

THEATRON

Of Mice and Muses

Thursday 29 July, 2010, 7 pm
Lovers' Lane Pool

Dramaturg: Andrew White
Designers: Polly Evans, Chris Harrison
Translators: Margaret Alexiou, Przemyslaw Marciniak, Andrew White

The Theatron Players

Barbara Papendorp
Laura J. Scott
T. D. Smith
Andrew White

and featuring Byzantine Summer Fellows and colleagues
as the Muses, as Slaves and as the Chorus of Mice



Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection

THEATRON

Byzantine authors write about performance of rhetorical pieces in terms of a ‘theatron’. This does not mean ‘theatre’ in the classical sense; indeed many Byzantinists would deny energetically that there was a Byzantine theatre. What has become clear in recent years is that there was instead a rich performative culture which found its place in church, on the streets, in monasteries, in schools and in palaces with music, rhetoric, acclamations, poetry, some but not all knit into liturgy and ceremonial. Recent work by Przemyslaw Marciniak and Andrew Walker White has attempted to define the limits of church drama, while the performance context of many different kinds of literature has also been a concern. All this brings us a little closer to what Byzantines thought of as ‘theatron’. In the early Byzantine period it seems to connote a gathering of scholars, in the Palaiologan era Niels Gaul has seen a political self-awareness in the kind of group brought together by the emperor Manuel II.

The Komnenian period suggests a different model, of literary circles gravitating towards aristocratic women at which letters from abroad were read, new works were tried out, and scholars were asked to improvise speeches. It is a period when satire and parody was fashionable (including the liturgical parodies current also in the west), when tragedy had come newly under a spotlight, and when dialogue was finding a new place in the literary canon. It was also a time of revivals (of heroic poetry, the novel, Lucianic satire) and of experiment (in verse, in the vernacular), but based on a solid rhetorical foundation of epideictic composition as taught in the schools of Byzantium through *progymnasmata*, preliminary exercises. What is less often realized is that some of these pieces are *funny*. This evening we offer you the slapstick adventures of Poor Prodomos (addressed to the emperors John II and then Manuel I), in which he adopts three personae (the husband, the monk, and the scholar), as well as extracts from two pieces by Theodore Prodomos (almost certainly the same as ‘Poor Prodomos’), one a mock-tragedy, the other a dialogue between Olympian gods considering a slave-purchase, built on a simple revelation gag. These arise from the summer fellowship projects of Margaret Alexiou and Przemyslaw Marciniak respectively. We also offer some parodic liturgical canons sung by Alexander Lingas, and a whole little play, a *dramation*, bearing, like *Ptochoprodromika* IV, on the perennial problem of why scholars don’t make more money.

Margaret Mullett

PROGRAM NOTES

Introit: Katavasia by Paul Kasas, Protopsaltes of Cyprus (early 15th c.)

The players enter singing the opening section of a textless work by the early fifteenth-century composer Paul Kasas, Protopsaltes (First-Cantor) of Cyprus that was transcribed into Western staff notation by Ioannis Arvanitis from Athens 2406, a manuscript copied in 1453 in the northern Greek town of Serres. Labelled a 'katavasia'—a technical term referring to the descent of the choirs into the nave that was normally applied to poetic stanzas sung during Byzantine morning prayer—this piece is an example of a 'kratema' (literally a 'holder'), a work constructed from passages on nonsense syllables (teretismata). As abstract musical compositions that were functionally equivalent to instrumental music (of which none survives from Byzantium), kratemata suspended liturgical time in a manner analogous to the organ preludes, postludes and interludes employed in some Western liturgical traditions. Musically, the Katavasia is formed from a series of sequential phrases that are repeated with variations before ending with a modulation to another mode (the Plagal Fourth), indicated dramatically with an intonation in octaves.

Alexander Lingas

Handwritten musical notation on a page, featuring a large decorated initial 'C' on the left side. The notation consists of several lines of rhythmic symbols (vertical stems with flags) and Greek letters (alpha, beta, gamma, delta, epsilon, zeta, eta, theta, iota, kappa, lambda, mu, nu, xi, omicron, pi, rho, sigma, tau, upsilon, phi, chi, psi, omega) interspersed with the rhythmic symbols. The text is written in a cursive, medieval style. The page is numbered '4' at the bottom center.

Katavasia by Kasas

ἄχος αἰ
(C)

Transcr: Ioannis Arvanitis

Ε - PE - PEPE PE - TE PE PE TE - KE - - ε - ρα' TE TE -'

TE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE' TE PE PE - TE TE TE PE PE - TE'

TE' TE PE PEPE PE TE PE PE - TE - TE TE' TE TE - PEPE PE - PEPE'

PE - PE PE PE - PEPE PE - PEPE PE - PEPE PE - PEPE PE PEPE' TE TE'

TE TE TE TE TE TE TE TE TE TE' TE - PE PE - PE - TEPEPEPE'

PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE' TE - TE PE PE - TE TE TE' TEPE PEPEPE'

PE PE PE PEPE PE - PE - PEPE' TE - PE PE TE TE TE - TE'

Ε - - ρα' Ε - PEPE PE - PEPEPE PE PE PE - PE - PE PE'

Ε PE TE - PE PEPE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE - PE'

PE PE PE TE PE TEPEPE PE' TE - PE PE - TE TE TE' TEPEPEPE'

(C)
PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE TE PE PE TE TE TE

(G)
KE KE Pa. E PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE

PE PE PE TE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE

(C)
E PE

(G) (C)
PE TE PE TE PE PE PE TE PE PE TE TE TE TE TE PE PE PE PE PE PE PE

PE PE PE PE PE TE PE PE PE PE TE PE PE PE PE TE PE PE TE

(T) # (C) (T)
KE E Pa. KE a KE a γι ει ~

"Ετερον τέλος διπλάσμα

(C)
KE a γι E

(T)
|| ~

Poor Prodromos

Welcome all. I am “Ptochoprodromos”, and I thank you for bringing me alive again after so many centuries - well nigh a thousand years. I always liked playing “dead and alive” games, so I’m happy to prove I never die! I was known as “Ptochoprodromos” in my lifetime, particularly for four begging poems addressed to the emperor at the imperial court. Tonight we will present six little scenes selected from these poems.

The first two scenes are from Poem I, addressed to John II. I begin by warning him that I have a really dreadful suffering – don’t worry, I tell him, it’s not catching, it’s not shit-from-the mouth, it’s just.... a DREADFUL WIFE! And here she comes, but first you must hear her in Greek.

POEM I: As a hen-pecked husband, I report to John II how my wife complains that she never gets any new clothes or jewelry, just useless old imperial gifts and handouts that she wants to give away or sell off (although they are highly prized)! In the second scene, I try some horseplay, but fail most wretchedly, and end up on the ground.

POEM III. This time as an abused monk, I report to Manuel I the wretched state of affairs at the Philotheou Monastery, where two abbots are in charge - quite against the rules - but they get away with it, whereas if I infringe the slightest one, they give me menial chores, worst of all being to bathe the abbots, both in the same tub... I then describe the lavish food laid before them even on fast days, whereas all we monks get is their tub of "agiozoumi / iozoumi" sacred broth = toxic swill (and shit-mouth).

POEM IV. Now a starving scholar, I tell Manuel I what happened when I followed my father’s advice to “learn my letters”: my cupboards stuffed with papers. When forced by hunger onto the streets to beg for food - shit in my face and all over me!

Margaret Alexiou

Theodore Prodromos

Bion Prasis: Celebrity Auction

Do you really believe the advertisements saying that you can buy everything on eBay? What if there was a place you could buy Einstein to do your homework and Chopin to play you lullabies? One of the funniest of Byzantine poets, the one who's responsible for the majority of the texts performed today, Theodore Prodromos, described such a place. He wrote a text entitled "The auction of celebrities". It's usually dismissed as an imitation of a similar piece written by the ancient satirist, Lucian. But Prodromos did not write an imitation; his text is rather a sequel, a very good one! Lucian describes the auction of the lives of the ancient philosophers, while Prodromos tries to sell the lives of the biggest writers of ancient times, the authorities in poetry, medicine, oratory, legal studies – Aristophanes, Euripides, Hippocrates, Demosthenes, Pomponius. All the characters speak language peculiar to them, most of the time using quotations, changed if need be, from their own texts. Prodromos tried also to do quite a modern thing – he tried to recreate the personalities of those writers as seen through their own texts. A dangerous thing sometimes, because the only thing that the greatest comedian of Antiquity, Aristophanes, does is to swear in a very elaborate way (and he ends up as the only one who is not sold).

One possible theory as to what purposes Prodromos's text was meant to serve is that it could be a school text (yes, the swearing part as well – the Byzantines did not only weep and mourn!), a kind of *ethopoiia*, part of the *progymnasmata*. The authors he chose were the ones that form the core of the Byzantine curriculum studiorum. But this does not exclude the possibility that it was shared between literati and treated as a satirical text. As has been said about another school text of Prodromos which features mice, *Schede tou muos*, there is no reason why a school exercise cannot be a satirical and funny work of literary merit.

Disclaimer: This introduction was not sponsored by eBay.

Przemysław Marciniak

A Satirical Canon by Michael Psellos

The canon is a musico-poetic form originally created to adorn the nine biblical canticles ('odes') sung at festal morning prayer in the Christian liturgical rites of Palestine. In Byzantium it became customary to employ the model melodies of Palestinian hymns not only for metrically identical new hymns, but also for secular compositions. Although most of these secular works are pedagogical in nature—lists of grammatical rules, travelogues, inventories of historical and mythological figures, etc.—a not insignificant number of them are satires. According to K. Mitsakis, the eleventh-century scholar and politician Michael Psellos was the first to write a satirical canon. This canon was composed as a response to an epigram by Jacob, a monk who resided at the Synkellos monastery on Mount Olympus in Bithynia, where Psellos had lived during a period of exile from Constantinople. Insinuating that Psellos had returned to the capital due to the lack of female companionship at the monastery, Jacob wrote:

O lord Zeus, mightily bragging and loud-thundering father and wand-wielder, you put up with Olympus for only a brief spell because your goddesses were not at your side, father Zeus.¹

Psellos responded with a canon set to familiar melodies in the Fourth Plagal Mode that were attributed to St John of Damascus and normally heard at Sunday Orthros. In place of the usual texts praising the resurrection of Christ, however, Psellos supplied eight odes painting the unfortunate Jacob as a gourmand and a drunkard. The version of the melody sung here is from the late Byzantine Heirmologion MS Vatopedi 1529.

Alexander Lingas

¹ Tr. K. Mitsakis, "Byzantine and Modern Greek Parahymnography," in D.E. Conomos, ed., *Studies in Eastern Chant*, 5 (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 57.

Theodore Prodromos

Katomyomachia: War of the Cat and Mice

Wars with frogs, helping lions, stealing food from Bishop Eustathios (as he describes minutely in his letters), travelling to the Underworld – mice of the ancient and Byzantine periods were very busy creatures indeed! Nobody has yet studied the role and portrayal of a mouse in Byzantine literature but this is a very promising field. The last work about these animals was possibly written some time in the fifteenth century and tells the story of a mischievous cat who persuaded mice to come to the oven and then, with his two fellows, massacred all of them.

The work whose fragment you're about to see is nearly as bloody. It describes the war between the mice and their biggest enemy – a cat (in the Greek original the cat is female). Of course, those mice are not ordinary ones – they speak Homeric Greek (no wonder if you steal food from Bishop Eustathios, the biggest commentator of Homer ever!), they threaten the gods to help them, they know perfectly well the tragedies of Aeschylus. In fact, the scene which will be performed is almost entirely based on the famous dialogue between queen Atossa and the chorus from the Aeschylean play “Persians”.

Since Herbert Hunger it has been argued that the “Katomyomachia”, “The Cat and Mice War” is a political satire. It's possible, however, that once again we are dealing with a text that was written as a didactic piece rather than a political satire. Theodore Prodromos constructed it using ancient texts used in Byzantine education. When describing brave mice, he in fact conveys the portrayal of ideal young Byzantine aristocrats. Or perhaps, it was just a satire without a political intent – with Byzantine texts you never know.

So, when you see a mouse in the library think – maybe you are about to murder an eminent specialist in Palaeologan poetry or a connoisseur of the Nazca language?

Przemysław Marciniak

A Phlebotomological Ode

Various attributed in manuscripts to Nikephoros Blemmydes, Maximos Planoudes and Patriarch Photios, this song is one of a number of medical texts set to the tunes of familiar hymns. Here the model is the sticheron Ὅτε ἐκ τοῦ ξύλου σε νεκρόν, a beloved text sung on Good Friday to mark the burial of Christ. This melody, sung here in its received version, is also used at the conclusion of the burial service for laymen, when it is employed for a series of stichera sung as members of the congregation offer a ‘last kiss’ to the diseased. This phlebotomological ode therefore comes with strong musical associations matching the terminal prognosis offered at its end.

Alexander Lingas

Michael Haploucheir

Dramation

Having had our fill of “Ptochoprodromos” and his belly-aching, and having seen the humiliation Homer endures in the Medieval “marketplace of ideas” we now turn to the oldest problem known to Academia – our often non-existent job prospects. In the *Dramation* we find Michael Haploucheir treading similar grounds as Prodromos, but with a twist. There’s no Emperor in sight, no nagging wife or randy monks, just poverty. Well, poverty compounded by the ultimate humiliation of seeing your idiot of a neighbor feted by the very goddess – Fortune – whom you’ve been expecting at your door for decades.

Haploucheir shows his anti-hero, Wise Guy (*Sophos*), overwhelmed by jealousy when Fortune bestows wealth and prosperity on Ignoramus (*Agroikos*). Spitting out insults, Wise Guy threatens to quit Rhetoric altogether and get himself a real job. The arrival of the Muses at his door – frequent house-guests of his, one would presume – only makes matters worse. After a brief but nasty spat, the Muses turn on their verbal charms and fashion a golden future for their host – his cynical reply, which ends the play, continues to puzzle scholars to this day, but its worldly-wise spirit is also something that scholars in any age can appreciate.

Andrew Walker White



TEXTS

Poor Prodromos, Poem 1

translated by Margaret Alexiou

No matter what comes, this or that,
The time has come to make all clear to you:
I can't stand, lord, this woman's spitefulness,
her daily scoffings, chidings; like her
"Sir, you pay no heed; sir, what do you mean?
45 What have you acquired? What are your gains?
What tunic woven for me, what fine cloth spun?
What border stitched for me? - some Eastertide !
Twelve years you kept me, each one cold and drear:
I've had no sandals from your toils upon my feet;
50 no silken gown to wear around my shoulders,
no jeweled ring to set upon my finger,
you never even brought me back a bracelet!
55 If I go to the bath-house, I get back depressed;
if one day I eat, the next two I starve;
I'm always moaning; I wail, beat myself, and weep.
That robe you brought me - know what? send it back!
That double-fringed silk-wool tunic, that long stole,
60 and the dyed cloak emblazoned with large figures:
give them away, sell them off, or hand them on!
As for those bathrobes you had made, and bedspread,
let your sons have them as a father's heirloom.
The goods and utensils from your kinsfolk
65 will suffice for you to dower your daughters.
Why stare so, man? Just look me in the eye!"

* * * * *

140 I flew into quite a rage, and swore at her.
Once more she yelled at me, as usual:
“How dare you? Who are you? Careful, don’t thrash me!”
and, “Mind your tongue, watch out who you insult,
I’m not your serf, nor paid servant either.
145 You laid hands on me - are you not ashamed?
Once I set eyes upon my brothers, won’t they
just catch you, break your back and kill you off,
150 then I’ll tie your four kids around your neck,
I’ll turn you out of home, parade you in disgrace.
I’ll ruin your good looks and reputation,
and fix your ugly mug for good and all!”
155 Wherefore, at these unseemly words of hers,
was I inclined to give her a good hiding.
Then I paused for thought, saying to myself,
“Prodromos, on your soul, sit tight, mouth shut;
take all she says, and bear it manfully:
160 if you do strike and beat her till she hurts
- you’re old, short of stature, and very frail -
she might grab you, set you ass-over-t’head;
and if she beat you then, she’d break your neck!
But should you wish to give her some *chastisement*,
165 grab that staff, swear, throw down your dome-shaped hat,
roll a stone against her - mind not to hit! -
then on your toes - go as if to catch her!
Stumble as you chase, then fall, take a swipe,
drop down, get up, then - after her again!
170 Give a ferocious look, roll eyes around, 8
And tilt that domed hat askew, roar like a lion.”
I couldn’t even find a staff, poor wretch,
so I snatched the broomstick from the toilet,
pleading, beseeching, clamorously I cried:
175 “Christ Immaculate, hold her, stop the bitch,
or else she’ll cut sharp turn and grab my stick,
thrash and shape me more crooked than the Devil.”

God-crowned lord, before what next transpired
She'd put bread and wine under lock and key.
180 Sneaking off, she hides, and shuts the door behind her,
she sat there pitiless, leaving me outside.
Broomstick in hand, I set upon her door;
aroused with fury as I was, I batted hard upon it
till I found a hole and slipped inside my stick-tip.
185 With one leap she held hard upon my rod
- she shafting from inside, me from outside -
until I knew, -- "yes, I can!" -- and tugged her hard:
loosening on the stick, she sets the door ajar
and suddenly I lay there, stretched upon the ground.
190 When she saw I'd fallen, she began to mock me,
coming out at once to lift me off the floor.
Feigning tenderness, here is what she said:
"Shame, sir. On your life, have you no pride? You're
no village bumpkin, nor no whining babe!
195 Give up that strength and supermanhood of yours,
Get hip – it's too darned hot! - respect your betters,
Don't try to play the stud - and no more howling!"



Celebrity Auction: The Blind Slave

translated by Przemyslaw Marciniak and Margaret Mullett

Hermes

Which one do you want me to present first, my Lord? The noble from Byzantium or this sad Ionian?

Zeus

Neither. This blind man, the citizen of seven cities, who deals with myths. Show him the way, if not, then he has called you in vain “guiding Hermes”.

Hermes

C’mon, old man! Present yourself to the potential buyers!

The blind slave

*Lead, son of Maia, o lead now, thou herald, good Argeiophontes.
Singing, I follow in order to be sold. No man can flee fate.*

Hermes

Faster, faster! There is no time to waste!

The blind slave

*No, not at all, good Hermes, my might is all loosed, and old age looms.
Weak is my squire and my horses are slow....*

Hermes

So, why don’t you take a break? It’s late, but you keep on singing these idle songs.

The blind slave

*What is this word, O my child, which has 'scaped all the bar of thy teeth?
How could I ever forget such a wise man, godlike in learning,
Clev'rest of mortals, and free in his offerings to
Immortal powers who inhabit the skies, on high in the heavens.*

Buyer

My dear Hermes, what kind of a blind man have you brought here?

Hermes

Of all his life is most sophisticated and contemplative ! Who'll buy? Who'll buy someone like this?

The blind slave

Throw in this mix, O Hermes, some parts of my undying epics!

Hermes

He knew what was, and what is and what will be

Buyer

So, this one, the contemplative one, will ask a lot from the future: if you're permanently blinded you can't see much of the present. And if you hadn't supported him and given him your hand he might easily have tripped and crashed his skull.

Hermes

Watch your tongue, man! You may bring the worst of calamities on yourself all unawares when you slander such a benefactor of the gods! He gave this Zeus the Aegis and the lightning bolt, I received from him these very wings and the wand as well as golden sandals. Hera owes him her white forearms and Aphrodite her magic bra. Athena received owl-like eyes, the Earthshaker the Trident and Ares his armor. If he hadn't been so nice to us, we would have surely been thirsty and hungry! We wouldn't have either a teensy weensy bit of ambrosia or a bottle of nectar! Ganymede wouldn't pour the wine, Apollo the Pythian wouldn't know the future (though he

borrowed his prophecies from the blind one). Hephaestus wouldn't make a famous shield for Achilles. Helios would have to go on foot and Klotho would have to leave the thread of lives untouched. On the top of that Charon wouldn't earn a penny!

Buyer

So, if he's the richest and the most generous person towards others and he gave Athena the owl-like eyes how come he left himself blind and sightless?

Hermes

It only seems like that, O foreigner! He chose to live according to the dictates of his mind and not according to the temptations of his sense-perception. Do you think he would have given Argos eyes all over his body if he wanted to have so many eyes himself? I will refrain from telling you that he knows how to cure blindness with herbs and oils and do it so well that he's able to discern what both man and god do.

Buyer

Oh mighty Heracles! You tell me that he's some kind of a wonder-worker?

Hermes

You haven't heard the best part! You'll learn, if you listen, how such a limb can appear from beneath unspeakable rags. He has gathered the Greek navy and the cavalry and all these kings and on his own conquered the whole of Troy. Having killed Hector of the glancing helmet, he ascribed these great deeds to the son of Thetis. But he also knows how to party. When he takes down the clear-voiced lyre from its hook, he sings the famous deeds of men and when he sings, with very beautiful kithara in hand, of the love of Ares and Aphrodite of the fair crown --

Zeus

-- Be silent, Hermes, about such things. Otherwise a fate like Tantalus might happen to you! All because of telling strange tales, forbidden to humans.

Hermes

But, O Zeus, this old man would be more just than I in rendering account. He wrote down not only about the bull and the gold but also about eagles and swans— ahem — and satyrs, their crooked beaks and horns.

Buyer

Let it be. Is it allowed to ask this wizard something or doesn't he have the right to answer?

Hermes

God, yes, it's allowed. Ask away!

Buyer

So, old man, tell me. Where are you from? Who are your folk? Where's your village?

The blind slave

I cannot answer a man whose speech in hexameter won't scan.

Buyer

Teach me then the proper words. How I should have asked?

The blind slave

Who among men art thou, and from where? Which city and lineage?

Buyer

[Bea] OK, let's *pretend* that's what I said. So tell me, where were you born?

The blind slave

*Cities which claim the all-hallowed root of the poet are seven:
Smyrna, Chios, Kolophon and Ithake, Pylos, Argos and Athens.*

Buyer

And where were you schooled?

The blind slave

Muse Kalliope taught me well, the daught'r' of the Thund'rer.

Buyer

OK, so, what's your name?

The blind slave

This appellation gave me father and all-honoured mother-- HOMER!



Poor Prodromos, Poem 3

translated by Margaret Alexiou

40 I can't stand all those lousy monastic rules:
"Where was he for the Censing? Penance is due!
Where was he at Sitting? No bread for him!
Where was he at Six Psalms? No wine for him!
Where at Vespers? Let them cast him out!

45 Stand up, chant from the soul, and shout out loud.
Why mutter so? Careful, don't gape and yawn.
Don't rub yourself up, squat down, pick at scabs.
Leave off so many baths - you are a monk ...

55 Stop eating so fast and drinking so much ...
Stop eyeing up that man's huge portion,
take good care not to talk to him at all.
He's a high priest, you're just a churchboy;

60 he's the head cantor, leader of the choir,
And you? You're tone-deaf, you can't sing in tune;
he keeps the accounts, you just heat the water;
he serves from vessels, you just mind the onions;

63a he is the manager, you're a shit-scraper;
he's a grammarian, skilled in readings,

65 you can't even spell your alphabet ...
He wears silk-lined suede, you a coarse tunic;
he has no less than four sparkling bedspreads,
while you sleep on straw, crawling with lice.

80 He goes to the bath-house four times a month;
you see no bath from this Easter to next ...
He holds as much as ten pounds in gold coin;

85 you, not a dime to save your soul ...
On with your fevered rounds, work for all ...

95 Stop gawping at the frogs, sturgeon, turbot,
with all that wet dribbling, dry swallowing.
Sure, you won't taste them: your food shall be dry

28

your throat shall be seared with Cretan cheese,
 sliced tunny scraps and filthy tuna fish.
 100 Go down to table, help the cellar man,
 go chop the wood and fetch the cauldron,
 serve the hot water, you're not a grandee ...
 Go, fetch hot water to bathe the fathers ...
 Go right now, bathe the big manager
 and the abbot too, see to both at once"
 From each bath-end one shouts to the other,
 the one cries "Rub me up and stir the scum!",
 again he says "Pour on me, I'm getting out!"
 Along with them comes the third, the ecclesiarch ...
 273 On Wednesdays and Fridays, it's dry food for all:
 There's no fish at all, king, in what they eat,
 275 Only fresh bread, lobster, and red crabs,
 276 crayfish just broiled, grapes and fried prawns,
 277 lentils, cabbage, then oysters and mussels,
 and with tripe, lord, scallops and razor fish
 fine-ground lentils and rice cooked with honey,
 280 skinned black-eyed peas, olives and caviar,
 with ripe fish roes just to whet appetites,
 282 apples, dried figs, date-palms and walnuts,
 raisins from Chios, and citrus juice too,
 284 and, just to ease the food down – it's so *dry* -
 285 sweet wine from Mount Ganos, Crete and Samos,
 286 so they may emit juices from sweet drinking,
 287 while for us they serve out well-soaked beans,
 288 and then slake our thirst with hot cumin tea, 37
 289 In keeping with the Rulebook, the fathers' laws.
 289a Then up a monk spoke: "Let the Rulebook be brought:
 quick, let's read it aloud at refectory."
 Roaring, "Most evil, fathers, what has been said!"
 the flatterers bawled, in front of the Shepherd,
 "Off with this fool at once from these halls
 lest he harm many more of the pious!"

Do you wish, lord, to learn what was his fault?
 The monk had declared, “The wine is sour!”
 and at once came from them the charge of “Guilty!”
 290 As for us, it’s still naught but “holy broth”:
 291 Now ponder the strange provenance of this name
 292 It’s a duck-diver, lord, four measures deep,
 293 up to the top the cooks fill it with water
 294 and beneath the pot they light a great fire,
 295 and throw in some twenty leonione rings.
 [295a And behold then, happenings and strange visions
 295b In there you may behold a ball-game played
 295c In there, you may behold the dance of onion-lions
 295d how pungently they rattle with knock-outs and kick-ins,
 295e as they play the game kids call “I told, now tell!” ...
 297 they are baptised in the name of Holy Trinity
 298 as the cook thrice dribbles in the oil
 H299 throwing in some savoury *sticks* for flavour,
 300 and then pours the liquid over the bread.
 301 They give us this, and call it “holy broth”
 301a - myself, I think it’s tepid water
 301c for it always tamps down frisky monks.
 301d “What’s cooking today?” “Holy broth,” they tell me,
 301e pathetic guy, he didn’t mention tepid water.
 302 I nudge my fellow eater, tug his robe:
 “What are we eating?” And he answers “toxic broth”.
 Believe me, it’s no lie, he’s got it spot on
 305 as the pungent onion taste kicks into me
 and the toxins turn the stewpot to battery acid ...
 They’re eating fine frogs, we get toxic broth,
 They swill sweet wine from decorated cups;
 we drink diluted hooch from earthenware.
 They get semolina bread, topped off with sesame;
 we get lumpy dough dusted with ashes.
 They often get suck from lickers honey-tongued,
 320 we get their backwash rich with toxins.

Canon of the Monk Jacob

Michael Psellos

translated by Andrew White and Przemyslaw Marciniak

Drunkenness, Drink and Dance, Jacob, it's your festival!
Clapping with your buddies, pleasures, delights,
Boogieing with cymbals, squeezing out those bunches,
Wine-trodden grapes, bellies filled with jugs' worth!
Longing for luxuries, Jacob, you spurned
Every single ascetic practice, moderation for starters,
Then sleeping on the ground, heavy training,
Prayer and tears and, father, raising yourself up to God!
He's beyond miracles, good Jacob of Synkellos monastery;
Like a vat he takes in the grapes and,
His throat like a press, he squeezes out the wine
Like his stomach was the jug, no need for decanting!
Pissing it out you're thirsty again, Jacob, you insatiable beast,
The flaming fever for drink unquenched,
The unbearable scorching and parched earth,
Drinking like an inferno or a sea, never filling your stomach.

War of the Cat and Mice

Theodore Prodromos

translated by Przemyslaw Marciniak and Andrew White

Chorus

O all gods together, O gods alone,
You who dwell on high and beneath the soil,
giver of all good things
Favor, and favor most strongly
When my lords go into fresh battle
against the whole all-devouring breed of cats.

Queen Mouse

Let them be victorious O Zeus, in their battle,
My generals, my husband and my son.

Chorus

“To win is sweet” – and yet I am possessed by fear

Queen Mouse

Me too, I tremble powerfully with fear.

Chorus

For fearsome is the bravery of the enemy

Queen Mouse

O King Zeus, make this battle victorious

Chorus

The Divine always sends good things

Queen Mouse

If the multitude of mice with force
Prevail against the enemy
We will live our lives happily ever after, and far from fear.

Chorus

Let it be so: from your mouth to the gods' ears.

Queen Mouse

But what if, defeated by the cats
They all are forced to retreat and flee,
In the blink of an eye all will be lost!

Chorus

I would it never happens; Let's hope it does not come to pass.

Queen Mouse

And all of us become servants in captivity.

Chorus

No, worse -- the enemy's main course!

Queen Mouse

And I, a queen once, together with my loved ones,
Quickly be enslaved.

Chorus

Enslaved? You and your kids?
Fat chance! Try *entrée* for some glutton.

Queen Mouse

Indeed? Then I will leave the sweetest light
And will be covered with dust in my grave.

Chorus

Silence, Silence, milady, I see something terrible.
What do I see? Some fellow running, hurried along
heavily bruised and breathing heavily.

Messenger

Enlighten me: where is milady?

Chorus

It is permitted now for you to see her.

Messenger

Misery, all misery, and thrice misery again,
He's fallen – Prince Crumbfilcher – wounded by a claw.

Queen Mouse

O lost and beloved child.
Fallen is the Staff of my old age
O, the suffering, suffering of mourning!
Woe! All horrible is the message!
Aie, I'll die! What's to become of me, where can I go?
How can I go? I have no more strength!
Oh, woe...

Chorus

Courage, courage, stop beating yourself!

Queen Mouse

O Zeus, I'm of two minds what's best to do now.

Chorus

Woe, Woe, wretched and pitiful mother,
Restrain (leave off) your unending groans

Queen Mouse

Unbelievable, Unbelievable, Horrible, Horrible, what you're telling me!

Chorus

Hold off a little your unending groans.

Queen Mouse

O most beloved face, O my beloved child!

Chorus

It is fitting that you bear this endless grief,
But now learn the rest of this fight!

Queen Mouse

But I don't have the power to stop the bitterness of this suffering.

Chorus

What use is all this endless moaning?

Queen Mouse

I'll destroy this cat – and quickly die ...

Chorus

Enough – proceed no further with the rest,
For I already see another fast-flying messenger.

Queen Mouse

I'm terrified that he'll tell me more frightful news!

Chorus

No, O august one.

Queen Mouse

How do you know? How?

Chorus

He's running down the street with a cheerful face!

Queen Mouse

Zeus, send me some good news!

Messenger

Let someone tell me where is the queen?

Chorus

Behold, here she is, look if you wish.

Messenger

All-golden one, don't worry, be happy!
And (*abem*) consider a reward for my message.

Queen Mouse

Spit it out, don't mock me like some show-off.

Messenger

First, pay me my reward for what I'll say.

Queen Mouse

I'll give immediately to the one who *has spoken*.

Messenger

The wretched cat has died in battle.

Chorus

I applaud and rejoice greatly;
May joy be victorious over grief.

Queen Mouse

I dance mightily with joy!

Chorus

First you must tell us about the battle,
And tell us how the unfortunate All-Devourer died.

Queen Mouse

Let the message-bearer recount everything
That occurred in the battle, and the fate
Of the wild-eyed, evil mouse-killer.

Chorus

Her highness has spoken – hit it!

Messenger

Lo, my discourse is prepared.
And you give ear willingly, ears pricked now,
To what I am about to explain.
As the awful body-wasting battle
The attack began in good order
And the first knight to fall was General
Crumb-Leaker, then Bread-Snatcher,
Then the child of our good Lord
He suffered in his heart,
Having seen his beloved son dead
And urging on his army towards the pestilent All-Devourer,
He fearlessly engaged in battle.
Most of the time he fought
Holding his ground, not fleeing,
When some wood fell from the roof above,
Ancient of days and battered by time
And hit it in the square of its back
And crashed onto its sinews instantly
And sent it to the depths of Hades.
And thus the once all-powerful
Now lay without life.



A Phlebotomological Ode

Now learn of the different bloods that come from phlebotomy,
and what they indicate:

If the blood flows black and without serum, there is fever present,
it is best when it produces serum there;

If it be ulcerous, it indicates the cure of a disease which is present now,
but will soon not be;

If it be completely blue and without a drop of red blood,
six months to a year may he live!



Poor Prodromos, Poem 4

translated by Margaret Alexiou

Ever since I was a lad, my father used to tell me,
“Learn letters, boy, as much as you are able.
See that man there, child? He used to walk on foot,
now he rides a fat mule with double rein-straps.
5 While he was learning, he wore no shoes at all,
now look at him, he wears long pointed ones.
While he was learning, he never combed his hair,
now he is well groomed, proud of his fine locks.
While he was learning, he saw no bath-house door,
10 but now he takes a bath three times a week.
His belt-fold used to swell with lice the size of almonds,
now it’s swell with Manuel’s golden coins.
So be persuaded by your old man’s fatherly advice
and learn your grammar, as much as you are able.”
15 So I learned my grammar, with a lot of effort.
Now I’ve become, supposedly, a craftsman,
I lack bread, I lack even a breadcrumb;
I spit on grammar and I say it with tears:
“Down with letters, Christ, and with whoever wants them!
20 Cursed be the time and cursed be that day
when they handed me over to school
to learn my letters as if I could live off them! ...
They gave me Homer, and I was faint from hunger;
215 they said, “Learn Oppian, and fear not hunger.”
When I’d learned Oppian, I too made bold to say,
“Avaunt, Poverty, to the peasants, off to the fools,
for I have learned the craft of letters, full of riches;
I have mastered Oppian, I have no fear of Hunger!”
220 But she, snarling beneath her breath, turned back to me.
Then as Hunger clung thus upon my cheek,
she didn’t even look like tenderloin.

If only I'd gone without Oppian, plied the baker's trade,
things would have gone fine with me - with interest! ...

As I set out one day along the road, with hunger and thirst,
my nostrils filled with pungent smell of street cooking,
- it went straight down to the gut and roused my hunger,
230 so I followed the smell, which took me to the butcher's,
where I found them roasting meat on a huge spit.
I began to flatter the butcher's wife,
"Mistress, mistress craftswoman, mistress tripewoman,
you, lady in beribboned bonnet, butcher's wife,
235 give us a bit of gut, give us a bit of tit,
a piece of your tenderloin, what's in your hand,
tenderloin to munch on, not too fatty,
bursting with grapesmell, crisp at the edges.
240 I saw good intentions, I saw a good woman,
not realising - bad luck - her trick and her act.
the woman's baneful ways, poor fool that I was!
She took me by the hand, she drew up a seat,
she laid out the table with these words to me,
245 "Take a seat sir, sit, notary grammarian,
philosopher-grammarian, Mr. Double-trouble."
She laid the table, drew me out a napkin,
and put me down a plate filled with tenderloin.
I took the first mouthful, the second and third;
250 at the fourth, as usual, I bent down to cut it;
at once (where *had* she been hiding that shit-lump,
stuffed with dung and most foully stinking?)
slapping the loins right in my face, she says
"Eat, good grammarian, grammarian notary,
255 grammarian philosopher, gutpipe washer!
Better you had eaten that ink of yours
than this swollen piece of shit-filled belly!"

Dramation (“Little Drama”)

Michael Haploucheir

translated by Andrew White

Ignoramus

Greetings, venerable, thrice-happy Fortune!
I always wanted to have an ally like you, as a kindly guide in my life.

Wise Guy

What’s that, Ignoramus? Why fawn over this goddess,
calling her “venerable and thrice-happy”,
when she’s really “detestable and thrice-wretched,”
always stumbling off the right path?

Ignoramus

Shush! Silence, gag that raging mouth,
and don’t look to stoke the goddess’s anger;
for she is everywhere and sees all.

Wise Guy

What man in his right mind would worship a blind goddess?

Ignoramus

Your wit’s diseased; mine’s sharp as a tack.

Wise Guy

And how did she come to the door of an ignoramus like you?

Ignoramus

15 She knew it to be worthy of her;
She came and found it open.

Wise Guy

How bizarre! You told the truth.
At least I've got my sights on what happened.

Ignoramus

What're you aiming at? Shoot it to me straight.

Wise Guy

20 She had set out to come to my place,
this aging old hag, this wretched specimen.
When the light departed the earth, and the shadows fell,
Miss Lam-foot here wandered – Alas! – off the road.
She suddenly fell and was thrown onto the stones,
And got a fierce pain in her feet.
25 Having recovered from this fall, she no longer
endeavored to direct herself towards my door;
but when she saw the next door open,
she went there and took shelter inside.

Fortune

30 Aiee! Aiee! I'm in mourning! Who calls nimble old me
Lame – me, with such perfect feet?
I rule the earth; I possess the heavens;
From afar, all bow down to me.

Wise Guy

35 You filthy old hag, mankind's greatest curse!
Despicable witch, steeped in evil!
Treating honorable men so dishonorably!

Fortune

Man, you're so long-winded! You spout nonsense.
Your babble is as frivolous as it is indecent.

You have the gifts of the Muses, *instead* of Fortune;
When you speak, you have the skills of a poet and an orator:
40 Take the Muses to court, not Fortune.

Wise Guy

Go hang yourself, you evil spirit! Get lost, flattened,
sink into the depths of the earth, disappear, shoot yourself,
distracting me with that “gifts of the Muses” stuff ...

Muses

Hail, O great one, of glittering speech!

Wise Guy

45 Aargh! Aargh! Silence! Absolute quiet! Not a sound!
Now some racket hits me smack between the eyes;
open this instant, before they pound on the door.

Muses

Greetings thou flaming torch, thou fount of eloquence!

Wise Guy

What fresh *joy* have we here?

Muses

50 Joy, delight, the graces of speech be with you.

Wise Guy

Chorus, go to the front gates for me.

Chorus

Master, rejoice! I recognize them, they're the Muses.

Wise Guy

Oh, yeah? Kick ‘em out; drive them away from my doors!

Chorus

No, not these goddesses, master!

Wise Guy

55 And when have I ever found their power of any use?

Chorus

Didn’t they give you the skill of fine speech?

Wise Guy

In no way has this ‘skill’ profited me nothin’.

Chorus

Aren’t you the brightest when it comes to advice?

Wise Guy

I counsel myself how to avoid life’s evils;
60 but I don’t see the point of it myself.

Chorus

You have the wealth of eloquence from it.

Wise Guy

They don’t take “eloquence” at the mall.

Chorus

Don’t you possess praises, instead of wealth?

Wise Guy

Since when does praise know how to fill a stomach?
65 Are you nuts! How I wish I had an ignoramus’s wealth.

Chorus

And you want to change to an ignoramus from a man of wisdom?

Wise Guy

I want to be a tanner, a stone-cutter,
or any other craftsman's art.
Even a cobbler too, an ignorant inn-keeper
70 who still can't say a single syllable,
but when he speaks he pours out buckets of spit,
a disgraceful, utterly brainless clod,
who makes his progress down the middle of the street
furnished with a royal escort,
75 vomiting up a lot of arrogant talk,
while a reverend soul, well bred in discourses
goes about homeless, poor, wretched.
I see the deranged in the Senate,
the brilliant dishonored, the dull piled high with honors:
80 For it's gold now that talks, everyone admires it.

Chorus

Master, would you stop already with that talk
and give the learned Muses a chance to speak:
For they're right here, here, all decked out.

Muses

85 Aiee! Aiee! How many tears from our eyes now
we have shed, we so gifted in speaking!
And what's the occasion for so many tears?
We learned that though on eloquence you've dined
you hate us, the princesses of eloquence.

Wise Guy

Yes, and I pronounce you treacherous and hateful.

Muses

90 Teach us now the reason for your hatred.

Wise Guy

I have no bread, no money, I'm miserable.

Muses

'Thou knowest the earth produces grasses and greens.'

Wise Guy

Whack these detestable ladies with some big sticks!
Hurry, man! Pound 'em, they're utterly vile!

Muses

95 You know how to master your passion;
but you're out of control.

Wise Guy

I'm a *man*; how on earth am I going to eat grass?
I'm miserable, and you compare me to a jack-ass,

Muses

100 You gold-digger, mired in your own mistakes.
Virtue? Glory? You don't want them at all:
you want to get drunk on the booze of wealth!

Wise Guy

And how I'd love to know what this "booze" is.

Muses

You've never observed a man drunk with wine?

Wise Guy

Teach me, pray, what does this “wine” thing do?
and don’t describe one unknown with others:
105 because water is all that irrigates my stomach.

Fortune

See how with much more elegant words
you address the Muses, not trite at all.

Wise Guy

You old hag, vile, abominable, older than dust!
common ruination of the entire race of mankind,
110 root of all evil, pathetic old vice,
It’s just as you say: Of *course* I love to talk good,
yeah, and wear this horrid, ragged, hair-suit,
and have no way to eat or drink,
and feed myself on grass and greens
115 like a wild boar from out of the woods.

Muses

Why are you wrecking your brains so now,
talking so crudely, you so skilled in the art of fine speaking,
The light of reason hasn’t been hidden from you?
Soon you will recognize your dying hope
120 as they come into the light, like a fresh beacon;
you will see wealth and taste life’s pleasures.

Wise Guy

Let it be soon! But I don’t see the future,
I fear the opposite will happen to me...

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