sounds of various birds and their effect. Singing competitions between birds help him define his credo as implicitly as he can. It is not easy to judge him negatively since he delicately "plays" with fable material.

Equally metapoetic is the reference to μάργαρος, which is the synonym for a small but precious heritage. It probably suggests here Gregory's love for his father's small parish in Nazianzus. He seems confident that he will be able to guide his little flock in Jesus' ways and make them shine in virtue just like a small pearl. Whereas in his *Epistle* 114 Gregory has the chance to elaborate the narrative about swallows and swans, in his epigram about μάργαρος he conforms to the nature of this genre by choosing a short priamel.

Moreover, his choice of fable themes has to do with the treatment of the role of Chance in man's life. The common motif of the fisherman killed by his victim or during his work is "Christianized" by Gregory. The Church Father is innovating on the belief in Chance, this ancient Greek and Roman deity. He attributes people's misfortune to God's mysterious plan, as in the case of Naucratius' drowning, with

the rhetorical question, "Tell me, O Word, how did the net land the fisherman instead of the fish?" (*Anth. Pal.* 8.156.3–4). Thus, the Church Father is relieved, hoping for Naucratius' salvation through baptism in the same water that took his life.

As for his treatment of the fate of people's corpses threatened by desecration, Gregory stresses the danger of pillaging tombs, suggesting two alternatives: either generosity and its reward, or gluttony and its aftermath. In a fabulistic atmosphere, he stresses how gold becomes a punishment for the wicked (analogously, the loss of gold prompts an impious man, or Cyclops, to hang himself). To the contrary, gold becomes a reward for the pious (as it is the case in fables, for the poor man who found the Cyclops' treasure and abandoned the idea of committing suicide, and the fisherman who discovered a rich hoard while burying an abandoned scull). Indeed, moral lessons emerge, since Gregory's critique aims to portray wealth as a vice, in accord with his didactic career as a bishop.

Finally, the maxim "Respect your limits" finds its way into Naucratius' misfortune and the neighbour's betrayal (we should not fully trust the sea, nor every neighbour, who might prove an animalistic tomb desecrator).[32] We are also quite justified in saying that Gregory alludes to a fable of a man giving parental affection to a lion cub (or to a wolf, in other versions), in other words to a θήρ, which would not manage to go against its animal nature. The fierce beast devours the house, just as the neighbour of a deceased person violates his tomb. Of course, Gregory's texts analysed above prove that they address a reader of at least a moderate level of education. It is not clear that every reader of Gregory would have been able to discern the web of interplay between fables and epistles or epigrams. Since Gregory is educated in a multicultural *milieu* where Near Eastern and Graeco-latin fable is in stock, familiarity with fables for the reader is a *sine qua non* to catch the mind-game of intertextuality in his works.

In conclusion, it is obvious that further inquiry into Gregory of Nazianzus' corpus may shed more light on the impact of fable material on Gregory's mentality and rhetoric. As for other primary sources, much more research needs to be done to reveal the impact of ancient fables on epigrams in early Byzantium, including Palladas and Agathias' *Cycle*, among others. And it would be useful to compare this corpus to attested epigraphic production of the same period. It also remains to study Christian epigrams, their context, their rhetoric, their philosoph-

**32** On the role of Chance and Fate in the *Augustana Collection*, see Zafiropoulos 2001, 137–140; on the maxim "Respect your limits", see Zafiropoulos 2001, 71–72, 75–76.

ical and theological value, to give more support to speculations about Christian epigrams and their links to ancient or not so ancient fables.[33]

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**33** van Dijk's *Aesopica posteriora* (van Dijk 2015) is instructive for Later Antique or Medieval fables which may relate to Christian epigrams.

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