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

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Introduction

συγγνώσθ᾿, ὅταν τις κρείσσον’ ἢ φέρειν κακὰ
πάθη, 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.

¹All translations are from the Loeb Classical Library, unless otherwise noted.
²For 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).
³The 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).
⁴For 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. 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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⁶It 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 δὲ τε πάντ᾽ ἐπέοικεν
ἀρηκταμένῳ, δεδαϊγμένῳ ὀξέι χαλκῷ,
κεῖσθαι· πάντα δὲ καλὰ θανόντι περ, ὃτι 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. 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.” 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. 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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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’ Menoeceus and Sophocles’ Haemon both kill themselves with a sword.\textsuperscript{10} Even Homer’s Achilles considers ending his life in this way.\textsuperscript{11} These tragic and epic figures are joined by several characters from the mythographic tradition who turn to the sword in their final moments.\textsuperscript{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. \textit{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’ \textit{Trachiniai} has long been noted as having masculine connotations (Soph. \textit{Trach.} 931).\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{14} Deianira is only one, however, of

\textsuperscript{10}Menoeceus sacrifices himself for his country by plunging a “dark-hilted sword” (\textit{μελάνδετον ξίφος}, Eur. \textit{Phoen.} 1090–92) into his throat. As previously mentioned, when Haemon finds Antigone hanged, he turns to the sword (Soph. \textit{Ant.} 1234-6).

\textsuperscript{11}When Nestor reports Patroclus’ death, Antilochos clutches Achilles’ hands “for he feared that he might cut his throat with the knife” (\textit{δείδιε γὰρ μὴ λαμβάνῃ ἀποτομήξεις σιδῆρῳ}, Hom. \textit{Il.} 18.32-3).

\textsuperscript{12}For a complete list of suicides, see Van Hooff 1990, 198-232.

\textsuperscript{13}For a discussion of this scene, see Carawan 2000, 189-237 and Loraux 1987, 44-6.

\textsuperscript{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.” 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. Even more cases appear in the mythographic tradition, such as Althaea, Ariadne, Cleite, Erigone, Evopis, and Polymele. 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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15Loraux 1987, 15.  
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.

¹⁸Galetaki 2020, 11
¹⁹Froma 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.
²⁰It 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.
²¹Loraux 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” (ἀπειρον 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.

\(^{22}\) 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:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{oμαδάκων} & \quad \text{πως θάνοιμ’ ἀν οὐ καλῶς;} \\
\text{ἀσχήμονες} & \quad \text{μὲν ἀγχόναι μετάρσιοι,} \\
\text{kάι τοῖσι δούλοις δυσπρεπὲς νομίζεται·} \\
\text{σφαγαὶ} & \quad \text{δ’ ἔχουσιν εὐγενὲς τι καὶ καλόν,} \\
\text{σμικρὸν} & \quad \text{δ’ ὁ καιρὸς ἀρθρ’ ἀπαλλάξαι βίου.}
\end{align*}
\]

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.


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

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.

\(^{26}\)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” (ἀπηγχονίσθησαν) 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

27Quoted 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 — *epigramma*: ‘write-upon’ — reveals its earliest form: inscriptions carved

\(^{28}\)Callanan and Davis 2011, 857
on monuments and dedicatory objects. This general meaning did not last for long. By the fifth century BC, *epigramma* had evolved to describe a specific epigraphic subset: verse inscriptions. 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.” 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. 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.

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 ἐπιγράμμα, 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.\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{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 \textit{Greek Anthology}, a large compilation that also contains imperial and Byzantine epigrams.\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{36}

Additionally, modern — or at least most Western — audiences inherit a sense of moral

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33}Fain 2010, 3.
\item \textsuperscript{34}Gutzwiller 2007, 107.
\item \textsuperscript{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 Loukili, who actually composed \textit{after} the Hellenistic period, are still considered among the ‘Hellenistic’ epigrams.
\item \textsuperscript{36}T. D. Hill, \textit{Ambitiosa Mors: Suicide and the Self in Roman Thought and Literature} (Routledge, 2011), 1.
\end{itemize}
disapproval towards suicide from Christian thought, so much so that several countries have at some point criminalized suicide.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{39} Regarding suicide more broadly, she claims there was, “social significance attached to suicide and at the same time very little odium or repulsion.”\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{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

\begin{thebibliography}{41}
\bibitem{37} Beginning with Augustine of Hippo’s \textit{The City of God}, Christian thought has largely condemned suicide as an act of self-murder that violates divine will. For further reading, see Aries (2008).
\bibitem{38} By this, I mean that the characters of suicide do not choose death because of an inwards, psychological state, although they often kill themselves in response to external situations.
\bibitem{39} Garrison 1991, 33.
\bibitem{40} Ibid., 2.
\bibitem{41} Kotlinska-Toma 2014, 2
\end{thebibliography}
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.

42For 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.
43αὐτοφόνος: 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.” 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.” 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. 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 Lycamnes. By these qualifications,

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44Durkheim 2005, x.
46For 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.

47See 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).\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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:

\begin{quote}
Zeû pátēr, Ὄθρυάδα τίνα φέρτερον ἔδρακες ἄλλοιν,
δὲ μόνος ἕκ Θυρέας οὐκ ἔθέλησε μολέιν
πατρίδ’ ἐπὶ Σπάρταν, διὰ δὲ ξίφος ἠλάσε πλευράν,
δοῦλα κυτηγράψας 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,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{48}See Appendix A, Figure 2.
\textsuperscript{50}This scene is most famously discussed by Herodotus in his \textit{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 Othryadas, 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” (Ἀνδρᾶς Ἀρης 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” (Αἴδην κηδεμόν' εὑρόμεθα). 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:

Δαμὼ καὶ Μάθυμνα τὸν ἐν τριετηρίσιν Ἑράς
Εὐφρονα λυσσατὰν ώς 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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56Callimachus: *A.P.* 7.517; Anyte: *A.P.* 7.492
57Nothing 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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{60} One such imagining is this epigram by Gaetulicus (1st century C.E) that loosely imitates a sepulchral inscription:

\begin{quote}
\textit{σῆμα τόδ’ Ἀρχιλόχου παραπόντιον, ὡς ποτε πικρὴν μοῦσαν ἐγκινήσας ἐβαψε χόλῳ, αἰμάξας Ἐλικώνα τὸν ἡμερον. οἶδε Λυκάμβης, μυρόμενος τρισσῶν ἅμαμα θυγατέρων. ἥρεμα δὴ παράμειψον, ὁδοιπόρε, μὴ ποτὲ τοῦδε κινήσῃς τύμβῳ σφῆκας ἐφεζομένου}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{59}Carey 1986, 60.

\textsuperscript{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. Lycamnes 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.” 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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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. 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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62The 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.”

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.” 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.” 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.” 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. 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.”

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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63Raskin 2008, 531.
64Halliwell 2008, 442.
66Kidd 2014, 43.
67For example: Hom. Il. 1.597–600
68Bloom 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.\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{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:

\begin{verbatim}
Ποιήσας δαπάνην ἐν ὑπνοῖς ὁ φιλάργυρος Ἡρμων
ἐκ περιωδυνίας αὐτὸν ἀπηγχόνισεν.
\end{verbatim}

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

\textsuperscript{69}For an in depth discussion of dark humor in the works of Callimachus, Cercidas, Machon, and Herodas in particular, see But (2010).
\textsuperscript{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” (αὑτὸν ἀπηγχόνισεν) after fighting with his father. Yet another epigram by Loukllios 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.” 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.” 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.). 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” (Ἥψεν ὃν εὗρε 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

72Raskin 2008, 531.
73Van Hooff 1990, 148.
74A.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.” 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 ἵμαντι) from either a pear tree or shed, depending on the epigram. Likewise, Menophanus “hung himself from hunger on another man’s oak” (διὰ λιμὸν ἐκ δρυὸς ἀλλοτρίας αὐτὸν ἀπηγχόνισεν). 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.” 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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78Van 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.\textsuperscript{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.”\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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


\textsuperscript{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 ἀνήρ εὑρὼν ἔλιπε βρόχον· αὐτάρ ὁ χρυσὸν
δὲν λίπεν ὦχ εὐρὼν ἦψεν δὲν εὑρε 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 Loukllios:

Ἐν καλάμῳ πήξας ἀθέρα Στρατονικὸς ὁ λεπτός,
καὶ τριχὸς ἐκδήσας, αὐτὸν ἀπηγχόνισεν·
καὶ τί γάρ; οὐχὶ κάτω βρῖσεν βαρύς· ἀλλ’ ὑπὲρ αὐτὸν
νηνεμίας οὔσης, νεκρὸς άνω 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

\(^{81}\) Nisbet 2003, 196
well-read and well-exercised: a healthy mind in a healthy body.” The *leptoï* 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 effeminate bodies do not have the strength to commit any suicide other than hanging. Unmanned by intellectual pursuits, the *leptoï* 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 *leptoï* — 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 ἔσσι, β. Φιλαυλός
Εὐκρατίδεω. α. Ποδαπὸς δ᾽ εἶχεα . . .

α. Ἐξησεις δὲ τίνα στέργων βίον; β. Όὐ τὸν ἀρότρου,
οὐδὲ τὸν ἐκ νηῶν, τὸν δὲ σοφοῖς ἔταρον.

α. Γῆραϊ δ᾿ ἢ νούσῳ βίον ἔλλιπες; β. Ἡλυθὸν
Ἄδαν αὐτοθελεί, Κείων γευσάμενος κυλίκων.

α. Λάχοι νῦ σε βῶλος ἐλαφρὴ σύμφωνο τινυτῷ σχόντα λόγῳ βίστον.

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 My adaptation of the Loeb Translation.
In the epigram, Philaulus clearly states that he died “of his own will” (αὐτοθελεῖ). 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. 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. 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. 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):

Σῆμα τόδ’ Αἰαντος Τελαμωνίου, ὃν κτάνε Μοῖρα,  
αὐτοῦ χρησαμένα καὶ χερὶ καὶ ξίφει.  
οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐν θνητοῖσι δυνήσατο καὶ μεμαυῖα  
eὑρέμεναι Κλωθῷ τὸδ’ ἔτερον 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 inflections 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 ἑρικυδέος, οὐ̣ ξένε, λεύσσεις,
εἰκόνα θεσπεσίῳ κάλλεϊ λαμπομένην.
τοῖς καὶ γενόμην, ἀλλ’ οὐ νόον, οἶον ἀκούεις,
ἔσχον, ἐπ’ εὐφήμοις δόξαν ἐνεγκαμένη.
οὐδὲ γὰρ Αἰνείαν ποτ’ ἐσέδρακον, οὐδὲ χρόνοις ἔσχον,
Τροίης περθομένης ἦλυθον ἐς Λιβύην· ἀλλὰ βίας φεύγουσα Ἰαρβαίων ὑμεναίων
πῆξα κατὰ κραδίης φάσγανον ἀμφίτομον.
Πιερίδες, τί μοι ἄγνον ἐφωπλίσσασθε Μάρωνα
οἰα 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 arkhētupon. 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.”

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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 sōphrosúne, 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 sōphrosúne, 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 ἀ γενέτειρα Βο伊斯κα
οὐδ᾿ ὑπὸ δυσμενέων δούρατι κεκλίμεθα·
ἀλλ᾿ αὐταί, πάτρας ὅποτ ἐφλέγεν ἀστυ Κορίνθου
γοργὸς Ἄρης, ἦσαν ἄλκιμον εἰλόμεθα.

ἔκτανε γὰρ μάτηρ με διαφακτήρι σιδάρῳ,
οὐδ᾿ ἰδίου φειδὼ δύσμορος ἔσχε βίου,
ἀψε δ᾿ ἐναυχενίῳ δειρὰν βρόχῳ· ἦς 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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{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 \textgreek{αὐταί} at the beginning of line three shows otherwise: \textit{“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-kilings 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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{88}The other epigrams are \textit{A.P.} 9.151 and \textit{A.P.} 7.297
\textsuperscript{89} \textit{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%
  - Count: 1

- **weapons**: 26.1%
  - Count: 12

- **poison**: 4.3%
  - Count: 2

- **unknown**: 21.7%
  - Count: 10

- **hanging**: 43.5%
  - Count: 20

Figure 1: Suicide methods in epigrams.
Figure 2: The gender of self-killers in epigrams.
Appendix B: Suicide Epigrams

_A.P. 7.69_ — Julianus the Prefect of Egypt

Κέρβερος δειμαλέην ὑλακήν νεκύεσσιν ἵαλλων,
ἠδὲ φρικαλέον δείδιθ καὶ σὺ νέκυν·
Ἀρχίλοχος τέθνηκε· φυλάσσει σιδηρόν ἵαμβων
δριμών, πικροχόλου πτικτόμενον στόματος.
οἶσθα βοῆς κείνοι μέγα σθένος,
εὖτε Λυκαμβιάς 
νηῦς μία ἔδωκε 
οἶδε 
οὐκ ἔλειπον ἀλυσκάζαι ἰαμβῶν
Ἀρχιλόχου φλέγμα Λυκαμβιάς,
πῶς οὐκ ἄν προλίποι σκοτίων πυλεῶνας ἐναύλων
νεκρὸς ἅπας, φεύγων τάρβος ἐπεσβολής;

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. 7.70_ — Julianus the Prefect of Egypt

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᾿ Ἀρχίλόχου παραπόντιον, ὡς ποτε πικρῆν
Μοῦσαν ἔχιδναίῳ πρώτοις ἔβαψε χόλῳ,
αἰμάξας Ἑλικῶνα τὸν ἧμερον. οἶδε Λυκάμβης,
μυρόμενος τρισσῶν ἄμματα θυγατέρων.
ηρέμα δὴ παράμειψας, ὀδοπόρε, μὴ ποτε τοῦδε
κινήσῃς τόμβῳ σφήκας ἐφεξομένως.

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

Hélioν πυρόεντα μιύμον ποτὲ φάσκεν ὑπάρχειν,
καὶ δίὰ τοῦτο θανεῖν μέλλειν Ἀναξαγόρας:
ἀλλ’ ὁ φίλος Περικλῆς μὲν ἐρύσατο τοῦτον· ὁ δὲ αὐτὸν
εξάγαγεν βιότου μάλθακίῃ 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 σοφὸς ἐπεθεός, καὶ θεός ἢ σοφία.

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 ἢ πρόπολος,
ἀλλὰ πιὸν ἀκόνιτον ὑπέκφυγε· τοῦτ’ ἀκονιτῇ
ἥν ἄρα νικήσαι 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 ἀσίτος;
<οἱ δ’ ὅτι προσκόμιον ποτ’ ἐφὶ χερὶ γὰν ἀλοήσας,
“Ἐρχομαι αὐτόματος· τί δὴ καλέεις 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

Αἳ ἐγὼ ἀ τλάμον Αρετά παρὰ τῶδε κάθημαι
Αἴαντος τύμβῳ κειραμένα πλοκάμους,
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’ Αίαντειον ἐπὶ Ποιτήσιν ἀκταίς
θυμὸν ἄχει μεγάλῳ βεβολημένα,
εἰ παρ’ Ἀχαιοῖς ἁδολφρῶν Ἀπάτα κρέσσον ἐμεῦ δύναται.

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 ὑπέρμαχοις ἀσπίδα τείνας,
ημισὶ βαρῶν Τρώων, Αἶαν, ἔμεινας ἀρην’
οὐδὲ σε χερμαδίων ὡςεν κτύπος, οὐ νέφος ἤνιον,
οὐ πῦρ, οὐ δοράτων, οὐ ἀκμῆς πάταγος·
 ámbα προβλής τε καὶ ἐμπέδος,
ὡς ἄριστος ἐρίπνα ἱδρυθείς,
ἐι δὲ σε μὴ τεύχεσεν Ἀχιλλέος ὁπλισεν Ἑλλάς,
άξιον διὰ τοῦ ἀρετᾶς ὅπλα ποροῦσα γέρας,
οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐν θυμοτοσὶ δυνήσατο καὶ μεμαυῖα.

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’ Αίαντος Τελαμωνίου, ὃν κτάνε Μοῖρα,
αὐτὸδ χρησαμένα καὶ χερὶ καὶ ξίφει.
οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐν θυμοτοσὶ δυνήσατο καὶ μεμαυῖα.
εὑρέμεναι Κλωθὼ τῷ δ᾿ ἔτερον 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_

Keίται ἐν Τροίῃ Τελαμώνιος, οὗ τινι δ᾿ ἐμπῆς ἀντιβίων ὀπάσας εὖχος ἐοῦ θανάτου· τόσσης γὰρ χρόνος ἄλλου ἐπάξιον ἀνέρα τόλμης οὐχ εὐρών, παλάμη 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, 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 εἴλετ᾿ Ἀρισταγόρας, νῦς ὁ Θευπόμπου, μὴ θαῦμ ἐξεῖ· Δωρικὸς ἀνὴρ πατρίδος, οὐχ ἡβας ὀλλυμένας ἄλεγει.

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_

Ἀύλος, Αὐσονίης στρατηίς πρόμος, ὁ χρυσέοις στέμμασι σωφρύσας αὐχένας ὀπλοφόρους, νοθὸν ὅτ᾿ εἰς ὑπάτην ἄφυκτον ὑπάτην τερμα τ᾿ ἀφυκτον εἶδεν, ἀριστείην τέμφανες εἰς ἱδην· πῆξε δ᾿ ὑπὸ σπλάγχνοισιν ἐόν ἔριφος, εἰπε τε θνήσκων· “Αὐτὸς ἐκών ἐδάμην, μὴ νόσος εὐχος ἔχη.”
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*

Αἰλιός ὁ θρασύχειρ Ἀρεως πρόμος, ὁ ψελιώσας αὐχένα χρυσοδέτοις ἐκ πολέμου στεφάνοις, τηξιμελεὶ νοῦσῳ κεκολουμένος, ἔδραμε θυμῷ ἐς προτέρην ἐργον ἀρσενα μαρτυρίην, ὅσε δ᾿ ὑπὸ σπλάγχνοις πλατύ φάσγανον, ἐν μόνον εἰπόν “Ἄνδρας Ἀρης 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*

Γῆραί καὶ πενή τετρυμένος, οὐδ᾿ ὅρεγοντος οὐδένος ἀνθρώπου δυστυχίης ἔρανον, τοῖς τρομεροῖς κόλοσιν ὑπήλυθον ἥρεμα τύμβον, εὐφόρον αἰζοροῦ τέρμα μόλις βιότου. ἡλάχθη δ᾿ ἐπ᾿ ἐμοί νεκτῶν νόμος· οὔ γάρ 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 ὄρκιον, αἰδὲ Λυκάμβεω, αἳ λάχομεν στυγερὴν κληδόνα, θυγατέρες, οὔτε τί παρθενίην ἥσχοναμεν, οὔτε τοκῆας, οὔτε Πάρον νήσουν αἰτυτάτινι ιέραν. ἄλλα καθ᾿ ἡμετέρης γενεῆς ῥήγηλον ὄνειδος φήμην τε στυγερήν ἐβλύσεν Ἀρχύλοχος. Ἀρχύλοχον, μὰ θεοὺς καὶ δαίμονας, οὔτε ἐν ἀγνοίαξε εἰδομεν, οὔθ᾿ Ἡρῆς ἐν μεγάλῳ τεμένει. εἰ δ᾿ ἤμεν μάχλοι καὶ ἀτάσθαλοι, οὐκ ἄν ἐκεῖνος ἥθελεν 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 Ἀἴδαο θεοῦ χέρα καὶ τὰ κελαινὰ ὑπὸ χθονί· περσεφόνης,
> παρθένοι ὡς ἔτυμον καὶ ὡς θυμία· πολλὰ δ᾽ ὡς πικρὸς
> αἰσχρὰ καθ᾽ ἡμετέρης ἐβλυσε παρθενίης Ἀρχίλοχος·
> ἐπέων δὲ καλὴν φάτιν οὐκ ἐπὶ καλὰ ἐργά,
> γυναικεῖον δ᾿ ἐτράπετ᾿, οὐχ ὡς εἰς πόλεμον.

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. Ἐἶπον ἀνειρομένῳ τίς καὶ τίνος ἐσσί. β. Φίλαυλος
> Εὐκρατίδεω. α. Ποδαπὸς δ᾽ εὕχεαι ὧς
> α. Ἐξίσας δὲ τίνα στέργων βίον; β. οὐ τὸν ἄροτρον,
> σοφοῖς ἐτράπετ᾿, οὐχ ὡς εἰς πόλεμον.
> α. Γήραϊ δ᾽ ἢ νούσῳ βίον ἑλλιπες; β. Ἡλυθον ᾽Αδαν
> αὐτοθελεί, Κείων γευσάμενος κυλίκων.
> α. Ἡ πρέσβυς; β. Ἐπεὶ κάρτα. α. Λάχοι νῦ σὲ
> βόλος ἑλαφρῇ
> σύμφωνον πινυτῷ σχόντα λόγῳ βιότον.

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

> Εἶπας “ήλιε, χαίρε” Κλεόμβροτος ὀμβρακιώτης ἤλατ’ ἄφ’ υψηλοῦ τείχεος εἰς άιδαν,
> ἄξιον οὐδέν ιδών θανάτου κακόν, ἄλλα Πλάτωνος ἐν τῷ 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, ἄνθρωπος, χρόνος προτοῦ, ἀχρὶ πρὸς ἣν ἦλθες, ἄχρὶ λοιπὸς μυρίος εἰς ἀιδήν.
> τίς μοῖρα ζωῆς ὑπολείπεται, ἢ ὅσον ὅσον ὅσον οὐδὲν θανάτου κακόν, ἀλλὰ Πλάτωνος ἐν τῷ περὶ ψυχῆς γράμμ’ ἀναλεξάμενος.

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_

Δαμώ καὶ Μάθυμα τὸν ἐν τριετήρισιν Ἡρας
Εὐφρονα λυσσατάν ὡς ἐπύθοντο νέκουν,
ζωὰν ἀρνήσαντο, ταυπλέκτων δ’ ἀπὸ μιτράν
χερσὶ δεραιόχους 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 ὀλόφρονος, ἥς ἀπὸ φαιδρὰν
ἐκλασάς ἥλικιαν, ἵμερόεσσα Κλεοὶ·
καδδὲ σ᾿ ἀμυξάμεναι περιδάκρυες ἀπὸ τύμβῳ
λαῖες Σειρήνων ἐσταμεὶς 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_

Ὡχόμεθ᾿, οἱ Μίλητε, φίλη πατρί, τῶν ἀθεμίστων
τὰν ἄνομον Γαλατάν κύριν ἀναινόμεναι,
παρθενικαὶ τρισσαὶ πολιήτιδες, ὡς ὁ βιατὰς
Κελτῶν εἰς ταύτην μοἴραν έτρεψεν Ἀρης,
οὐ γὰρ ἐμείναμεν ἁμα τὸ δυσσεβὲς οὐδ᾿ Ἐμέναιον
νυμφίον, ἀλλ᾿ Ἀϊδην 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 νοῦσῳ Ῥοδόπα τε καὶ ἄ γενετειρα Βοΐσκα
οὐδ᾽ ὑπὸ δυσμενέοιν δούρατι κεκλιμέθα·
ἀλλ᾽ αὐταί, πάτρας ὁπότ᾽ ἐφέλγεν ἄστυ Κορίνθου
γοργὸς Ἀρης, ἀδὰν ἄλκιμον εἰλόμεθα.
ἐκτάνε γὰρ μάτηρ με διασφακτήρι σιδάρφο,
οὐδ᾽ ἰδίου φειδὼ δύσμορος ἐσχε βίου,
Ἀγαθὸς ἠθανατοῦσις δειρὰν βρόχῳ· ἦς γὰρ ἀμείνων δουλοσύνας ἀμὴν 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

Ἡῳοι Μελάνιππον ἑθάπτομεν, ἤλιον δὲ δυομένου Βασιλὼ κάτθανε παρθενικὴ αὐτοχερί· ζώειν γὰρ, ἀδελφεὸν ἐν πυρὶ θείσα, οὐκ ἔτλη. δίδυμον δ᾿ οἶκος ἐσεῖδε κακὸν πατρὸς Ἀριστίπποιο· κατήφησεν δὲ Κυρήνη πᾶσα, τὸν εὐτεκνὸν χῆρον ἱδοῦσα 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 ἐδρακες ἄλλον, ὃς μόνος ἐκ Θυρέας οὐκ ἐθέλησε μολεῖν πατρίδ᾿ ἐπὶ Σπάρταν, διὰ δὲ ξίφος ἠλάσε πλευρᾶν, δοῦλα καταγράψας σκῦλα κατ Ἦναξιδάν;

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

Ὑστατόν ἐθρήνησε τὸν ὑκύμορον Κλεαρίστῃ παῖδα, καὶ ἄμφι τάφῳ πικρόν ἐπαυσε βίον· κωκύσασα γὰρ ὅσσον ἐχάνδαν μητρὸς ἀνίη, οὐκετ᾿ ἐπιστρέψαι πνεύματος ἐσχὲ τόνους. θηλύτεραι, τί τοσοῦτον ἐμετρήσασθε τάλαιναι θρήνων; ἵνα κλαύσῃ θρήνων καὶ Αἰδεω;

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

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

“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 — Statylius Flaccus [attributed to Plato]

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 — Statylius Flaccus

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

He who 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.
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 δάμαλς μία καὶ τριχόμαλλος ἦν δ’ ἐκ τούτων λιμόν ἐλαυνε θύρης.

A.P. 9.255 — Phillipus of Thessalonica

Ἀρίθμει πολὺν ὀλβὸν Ἀριστείδης ὁ πενιχρὸς τὴν δ’ ὡς ποίμνην, τὴν βόα δ’ ὡς ἀγέλην.

A.P. 9.574 — Anonymous

Ἡμάξευσα καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ τρισδύστηνος Ἀναξίς πολύς δύσζωον κοῦ βιοτον βιοτον.

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 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.

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 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.

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
Τῶ 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 Στρατονικος ὁ λεπτός, καὶ τριχὸς ἐκδήσας, αὑτὸν ἀπηγχόνισεν· καὶ τί γάρ; οὐχὶ κάτω βρίσεν 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 αὑτὸν 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 ἑαυτῷ τὴν γένεσιν διαθεὶς Αὖλος ὁ ἀστρολόγος, καὶ ζήσειν ὡς δὲ παρῆλθεν εἰς πέμπτην, καὶ ζῇν εἰδότα μηδὲν ἐδει, αἰσχυνθεὶς Πετόσιρι 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
Ἑξῆς ἀπάγχεσθαι μέλλων Δείναρχος ὁ φείδων, Γλαύκε, δι’ ἐξ χαλκοὺς δύσμορος οὐκ ἔθανεν· ἐξ χαλκῶν ἦν γὰρ τὸ σχοινίον· ἀλλ’ ἐδυσώνει, εὔωνον ζητῶν ἀλλὸν ἰσως θάνατον. τοῦτο φιλαργυρίας δεινῆς ὀρος, δὲ γ᾿ ἀποθνήσκων,
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 — Loukilios

Ἀγρὸν Μηνοφάνης ὄνησατο, καὶ διὰ λιμὸν ἐκ δρύου ἄλλοτριας αὐτὸν ἄπηγχόνισεν.

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

A.P. 11.264 — Loukilios

Ποιήσας δαπάνην ἐν ὕπνοις ὁ φιλάργυρος Ἐρμων ἐκ περιωδυνίας αὑτὸν ἀπηγχόνισεν.

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. 16.151 — Anonymous

Ποιήσας δαπάνην ἐν ὕπνοις ὁ φιλάργυρος Ἐρμων ἐκ περιωδυνίας αὑτὸν ἀπηγχόνισεν.

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

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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