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**"Hearing Voices: The Herculanean Papyri and Classical Scholarship"**

O ye, who patiently explore  
The wreck of Herculanean lore,  
What rapture! could ye seize  
Some Theban fragment, or unroll  
One precious, tender-hearted scroll  
Of pure Simonides.

That were, indeed, a genuine birth  
Of poesy; a bursting forth  
Of genius from the dust:  
What Horace gloried to behold,  
What Maro loved, shall we enfold?  
Can haughty Time be just!

Wordsworth, *Poems of Sentiment and Reflection*, no. 28 (1819/20)

The expectations voiced by William Wordsworth in 1819 were shared by an entire generation that had been exposed to the discovery and gradual unrolling of the papyri found at Herculaneum in 1752-54. At first tossed aside because of their sorry condition (they were carbonized and resembled lumps of black coal or burnt wood) and only then discovered to contain traces of writing, the papyri were unearthed by Bourbon excavators tunneling through the buried remains of what became known as Villa of the Papyri, and later (with less justification) was dubbed the library of Philodemus. Approximately one thousand books were discovered on the site, in different locations and in whatever spot they happened to occupy, possibly in a state of rescue, at the time when the lava of Vesuvius submerged the town in 79 CE. Obviously, the discovery of this library was and still is of extraordinary interest: it offers a rare glimpse of a perished antiquity. Even so, Wordsworth's excitement, his expectations, and his ignorance remain as valid today as they were in 1819. No Theban fragments of Pindar have been found, and no Simonides either. The connections of the Villa to Horace and Vergil remain uncertain, a mere speculation built on the most circumstantial of evidence. The status of the library collection as a whole, with its predominance of Epicurean writings (mainly by Philodemus of Gadara), but also containing a few works by the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus and a handful of Latin texts by Ennius, Caecilius Statius and possibly Lucretius, is likewise in doubt. The library may have belonged to (or been organized by) Philodemus, but possibly not: it may have belonged to his patron, L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus (consul in 58) or to some other Roman in the first century BCE, or else the collection may have existed only at a later date, say at some point after Philodemus' death in 35 and until 79. We simply do not know. Future excavations could in theory clarify these puzzles by bringing to light fresh details about the physical layout of the library and villa or by revealing further chambers containing new papyrus rolls—if these

exist to be found at all. Or we may never really discover the answers. Time is haughty indeed!

But there are other uncertainties and complexities. The library of Herculaneum presents a unique opportunity to recover voices from the past. But whose voices do we hear? Wordsworth's hopes to recover "pure" poets were thoroughly in line with classical paradigms. But Herculaneum does not appear to obey the wishes of classicism. As the papyri were gradually and painstakingly deciphered during the nineteenth century, scholars learned to make the adjustment to a postclassical if not unclassical archive. Their adjustments are an object-lesson in the ways in which classical scholarship deals with the unwieldy idea of the "classical" in its very methods. What are the aesthetic biases of classical scholarship? Can scholarship itself be *classicizing*?

One way to short-circuit the question is to consider how classical scholars deal with materials that themselves have a strongly aesthetic component. As it turns out, the writings of Philodemus, the late repository of Epicurean doctrine who flourished in the first half of the last century BCE, contain a "great trilogy" of works on aesthetic problems: *On Music*, *On Rhetoric*, and *On Poems*. Once identified, these drew intense interest. Whence the fervor of Theodor Gomperz in 1865, who felt that here one could finally point to "the until now fully unknown aesthetics of the Epicurean school"—not quite a classical prospect, to be sure, although perhaps it is, in ways that would need to be explored (does the hope express a desire to bring Epicurus back into the fold of classical culture, which he evidently repudiated on philosophical grounds?). However alluring Gomperz's hope may be, and it is shared by a majority of scholars today, Philodemus brings us no closer to an Epicurean poetics than did Epicurus himself (Epicurus was notoriously hostile to poetry and its study). Instead, the writings of Philodemus contain a wealth of information about developments in aesthetic theory outside of the Epicurean school and after Epicurus, many of which are indeed attested nowhere else. As it happens, these developments are for the most part obsessed with the question of *voice* (*phonê*)—of the sound and aesthetic surface of music, poetry, and rhetoric. And in the writings on poetics in particular, the emphasis, while apparently aimed at a theory of euphony (an analysis of how poems sound), is in fact aimed at how texts from the remote past, when read out loud, resurrect the voices of classical authors in a powerfully immediate, sensuous, and pleasurable way. What these critical writings preserved by Philodemus sketch out is a theory of reading the voice buried in the voiceless script of Greek texts from the distant past. And so although the writers in aesthetics described by Philodemus are not classical authors by any means (the earliest of these is Heraclides of Pontus, a contemporary of Plato's), they do represent a strongly classicizing tendency of postclassical antiquity. What they give us, I want to suggest, is an aesthetics of classicism in the guise of a theory of sensuous perception (of sound, hearing, euphony, etc.). But the service they ultimately perform is to justify classicism and to reinforce its structures of feeling through the advocacy of an extreme aesthetic and irrational hedonism—a fact which drew the ire of the Epicureans, and which accounts for the preservation of these theorists by Philodemus, but not for their lack of attestation elsewhere in our ancient sources.

In tell briefly the history of Herculanean philology, my paper will trace the interweaving of two general strands in classical scholarship which the Herculanean discoveries put to an extreme test: the desire of scholarship to recover voices from the

past, and the unexpected and sometimes unwanted voices that the past can at times return. One of the great ironies of the library of Herculaneum, at least where the writings on aesthetics are concerned, is that what it contains are not so much products of the classical era as perspectives as wistful as our own on that vanished past: the voices we can recover mirror our own aestheticizing and classicizing desire to recover the voices of the classical past. Perhaps the most disconcerting voice the past can ever transmit is not that of past strangers but the echo of ourselves.