

Poem - Abonoteichus

Post by "Joshua" of July 26, 2019 at 8:14 PM

This poem is written in the form of a sestina, with repeating end-words. The first stanza sets the pattern; each subsequent stanza recycles the words according to the one before, in this formula: 5, 2, 4, 3, 6, 1. Because the second-line word goes second in the next stanza as well, its position never changes. That word is "garden"--stable, reliable, unaltered.

The scene of the poem is the city written about by Lucian.

Abonoteichus - a dialogue

Scholarch:

By winds and waves that storm our coast for ages!

By sighing Aphrodite in her garden,

Where hast thou been my son, for there is fire

Deep in thine eyes, and strife upon thy temple?

What trial shakes thy soul with trembling atoms,

Sieging thy mind like a beleaguered city?

Ephebos:

I strain my limbs for use of all their atoms

And refuge take in this the soothing garden,

For multitudes are gathered at the temple

Where piled scrolls are ravaged in the fire!

A sickness lies upon this seething city,

And men disgrace the memory of ages!

Scholarch:

Ah--is that all? Have ye not seen this city

Charméd by snakes, defiling grove and garden,

With grim religion spreading fast as fire?
Have ye not seen them lurking by that temple--
and of all sexes, qualities, and ages--
Who rain on Epicurus scorn like atoms?

Ephebos:

But can it have been so in all past ages?
Can truth have grown free only in a garden
Which ought by rights have garlanded a temple?
Will all mankind forsake that sacred fire,
Spurning pleasure--denying void and atoms?
Naught but Euxine waters would cleanse this city!

Scholarch:

Peace son! Their worth is measured not in atoms.
Some yet will seek true health, and this our garden
Will beckon them--a solitary fire
Against the darkness; a bright green-grass temple
Unroofed to starlight, shining like a city,
And crowned with all the wisdom of the ages!

Ephebos:

Wilt thou then that we leave for that city?

Scholarch:

And bear the fruit of peace from out this garden.

Ephebos:

Even into the shadow of that temple?

Scholarch:

For Epicurus, even unto fire.

Ephesos:

And make his wisdom echo through the ages--

Scholarch:

And calm that rage, that rends his scrolls to atoms.

-josh

Post by "Joshua" of July 26, 2019 at 8:36 PM

I have Giordano Bruno in mind in the third line from the end, although I'm not sure that kind of sacrifice is really sound doctrine. And I'm also aware that "Scholarch" may not be the right word here, in a school so far from Athens.

Post by "Cassius" of July 26, 2019 at 8:52 PM

Wow you do excellent work Joshua!

Which city written about by Lucian? In what dialog?

Post by "Joshua" of July 26, 2019 at 9:00 PM

Thanks Cassius! The backdrop of this dialogue is Abonoteichus on the Black Sea, during the 'reign' of Alexander-the-Oracle-Monger, prophet of the snake-god Glycon. Lucian mentions that Alexander once made himself "supremely ridiculous" by burning a copy of Epicurus' *Principle Doctrines* and throwing the ashes into the sea. I wanted to explore the reaction of the Epicurean community to such aggressions.

Post by “Cassius” of July 26, 2019 at 9:27 PM

Excellent! Thank you!

Post by “Godfrey” of July 27, 2019 at 1:06 AM

Bravo, Josh! You've delineated a bridge of sanity from Lucian's time to the present day.

Post by “Hiram” of July 29, 2019 at 10:18 AM

I don't know if you've seen this before, [Joshua](#) but I have a full series of essays on Horace (on whose shoulders you stand as an Epicurean poet)

<http://societyofepicurus.com/in-memory-of-horace-carpe-diem/>

His [Epistle to the Pisos](#) (the same family who hired Philodemus to teach them philosophy in Herculaneum) is also called "Art of Poetry" and contains Horace's advise to poets and writers.