

Episode Sixty-Two - The Perils of Romantic Love (Part 2)

Post by “Don” of March 23, 2021 at 10:01 PM

I finally had the chance to listen to the entire episode. I agree this is an important practical topic. Lucretius's focus on a men's perspective primarily is simply because it was a very patriarchal society. His deciding to talk about women enjoying sex at all is a revolutionary idea for his time.

I also generally agree with Elayne's brief comment near the end on women's status in ancient Roman society. In fact, women were always going to be under the control of a male guardian. Male slaves could at least have the possibility of buying or winning their freedom. The pater familias, the oldest male in the household, literally had life and death control over all the members of the household. The women of ancient Greece had their lives even more circumscribed.

Ancient Greek and Roman women could only exercise any influence solely through the men in their lives. If they could get men to listen to them only by feigning to enjoy sex with them, more power to them. They had to be resourceful.

The hetairai of ancient Greece had it both better and worse than most women. From what I remember reading, they had no recourse if a roaming band of drunken men tried to break into their house to demand sex. There are stories of men trying to burn doors down because they felt entitled even after being turned away for being rude, drunk, and disorderly. I've read the hetairai were often more free and cultured than married women, but at the cost of their security. They were expected to entertain men, engage them in high-level conversation at symposia, and also be available for sex. Some hetairai were long-term companions of particular men (e.g., Pericles and Aspasia)

On a slight tangent: To get a woman's perspective on Ancient Greece in an entertaining and poignant fashion, I highly recommend Natalie Haynes recent novel A Thousand Ships. This is a retelling of the Trojan War from the perspective of all the women and goddesses mentioned in Homer and other sources. Haynes does an amazing job narrating the audiobook, too! It was an eye-opening experience listening to it.