

Philodemus' Poetry

Post by “Pacatus” of October 26, 2022 at 6:45 PM

I found this site with Philodemus' epigrammatic poetry in translation:
<http://www.attalus.org/poetry/philodemus.html>

“Philodemus was an Epicurean philosopher as well as a poet, but his poems seem to have had a greater reputation than his philosophical works in ancient times.”

I was surprised at the tone of erotic gaiety in many of them – they reminded me of, say, Sir John Suckling or Robert Herrick (both 17th century) in English poetry; or of the more modern e.e. cummings.

Apparently the original Greek was in stanza form of no more than eight lines, and I attempt to re-render them that way (albeit my lines may not match up with the Greek – which you can read by clicking the “G” that accompanies the epigram). The following, for example, reminds of Herrick's “To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time” (here: <https://poets.org/poem/virgins-make-much-time>) –

Your summer's flower hath not yet burst from the bud,
the grape that puts forth its first virgin charm is yet green,
but already the young Loves sharpen their swift arrows,
Lysidicē, and a hidden fire is smouldering. Let us fly,
we unlucky lovers, before the arrow is on the string:
I foretell right soon a vast conflagration.

(Maybe [Don](#) can provide a better line-by-line translation from the Greek.)

Post by “Cassius” of October 26, 2022 at 7:48 PM

Thank you! And yes that Attalus site is excellent!

Post by “Pacatus” of October 28, 2022 at 3:57 PM

I'm trying to render this poem into a modern English version (with my own interpretive edits, additions and wordplay). I'm working with the translation in Attalus since Greek is "Greek" to me. But here is the result from the Google translator:

even for those who live naked in the summer, it does not darken

botrys the virgin of firstborn grace:

but already those young bows are becoming Loves,

Lysidiki, and fire is buried in burial.

we flee, unloved ones, until an arrow is on the nerve:

I am a diviner of great fire.

This seems a bit less lusty than the translation on Attalus. But I'm still searching.

Here is another translation from DeepL:

As the naked summer covers thee, no bruising of the virgin's maidenly firstfruits: but already there are new bows and arrows, Lysidice, and fire is being kindled. Let us flee, unhappy, until the arrow is not on the nerves: I am a seer of a great ear of fire.

Post by “Pacatus” of October 29, 2022 at 5:44 PM

This is a loose rendering in my attempt to draft from a couple translations (and my raw grappling with the Greek) a more modern poetic form – with my own interpretive edits, additions and wordplay. Thus, it's a free rendering, not a translation.

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Lysidikē

– *A free rendering from a Greek poem by Philodemus*

Your summer's bloom not yet burst
from naked buds, nor yet dark
the tender virginal grapes
soon to ripen full-fruit charms -

but already in their vigor
plucky impassioned archer-lads
swift-flighting flame-arrows hone
from embers smoldering within.

Let us then fly, dear Lysidikē,
we unlucky lovers, before
the nock is notched on their bowstring:
I fear a lusty wildfire looms.

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Lysidikē ([Λυσιδίκη](#)) is the name of several women in Greek myth, one of whom “lay” with Heracles and bore him a son, Teles.

“nock”: the notch on the shaft of an arrow to fit it to the bowstring; also the act of fitting.

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Here is the Greek:

οὔπω σοι καλύκων γυμνὸν θέρος οὐδὲ μελαίνει
βότρυς ὁ παρθενίους πρωτοβολῶν χάριτας,
ἀλλ’ ἤδη θοὰ τόξα νέοι θήγουσιν Ἴρωτες,
Λυσιδίκη, καὶ πῦρ τύφεται ἐγκρύφιον.
φεύγωμεν, δυσέρωτες, ἕως βέλος οὐκ ἐπὶ νευρῆ·
μάντις ἐγὼ μεγάλης αὐτίκα πυρκαϊῆς.

Post by “Don” of October 29, 2022 at 6:54 PM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

my raw grappling with the Greek

👍 👍 I applaud your grappling with the Greek!!

I'm not sure of your process, but my go-to first stop is often Wiktionary:

ex., <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/%CE%B1%E1...%AF%CE%BA%CE%B1>

Which then gives you direct access to LSJ (not in the case of this word, but)..

[μάντις - Wiktionary](#)

and

[Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, μάντις](#)

Post by “Pacatus” of October 29, 2022 at 7:29 PM

[Don](#)

Thanks! Yeah, I go to Wiktionary first (mostly I work with the Latin), and sometimes just start Googling. I forgot about LSJ -- thanks for that!

Post by “Don” of October 30, 2022 at 5:47 AM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

[Don](#)

Thanks! Yeah, I go to Wiktionary first (mostly I work with the Latin), and sometimes just start Googling. I forgot about LSJ -- thanks for that!

Sounds good! And Wiktionary gives direct access to Lewis and Short for the Latin entries: ex.,

[Charlton T. Lewis, Charles Short, A Latin Dictionary, semper](#)

All the Wikimedia Projects are great examples of the work that can be done by committed volunteers. We don't always agree with some WP articles (looking at you, Epicureanism article)

but the non-profit, volunteer editors provide great benefits for us all. And editing can be fun and rewarding! 😊

Post by “Pacatus” of November 14, 2022 at 12:14 PM

The Silent Lamp

- A free rendering from a Greek poem by Philodemus

The loyal nightstand lamp keeps silent:
confidante of intimate affairs
we dare not speak of, even in the dark.

But intoxicate her wick with perfumed oil,
Philaenis, inflame the room with light -
and leave us alone behind locked door.

For Eros desires no living witness
other than herself, Xantho - as in our bed
we explore Aphrodite’s ecstatic lore.

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From Epigram 5.4 of The Greek Anthology cited above. In addition to that translation, I also consulted Nisbet’s translation from “Epigrams from the Greek Anthology: a new translation by Gideon Nesbit” (Oxford World Classics, 2020); here is his translation:

The silent lamp, complicit partner in

The things we mustn’t speak of carelessly:

Philaenis, make it drunk with drops of oil.

Then take your leave: for Love alone desires

No living witness; close the jointed door.

And you, dear Xantho—but the lover’s bed

Well knows what Aphrodite has in store.

Post by “Pacatus” of January 16, 2024 at 6:35 PM

I’ve been laboring for some weeks on a poem called “An Ode on Philodemus and His Loves.” The poem has references to at least most (if not all) of the women Philodemus wrote about as lovers, and allusions to how he wrote about them. A translation of those poems is available here: <https://www.attalus.org/poetry/philodemus.html>. (Also in Nate’s *Hedonicon*.)

I tried my hand at a couple of free renderings into modern verse (with poetic/metaphorical license) of a couple of Philodemus’ erotic poems here (above) in this thread. My “Ode” is no more erotically explicit than Philodemus (but likely not less so either). My plan (when I have “finished” it) is to publish it either here or in the “Poetry in Honor of Epicureanism” thread. But if it is likely to cause offense (and the guide may be my renderings above), then I just will not.

Guidance sought ...

Post by “Joshua” of January 16, 2024 at 6:46 PM

Quote

When we get to this kind of language, it should be put down, not by some philosopher, but by the censor, for its fault is not a matter of language only but of morality as well.

-Marcus Tullius Cicero

This censor approves! *I, the pencil, was silver when I came from the fire, but in your hands I have become golden likewise.*

Post by “Joshua” of January 16, 2024 at 6:54 PM

Episode [61](#) of the Lucretius Today podcast (well before my time) gives another view onto this aspect of the philosophy.

Post by “Cassius” of January 16, 2024 at 7:07 PM

[Pacatus](#) I strongly suspect anything you write would be ok, but maybe you could send a sample to Joshua and he could share with the other moderators.

I am trying to think ahead to what implications might arise. One distant glimmer of a concern I have is just for the size of the forum data. Surely poetry would be largely text, but in the distant future I can see people wanting to share other types of art that are more space intensive (music, artwork) and for that I would encourage placing the material somewhere else and just posting links here. There are reliable websites where things can be stored (like Archive.org) and then links posted here.

In general I think we want to help "our people" share their work in whatever their interest is, and for that we can collaborate on suggestions as to how to do that.

But my first thought is as above - send the proposed material to Joshua (he is the poetry expert among our moderators), and he can share with the others.

Post by “Pacatus” of January 16, 2024 at 7:17 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

but maybe you could send a sample to Joshua and he could share with the other moderators.

Will do, as soon as I get a bit closer to completion. Thank you.

Post by “Pacatus” of January 27, 2024 at 1:40 PM

While working on my Philodemus poem, I just stumbled on the book *The Epigrams of Philodemos: Introduction, Text, and Commentary* by David Sider. Now I feel the need to read it before continuing. But, in the early pages, he broaches a very interesting topic: that the relationship between various sub-schools of Epicureanism was not all peace and light. Philodemus was loyal to his teacher Zeno of Sidon, and engaged in “much internecine polemic” with the Epicureans of Rhodes (where Philodemus may have also studied for awhile).

Post by “Cassius” of January 27, 2024 at 1:45 PM

Anything significant you think worth discussion about that, please post a new thread - perhaps in the subforum on Philodemus

[Philodemus of Gadara](#)

Post by “DavidN” of January 27, 2024 at 2:37 PM

[Quote from Pacatus](#)

While working on my Philodemus poem, I just stumbled on the book *The Epigrams of Philodemos: Introduction, Text, and Commentary* by David Sider. Now I feel the need to read it before continuing. But, in the early pages, he broaches a very interesting topic: that the relationship between various sub-schools of Epicureanism was not all peace and light. Philodemus was loyal to his teacher Zeno of Sidon, and engaged in “much internecine polemic” with the Epicureans of Rhodes (where Philodemus may have also studied for awhile).

I think I've seen this before, I think while I was studying Virgil. I don't remember where it was I saw it but I think Zeno was credited with maintaining proper adherence to "orthodox" epicurean practices and teachings. Something like that I was just skimming it. Let us know what you find.

Post by “Pacatus” of January 27, 2024 at 3:06 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Anything significant you think worth discussion about that, please post a new thread - perhaps in the subforum on Philodemus

Will do. 😊 I'll keep this thread on topic to Philodemus' poetry.

Post by “Pacatus” of January 27, 2024 at 3:32 PM

A quote from Sider’s book:

“In addition to the above considerations in the proper assessment of poetry, another important criterion requires that hearing or reading the poem in question provide its audience with pleasure of a correct Epicurean sort. In brief, as Asmis ably demonstrates, ***Epicurus, despite what later detractors said of him, was willing to accept poetry, although with reservations.*** In particular, the wise man could be trusted to have the proper attitude, able to listen to the recitation of poetry without succumbing to its Sirenic charms or accepting its claims to do anything more than provide harmless pleasure. **Poetry, that is, can be classified in Epicurean terms as a natural but unnecessary pleasure.** As such it was allowed a place at the banquets attended by Epicureans, where, at least originally, it was listened to but not subjected to immediate literary criticism, which would detract from the pleasure. ... It is thus possible to apply Philodemus' general view of poetry to the epigram in particular, as the performance of epigrams at dinner parties (see above) fits perfectly into our picture of the symposia held in the Epicurean Gardens of Naples and surroundings.”

Joshua and I discussed some of this briefly before at [RE: Introduction---Joshua's Notes on "The Good Poem According to Philodemus", by Michael McOsker](#)

Another interesting comment by Sider in a footnote: “Like Aristotle, Philodemus demands ordinary human values. Differently from Aristotle, however, Philodemus clearly distinguishes the ‘thought’ of the poem as a whole, as presented by the poet, from the thought of the characters.”