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'DEATH', DOXOGRAPHY, AND THE 'TERMERIAN EVIL' (PHILODEMUS, EPIGR. 27 PAGE = A.P. 11.30)*

The text of this poem, already corrupt in the Palatine, has had a turbulent history over the last two centuries. Here is Page's version, the translation in Gow–Page,1 and my own somewhat expanded apparatus:

I who in time past was good for five or nine times, now, Aphrodite, hardly manage once from early night to sunrise. The thing itself, — already often only at half-strength, — is gradually dying. That's the last straw. Old age, old age, what will you do later when you come to me, if even now I am as languid as this.

In 1982 D. Sider responded to Gow–Page.2 First, whereas the latter had said of ṭεπτιέπτον in line 4 ‘proverbially = “a great disaster”, “the last straw”’,3 Sider attempted to specify the exact sense, for which the ground had already been laid:4 ‘as Kaibel and others have recognized, Philodemus’ reference is to the Termeros who used to kill people by butting them with his head until he had his head broken by Theseus [in fact it is Heracles] (Plut. Thes. 11) … a Termerion kakon is the punishment that fits the crime, as is certainly the case in Philodemus where that which has done the butting [the phallus] has had its κεφαλή “die”.5 We shall return to this explanation later. Sider’s second line of approach came from his belief (correct, I think) that Page’s ἡμιμαθέσες ‘cannot be allowed to stand unchallenged’.6 Gow–Page were chiefly troubled by the repetition: ‘ἡμιμαθέσες repeats both the wording and the sense of κατά βραχύ θυνίσκει much too closely; substitute the quite different ἡμιμαθέσες, ”at half-strength” ’ (cf. Heraclitus 7.465.2 = 1936, ἡμιμαθέσες P: ἴθανές P1), and the lines run well’.7 Sider did not agree, keeping ἡμιμαθέσες, but repunctuating the couplet:

In 1982 D. Sider responded to Gow–Page.2 First, whereas the latter had said of τὸ Τερμέριον [κακόν] in line 4 ‘proverbially = “a great disaster”, “the last straw”’,3 Sider attempted to specify the exact sense, for which the ground had already been laid:4 ‘as Kaibel and others have recognized, Philodemus’ reference is to the Termeros who used to kill people by butting them with his head until he had his head broken by Theseus [in fact it is Heracles] (Plut. Thes. 11) … a Termerion kakon is the punishment that fits the crime, as is certainly the case in Philodemus where that which has done the butting [the phallus] has had its κεφαλή “die”’.5 We shall return to this explanation later. Sider’s second line of approach came from his belief (correct, I think) that Page’s ἡμιμαθέσες ‘cannot be allowed to stand unchallenged’.

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οἴμοι καὶ τοῦτ’ αὐτὸ κατὰ βραχὺ, πολλάκις δ’ ἤδη ἡμιμαθέσες θυνίσκει τοῦτο τὸ Τερμέριον.

* I thank my colleagues, Professors Albert Henrichs, Ian Rutherford, Calvert Watkins, and Mr Alex Sens, and my former colleague, Professor Hayden Pelliccia, for comments on earlier drafts. They are responsible neither for remaining errors nor for adherence to any specific interpretation here espoused.

4 E.g. by Kaibel, quoted by Gow–Page: ‘iam ego were patior Termerium illud malum’. They did not quote him further, but should have: ‘Nam non quoduis malum est Termerium sed quod quis ea corporis parte patitur qua antea peccauerat’. Philodemi Gadarenis Epigrammata. Index Scholarum in Universitate Litteraria Gryphiswaldensi per semestre aestsuom anni 1885 a die 15 mens. April. habendarum (Greifswald, 1885), p. 22.
5 Sider, op. cit. (n. 2), 212–13, and 213 n. 15 for parallels for a play on κεφαλή/φαλлός.
6 Sider, op. cit. (n. 2), 212.
7 Gow–Page, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 399. At A.P. 7.465.2 there is a clear vegetative metaphor at work, which is not the case here.
Now his paraphrase of the first four lines: ‘What he used to do up to nine times before he now does only once, with difficulty (μολις) ; and the thing itself, the act from start to finish, lasts but a short time (κατα βραχύ); and already half-dead his member often dies altogether.’

This seems to me to complicate things even further for at least two reasons: (1) in normal usage κατα βραχύ means ‘gradually’, ‘little by little’, even ‘slowly’ – virtually the opposite of ‘a short time’; and this sense ‘gradually’ would in any case already be represented by the words μολις εκ πρώτης νυκτός ες ήθελον in line 2, which strongly suggests that ‘the act from start to finish’ now takes all night; (2) πολλάκις does not easily qualify θυνίσκει from which it is separated by both ηδή and ήμιθανές. Put another way, πολλάκις δ’ ηδή surely goes together most naturally as an adverbial cluster. So far, then, we have two possibilities, neither entirely satisfactory, for the second couplet: a stop after θυνίσκει with πολλάκις … ήμιθανές parenthetical, or stops after βραχύ and θυνίσκει.

There is a further problem: what is a Τερμέριος κακόν? Is it, as Sider takes it, the same as a Τερμέριοσ τίσις? ‘Termerian trouble’ seems in fact to refer primarily to trouble not for Termerus, but for the people Termerus butted. Plutarch, Thes. 11 needs to be quoted in its full context. The subject is Theseus:

ἐν δὲ Ἑλευσίων Κερκύνων τὸν Ἐρικαδίας καταπαλαίσας, ἀνείκεν καὶ μικρὸν προελθὼν Δαμάστην ἐν Ἑρμίων ἐν τοῖς Προκρούσισθ, ἀναγκαία διαφορὰς κυλήσας ἀπὸ τῶν ἥξεως ἕκειν ἐπράττε δὲ ταῦτα μικρομένους τῷ Ἡρακλεία, καὶ γὰρ ἥκειος ὡς ἐπεβουλεύετο τρόποις ἀμιμομένους τοὺς προκριματίσαντος, ἐθυσεν τὸν Θεόσπορο καὶ καταπαλαίσε τὸν Ἀνταίον καὶ τὸν Κάκιον καταμυσμόγκησε καὶ τὸν Τέρμερον συρρίξας τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀπέτεκτον. ὃς ὠν δὴ καὶ τὸ Τερμέριον [sic] κακὸν ὅμοιαθήνη λέγονθα παῖνιν γάρ, ώς ἐιπέτο, τῇ κεφαλής τοῖς ἐντυγχάνοντας ὁ Τέρμερος ἀπάλουκην. οὕτω δὴ καὶ θερεϊς κολάζων τοὺς πονηροὺς ἐπεξήθην, ὡς μὲν ἐβιάζοντο τοὺς ἀλλόως, ὑπ’ ἕκεινον καταβιαζομένους, ἐν δὲ τοῖς τρόποις τῆς ἕαντων ἀδίκαια τὰ δίκαια πάσχοντας.

The entire paragraph draws a parallel between Theseus and Heracles, specifically in their common mode of punishing wrongdoers with the same fate those wrongdoers had inflicted on others – a system of punishment elsewhere known as Νεοπτολέμειος τίσις.11

8 Sider, op. cit. (n. 2), 212.

9 Cf. Thuc. 1.64.2; 4.96.4; 7.79.5; Anaxagoras fr. 33 Diels-Kranz; Aristot. H.A. 692b15; at Prot. 329b4, Gorg. 449b8, and elsewhere, Plato uses it to describe the gradual progress of Platonic dialectic. The Ibycus (which produced the above examples) reveals that the phrase, rather rare before the Roman period, becomes very common in the medical writers and is often used to describe the gradual progress of disease, etc.

10 The Ibycus supports this, showing πολλάκις ήδη frequently in Theognis, Euripides, Thucydides, Plato, Theophrastus, Menander, in the orators, and constantly in later Greek. When the cluster occurs (forming a single unit) with a post-positive particle, that particle always comes between the two adverbs (as here), and is never postponed to follow ήδη; so πολλάκις μὲν ήδη at Plato, Gorg. 508d5; Thuc. 3.37.1; Men. Perik. 267; Galen, De sanitate tuenda 6.190; πολλάκις δὲ ήδη at Theophr. Hist. Plant. 8.10.3; Arrian, Cyn. 16.3.1; Oppian, Halieut. 3.510; πολλάκις γὰρ ήδη at Gorgias 7.22 (Diels-Kranz); Plato, Gorg. 456b1; Dio Chrys. Orat. 15.12; Galen, de usu partium 3.157, 359, 900 (in each of these categories I have omitted further examples from later Greek).

11 The expression, which does not appear in Plutarch, is explained and defined aetiologically by Pausanias at 4.17.4: it was the fate of Neoptolemus, after killing Priam on the altar of Zeus Herakles at Troy, to be slain himself by the altar of Apollo in Delphi. He concludes: καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦτο τὸ παθεῖν ὑπὸ σπουδῆς καὶ ἔβασε συμβουλέων τίσιν ὄνομαζον. It is hard to say whether ἀπὸ τοῦτο is temporal (‘thenceforward’ – so the Loeb), temporal/causal (‘from this occurrence’), or even refers to Neoptolemus himself (‘they name it after him’). In fact, there may be more than one nuance to the words. I am evading the very difficult issue concerning competing versions and details of this myth, within the Pindaric corpus and elsewhere, since it
Is a 'Termereian evil, or trouble' the same as a 'Neoptolemeian punishment'; for that is more or less what has been taken by critics of Philodemus (who may well have had this latter proverb in mind as they dealt with τοῦτο τῷ Τερμέρου;) I think it is not, and although the inference may proceed from Plut. Thes. 11, it is not the easier one. Let us look at the temporal and logical sequence in Plutarch: Theseus defeated Cercyon and Damastes (Procrustes), in which actions he imitated Heracles, for Heracles had used the methods of wrongdoers against the wrongdoers themselves, sacrificing Busiris, wrestling with Antaeus, fighting Cynicus in single combat, and breaking Termerus' head. Plutarch proceeds with the aetiology of Termereian trouble, in which Heracles has no part: it is from Termerus (ἀδ’ ἀυτοῦ) that Termereian trouble is named; for (γὰρ) it seems he killed those he met by butting them with his head. Like Heracles, then (οὔτω δὴ καὶ), Theseus went about punishing wrongdoers with the same fate they meted out to others. The aition on Termerus attaches most easily to the account of how Termerus killed people, while the final sentence relating the actions of Heracles to those of Theseus brings the focus back to the latter and concludes the entire chapter. But in Philodemus' epigram, from the words τοῦτο τῷ Τερμέρου, Kaibel and Sider first extract πᾶσχον τῷ ‘Τερμέρειον κακόν’ (whose natural meaning would be ‘I suffer a great evil [such as being butted to death]’), and must then supply the sense πᾶσχον τὴν ‘Τερμέρειον τίνος’ (= ‘punishment for the “butter”’). If you look up Τερμέρειον in LSJ9 you will find first a sense ostensibly derived from Plutarch, Thes. 11 (‘Τερμέρειον or Τερμέρου κάκων, τό, prov., a misfortune one brings on oneself’), and second the following: ‘τό τ. = membrum uirile, dub. in A.P. 11.30 (Phld.)’. This second gloss is incomprehensible to a reader of any edition, apparatus, translation or discussion of the epigram from this century – that is from Sider (1982), Page (1975), Aubreton (1972), Gow-Page (1968), Becky (1958), or Paton (1918). But here is the second distich in the 1872 edition of F. Dübner:

οἶμοι καὶ τοῦτ' αὐτὸ καταβραχύ πολλάκις δ’ ἤδη ἡμιθανές θυνίασκε τοῦτο τὸ τερμέρουν.

A third possibility, then: a stop after κατὰ βραχύ, but none after θυνίασκε: ‘hei mihi! et hunc [sc. coitum] breuem: saepius uero jam | semimortuum prorsus – moritur hoc malum’. In this Dübner was accepting Pauw's Τερμέρειον (ισ. κακῶν) and following Jacobs' supplement το(ύν’ α)ὐτότι:14 And stops are likewise present after κατὰ βραχύ, does not directly affect the status of the proverb. On this subject, see H. Lloyd-Jones, 'Modern Interpretation of Pindar: the Second Pythian and Seventh Nemean Odes', JHS 93 (1973), 109–37; cf. pp. 131–2; and most recently L. Woodbury, 'Neoptolemus at Delphi: Pindar, Nen. 7.30ff.', Phoenix 33 (1979), 95–133; the matter will be treated by I. Rutherford in a forthcoming book on Pindar's Paean (Oxford University Press).

12 The Loeb so takes the phrase, and in this is supported by the following γὰρ.
13 Most other references to Termerus or 'Termerian trouble' (Philippus of Theangela FGrHist 741 F 3 ap. Schol. Eur. Rhes. 509; Jul. Or. 7.210d; Lucian, Lex. 11; Suidas s.v. Τερμέρα κακά; Paroem. Graec. i.162, ii.215) give no explanation, but in those instances which deal with the actual κακά, we are dealing with huge (though generally unspecified) problems or troubles, not punishments. For some other late references, not very relevant to the present discussion, see G. Türk, 'Termeros', RE 5A (1934), 731.
but absent after ὑθήσακεν in the other earlier editions, of Tauchnitz (1829), and Brunck (1772–6).15 What is astonishing is that this eighteenth- and nineteenth-century consensus is not preserved in the notes or apparatus critici of any subsequent edition or commentary, only in LSJ9, where it is fossilized in the form of a gloss which is incomprehensible without a research library.16

In 1885 there appeared Georg Kaibel’s edition and commentary of the epigrams of Philodemus;17 he printed a second distich which is in essence that inherited by Page:

οἴμοι καὶ ποτὲ τοῦτο κατὰ βραχύ (πολλάκις δ’ ἡδη ἔμμαθανές) ὑθήσακεν: τοῦτο τὸ τερμέριον.

‘Alas and this one (often already half-dead) is gradually dying. I am suffering the Termerian ill.’ The τοῦτο of line 3 now refers to the penis, rather than the act, while that in line 4 (together with τὸ τερμέριον) is part of a separate exclamation (σκ. νῦν πάνω), and refers to the poet’s actual condition.

Why the change, and what new problems does it create? Kaibel came up with three structural or contextual objections to Jacobs’ and Dübner’s punctuation and restoration: (1) the υὸν of 2 is already qualified by μολίς and further qualification (κατὰ βραχύ) is impossible; (2) κατὰ βραχύ means ‘gradually’ (paullatim), not ‘soon’ or ‘quickly’;18 (3) the first distich constitutes a separate thought to which nothing further can be added. Each of these points is well-taken, and two have already been shown to work against Sider’s repunctuation, as well as that of Jacobs and Dübner.

In dealing with the end of the couplet, Kaibel proceeded to compare Ovid, Amores 3.7, an amusing expansion of Philodemus’ epigram, which dwells at great length on the poet’s inability to perform.19 Much of the humour of Ovid’s poem derives from the fact that it takes him 84 lines to tell us that nothing happened, and he does so fairly explicitly, referring more than once to the offender: 13 ‘mea membra’; 65 ‘nostra membra’; 69 ‘quin istic pudibunda iaces, pars pessima nostri’.20 But Kaibel was concerned to keep such explicitness to a minimum. In rejecting Brunck’s τοῦτο τὸ τερμόνον and Dübner’s tentative suggestion τοῦθ’ ὅτι περ μόριον he notes: ‘nonnull solum brevior [sc. quam Ovidius], ut par est, sed uerecundior etiam longe Philodemus, ut u. 1. 2 docet uerbum omissum. Cauebimus igitur ne spurca uocabula inferamus secundo disticho corrupto et impedito’; and a little later: ‘procul habendi ei sunt qui proprium membro nomen restituebant’.21 He then distinguishes between Strato, τοῦτο κατὰ βραχύ. And in his edition of 1794 (Anthologia Graecae sive Poetarum Graecorum Lusus ex recensione Brunckii, i [Leipzig, 1794], p. 73), as the title suggests, he had printed the text of Brunck, who accepted Reiske’s φθινει μοι καὶ τοῦτο.

15 Brunck, however (Analecata Veterum Poetarum Graecorum, ii [Strasburg, 1773], p. 86), printed φθινει μοι καὶ τοῦτο κατὰ βραχύ. My colleague, Ian Rutherford, without awareness of these editions, had also thought τοῦτο τὸ Τερμέριον might be the subject of ὑθήσακεν.

16 It was introduced in the sixth edition of 1869; Kaibel’s edition, or more likely Paton’s Loeb of 1918, led to the addition of ‘dub.’ after ‘membrum uirile’ in LSJ9 (1940).


18 Cf. above, p. 131; Sider refers elsewhere to Kaibel, but does not address his objection to so taking the phrase.

19 Ovid’s source is unmistakeable: 17–18 (‘quae mihi uentura est, siquidem uentura, senectus, cum desit numeris ipsa iuuenta suis?’) is virtually a translation of Philodemus’ third distich, while the first and second are represented respectively by 23–6 (‘at nuper bis flaua Chloide, ter candida Pitho, I ter Libas officio continuata meo est; I exigere a nobis angusta nocte Corinnam, I me memini numeros sustinuisse novem’) and 65–6 (‘nostra tamen iacuere uelut praemortua membra I turpiter hesterna languidiora rosa’). Cf. also Gow–Page ii, op. cit. (n. 1), pp. 398–9.


Martial, and the Priapic poets on the one hand (who do name the penis) and on the other ‘omnes elegantioris judicii poetae’ such as Philodemus, who must not be charged with actually doing so. He then enlists Pauw: ‘has igitur sordes prudenter euitauit, qui prouerbii memor scripsit τούτο τὸ τερμέριον’. What Pauw meant, as is clear from the translation of Dübner, and from Kaibel’s discussion, is that the Termerian evil (i.e. the ‘penis’) is ‘dying’, but as Kaibel noted ‘potuit fortasse poeta suam calamitatem Τερμέριον κακόν appellare, non potuit membrum ipsum’. Hence his punctuation after θηνίσκει, which removes any reference to the penis other than the vague τούτο in line 3. And his treatment has so convinced other scholars that the earlier punctuation and meaning was expunged from the record.

There are, I think, at least two immediate problems with this reconstruction: (1) The τούτο in line 3 and that in line 4 have different referents – as they do in all the other interpretations. This is not an overwhelming obstacle, but it seems rather wanting in an epigrammatist of Philodemus’ elegance. (2) More telling, other usage in the Anthology strongly militates against taking τούτο τὸ τερμέριον as syntactically independent from what precedes. In poets both before and after Philodemus, when we find τούτο τὸ + noun or adjective, beginning at the medial caesura of the pentameter, the phrase always functions as either subject or object of an expressed preceding verb:

In five of these cases we see not only this general syntactical parallelism, but also rhetorical or prosodic parallelism, as the pattern of choriambic clausulae suggests what is a virtually ‘formulaic’ system: μαρμάρινον / παιδάριον / λειπόμενον / δαιμόνιον / δωδέκατον. Any critic who approaches Ουλόκελε and τούτο τὸ τερμέριον unaware of these patterns, and then proceeds to isolate the two from each other, is treading dangerously.

22 For support he refers to various epigrams where there is no actual word for ‘penis’: A.P. 12.216 (Strato) where it is called ὀρθή (with ποσάθ or σάθ understood); 12.232 (Scythinus) ὀρθῶν νῦν ἔστηκας, ἀνώνυμον;
23 No editor or commentator tells where Pauw published his emendation, and I have simply been unable to find the reference.
24 The instances were provided by the Ibycus. In two cases (A.P. 9.618.2, 680.4) we find τούτο τὸ λωτρὸν, also beginning at the medical caesura of the hexameter, as the subject of a following ἔγραψε.
25 The text is that of Beckby, accepted from the Palatine. The MSS of Theocritus have essentially a different poem, and Gow–Page, The Greek Anthology. Hellenistic Epigrams, i (Cambridge, 1965) print that version, as Gow did at Theocritus, i (Cambridge, 1965), p. 244 = Epigr. 10 (with ἐννέα for ἀνάθετο, and θηκε for τούτο). It looks as if we could be dealing even with two genuine but slightly different epigrams, and should not choose between the two.
26 The poem is assigned to Plato by Diogenes Laertius (3.33), while the Palatine has the lemma Μουσικόν, the Planudean Μουσικόν οἱ δὲ Πλάτωνος. Its relationship to Philodemus 27 is uncertain: cf. R. Reitzenstein, Epigram und Skolion (Giessen, 1893), p. 182 ‘seinem Charakter nach könnte es sehr wohl erst um Beginn der Kaiserzeit oder kurz vorher entstanden sein’; id., ‘Platos Epigramme’, NGG (Berlin, 1921), p. 54.
27 This is parallel in the rhythm it sets up, if not exactly in syntax, since δωδέκατον is in fact a predicate adjective.
Why must we assume, as all editors who print *Τερμέριον* do, that κακόν is to be understood with it? Philodemus' use of the adjective is the first attested, and although the proverb presumably predates Plutarch, it need not follow that every use of the adjective specifically presupposes the actual proverb. Why should we not take τούτο τό *Τερμέριον* as meaning (as it does most naturally) 'this Termerian one', 'this thing that exhibits the qualities of Termerus'. What is distinctive about Termerus, at least in the most extensive surviving treatment of the myth in Plut. *Thes.* 11, is his method of killing, by butting. A 'Termerian thing', then, will be a 'butter', a penis, which can now be allowed to serve as the subject of *θησισκεί*. This is in line with the formulaic parallels quoted above, and also removes the problem regarding the repetition of τούτο. Here is a new version, with Beckby's μοι (Gow–Page: 'deserves consideration') supplementing line 3:

οἷμοι <μοί> καὶ τούτο κατὰ βραχύ (πολλάκις δ' ἦδη ἡμιθανείς) θησισκεί τούτο τό *Τερμέριον*.

'Ah me, and this thing gradually (often already half-dead) is dying on me – this Termerian thing.

The couplet now consists (for the first time in its editorial history) of a single sentence, as do the one preceding and the one following, and (also for the first time) the second τούτο merely resumes the first, specifying its meaning as an almost embarrassed postscript. We find a more or less parallel phenomenon at Theoc. *A.P.* 6.338.1–2: Ὡμιν τούτο, θεαί, κεκαριμένον ἀνθέτο πάσαις | τῶγαλμα Ἑνοκλής, τοῦτο τό μαμάρινον, μουσικός. Although the first τούτο here modifies τῶγαλμα, it is similarly resumed (as object) by the τούτο τό phrase.

We are not quite done with τό *Τερμέριον*. It is, I think, possible to view it not just as a nominal adjective, but rather as an actual diminutive noun – 'little butter'.28 Such a diminutive of a proper name would in origin be of the hypocoristic type suggesting endearment29 and would be parallel with terms of address such as *Γλυκέρα* from *Γλυκέρα*, which are formed on an *ad libitum* basis where the context calls for them.30 There are six other instances just in Philodemus' epigrams (8.1 *Φιλαίνις*, 9.3 *Καλλίστις*, 14.6 *Σαβαδάριον* [from *Σαβανδ’, 14.1], 16.1 *Θερμίον*, 16.5 *Δημάριον* [from *Δημίο’, 16.1], 26.2 *Πηγόνιον*). Indeed, Philodemus may even have gained some notoriety for his use of these diminutives.31 We could also see in τό *Τερμέριον* an appropriate diminutive of the deteriorative type whose real diminutive force


30 So Aristoph. *Ach.* 404–5 Ἐυριστίδη, Ἐυριστίδιον, ὄπακουσσον. Philostratus (*Epist. Erot.* 38) refers to the well-known Glyceria of Menander as *Γλυκέρα*, and at *Misog.* fr. 280 K4. Bentley suggested χαὶρ’ ὧ Γλυκέραν where Priscian (18.251) has unmetrical χαὶρ’ γλυκέρα. Meineke and Kö rte, however, accept Porson’s ὧ γαϊρε, Γλύκερα. On this type of diminutive, cf. Petersen, op. cit. (n. 29), p. 175. There is clearly flexibility in the formation of these diminutives which, given their intensely colloquial nature, must have been far more numerous than our surviving texts can indicate. Philodemus may even have formed it (without strict linguistic accuracy) after, e.g., Τιμάριον (Meleager, *Epigr.* 59–62 Page), or παιδάριον, which occurs at [Plato] *A.P.* 9.39.4 in the same position, and with τούτο τό (for the chronological issue, see above, p. 134).

31 That is, if we accept, as many do, the suggestion of G. Friedrich concerning the 'Socration' addressed in Cat. 47 (*Catulli Veronensis Liber* [Leipzig and Berlin, 1908], p. 228): 'Wir haben nach dem Wortlaut unseres Gedichtes keinen Grund, uns den Socratoren anders vorzustellen als den Philodemus von Gadara, der auch bei Piso in Macedonien war, Graecus facilis et ualde uenustus (Cic. in Pis. 70)'. If this is so, then the name will have perhaps been for Catullus and his group a fine coterie nickname: 'Little Socrates who was fond of nouns in -τον'.

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(reflecting the ultimate fate of the mythical Termerus) aptly describes the present condition of the poet.32 Now with the possible exception of ἔπειρων, the identity of Philodemus’ ἤτον characters is female,33 but that is no obstacle: first, that is often the gender of such words (cf. A.P. 12.216.1 ὁρβῆ [sc. ἑορτάσῃ, ἑορτᾶ]); Lat. mentula,34 etc.), and second, such a transformation suits the reduced condition of the ‘butter’: what once was a Termerus is now a Termerion. Here we may invoke a precise parallel from TSchol. II. 2.235, which characterizes Thersites’ taunting of the Greeks (Ἄρχαιδες, οὐκέτ’ Ἀρχαιοί)’: Ἀρχαιδες: παρομοιασία, οία ‘οῦ Φίλιππος, ἀλλὰ Φιλίππων κεκράτηκεν δεις Ἑλλάδος.’35

To return to the text of Epigr. 27, what are we to say of the repetition in ἡμιθάνες θηνίακες to which Page (and others before him) objected? It will become unobjectionable if it does not constitute a real repetition, that is if the type of ‘death’ in ἡμιθάνες is distinct from that in θηνίακες.36 There are two possibilities: (1) the ‘frequent half-death’ refers to the flaccidity which occurs in the course of the one all-night event. This is then succeeded by the actual death of impotence; but better, I think, (2) ἡμιθάνες belongs to the vigorous stage, for this is the post-coital ‘half-death’ that already used to occur often – five to nine times a night, to be followed by four to eight resurrections. Hence παλλάκει δ’ ἦδη which far from being mere filler now strengthens the contrast between the first and second couplets: the poet’s temporary ‘half-death’ is a very different one from the progressive death of impotence which the poem laments.37

32 Given the nature of Greek society, we will not often find diminutives for ‘penis’; exceptions are found at Aristoph. Thesm. 254, 515 πόσθιον (where the actual diminutive force is also felt), and Clouds 197 πραγμάτων (where the diminutive is perhaps more affectionate, ‘my little thing’); on these see J. J. Henderson, The Maculate Muse (New Haven and London, 1975), pp. 109, 116. Those who so wish will add to these two ληκύθων, for the controversy over which see most recently and conveniently (with further bibliography) J. J. Henderson, ‘Κωδάριον: a Reply’, Mnemosyne 27 (1974), 293–5, and R. J. Penella, ‘Κωδάριον: a Comment’, Mnemosyne 27 (1974), 295–7. We could add ἅρκυνον (in Latin perhaps = ‘particula’), for the controversy on which see most recently and conveniently (with further bibliography) J. J. Henderson, ‘Κωδάριον: a Reply’, Mnemosyne 27 (1974), 293–5, and R. J. Penella, ‘Κωδάριον: a Comment’, Mnemosyne 27 (1974), 295–7. We could add μόριον (in Latin perhaps = ‘particula’), for which see Adams, op. cit. (n. 20), p. 45), which is properly if not effectively a diminutive, and Latin ‘mentula’ is also worth mentioning.

33 Trygonion is an interesting name, perhaps related to our subject. It means ‘little dove’ and has erotic associations: Epigr. 26 Page is a difficult poem, but Gow–Page accept Paton’s view (rendered sensible by his emendation of ἀρβί γυναικῶν to ἡμίγυναικῶν [another ἡμι- compound] in line 5) that is an epithet for his Trygonion, an emasculated priest of Cybele (Gallus) who, when he was ‘alive’, alone among the effeminates adored the Cyprian’s rites and took to the seductions of a Lais’ (trans. Gow–Page). Are we dealing with a ‘dove’ that has become reduced in the same way as Termerion in Epigr. 27? For columba = ‘penis’, cf. G. Giangrande ap. P. Howell, A Commentary on Book One of the Epigrams of Martial (London, 1980), pp. 122–3; Y. Nadeau, ‘Catullus’ Sparrow, Martial, Juvenal and Ovid’, Latomus 43 (1984), p. 862; R. F. Thomas, ‘Sparrows, Hares and Doves: “Source Criticism” and the limits of plurality’ (forthcoming issue of Helios on Catullian criticism).

34 In the name Mentula in Catullus 94, 105, 114 and 115, we perhaps have an inverted parallel for Termerion. Virgil’s revising of the Homeric lines is tantalizing: Numanus Remulus’ taunt of the Trojans at Aen. 9.617 (’o uere Phrygiae, neque enim Phryges’) is set in the context of reminiscence of Cat. 63 and its treatment of the emasculation of Attis; cf. 617–18 ‘ite per alta | Dindyma’ etc.


36 In other poems treating impotence as the death of the penis, the death has actually occurred: Scythinus, A.P. 12.232 (νεκρόν ἀπέκρεμασο); Automated, A.P. 11.29.3–4 (ἢ πρῶν ἀκαμήτης | ἔως, νεκρά μηρῶν πάσα δεδυκέν ἐσο); here cf. the proximity of the language to that of Philodemus (ἢ πρῶν / ἢ πρῶν) – and the two epigrams are juxtaposed in the Anthology (11.29–30). For these, and for Latin parallels, including Ovid, Am. 3.7.65 ‘praemortua membra’ (above, n. 19), see G. Giangrande, ‘Catullus’ Lyrics on the Passer’, Mus. Phil. Lond. 1 (1975),
There is no surviving instance of υμιθανές with this precise force, but that is not very surprising given the subject. We have already cited Ov. Am. 3.7.65, from a poem acknowledged as influenced by Philodemus 27: ‘nosta rimen iacuere uelut praemortua membra’ (see above, p. 133). This clearly responds to lines 3–4 of the Greek (and ‘praemortua’ refers to premature impotence), but it also looks to a prior Latin tradition, which is conflated with the ultimate Hellenistic model. I have in mind Catullus 50.14–16, where the poet uses erotic language (but not the language of impotence) to describe the effect on him of Calvus’ poetry: ‘at defessa labore membri postquam semimortua lectulo iacebant, hoc, iucunde, tibi poema feci’. ‘Semimortuus’ is first found here and is surprisingly rare.38 Did Catullus coin or use it after Philodemus’ use of υμιθανές? If so, both could refer to post-coital exhaustion, real for Philodemus, figurative for Catullus.39 Although it cannot be known beyond doubt whether Catullus had access to Philodemus’ poetry, it is assumed by many that Poem 32.7–8 (‘sed domi maneamus paresque nobis nouem continuas fututiones’) may refer to this same Epigram 27 of Philodemus (cf. 1 εννέα).40

I conclude by representing the temporal scope of the epigram with reference to past, present and future in the following version, which reflects the epigram’s careful play with time, and its juxtaposing of past vigour (1–2) and present dysfunction (3–4), with the latter anticipating the permanent impotence of old age (5–6):

I who in time past was good for five or nine times, now, Aphrodite, hardly manage once from early night to sunrise. Ah me, and this thing gradually (often already half-dead) is dying on me — this little ‘Termerus’. Old age, old age, what will be left for you to do later if you arrive, when already now we are as languid as this?

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p. 140. I have suggested elsewhere (op. cit., n. 33) that in Meleager 65 Page (= A.P. 7.207), where Phanion’s hare uses θησικος = πεθηκα, there may be an obscene level of the same sort. For θησικος in this sense see Gow–Page, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 374, on Leonidas of Tarentum 70.4; also Smyth (Greek Grammar) §1887a.

38 OLD s.v. otherwise has only Sen. Con. 1.7.9; Apul. Met. 6.26, and the Ibycus adds only a second instance from Apuleius, Met. 1.14.6.

39 For Catullus’ clear use of erotic language in Poem 50 (whether metaphorical or otherwise matters not for the present purposes), see most recently D. L. Burgess, ‘Catullus c. 50: the Exchange of Poetry’, AJP 107 (1986), 576–86.

40 Cf. W. Kroll, C. Valerius Catullus (Stuttgart, 1959), p. 60, where the connection to Ovid, Am. 3.7 is also made. I will perhaps be forgiven a sortée into the realm of the biographical fallacy if I note that Epigr. 27 is likely to have a lower terminus of c. 60 b.c. (since Philodemus, born c. 110, presents himself as not yet old; cf. 5–6), while Catullus’ poetic production (even if Lesbia is Clodia Metelli and Poem 83 therefore predates the death of Metellus in 59) is confined to the decade of the 50s. From In Pis. 68–72 it is clear that Philodemus had produced a considerable corpus of epigrams by the year 55.