

KVSA VERTAALPRYS / CASA TRANSLATION PRIZE

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SELECTIONS FROM STRATO'S *MUSA PAIDIKE* : AN AFRIKAANS TRANSLATION

Reinhard Schreiber (North-West University)

Introduction

I have selected ten epigrams attributed to Straton of Sardis and translated them into Afrikaans. The inspiration came to me as I realised that there is a need to break social barriers that have burdened the LGBTQ+ community. I often meet young men who have suppressed their feelings out of fear for their families and social expectations. In order to combat these fears, there is a plethora of published literature that deals with homosexuality, however, there is a clear lack of Afrikaans publications. In the case of these epigrams, it seems that translators tend to shy away from them as they are evidently vulgar and touches sensitive topics and thus, I decided to undertake this translation. These epigrams were admittedly written in a different time with different views on sexuality, this does not, however, deny the existence of sexual attraction and love between the same sex. The more material that is available to young people, the more homosexuality will be normalised, assisting many individuals to accept themselves.

The selected epigrams come from *The Mousa Paidike* compiled by Straton of Sardis during the reign of Hadrian in the second century CE, which forms a part of *The Greek Anthology*. The poems in *The Mousa Paidike* mostly consist of several aspects of pederastic love that varies in tone from light-heartedness to graveness.¹ Hine (2001) published an updated English translation of *The Mousa Paidike* and opted to transmit the original Greek meter into English by '[using a] blank verse, but chose to echo the sound of the Greek more directly'.² This technique allowed him to write more freely in English, he maintained a meter that is familiar to the reader but he did not do away with the original sense the authors had in mind. One problem which I have noticed with his method is that the Greek original seems to be sacrificed in order to produce a pleasing translation for an English reader. I decided to rather sacrifice the poetic meter in order to produce a translation that is as close as possible in sense to the Greek. However, in certain instances, an *ad literam* translation would make little sense and I took the liberty to

¹ Hine 2001:IX.

² Hine 2001:XVIII.

adjust my translation in order to convey my interpretation of the text. The second hurdle I faced was how to interpret certain words which have an obscure or crude meaning. A modern reader could perceive a word as crude whereas the word might have had a different meaning to the Ancient Greeks.³ Thus it is important to note that the words translated did not necessarily have the same connotation to profanity in the original as they do to us.

Greek texts⁴

12.4 ΣΤΡΑΤΩΝΟΣ

ἀκμῆ δωδεκέτους ἐπιτέρπομαι: ἔστι δὲ τούτου
 χῶ τρισκαιδεκέτης πουλὺ ποθεινότερος:
 χῶ τὰ δις ἐπτὰ νέμων, γλυκερώτερον ἄνθος Ἐρώτων
 τερπνότερος δ' ὁ τρίτης πεντάδος ἀρχόμενος:
 ἐξεπικαιδέκατον δὲ θεῶν ἔτος: ἐβδόματον δὲ 5
 καὶ δέκατον ζητεῖν οὐκ ἐμόν, ἀλλὰ Διός.
 εἰ δ' ἐπὶ πρεσβυτέρους τις ἔχει πόθον, οὐκέτι παίζει,
 ἀλλ' ἤδη ζητεῖ ' τὸν δ' ἀπαμειβόμενος.'

12.9 ΤΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΥ

ἄρτι καλός, Διόδωρε, σύ, καὶ φιλέουσι πέπειρος:
 ἀλλὰ καὶ ἦν γήμηξ, οὐκ ἀπολειψόμεθα.

12.11 ΤΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΥ

ἐχθὲς ἔχων ἀνὰ νύκτα Φιλόστρατον, οὐκ ἐδυνήθην,
 κείνου, πῶς εἶπω; πάντα παρασχομένου.
 ἀλλ' ἐμὲ μηκέτ' ἔχοιτε φίλοι φίλον, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ πύργου
 ρίψατ', ἐπεὶ λίην Ἀστυάναξ γέγονα,

³ Hine 2001: XVI.

⁴ The text is taken from *The Greek Anthology IV* (Paton 1918).

12.192 ΤΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΥ

οὐ τέρπουσι κόμαι με, περισσότεροί τε κίκινοι,
 τέχνης, οὐ φύσεως ἔργα διδασκόμενοι:
 ἀλλὰ παλαιστρίτου παιδὸς ῥύπος ὁ ψαφαρίτης,
 καὶ χροὴ μελέων σαρκὶ λιπαινομένη.
 ἡδὺς ἀκαλλώπιστος ἐμὸς πόθος: ἡ δὲ γοῆτις
 μορφὴ θηλυτέρης ἔργον ἔχει Παφίης.

5

12.200 ΤΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΥ

μισῶ δυσπερίληπτα φιλήματα, καὶ μαχιμῶδεις
 φωνάς, καὶ σθεναρὴν ἐκ χερὸς ἀντίθεσιν
 καὶ μὴν καὶ τόν, ὅτ' ἐστὶν ἐν ἀγκάσιν, εὐθὺ θέλοντα
 καὶ παρέχοντα χύδην, οὐ πάνυ δὴ τι θέλω:
 ἀλλὰ τὸν ἐκ τούτων ἀμφοῖν μέσον, οἷον ἐκεῖνον
 τὸν καὶ μὴ παρέχειν εἰδότα καὶ παρέχειν.

5

12.203 ΤΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΥ

οὐκ ἐθέλοντα φιλεῖς με, φιλῶ δ' ἐγὼ οὐκ ἐθέλοντα:
 εὐκόλος ἦν φεύγω, δύσκολος ἦν ἐπάγω.

12.223 ΤΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΥ

τερπνὸν ὄλωσ τὸ πρόσωπον ἐμοὶ προσιόντος ἀπαρκεῖ:
 οὐκέτι δ' ἐξόπιθεν καὶ παριόντα βλέπω.
 οὕτω γὰρ καὶ ἄγαλμα θεοῦ καὶ νηὸν ὀρῶμεν
 ἀντίον, οὐ πάντως καὶ τὸν ὀπισθόδομον,

12.240 ΤΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΥ

ἤδη μοι πολιαὶ μὲν ἐπὶ κροτάφοισιν ἔθειραι,
 καὶ πέος ἐν μηροῖς ἀργὸν ἀποκρέματα:
 ὄρχεις δ' ἄπρηκτοι, χαλεπὸν δέ με γῆρας ἰκάνει.
 οἴμοι: πυγίξειν οἶδα, καὶ οὐ δύναμαι.

12.243 ΤΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΥ

εἶ με τὸ πηγίζειν ἀπολώλεκε, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο
 † ἐκτρέφομαι ποδαγρῶν, Ζεῦ, κρεάγραν με πόει.

12.244 ΤΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΥ

ἦν ἐσίδω τινὰ λευκόν, ἀπόλλυμαι: ἦν δὲ μελίχρουν,
 καίομαι: ἦν ξανθὸν δ', εὐθύς ὄλος λέλυμαι.

12.249 ΤΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΥ

Βουποίητε μέλισσα, πόθεν μέλι τοῦμὸν ἰδοῦσα
 παιδὸς ἐφ' ὑαλέην ὄψιν ὑπερπέτασαι;
 οὐ παύση βομβεῦσα, καὶ ἀνθολόγοισι θέλουσα
 ποσσὶν ἐφάψασθαι χρωτὸς ἀκηροτάτου;
 ἔρρ' ἐπὶ σοὺς μελίπαιδας ὅποι ποτέ, δραπέτι, σίμβλους 5
 μὴ σε δάκω: κήγῶ κέντρον ἔρωτος ἔχω.

Afrikaans translations

12.4 Straton van Sardis

Ek verheug my in 'n seun van twaalf se fleur,
 Maar 'n dertienjarige is 'n genot.
 'n Veertienjarige is soeter as 'n bloeisel van erotiese begeerte,
 Maar hy wat nou net vyftien geword het, is nog méér lieflik.
 'n Sestienjarige is werklik aanbidbaar, 5
 Maar 'n sewentienjarige is nie myne om te smag nie, want hy behoort aan
 Zeus.
 En so, 'n man wat nog 'n ouer seun begeer, speel nie meer speletjies nie,
 Maar nou soek hy 'n antwoord van hom.⁵

⁵ The original Greek forms a part an introduction formula of Homeric speeches (Smith 2014:22-23). In order to understand the line better, a possible interpretation could be that the man is overstepping the line of societal norms and that he would be held accountable for his actions. This could suggest that a boy of 18 or above would no longer be considered a suitable partner for an adult male.

12.9 Van dieselfde

Jy is nou pragtig, Diodorus, en ryp vir liefde,
Maar al sou jy trou, sal ons jou nooit agterlaat nie.

12.11 Van dieselfde

Gister het ek Philostratos die hele nag beet gehad, maar ek kon nie hard
word nie,
Hoe moet ek dit stel? Hy het wel sy alles gegee.
My vriende, moet my nie langer as jul vriend beskou,
Maar gooi my van 'n toring af, want ek is nie meer 'n Hardus nie!⁶

12.192 Van dieselfde

Lang hare en verfynde krulletjies vermaak my nie;
'n Aangeleerde kuns — nie een van natuur.
Maar skurwe seuns in die gimnasium met gedroogte sweet,
En die olyf gelaatskleur met glimmende olie oor hul ledemate.
My ongekunstelde smaak is eenvoudige, maar die vroulike 5
Vorm het die mag van die betowerende Aphrodite.⁷

12.200 Van dieselfde

Ek haat dit as dit moeilik is om 'n soentjie te kry gepaar met 'n bakleierige
ween,
En 'n vuisgeveg in opposisie;
Ook as een wat in my arms is,
Hom onmiddellik aan my oorgee. Ek smag egter na een,

⁶ The original Greek refers to the story of Hector's son being hurled from a tower and introduces a pun with ἄστυνάαξ. The *α* is a privative and στήεν to erect, raise, arouse or excite. To modernise this passage, I opted to use Hardus as a replacement, meaning hard.

⁷ The original text refers to Παφίης. Paphos is claimed to be where Aphrodite rose from the sea. In order to maintain clarity, I have opted to use her name instead.

Tussen die twee

5

Wat weet wanneer om homself te gee, maar ook wanneer om terug te hou.

12.223 Van dieselfde

Soos wat hy aankom, is sy gesig ten volle 'n plesier,

en dit is genoeg vir my,

Ek kyk nie eers na sy boudjies wanneer hy verby loop nie,

So kyk ons immers ook na 'n standbeeld van 'n god in 'n tempel,

Aangesig tot aangesig — glad nie die agterend.

12.240 Van dieselfde

Daar is reeds gryshare op my kop,

My penis hang ongebruik tussen my dye,

My ballas is nutteloos; oudword het maar moeilik oor my gekom,

O arme ek! Ek weet hoe om hol te naai, maar ek het nie meer krag daarvoor
nie.

12.243 Van dieselfde

Holjöl het my klaargemaak, en boonop,

Die jīg gegee,⁸ O Zeus! Maak van my 'n sosatie-stokkie vir 'n jong stukkie.⁹

12.244 Van dieselfde

As ek 'n seun met ligte vel sien dan is ek stomgeslaan,

As ek een sien met 'n olyf gelaatskleur dan is ek aan die brand,

Maar as dit een is met goue lökkies, dan gee my knieë eenvoudig in.

⁸ The meaning of the joke is obscure and the *crux desperationis* indicates uncertainty in the manuscript tradition (Paton 1918:405).

⁹ Κρεάγραν in the original text refers to a flesh-hook. A *sosatie-stokkie* is an adaptation for a South African context maintaining the original association with meat and the possible sexual connotation.

12.249 Van dieselfde

O, jou bulletjie van 'n by, waarom kyk jy so na my heuning?
Jy vlieg oor die seun se vel wat lyk of dit uit glas gemaak is,
Sal jy nie ophou met jou huiwer nie! En raak tog nie sy reine vel
Met jou blom versamelend voetjies nie!
Gaan terug na jou korf wat vol heuning is waarvandaan jy gekom het. 5
Sodat ek jou nie steek nie, want ek het self ook 'n liefdesangel.

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