

In the introduction to his *Maculate Muse*, Jeffrey Henderson briefly examines the obscene language of Epicharmus' fragments, calling it "gentle and casual" (1991, 26). Although Henderson is right to contrast the sexual innuendo of Epicharmus' plays with the more explicit obscenity of Old Comedy, I would argue that he misjudges both the frequency and the significance of innuendo in the extant fragments of Sicilian comedy. In this paper, I will offer a close examination of Epicharmus' comic style, looking specifically at his most quoted production in antiquity, *Wedding of Hebe*. I will contend that the play not only presents a wedding feast but also a humorous feast of sexual double-entendres.

Though the context for most of Epicharmus' poetry is lost, a number of his fragments preserve instances of playful innuendo, a few examples of which Henderson notes in the introduction to his *Maculate Muse*: ἄγκυρα (anchor/penis), ἄρχον (leader/anus), γέρρα (flap/vagina). In addition to these instances of Epicharmean double-entendres, however, there are a number of other significant passages that allude to sexual organs in the same humorous manner. The most notable examples come from the dramatization of Heracles' and Hebe's wedding. Ancient scholars were primarily interested in the play because of its sizeable list of fish and other sea-creatures; and modern scholars have regarded it as little more than a "magnificent tribute to fish" at the divine wedding banquet (Wilkins, 2001: 313). I will show, however, that Epicharmus clusters many of these foods together because they humorously allude to sexual organs. As a comic play that represents the marriage of such a sexualized divinity as Hebe, it should not be surprising to find sexual imagery within the text; and despite the fragmentary state of the play, it appears that the production fully exploited Greek wordplay and double-entendres to create such imagery.

For example, in fragment 40, Epicharmus repeatedly employs the word κόγχος (=κόγχη) and its derivatives (κογχύλια, κόγχος, κογχοθηρᾶν, κόγχοι), which Jeffrey Henderson says function as a common reference to the female genitalia in Old Comedy: "the cavity (pink or red) of a seashell, used in technical writers for many bodily cavities, is a double entendre meaning 'vagina'" (1991, 142). That Epicharmus uses this sexualized term four times within nine verses seems to suggest the potential for a secondary interpretation of the passage. In fact, upon closer inspection, the whole fragment comes to life with sexual allusions. Liddell & Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon* notes the sexual undertones of many of the foods, but many others can only be appreciated through a comparison to other passages from Greek comedy, mime and iambography. With a close reading of Epicharmus' *Wedding of Hebe*—and a close comparison to these supplementary works—I will demonstrate the sexual intent of the wedding feast and offer a new perspective on Epicharmean comic style.