

Sex, Poetry, and Philodemus in Horace, *Satires* 1.2

The speaker in Horace's *Satires* 1.2, in clinching his case for preferring safe, easily accessible sex to the more expensive and dangerous kinds, cites the Epicurean Philodemus and paraphrases (120-22) lines from one of his epigrams to endorse his own position that a *parabilem...venerem facilemque* (119) is the best option. It often has been noted how appropriate an Epicurean view of sex is to the characterization of the Horatian satirist. Freudenburg extends the significance of the Philodemus reference to include poetics and suggests that 1.2, together with 1.1, is important in understanding Horace's poetic program in the *Sermones* I. The playful humor in the Philodemus reference, however, has not been noted. This paper explores the relevance of Epicurean poetics to *Satires* 1.2 and provides supporting evidence for the characterization of the Horatian satirist in *Satires* 1 as a *doctus ineptus* (Zetzel, Freudenburg, Turpin, et al.).

Two features of Philodemus' views on poetry are especially pertinent to 1.2, one of the so-called "diatribe" or moralizing satires. In *On Poems* 5, Philodemus maintains that poetry qua poetry does not benefit its audience; poetry is not a suitable mode for teaching or advising purposes (Asmis and Sider). Next, in terms of the relationship of form and content, Philodemus claims that metathesis is impossible in poetry. The artful arrangement of words is essential to creating poetry; to change the word order in a particular poem is to unmake what makes that text the poem it is. Most importantly, any change in the syntax changes the thought/content expressed in the poem (Armstrong).

The satirist's use of Philodemus' epigram demonstrates a misreading of Philodemus' poetry on a par with Cicero's quite deliberate misreading of Philodemus' verse when he uses the epigrams as evidence against Piso and claims that the poems reflect Piso's life, including all his

adulteries, as in a mirror (*In Pisonem* 71). The satirist's sole concern with appropriating the literal and what he represents as the beneficial message of Philodemus' epigram at 1.2.120-22 to support his pronouncements about sex is comically inept given Philodemus' convictions about the function and nature of poetry, not to mention generic conventions and expectations of Greek erotic epigrams. No less a travesty of Philodemus is the gross example of metathesis at lines 120-22. The poetic integrity of the original Greek epigram is entirely lost in the Latin hexameters; the lines and, by Philodemus' criteria, the thought are no longer Philodemus' – a point ironically underscored by the satirist's naming of his source. As every reader of erotic epigrams in the first century recognized, Philodemus was not in the business of giving life lessons in his poems; he was writing witty light verse to entertain himself and his friends. Horace's deployment of the Epicurean writer in 1.2 is a good literary joke meant to amuse himself and his readers.

Bibliography

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