

The Wreathed Figure In Blue - Epicurus? Democritus? Someone Else?

Post by "Eikadistes" of May 23, 2021 at 10:26 PM

Laurel wreathes tend to identify poets, so this symbolic allusion would not have been an effective way to express Epicurus: If this Renaissance artist's intention were to depict Epicurus, a symbol of poetry may not have been the first object an artist would have employed to identify an anti-superstitious proto-physicist.

For example: **Danté Alighieri** is almost **exclusively** depicted with a laurel wreath on his head. If the context weren't *Athens*, I'd say that "Danté" would be a pretty safe guess to identify the figure, especially with the cherub; however, Raphael would have been very familiar with Danté's slender portrait with sharp cheekbones and a pointed chin.



It could be **Lucretius**: *De Rerum Natura* was spreading amongst educated circles; Lucretius would have been correctly identified as a "poet", and, symbolically, Raphael would have identified Lucretius as a Roman male, who, by default, are painted without beards when contrasted with Greeks (unless a bust is known like Marcus Aurelius).

It would seem that Lucretius' portrait was, perhaps, **more** unknown than Epicurus', so Lucretius should be a more likely candidate for the identity of the the "chubby, non-Greek-looking guy" than Epicurus, especially considering that we have a tall, bearded, Greek man with something similar to a bowl cut, painted with a strong brow in the background, who is a much better candidate in all regards for Epicurus.

Though, I'm not sure that the cherub, helping the figure hold up the book is consistent. The cherub, working with a poet to hold an epic would indicate that the poem were divinely inspired. I'm not sure that would have been the right message for a book that opens with a hymn to Venus. Then again, that's the bottom-line of the entire painting: *that Greco-Roman*

pagans were on the right track to truth, but the wrong train.

The identity of this figure will have to cohere with the following imagery: (1) a uniquely chubby character who, (2) is not bearded, (3) is wearing a poet's laurel, (4) their work is being supported by a cherub, and (5) their shoulders are being physically massaged by dark-haired, downward-looking person behind him. The figure is well-fed and tranquil, smiling as a companion massages their shoulders, the very stereotype of a hedonist.

Given **my** assumption that Raphael didn't know what Lucretius looked like, I think this character, *symbolically*, in terms of *imagery that Renaissance artists were regularly employing to convey meaning*, better fits **LUCRETIUS** than Epicurus.

Even if he had seen the cartoon of Lucretius' profile, it would still have been appropriate to make the choice to remove his beard and add weight to his cheeks, arms, and neck to emphasize the archetype of a Roman Hedonist.