'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:

6 Trptv Ey) Kal TETVE Kal vvEa, VVV, 'Apo077, TEVTE Kal zTpo)TrlS VVKTOS ES eiOV.

Oft.LO Kal rooT' avTro Ka-ra fpaXv, 7roAAa,Kt 3'

r7tLOaAES, OvrjLaKEL' TgOVTO TO TepJieptov.

c0 yr7pas y7pas, TLr 770' Varepov riv dLaLrKat

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 τό 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. Thea. 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 ἡμιμαθές ‘cannot be allowed to stand unchallenged’.6 Gow–Page were chiefly troubled by the repetition: ‘ἡμιμαθές repeats both the wording and the sense of κατὰ βραχύ θνήσκει much too closely; substitute the quite different ἠμιμαθές,” “at half-strength”’ (cf. Heraclitus 7.465.2 = 1936, ἡμιμαθείς P: -θανείς P1), and the lines run well’.7 Sider did not agree, keeping ἡμιμαθές, but repunctuating the couplet:

οίμοι καὶ τοῦτ' αὐτὸ κατὰ βραχύ, πολλάκις 3' ἡθ ἡμιμαθές θνίασεκε 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 wo patrier 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', Philodem. Gadarensis Epigrammata. Index Scholarum in Universitate Litteraria Gryphswaldensi per semestre aestiuom 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 κεφαλῆ/φαλλῶς.
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 (μολίς); and the thing itself, the act from start to finish, lasts but a short time (κατὰ 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 κατὰ 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 μολίς ἐκ πρώτης νυκτὸς ἐς ἥδεον in line 2, which strongly suggests that ‘the act from start to finish’ now takes all night; (2) πολλάκις does not easily qualify θνησίκει, from which it is separated by both ὅδη and ἡμιθάνεις. Put another way, πολλάκις δ’ ὅδη 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 θνησίκει with πολλάκις ... ἡμιθάνεις parenthetical, or stops after βραχύ and θνησίκει.

There is a further problem: what is a Τερμέριοι κακῶν? 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 Ἑλευσίνι Κερκύνα τῶν ἔξ Ἀρκαδίας καταπάλασας ἀνείλε καὶ μικρὸν προελθὼν Δαμαστὴν ἐν Ἑρυκεῖον τὸν Προκρούτσην, ἀναγκάζεται αὐτὸν ἀποστήν τοὺς κλιτήρας ὅσπερ τοὺς ἕνας ἕκειν ἐπράττε δὲ ταῦτα μμομομένου τῶν Ἡρακλεία, καὶ γὰρ ἕκειν οἷς ἐπεβουλεύτω τρόπος ἁμομομένου τοῦ προκρούτσησ, ἔθους τὸν Βοῦσκος καὶ κατεπάλαισα τὸν Ἀνταίον καὶ τὸν Κάκιον κατεμοιομάχησε καὶ τὸν Τέρμερον συρρήξε τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀπέκτεινεν. ὅτι ὅθεν δὴ καὶ τὸ Τερμέριον [sic] κακῶν ὁμοιαθηνή λέγοντο· παῖνε γάρ, ὡς ἐνυκτερίς, τῇ κεφαλής τοῖς ἔντυχον ὅπλοις ὁ Τέρμερος ἀπάλυκι. οὕτω δὴ καὶ θερίσει κολάζων τοῖς πονηροῖς ἐπεξήθην, οἷς μὲν ἐβιαζότο τοῖς ἄλλοις, ὡς ἕκειν καταβιάζομενος, ὅν τοῖς τρόποις τῆς ἔναντιν ἀδικίας τὰ δίκαια πάσχοιτο.

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 Νεοπτολέμεοι τίσις.

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 ἄχαρτον 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 ὅδη; so πολλάκις μὲν ἄχαρτον at Plato, Gorg. 508d5; Thuc. 3.37.1; Men. Perik. 267; Galen, De sanitate tuenda 6.190; πολλάκις δὲ ἄχαρτον at Theophr. Hist. Plant. 8.10.3; Arrian, Cyn. 16.3.1; Oppian, Halieut. 3.510; πολλάκις γὰρ ἄχαρτον 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 Neopolemus, after killing Priam on the altar of Zeus Herkeios at Troy, to be slain himself by the altar of Apollo in Delphi. He concludes: καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦτον τὸ παθεῖν ὅποιον τις καὶ ἔφρασε Νεοπτολέμεοι τίσιν ὁμοιάζωσιν. It is hard to say whether ἀπὸ τοῦτον is temporal (‘thenceforward’ – so the Loeb), temporal/causal (‘from this occurrence’), or even refers to Neopolemus 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 τὸ Τερμέρειον)? 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 Cynus in single combat, and breaking Termes’ head. Plutarch proceeds with the aetiology of Termerean trouble, in which Heracles has no part: it is from Termes (ἀďφ’ αὐτά)⁵⁰ that Termerean trouble is named; for (γὰρ) it seems he killed those he met by butting them with his head. Like Heracles, then (οὐτώ δὴ καὶ), Theseus went about punishing wrongdoers with the same fate they meted out to others. The aition on Termes attaches most easily to the account of how Termes 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.¹³ But in Philodemus’ epigram, from the words τοῦτο τὸ Τερμέρειον, Kaibel and Sider first extract πᾶσχοι τὸ ‘Τερμέρειον κακῶν’ (whose natural meaning would be ‘I suffer a great evil [such as being butted to death]’), and must then supply the sense πᾶσχοι τῆν ‘Τερμέρειον τίαν’ (= ‘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 Τερμέρειον κακῶν, τό, prov., a misfortune one brings on oneself’), and second the following: ‘τὸ 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:

οἴμου καὶ τοῦτ’ αὐτὸ καταβραχύ, πολλάκις δ’ ἡδή
ημιθανές θνήσακε τοῦτο τὸ τερμέρειον.

A third possibility, then: a stop after κατὰ βραχυ, but none after θνήσακε: ‘hei mihi! et hunc [sc. coitum] breuem: saepius uero jam | semimortuum prorsus – moritur hoc malum’. In this Dübner was accepting Pauw’s Τερμέρειον (ξε.) κακῶν and following Jacobs’ supplement τοῦτ’ αὐτὸ τιν’ Τερμέρειον κακῶν. And stops are likewise present after κατὰ βραχυ, 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, Nem. 7.30ff.’, Phoenix 33 (1979), 95–133; the matter will be treated by I. Rutherford in a forthcoming book on Pindar’s Paens (Oxford University Press).

¹² The Loeb so takes the phrase, and in this is supported by the following γὰρ.

¹³ Most other references to Termes 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. Τερμέρεια κακά; Paroem. Graec. 1.162, 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 ἴησακε in the other earlier editions, of Tauchnitz (1829), and Brunck (1772–6). 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 LSJ², 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; he printed a second distich which is in essence that inherited by Page:

οἶμοι καὶ κατὰ τοῦτο κατὰ βραχύ (πολλάκις δ’ ήδη ἱμαθινές) θηνίακε: 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 (sc. νῦν πάχω), 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 ἵνα of 2 is already qualified by μόλις 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 pessimast nostri’.²⁰ But Kaibel was concerned to keep such explicitness to a minimum. In rejecting Brunck’s τοῦτο τὸ τερμόνιον and Dübner’s tentative suggestion τοῦθ’ ὅτι περ μόριον he notes: ‘non 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 membri nomen restituebant’.²¹ He then distinguishes between Strato, τοῦτο *κατάβραχος. And in his edition of 1794 (Anthologia Graeca 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 (Analecēa 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 θηνίακε.

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 LSJ² (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 nouem’) 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 proaberrii memor scripsit τοῦτο 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 θητίσκει, which removes any reference to the penis other than the vague τοῦτο 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 τοῦτο 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 τοῦτο τὸ τερμέριον as syntactically independent from what precedes. In poets both before and after Philodemus, when we find τοῦτο 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 rhythmical 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 Οὐλόκλειδω and ἣν τοῦτο τοῦ τὸ δωδέκατον 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 ὅρθη (with ποσηθί or σαθι understood); 12.232 (Scythinus) ὅρθος τὸν ἐστήκας, 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 τοῦτο τὸ λουτρόν, also beginning at the medical caesura of the hexameter, as the subject of a following ἔχει.
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 ἔννεα for ἄνθετο, and θήκε for τοῦτο). 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 Μουσικοῦ, the Planudean Μουσικοῦ αἱ δὲ Πλάτωνος. Its relationship to Philodemus 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 τοῦτο τὸ 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. Thees. 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 θνήσκει. This is in line with the formulaic parallels quoted above, and also removes the problem regarding the repetition of τοῦτο. Here is a new version, with Beckby’s μοι (Gow–Page: ‘deserves consideration’) supplementing line 3:

οἷμοι μοι καὶ τοῦτο κατὰ βραχὺ (πολλάκις δ’ ἦδη ημιθανές) θνήσκει τοῦτο τὸ 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 τοῦτο 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: ‘Ùμίν τοῦτο, θεία, κεχαριμένου ἀνθέο σαίνει | τῶγαλμα Ξενοκλῆς, τοῦτο τὸ μαρμάρινον, | μουσικός. Although the first τοῦτο here modifies τῶγαλμα, it is similarly resumed (as object) by the τοῦτο τὸ phrase.

We are not quite done with τὸ 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 Φιλαίνων, 9.3 Καλλίστιον, 14.6 Ξανθάριον [from Ξανθώ, 14.1], 16.1 Θερμίων, 16.5 Δημάριων [from Δημίου, 16.1], 26.2 Τριγύόνων). Indeed, Philodemus may even have gained some notoriety for his use of these diminutives.31 We could also see in τὸ Τερμέριον an appropriate diminutive of the deteriorative type whose real diminutive force

28 For parallel forms in -ερον, see Kretschmer-Locker, Rückläufiges Wörterbuch der griechischen Sprache² (Göttingen, 1963), p. 166: διθήρεων, κρησέρων, πατέρων, πτέρων, and χέρων, and the Ibycus adds μπέρων at Heliod. Aeth. 7.10.3.
30 So Aristoph. Ach. 404–5 Εὐριπίδης, Εὐριστίδιον, ἦπάκουσον. Philostratus (Epist. Erot. 38) refers to the well-known Glycera of Menander as Γλυκέρα, and at Misog. fr. 280 Kő. Bentley suggested χαίρ’ ὧ Γλυκέρα where Priscian (18.251) has unmetrical χαίρ’ γλύκερα. Meineke and Köte, however, accept Porson’s χαίρε, 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., Τιμάριων (Meleager, Epigr. 59–62 Page), or παιδάριων, which occurs at [Plato] A.P. 9.39.4 in the same position, and with τοῦτο τὸ (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 Socration anders vorzustellen als den Philodemus von Gadara, der auch bei Piso in Macedoni war, Graecus facilis et valde vemustus (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 -tov’.
(reflecting the ultimate fate of the mythical Termerus) aptly describes the present condition of the poet.32 Now with the possible exception of Τρογώνιον, the identity of Philodemus’ -tov characters is female,33 but that is no obstacle: first, that is often the gender of such words (cf. A.P. 12.216.1 ὅρβη [sc. ἀγαθία, σαθή]); 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. ll. 2.235, which characterizes Thersites’ taunting of the Greeks (‘Ἀχαϊδές, οὐκέτ’ Ἀχαῖοι’; ‘Ἀχαϊδές: παρονομασία, οία “οὐ Φιλίππος, ἀλλὰ Φιλίππον κεκράτηκεν διὸ Ἐλλάδος.”’ 35

To return to the text of Epigr. 27, what are we to say of the repetition in ἡμιθανεῖς 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 ἡμιθανεῖς 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) ἡμιθανεῖς 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 παλλάς δ’ ἡδη 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 πῶθιδων (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 λῃσθῶν, for the controversy on which see most recently and conveniently (with further bibliography) J. J. Henderson, ‘Κοδάριον: a Reply’, Mnemosyne 27 (1974), 293–5, and R. J. Penella, ‘Κοδάριον: 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 ἄρβι γυναικῶν to ήμιγυναικῶν [another ἡμι-compound] in line 5) that is an epitaph 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 columna = ‘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.

35 Virgil’s reworking of the Homeric lines is tantalizing: Numanus Remulus’ taunt of the Trojans at Aen. 9.617 (‘ο 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 l Dindyma’ etc.

36 On the artistic desirability of such distinct repetition, see D. R. Shackleton Bailey on Horace’s ‘rura ... rura’ (Odes 4.5.17–18) in Profile of Horace (London, 1982), pp. 137–8.

37 In other poems treating impotence as the death of the penis, the death has actually occurred: Scythinus, A.P. 12.232 (νεκρῶν ἄπεκρεμασσο); Automated, A.P. 11.29.3–4 (τῷ πρῶν ἀκομήτησ Ἀσσα, νεκρά μην ἀπά ὀδύνην ἐσο); here cf. the proximity of the language to that of Philodemus (ὁ πρῶν / ἡ 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 ἡμμιθανέως 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: ‘nostra tamen 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 membra 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 ἡμμιθανέως? 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 maneas paresque nobis | nouem continuas fututiones’) may refer to this same Epigram 27 of Philodemus (cf. 1 ἐννέα).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?

Harvard University

RICHARD F. THOMAS

p. 140. I have suggested elsewhere (op. cit., n. 33) that in Meleager 65 Page (= A.P. 7.207), where Phanion’s hare uses ἔνθησικος = πεθησικα, there may be an obscene level of the same sort. For ἔνθησικος 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.