

AN OBSCENE EPIGRAM BY LEONIDAS OF TARENTUM

Heather White

Las dificultades que los editores (Gow-Page) ven en un epigrama de Leónidas (A. P. 9.316) desaparecen en cuanto se comprende que contiene unas muy precisas metáforas eróticas.

The difficulties which editors (Gow-Page) read into an epigram by Leonidas (A. P. 9.316) disappear as soon as one realizes that the poem contains precise erotic metaphors.

A. P. 9.316:

ᾠ τάνδε στείχοντες ἀταρπιτὸν, αἴτε ποτ' ἀγρούς
δαμόθεν αἴτ' ἀπ' ἀγρῶν νεῖσθε ποτ' ἀκρόπολιν.
ἄμμες ὄρων φύλακες δισσοὶ θεοὶ ὧν ὁ μὲν Ἑρμᾶς
οἶον ὄρησ' μ', οὗτος δ' ἄτερος Ἡρακλῆς,
5 ἄμφω μὲν θνατοῖς εὐάκοι ἀλλὰ ποθ' αὐτοῦς

* * * * *

αἰ τῷ μαι παραθῆς ἀχράδας ἐγκέκαφεν·
ναὶ μὰν ὡσαύτως τοὺς βότρυας, αἴτε πέλονται
ῶριμοὶ αἴτε χύδαν ὄμφακες, εὐτρέπικεν.

μισέω τὰν μετοχὰν οὐδ' ἤδομαι· ἀλλ' ὁ φέρων τι
 10 ἀμφίς, μὴ κοινᾷ τοῖς δυοῖ παρτιθέτω
 καὶ λεγέτω, 'τὶν τοῦθ' 'Ἡράκλεες', ἄλλοτε 'τοῦτο
 'Ερμᾶ', καὶ λῦοι τὰν ἕριν ἀμφοτέρων.

Translation by W. R. Paton (*The Greek Anthology*, London, Loeb, 1968): «O ye who pass along this road, whether ye are going from town to the fields or returning to the city from the country, we two gods here are the guardians of the boundary. I, as you see me, am Hermes, and this other fellow is Heracles. We both are gracious to mortals, but to each other...If anyone offers a dish of wild pears to both of us, *he* bolts them. Yes, and indeed, likewise grapes; whether they are ripe ones or any quantity of sour ones, he stows them away. I detest this method of going shares, and get no pleasure from it. Let whoever brings us anything serve it separately to each of us and not to both, saying, 'This is for thee, Heracles', and again, 'This is for Hermes'. So he might make up our quarrel».

In this epigram Hermes complains that Heracles consumes all the offerings which are made to them. We are supposed to imagine that the poet is describing a boundary-mark in the form of a double Herm with heads of the two gods back to back. Gow-Page¹ commented as follows on the verb εὐτρέπικεν in line 8: «The meaning seems to be *appropriates*, but it is far from known uses of the verb, which is not rare and means *prepare, get ready* ». I would like to point out that εὐτρέπικεν contains an obscene joke. Heracles is imagined to be ithyphallic, like Hermes, and thus to be «ready», «prepared»² for sexual intercourse. For the ithyphallic nature of Hermes cf. Callimachus, fr. 199 Pf:

'Ερμᾶ, τί τοι τὸ νεῦρον, ὦ Γενειόλα,
 ποττὰν ὑπήναν κού ποτ' ἴχνιον;

Translation by C. A. Trypanis³: «Long-bearded Hermes, why is your penis (pointing?) to your beard and not to your feet...?».

In other words, the verb εὐτρέπικεν means «he has prepared (it)»⁴, i. e. he has prepared his «membrum virile» for intercourse. There is, of course, a double meaning contained in the words ἀχράδας ἐγκέκαφεν in line 6⁵. For the connection between eating and sex cf. Henderson, *op. cit.*, 47 and 174. For the connec-

¹ A. S. F. Gow-D. L. Page, *The Greek Anthology. Hellenistic Epigrams* (Cambridge 1965) II, 337.

² Cf. Ov. *Fast.* 1.437, where Priapus is described as «deus obscena nimium quoque parte paratus». Cf. also A. P. 5.306, where Gow-Page have failed to understand that the girl complains that her lover is not ready (σὺ μένεις) for intercourse.

³ Callimachus, *Aetia, Iambi, Hecale* (London, Loeb, 1968, repr.) 139.

⁴ For the ellipse of a coarse word cf. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse* (London 1975) 117, quoting e. g. Theocr. 1.104. Cf. also A. P. 16.232.1.

⁵ For other double meanings in Hellenistic epigrams cf. A. Harvey, «Two Ambiguous Epigrams in the Anthology», *MPL* 7 (1986) 91 ff.

tion between the noun ἀχράς («prickly pear») and anal intercourse cf. Henderson 189, and for threats of anal intercourse cf. *A. P.* 16.240 and 241. Hermes complains that Heracles does not mind whether what he enjoys is ripe (ῥιμοί) or unripe (ῥμφακες). For the metaphor of unripe grapes cf. *A. P.* 12.205:

Παῖς τις ὄλωσ ἀπαλὸς τοῦ γείτονος οὐκ ὀλίγως με
κνίζει· πρὸς τὸ θέλειν δ' οὐκ ἀμύητα γελᾷ·
οὐ πλεῦν δ' ἔστιν ἐτῶν δύο καὶ δέκα. νῦν ἀφύλακτοι
ῥμφακες· ἦν δ' ἀκμάση, φρούρια καὶ σκόλοντες.

Translation by Paton: «My neighbour's tender young boy provokes me not a little, and laughs in no novice manner to show me that he is willing. But he is not more than twelve years old. Now the unripe grapes are unguarded; when he ripens there will be watchmen and stakes».

I therefore propose the following translation for lines 6 ff.: «If anyone offers wild pears to both of us, he bolts them. And likewise (if anyone offers)⁶ grapes, whether they are ripe or unripe, he is ready (for intercourse)».

It is worth noting that the following epigram (i. e. *A. P.* 9.317) is also obscene:

- α. Χαίρω τὸν λακόρυζον ὄρων θεὸν εἰς τὸ φάλανθον
βρέγμ' ὑπὸ τᾶν ὄχνῶν, αἰπόλε, τυπτόμενον.
β. Αἰπόλε, τοῦτον ἐγὼ τρὶς ἐπύγισα· τοὶ δὲ τραγίσκοι
εἰς ἐμέ δερκόμενοι τὰς χιμάρας ἐβάτευν.
γ. Ὀντως σ', Ἑρμαφροδίτε, πεπύγικεν; α. Οὐ μὰ
τὸν Ἑρμᾶν,
αἰπόλε. β. Ναὶ τὸν Πᾶν', αἰπόλε, κάπιγελῶν.

Translation by Paton: Hermaphroditus. «Goatherd, I love seeing this foul-mouthed god struck on his bald pate by the pears». Silenus. «Goatherd, hunc ter inivi, and the young billy-goats were looking at me and tugging the young nanny-goats». Goatherd. «It is true, Hermaphroditus, that he did so?». Hermaphroditus. «No, goatherd, I wear by Hermes». Silenus. «I sear by Pan I did, and I was laughing all the time».

For another obscene epigram by Leonidas cf. my *Studies in Theocritus and Other Hellenistic Poets* (Amsterdam 1979, 51 ff.). Cf. moreover G. Giangrande, *Scripta Minora Alexandrina* (III, Amsterdam 1984, 172), where it is noted that at *A. P.* 7.657.2 the participle ἐμβατεύοντες can «be taken *sensu obsceno*, indicating that the shepherds, because οἰοπολέοντες, are given to μηλοβατεῖν».

For the convenience of the reader, I might as well sum up. It is well known that epigrammatists, when composing salacious poems, often obtain their intended effect by means of «mots à double entente»: cf. for instance Harvey, *MPL* 7, 91 ff.

⁶ For the syllepsis cf. G. Giangrande, *Scripta Minora Alexandrina* III (Amsterdam 1984) 142.

A large number of such «mots à double entente» consist in terms pertaining to the vegetable world. Leonidas has used the technique in question at *A. P.* 9.320 and 7.657. For the double meaning of certain vegetable terms cf. Giangrande, *op. cit.* I, 258. The epigram which I have explained here belongs to the type under discussion. It contains a list of vegetable terms, after which list the «pointe» is achieved by the use of an apparently incongruous verb, i. e. εὐτρέπικεν. What can εὐτρέπικεν mean? The terms employed by Leonidas (grapes, etc.) are capable of denoting not only real fruits, but also males who can be possessed erotically. Any ithyphallic god is always ready for sexual penetration. The notion of «being ready» aptly describes those who are willing to perform the sexual act: Cf. *A. P.* 12.184.4 and Timocl. 22.4. Here, εὐτρέπικεν can be understood either as an active form having a medio-passive meaning, i. e. meaning «he is ready» (cf. Blass-Debr.-Rehkopf § 309, 2), or can be taken to be transitive («he has made ready» -active instead of middle, as is common in Hellenistic poetry): there is, in this case, an ellipse of the word ὄπλον, *mentula*. Be that as it may, once we understand that the vegetable terms can denote, metaphorically, persons who can be possessed erotically, the meaning of εὐτρέπικεν becomes obvious: Heracles is ready to possess them. For the notorious amatory prowess of Heracles cf. *A. P.* 16.92.14.