

Playing the *Pharmakos*: Persona and Parody in Hipponax

The fragments of Hipponax are full of threats of violence, strange sexual encounters, bodily functions, poverty, injury, and perhaps even suicide— all topics marking the speaker as religiously or physically unclean. Though degradation of his verses is used against his enemies, it is often also turned against himself. Hipponax is cold, hungry, and ailing. The culmination of this impulse is his self-characterization as a *pharmakos*, a scapegoat who was expelled from their community during a time of hardship, such as famine or plague. Due to a lack of facts about Hipponax, it has been assumed by many commentators, both ancient and modern, that he was an actual victim of a *pharmakos* ritual.

This presentation questions the plausibility of such a position through a consideration of our historical understanding of the ritual, as well the implications of such a *pharmakos*-persona in context of Hipponax' work. Though earlier scholars have speculated that Hipponax' *pharmakos* might be a mere persona, there has been little explanation as to how it might have functioned poetically. I argue that the *pharmakos* holds symbolic importance in Hipponax' body of work, specifically in his epic parody (Fr. 128W), as the *pharmakos* takes on a role that is simultaneously despicable and heroic. His expulsion saves a city from destruction, though he is the lowliest of its inhabitants. In order to undermine the epic tradition, and its relationship to his own iambic tradition, Hipponax imagines himself in the farthest imaginable (yet surprisingly adjacent) position from the subjects of epic. He utilizes the *pharmakos* as an abject figure that sheds light on what is normative and structural to the order of his day. Through the *pharmakos*, Hipponax brings attention to the fact the community relies on having someone expendable as much as it relies on having a heroic figure.