

## SHORTER NOTES

### HORACE'S XANTHIAS AND PHYLLIS

Horace C. 2.4 is an ironical address to Xanthias (presumably a freeborn man), who, it appears, is rather ashamed of his love for Phyllis, a slave-girl. It has long been held that 'Xanthias' is a pseudonym, but so far there has been no convincing explanation of why Horace chose that appellation rather than any other. Of course, there is no way of telling if the situation of the ode is real or imaginary, but, whether 'Xanthias' is the pseudonym of an actual person or a name given to an invented character, I believe that it does have particular point.

'Xanthias' was a name for slaves in real life and was often given to slaves in Greek Comedy.<sup>1</sup> A slave-name in general seems a mischievously suitable appellation for the addressee of the poem, since female slaves were normally loved by fellow slaves and it could be regarded as socially lowering for a free man to have an affair with a slave.<sup>2</sup> The name of a slave from Comedy is even more apt, as Horace clearly appears to be amused by the behaviour of the lover in this ode. Perhaps 'Xanthias' in particular was chosen because it translates Flavius, the name of the addressee of Catullus 6, who in similar circumstances had been subjected to similar teasing.

'Phyllis' too is probably not without significance. For the alert educated reader it would call to mind Demophoon's Phyllis, daughter of the king of Thrace. If 'Phyllis' was the real name of an actual person, these regal connotations may well have been responsible for the banter at 13 ff. ('nescias an te generum beati/ Phyllidis flavae decorent parentes:/ regium certe genus et penates/ maeret iniquos'). If 'Phyllis' was a pseudonym for a real girl or the name given to an imaginary character, it will have been chosen out of fun, partly because of its suggestion of legendary beauty and a heroic love affair<sup>3</sup> and partly because of its suggestion of royal lineage, which fits in with the humorous conjectures that Horace makes at 13 ff.

It seems likely that the literary and mythological associations of these two names especially appealed to Horace and that he was also taken with the rather amusing complexities of a situation in which a free man with a slave's name is in love with a slave-girl bearing the name of a princess and is embarrassed by his love.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Aristoph. *Vespae*, *Ranae*, *Ach.* 243, 259, *Nub.* 1485, *Av.* 656, Aeschines *De Fals. Leg.* 157, Athenaeus 336e, 553a, 689f.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. e.g. Ovid *Am.* 2.7.21 f. 'quis Veneris famulae conubia liber inire/ tergaque complecti verberare secta velit?'

<sup>3</sup> There could also be a hint that, like her mythological predecessor in most accounts, the 'Phyllis' of this ode will be left by her lover before her marriage to him (cf. 'generum', 13).