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Wine or Spinning? The Sexual Lives of Women in Horace's C. 3.12 and 3.15

There is a close relationship between Horace's C. 3.12 (*miserarum est*) and 3.15 (*uxor pauperis Ibyci*). They are marked as a pair by shared vocabulary and metaphors. By reading these poems as a set, one sees that together they represent the full course of a woman's sexual life. Horace breaks down this life-cycle into pre-sexual, sexual, and post-sexual stages. Neobule, in 3.12, represents the girl on the verge of sexual maturity, unable to break out of youth's restrictions; Chloris, in 3.15, carries on her sexual life over-long; and Chloris' daughter, Pholoï, approaches her youthful sexuality with nymph-like enthusiasm. Neobule, Chloris, and Neobule's beloved Hebrus have semantically loaded names that make them types rather than individuals.

The odes are joined first by their references to producing textiles. Wool-working traditionally indicates that a Roman matrona is chaste and dutiful and that she contributes to the household's economy. Horace narrows the topos, using it in C. 3.12 to mark the period leading up to a girl's adolescence and sexual maturity and in 3.15 to mark the cessation of a woman's sexual life. Neobule's desire for Hebrus distracts her from her proper occupation of weaving. A *redende Name*, Neobule translates as "new thought." Poised on the brink of adolescence (Cairns 1977), Neobule is experiencing the bewildering early stages of sexual awakening. Chloris (3.15) has reached what should be the close of her sexual life; she nevertheless continues to behave like a young woman, frisking in competition with her daughter. Because of her age, Chloris' proper concern should be wool-working.

Where wool-working marks the asexual ends of a woman's life, wine is limited to its central phase. Neobule, despite her fascination with Hebrus, cannot break free of the restrictions placed on young girls: she is able neither to indulge in love-play (3.12.1) nor to use wine to forget her cares (*dulci mala vino lavere*, 3.12.1-2). Hebrus is named for a river; for this reason, and because of his proximity to Cupid in the ode's second stanza, we should view him purely as an embodiment of male sexuality. Chloris again defines the opposite end of the spectrum of women's sexuality. Because of her age, she should no longer be indulging in wine (3.15.16). As Connor 1987 notes, though, the poet implies that Chloris consumes wine desperately: *te . . . non . . . decent poti vetulam faece tenus cadi* (3.15.13-16). Chloris is trying futilely to hold on to her youth, as indicated by her guzzling of wine's dregs and by her ironic name, "Green."

Both Neobule and Chloris, therefore, are associated with textiles (symbolic of settled domesticity) and excluded from wine (symbolic of eroticism and of joyous sympotic gatherings). Pholoï is the middle term in female development. Aggressively sexual, she is entitled to drink wine; avoiding her own home, she tries to enter the homes of young men. She can "play" (*ludere*, 3.15.12), a euphemism for sexual activity explicitly denied to Neobule (3.12.1) and to Chloris (3.15.5). According to the odes' prescriptions, therefore, a woman can be "too young--the ideal age--too old" for sexual activity.

Neither 3.12 nor 3.15 has received much scholarly attention. C. 3.12 has been discussed largely in terms of its meter, its relationship to archaic lyric, and the identification of its speaker (Ross 1969; Syndikus 2001). More substantive treatments include Nielsen 1980, who rightly notes the conflict in 3.12 between Neobule's restricted female world and Hebrus' more active, display-oriented male world. I believe that Nielsen errs, however, in defining Neobule entirely in relation to the men around her. The same is true of Commager's remarks (1962): Neobule "proudly describes" a lover's achievements. If, instead of allowing Hebrus to define the world of this ode, we focus on Neobule's experience of her world, we find that 3.12 unquestionably describes the beginnings of a girl's transition into adulthood.

C. 3.15 has been readily categorized as invective against the sexual old woman. Putnam 1976 discusses it as a statement about *decus*: the older Chloris behaves inappropriately by violating the norms for her age, while her daughter Pholoî shows excessive aggression for a woman. While in general I agree, Putnam over-reads when he concludes that Pholoî is criticized for the wildness of her sexual behavior. I suggest that instead Pholoî represents the stage of life that Neobule will soon enter and that Chloris should be abandoning. The three women together define three primary stages of a woman's life.