# THE A TEAM: A NOTE ON *ANTH. PAL.* 11.437*

*Αἰάζω Διότιμον, ὃς ἐν πέτραισι κάθηται*
*Γαργαρέων παισὶν βῆτα καὶ ἄλφα λέγων.*

This poem has been seen by some critics as scornful. 'Der Dichter, welcher zum Elementarlehrer wieder herabgesunken ist, ist dadurch für Mit- und Nachwelt tot ... wer darin den Hohn nicht empfindet, raubt dem Gedicht Sinn und Pointe.'[1] Gow and Page, however, perceptively note that 'such a couplet might be playful rather than scornful'.[2]

The playfulness becomes clearer, perhaps, if one notes that the poem is framed by word-play. *Αἰάζω* does indeed mean 'I bewail', but it also means 'I say AI', or, to put it another way, 'I say alpha and iota'. Compare the myth of Aias: not only is the hero's name linked to the saying of AI, but the two letters appear on the flower that springs from his blood upon his death.[3]

The speaker and the unfortunate Diotimus are both, then, 'saying A'. They do so, however, in amusingly different ways. The former is still free to indulge in the high diction of poetic pronouncement, while the latter is reduced to teaching the letter to children.

*University of Durham* L. V. PITCHER
l.v.pitcher@durham.ac.uk
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[1] R. Reitzenstein, *Epigramm und Skolion: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der alexandrinischen Dichtung* (Giessen, 1893), 171.

[2] A. S. F. Gow and D. L. Page, *The Greek Anthology: Hellenistic Epigrams* 2 (Cambridge, 1965), 107.

[3] See Jebb on Soph. *Aj.* 430–1 (p. 74).

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