

Playing to the Crowd: *Od.* 9.5-11 and the Epicurean Debate

As scholars like Gordon (1998) and Asmis (1991) have shown, reception of the *Odyssey*, Phaeacian episode, played a large role in Epicurean debate. However, for a specific passage, *Od.* 9.5-11, the connection was even closer: both the philosophy's proponents and detractors describe it as central to the Epicurean ideology, and used purely literary analyses of the passage in order to support or undermine it. Therefore, looking at the opposing efforts to utilize the passage can enlighten us not only on how various writers understood Epicureanism, but also about the tactics of interpretation, both honest and not, that they believed their readers and listeners would accept.

Epicureans and their supporters, including Epicurus himself, took *Od.* 9.5-11 at face value, and then attempted to apply the sentiment in the passage to the world at large. Conversely, Heraclitus and other opponents claimed that Odysseus' comments to the Phaeacians here were lies, making the passage into an indictment rather than a confirmation of Epicurean principles. Despite these differences, the rhetorical underpinning of the interpretations is markedly similar. Both state their interpretation without providing any evidence to confirm it, treating their opponents as if their interpretation were ridiculous on its face; this is particularly notable in the anti-Epicureans, whose interpretation seems to need far more explanation than the Epicureans. Both also write as if the interpretation of *Od.* 9.5-11 is sufficient proof about Epicurus' beliefs on its own, without supporting evidence from inside or outside the *Odyssey*. Instead, they present *Od.* 9.5-11 in ways that favor their interpretation, and often hide information modern readers would find vital for its successful interpretation.

When Eratosthenes (preserved in *Deipnosophistae* 1.16e) quotes *Od.* 9.5-11, he does so without mentioning that Odysseus, not the Homeric narrator, spoke them. Leaving this context out makes the *Odyssey*'s support of Epicurean beliefs seem stronger than it is. Anti-Epicureans

go like Heraclitus (*Allegoriae* 73) go even farther, leaving out *Od.* 9.11 entirely, and with it the praise of poetry that could undermine the effort to cast Epicureans as poetry-haters. Both of these manipulations of the text would be easy to catch through even a cursory reading of the *Odyssey*, suggesting that the people who utilized expected their readers to be either so credulous that they do not check their arguments, or already so in line with the opinions expressed in the treatises that they have nothing to gain by doing so.

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