Miscellanea

Antiphilus’ Erotic Epigrams: Two Notes

I

Of the fifty or so poems ascribed to Antiphilus in the Greek Anthology, two (or possibly three: see below) deal with an erotic subject. AP 5.111 = Antiphilus 12

Gow-Page runs:

Εἶπον ἐγὼ καὶ πρόσθεν, ὅτ᾽ ἦν ἔτι φίλτρα Τερείνης νήπια· "Συμφλέξει πάντας ἀεξομένην."
oi δ᾽ ἐγέλων τὸν μάντιν. ἰδ᾽, ὁ χρόνος, ὅν ποτ᾽ ἐφώνουν,
οὗτος· ἐγὼ δὲ πάλαι τραύματος ἠσθανύμην.
καὶ τί πάθω; λεύσσειν μὲν, ὃλαι φλόγες· ἢν δ᾽ ἀπονεύσω,
φροντίδες· ἢν δ᾽ αἰτῶ, παρθένος. οἰχόμεθα.

Gow and Page translate:

I said it in early days too, when Tereina’s charms were still in childhood, “When she grows up she will burn every man to cinders.” And they laughed at me, the great prophet. Now look, the time I spoke of is here, and I have long felt the wound. What is to become of me? To look at her is to be in flames, nothing else; if I turn towards her, it’s a heartache; if I ask the favour—she’s a virgin. There is no hope for me.

In their commentary (p. 124), Gow and Page describe this poem as a “lively and neatly phrased variation on the theme of unrequited passion for a beautiful and virtuous girl”. But this girl is no chaste maiden: she is the kind who sets men on fire—all men, as the poet predicted: the poet himself is simply one among the

1) This paper is a much abbreviated version of a talk given at the colloquium “Das antike Epigramm”, held at the University of Munich on 15 July 2006. I would like to thank participants in the colloquium for their comments, and especially Regina Höschele, the organizer, for her encouragement and critical acumen. I dedicate this little article to her. I am grateful also for the acute and immensely helpful comments of the anonymous referee for this journal.
multitude. What is more, she is a tease: ask for her favors, and she replies: “I’m a virgin!” Surely her claim is not to be taken at face value. This is not the kind of conversation that obtains between a suitor and a modest young woman from a respectable family. Virgin she may be, though one may doubt it; a “virtuous girl” she is not. As in the epigrams of Marcus Argentarius and others of this period, one expects a joke or twist in the final verse, and the excuse that she is a virgin is it.2)

The social context for such exchanges between forward men and coy women is the world of _hetaerae_ and their suitors, as in the following playful conversation ascribed to Antiphilus (14 Gow-Page = _AP_ 5.308):

`᾿Η κομψή, μεῖνόν με. τί σοι καλὸν οὖνομα; ποῦ σε ἔστιν ἰδεῖν; ὃ θέλεις, δώσομεν. οὗδε λαλεῖς; ποῦ γίνῃ; πέμψω μετὰ σ’ οὗ τίνα. μή τις ἔχει σε; ὃ σοφαρή, ἧγιαῖν’. οὗδ’ “Ὑγίαινε” λέγεις; καὶ πάλι καὶ πάλι σοι προσελεύσομαι· οἶδα μαλάσσειν καὶ σοῦ σκληρύνεις, νῦν δ’ ὑγίαινε, γύναι.

Again, I provide Gow and Page’s translation:

Wait for me, my charmer. What is your pretty name? Where can one see you? I will pay whatever you like. Won’t you even speak to me? Where do you live? I will send someone to fetch you later on. Have you a lover? Miss Airs and Graces, good-bye to you. Won’t you even say good-bye? I shall accost you again and yet again; I know how to soften even harder girls than you. So good-bye for now, my lady.

The girl does not allege that she is a virgin in this poem, but it is clear that she does not give her favors easily. There is, I think, a palpable resemblance to Tereina.

The preceding poem is, as all commentators note, a variation on a similar dialogue composed by Philodemus (_AP_ 5.46):

`Χαῖρε σύ.—“Καὶ σὺ γε χαῖρε.”—Τί δεῖ σε καλεῖν;—“Σὲ δὲ;”—Μὴ πω τοῦτο· φιλόσπουδος.—“Μηδὲ σὺ.”—Μὴ τιν’ ἔχεις;—“Αἰεὶ τὸν φιλέοντα.”—Θέλεις ἀμα σήμερον ἡμῖν δεικνύειν;—“Εἴ σὺ θέλεις.”—Εὖγε· πόσου παρέσῃ;—“Μηδὲν μοι προδίδου…”—Τοῦτο ξένον.—“ἄλλα ὀσον ἂν σοι κοιμηθέντι δοκῇ, τοῦτο δὸς.”—Οὐκ ἀδικεῖς.