

Introduction---Joshua's Notes on "The Good Poem According to Philodemus", by Michael McOsker

Post by "Pacatus" of November 1, 2022 at 5:16 PM

[Joshua](#)

The cost of the book is too rich for my wallet at this time; my public membership at the local university library expired during our rigorous social distancing during the covid surge - maybe time to resurrect it.

The blurb on Amazon says, in part:

"His [Philodemus'] main critical principle is that **form and content are inseparable and mutually-reinforcing: a change in one means a change in the other. The poet uses this marriage of form and content to create the psychological effect of the poem in the audience.** This effect is hard to pin down exactly. **Poems produce "additional thoughts" in the audience, and these entertain them. It seems clear that Philodemus expected good poets to arrange form and content suggestively,** so that the poems could exert a lasting pull on the minds of the audience."

It seems to be akin to a couple of my own poetic principles, such as a notion I borrowed from the Rastafarians: that of "word-sound-power" - along with imagery, metaphor and rhythm. And this:

"The purpose of art is washing the dust of daily life off our souls." - Pablo Picasso

I have just recently been dipping into Philodemus' epigrammatic poems, which are richly erotic. (And I have thus far made one attempt at rendering one of his into a more modern lyric form - with my own poetic proclivities.) As I read the free sample of McOsker on Amazon, I note that Philodemus rejected didactic poetry on Epicurean grounds, and thought that poetry need not be useful (at least philosophically) to be good. Philodemus advocated prolepsis as a criterion for determining the worth of a poem, though McOsker says he did not rely on that alone. He did insist that a good poem has "meaning" - which I would associate with its intended effect on the reader/listener. (But I do think that the "meaning" of a poem can be - even, most often, is - multiplex, and the reader is a collaborator of sorts on that.

Philodemus' criterion for a good poem is pleasure. I tend mostly to agree (though I sometimes write darker, Poe-esque verse).

Any thoughts, friend poet? ☐☐