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The Gender of Greek Suicide: Constructions of Humor and Heroism in Epigrams

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Introduction

> συγγνώσθ᾽, ὅταν τις κρείσσον᾽ ἢ φέρειν κακὰ
> πάθῃ, ταλαίνης ἐξαπαλλάξαι ζόης.

> When a man suffers calamity too great to bear, it is pardonable if he takes leave of his miserable life.[1]

> Euripides, *Hecuba* 1107-8

With these words, Euripides' chorus addresses a question pervasive in Greek literature: what drives someone to take their own life?[2] In answering this question, ancient authors explore conflicts between the self and the other, pulls between familial and civic responsibilities, and the fundamental tensions between masculinity and femininity.[3] In fact, one could argue, the issue of gender is at the heart of these suicides. The self-killers are gendered agents operating in a literary world of binary opposites between male and female. Thus, their suicides inherently carry gendered meaning. When viewing literary suicides in this light, three key observations emerge regarding the gendered dynamics of self-killing. First, there are far more female self-killers than men.[4] Second, the motives for suicide tend to follow gendered patterns. Women mainly kill themselves following sexual humiliation or as an extreme act of mourning. Men also commit suicide from grief, but more often their suicide acts as an escape from dishonor or as a catalyst for their anger. Third, in addition to gendered motivations for suicide, there are also gendered methods: women commit suicide by the noose, while men commit suicide by the sword.

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[1]All translations are from the Loeb Classical Library, unless otherwise noted.

[2]For a complete compilation of literary suicides, see A.J. van Hooff, *From Antothanasia to Suicide: Self Killing in Classical Antiquity* (1990) and R. Hirzel, *Der Selbstmord* (1908).

[3]The fundamental studies (written in English) regarding ancient Greek suicide are E. Garrison: *Groaning Tears: Ethical and Dramatic Aspects of Suicide in Greek Tragedy* (1995); R. Garland: *The Greek Way of Death* (2001); N. Loraux: *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman* (1987); M.D. Faber: *Suicide and Greek Tragedy* (1970); J.M. Cooper: "Greek Philosophers on Euthanasia and Suicide" (1989); A.J. van Hooff: *From Antothanasia to Suicide: Self Killing in Classical Antiquity* (1990); A. Katsouris: "The Suicide Motif in Ancient Drama" (1976).

[4]For a demographic breakdown of Greco-Roman suicides by gender, see Van Hooff 1990, 21.

This final observation functions as the starting point of my thesis. Current scholarship has conclusively proven that the sword/noose, male/female paradigm underlies the suicides of pre-classical and classical literature. The paradigm's presence in later branches of Greek literature, however, has largely been ignored. The suicides of Hellenistic and Imperial epigrams are especially understudied, with no sustained research on gendered modes of suicide in these genres.[5] This lack of scholarship is somewhat surprising since suicides are a recurring motif of epigrams, particularly in the sepulchral and skoptic varieties. So the question naturally arises: how do epigrammatists evoke and manipulate the sword/noose, male/female paradigm in their constructions of these suicides? Through my thesis, I intend to answer this question.

When examining the corpus of suicide epigrams, a few overall trends quickly emerge. For one, several suicide epigrams conform to the suicide paradigm, meaning that women hang themselves and men stab themselves. This phenomenon reveals that epigrammatists were aware of the paradigm and used it in their writings, which will be discussed in section two. Beyond the epigrams that associate male suicide with swords and female suicide with nooses, several epigrams invert or subvert the established literary schema to shocking effects. I have sorted these epigrams into two broad sets. The first of these sets is the non-traditional suicides by hanging, which will be examined in section three. In these epigrams, men — not women — hang themselves, a practice that generates dark humor and makes the men into objects of ridicule. Throughout this thesis, I refer to these deaths as 'humorous' suicides, by which I mean suicides that aim to provoke laughter or a sense of amusement in the reader. Conversely, suicides in the

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[5]As far as I am aware, the only works that address suicide in epigrams are A.J. van Hooff, *From Autothanasia to Suicide: Self Killing in Classical Antiquity* (1990); A. Kotlińska-Toma, "Is Ending a Wretched Life Pardonable? Attitudes Towards Suicide in Greek Funerary Epigrams" (2014); and G. Nisbet, "A Sickness of Discourse: The Vanishing Syndrome of Leptosune" (2003).

second set of epigrams (non-traditional suicides by weapons) generate a sense of admiration and respect. These suicides are committed by women, largely to avoid some disgrace, and come across as noble, courageous, and altruistic. Throughout this thesis, I refer to these suicides as 'heroic,' by which I mean suicides that the authors intended to be seen as praiseworthy.

By drawing on the theoretical framework established by Judith Butler, which understands gender as performative behavior, I argue that epigrams use gender-transgressive modes of self-killing to construct their heroic and humorous portrayals of suicide. Since hanging is a performatively female behavior, men who employ the noose appear feminine. It is not a coincidence that these suicides are humorous: the effeminization of a male character identifies these suicides as distinctly laughable to a Greek audience, in no small part due to embedded associations between female suicide and disgrace in Greek thought. Following the same logic, women who commit suicide by the sword appear masculine. This sense of manliness codes the female suicides as heroic, as it brings to mind images of wartime glory and courage. In other words, I argue that the female noose reduces a male suicide to a humorous punchline, while the male sword elevates a female suicide to heroic status.

On a surface level, this argument allows for a richer understanding of how epigram authors manipulated the suicide paradigm of high literature for their unique purposes. The humorous suicides transform the weighty topic of suicide into a laughing matter, while heroic suicides blur the boundaries between male and female glory, both of which align well with the unconventional spirit of epigrams and their interest in pushing the traditional boundaries of literature. But more importantly, examining these manipulations of gendered norms facilitates a close interrogation of the interdiscursive mythologies around Greek suicide. Through these

suicide epigrams, we can better understand the cultural meaning-making processes that ascribed gendered significance to certain modes of death and what it means when those modes were subverted. In short, the very telling ways that suicide was gendered in the Greek imagination.

1. The Rope and the Sword

As previously mentioned, this paper takes as its starting point a conceptual polarity in Greek thought between suicide by the sword, which literary and cultural materials associate with men, and suicide by the noose, which these same sources associate with women. This sword/male, noose/female paradigm underlies most of the suicides in preclassical and classical literature. Tragic and mythical materials, however, best bear out the schema, mainly because suicide occurs with such frequency in these genres. As just one example of many, we can see the paradigm at work in Sophocles' *Antigone.* When the messenger recounts the double suicide of Haemon and Antigone, his works evoke a grim image: Antigone dangles by a linen noose while Haemon lies in a pool of blood, a two-edged sword in his side (1192-1243). In these two suicides, Sophocles' audience would have seen the tragic deaths of two lovers, the victims of unhappy circumstances. But the audience also would have recognized gendered modes of suicide deeply entrenched in Greek thought: hanging belongs to the sphere of women and weapons to that of men.

Of the two elements in this paradigm, the association between suicide by weapons and men makes the most practical and symbolic sense. The proximity between weapons and death in battle makes this *modus moriendi* a natural emblem of masculine destruction.[6] A man worthy of

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[6]It is also worth mentioning that Greek art often makes a symbolic equation between phallic imagery and the sword. For further discussion, see Keuls 1993, 45-47 and 130-36.

the name could die only by the weapon of another in close combat – this is the ideal embedded in

Greek literature from its earliest conception. For instance, in the *Iliad,* Priam tells Hector:

> νέῳ δέ τε πάντ᾿ ἐπέοικεν
> ἀρηικταμένῳ, δεδαϊγμένῳ ὀξέι χαλκῷ,
> κεῖσθαι· πάντα δὲ καλὰ θανόντι περ, ὅττι φανήῃ·

> For a young man it is wholly fitting, when he is slain in battle, to lie mangled by the
> sharp bronze; dead though he is, all is fair that can be seen.
> Hom. *Il.* 22.71-7.

Martial death, Priam says, makes the warrior beautiful. When the enemy's weapon pierces a

man's body, it ends his life but cements his glory. The message here, as well as elsewhere in

Greek literature, is clear: a man must die at a man's hand by the sword.

This rule also applied to suicide, as evidenced by the *exemplum* of heroic self-killing:

Ajax.[7] The hero commits suicide by throwing himself on his sword, and it is this weapon that

allows Ajax to maintain his masculine valor even during the act of suicide. As Loraux says,

"Ajax kills himself by the sword, faithful till the end to his status as a hero who lives and dies in

war, where wounds are given and received in an exchange that, on the whole, is subject to

rules."[8] In other words, Ajax kills himself, but he does so by a sword, and thus in a manner

worthy of a man. In fact, Sophocles explicitly uses the sword to imbue Ajax's suicide with a

sense of wartime honor, since he frames the sword as a gift from the enemy (660-665). This

framing leads many scholars to interpret Ajax's suicide as the conclusion of his discontinued

fight with Hector.[9] In this reading, Ajax's solitary act of suicide becomes akin to death in battle,

making the sword an assertion of his male valor.

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[7]Multiple scholars have addressed Ajax's suicide in great depth, including Cohen (1978), Davidson (2018), Fletcher (2013), Gardiner (1979), Garrison (1995), Hiscock (2018), Instone (2007), Keyser (2009), Mills (1980), Most and Ozbek (2015), Segal (1981), and Starobinski (1974).
[8]Loraux 1987*,* 12
[9]For example: Cohen 1978, 32

Of course, Ajax is not the only Greek man of literature who commits suicide by the sword. Euripides' Menoecus and Sophocles' Haemon both kill themselves with a sword.[10] Even Homer's Achilles considers ending his life in this way.[11] These tragic and epic figures are joined by several characters from the mythographic tradition who turn to the sword in their final moments.[12] For example, in the etiological myth of the Callirhoe spring, Coresus turned the sword on himself rather than kill Callirhoe (Paus. 7.21.1). Dimoites, a brother of the mythical Troezen, slew himself after he fell in love with a corpse (Parth. *Er. Path.* 31). In some traditions, even Narcissus committed suicide with a sword (Konon, Frag. 24). These men all adhere to the ideal that a male death, even if suicide, must occur by the sword. Admittedly, there are not many instances of male self-killing beyond those examined here. However, because the extant cases invariably link male suicide with weapons, it seems fair to say that suicide by the sword was a ubiquitously male way to die.

It is true that no small number of literary women also employ this means of suicide. However, when women touch weapons, they are portrayed in a decisively masculine light. For instance, Deianeira's suicide atop her marriage bed in Sophocles' *Trachiniai* has long been noted as having masculine connotations (Soph. *Trach.* 931).[13] When she plunges the sword into her side, she seems to cast aside female categorization all at once, especially in contrast to her husband who dies emasculated. According to Gould, Deianira's death is a "horrifying masculine way to die and the shock of it reverberates through the play."[14] Deianira is only one, however, of

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[10]Menoecus sacrifices himself for his country by plunging a "dark-hilted sword" (μελάνδετον ξίφος, Eur. *Phoen.* 1090–92) into his throat. As previously mentioned, when Haemon finds Antigone hanged, he turns to the sword (Soph. *Ant.* 1234-6).

[11]When Nestor reports Patroclus' death, Antilochos clutches Achilles' hands "for he feared that he might cut his throat with the knife" (δείδιε γὰρ μὴ λαιμὸν ἀποτμήξειε σιδήρῳ, Hom. *Il.* 18.32-3).

[12]For a complete list of suicides, see Van Hooff 1990, 198-232.

[13]For a discussion of this scene, see Carawan 2000, 189-237 and Loraux 1987, 44-6.

[14]Gould 1980, 57

a series of Greek heroines who commit suicide by the sword, and thus in a masculine way. As another example, Euripides' Jocasta is often cited for her manly death. Unlike the Jocasta of Sophocles, she does not hang herself but stabs herself with the same sword that kills her sons (Eur. *Phoen*. 1567–81). According to Loraux, this masculine death reflects her character redevelopment from Sophocles to Euripides: "she is no longer … above all a wife; she is exclusively a mother, and her manly death should be seen as a consequence of this critical reshaping of the tradition."[15] In short, when a woman turns to the sword, she crosses the divide between male and female ways to commit suicide. She uses a masculine mode of self-killing and thus appears manlike in death. These manly women actually uphold, rather than upset the paradigm; they are the exceptions that prove the durable rule of Greek literature: suicide by the sword was a symbol of male death.

But as for the second portion of this gendered schema: suicide by hanging occurs primarily among women in ancient Greek literature. Sophocles' Antigone and Jocasta both commit suicide in this way, as has been previously discussed. These women are only two, however, of several female figures who use the noose to end their lives. From tragedy, additional examples include Euripides' Leda and Phaedra.[16] Even more cases appear in the mythographic tradition, such as Althaea, Ariadne, Cleite, Erigone, Evopis, and Polymele.[17] By contrast, men do not commit suicide in this way. In fact, no examples exist among the mythic and tragic materials. Consequently, suicide by hanging appears both conventionally feminine and feminizing. As Galetaki comments, it is not difficult "to see the almost circular logic through which these two

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[15]Loraux 1987, 15.
[16]Leda: Eur. *Hel*. 134–36; Phaedra: Eur. *Hipp*. 803
[17]Althaea: Apd.1.8.1-3; Ariadne: Plu. *Thes*. 20.1-4; Cleite: Ap. Rhod. 1.1063; Parth. 28; Erigone: Apd. 3.14.7, Hyg. *Fab*. 224; Evopis: Parth. 31; Polymele (also called Polymede, Polypheme, or Alcimede): Apd. 1.9.27.

assumptions reinforce each other. If only women hang themselves, this must be by reason of their special affinity for this suicide method; conversely, a woman who hangs herself, regardless of other indications about her gender, is perforce returned to conventional femaleness."[18] In other words, hanging serves as a ubiquitously female death that embodies and reinforces the self-killers' femininity. Just as the sword belongs to the realm of men, hanging belongs to women.

At first glance, this link between women and the noose, while self-evident, does not seem logically sound. There is no obvious connection between women and hanging in the same way that there is between men and weapons. Yet, the connection undeniably exists. Various scholars have offered explanations for this phenomenon, but Loraux holds the preeminent place in this conversion with her 1987 *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman*.[19] In this work, Loraux offers not one, but several symbolic reasons for why hanging serves as the privileged instrument of female death.[20] One element at play is the imagery of trapped prey. For women, death is an exit. It is a way to escape from threats that surround them. Unsurprisingly, then, the suicidal women of tragedy are often described as birds, since as Loraux says, this metaphor "presents a concrete image of flight."[21] For these feminine figures who seek to fly away from their earthly existence, hanging is an especially fitting end. The noose ensnares her like prey in a trap, representing her status as a bird in flight, for whom the only escape was throwing herself into the hands of gravity.

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[18]Galetaki 2020, 11

[19]Froma Zeitlin also discusses the gendered significance in *Playing the Other* (1990)*.* Throughout many of her essays she argues that hanging represents the internal dissonance that defines women, an external manifestation of the tensions that they experience internally.

[20]It is important to note that Loraux's analysis exclusively refers to tragic materials. However, the core aspects of her analysis regarding the rope / sword schema can easily be extrapolated and applied to much of Greek literature, as I do throughout this paper.

[21]Loraux 1987, 19

But, more importantly, Loraux also points out that hanging alludes to feminine artifice and seduction. Suicidal women commonly use female accouterment — veils, girdles, headbands, and the like — as their noose. Consequently, they end their lives strangled by their own seductive power, a fitting end for such excessively feminine women.[22] This point is furthered by the idea that hanging's effectiveness depends on the ability of the noose to restrict the throat, a symbol of feminine allure and vulnerability. As the noose closes around a woman's neck, it draws attention to her uniquely female power and weakness. The idea that hanging captures women in their own traps, however, does not end here. Hanging also alludes to ensnaring *mētis*, "which works in the words and actions of women and weaves the meshes of earth or busily tightens knots."[23] For example, it is this *mētis* that captures Agamemnon under an "endless net" (ἄπειρον ἀμφίβληστρον) and renders him helpless against his wife's attack, and Penelope uses the same *mētis* to weave her wedding veil that deceives the suitors and facilitates their demise.[24] Such behavior is deceptive, secretive, and duplicitous. Hanging perfectly benefits the architects of such behavior, as it ensnares them in the physical materialization of the unheroic cunning that they would use to trap men.

With all this in mind, Loraux's analysis makes it clear why the noose serves as a uniquely female death. The noose reflects and reinforces cultural assumptions about women and femininity. It calls to mind seduction, cunning, and the recurrent connection between women and ensnarement (both as the victim and mastermind of such traps). I would add that the noose creates a feminine death diametrically opposite to the male death by the sword: death by hanging

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[22]Loraux 1987, 10
[23]Ibid.
[24]Agamenon's death: Aesch. *Ag.* 1382; Penelope's *mētis*: Hom. *Od.* 2.90-112; for a discussion of *mētis'* ability to disrupt the patriarchy see Long (2007).

is a bloodless death suspended in the air as opposed to a bloody death fixed on the ground. In

fact, as a representation of *mētis*, hanging also functions as the direct antithesis of the sword.

Where the sword cuts and stabs in open warfare, *mētis* ensnares its prey in secrecy. The sword

embodies male power and authority, while *mētis* destabilizes patriarchal systems. In a sense, the

noose symbolizes the ways that women could challenge male authority, and, by extent, the core

tensions between male and female power. Thus, there could not be a more fitting counterpoint to

the masculine sword than the female noose, and it is no surprise that Greek literature asserts

hanging as a woman's way of death.

Beyond being a female death, it is also true that hanging was an act intrinsically linked

with shame and dishonor. Especially in tragedy, the noose serves as a sign of disgrace and ruin.

One would only turn to this suicide method to end a life tainted by disreputable actions. We can

see this attitude towards hanging in Euripides' *Helen.* When Helen finds herself alone in Egypt,

she contemplates various ways to kill herself:

> θανεῖν κράτιστον· πῶς θάνοιμ᾽ ἂν οὐ καλῶς;
> ἀσχήμονες μὲν ἀγχόναι μετάρσιοι,
> κἂν τοῖσι δούλοις δυσπρεπὲς νομίζεται·
> σφαγαὶ δ᾽ ἔχουσιν εὐγενές τι καὶ καλόν,
> σμικρὸν δ᾽ ὁ καιρὸς ἄρθρ᾽ ἀπαλλάξαι βίου.
>
> Death is best. How can it not be right to die? To hang oneself is unseemly: it does not
> look good even in a slave. Death by the sword is noble and glorious, but it is hard to find
> the vital spot that will end the body's life.
> Eur. *Helen.* 298–303.

In Helen's mind, hanging is an unclean death; a death of shame. This same perspective surfaces

in many other writings and cultural materials.[25] In fact, it even appears in the earliest literary

products of the Greek world: the Homeric epics. Although not suicide, it is this unclean death to

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[25]Shame: Plato, *Laws* IX. 873e6; defilement: Soph., *Ant.* 54 and Aesch., *Supp..* 473; dishonor: Eur., *Hel.* 134-6, 200-2, 686-7.

which the female slaves were consigned by Odysseus and Telemachus after they consorted with

the suitors (Hom. *Od.* 22.440-74). According to Loraux, from the deaths of these slave girls

onwards, "the rope dealt the impurest of deaths" in Greek literature.[26]

The fact that the most shameful form of death was also the *modus moriendi* favored by

women is not a coincidence. When women turn to suicide, they often do so following an act of

the shame of sexual humiliation. In these cases of incest and rape, the shameful nature of the

noose matches the situation; the women choose a mode of death that aligns with their disgrace.

At the same time, not all female suicides are inherently shameful in this way. Take, for instance,

Sophocles' Antigone, who committed suicide as a culmination of her familial duty. It seems,

then, that there is a sense of disgrace embedded within the very nature of female suicide. Even if

a woman does not commit suicide for a shameful reason, she turns to this shameful suicide

method because she is a woman, and to commit suicide as a woman is to hang by a noose.

In fact, there are other indications of this connection even beyond tragedy that suggest a

consistent, almost institutional link between women and hanging. For instance, Plutarch recounts

a feast celebrated in Delphi called Charila (Plut. *Quaest. Graec*. 293E). According to Plutarch,

many years earlier the region had suffered from a great famine. When a poor orphan girl named

Charila begged the king for food, he hit her in the face with his sandal. The proud girl then hung

herself with her girdle. After this, the hardships were so unbearable that the oracle was called

upon, who declared that Charila's death must be expiated. Thus, every eight years, a feast was

celebrated in Delphi in which the king distributed grains among people and then kicked a doll

that represented Charila. The doll was then carried to the place where Charila had hanged herself

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[26]Loraux 1987, 15.

and buried in the earth with a noose around its neck. Several other religious and cultural ceremonies were built around the aetiological element of women hanging themselves. In the Thessalian *polis* of Meliteae, the villagers would celebrate the suicide of a maiden who hung herself to avoid rape (Ant. Lib., *Met* 13). Another ritual, this one Laconian, celebrated the death of a chorus of maidens who had hung themselves to avoid an unspecified danger (Schol. Stat. *Theb*. 4.225).[27] Perhaps most famously, Athens celebrated the Aiora, during which women swung on trees in remembrance of the mythical Erigone and the other Athenian women who had hung themselves (Hyg. *Ast.* 2.4.2-5).

Additional proof of the ingrained connection between women and hanging appears in medical thought and activity. For instance, in the Hippocratic writing "About Maidens" (Περὶ Παρθενίων), the text author examines disturbances in the *parthenos* who is childless and unmarried but at the age for marriage. The text claims that this demographic will likely commit suicide at the first occurrence of menstruation. At this time, blood flows to the womb as if going to pass from the body. Not finding an exit, blood accumulates near the heart and the diaphragm. Because of the pressure exerted on these vital organs, a deadly sombreness takes possession of the young women, who consequently feel the need to kill themselves. More specifically, the author specifies that *parthenoi* "hang" (απηγχονίσθησαν) themselves. But why hanging? Although there is no concrete link between hanging and this pathological condition, the *parthenoi's* femininity seemingly prescribes this mode of death. The text authors specify that the *modus moriendi* would be the noose, because how else would a suicidal woman take her own life? Through this text, we once again see an association so omnipresent in the Greek

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[27]Quoted in Cantarella 1985, 92.

socio-cultural imagination that it even infiltrated medical thought: the association between suicidal women and the noose.

As a whole, it is clear that the ancient Greeks possessed a conceptual schema that contrasts masculine suicide by the sword to feminine suicide by hanging. To what degree this schema extended beyond literature is impossible to say. Perhaps — as the Hippocratic text claims — these textual sources are an example of "art imitates life," and suggest that men did have a special affinity for suicide by weapons, and women for suicide by hanging. Modern studies have certainly proven that gendered modes of suicide exist. In the United States, men tend to choose violent suicide methods, such as firearms, hanging, and asphyxiation, whereas women are more likely to overdose on medications or drugs.[28] Maybe the sword/male, noose/female schema reflects a similar concept from ancient Greece. Unfortunately, this would be impossible to research since literature is our only form of suicide statistics from the ancient world. What we can deduce from literature, however, is that the suicides of pre-classical and classical Greek literature operated within a highly codified literary schema. Suicide by the noose was associated with women, while suicide by the sword was associated with men. But how did this literary schema appear in post-classical literature, specifically epigrams? This is the question that will begin to be explored in the next section.

2. Suicide in Epigrams

    I.   Defining Suicide Epigrams

Before examining how epigrams portray suicide, it is necessary to give an overview of the genre. Its name — *epi-gramma:* 'write-upon' — reveals its earliest form: inscriptions carved

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[28]Callanan and Davis 2011, 857

on monuments and dedicatory objects. This general meaning did not last for long. By the fifth

century BC, *epígramma* had evolved to describe a specific epigraphic subset: verse

inscriptions.[29] These poems were a minor genre largely relegated to epigraphic obscurity. As

Fantuzzi puts it, "the history of the archaic and early classical inscribed epigram is the history of

a 'lesser literature,' more subordinated to, than operating in parallel with, orally transmitted

verse."[30] However, the Hellenistic era saw the epigram move from stone to papyrus, and from

obscurity into the heart of Greek literary culture. Professional poets began to create literary

epigrams intended not for inscription, but for written publication. Many of these epigrams

modeled the sepulchral and dedicatory variety, although these also branched into modified types

such as the ekphrastic epigram.[31] Others drew on erotic or sympotic subjects, resulting in poetry

that, apart from an interest in brevity, had no ties to inscribed epigrams. As authors continued to

explore and develop this novel literary form, the epigram became a literary genre fully

autonomous from its lapidary ancestors with a distinct set of techniques, devices, structures,

themes, and types.[32]

At first, this success of epigrams may seem odd. These writings are strikingly different

from anything else in the Greek literary tradition, especially when contrasted with works of

drama, historiography, and epic that defined preceding periods But it was, in fact, this sense of

different-ness that made epigrams so popular among the Hellenistic authors who reinvented the

genre. For Hellenistic poets, epigrams offered a new source of poetic inspiration and, most

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[29]Herodotus describes epigrams consisting of only one hexametric verse or composed in elegiac couplets as ἐπιγράματτα, the earliest usage as the term (*Hdt.* 5.59, 7.228). Thucydides also refers to verse inscriptions with this term (*Thuc.* 6.54.7, 6.59.3).
[30]Fantuzzi and Hunter 2004, 288.
[31]Gutzwiller 2007, 107
[32]Nisbet 2003, xiv.

importantly, a way to write outside the shadows of their literary predecessors. Rather than competing with the looming figures of Homer, Euripides, Aeschylus, and the like, Hellenistic authors invented a new genre, through which they could display their literary expertise.[33] Additionally, as Kathryn Gutzwiller points out, "the brevity, conciseness, and personal tone of the form appealed to the new literary tastes sweeping the Greek world."[34] Just as the sculptors of the period discovered wrinkled old men and scenes from childhood, authors developed a new interest in realistic emotions and experiences. Epigrams, which provided snapshots of human existence, perfectly facilitated the exploration of these new themes. Thus, it is not so strange after all that epigrams came to occupy a central place in first Hellenistic and then Imperial literature.

Most of the epigrams that survive have been preserved in the *Greek Anthology,* a large compilation that also contains imperial and Byzantine epigrams.[35] It is from this collection that I compiled the corpus of suicide epigrams. But what determines that an epigram belongs in this collection of suicides? This first requires a definition of suicide itself, a task easier said than done. Self-killing carries cultural baggage, which complicates any modern understanding of the ancient practice. Contemporary audiences mainly understand self-killers as victims of mental illness. As Hill says, "suicide is understood primarily as an act arising out of intense, morbid, and pathological states of mind, representative of the furthest extreme of human misery."[36] Additionally, modern — or at least most Western — audiences inherit a sense of moral

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[33]Fain 2010, 3.

[34]Gutzwiller 2007, 107.

[35]It is important to note that the term 'Hellenistic' is used imprecisely when referring to epigrams throughout this paper. By 'Hellenistic Epigrams,' I mean those included in the Greek Anthology, not just those written in the Hellenistic period. Hence, authors like Loukillios, who actually composed *after* the Hellenistic period, are still considered among the 'Hellenistic' epigrams.

[36]T. D. Hill, *Ambitiosa Mors: Suicide and the Self in Roman Thought and Literature* (Routledge, 2011), 1.

disapproval towards suicide from Christian thought, so much so that several countries have at some point criminalized suicide.[37] While it is of course impossible to distill modern attitudes into a single sentence, it is fair to say that suicide is largely seen as shameful and pathological, the miserable culmination of mental sickness.

Greek sources portray suicide in a very different light. For one, Greek self-killing is rarely associated with anything even broadly recognizable as "depression," or any similar pathological state.[38] Nor does suicide seem to have been viewed with such blanket distaste. Tolerance, respect, horror, scorn, and even indifference, all coexist in the public discourse around suicide. From these varied, sometimes contradictory sources, Garrison deduces that "the Greeks generally recognized a sharp distinction between honorable and cowardly suicides, and that very often suicide was a response to such social pressures."[39] Regarding suicide more broadly, she claims there was, "social significance attached to suicide and at the same time very little odium or repulsion."[40] Others scholars would likely quibble with the idea that suicide was not viewed negatively. Kotlinska-Toma claims that suicide, "was never praised and only some sorts of suicide were excusable, while the common act of taking one's own life out of cowardice was deemed repulsive."[41] Despite their differences, both of these scholars recognize key qualities of suicide in the ancient world: suicide could be seen as a legitimate way out of unbearable circumstances, self-killers were largely viewed as active agents in their own deaths, and the

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[37] Beginning with Augustine of Hippo's *The City of God,* Christian thought has largely condemended suicide as an act of self-murder that violates divine will. For further reading, see Aries (2008).

[38] By this, I mean that the characters of suicide do not choose death because of an inwards, psychological state, although they often kill themseves in response to external situations.

[39] Garrison 1991, 33.

[40] Ibid., 2.

[41] Kotlinska-Toma 2014, 2

motivations for suicide influenced its reception, all of which conflict with modern conceptions of self-killing.

Aside from these conceptual differences, defining suicide is further complicated by linguistic discrepancies between English and Greek lexicons. The Greek lexicon uses a diffuse set of words and phrase to describe suicide.[42] Such expressions are often broader in scope and more neutral in meaning than the English 'suicide.' For example, *autophonos* can mean 'self-killer' but also 'someone who kills their own kin.'[43] As *autophonos* also demonstrates, Greek commonly blends more general terms with the prefix *auto-* to convey the idea of self-slaughter, such *autagretos* (self-seizing)*, authairetos thanatos* (self-chosen death)*, autothelei* (self-willing). Self-killers can also be those who simply *leipo* (leave) life. On the other hand, Greek uses elaborate circumlocutions for 'killing oneself' such as *katastrophen tou biou poieomai*. Some of these phrases shade the self-inflicted death with a sense of admiration for the show of personal autonomy. Expressions such as *lambano thanaton* (taking death) and *eleutheros potmos* (free fate) emphasize the volition of the self-killer. Many words and phrases also focus on the hand that slaughtered its own body, including *cheiras heautoi epi prosphero* (lying hands on oneself). This is all to say that the Greek lexicon notably lacks a single word that exclusively refers to self-killing. With all this in mind, it is easy to see why defining ancient suicide for a modern audience challenges scholars, as this definition must align the nuanced attitudes and vocabulary of the ancient world with the modern notion of suicide, a hostile word that mainly orients towards the Christian concept of a self-murderer.

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[42]For a comprehensive list of the words and phrases that describe suicide in Greek literature and their appearances in sources, see Van Hooff 1990, 243-51.

[43]αὐτοφόνος: self-killer (Opp. *Hal.* 2.480), someone who kills his own kin (Aesch. *Ag.* 1090)

Nevertheless, a definition is necessary, and so this paper borrows one from *Le Suicide,* Emile Durkheim's sociological study on suicide. Durkheim identifies suicide as "any death which is the direct or indirect result of a positive or negative act accomplished by the victim and which he knows will produce this result."[44] A person may use direct action, such as self-destruction by a dagger, or inaction, such as refusal to eat. At most simple, Durkheim claims that "suicide is always the act of someone who prefers death to life."[45] This definition has often been criticized by classicists as insufficient, largely because it fails to capture the varied expressions of suicide in the ancient world.[46] And indeed, not all ancient suicides fall neatly into this definition. For example, should the Christian martyrs, who provoked death by their own behavior, be considered to have committed suicide? Or those who willingly 'choose death' by entering the battlefield? Or what about those who waste away from grief? Should these, too, count as suicides? Durkheim's definition does not provide a conclusive answer. However, his definition still functions as a useful starting point within which to organize the sizable data set on death in epigrams. Thus, as long as an epigrammatic figure chooses 'death to life,' whether that is through passive resignation, indirect action, or active behavior, I count their death as a suicide.

Even with this definition, a few more factors must be considered before reaching the final collection of suicide epigrams. For one, I do not include instances where suicide is desired or referenced in hyperbole, because my focus is on the performative aspect of suicide. I do, however, include epigrams where suicide is clearly referenced, even if the death is not explicitly identified as self-killing. This phenomenon only occurs in descriptions of well-known historical or mythical suicides, such as that of Ajax or the daughters of Lycambes. By these qualifications,

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[44]Durkheim 2005, x.
[45]Ibid., 29.
[46]For example, see Van Hooff 1990, 80; Hill 2004, 5-6.

I reached a set of 46 epigrams written by at least 26 different authors.[47] This corpus includes a variety of epigrams. Skoptic and sepulchral epigrams make up the strong majority, but a few poems from the declamatory and ekphrastic collections of the Greek Anthology also appear. These epigrams also portray a wide range of characters. The poor and rich, young and old, imaginary and historical, men and women all make an appearance. Most importantly for this paper, of the 46 suicides, 32 of them occur by hanging or a weapon. Only four of the remaining 14 suicides specify a *modus moriendi.* Some of these 'alternative' ways to commit self-slaughter will be discussed throughout this paper. But for now, I will primarily focus on the rope and the sword, since these modes captured the imagination and interest of epigrammists.

II.   The (Traditional) Rope and the Sword in Epigram

So how, then, do these epigrams employ the sword/noose, male/female schema? Or do poets abandon this schema with the invention of literary epigrams, making it just a coincidence that weapons and hanging dominate epigrammatic suicides? Unsurprisingly, given the topic of this paper, the answer to the latter question is a resounding 'no.' By closely examining a few of the suicide epigrams, this section demonstrates that epigram authors were clearly aware of this literary schema in their constructions of suicide. Men stab themselves for stereotypically 'male' reasons, mainly battlefield glory, while women hang themselves, often for stereotypically 'female' reasons, primarily grief, love, and shame. Based on this evidence, it is clear that authors well-versed in the works of high literature brought the association between male suicide and weapons, as well as that between female suicide and hanging, into literary epigrams.

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[47]See Appendix A for breakdowns of the *modi moriendi* (Figure 1) and gender (Figure 2); see Appendix B for the Greek and English translations of the epigrams.

The schema most commonly materializes in the male suicides of epigram. This phenomenon is unsurprising, given that men make up the majority of epigrammatic suicides (67.4%, to be precise).[48] Most of these epigrams are receptions of famous male suicides from literature or history. As arguably the most well-known suicide from Greek literature, Ajax often appears in these receptions. The Greek Anthology features no less than six epigrams on the hero's suicide, a collection that will be more thoroughly explored at a later point.[49] For now, it suffices to say that these epigrams revisit the suicide, seeking new meanings and interpretations from this famous scene as part of an ongoing literary discussion about Ajax's death. In the process, the epigrams often lay emphasis on the physical act of suicide, meaning the sword, as well as the heroic nature of his death. By emphasizing Ajax's status as a masculine hero who died by the sword, these epigrams implicitly recognize the sword as the ideal agent of male destruction.

Nicander of Colophon (2nd century B.C.) provides another epigram that links male suicide with the sword with his reception of Otrhyadas' suicide.[50] The last surviving Spartan from the Battle of the Champions in 546 BC, Otrhyadas was supposedly so ashamed at surviving his comrades that, as the epigram describes, he committed suicide after writing a victory inscription on his shield with blood:

> Ζεῦ πάτερ, Ὀθρυάδα τίνα φέρτερον ἔδρακες ἄλλον,
> ὃς μόνος ἐκ Θυρέας οὐκ ἐθέλησε μολεῖν
> πατρίδ᾽ ἐπὶ Σπάρταν, διὰ δὲ ξίφος ἤλασε πλευρᾶν,
> δοῦλα καταγράψας σκῦλα κατ᾽ Ἰναχιδᾶν;

> O father Zeus, did you ever see someone braver than Othryadas,
> who would not return alone from Thyrea to Sparta his country,

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[48]See Appendix A, Figure 2.
[49]Epigrams that portray Ajax's suicide: *A.P.* 7.145, *A.P.* 7.146, *A.P.* 7.147, *A.P.* 7.148, *A.P.* 7.149, and *A.P.* 7.150.
[50]This scene is most famously discussed by Herodotus in his *Histories* (1.83).

     but transfixed himself with his sword after having inscribed
     the trophy signifying the subjection of the Argives.[51]
     A.P. 7.526

Nicander carefully constructs this suicide as an *exemplum* of male suicide. The epigram is almost overly positive in its portrayal of Othryadas, the model of Spartan virtue who was "braver" (φέρτερον) than everyone. Naturally, in such a highly idealized image of male suicide, the man dies by the sword. There is no other way for a man, much less a warrior, to take his own life.

Beyond Ajax and Otrhyadas, the sword also appears in relation to the deaths of other men. For instance, there is the death of Aelius, a soldier of "high rank" (πρόμος) in the Roman military.[52] This suicide is described by Apollonides (*A.P.* 7.233) and in a later emulation of his epigram by Philippus of Thessalonica (*A.P.* 7.234), both of whom wrote in the 1st century AD. In both tellings, Aelius stabs himself to avoid death by disease, once again demonstrating that if a man must kill himself, it should be done by the sword.[53] In fact, one of the epigrams (*A.P.* 7.234) explicitly refers to this ideal when Aelius says, "Ares kills men, disease kills cowards" (Ἄνδρας Ἄρης κτείνει, δειλοτέρους δὲ νόσος).[54] Here, Ares serves as a metonymic allusion to swords, since he embodies the battlefield and its accompanying weapons. If Ares kills men, it is a sword or similar weapon of war that kills them. According to Aelius, then, a man who does not want to be remembered as a coward must die by the sword. With this statement, he acknowledges and obeys the firm rule that "a man must die at a man's hand, by the sword and with blood spilt."[55]

With regards to hanging, the epigrammatic tradition also acknowledges the sword/male, rope/female dichotomy. With that being said, female suicides appear far less than male ones in

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[51]My adaptation of the Loeb Translation.
[52]*A.P.* 7.234
[53]These epigrams are *A.P.* 7.233 and *A.P.* 7.234
[54]Translation is my own.
[55]Loraux 1987, 12.

epigrams. As previously mentioned, only 13 epigrams broach the topic. Moreover, most of these female suicides do not identify the *modus moriendi*. For instance, Basilio is only said to have died "by her own hand" (κάτθανε αὐτοχερί), while the Milesian maidens delicately allude to suicide by stating that "we instead put ourselves in the protection of Hades" (Ἀίδην κηδεμόν᾽ εὑρόμεθα).[56] But a few female suicides fall neatly into the dichotomy. For one example, take this epigram by Aristodicus of Rhodes regarding the case of Demo and Methymna:[57]

> Δαμὼ καὶ Μάθυμνα τὸν ἐν τριετηρίσιν Ἥρας
> Εὔφρονα λυσσατὰν ὡς ἐπύθοντο νέκυν,
> ζωὰν ἀρνήσαντο, τανυπλέκτων δ᾽ ἀπὸ μιτρᾶν
> χερσὶ δεραιούχους ἐκρεμάσαντο βρόχους.
>
> Demo and Methymna when they heard that Euphron,
> the frenzied devotee at the triennial festivals of Hera,
> was dead, refused to live longer, and made of their
> long knitted girdles nooses for their necks to hang themselves.
> *A.P.* 7.473

Here, the epigram clearly models the stereotypical characteristics of female suicide from the sword/male, noose/female schema. Of course, the women hang themselves, which alone is a conventionally female way to die. However, the female-ness of their death doesn't end there. Demo and Methymna specifically hang themselves by girdles, which only further emphasizes their femininity. These women end their lives hoisted by representations of feminine allure and seduction, a hallmark of female suicide.

Additionally, while the three characters have an unclear relationship with each other, it is clear that the two women kill themselves from grief. This *causa moriendi* again associates the women with conventional female-ness since, throughout Greek literature, suicide in mourning

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[56]Callimachus: *A.P.* 7.517; Anyte: *A.P.* 7.492
[57]Nothing is known about Aristodicus of Rhodes except that he authored two epigrams in the Greek Anthology: *A.P.* 7.189 an *A.P.* 7.473.

disproportionately features women.[58] Mourning was the role of female family members and, the

literature seems to suggest, suicide in grief was the ultimate extension of this role. It was an act

of ultimate loyalty and devotion, whether to their husbands, children, or parents. Moreover, when

a woman does commit suicide in this distinctly feminine way, they primarily do so by the

feminine *modus moriendi* of hanging. With all this in mind, Demo and Methymna's suicide

represent a suicide conventionally female in every sense. Overwhelmed by feminine grief, they

use an instrument with feminine associations to complete an acutely feminine method of suicide:

hanging.

Another example that connects female suicide with hanging is the Lycambids' suicide.

As the story goes, Archilochus, a lyric poet, was outraged when Lycambes called off the

marriage between Archilochus and one of Lycambes' daughters. In revenge, Archiloches

excoriated the daughters in verse, leading them to hang themselves.[59] These women were a

popular topic in epigrams. No less than five epigrams assume the voice of the suicidal daughters

attempting to exonerate themselves against the charges that Archilocus had leveled against them

in his poems.[60] One such imagining is this epigram by Gaetulicus (1st century C.E) that loosely

imitates a sepulchral inscription:

> σῆμα τόδ᾽ Ἀρχιλόχου παραπόντιον, ὅς ποτε πικρὴν
> μοῦσαν ἐχιδναίῳ πρῶτος ἔβαψε χόλῳ,
> αἱμάξας Ἑλικῶνα τὸν ἥμερον. οἶδε Λυκάμβης,
> μυρόμενος τρισσῶν ἄμματα θυγατέρων.
> ἠρέμα δὴ παράμειψον, ὁδοιπόρε, μή ποτε τοῦδε
> κινήσῃς τύμβῳ σφῆκας ἐφεζομένου

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[58] For example, Hecuba in the Troades bitterly rebuked Helen because nobody had ever "surprised her in the act of hanging up a noose or sharpening a dagger as a noble-hearted woman would have done in mourning her first husband" (1012-14); for further discussion on this asymmetry, see Van Hooff 1990, 99-106

[59] Carey 1986, 60.

[60] *A.P.* 7.69, *A.P.* 7.70, *A.P.* 7.71, *A.P.* 7.351, *A.P.* 7.352; for a discussion on this set of epigrams, see Rosen (2007)

> This tomb by the sea is that of Archilochus, who first made the Muse bitter dipping her in vipers' gall, staining mild Helicon with blood. Lycambes knows it, mourning for his three daughters hanged. Pass quietly by, O way-farer, lest haply thou arouse the wasps that are settled on his tomb.
> *A.P.* 7.71

Here, Gaetulicus clearly sees Archilochus as a "vituperative satirist, an angry, bitter poet responsible for the deaths of innocent girls."[61] The epigram portrays Archilochus as a violent intruder into Helicon, the traditional locus of poetic inspiration, polluting the serene space with blood from his writings. This decisively negative stance on the power of poetry is markedly unusual in Greek literature. Whether it serves as a criticism of the iambic tradition or an attack against a fellow poet, this stance alone makes this epigram worthy of study. But more importantly, the epigram serves as another example of the connection between women and hanging. Driven to suicide by mocking words, the daughters turned to the noose. Their suicide is, like the deaths of Kleite, Demo, and Methymna, stereotypically feminine in motive. Their character was undermined, and so, for the same reasons that Iokaste, Canace, and many others kill themselves – the destruction of their reputation – they commit suicide. And of course, their *modus moriendi* matches the female nature of this death: they end their lives hanging by the noose.

With all this in mind, the epigram authors undeniably recognized the literary schema that associates male suicide with weapons, and female suicide with hanging. Their portrayals of Otrhyadas, Aelius, Demo, Methymna, and others make this abundantly clear. Of course, this should not come as a surprise, given how self-consciously Hellenistic authors navigated their literary heritage. Even as these poets created new genres outside the shadows of authors who had

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[61]Rosen 2007, 465.

become classics by the Hellenistic period they also drew on the language and tropes of these same authors to showcase their poetic ability. Thus, in the same way that Anyte invokes epic language in her lament for a puppy (Anyte 10), or that Callimachus models Basilio's death on messenger speeches from tragedy (*A.P.* 7.517), the epigram authors recognized and utilized the sword/noose, male/female schema in their writings. But what this paper now aims to explore is how these epigrammatists also played with tradition; how they subverted and reimagined these gendered modes of dying to fit the unique purposes of epigram as a genre that aims to shock its reader and push the existing boundaries of literature.

3. Humorous Suicides

    I.   Suicide and Dark Humor in Epigrams

As previously discussed the Greek world possessed a wide range of literary attitudes toward suicide, from distaste to admiration to indifference. However, even among these varying attitudes, pre-classical and classical literature shows a consistent tone toward suicide. Tragedy, historiography, philosophy, and all other forms of literature discuss self-killing with a universal sense of gravity.[62] The same can not be said of epigrams. These writings make no claims to be dispassionate or high-minded in their treatment of suicide. On the contrary, many epigrams exploit suicide as fodder for humor. These epigrams pull no punches in their brutal mockery of the self-killers, who primarily come from an established repertoire of humorous stereotypes. They approach this traditionally serious topic with a playful touch that seems simultaneously unsettling and shocking. Instead of eliciting a sense of tragedy or pity, these suicides provoke a

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[62]The one possible exception would be Old Comedy. However, while these writings do occasionally reference suicide in a light-hearted way, they only do so in hyperbole. For example, in Aristophanes' *The Frogs,* Hercules recommends Dionysus to commit suicide if he wishes to visit Euripides (120-135).

sense of dark humor, by which I mean "humor dealing with subjects that are usually too serious to be funny."[63]

Epigrams are certainly not the first Greek genre to utilize dark humor. This particular form of humor had existed in the Greek world for centuries, from the "high" epic and tragedy, to prose historiography, to the "low" inscribed epigram. Stephen Halliwell, in his book on Greek laughter, acknowledges its "capacity to transmute what ordinarily counts as horrific . . . into an occasion for somebody's unabashed mirth."[64] Indeed, the Greek literary tradition often leaped on physical, mental, and character flaws as good fodder for humor. In his book on the origins of visual humor in Greek vase painting, Alexandre Mitchell showed that disability and disease were unambiguously caricatured and aroused laughter: "anything contrary to the norm was ridiculed."[65] Similarly, Stephen Kidd, in his book on nonsense in ancient Greek comedy, remarks that "laughing at the mentally ill was something of an institution in much of the ancient world" and "a Greek pastime."[66] In fact, this phenomenon exists even in Homer, the pinnacle of grand literature: Hephaestus' physical deformities often make him the object of laughter and jokes.[67] And especially in the humor of Old Comedy, writers would exploit serious or taboo material to amuse and shock their audience. For example, Cowan argues that Aristophanes employs dark humor as an apocalyptic writer with "double vision."[68]

But at no point in Greek literary history did dark humor flourish more than the Hellenistic. Generally speaking, scholarship on Hellenistic authors emphasizes their creative

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[63]Raskin 2008, 531.
[64]Halliwell 2008, 442.
[65]Mitchell 2009, 235.
[66]Kidd 2014, 43.
[67] For example: Hom. *Il*. 1.597–600
[68]Bloom and Hobby 2010, 1.

process as focused on literary allusion, mythology, and etiology. However, during the Hellenistic

era, a time when poetry sought to explore extremes of human existence, dark humor also

abounded. Especially in the writings of poets who belonged to the tradition of Greek iambic

poetry, a form that originated from ritual obscenity, authors often played with morbid, horrific,

and otherwise unsettling topics.[69] Tsacona states that this extensive emergence of humor in a

wider variety of texts is often connected with the recontextualization of generic conventions,

using as an example postmodern texts, in which "generic conventions are creatively violated, and

genre-mixing or genre hybridization is common practice."[70] To this end, it makes sense that the

Hellenistic authors turned to dark humor as they reworked, transformed, and broke generic rules

established in poetry and performance of previous centuries throughout the Ancient

Mediterranean.

In fact, it is during the Hellenistic period that we see the 'comedizing' of suicide for the

first time in works such as a comedy by Crobylus — who wrote sometime after 324 BC —

entitled "The Man Who Hangs Himself" (Ἀπαγχόμενος). But epigrams latched onto this new

trope like no other genre. As previously mentioned, suicide and dark humor often emerge side by

side in Hellenistic epigrams. These jokes tend to be clever, but also unsubtle in their exploitation

of character flaws to create a humorous suicide. For example, in one epigram by Loukillios (1st

century CE), a miserly man's suicide becomes a source of laughter:

> Ποιήσας δαπάνην ἐν ὕπνοις ὁ φιλάργυρος Ἕρμων
>   ἐκ περιωδυνίας αὐτὸν ἀπηγχόνισεν.

Hermon the miser, having spent money in his sleep, hanged himself from vexation.

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[69]For an in depth discussion of dark humor in the works of Callimachus, Cercidas, Machon, and Herodas in particular, see But (2010).
[70]Villy Tsakona 2017, 489-503.

Here the epigram pokes fun at Hermon's extreme love for money. This obsession renders

Hermon mentally unstable, so much so that he can not even bear the thought of spending money

in a dream and hangs himself. Such pathetic incompetence at handling life makes Hermon

distinctly laughable. His suicide is not worthy of pity, since it stems from his comic inadequacy:

a reader is welcome to mercilessly laugh at the absurd character, who committed the extreme act

of suicide in response to a mundane situation.

Other epigrams employ a similar tactic, playing with the extreme nature of suicide to

create a sense of levity in the poem. Another one of Loukillios' epigrams dryly remarks that a

young boy named Marcus "hanged himself" (αὐτὸν ἀπηγχόνισεν) after fighting with his father.[71]

Yet another epigram by Loukillios laughs at Aulus the astrologer, who predicted that he had only

four hours to live (*A.P.* 11.164). When five hours passed, he feared he would have to live on as a

charlatan, and so hung himself to make the horoscope true. Unlike the characters of high

literature who commit suicide in the face of extreme despair, grief, fury, or shame (especially

regarding sexual humiliation or military defeat), the catalyst for these suicides is minor

annoyances. In doing so, these epigrams create an incongruence between the serious expectations

of suicide and the actual contents of the poems. It is this incongruence that transforms suicide

into a source of comedy and allows the reader to laugh at these ridiculous individuals who were

unable to handle superficial inconveniences.

On a local level, it seems to be this juxtaposition between action and circumstances that

makes these suicides so distinctly humorous. By blending the seriousness of suicide with

comedically inadequate characters and their equally ridiculous behavior, the epigrams are able to

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[71]*A.P.* 11.90

laugh at a subject "usually too serious to be funny."[72] This appropriation of the suicide theme

from high literature aligns well with epigrams and their interest in testing literary boundaries.

They revisit a traditional theme, but from a completely different perspective in order to shock

and amuse their audience. However, these epigram authors do not simply subvert the tone of

high literature in their approach to suicide. A key part of the suicide's humor also stems from the

self-killers' *modus moriendi.* In all three of the cases examined above, hanging is the preferred

mode of suicide. This trend continues into all instances of 'humorous' suicides from the extant

corpus of epigrams. As the next section demonstrates, far from a meaningless aesthetic choice,

hanging serves a critical role in these jokes.

II.   A Woman's Suicide for a Man's Death

As previously mentioned, virtually no attention has been paid to the significance of

hanging in suicide epigrams. Most scholars seem to dismiss hanging as an immaterial or

circumstantial part of the jest. In his groundbreaking survey on Greco-Roman suicide, Anton van

Hooff simply says that, in epigrams, "hanging as a method is prescribed by the situation."[73] By

this logic, the fact that all 'humorous' suicides occur by the noose is just a coincidence. To be

sure, on a case-by-case level, many hangings could be explained as a situational factor. For

instance, in one epigram by Statyllius Flaccus, a miserable person was about to hang himself, but

at the final moment he discovered a pot full of gold (1st century A.D.).[74] The unlucky owner later

found the rope in place of his gold. Overwhelmed by despair, the owner "hanged himself with

the noose which he had found" (ἧψεν ὃν εὖρε βρόχον). In this case, Van Hooff argues, hanging

as a method is prescribed by the situation: the gold had to be hidden in a remote place, "the same

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[72]Raskin 2008, 531.
[73]Van Hooff 1990, 148.
[74] *A.P.* 9.44; the Greek Anthology features this same theme twice, both in this epigram and *A.P.* 9.45

loneliness the would-be suicide looked for."[75] Of course, isolation does not necessarily mandate hanging — a sword could be utilized in an empty field just as easily as a battlefield — and so this argument already seems somewhat tenuous.

Another logistics-related explanation could be that the self-killers simply could not afford a sword or similar weapon, and in their desperate state, turn to hanging as the most readily available solution. Several epigrams feature suicides that would support this theory. For instance, after losing his sole sheep and cow, a "poor" (πενιχρὸς) farmer named Aristides hanged himself with the "strap of his wallet" (πηροδέτῳ ἱμάντι) from either a pear tree or shed, depending on the epigram.[76] Likewise, Menophanus "hung himself from hunger on another man's oak" (διὰ λιμὸν ἐκ δρυὸς ἀλλοτρίας αὑτὸν ἀπηγχόνισεν).[77] His land was so small that there wasn't even enough room to die: he had to use another man's tree. For these men, their suicide stems from their impoverished existence, and it certainly seems that they would not have the economic means to own weapons. In the cases of Aristedes and the aforementioned unlucky gold owner, it is even an explicit part of the joke that they hang themselves because they had no other possessions besides the wallet string and empty rope.

But ascribing such a uniform pattern (it can not be overstated that *all* humorous epigrams use hanging as their *modus moriendi*) to mere logistics is an unsatisfactory solution. Especially since satirical epigrams exist in a cartoon-like, fictional world not at all defined by logic, this phenomenon begs a closer examination. And so Van Hooff offers another solution, suggesting that "in these jokes, hanging … underlines the miserable character of the ridiculous

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[75]Van Hooff 1990, 148.
[76] Epigrams that claim he hung himself from a beam inside the shed: *A.P.* 9.155, *A.P.* 9.255; Epigram that claims he hung himself from a pear-tree: *A.P.* 9.149.
[77]*A.P.* 11.249

protagonists."[78] Here, van Hooff comes closer to the conclusion that I hope to reach. Although he still overlooks hanging's gendered significance, this point begins attempts to unpack the literary-cultural connotations of hanging. Rather than viewing hanging in a literary vacuum, van Hooff points out that Greek literature perceives hanging as a shameful form of death, as has been previously discussed. Given these shameful connotations, van Hooff argues that hanging is well suited for the pathetic characters of humorous epigrams. Certainly, this reasoning follows a logical path: an impure and shameful form of death would better allow the epigrammatists and their audiences to laugh at humorous stereotypes of the poor, the disabled, and the stupid.

However, there is another layer of meaning to hanging as the default *modus moriendi* of humorous suicides. Yes, it is indisputable that hanging was a disgraceful and shameful form of death. But, as previously discussed, hanging is also a woman's way of death. These associations do not — and cannot — exist independently of each other, but instead uphold one another in a somewhat circular logic: hanging is shameful partially because of its connection with femininity, while female suicides are shameful partially because they largely occur by hanging. Thus, they cannot be treated separately from each other, and the noose cannot only represent desperation, as van Hooff suggests. Literary hanging served as a performative ritual inscribed with a network of socially-constructed meanings created by association with others. Through a complex constellation of literature, medical treatises, and cultural practices, hanging simultaneously evoked concepts of shame, disgrace, desperation, impurity, and above all, femininity in the Greek mind.

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[78]Van Hooff 1990, 71.

It seems, then, that the phenomenon of suicide by hanging was an act of performative femaleness. This conclusion is supported by the theoretical framework developed by Judith Butler.[79] Throughout her research, Butler argues that gender can be understood as a performance: "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame … congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being."[80] In other words, gender is performative, in the sense that it has no notional validity outside of the acts that constitute it; the repetition of acts, gestures, desires, and other behaviors creates the identity these acts claim to express. With regard to ancient suicide, then, Butler's theory shows that each narrative of Greek self-killing offers a performance of gender. As an act committed by gendered subjects, but also as one carrying its own set of gendered connotations, suicide participates in ongoing performance in the public consciousness on gendered suicide methods. The sword/male, noose/female schema is a clear by-product of these performances. Through a series of literary repetitions imbued with cultural meaning, the sword became gendered as a male *modus moriendi.* By the same logic, the act of hanging became a ubiquitously female act, a symbol of performative femininity in the Greek consciousness.

From this idea that hanging serves as a performatively female behavior, the fact that the male self-killers of humorous epigrams die by hanging gains new significance. Rather than just a chance mode of death or a reflection of their desperate state, these hangings effeminize the suicidal characters. These self-killers engage in a ritualized pattern of suicide, that a Greek reader would identify as performatively female. In other words, the humorous epigrams assign a

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[79]Butler's primary texts are *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* (1988) and *Gender Trouble* (1989).
[80]Butler 1989, 45.

woman's suicide to a man's death. With all this in mind, it is worth revisiting one of humorous

suicides that van Hooff identifies as a 'circumstantial' hanging:

> Χρυσὸν ἀνὴρ εὑρὼν ἔλιπε βρόχον· αὐτὰρ ὁ χρυσὸν
>   ὃν λίπεν οὐχ εὑρὼν ἧψεν ὃν εὗρε βρόχον.

> A man finding gold left his halter, but the man who had left the gold and did not find it,
> hanged himself with the halter he found.
> *A.P.* 9.44

In this brief epigram, there is a series of narrative contrasts: the abandoned and found, the lucky

and unlucky, the gold and the halter. There is also the contrast between the male character and

his female suicide. Because only women hang themselves, the unlucky man performatively dies

as a woman. With this upheaval of gendered tradition, the man's already ridiculous character

becomes even more laughable. He is so pathetic that he must use a female mode of death, the

most pathetic and shameful way of all to commit suicide.

In fact, even the specific instrument of hanging — a *brókhos*— draws attention to the

feminine nature of his death. Throughout suicide literature, *brókhos* is a common term for the

noose by which women end their lives. In the *Odyssey,* it is by a *brókhos* that Epicaste hangs

herself from the rafters (11.278), and it is also a *brókhos* that Telemachus places around the

necks of the slave girls (22.473). Antigone dangles by a *brókhos* (Soph. *Ant.* 1219), and the

brókhos is Phaedra's instrument of suicide (Eur. *Hipp.* 779). The noose is a feminine way to die,

and a *brókhos* is the most feminine of the nooses. It is clear, then, that even on a semantic level,

the epigram deliberately plays with gender transgressive behavior in its construction of humor.

The unlucky man hangs himself by the female noose, effectively dying a prescribed female

death. This sharp contrast between how a man should commit suicide (weapons), and how this

self-killer actually commits suicide (hanging), enforces the humorous sense of this suicide.

But is it the female-ness of these suicide epigrams that make them humorous? Or is it because the deaths are humorous that they use a female mode of death? The answer, I would argue, is a mixture of both. Since hanging is a performatively female action, these male characters essentially die as a woman, or at least that is what it would have seemed to a Greek audience, which — as I have shown — would help transform the suicide from a serious to a humorous concept. At the same time, the epigram authors likely chose this construction to further mock an already pathetic character. But regardless, it is this juxtaposition between a male suicide and a female mode of death that makes hanging so perfectly suitable for the pathetic characters of epigram, and in fact, what codes them as so ridiculously humorous. Thus, it appears that the authors specifically play with the concept of gender performativity in their constructions of humorous suicides. They upset the established dichotomy, and in this upheaval of audience expectations, form a new and humorous way to portray suicide. By placing the noose around a man's neck, they subverted gendered modes of dying to shock and amuse their audience.

Hanging plays yet another role in the epigrams' constructions of suicide, at least with regard to a specific subset of humorous epigrams. In book 11, several epigrams exist that mock suicidal *leptoi,* such as this one by Loukillios:

> Ἐν καλάμῳ πήξας ἀθέρα Στρατονικος ὁ λεπτός,
>   καὶ τριχὸς ἐκδήσας, αὐτὸν ἀπηγχόνισεν·
> καὶ τί γάρ; οὐχὶ κάτω βρῖσεν βαρύς· ἀλλ᾽ ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν
>   νηνεμίας οὔσης, νεκρὸς ἄνω πέταται

> Thin Stratonicus fixed on a reed a spike of corn and attaching himself to it by a hair hanged himself. And what happened? He was not heavy enough to hang down, but his dead body flies in the air above his gallows, although there is no wind
> *A.P.* 11.91

Here, Loukillios chuckles at the attempted suicide of Stratonicus. In a scene of comical

implausibility, the *leptos* fails to successfully hang himself. He is so small and weak that he can

not even kill himself in a stereotypically female way. Due to his physical incapacity, he performs

the only action more laughable than male suicide by hanging: a failed male suicide by hanging.

Many other skoptic epigrams, both regarding suicide and not, feature these comedic

leptos. For example, Diophantos was so thin that he could hang himself with a spiders web (*A.P.*

11.111), Marcus climbed inside an Epicurean atom (*A.P.* 11.93), and Gaius was so insubstantial

that there was nothing to bury when he died (11.92). But who were these *leptoi*? According to a

dictionary definition, this would simply mean 'thin' or 'light' men. Indeed, at first glance it may

seem like the *leptoi* are just hyperbolically thin figures. However, *leptoi* doesn't just refer to the

physical attributes of these men, but a specific physiological condition. Gideon Nisbet effectively

proves that the *leptoi* of skoptic epigrams represent scholars and intellectuals.[81] These men spent

their time reading and buried in books, while their bodies waste away, hence their comically thin

and withered appearance. There is also likely a play on words here: the *leptoi* spent their time

engrossed in literature. Hellenistic writings revolved around the ideal of *leptos*: literary

productions that were clean, miniature, and elegant. In that sense, the *leptoi* became the *leptos*

that they spend their time studying.

What, however, does this have to do with a discussion on gender and suicide? This

fixation on the *leptoi's* physical thinness identifies their bodies as 'not' masculine, since the

leptoi do not maintain the masculine ideal of physical health. As Nisbet says, "elite males within

Greek culture … pursue a conventional and idealized Hellenic masculinity which is both

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[81] Nisbet 2003, 196

well-read and well-exercised: a healthy mind in a healthy body."[82] The *leptoi* do not conform to

this ideal. Instead, they only exercise their mind. Consequently, their bodies seem less than

masculine. In other words, feminine. Such feminized characters are especially suited for suicide

by the female noose. They lack the strength and manly character that Greek literature mandates

for suicide by the sword. Their effeminized bodies do not have the strength to commit any

suicide other than hanging. Unmanned by intellectual pursuits, the *leptoi* are doomed to a

feminine death by hanging, a phenomenon that clearly emphasizes their pathetic nature.

As a whole, the humorous suicides of epigram formulate their constructions of dark

humor around a contrast between the male self-killers and their female *modus moriendi.* This

contrast imbues the seriousness of suicide with a sense of ridiculousness, enabling a reader to

laugh at these feminized characters. The epigrams absorb the literary discourses of death and

suicide, but then deliberately subvert these traditions to match their specific aims: the

transformation of suicide into a laughing matter. In the case studies more closely examined here

— that of the unlucky gold owner and the *leptoi* — it is clear how looking at these epigrams

through the lens of the sword/male, noose/female schema allows for a richer understanding of

epigrammatic portrayals of men, humor, and suicide. If one does not examine the suicides

through the gendered schema, the exact reasons for their 'humorous' nature seem unclear. By the

nature of jokes, they will not fully explain themselves, leaving the reader to put the pieces

together. Viewing these epigrams not as existing within a literary vacuum, but operating within a

rich literary tradition, allows us to better understand the jokes themselves and how they drew on

a constellation of gendered associations in their constructions of humorous suicides.

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[82] Nisbet 2003, 199

4. Heroic Suicides:

I.   Suicide and Heroism in Epigrams

Epigrams, however, demonstrate more than the relentless mockery of self-killing that we see in humorous epigrams. Epigrammists also convey a sense of admiration towards those who end their own lives. This perspective can often be seen in epigrams on individuals who willingly chose death for philosophical reasons. As one example, consider this epigram in dialogue form by Meleager.

α. Εἶπον ἀνειρομένῳ τίς καὶ τίνος ἐσσί. β. Φίλαυλος
Εὐκρατίδεω. α. Ποδαπὸς δ᾽ εὔχεαι . . .
α. Ἔζησας δὲ τίνα στέργων βίον; β. Οὐ τὸν ἀρότρου,
οὐδὲ τὸν ἐκ νηῶν, τὸν δὲ σοφοῖς ἔταρον.
α. Γήραϊ δ᾽ ἢ νούσῳ βίον ἔλλιπες; β. Ἤλυθον
Ἄδαν αὐτοθελεί, Κείων γευσάμενος κυλίκων.
α. Ἦ πρέσβυς; β. Καὶ κάρτα.
α. Λάχοι νύ σε βῶλος ἐλαφρὴ σύμφωνον πινυτῷ σχόντα λόγῳ βίοτον.

A. "Tell him who enquires, who are you and who was your father?" B. "Philaulus son of Eucratides." A. "And what country do you claim to be from?" B. ". . ."
A. "What livelihood did you choose when alive?" B. "Not that of the plough nor that of ships, but that which is gained in the society of sages."
A. "Did you leave life from old age or from sickness?" B. "Voluntarily I came to Hades, having drunk of the Cean cup[s]."
A. "Were you old?" B. "Yes, very old."
A. "May the earth rest light upon you, for the life you lead was in accordance with wisdom and reason."[83]
A.P. 7.70

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[83]My adaptation of the Loeb Translation.

In the epigram, Philaulus clearly states that he died "of his own will" (αὐτοθελεί). The interlocutor accepts, and even praises, this announcement. But the reasons for the interlocutor's praise are more complex than may initially appear. In fact, a close reading suggests the interlocutor respects Philaulus's adherence to particular rules of life — of which his suicide was a byproduct – not the act of suicide itself.

Evidence for this interpretation comes from Philaulus' *modus moriendi*: he drank from the "Cean Cups," a metonymic reference to hemlock.[84] This allusion to the exotic 'Cean custom' serves a dual purpose. For one, it connects Philaulus, who self-identifies as a philosopher, to the most famous 'philosophical' suicide: that of Socrates, who died after drinking hemlock. Secondly, it refers to a well-known practice on Ceos, where men over sixty were allegedly compelled to drink poison.[85] The Cean suicide functioned as a kind of self-sacrifice since the island didn't have sufficient resources to support unproductive community members. Like the Cean elders, Philaus chooses death instead of wretched existence, and like Socrates, he willingly chose to die after living a life in accordance with his own values. The interlocutor praises this conscious resignation from life, not necessarily because of the act itself, but because it acted as the natural conclusion to the "wise and prudent" life befitting a philosopher in the "society of sages."

Similar praise for philosophical suicides appears elsewhere in the Greek Anthology.[86] However, the Greek Anthology also contains several suicides exist in which the act itself, not just the self-killer's adherence to a certain set of morals, is ostensibly praised. This distinction between philosophical and heroic suicides is important to make. In the latter suicides, the

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[84]Van Hoof 1990, 148
[85]See Strabo X 5.6.
[86]For example, see A.P. 7.731; *A.P.* 7.472 and 472b.

epigrams make clear that the self-killings are worthy of admiration and respect. This differs from philosophical suicides, where the adherence to the rules of a particular philosophy is admired, and not the suicide itself. Broadly speaking, this sense of admiration for suicide primarily stems from its altruistic motives. In order for suicide to garner respect, it must be done for noble reasons, whether that is the fulfillment of a moral obligation or self-sacrifice for the community. It is these suicides that I deem heroic, a definition that always hinges on how the epigrams portray the act. Interestingly, all these so-called 'heroic' suicides are committed by swords. On a logistical level, this is slightly unsurprisingly, since most of the male suicides appear in a martial contest. At the same time, since suicide by weapons is so inherently tied to masculinity in Greek literature, these epigrams suggest there is an additional association between heroic suicide and masculinity in the Greek imagination.

For example, no less than five epigrams celebrate Ajax's suicide by the sword. Although the specific emphasis varies from epigram to epigram, all are constructed with a sense of awe and respect for the hero. Especially in the later epigrams, which narrow in more on the act of suicide, it becomes clear that Ajax's suicide should be read as praiseworthy, such as in this epigram by Archia (1st century BC)s:

> Σῆμα τόδ᾽ Αἴαντος Τελαμωνίου, ὃν κτάνε Μοῖρα,
>   αὐτοῦ χρησαμένα καὶ χερὶ καὶ ξίφεϊ.
> οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐν θνητοῖσι δυνήσατο καὶ μεμαυῖα
>   εὑρέμεναι Κλωθὼ τῷδ᾽ ἕτερον φονέα.

> This is the tomb of Telamonian Ajax whom Fate slew by means of his own hand and
> sword. For Clotho, even had she wished it, could not find among mortals another able to
> kill him.
> *A.P.* 7.147

Here, Archias claims the main cause of Ajax's suicide was the decree of Clotho. Consequently,

any sense of guilt or shame regarding suicide is diminished if not completely shifted onto his

unavoidable lot. His suicide is an act of divine will, commanded by the immortals themselves

since no other mortal could kill him. Ajax needed to die at his own hand, so great was his

strength and power. In this sense, Ajax's suicide is a testimony to his invincibility: he was so

powerful that no one could destroy him beside himself. And his sword, the weapon of his

suicide, is both an instrument of divine will and proof of his epic glory. In this sense, the epigram

represents the complex interrelation between masculinity, suicide, and weapons that construct a

heroic suicide. In this representation of Ajax's suicide, as in other epigrams, none of these

concepts exist independently of another, but each continuously reinforces the other to create the

concept of a heroic suicide.

Another case that seems intended to inspire admiration in a reader is the aforementioned

death of Aelius, the Roman captain who chooses suicide over death by disease. It is impossible

to establish if the epigrams are based on real events, but it certainly seems that Aelius represents

Greek wonderment at the Roman glorification of martial suicide. Both of the authors,

Apollonides and Philippus, are late Hellenistic poets who flourished in the time of Roman

domination and such uncompromising bravery on the part of the Romans was for them clearly

impressive, even if slightly bewildering. Indeed, they portray Aelius' suicide as an act of

heroism. Aelius' suicide is not an act of despair but rather one of control. He chooses not to be

conquered by his enemy: disease. The suicide is an issue of a soldier's death with dignity.

Naturally, such a heroic death warrants the sword as its *modus moriendi,* since a heroic suicide is

one inevitably committed by the sword. With that being said, the next section examines what happens when this instrument of masculine destruction appears in the hands of women.

II.   A Man's Suicide for a Woman's Death

It has already been discussed how Butler's theoretical work on gender informs our understanding of certain suicide methods. By the same logic that makes hangings performatively feminine in Greek thought, suicides by weapons can be understood as performatively masculine. Through the stylized suicides of men such as Ajax, Greek literature repeatedly conforms to the gendered expectations that men must commit suicide by weapons. Consequently, as the image of male suicide became synonymous with one committed by the sword, the sword itself came to signify a performatively masculine death imbued with such strong connotations of masculinity that it does necessarily require a male-self killer to assert a sense of male-ness.

It should not be surprising, then, that when female self-killers employ weapons and thus engage in performatively masculine behavior, they die a manly death. This concept of a 'masculine' female suicide appears throughout Greek literature. Deianira, Eurydice, Amphinomene, and Euripides' Jocasta have already been explored as female deaths made masculine by their weapons and the same basic phenomenon exists in epigrams. With that being said, epigrams are far less interested in female suicides than their male counterparts. Of the 14 female suicides, only small minority feature women who kill themselves in a nontraditional way (that is to say, not by hanging). The few women that commit suicide by swords, however, are worthy of discussion because of the somewhat unusual ways that epigrams bring out the gendered inflictions of this phenomenon. They exploit the explicit associations between men and weapons, and also the more implicit associations between masculinity and battlefield heroism, to

construct heroic female suicides that simultaneously contradict and complement concepts of normatively female death.

As we have seen before, epigrams often draw on the sword as an ideological and symbolic focal point for the convergence of heroism and masculinity. The basic reasoning behind this pattern is not hard to see. From the ancient literary association between wartime violence and heroism, an intrinsic link between a masculine death — meaning one committed by weapons — and heroism seems to have formed in Greek thought. This link theoretically restricts female access to concepts of the heroic. However, the performatively masculine suicide by sword allows epigrammatic women to bypass this restriction and enter the sphere of male heroism. In these heroic suicides, the manly character of the women's death merges with the epigram's admiration for the masculine qualities of courage and altruism that inevitably accompany their use of the sword. Indeed, the sword codes these suicides as heroic, that is to say, as suicides worthy of admiration and respect, since they were committed in a manly way with masculine qualities.

Perhaps the best example of this link between the sword and a heroic female suicide comes from an imperial epigram, whose author is unknown:

> Ἀρχέτυπον Διδοῦς ἐρικυδέος, ὦ ξένε, λεύσσεις,
>   εἰκόνα θεσπεσίῳ κάλλεϊ λαμπομένην.
> τοίη καὶ γενόμην, ἀλλ᾽ οὐ νόον, οἶον ἀκούεις,
>   ἔσχον, ἐπ᾽ εὐφήμοις δόξαν ἐνεγκαμένη.
> οὐδὲ γὰρ Αἰνείαν ποτ᾽ ἐσέδρακον, οὐδὲ χρόνοισι
>   Τροίης περθομένης ἤλυθον ἐς Λιβύην·
> ἀλλὰ βίας φεύγουσα Ἰαρβαίων ὑμεναίων
>   πῆξα κατὰ κραδίης φάσγανον ἀμφίτομον.
> Πιερίδες, τί μοι ἀγνὸν ἐφωπλίσσασθε Μάρωνα
>   οἷα καθ᾽ ἡμετέρης ψεύσατο σωφροσύνης;

> Thou seest, O stranger, the exact likeness of far-famed Dido, a portrait shining with divine beauty. Even so I was, but had not such a character as thou hearest, having gained glory rather for reputable things. For neither did I ever set eyes on Aeneas nor did I reach

> Libya at the time of the sack of Troy, but to escape a forced marriage with Iarbas I
> plunged the two-edged sword into my heart. Ye Muses, why did ye arm chaste Virgil
> against me to slander thus falsely my virtue?
> *A.P.* 16.151

This epigram imagines a scenario in which a traveler comes by a visual representation of Dido "as she really was," which seems to be the core sense of *arkhétupon*. This disgruntled portrait addresses the viewer, defending herself against Virgilian slander. According to the portrait, she did not commit suicide atop a flaming pyre because she was lovesick for Aeneas, who, on simple chronological grounds, she never could have even met. Rather, she stabbed herself to avoid a forced marriage with her African suitor, Iarbas. As she asserts that her suicide was committed for an honorable reason, she also asserts the instrument of her suicide: a sword.

Of course, the Virgilian Dido uses this same instrument in her suicide: she "fell on the sword" (*ferro conlapsam*) before being consumed by the flames of her funeral pyre (4.663-4). However, the epigram brings out a much different emphasis than Virgil's telling. Two images dominate Dido's suicide in the *Aeneid*: the fire and the wound. These are named at the very opening of Book 4:

> *At regina gravi iamdudum saucia cura*
> *vulnus alit venis, et caeco carpitur igni.*
>
> But the queen, long since smitten with a grievous love-pang, feeds the wound with her
> lifeblood, and is wasted with fire unseen.
> Virgil. *Aen.* 4.1-2

The wound, invisible but all-consuming, feeds off Dido's lifeblood. Likewise, the fire overwhelms Dido, blinding her with love for Aeneas. The two images are, in a sense, one. As Austin says, "her wound causes her fever, and her fever deepens her wound."[87] These intertwined

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[87]Quoted in Ferguson 1970: 57

images weave throughout Book 4, the entire time pointing towards its end when Dido mounts the funeral pyre and stabs herself with Aeneas' sword. Here, the metaphor becomes physical reality. The love wound that stripped Dido of her dignity and blinded her with love materializes into her shameful suicide. The sword is simply what facilitates this materialization; a byproduct of the ongoing metaphor of Book 4.

By contrast, the epigram transforms the sword from a physical manifestation of her metaphorical love wound, and thus her loss of honor and love, to a symbol of her noble character. Rather than stabbing herself as the culmination of her blind love for Aeneas, the epigrammatic Dido deliberately chooses this death as a calculated escape plan. When faced with a choice between betraying her first husband or death, Dido chose death. Such a suicide is praiseworthy, this Dido claims. It is emblematic of her *sōphrosúnē*, a word that is often simply translated as "virtue," but at its core refers to a dual ideal of excellence of character and soundness of mind. And just as the suicide acts as a testament to her *sōphrosúnē*, so by extent, does the sword, as it is the instrument through which she adhered to a noble code of behavior.

Moreover, this *modus moriendi* conjures up images of battlefield courage and altruistic sacrifice. Its associations with wartime, and thus manly, heroism brings to mind a sense of selfless determination, a quality that Dido wishes to impress on the listener. As the epigram seeks to retell Dido's story as the heroic suicide of a noble queen, the new emphasis on the sword — rather than the images of wound and fire – compliments this retelling. The sword's associations with masculine death imbue her suicide with a sense of heroic nobility, playing a vital role in its construction as objectively praiseworthy. Through the sword, this epigram demonstrates, even a woman can die a heroic death.

This blatant praise for a female suicide alone is unusual, although not nonexistent, in Greek literature. With this in mind, it is important to note the motivations for Dido's suicide are avoidance of forced marriage. The heroic suicides of epigram use gender inversion to praise a specific type of female self-killer: those who commit suicide rather than face captivity and violation from outside invaders. This conflict-driven context makes the sword particularly fitting for these women. Although they are not on the battlefield, they are still reacting to their home or safety being threatened, and thus seem worthy of the wartime praise and admiration that death by sword brings. At the same time, these suicides occur in reaction to a distinctly female threat. When women were taken captive, the menace of violation was added to the loss of status and freedom. In this sense, these heroic epigrams simultaneously paint these women as masculinely heroic, but within a distinctly feminine context.

This idea comes across clearly in an epigram by Antipater of Thessalonica (1st century C.E.):

> Οὐ νούσῳ Ῥοδόπα τε καὶ ἁ γενέτειρα Βοΐσκα
>   οὐδ᾽ ὑπὸ δυσμενέων δούρατι κεκλίμεθα·
> ἀλλ᾽ αὐταί, πάτρας ὁπότ᾽ ἔφλεγεν ἄστυ Κορίνθου
>   γοργὸς Ἄρης, ἀΐδαν ἄλκιμον εἱλόμεθα.
> ἔκτανε γὰρ μάτηρ με διασφακτῆρι σιδάρῳ,
>   οὐδ᾽ ἰδίου φειδὼ δύσμορος ἔσχε βίου,
> ἇψε δ᾽ ἐναυχενίῳ δειρὰν βρόχῳ· ἧς γὰρ ἀμείνων
>   δουλοσύνας ἁμῖν πότμος ἐλευθέριος.

> I, Rhodope, and my mother Boisca neither died of sickness, nor fell by the sword of the foes, but ourselves, when dreadful Ares burnt the city of Corinth our country, chose a brave death. My mother slew me with the slaughtering knife, nor did she, an unhappy woman, spare her own life, but tied the noose round her neck; for it was better than slavery to die in freedom.
> *A.P.* 7.493

A poem that purports to be written from the grave, this epigram describes the double suicide of a

mother and daughter after Rome captured Corinth in 146 BC. Like the other epigrams on the fall

of Corinth, this poem attempts to capture the magnitude of the catastrophe for the Greek

people.[88] In this case, the epigram demonstrates that a mother and daughter would rather end

their lives than exist in Roman slavery. And indeed, both of them commit suicide. Notice that I

said *both* mother and daughter commit suicide. At first glance, it may seem like there is only one

suicide in this epigram: Boisca's. However, the αὐταί at the beginning of line three shows

otherwise: "*We* chose a brave death," Rhodope says. Through this statement, the epigram

vocalizes the voluntary nature of Rhodope's death. If we return to Durkheim's definition, suicide

is simply the action of 'choosing death over life.' Thus, Rhodope's death is an act of suicide, even

though she did not wield the weapon.

These self-killings were certainly intended to be read as heroic. The epigram's

self-identifications of the suicides as "brave death" (ἀΐδαν ἄλκιμον) explicitly denotes them as

praiseworthy and worthy of admiration. Even if Corinth could not be saved, these women could

at least defend their honor and their city's reputation, this seems to be the message of the

epigram. For these women, suicide is a praiseworthy alternative to violation and imprisonment,

an idea that also appears in an epigram by Anyte that glorifies suicide in the face of defeat.[89] In

this sense, suicide becomes a specifically female brand of honor, as it allows them to escape

violation and disrespect at the hands of the enemy. This sense of honor is furthered by the sword

acting as the main weapon.

Indeed, the sword serves as the metaphorical texture that binds the epigram together: the

swords of the Romans signal a life of brutal captivity. The sword becomes a friendly weapon in

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[88]The other epigrams are *A.P.* 9.151 and *A.P.* 7.297
[89] *A.P.* 7.492

the hands of Boisca, and finally, a healing blade that releases Rhodope from her earthly fate. In this sense, it is immaterial that the sword doesn't physically release both of them from life. The sword dominates the epigram, and through its martial connotations, portrays the suicides as an act of warfare. The women are fighting their own war, but 'off camera,' so to speak. In this sense, the sword allies these women and their suicides with the heroes of epic and tragedy. The sword elevates their suicide, coding it as masculine, and thus heroic. At the same time, the fact that Boisca still dies by the noose asserts her femininity. Hanging evokes the conventional image of tragic heroines swaying in nooses, and thus contrasts with Boisca's manly wielding of the sword. Fastened to death by an oxymoron of masculine and feminine weapons, Boisca's brings a unique point of balance between the feminine actor and masculine *modus moriendi* that we see in the non-traditional suicides by weapons.

Although few in number, these epigrams play out the second, epigrammatic inversion of the word/male rope/female schema. From these epigrams, we see that, while feminine suicide reduces male death to a humorous punchline, masculine suicide elevates female deaths to heroic status. This is not necessarily to say that the female suicides committed by the sword are heroic because of their *modus moriendi.* Rather, it seems like because these suicides are committed for altruistic – and thus masculine — reasons, they befit a death by the sword. At the same time, as a symbol of masculine power and authority, the sword codes these suicides as heroic, making it clear that they are worthy of admiration. Embedded within this gender transgression, however, is a further blurring of normative masculinity and femininity. The portrayals of these heroic suicides simultaneously contradict and complement concepts of normatively female death. On the one hand, the female self-killers die for intensely female reasons. Rape, forced marriage, and

capture motivate these suicides. In this sense, they fulfill themselves as women in their deaths. Even while using a male method of suicide, the epigrams emphasize their femininity first and foremost. On the other hand, these female self-killers earn a sense of glory that goes far beyond the praise traditionally offered to women. Through this praise, the epigrams grant the women a noble death and permanent glory, the very *kleos* that their femininity excludes them from in high literature.

Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was to examine how epigrams evoke and manipulate the gendered schema of high literature in their writings. As seen throughout this paper, epigrams' receptions and subversions of gendered norms illuminate a series of associations that shaped how the ancient Greeks understood self-killing: those between men and weapons, masculinity and heroism, women and hanging, and femininity and disgrace. Suicide epigrams rely on these associations, and their accompanying discourses of femininity and masculinity, to construct humorous and heroic suicides. As a performatively female behavior, hanging effeminizes its male victims and imbues them with a sense of feminine disgrace, making them laughable. Similarly, as a performatively male behavior, suicide by weapons makes female self-killers seem masculine and codes their deaths as heroic. From this phenomenon, we see that the epigram authors adopted the suicide schema of high literature, but refracted it through a complex network of gendered associations to subvert tradition and fit their unique aims These suicide epigrams, then, function as a site for the interrogation, confluence, and parody of conventionally gendered modes of dying, which sheds new light on the nuanced ways that suicide functioned as a deeply gendered act in the Greek imagination.

Appendix A: Demographics of Suicide Epigrams

Modus Moriendi

grief
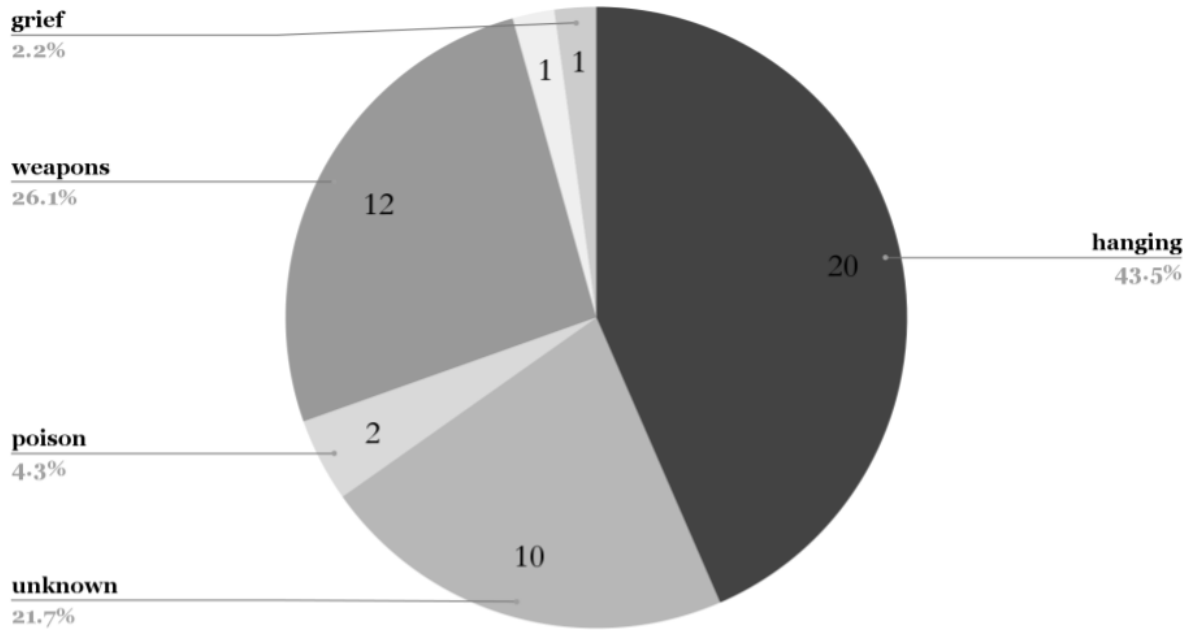2.2%

weapons
26.1%

poison
4.3%

unknown
21.7%

12

1 1

20

hanging
43.5%

2

10

Figure 1: Suicide methods in epigrams.

Gender

unknown
2.2%
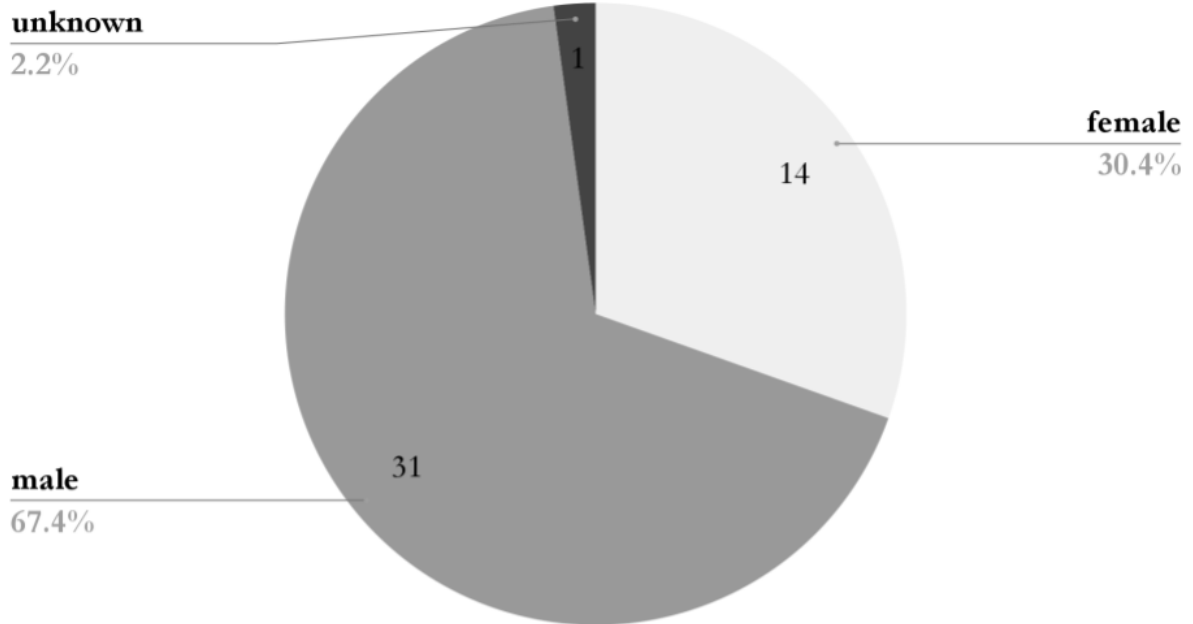
female
30.4%

1

14

male
67.4%

31

Figure 2: The gender of self-killers in epigrams.

Appendix B: Suicide Epigrams[90]

A.P. 7.69 — Julianus the Prefect of Egypt

    Κέρβερε δειμαλέην ὑλακὴν νεκύεσσιν ἰάλλων,
        ἤδη φρικαλέον δείδιθι καὶ σὺ νέκυν·
    Ἀρχίλοχος τέθνηκε· φυλάσσεο θυμὸν ἰάμβων
        δριμύν, πικροχόλου τικτόμενον στόματος.
    οἶσθα βοῆς κείνοιο μέγα σθένος, εὖτε Λυκάμβεω
        νηῦς μία σοὶ δισσὰς ἤγαγε θυγατέρας.

    Cerberus, whose bark strikes terror into the dead, there comes a terrible shade before whom even thou must tremble. Archilochus is dead. Beware the acrid iambic wrath engendered by his bitter mouth. Thou knowest the might of his words ever since one boat brought thee the two daughters of Lycambes.

A.P. 7.70 — Julianus the Prefect of Egypt

    Νῦν πλέον ἢ τὸ πάροιθε πύλας κρατεροῖο βερέθρου
        ὄμμασιν ἀγρύπνοις τρισσὲ φύλασσε κύον.
    εἰ γὰρ φέγγος ἔλειπον ἀλυσκάζουσαι ἰάμβων
        ἄγριον Ἀρχιλόχου φλέγμα Λυκαμβιάδες,
    πῶς οὐκ ἂν προλίποι σκοτίων πυλεῶνας ἐναύλων
        νεκρὸς ἅπας, φεύγων τάρβος ἐπεσβολίης;

    Now, three-headed dog, better than ever with thy sleepless eyes guard the gate of thy fortress, the pit. For if the daughters of Lycambes to avoid the savage bile of Archilochus' iambics left the light, will not every soul leave the portals of this dusky dwelling, flying from the terror of his slanderous tongue?

A.P. 7.71 — Gaetulicus

    Σῆμα τόδ᾽ Ἀρχιλόχου παραπόντιον, ὅς ποτε πικρὴν
        Μοῦσαν ἐχιδναίῳ πρῶτος ἔβαψε χόλῳ,
    αἱμάξας Ἑλικῶνα τὸν ἥμερον. οἶδε Λυκάμβης,
        μυρόμενος τρισσῶν ἅμματα θυγατέρων.
    ἠρέμα δὴ παράμειψον, ὁδοιπόρε, μή ποτε τοῦδε
        κινήσῃς τύμβῳ σφῆκας ἐφεζομένους.

    This tomb by the sea is that of Archilochus, who first made the Muse bitter dipping her in vipers' gall, staining mild Helicon with blood. Lycambes knows it, mourning for his three daughters hanged. Pass quietly by, O way-farer, lest haply thou arouse the wasps that are settled on his tomb.

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[90]All translations and text in this appendix are from the Loeb Classical Library.

A.P. 7.95 — Diogenes Laertius

Ἥλιον πυρόεντα μύδρον ποτὲ φάσκεν ὑπάρχειν,
  καὶ διὰ τοῦτο θανεῖν μέλλεν Ἀναξαγόρας·
ἀλλ᾽ ὁ φίλος Περικλῆς μὲν ἐρύσατο τοῦτον· ὁ δ᾽ αὐτὸν
  ἐξάγαγεν βιότου μαλθακίῃ σοφίῃ

Anaxagoras once said that the sun was a red-hot mass, and for this was about to be killed.
His friend Pericles saved him, but he ended his own life owing to the sensitiveness of his
wise mind.

A.P. 7.96 — Diogenes Laertius

Πῖνέ νυν ἐν Διὸς ὤν, ὦ Σώκρατες· ἦ σε γὰρ ὄντως
  καὶ σοφὸν εἶπε θεός, καὶ θεὸς ἡ σοφία.
πρὸς γὰρ Ἀθηναίων κώνειον ἁπλῶς σὺ ἐδέξω,
  αὐτοὶ δ᾽ ἐξέπιον τοῦτο τεῷ στόματι.

Drink now, O Socrates, in the house of Zeus. Of a truth a god called thee wise and
Wisdom is a goddess. From the Athenians thou didst receive simply hemlock, but they
themselves drank it by thy mouth.

A.P. 7.107 — Diogenes Laertius

Μέλλων Εὐρυμέδων ποτ᾽ Ἀριστοτέλην ἀσεβείας
  γράψασθαι, Δηοῦς μύστιδος ὢν πρόπολος,
ἀλλὰ πιὼν ἀκόνιτον ὑπέκφυγε· τοῦτ᾽ ἀκονιτὶ
  ἦν ἄρα νικῆσαι συκοφάσεις ἀδίκους.

Eurymedon, the priest of Demeter, was once about to prosecute Aristotle for impiety, but
he escaped by drinking hemlock. This was then, it seems, to overcome unjust slander
without trouble.

A.P. 7.118 — Diogenes Laertius

Τὸν Κιτιέα Ζήνωνα θανεῖν λόγος ὡς ὑπὸ γήρως
  πολλὰ καμὼν ἐλύθη μένων ἄσιτος·
<οἱ δ᾽ ὅτι προσκόψας ποτ᾽ ἔφη χερὶ γᾶν ἀλοήσας,
  "Ἔρχομαι αὐτόματος· τί δὴ καλεῖς με;">

Some say that Zeno of Citium, suffering much from old age, remained without food, and
others that striking the earth with his hand he said, "I come of my own accord. Why dost
thou call me?

A.P. 7.145 — Asclepiades

Ἅδ᾽ ἐγὼ ἁ τλάμων Ἀρετὰ παρὰ τῷδε κάθημαι
  Αἴαντος τύμβῳ κειραμένα πλοκάμους,

θυμὸν ἄχει μεγάλῳ βεβολημένα, εἰ παρ᾽ Ἀχαιοῖς
    ἁ δολόφρων Ἀπάτα κρέσσον ἐμεῦ δύναται.

Here sit I, miserable Virtue, by this tomb of Ajax, with shorn hair, smitten with heavy
sorrow that cunning Fraud hath more power with the Greeks than I.

A.P. 7.146 — Antipater of Sidon

    Σῆμα παρ᾽ Αἰάντειον ἐπὶ Ῥοιτηΐσιν ἀκταῖς
        θυμοβαρὴς Ἀρετὰ μύρομαι ἑζομένα,
    ἀπλόκαμος, πινόεσσα, διὰ κρίσιν ὅττι Πελασγῶν
        οὐκ ἀρετὰ νικᾶν ἔλλαχεν, ἀλλὰ δόλος.
    τεύχεα δ᾽ ἂν λέξειεν Ἀχιλλέος· "Ἄρσενος ἀκμᾶς,
        οὐ σκολιῶν μύθων ἄμμες ἐφιέμεθα."

By the tomb of Ajax on the Rhoetean shore, I, Virtue, sit and mourn, heavy at heart, with
shorn locks, in soiled raiment, because that in the judgment court of the Greeks not Virtue
but Fraud triumphed. Achilles' arms would fain cry, "We want no crooked words, but
manly valour."

A.P. 7.147 — Archias

    Μοῦνος ἐναιρομένοισιν ὑπέρμαχος ἀσπίδα τείνας,
        νηυσὶ βαρὺν Τρώων, Αἶαν, ἔμεινας ἄρην·
    οὐδέ σε χερμαδίων ὦσεν κτύπος, οὐ νέφος ἰῶν,
        οὐ πῦρ, οὐ δοράτων, οὐ ξιφέων πάταγος·
    ἀλλ᾽ αὕτως προβλής τε καὶ ἔμπεδος, ὥς τις ἐρίπνα
        ἱδρυθείς, ἔτλης λαίλαπα δυσμενέων.
    εἰ δέ σε μὴ τεύχεσσιν Ἀχιλλέος ὥπλισεν Ἑλλάς,
        ἄξιον ἀντ᾽ ἀρετᾶς ὅπλα ποροῦσα γέρας,
    Μοιράων βουλῇσι τάδ᾽ ἤμπλακεν, ὡς ἂν ὑπ᾽ ἐχθρῶν
        μή τινος, ἀλλὰ σὺ σῇ πότμον ἕλῃς παλάμῃ.

Alone in defence of the routed host, with extended shield didst thou, Ajax, await the
Trojan host that threatened the ships. Neither the crashing stones moved thee, nor the
cloud of arrows, nor the clash of spears and swords; but even so, like some crag, standing
out and firmly planted thou didst face the hurricane of the foes. If Hellas did not give thee
the arms of Achilles to wear, a worthy reward of thy valour, it was by the counsel of the
Fates that she erred, in order that thou shouldst meet with doom from no foe, but at thine
own hand.

A.P. 7.148 — Anonymous

    Σῆμα τόδ᾽ Αἴαντος Τελαμωνίου, ὃν κτάνε Μοῖρα,
        αὐτοῦ χρησαμένα καὶ χερὶ καὶ ξίφεϊ.
    οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐν θνητοῖσι δυνήσατο καὶ μεμαυῖα

εὑρέμεναι Κλωθὼ τῷδ᾽ ἕτερον φονέα.

This is the tomb of Telamonian Ajax whom Fate slew by means of his own hand and sword. For Clotho, even had she wished it, could not find among mortals another able to kill him.

A.P. 7.149 — Leontius Scholasticus
> Κεῖται ἐνὶ Τροίῃ Τελαμώνιος, οὔ τινι δ᾽ ἔμπης
>   ἀντιβίων ὀπάσας εὖχος ἑοῦ θανάτου·
> τόσσης γὰρ χρόνος ἄλλον ἐπάξιον ἀνέρα τόλμης
>   οὐχ εὑρών, παλάμῃ θῆκεν ὑπ᾽ αὐτοφόνῳ.

The Telamonian lies low in Troy, but he gave no foeman cause to boast of his death. For Time finding no other man worthy of such a deed entrusted it to his own self-slaying hand.

A.P. 7.150 — Leontius Scholasticus
> Αἴας ἐν Τροίῃ μετὰ μυρίον εὖχος ἀέθλων
>   μέμφεται οὐκ ἐχθροῖς κείμενος, ἀλλὰ φίλοις.

Ajax lieth in Troy after a thousand vaunted deeds of prowess, blaming not his foes but his friends.

A.P. 7.231 — Damagetus
> Ὧδ᾽ ὑπὲρ Ἀμβρακίας ὁ βοαδρόμος ἀσπίδ᾽ ἀείρας
>   τεθνάμεν ἢ φεύγειν εἵλετ᾽ Ἀρισταγόρας,
> υἱὸς ὁ Θευπόμπου. μὴ θαῦμ᾽ ἔχε· Δωρικὸς ἀνὴρ
>   πατρίδος, οὐχ ἥβας ὀλλυμένας ἀλέγει.

Thus for Ambracia's sake the warrior Aristagoras, son of Theopompus, holding his shield on high, chose death rather than flight. Wonder not thereat: a Dorian cares for his country, not for the loss of his young life

A.P. 7.233 — Apollonides
> Αἴλιος, Αὐσονίης στρατιῆς πρόμος, ὁ χρυσέοισι
>   στέμμασι σωρεύσας αὐχένας ὁπλοφόρους,
> νοῦσον ὅτ᾽ εἰς ὑπάτην ὠλίσθανε τέρμα τ᾽ ἄφυκτον
>   εἶδεν, ἀριστείην †ἐμφανὲς εἰς ἰδίην·
> πῆξε δ᾽ ὑπὸ σπλάγχνοισιν ἑὸν ξίφος, εἶπέ τε
>   θνήσκων·
> "Αὐτὸς ἑκὼν ἐδάμην, μὴ νόσος εὖχος ἔχῃ."

Aelius, the Roman captain, whose armed neck was loaded with golden torques, when he fell into his last illness and saw the end was inevitable, was minded of his own valour and driving his sword into his vitals, said as he was dying "I am vanquished of my own will, lest Disease boast of the deed."

A.P. 7.234 — Phillippus of Thessalonica

Αἴλιος ὁ θρασύχειρ Ἄρεος πρόμος, ὁ ψελιώσας
   αὐχένα χρυσοδέτοις ἐκ πολέμου στεφάνοις,
τηξιμελεῖ νούσῳ κεκολουμένος, ἔδραμε θυμῷ
   ἐς προτέρην ἔργων ἄρσενα μαρτυρίην,
ὦσε δ᾽ ὑπὸ σπλάγχνοις πλατὺ φάσγανον, ἓν μόνον
    εἰπών·
   "Ἄνδρας Ἄρης κτείνει, δειλοτέρους δὲ νόσος."

Aelius, the bold captain, whose neck was hung with the golden torques he had won in the wars, when crippled by wasting disease, ran back in his mind to the history of his past deeds of valour, and drove his sword into his vitals, saying but this: "Men perish by the sword, cowards by disease"

A.P. 7.336 — Anonymous

Γήραϊ καὶ πενίῃ τετρυμένος, οὐδ᾽ ὀρέγοντος
   οὐδενὸς ἀνθρώπου δυστυχίης ἔρανον,
τοῖς τρομεροῖς κώλοισιν ὑπήλυθον ἠρέμα τύμβον,
   εὑρὼν οἰζυροῦ τέρμα μόλις βιότου.
ἠλλάχθη δ᾽ ἐπ᾽ ἐμοὶ νεκύων νόμος· οὐ γὰρ
    ἔθνησκον
   πρῶτον, ἔπειτ᾽ ἐτάφην· ἀλλὰ ταφεὶς ἔθανον.

Worn by age and poverty, no one stretching out his hand to relieve my misery, on my tottering legs I went slowly to my grave, scarce able to reach the end of my wretched life. In my case the law of death was reversed, for I did not die first to be then buried, but I died after my burial.

A.P. 7.351 — Dioscorides

Οὐ μὰ τόδε φθιμένων σέβας ὅρκιον, αἵδε Λυκάμβεω,
   αἳ λάχομεν στυγερὴν κληδόνα, θυγατέρες,
οὔτε τι παρθενίην ᾐσχύναμεν, οὔτε τοκῆας,
   οὔτε Πάρον νήσων αἰπυτάτην ἱερῶν.
ἀλλὰ καθ᾽ ἡμετέρης γενεῆς ῥιγηλὸν ὄνειδος
   φήμην τε στυγερὴν ἔβλυσεν Ἀρχίλοχος.
Ἀρχίλοχον, μὰ θεοὺς καὶ δαίμονας, οὔτ᾽ ἐν ἀγυιαῖς
   εἴδομεν, οὔθ᾽ Ἥρης ἐν μεγάλῳ τεμένει.
εἰ δ᾽ ἦμεν μάχλοι καὶ ἀτάσθαλοι, οὐκ ἂν ἐκεῖνος
   ἤθελεν ἐξ ἡμέων γνήσια τέκνα τεκεῖν.

Not, by this tomb, the solemn oath of the dead, did we daughters of Lycambes, who have obtained such an evil name, ever disgrace our maidenhead or our parents or Paros, queen of the holy islands ; but Archilochus poured on our family a flood of horrible reproach and evil report. By the gods and demons we swear that we never set eyes on Archilochus, either in the streets or in Hera's great precinct. If we had been wanton and wicked, he would never have wished lawful children born to him by us.

A.P. 7.352 — Anonymous, attributed by some to Meleager

    Δεξιτερὴν Ἀΐδαο θεοῦ χέρα καὶ τὰ κελαινὰ
      ὄμνυμεν ἀρρήτου δέμνια Περσεφόνης,
    παρθένοι ὡς ἔτυμον καὶ ὑπὸ χθονί· πολλὰ δ᾽ ὁ
        πικρὸς
      αἰσχρὰ καθ᾽ ἡμετέρης ἔβλυσε παρθενίης
    Ἀρχίλοχος· ἐπέων δὲ καλὴν φάτιν οὐκ ἐπὶ καλὰ
      ἔργα, γυναικεῖον δ᾽ ἔτραπεν ἐς πόλεμον.
    Πιερίδες, τί κόρῃσιν ἔφ᾽ ὑβριστῆρας ἰάμβους
      ἐτράπετ᾽, οὐχ ὁσίῳ φωτὶ χαριζόμεναι;

We swear by the right hand of Hades and the dark couch of Persephone whom none may name,   that we are truly virgins even here underground;
 but bitter Archilochus poured floods of abuse on our maidenhood, directing to no noble end but to war with women the noble language of his verse.
O Muses, who show favor to an impious man, why did you turn upon girls those scandalous iambics?

A.P. 7.470 — Meleager

    α. Εἶπον ἀνειρομένῳ τίς καὶ τίνος ἐσσί. β. Φίλαυλος
      Εὐκρατίδεω. α. Ποδαπὸς δ᾽ εὔχεαι . . .
    α. Ἔζησας δὲ τίνα στέργων βίον; β. Οὐ τὸν ἀρότρου,
      οὐδὲ τὸν ἐκ νηῶν, τὸν δὲ σοφοῖς ἕταρον.
    α. Γήραϊ δ᾽ ἢ νούσῳ βίον ἔλλιπες; β. Ἤλυθον
        Ἄδαν
      αὐτοθελεί, Κείων γευσάμενος κυλίκων.
    α. Ἦ πρέσβυς; β. Καὶ κάρτα. α. Λάχοι νύ σε
      βῶλος ἐλαφρὴ
      σύμφωνον πινυτῷ σχόντα λόγῳ βίοτον.

A. "TELL him who enquires, who and whose son thou art" B. "Philaulus son of Eucratides." A. "And from whence dost thou say?" B. ". .
A. "What livelihood didst thou choose when alive?"
B. "Not that from the plough nor that from ships, but that which is gained in the society of sages." A. "Didst thou depart this life from old age or from sickness?" B. "Of my own will I came to Hades, having drunk of the Cean cup." A. "Wast thou old?" B. "Yea, very

old." A. "May the earth that rests on thee be light, for the life thou didst lead was in accordance with wisdom and reason."

A.P. 7.471 — Callimachus

Εἴπας "ἤλιε, χαῖρε" Κλεόμβροτος ὠμβρακιώτης
 ἥλατ᾽ ἀφ᾽ ὑψηλοῦ τείχεος εἰς ἀΐδαν,
ἄξιον οὐδὲν ἰδὼν θανάτου κακόν, ἀλλὰ Πλάτωνος
 ἓν τὸ περὶ ψυχῆς γράμμ᾽ ἀναλεξάμενος.

Cleombrotus the Ambracian saying, "Farewell, O Sun," leapt from a high wall to Hades, not that he saw any evil worthy of death, but that he had read one treatise of Plato, that on the soul.

A.P. 7.472 and 472 b — Leonidas of Tarentum

Μυρίος ἦν, ἄνθρωπε, χρόνος προτοῦ, ἄχρι πρὸς ἠῶ
 ἦλθες, χὠ λοιπὸς μυρίος εἰς ἀΐδην.
τίς μοῖρα ζωῆς ὑπολείπεται, ἢ ὅσον ὅσσον
 στιγμὴ καὶ στιγμῆς εἴ τι χαμηλότερον;
μικρή σευ ζωὴ τεθλιμμένη· οὐδὲ γὰρ αὐτὴ
 ἡδεῖ᾽, ἀλλ᾽ ἐχθροῦ στυγνοτέρη θανάτου.
ἐκ τοίης ὤνθρωποι ἀπηκριβωμένοι ὀστῶν
 ἁρμονίης, †ὕψιστ᾽ ἠέρα καὶ νεφέλας·
ὦνερ, ἴδ᾽ ὡς ἀχρεῖον, ἐπεὶ περὶ νήματος ἄκρον
 εὐλὴ ἀκέρκιστον λῶπος ἐφεζομένη·
οἷον τὸ †ψαλα, θρῖον ἀπεψιλωμένον οἷον,
 πόλλον ἀραχναίου στυγνότερον σκελέτου.
ἠοῦν ἐξ ἠοῦς ὅσσον σθένος, ὦνερ, ἐρευνῶν
 εἴης ἐν λιτῇ κεκλιμένος βιοτῇ·
αἰὲν τοῦτο νόῳ μεμνημένος ἄχρις ὁμιλῇς
 ζωοῖς, ἐξ οἵης ἡρμόνισαι καλάμης.

Χειμέριον ζωὴν ὑπαλεύεο, νεῖο δ᾽ ἐς ὅρμον,
 ὡς κἠγὼ Φείδων ὁ Κρίτου εἰς ἀΐδην.

O man, infinite was the time ere thou camest to the light, and infinite will be the time to come in Hades. What is the portion of life that remains to thee, but a pin-prick, or if there be aught tinier than a pin-prick? A little life and a sorrowful is thine; for even that little is not sweet, but more odious than death the enemy. Men built as ye are, of such a frame of bones, do ye lift yourselves up to the air and the clouds? See, man, how little use it is; for at the end of the thread a worm seated on the loosely woven vesture reduces it to a thing like a skeleton leaf, a thing more loathly than a cobweb. Enquire of thyself at the dawn of every day, O man, what thy strength is and learn to lie low, content with a simple life; ever remembering in thy heart, as long as thou dwellest among the living, from what stalks of straw thou art pieced together.

Avoid the storms of life and hie ye to the haven, to Hades, as I, Pheidon the son of Critas, did.

A.P. 7.473 — Aristodicus

Δαμὼ καὶ Μάθυμνα τὸν ἐν τριετηρίσιν Ἥρας
    Εὔφρονα λυσσατὰν ὡς ἐπύθοντο νέκυν,
ζωὰν ἀρνήσαντο, τανυπλέκτων δ᾽ ἀπὸ μιτρᾶν
    χερσὶ δεραιούχους ἐκρεμάσαντο βρόχους.

Demo and Methymna when they heard that Euphron, the frenzied devotee at the triennial festivals of Hera, was dead, refused to live longer, and made of their long knitted girdles nooses for their necks to hang themselves.

A.P. 7.491 — Mnasalcas

Αἰαῖ παρθενίας ὀλοόφρονος, ᾆς ἄπο φαιδρὰν
    ἔκλασας ἁλικίαν, ἱμερόεσσα Κλεοῖ·
καδδέ σ᾽ ἀμυξάμεναι περιδάκρυες αἵδ᾽ ἐπὶ τύμβῳ
    λᾶες Σειρήνων ἕσταμες εἰδάλιμοι.

Woe worth baleful virginity, for which, delightful Cleo, thou didst cut short thy bright youth! We stones in the semblance of Sirens stand on thy tomb tearing our cheeks for thee and weeping.

A.P. 7.492 — Anyte of Tegea

Ὠιχόμεθ᾽, ὦ Μίλητε, φίλη πατρί, τῶν ἀθεμίστων
    τὰν ἄνομον Γαλατᾶν κύπριν ἀναινόμεναι,
παρθενικαὶ τρισσαὶ πολιήτιδες, ἃς ὁ βιατὰς
    Κελτῶν εἰς ταύτην μοῖραν ἔτρεψεν Ἄρης.
οὐ γὰρ ἐμείναμεν ἅμμα τὸ δυσσεβὲς οὐδ᾽ Ὑμέναιον
    νυμφίον, ἀλλ᾽ Ἀΐδην κηδεμόν᾽ εὑρόμεθα.

We leave thee, Miletus, dear fatherland, refusing the lawless love of the impious Gauls, three maidens, thy citizens, whom the sword of the Celts forced to this fate. We brooked not the unholy union nor such a wedding, but we put ourselves in the wardship of Hades.

A.P. 7.493 — Antipater of Thessalonica

Οὐ νούσῳ Ῥοδόπα τε καὶ ἁ γενέτειρα Βοΐσκα
    οὐδ᾽ ὑπὸ δυσμενέων δούρατι κεκλίμεθα·
ἀλλ᾽ αὐταί, πάτρας ὁπότ᾽ ἔφλεγεν ἄστυ Κορίνθου
    γοργὸς Ἄρης, ἀΐδαν ἄλκιμον εἱλόμεθα.
ἔκτανε γὰρ μάτηρ με διασφακτῆρι σιδάρῳ,
    οὐδ᾽ ἰδίου φειδὼ δύσμορος ἔσχε βίου,

ἇψε δ' ἐναυχενίῳ δειρὰν βρόχῳ· ἧς γὰρ ἀμείνων
    δουλοσύνας ἁμῖν πότμος ἐλευθέριος.

I, Rhodope, and my mother Boisca neither died of sickness, nor fell by the sword of the foes, but ourselves, when dreadful Ares burnt the city of Corinth our country, chose a brave death. My mother slew me with the slaughtering knife, nor did she, unhappy woman, spare her own life, but tied the noose round her neck; for it was better than slavery to die in freedom.

A.P. 7.517 — Callimachus
Ἠῶοι Μελάνιππον ἐθάπτομεν, ἠελίου δὲ
    δυομένου Βασιλὼ κάτθανε παρθενικὴ
αὐτοχερί· ζώειν γάρ, ἀδελφεὸν ἐν πυρὶ θεῖσα,
    οὐκ ἔτλη. δίδυμον δ' οἶκος ἐσεῖδε κακὸν
πατρὸς Ἀριστίπποιο· κατήφησεν δὲ Κυρήνη
    πᾶσα, τὸν εὔτεκνον χῆρον ἰδοῦσα δόμον.

It was morning when we buried Melanippus, and at sunset the maiden Basilo died by her own hand; for after laying her brother on the pyre she could not abide to live. The house of their father Aristippus witnessed a double woe, and all Cyrene stood with downcast eyes, seeing the home bereft of its lovely children.

A.P. 7.526 — Nicander of Colophon
Ζεῦ πάτερ, Ὀθρυάδα τίνα φέρτερον ἔδρακες ἄλλον,
    ὃς μόνος ἐκ Θυρέας οὐκ ἐθέλησε μολεῖν
πατρίδ' ἐπὶ Σπάρταν, διὰ δὲ ξίφος ἤλασε πλευρᾶν,
    δοῦλα καταγράψας σκῦλα κατ' Ἰναχιδᾶν;

O father Zeus, didst thou ever see a braver than Otrhyadas, who would not return alone from Thyrea to Sparta his country, but transfixed himself with his sword after having inscribed the trophy signifying the subjection of the Argives

A.P. 7.644 — Bianor the Grammarian
Ὕστατον ἐθρήνησε τὸν ὠκύμορον Κλεαρίστη
    παῖδα, καὶ ἀμφὶ τάφῳ πικρὸν ἔπαυσε βίον·
κωκύσασα γὰρ ὅσσον ἐχάνδανε μητρὸς ἀνίη,
    οὐκέτ' ἐπιστρέψαι πνεύματος ἔσχε τόνους.
θηλύτεραι, τί τοσοῦτον ἐμετρήσασθε τάλαιναι
    θρῆνον, ἵνα κλαύσητ' ἄχρι καὶ Ἀΐδεω;

Cleariste mourned her last for the early death of her son, and on the tomb ended her embittered life. For, wailing with all the force a mother's sorrow could give her, she could not recover force to draw her breath. Women, why do you give such ample measure to your grief as to wail even till it brings you to Hades?

A.P. 7.691 — Anonymous
    Ἄλκηστις νέη εἰμί· θάνον δ᾽ ὑπὲρ ἀνέρος ἐσθλοῦ,
    Ζήνωνος, τὸν μοῦνον ἐνὶ στέρνοισιν ἐδέγμην,
    ὃν φωτὸς γλυκερῶν τε τέκνων προὔκριν᾽ ἐμὸν ἦτορ,
    οὔνομα Καλλικράτεια, βροτοῖς πάντεσσιν ἀγαστή.

I am a new Alcestis, and died for my good husband Zeno, whom alone I had taken to my bosom. My heart preferred him to the light of day and my sweet children. My name was Callicratia, and all men reverenced me.

A.P. 7.731 — Leonidas of Tarentum
    "Ἄμπελος ὡς ἤδη κάμακι στηρίζομαι αὐτῷ
      σκηπανίῳ· καλέει μ᾽ εἰς ἀΐδην θάνατος.
    δυσκώφει μὴ Γόργε· τί τοι χαριέστερον, ἢ τρεῖς
      ἢ πίσυρας ποίας θάλψαι ὑπ᾽ ἠελίῳ;"
    ὧδ᾽ εἴπας οὐ κόμπῳ, ἀπὸ ζωὴν ὁ παλαιὸς
      ὤσατο, κἠς πλεόνων ἦλθε μετοικεσίην.

"I am already supported only on a stick, like a vine on a stake; Death calls me to Hades. Stop not thy ears, Gorgus. What further pleasure hast thou in basking in the sun yet for three or four summers?" So speaking in no braggart strain the old man cast away his life and settled in the abode of the greater number.

A.P. 9.44 — Statyllius Flaccus [attributed to Plato]
    Χρυσὸν ἀνὴρ ὁ μὲν εὗρεν, ὁ δ᾽ ὤλεσεν· ὧν ὁ μὲν εὑρὼν
      ῥίψεν, ὁ δ᾽ οὐχ εὑρὼν λυγρὸν ἔδησε βρόχον.

A man finding gold left his halter, but the man who had left the gold and did not find it, hanged himself with the halter he found.

A.P. 9.45 — Statyllius Flaccus
    Χρυσὸν ἀνὴρ ὁ μὲν εὗρεν, ὁ δ᾽ ὤλεσεν· ὧν ὁ μὲν εὑρὼν
      ῥίψεν, ὁ δ᾽ οὐχ εὑρὼν λυγρὸν ἔδησε βρόχον.

One man found the gold and the other lost it. He who found it threw it away, and he who did not find it hanged himself with the dismal halter

A.P. 9.149 — Antipater of Thessalonica
    Εἶχεν Ἀριστείδης ὁ βοκέρριος οὐκ ἀπὸ πολλῶν
      πολλά, μιῆς δ᾽ ὄϊος καὶ βοὸς εὐπορίην.
    ἀλλὰ γὰρ οὐδ᾽ ὁ πένης ἔφυγε φθόνον· ἤματι δ᾽ αὐτῷ
      θῆρες ὄϊν, τὴν βοῦν δ᾽ ὤλεσε δυστοκίη.
    μισήσας δ᾽ ἀβληχὲς ἐπαύλιον, ἄμματι πήρης

ἐκ ταύτης βιοτὴν ἀχράδος ἐκρέμασεν.

Aristides the . . . had not much from many sources, but his fortune was one ewe and one cow. Yet, notwithstanding his poverty, he escaped not Envy, and in one and the same day wild beasts killed the sheep and a difficult birth the cow. Hating the sight of his yard, in which the sound of bleating was silent, he hanged himself by the strap of his wallet from this wild pear tree.

A.P. 9.150 — Antipater of Thessalonica
　　Πλοῦτος Ἀριστείδη δάμαλις μία καὶ τριχόμαλλος
　　ἦν ὄϊς· ἐκ τούτων λιμὸν ἔλαυνε θύρης.
　　ἤμβροτε δ᾽ ἀμφοτέρων· ἀμνὴν λύκος, ἔκτανε δ᾽ ὠδὶς
　　　τὴν δάμαλιν· πενίης δ᾽ ὤλετο βουκόλιον.
　　πηροδέτῳ δ᾽ ὅ γ᾽ ἱμάντι κατ᾽ αὐχένος ἄμμα λυγώσας,
　　　οἰκτρὸς ἀμυκήτῳ κάτθανε πὰρ καλύβῃ.

All the wealth of Aristides was one heifer and one fleecy sheep. By their means, he kept famine from the door. But he lost both; a wolf killed the sheep and the cow perished in labour. His poor stock was gone, and noosing his neck in the strap of his wallet, the wretched man died close to his cabin, which no longer echoed to the sound of lowing.

A.P. 9.255 — Phillippus of Thessalonica
　　Ἠρίθμει πολὺν ὄλβον Ἀριστείδης ὁ πενιχρὸς
　　　τὴν ὄϊν ὡς ποίμνην, τὴν βόα δ᾽ ὡς ἀγέλην·
　　ἤμβροτε δ᾽ ἀμφοτέρων· ἀμνὴν λύκος, ἔκτανε δ᾽ ὠδὶς
　　　τὴν δάμαλιν, πενίης δ᾽ ὤλετο βουκόλιον·
　　πηροδέτῳ δ᾽ ὅ γ᾽ ἱμάντι κατ᾽ αὐχένος ἄμμα πεδήσας
　　　οἰκτρὸς ἀμυκήτῳ κάτθανε πὰρ καλύβῃ.

 Needy Aristides reckoned his possessions as great; his one sheep was a flock, his one cow a herd. But he lost both; a wolf killed the ewe, and the cow died in calving. So that the stock of his poor farm was gone, and the luckless man, noosing his neck in the strap of his wallet, perished by his shed that no longer echoed to the sound of bleating.

A.P. 9.574 — Anonymous
　　Ἡμάξευσα καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ τρισδύστηνος Ἄναξις
　　　τοῦτον δύσζωον κοὺ βίοτον βίοτον.
　　οὐ μὴν πολλὸν ἐπὶ χρόνον ἤλασα· λὰξ δὲ πατήσας
　　　λυσσώδη ζωήν, ἤλυθον εἰς Ἀΐδεω.

I , too, thrice unhappy Anaxis, carted along the burden of this weary life that is no life. Yet I did not pull it for long, but spurning from me this distraught life I went to Hades.

A.P. 11.90 — Loukillios

Τῷ πατρὶ θυμωθείς, Διονύσιε, Μάρκος ὁ μικρός,
  πυρῆνα στήσας, αὐτὸν ἀπηγχόνισεν.

Do you know, Dionysius, that little Marcus, being angry with his father, set on end a probe and hanged himself on it.

A.P. 11.91 — Loukillios

Ἐν καλάμῳ πήξας ἀθέρα Στρατόνικος ὁ λεπτός,
  καὶ τριχὸς ἐκδήσας, αὐτὸν ἀπηγχόνισεν·
καὶ τί γάρ; οὐχὶ κάτω βρῖσεν βαρύς· ἀλλ᾽ ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν
  νηνεμίας οὔσης, νεκρὸς ἄνω πέταται

Thin Stratonicus fixed on a reed a spike of corn and attaching himself to it by a hair hanged himself. And what happened? He was not heavy enough to hang down, but his dead body flies in the air above his gallows, although there is no wind

A.P 11.111 — Loukillios

Βουλόμενός ποθ᾽ ὁ λεπτὸς ἀπάγξασθαι Διόφαντος,
  νῆμα λαβὼν ἀράχνης αὐτὸν ἀπηγχόνισεν.

Lean Diophantus once wishing to hang himself took a thread from a spider's web and did so.

A.P 11.164 — Loukillios

Εἶπεν ἐληλυθέναι τὸ πεπρωμένον, αὐτὸς ἑαυτοῦ
  τὴν γένεσιν διαθεὶς Αὖλος ὁ ἀστρολόγος,
καὶ ζήσειν ὥρας ἔτι τέσσαρας· ὡς δὲ παρῆλθεν
  εἰς πέμπτην, καὶ ζῆν εἰδότα μηδὲν ἔδει,
αἰσχυνθεὶς Πετόσιριν ἀπήγξατο· καὶ μετέωρος
  θνήσκει μέν, θνήσκει δ᾽ οὐδὲν ἐπιστάμενος.

Aulus the astrologer, after making out his own nativity, said that the fatal hour had come and that he had still four hours to live. When it reached the fifth hour and he had to go on living convicted of ignorance, he grew ashamed of Petosiris *   and hanged himself, and there up in the air he is dying, but he is dying ignorant.

A.P. 11.169 — Nicarchus

Ἐχθὲς ἀπάγχεσθαι μέλλων Δείναρχος ὁ φείδων,
  Γλαῦκε, δι᾽ ἓξ χαλκοῦς δύσμορος οὐκ ἔθανεν·
ἐξ χαλκῶν ἦν γὰρ τὸ σχοινίον· ἀλλ᾽ ἐδυσώνει,
  εὔωνον ζητῶν ἄλλον ἴσως θάνατον.
τοῦτο φιλαργυρίας δεινῆς ὅρος, ὅς γ᾽ ἀποθνήσκων,

Γλαῦκε, δι᾽ ἒξ χαλκοῦς δύσμορος οὐκ ἔθανεν.

Yesterday, Glaucus, Dinarchus the miser being about to hang himself, did not die, poor fellow, all for the sake of sixpence; for the rope cost sixpence, but he tried to drive a hard bargain, seeking perhaps some other cheap death. This is the very height of wretched avarice, for a man to be dying, Glaucus, and not able to die, poor fellow, all for the sake of sixpence.

A.P. 11.249 — Loukillios
    Ἀγρὸν Μηνοφάνης ὠνήσατο, καὶ διὰ λιμὸν
      ἐκ δρυὸς ἀλλοτρίας αὑτὸν ἀπηγχόνισεν.
    γῆν δ᾽ αὐτῷ τεθνεῶτι βαλεῖν οὐκ ἔσχον ἄνωθεν,
      ἀλλ᾽ ἐτάφη μισθοῦ πρός τινα τῶν ὁμόρων.
    εἰ δ᾽ ἔγνω τὸν ἀγρὸν τὸν Μηνοφάνους Ἐπίκουρος,
      πάντα γέμειν ἀγρῶν εἶπεν ἄν, οὐκ ἀτόμων.

Menophanus bought a field, and from hunger hanged himself on another man's oak. When he was dead they had no earth to throw over him from above, but he was buried for payment in the ground of one of his neighbours. If Epicurus had known of Menophanes' field he would have said that everything is full of fields, not of atoms.

A.P. 11.264 — Loukillios
    Ποιήσας δαπάνην ἐν ὕπνοις ὁ φιλάργυρος Ἕρμων
      ἐκ περιωδυνίας αὑτὸν ἀπηγχόνισεν.

Hermon the miser, having spent money in his sleep, hanged himself from vexation.

A.P. 16.151 — Anonymous
    Ἀρχέτυπον Διδοῦς ἐρικυδέος, ὦ ξένε, λεύσσεις,
      εἰκόνα θεσπεσίῳ κάλλεϊ λαμπομένην.
    τοίη καὶ γενόμην, ἀλλ᾽ οὐ νόον, οἷον ἀκούεις,
      ἔσχον, ἐπ᾽ εὐφήμοις δόξαν ἐνεγκαμένη.
    οὐδὲ γὰρ Αἰνείαν ποτ᾽ ἐσέδρακον, οὐδὲ χρόνοισι
      Τροίης περθομένης ἤλυθον ἐς Λιβύην·
    ἀλλὰ βίας φεύγουσα Ἰαρβαίων ὑμεναίων
      πῆξα κατὰ κραδίης φάσγανον ἀμφίτομον.
    Πιερίδες, τί μοι ἁγνὸν ἐφωπλίσσασθε Μάρωνα
      οἷα καθ᾽ ἡμετέρης ψεύσατο σωφροσύνης;

Thou seest, O stranger, the exact likeness of far-famed Dido, a portrait shining with divine beauty. Even so I was, but had not such a character as thou hearest, having gained glory rather for reputable things. For neither did I ever set eyes on Aeneas nor did I reach Libya at the time of the sack of Troy, but to escape a forced marriage with Iarbas I

plunged the two-edged sword into my heart. Ye Muses, why did ye arm chaste Virgil against me to slander thus falsely my virtue?

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