

# Greek Skoptic Epigram and ‘Popular’ Literature: *Anth.Gr.* XI and the *Philogelos*

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**G**REEK SKOPTIC EPIGRAM, an epigrammatic subgenre whose main practitioners flourished during the first and second centuries A.D., and which is preserved mainly in Book XI of the *Greek Anthology*, targets physical defects or moral vices, directing its satire towards persons who represent generic human categories. Categorization into character types, concision, and a tendency to concentrate the humour in the final punch line are characteristics that skoptic epigrams share with ‘popular’ literary genres such as comic tales, of which an ancient collection is represented by the *Philogelos*,<sup>1</sup> the only certain jokebook to have survived from antiquity.<sup>2</sup>

It is well known that the definition of popular literature—and of popular culture in general—is problematic, especially for the ancient world.<sup>3</sup> In order to distinguish what is ‘popular’ from

<sup>1</sup> On the *Philogelos* see B. Baldwin, *The Philogelos or Laughter-Lover* (Amsterdam 1983); W. Hansen, *Anthology of Ancient Greek Popular Literature* (Bloomington 1998) 272 ff.; M. Andreassi, *Le facezie del Philogelos. Barzellette antiche e umorismo moderno* (Lecce 2004); T. Braccini and M. Bettini, *Come ridevano gli antichi (Philogelos)* (Genoa 2008). I use the critical edition by R. D. Dawe, *Philogelos* (Munich/Leipzig 2000). Translations of the *Philogelos* are adapted from Baldwin; of *Anth.Gr.* XI from W. R. Paton’s Loeb (1918).

<sup>2</sup> Remnants of another ancient *Witzbuch* could be those preserved by *P.Heid.* I 190, if R. Kassel, “Reste eines hellenistischen Spassmacherbuches auf einem Heidelberger Papyrus?” *RhM* 99 (1956) 242–245, is right in interpreting them as such; see also G. Monaco, *Paragoni burleschi degli antichi*<sup>2</sup> (Palermo 1966) 84–87; Andreassi, *Le facezie* 22–24.

<sup>3</sup> See most recently J. P. Toner, *Popular Culture in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge 2009) 1–10, and the important theoretical article by H. N. Parker, “Toward

what is not, I follow here W. Hansen's model (*Anthology* xi–xvii), based on Pierre Bourdieu's definition of popular aesthetic, which, in spite of the reasonable criticisms raised against it,<sup>4</sup> still provides, in my view, a useful, if schematic, working definition, at least when approaching ancient texts of the kind analyzed in this paper.

According to Hansen's model, none of the traits considered characteristic of popular literature can be detected in Greek skoptic epigram. While one of the main features of popular literature is, as Hansen puts it, "straightforwardness, the contrary of subtlety and indirection" (xiv), so that a certain content is expressed regardless of style, in skoptic epigram not only the *object*, but also the *mode* of representation is very important. The witticism of the texts often works through puns, intertextual allusions, quotations, literary parody, and polysemy in a complex and subtle way,<sup>5</sup> allowing the texts to be labelled as 'high culture'.<sup>6</sup> Second, traits characteristic of popular literature are considered to be anonymous authorship and textual fluidity. Skoptic epigrams are only rarely anonymous, and when they are this is mostly due to the accidents of transmission.<sup>7</sup> More-

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a Definition of Popular Culture," *History and Theory* 50 (2011) 147–170.

<sup>4</sup> See Parker, *History and Theory* 50 (2011), esp. 160–163.

<sup>5</sup> G. Nisbet, *Greek Epigram in the Roman Empire. Martial's Forgotten Rivals* (Oxford 2003); E. Magnelli, "Nicarco, *A.P.* 11.328: allusioni oscene e allusioni erudite (con osservazioni sulla trasmissione degli epigrammi skoptici)," *SemRom* 8(2) (2005) 153–166; L. Floridi, "Rivisitazione delle convenzioni epigrammatiche nel sottogenere skoptico," *MD* 65 (2010) 9–42.

<sup>6</sup> On this point see also K.-W. Weeber, "Philogelos," in *Metzler Lexicon antiker Autoren* (Stuttgart 1997) 528, who underlines how the "thematische Übereinstimmungen" between popular jokes and skoptic epigram do not involve a similar "literarisch-formale Qualität." Andreassi, *Le facezie* 39 n.25, stresses how the *Philogelos*—like popular culture in general—avoids details which are not strictly necessary to the plot (on this point more below).

<sup>7</sup> A different case is represented by imperial epigrams in which satire is directed against men in power—here anonymity is compulsory: see J. Blomqvist, "The Development of the Satirical Epigram in the Hellenistic Period," in M. A. Harder et al. (eds.), *Genre in Hellenistic Poetry* (Groningen

over, textual fluidity is not a typical feature of these texts: although they were subject to refinement before publication<sup>8</sup>—a fact which can occasionally result in variant readings<sup>9</sup>—they were certainly collected in single-authored books and anthologies, artistically arranged.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, they were mainly conceived as 'written' literature, although they could sometimes be performed orally, at symposia or elsewhere.<sup>11</sup> An influence of popular culture on skoptic epigram is nonetheless detectable:<sup>12</sup> jokes are, by their very nature, doomed to live different lives through the centuries, through their retelling.<sup>13</sup> It is therefore by no means surprising to find several points of contact between the jokes contained in *Anth.Gr.* XI and jokes transmitted through other sources.

The aim of this paper is to explore these points of contact, concentrating in particular on two aspects: (1) thematic analogies between Greek skoptic epigrams and popular ancient

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1998) 45–60, at 59.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Plin. *Ep.* 8.21; R. Höschele, *Die blütenlesende Muse: Poetik und Textualität antiker Epigrammsammlungen* (Tübingen 2010) 46 ff.

<sup>9</sup> Variant readings are shown, for instance, by Nicarch. *Anth.Gr.* 11.328, transmitted via both the *Greek Anthology* and *P.Oxy.* LXVI 4502; for a discussion see Magnelli, *SemRom* 8 (2005) 159–164.

<sup>10</sup> Pace Nisbet, *Greek Epigram* 35, for whom books of skoptic epigrams are not "literary books, to be read at a sitting," but "books designed for use": see reviewers' objections, e.g. N. Holzberg, *Gnomon* 76 (2004) 705–707; S. Lorenz, *AnzAW* 57 (2004) 131–134; K. J. Gutzwiller, *BMCR* 2005.01.19; E. Magnelli, *Prometheus* 31 (2005) 282–285. For evidence to the contrary, Magnelli, *SemRom* 8 (2005) 161 ff.; Floridi, *MD* 65 (2010) 34 ff.

<sup>11</sup> For the ways epigrams circulated in the I–II centuries A.D. see especially M. Citroni, "Pubblicazione e dediche dei libri in Marziale," *Maia* 40 (1988) 3–39 (repr. with additions in *Marziale. Epigrammi* I [Milan 1996] 5–64).

<sup>12</sup> Only in this sense is Nisbet's claim acceptable that skoptic epigrams can be read as "a kind of 'street style', bubbling up ... from below" (*Greek Epigram* 210).

<sup>13</sup> For examples of jokes of the *Philogelos* still in circulation see W. Hansen, "The Seer and the Computer: on *Philogelos* and Modern Jokes," *CB* 77 (2001) 87–102; Andreassi, *Le facezie* 81 ff.

jokes, with a particular focus on the exploitation of analogous comic ideas that serve to provoke laughter; (2) the form of some of the epigrams, in order to suggest the existence of stock comic schemes, based on common syntactic structures that can be adapted in various ways.

*Skoptic epigram and joke books: targets and categorization*

From a structural point of view, several similarities are detectable between Book XI of the *Greek Anthology* and the *Philogelos*: (1) both are categorized into character types,<sup>14</sup> which represent generic human categories, reflecting moral or physical faults; (2) character types tend to be indicated by analogous labels, for example misers,<sup>15</sup> cowards,<sup>16</sup> the envious,<sup>17</sup> the lazy,<sup>18</sup> those with bad breath.<sup>19</sup> They are, more generally, often the same, even when this is not reflected by the headings under

<sup>14</sup> For skoptic epigram, see the *tituli* under which poems are grouped in the two principal textual witnesses of the *Greek Anthology*, **P** (*Pal.Heidel.gr.* 23) and **PI** (*Venet.Marcian.gr.* 481), which could reflect an ancient—sometimes authorial—way to arrange texts in books and anthologies; cf. Floridi, *MD* 65 (2010) 35–36. Similar *tituli* precede the sections of the *Philogelos* and of *P.Heid.* I 190.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Philogelos* section *περὶ φιλαργύρων* (104–108) with *Anth.Gr.* XI headings *εἰς μικρολόγους* (11.165–173; the term *φιλάργυρος* is used in three of these poems, 165.1, 170.1, 171.1; see also 169.5 *φιλαργυρίας*); *εἰς φιλάργυρον* (264); *εἰς φειδωλόν* (391, where the character is *Ἀσκληπιάδης ὁ φιλάργυρος*).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Philogelos* section *δειλοί* (206–210 and 217–218) with *Anth.Gr.* *εἰς δειλούς* (11.210–211).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Philogelos* *φθονεροί* (214–216) with *Anth.Gr.* *εἰς φθονερούς* (11.192–193).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Philogelos* *ὀκνηροί* (211–213) with *Anth.Gr.* *εἰς ὀκνηρούς* (11.276–277, preceded by this lemma in **PI**; the texts read *ἀργός*, and the same adjective is used in 11.311.1).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Philogelos* *ὄζόστομοι* (231–243) with *Anth.Gr.* more general label *εἰς βαρυόδμους* (11.239–242—but the section includes epigrams specifically addressed towards *ὄζόστομοι*, 241–242, and the term is used in ‘Lucian’ *Anth.Gr.* 11.427.1).

which materials are arranged: doctors,<sup>20</sup> astrologers,<sup>21</sup> gluttons,<sup>22</sup> drunkards,<sup>23</sup> particular ethnic groups or communities,<sup>24</sup> boxers,<sup>25</sup> fools,<sup>26</sup> thieves,<sup>27</sup> grammarians,<sup>28</sup> barbers,<sup>29</sup> comic/tragic actors,<sup>30</sup> etc. Some of these types are familiar from the comic stage (e.g. doctors or astrologers), but some are new, and quite peculiar (see, in particular, persons with foul breath).<sup>31</sup> It should also be noted that other works with similar categorisations, such as Theophrastus' *Characters*, have only an insignificant number of character types indicated by similar labels (among these, the coward, δειλός, and the miser, μικρολόγος), or characterised by similar traits (the ἀναίσθητος, for instance, has much of the fool, variously represented in jokes and epigrams). Pervasive analogy between jokes and epigrams thus shows a privileged point of contact between the two genres.

In addition, both jokes and skoptic epigrams sometimes combine, within the same text, two different human categories, or

<sup>20</sup> E.g. *Philog.* 3 (~ 175 bis), 139, 142, 143, 151 bis, 174–177, 182(?)–186, 221, 235; *Anth.Gr.* 11.112–126, 257.

<sup>21</sup> E.g. *Philog.* 187, 202, 204; *Anth.Gr.* 11.114, 365, and the section εἰς μάντις (159–164).

<sup>22</sup> E.g. *Philog.* 219–226, 261; *Anth.Gr.* 11.205–208.

<sup>23</sup> *Philogelos* section μέθυσοι (227–230); *Anth.Gr.* e.g. 11.232, 297–298.

<sup>24</sup> *Philog.* sections labelled Ἀβδηρίτης (110–127), Σιδόνιοι (128–139), Κυμαῖοι (154–182); *Anth.Gr.* e.g. 11.235 (on people from Chios), 236 (on Cilicians), 237–238 (on Cappadocians).

<sup>25</sup> *Philog.* 172, 208–210, 218; *Anth.Gr.* 11.75–81.

<sup>26</sup> A typical character in ancient jokes is the σχολαστικός, the intellectual/numskull, who features in many a comic tale: on this figure, and on the meaning of the term, see Andreassi, *Le facezie* 43–51. For fools in epigrams see e.g. *Anth.Gr.* 11.434 (on the typical comic character of the μωρὸς φαλακρός).

<sup>27</sup> *Philog.* 142, 150, 211; *Anth.Gr.* 11.174–179, 315.

<sup>28</sup> *Philog.* 136, 196, 197; *Anth.Gr.* 11.138–140, 278–279, 309, 321–322.

<sup>29</sup> *Philog.* 148, 198; *Anth.Gr.* 11.191, 288.

<sup>30</sup> *Philog.* 226, 239; *Anth.Gr.* 11.189.

<sup>31</sup> The novelty of this theme is pointed out also by Andreassi, *Le facezie* 56–57.

two different faults in a single person: Lucillius, for instance, directs his satire, in *Anth.Gr.* 11.114, towards astrologers and doctors, thus pointing out the unexpected similarities between two categories apparently far one from the other (both are able to “foretell” somebody’s death). Adesp. *Anth.Gr.* 11.125 illustrates the reciprocal exchange of favours between a doctor and a sexton: the sexton steals the wrappings from the grave-clothes, for the doctor to use as bandages; the doctor, in return, sends him all his patients to bury. Adrastus is an orator who is mocked, in Lucillius *Anth.Gr.* 11.392, for his pretentiousness, but also for his ridiculous physical condition (as is evident from the context, he is a μικρός and a λεπτός). Popular jokes show similar techniques: in *Philog.* 33 the stupidity of the father adds to that of the son; 183–185 feature bad-tempered persons who are, at the same time, doctors; in 6 “the alleged rapacity of doctors is as much at stake as the stupidity of the *scholasticus*,”<sup>32</sup> etc. Implicit effects of hyperbole are thus achieved, or the varied, multilayered nature of the human being is vividly portrayed.

The fact that skoptic epigrams tend to call by name their targets, while the *Philogelos* mostly uses generic expressions, does not diminish the similarities: as scholars have observed, skoptic epigrams are mostly directed towards character types, not individuals.<sup>33</sup> Many of the names chosen for them are *nomina ficta*, fitting the contents, or generic names, indicating a somebody, any Tom, Dick, and Harry.<sup>34</sup> The *typologies* of those made fun of are made clear by adjectives/nouns describing them, such as μικρός, ιατρός, φιλάργυρος, πύκτης, in a way that is not so different from the generic indications of comic tales/narrative jokes (φιλάργυρός τις, φιλόσοφος τις, etc.). As is well known,

<sup>32</sup> Baldwin, *The Philogelos* 54.

<sup>33</sup> On this point see especially R. Reitzenstein, *Epigramm und Skolion* (Giessen 1893) 92 n.1; H. Beckby, *Anthologia Graeca*<sup>2</sup> I (Munich 1967) 46–48; V. Longo, *L'epigramma scoptico greco* (Genoa 1967) 94–104; Blomqvist, in *Genre in Hellenistic Poetry* 45–60.

<sup>34</sup> More on this point in L. Floridi, *Lucillio. Epigrammi* (forthcoming) Introduzione II.5 (“Bersagli polemici e *nomina ficta*”).

the appearance of characters with no names or with generic names, rather than with the names of actual persons, is exactly what distinguishes jokes from comic anecdotes. The distinction between the two is not only formal, but regards, more generally, the purpose for which the texts were conceived (and the underlying conception of the social/moral ends of literature): while anecdotes, so widespread in Greek and Latin literature, promised insights into important persons/events, jokes—which are, by contrast, relatively rare—merely had to be amusing, without necessarily being instructive.<sup>35</sup> The *Philogelos* and the epigrams of *Anth.Gr.* XI (at least those that show the closest similarities to popular jokes) are thus (rare) expressions of a similar 'disengaged' conception of (literary) narrative.

#### *Thematic analogies*

Before we start our analysis, it should be noted that the *Philogelos*, although probably compiled in the fourth-fifth centuries, is a stratified text, whose jokes reflect centuries of oral transmission;<sup>36</sup> fixing a relative chronology with respect to skoptic epigrams, whose dates are usually more precisely known, is impossible, as well as pointless. While sometimes quite close parallels can (and will) be pointed out,<sup>37</sup> it is important to stress how humour, in these texts, works through similar comic mechanisms and ideas (some of which still operate in modern jokes: humour, although inevitably subject to relativism, can exploit very long-lasting, if not universal,

<sup>35</sup> See Hansen, *CB* 77 (2001) 88–89. Nevertheless, jokes can indirectly serve the purpose of instructing people: they criticise human mistakes and failures, on which readers/listeners are thus made to reflect. Significantly, a σκῶμμα is defined by Theophrastus (*ap.* Plut. *Mor.* 631E) as “a disguised reproach for a mistake” (ὄνειδισμὸς γὰρ ἔστιν τῆς ἁμαρτίας παρεσχηματισμένος τὸ σκῶμμα).

<sup>36</sup> See Andreassi, *Le facezie* 33–37.

<sup>37</sup> Thematic analogies between the *Philogelos* and *Anth.Gr.* XI are briefly pointed out by F. J. Brecht, *Motiv- und Typengeschichte des griechischen Spott-epigramms* (Leipzig 1930) 37, 38 n.223, 41, 44 and n.246, 49–51, 59 n.311, 65–66, 79, 84–85, 87, 95–96, 99–100.

general principles).

In several skoptic epigrams the humour is based on a comic character who, in order to gratify a vice or moral weakness (such as stinginess or laziness), acts against his own interests: I shall call this motif, still very much present in modern-day jokes,<sup>38</sup> ‘the self-indulgent man who damages himself’. In an epigram by Lucillius, *Anth.Gr.* 11.311, for instance, a lazy person prays to the gods to prevent him recovering from a disease, so as not to have to get up from bed. Another lazy man, in Lucillius 11.276, admits committing a murder in order not to get out of prison, while another still, in Lucillius 11.277, decides not to fall asleep anymore, after he has dreamed of running. The miser of Lucillius 11.171 prefers death to life when he finds out that paying the bill to the doctors after recovering will cost him more than meeting funeral expenses.<sup>39</sup> A miser in Macedonius *Anth.Gr.* 11.366 = 36 Madden seeks to achieve eternal sleep after he has dreamed of getting hold of some treasure; but upon waking up in his state of poverty, he goes back to sleep in the hope of returning to the same sweet dream.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Some random examples from the web: “(A): I am so miserly, that I went alone for my honeymoon and saved half the money. (B): That is nothing, I saved all the money. I sent my wife to honeymoon with a friend.” “He was so lazy that he married a pregnant woman.”

<sup>39</sup> For similar black humour cf. Lucillius 11.172, Γεννηθὲν τέκνον κατεπόντισεν Ἀῦλος ὁ κνιπός, / ψηφίζων αὐτοῦ σφζομένου δαπάνας, “Aulus the miser drowned in the sea a child that was born to him, reckoning how much it would cost him if he kept it.” In modern times cf. e.g. “era così tirchio che quando seppe dei saldi alle pompe funebri si suicidò” (taken from the web).

<sup>40</sup> For this idea cf. *Philog.* 124, where a miser dreams of refusing an offer for a pig he wishes to sell at a higher price; on waking he closes his eyes and, stretching out a hand, agrees to accept the money offered (for other versions of the same story see Andreassi, *Le facezie* 119–120). As regards Macedonius, the situation of dreaming about riches might be jocularly reminiscent of a philosophical tradition of praise of the simple life and contempt for excessive wealth, as is exemplified by [Theocritus] *Idyll* 21 (with L. Belloni, [*Teocrito*], *I pescatori* [Como 2004], esp. 19 ff. for the philosophical background of the poem) and Lucian *The Dream* (with L. Gil, “Comentario a

All these characters can be compared to the miser of *Philog.* 27 (~ 79 *bis*), who does not want to recover from a disease in order not to pay the doctor's bill,<sup>41</sup> or to the σχολαστικός of *Philog.* 34, who wants to fall ill in order to return what he considers to be a friend's discourteous act.<sup>42</sup> As in skoptic epigram, in the *Philogelos* this comic scheme is mostly, but not exclusively, applied to lazy persons (211, 213) and misers (e.g. 27 ~ 79 *bis* and 97). A particularly striking similarity is offered by the pair Nicarch. *Anth.Gr.* 11.170 and *Philog.* 97, which can be considered as partly expressing this comic scheme:

Δακρύει Φεΐδων ὁ φιλάργυρος, οὐχ ὅτι θνήσκει,  
 ἀλλ' ὅτι πέντε μνῶν τὴν σορὸν ἐπρίατο.  
 τοῦτ' αὐτῷ χαρίσασθε καί, ὡς τόπος ἐστὶν ἐν αὐτῇ,  
 τῶν πολλῶν τεκνίων ἐν τι προσεμβάλετε.

Phido the miser weeps not because he is dying, but because he paid five minai for his coffin. Grant him this, and as there is room in it, put one of his many little children into it besides.

Pseudo-Teocrito, *Idil.* XXI," *Emerita* 30 [1962] 241–261, esp. 243–245 for the similarities with [Theocritus]), where the dream plays an important role. For the dream of wealth see also Alciphron 2.2; Nonn. *Dion.* 35.245–252.

<sup>41</sup> Σχολαστικός νοσῶν συνετάξατο τῷ ἰατρῷ εἰ θεραπευθεῖ μισθὸν δώσειν. ὡς οὖν οἶνον ἐν τῷ πυρέσειν πίνοντι αὐτῷ ἐπετίμα ἡ γυνή· Σὺ δὲ ὑγιάναντα βούλει με, ἔφη, ἀναγκασθῆναι τῷ ἰατρῷ τὸν μισθὸν δώσειν; ("An egghead who was ill promised his doctor a reward for curing him. Later on, when his wife was reproving him for drinking wine when he had a fever, he answered: 'Do you really want me to get better and so have to pay the doctor his reward?'""); cf. in particular Lucill. *Anth.Gr.* 11.171.3–6 (quoted n. 60 below): "He lay there reckoning what fee he must pay the doctors if he leaves his bed and how much his illness costs him. But when he found it cost one drachma more if he were saved, 'It pays', he said, 'to die', and stretched himself out."

<sup>42</sup> The joke is transmitted in three slightly different versions; I quote here 34b: Σχολαστικός νοσοῦντα ἐταῖρον ἐπισκεπτόμενος ἠρώτα περὶ τῆς νόσου. τοῦ δὲ μὴ ἀποκρινομένου ὀργισθεὶς· Ἐλπίζω, εἶπε, κάγω νοσῆσαι, καὶ οὐκ ἀποκρивоῦμαί σοι ("Having gone to visit a sick friend, an egghead asked him how he was, but got no reply. Losing his temper, he said: 'I hope I'm sick one day, and then I'll be able not to answer you!'").

Σχολαστικός, γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ ἀποθανούσης, σορὸν ἠγόραζε καὶ περὶ τῆς τιμῆς ἐζυγομάχει. τοῦ δὲ πωλοῦντος ὁμόσαντος μὴ ἔλαττον πέντε μυριάδων πωλήσειν, ὁ δὲ· Ἐπειδὴ, ἔφη, προσεῖληψαι τῷ ὄρκῳ, λαβὲ μὲν τὰς πέντε μυριάδας, εἰς προσθήκην δέ μοι μικρὸν σορίδιον δός, ἵνα ἐάν που χρεῖα παιδίῳ γένηται ἔτοιμον ἦ.

An egghead went to buy a coffin for his wife who had died, but got into an argument over the price, the undertaker swearing that he would not sell for less than five myriads. “All right, here are the five myriads, since you are bound by your oath. But throw in for me one small coffin as well so that it will be ready for my son should I need one.”

The same underlying humourous idea is operating: in his biased perception of reality, a miser expresses an absurd and paradoxical scale of values, in which not death, but expenditure, is the ultimate misfortune. While in the *Philogelos* the stupidity of the miser is stressed—ultimately, he wants to suffer the death of a child in order to amortize the funeral expenses caused by the death of his wife<sup>43</sup>—in the epigram it is the author who suggests the possibility of the death of a child as a sarcastic means of interpreting the will of the miser himself, who is in distress not for having to die but for having to incur an expense for the burial. Another coincidence calls for comment: in both texts the amount of money is indicated by five. This may well be accidental, but, in view of the general similarities between the two texts, the possibility that it is not cannot be ruled out: replacing the old minai with the more recent myriads<sup>44</sup> could point to an ‘updating’ of a previous ver-

<sup>43</sup> For an anecdote based on a similar stupidity see Theophr. *Char.* 14.13, λέγοντός τινος· πόσους οἶει κατὰ τὰς Ἡρίας πύλας ἐξενηνέχθαι νεκρούς; πρὸς τοῦτον εἰπεῖν· ὅσοι ἐμοὶ καὶ σοὶ γένοιτο (“When someone remarks ‘You can’t imagine how many bodies have been taken out to the cemetery through the Erian Gates’, he answers ‘I wish you and I could have such a windfall’”) [transl. Diggle].

<sup>44</sup> For the relevance of the mention of the myriads in fixing the date of the *Philogelos* see Andreassi, *Le facezie* 34.

sion of a joke, as regularly happens in texts of this kind.<sup>45</sup> Be that as it may, what I am suggesting is not that the joke of the *Philogelos* is a conscious reworking of precisely Nicarchus’ epigram: the underlying comic idea is realised in different ways—there are different narrative details (death of himself *vs.* death of his wife; space for accommodating a child in the same coffin *vs.* request of a second coffin *gratis*); and there are differences in the narrative structure (narrative in the third person *vs.* dialogue between two characters)—but it is likely that at the core of the witticism is the same joke, circulating orally.

Most of the epigrams of what we have called ‘the self-indulgent man who damages himself’ motif call attention to their targets by their names: Nicarchus chooses the telling name of Φείδων for his φιλάργυρος,<sup>46</sup> Lucillius Ἐρμοκράτης for the miser in *Anth.Gr.* 11.171, the generic Μάρκος for his ἀργός in 276 and 277, while Πανταίνετος is the lazy person of 11.311. Macedonius *Anth.Gr.* 11.366 = 36 Madden, on the contrary, leaves his character anonymous, using a stock type of opening in tales: φειδωλός τις ἀνήρ. Even though the later poet almost certainly drew on his predecessors—according to the epigrammatic technique of variation on a theme—and in particular on Lucillius, combining the two ideas of (1) preferring death to spending (*Anth.Gr.* 11.171) and (2) having a dream related to money, and actually behaving as if it were real (11.264),<sup>47</sup> he seems to be aware that he is adopting a popular scheme, like those employed in fables and tales. He thus decides to keep one of their most typical features, viz. the intro-

<sup>45</sup> On this point see in particular Hansen, *CB* 77 (2001) 87–102.

<sup>46</sup> For similar jokes on names derived from φείδομαι see e.g. Φειδωνίδα and Φειδιπίδη in Ar. *Nub.* 65 and 67; maybe Φειδίζ in Alcaeus *Anth.Gr.* 7.429 = *HE* 96 ff., if Gow-Page *ad loc.* are right in suggesting that the name is appropriate for a woman “whose thriftiness is exemplified by the brevity of her tomb inscription” (K. J. Gutzwiller, *Poetic Garlands. Hellenistic Epigrams in Context* [Berkeley 1998] 269). Other examples in L. Floridi, *Stratone di Sardi. Epigrammi* (Alessandria 2007) *ad* Strato 15.6 = *Anth.Gr.* 12.21.6.

<sup>47</sup> See J. A. Madden, *Macedonius Consul. The Epigrams* (Hildesheim 1995) 253.

duction of a character qualified by a generic denomination and accompanied by an indefinite pronoun (see e.g. Aesop 61 Perry γεωργός τις, 225 φιλάργυρός τις, 246 γυνή τις; *Philog.* 190a τις ἀργός).<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, he gives his variation a literary flavour, working on diction and style and echoing ‘high’ poetry.<sup>49</sup> This provides a good example of how epigrammatists could be aware of the multiple sources of inspiration they were drawing on and of the multi-layered nature of their writings, resulting from a combination of literary and popular suggestions that are cleverly conflated.

Another comic idea which is sometimes exploited by skoptic epigrams, and which is paralleled by several jokes, is foolishness displayed by an inability to distinguish dream from reality (see Lucillius *Anth.Gr.* 11.264 and Macedonius 11.366 mentioned above, and *Philog.* 102, 124), or to recognize oneself (this theme is freely exploited by Lucillius in 11.77; cf. *Philog.* 33, 56). Another one which is likely to be a popular commonplace is that bad smell is contagious, as it passes from one subject to another: Lucillius 11.240 Οὐ μόνον αὐτὴ πνεῖ Δημοστρατίς, ἀλλὰ δὴ αὐτῆς / τοὺς ὀσμησαμένους πνεῖν πεποίηκε τράγου (“Demonstratis not only herself breathes the stink of a he-goat, but makes those who smell her breath the same”); Mart. 3.17, 3.28, 7.94 (who maybe drew from Lucillius for his variations);<sup>50</sup> this is paralleled by *Philog.* 237, Ὀζόστομος λουκάνικον ὀπτῶν καὶ ἐπὶ πολὺ προσφυσῶν κυνέαν αὐτὸ ἀπειργάσατο (“A man with bad breath was cooking some bratwurst, but breathed over it so much that he turned it to shit”), which is particularly close to Martial 3.17.4–5, where Sabinius breathes over a cake and it becomes shit: *sufflavit buccis terque quaterque suis. / illa qui-*

<sup>48</sup> For a similar beginning in epigrams see e.g. Agath. *Anth.Gr.* 9.442.1 = 55 Viansino, γριπεύς τις...

<sup>49</sup> So e.g. line 1 ἀφόων ..., which is reminiscent of Nonn. *Dion.* 35.245–252, as remarked by Madden, *Macedonius* 253.

<sup>50</sup> See W. Burnikel, *Untersuchungen zur Struktur des Witzepigramms bei Lukillios und Martial* (Wiesbaden 1980) 33–35; M. Citroni, *Orpheus* 6 (1985) 186–192, at 189.

*dem tepuit digitosque admittere visa est, / sed nemo potuit tangere: merda fuit* (“He immediately blew on it with his cheeks three or four times. The tart cooled, to be sure, and seemed ready to admit our fingers, but nobody could touch it. It was shit”).<sup>51</sup>

Particularly significant is a comic scheme involving a common thematic background, detectable in several epigrams: the ‘self-evident prophecy’. An incompetent seer says the obvious, by way of ‘correcting’, through a series of hypothetical and/or concessive clauses, a first utterance, pronounced with apparent confidence. Thus Lucill. *Anth. Gr.* 11.163:

Πρὸς τὸν μάντιν Ὀλυμπον Ὀνήσιμος ἦλθ' ὁ παλαιστής  
καὶ πένταθλος Ὑλας καὶ σταδιεὺς Μενεκλῆς,  
τίς μέλλει νικᾶν αὐτῶν τὸν ἀγῶνα θέλοντες  
γνῶναι. κάκεϊνος τοῖς ἱεροῖς ἐνιδῶν·  
Πάντες, ἔφη, νικᾶτε, μόνον μὴ τις σὲ παρέλθῃ  
καὶ σὲ καταστρέψῃ καὶ σὲ παρατροχάσῃ.

Onesimus the wrestler and the pentathlist Hylas and the runner Menecles came to the prophet Olympus wishing to know which of them was going to win at the games, and he, after inspecting the sacrifice, said, “You will all win—unless anyone passes you, Sir, or unless anyone throws you, Sir, or unless anyone runs past you, Sir.”<sup>52</sup>

Nicarchus *Anth. Gr.* 11.162:

Εἰς Ῥόδον εἰ πλεύσει, τις Ὀλυμπικὸν ἦλθεν ἐρωτῶν  
τὸν μάντιν, καὶ πῶς πλεύσεται ἀσφαλῶς.  
χῶ μάντις· Πρῶτον μὲν, ἔφη, καινὴν ἔχε τὴν ναῦν,  
καὶ μὴ χειμῶνος, τοῦ δὲ θέρους ἀνάγου.  
τοῦτο γὰρ ἂν ποιῆς, ἥξεις κάκεϊσε καὶ ᾧδε,

<sup>51</sup> Transl. adapted from D. R. Shackleton Bailey.

<sup>52</sup> The epigram is freely translated by Auson. *Epigr.* 104 Green. Lucill. *Anth. Gr.* 11.161 is slightly different, as it implies at least the clear knowledge, on the part of the seer, of the boxer’s incompetence: Πρὸς τὸν μάντιν Ὀλυμπον Ὀνήσιμος ἦλθεν ὁ πύκτης, / εἰ μέλλει γηρᾶν βουλόμενος προμαθεῖν. / κάκεϊνος· Ναί, φησὶν, ἐὰν ἤδη καταλύσῃς· / ἂν δέ γε πυκτεύῃς, ὠροθετεῖ σε Κρόνος (“Onesimus the boxer came to the prophet Olympus wishing to learn if he were going to live to old age. And he said: ‘Yes, if you give up the ring now, but if you go on boxing, Saturn is your horoscope’”).

ἄν μὴ πειρατῆς ἐν πελάγει σε λάβῃ.

One came to ask the prophet Olympicus if he should take ship for Rhodes and how to sail there safely. And the prophet said, “First have a new ship and don’t start in winter, but in summer. If you do this you will go there and back, unless a pirate catches you at sea.”

And, some centuries later, the longer and more elaborate Agathias *Anth. Gr.* 11.365 = 97 Viansino:

Καλλιγένης ἀγροῖκος, ὅτε σπόρον ἔμβαλε γαίῃ,  
οἶκον Ἀριστοφάνους ἦλθεν ἐς ἀστρολόγου·  
ἦτε δ’ ἐξερέειν, εἴπερ θέρος αἴσιον αὐτῷ  
ἔσται καὶ σταχύων ἄφθονος εὐπορίῃ.  
ὅς δὲ λαβῶν ψηφίδας, ὑπὲρ πίνακός τε πυκάζων  
δάκτυλά τε γνάμπτων φθέγγατο Καλλιγένει·  
Εἴπερ ἐπομβρηθῆ τὸ ἀρούριον, ὅσσον ἀπόχρη,  
μηδὲ τιν’ ὑλαίην τέξεται ἀνθοσύνην,  
μηδὲ πάγος ῥήξη τὴν αὐλακα, μηδὲ χαλάζη  
ἄκρον ἀποδρυφθῆ δράγματος ὀρνυμένου,  
μηδὲ κεμάς κείρησι τὰ λήια, μηδὲ τιν’ ἄλλην  
ἠέρος ἢ γαίης ὄψεται ἀμπλακίην,  
ἐσθλὸν σοι τὸ θέρος μαντεύομαι, εὖ δ’ ἀποκόψεις  
τοὺς στάχυας· μούνας δείδιθι τὰς ἀκρίδας.

Calligenes the farmer, when he had cast the seed into the land, came to the house of Aristophanes the astrologer and begged him to tell him if he would have a favourable harvest and great abundance of corn. Taking his counters and spreading them on a tray, and bending his fingers, he said to Calligenes, “If your bit of land receives sufficient rain and produces no crop of wild flowers, if the frost does not break the furrows, if the hail does not nip off the tops of the sprouting ears, if no goat browses on the corn, and if it meet with no other injury by air or earth, I prophesy that your harvest will be excellent and you will cut the ears with success; only look out for the locusts.”

Reciprocal influences and imitations apart—Nicarchus almost certainly is a variation on Lucillius, and Agathias was maybe reminiscent of his predecessors—that we have here a popular scheme, subject to being variously elaborated, is attested by *Philog.* 205:

Ἀφύης μάντις ἐμπεσὼν εἰς πολεμίους καὶ εἰπὼν ὅτι Μάντις εἰμί  
 ... μελλούσης πρὸς ἀντιπάλους μάχης συνάπτεσθαι· Νικήσετε,  
 εἶπε, τὸν πολέμιον ἐὰν τὰς ἐξόπισθεν τρίχας τῶν κεφαλῶν ὑμῶν  
 ἐν τῇ παρατάξει τῆς μάχης μὴ βλέψωσιν.

A charlatan prophet was captured by the enemy, and confessed his trade. Now it so happened that they were about to fight a battle. "You'll win it," he promised them, "so long as the enemy don't see the hairs on the back of your heads."

The joke of the *Philogelos*, as compared with the epigrams, is a sort of 'degree zero', where the structure is shown in its raw essence: the answer of the seer is formed by a single hypothetical sentence, where the presupposition of the apodosis is contradicted by the protasis. The fact that all these texts play with different situations—the prophecy in Lucillius concerns sport, in Nicarchus sailing, in Agathias harvest, in the *Philogelos* war—should not obscure the essential fact that they not only share the same structure, but also meet a same purpose: mocking an incompetent seer. Variations of details can thus almost be regarded as 'allomotifs'—to use in a very extended and more general meaning the word that folklorist Alan Dundes has employed to define the "different motifs that can fill the same slot in different texts of the same tale because they perform essentially the same narrative function."<sup>53</sup>

With this in mind I turn to a somewhat different case. *Philog.* 176 is a joke about a bad doctor:

Κυμαῖος ἰατρὸς ἀπεγνωσμένον ἄρρωστον ἐνημάτισεν, ἐκέλευσε δὲ θεράποντα τὰ ἐκκεχωρισμένα ἰδεῖν. τοῦ δὲ δείξαντος καὶ εἰπόντος ὅτι ἀπέθανεν, ὁ ἰατρὸς μεθ' ὄρκου ἀπεκρίνατο· Οὗτος, εἰ μὴ ἐκλύσθη, ἐλάκησεν ἄν.

A doctor from Cyme gave an enema to a patient of whom he despaired, and ordered his assistant to look at what came out. The assistant tactfully pointed out that the patient was dead. "Hell," swore the doctor, "If he hadn't been given an enema, he'd have exploded."

<sup>53</sup> Hansen, *CB* 77 (2001) 93.

This joke, based on a distorted logic, due to the inability of the doctor to understand—and thus to admit—his failure, is particularly close to another epigram on a bad doctor, Nicarchus *Anth. Gr.* 11.121:

Χειρουργῶν ἔσφαξεν Ἀκεστορίδην Ἀγέλαος·  
ζῶν γὰρ χολεύειν, φησίν, ἔμελλε τάλας.

Agelaos by operating killed Acestorides, and said, “If he had lived the poor fellow would have been lame.”

Confronted with the evidence of the death of his patient, the doctor not only avoids admitting impotence/responsibility, but persists in his stupid supposition of professional competence. The underlying humorous idea is thus the same and the surface realization is also similar, as it includes the same sequence of actions: (1) the doctor does his job; (2) this does not save the patient’s life; (3) via direct speech the doctor justifies his own behaviour by a silly paradox. The two texts also differ in several details: the joke is longer, and introduces a second character, whose function is to inform the doctor of the death of the patient. Death appears, from the very beginning, inescapable (the patient is ἀπεγνωσμένον), so the therapy is basically ineffective, and even pointless, while in the epigram it is actually responsible for the death. The epigram points directly to the final punch line, where a minor inconvenience (lameness) is indicated as a major problem—paradoxically, death is thus presented as preferable to life. Differences between the two texts, in this case, cannot be interpreted as allomotifs, as they seem to have a different purpose: while the doctor in the *Philogelos* is mocked for his obtuseness (he is a Cymean, i.e. a stupid man), in the epigram the primary emphasis is on his incompetence: Agelaos actually causes the death of his patient and makes up a (silly) excuse in order to deny responsibility. Whether he actually believes what he is saying or not, what matters is that he is responsible for the death of the person he should have cured. This is consistent with the epigrammatic motif of the *mörderische Artz*: in Book XI

of the *Greek Anthology* doctors are (almost) consistently mocked for their incompetence,<sup>54</sup> while in the *Philogelos* the figure of the physician is more complex, and involves a richer variety of weaknesses and faults (incompetence itself, greed, obtuseness, etc.). Therefore, although the same comic idea lies behind the two texts and the surface structure is similar, the difference in details is the result of an ultimately different purpose.

Epigrams on ὄζόστομοι are often based on the ambiguity of mouth and bottom, that it is impossible to know whether a person is speaking or farting: thus Nicarchus *Anth.Gr.* 11.241 (quoted below), 11.242,<sup>55</sup> Antipater or Nicarchus 11.415 = Gow-Page, *GP* 665 ff.<sup>56</sup> On the same misunderstanding are based several jokes of the *Philogelos* (233, 235, 237 bis, 240). Compare, in particular, Nicarchus 11.241 and *Philog.* 235:

Τὸ στόμα χά πρωκτὸς ταῦτόν, Θεόδωρε, σοῦ ὄζει,  
ὥστε διαγνῶναι τοῖς φυσικοῖς καλὸν ἦν.  
ἦ γράψαι σε ἔδει, ποῖον στόμα, ποῖον ὁ πρωκτός·  
νῦν δὲ λαλοῦντός σου <βδεῖν σ' ἐνόμιζον ἐγώ>.

Your mouth and your bottom, Theodorus, smell the same, so that it would be a famous task for men of science to distinguish them. You should really write on a label which is your mouth and which your bottom: as it is, when you speak I think you break wind.

Ὅζόστομος ἰατρῶ ὑπαντήσας λέγει· Κύριέ μου, ἴδε ὅτι ἡ σταφυλή μου κατέβη. καὶ χανόντος ὁ ἰατρὸς ἀποστρεφόμενος ἔλεγεν· Οὐχὶ ἡ σταφυλή σου κατέβη, ἀλλ' ὁ κῶλος σου ἀνέβη.

<sup>54</sup> See *Anth.Gr.* 11.112–126; exceptions are Callict. 11.333 and Agath. 11.382 = 96 Viansino, variations on the theme of the greedy doctor.

<sup>55</sup> Οὐ δύναμαι γνῶναι, πότερον χαίνει Διόδωρος / ἢ βδῆσ'· ἐν γὰρ ἔχει πνεῦμα κάτω καὶ ἄνω (“I can't tell whether Diodorus is yawning or has broken wind, for he has one breath above and below”).

<sup>56</sup> Τίς σοῦ, Μεντορίδη, προφανῶς οὕτως μετέθηκεν / τὴν πυγὴν, οὐπερ τὸ στόμα ἔκειτο πρὸ τοῦ; / βδεῖς γὰρ κοῦκ ἀναπνεῖς, φθέγγῃ δ' ἐκ τῶν καταγείων. / θαυμά μ' ἔχει, τὰ κάτω πῶς σου ἄνω γέγονεν (“Who, Mentorides, so obviously transferred your bottom to the place where your mouth formerly was? For you break wind and do not breathe, and you speak from the lower storey. I wonder how your lower parts became your upper!”).

A man with bad breath went to a doctor and said, “Look, Doctor, my uvula is lower than it should be.” “Phew!” gasped the doctor, as the man opened his mouth to show him, “It’s not your uvula that has gone down, it’s your arsehole that has come up!”

In both jokes, the authoritative figure of the doctor is involved, the most qualified to solve the enigma provoked by the unusual anatomical circumstance described. The joke, based on a comic dialogue, is very straightforward and gives only the essential details of what is paradoxically, and wittily, described as an anatomical metamorphosis. The epigram is far more elaborate: exploiting the semantic ambiguity of διαγιγνώσκω, which is both ‘distinguish, discern’, and, in medical jargon, ‘form a diagnosis’,<sup>57</sup> it plays with the idea of a medical enquiry, representing a team of physicians comically intent on understanding the peculiar anatomy they are faced with. Line 3 suggests a pragmatic solution, serving the purpose of helping the doctors and others to formulate the distinction: the interlocutor is invited, with apparent complicity, to “mark with a sign” the two parts of the body (γράψαι, evoking the same semantic area of διαγιγνώσκω, as the latter can also mean ‘read through’, cf. LSJ III); the close of the epigram goes back, in a sort of *Ringkomposition*, to the initial idea of the same foul smell coming from the mouth and the bottom. Although the treatment is somewhat different, the same underlying idea is at the core of both joke and epigram, and the sharing of certain details—in particular the recurring image of the doctor—makes it tempting to think of a single joke differently interpreted.

Other epigrams on ὄζόστομοι are based on the semantic ambiguity of φιλέω, “kiss/love”: so Antipater *Anth.Gr.* 11.219 = *GP* 629 ff., Οὐ προσέχω, καίτοι πιστοὶ τινες· ἀλλὰ μεταξύ, / πρὸς Διός, εἴ με φιλεῖς, Πάμφιλε, μή με φίλει (“I don’t pay any attention, although some people are to be trusted; but in the

<sup>57</sup> LSJ s.v. I.3; H. Schulte, *Die Epigramme des Nikarchos. Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar* (Trier 1999) 61.

meantime, for God's sake, if you love me, Pamphilus, don't kiss me"), with the etymological play on Pamphilus ("friend of all," but also, given the context, "one who kisses all"), and Nicarchus 11.252, Εἵ με φιλεῖς, μισεῖς με, καὶ εἰ μισεῖς σὺ, φιλεῖς με· / εἰ δέ με μὴ μισεῖς, φίλτατε, μή με φίλει ("If you kiss me you hate me, and if you hate me you kiss me. But if you don't hate me, dear friend, don't kiss me!"), structured around the opposition μισέω/φιλέω, taken in its double meaning. The epigram by Nicarchus is especially similar to *Philog.* 234, Ὅζόστομος τὴν γυναῖκα ἠρώτα λέγων· Κυρία, τί με μισεῖς; κάκεινη ἀπεκρίνατο λέγουσα· Διότι σὺ με φιλεῖς ("Why do you hate me?" a man with bad breath asked his wife. 'Because you love/kiss me!'), which exploits the same semantic ambiguity, highlighted by the same polarity μισέω/φιλέω. But while the joke registered by the *Philogelos* is a dialogue between two interlocutors, straightforwardly based on the opposition μισεῖς/φιλεῖς, the epigram exploits all the possibilities of contradiction and opposition offered by the situation, playing with language, rhetorical and phonetic devices, such as chiasmus (the structure ABBA/BA in the sequence φιλεῖς – μισεῖς – μισεῖς – φιλεῖς – μισεῖς – φίλει) and parallelism (Εἵ ... καὶ εἰ / εἰ δέ ... μὴ, μὴ), alliteration (with prevalence of μ and εἰ/η/ε sounds) and anaphora (Εἵ με φιλεῖς, μισεῖς με ... εἰ μισεῖς ... φιλεῖς με· / εἰ ... με μὴ μισεῖς ... μή με...), assonance (e.g. με μὴ μισεῖς), etymological figures (φίλτατε ... φίλει). Furthermore, in a structure typical of skoptic epigrams, the poet addresses his interlocutor directly, while the anonymous joke takes a narrative form. This is a very good example of the changes which can occur in the passage from comic tales to epigrammatic poetry: while the jokes of the *Philogelos*, with their simple and ordinary style, reflect a popular aesthetic,<sup>58</sup> skoptic epigrams look to create special aesthetic effects, even when they show great similarities with popular jokes.

Similar observations are prompted by comparing the first

<sup>58</sup> See Hansen, *Anthology of Ancient Greek Popular Literature* 275.

couplet of Lucillius *Anth.Gr.* 11.171.1–2, Θνήσκων Ἑρμοκράτης  
ὁ φιλάργυρος ἐν διαθήκαις / αὐτὸν τῶν ἰδίων ἔγραφε κληρο-  
νόμον (“Hermocrates the miser when he was dying wrote  
himself his own heir in his will”), and *Philog.* 104, Φιλάργυρος  
διαθήκας γράφων ἑαυτὸν κληρονόμον ἔταξεν (“Then there  
was a miser who put himself as heir in his own will”). Not only  
are the texts based on the same idea,<sup>59</sup> but this idea is expressed  
in the same words. The only relevant difference is, once again,  
that Lucillius calls his character by name, while the *Philogelos*  
leaves the miser anonymous. In addition, there is nothing  
superfluous in the joke, while Lucillius indulges in a couple of  
negligible details in order to fill out the couplet (Θνήσκων / τῶν  
ἰδίων, which adds nothing to the situation). Moreover, in Lucil-  
lius the joke is just the starting point for a longer story, which  
includes more points and ideas (the first two lines are followed  
by another six).<sup>60</sup>

The last examples—especially the one based on the am-  
biguity μισέω/φιλέω—call for some further observations. One  
of the most popular sources of humour, in all places and times,  
is language. Puns, plays on words, are very often what provoke

<sup>59</sup> Found again in Pallad. *Anth.Gr.* 7.607.1–2, Ψυλλῶ πρεσβυγενῆς τοῖς  
κληρονόμοις φθονέσασα / αὐτὴ κληρονόμος τῶν ἰδίων γέγονεν, which is  
probably reminiscent—here as elsewhere—of Lucillius, as the syntagma  
κληρονόμος τῶν ἰδίων seems to suggest.

<sup>60</sup> It is worth quoting the epigram in full, as the last line is missing in **P**  
and **PI**, and thus in the modern editions of the *Greek Anthology* (where Aldus  
Manutius’ supplement χρήματα κληρονόμοι ἤρπασαν ἀσπασίως is usually  
printed), but is written (twice) in the margins of **Q** (*British Library, Add.*  
16409), an early apograph of **PI** (as already remarked by A. Turyn,  
“Demetrius Triclinius and the Planudean Anthology,” *EpetHetByzSpoud* 39–  
40 (1972–1973) 418–419; unlike Turyn, I see no reason why the reading of  
**Q** should not be trusted: Floridi, *Lucillio. Epigrammi*, ad loc.): Θνήσκων  
Ἑρμοκράτης ὁ φιλάργυρος ἐν διαθήκαις / αὐτὸν τῶν ἰδίων ἔγραφε κληρο-  
νόμον. / ψηφίζων δ’ ἀνέκειτο, πόσον δώσει διεγερθεὶς / ἰητροῖς μισθοῦ καὶ  
τί νοσῶν δαπανᾷ. / ὥς δ’ εὔρε πλείω δραχμὴν μίαν, ἣν διασωθῆ· /  
λυσιτελεῖ θνήσκειν, εἶπε, καὶ ἐξετάθη. / κεῖτο δέ γ’ οὐδὲν ἔχων ὀβολοῦ  
πλέον· οἱ δὲ τὰ κείνου / πάντα γελῶντες ἔχον γείτονες ἀλλότριοι.

laughter. While in the case of μισέω/φιλέω it is likely there is a variation on the same commonplace joke—the opposition serves the same purpose in all the examples we have examined—more often the same pun can be invented independently, or exploited in different ways and for different purposes. With this in mind, it is worth examining a couple of examples of convergence between skoptic epigram and the *Philogelos* in the use of language for comic purposes, as this testifies to a common underlying social/historical/linguistic substratum.

Lucillius *Anth.Gr.* 11.208 is a funny epigram (maybe a mock epitaph)<sup>61</sup> for a runner:

Ἦν βραδὺς Εὐτυχίδας σταδιοδρόμος, ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ δεῖπνον  
ἔτρεχεν, ὥστε λέγειν· Εὐτυχίδας πέταται.

As a racer Eutychides was slow, but he ran to supper so quickly that they said: “Eutychides is flying.”

With typical reversal, the poet replaces eulogy with abuse, pointing out not the qualities of the athlete, but his chronic failures.<sup>62</sup> In doing so, he cleverly conflates two different ideas: (1) the eulogistic hyperbole of the fast runner who ‘flies’ (e.g. adesp. *Anth.Plan.* 53, Λάδας τὸ στάδιον εἴθ’ ἤλατο, εἴτε διέπτῃ, / οὐδὲ φράσαι δυνατόν· δαιμόνιον τὸ τάχος; Antip. Thess. *Anth.Gr.* 9.557.3 = *GP* 511, πτηνοὶ πόδες; Philip. 6.259.6 = *GP* 2794); (2) the comic and skoptic image of the parasite who ‘flies’ towards food (e.g. Alex. fr.213.2 *PCG*; Antiphan. fr.227.2 *PCG*; cf. τρεχέδειπνος, ‘running to a banquet’, Plut. *Mor.* 726A; Athen. 4A, 242C; maybe Poseidipp. 121.7 A.-B. = Gow-Page,

<sup>61</sup> The narrative is set in the past, so that the poem can be read as a post-mortem commemoration.

<sup>62</sup> Praise of one’s agonistic achievements was obviously common not only in dedications celebrating victories in athletic competitions but also in epitaphs for athletes: see e.g. *SEG XIV* 388 = 70 Ebert; A. Stecher, *Inscriptliche Grabgedichte auf Krieger und Athleten* (Innsbruck 1981). For Lucillius’ epigrams on unsuccessful athletes, built around the parody of honorific inscriptions, see L. Robert, “Les épigrammes satiriques de Lucillius sur les athlètes. Parodie et réalités,” in *L’Épigramme grecque* (Entretiens Hardt 14 [Vandoeuvres/Geneva 1968]) 179–295.

*HE* 3140; LSJ s.v.). The result is that a phrase which would be complimentary *per se* when addressed to a runner (Εὐτυχίδαε πέταται) becomes the means to stress the weaknesses and vices of his character—very bad at sport, but very good when it comes to obtaining a meal.<sup>63</sup>

The comic misconception caused by the overlapping of the two different layers of meaning in πέταται is the core of the humour also in the following joke (*Philog.* 121):

Ἀβδηρίτης ἰδὼν δρόμεα ἐσταυρωμένον εἶπε· Μὰ τοὺς θεοὺς οὗτος οὐκέτι τρέχει, ἀλλὰ πέτεται.

On seeing a runner who had been crucified, an Abderite remarked: “By the Gods, he does not run anymore—he does fly!”

The humour of the joke, far less subtle and multilayered than that of the epigram, lies in the usual gullibility of the Abderite—a stock comic character after Democritus derided the foolishness of men in general and of his fellow citizens in particular.<sup>64</sup> He applies the metaphoric, honorific verb to the runner in order to describe the unusual but actual circumstance of his punishment, which makes him, hanging on the cross and so suspended in the air, literally ‘fly’.

Another example of the same pun, used for the same purpose—derision of unsuccessful boxers—is represented by the exploitation of the comic potentialities of the word μύρμηξ, ant, but also, in boxers’ jargon, “a sort of *gauntlet* or *cestus* with metal studs or nails *like warts* (μυρμηκία) on it,”<sup>65</sup> both in *Philog.* 210 and in Lucill. *Anth.Gr.* 11.78.<sup>66</sup>

Δειλὸς πύκτης χωρίον ἀγοράζων κατηρώτα τοὺς ἐντοπίους μὴ ἔχει μύρμηκας.

<sup>63</sup> For a similar joke see ‘Lucian’ *Anth.Gr.* 11.431.

<sup>64</sup> See Andreassi, *Le facezie* 51–53.

<sup>65</sup> LSJ s.v. IV. See Pollux 3.150; Hesych. μ 1902, μύρμηκας· ἔξω τοῦ ζόφου καὶ οἱ πυκτικοὶ ἱμάντες, cf. ι 612; for discussion of the word see M. B. Poliakoff, *Studies in the Terminology of the Greek Combat Sports* (Königstein 1982) 54–60.

<sup>66</sup> As already remarked by Robert, in *L’Épigramme grecque* 289.

When buying some land, a cowardly boxer asked the natives to promise him that it did not have ‘ants’.<sup>67</sup>

Κόσκινον ἢ κεφαλή σου, Ἀπολλόφανες, γεγένηται  
 ἢ τῶν σητοκόπων βυβλαρίων τὰ κάτω·  
 ὄντως μυρμηκῶν τρυπήματα λοξὰ καὶ ὀρθά ...

Your head, Apollophanes, has become a sieve, or the lower edge of a worn-eaten book, all exactly like ant-holes, crooked and straight ...

The absence of close similarities between these two—apart from the exploitation of the pun at the expense of (roughly) the same character type<sup>68</sup>—confirms that the jokes make independent use of the same play on words drawing from the same linguistic (and social) repertoire.<sup>69</sup>

The examples we have examined show recurring humorous ideas underlying both epigrams and jokes, which can occasionally result in quite strong similarities, concerning both general situation and comic targets (e.g. the pair Nicarch. *Anth.Gr.* 11.170 and *Philog.* 97) and language and/or structure (e.g. jokes based on the μισέω/φιλέω opposition; the ‘obvious prophecy’; the pair *Anth.Gr.* 11.171.1–2 and *Philog.* 104). In these cases, it is legitimate to think of the same underlying joke, elaborated with varying degrees of freedom and aesthetic refinement. Most often, the purpose is different, and the same idea seems to be differently interpreted and employed; the

<sup>67</sup> A very similar story in Eustath. 1324.19 ff. (IV 814–815 van der Valk): ἐκαλοῦντο δέ, φασί, καὶ μύρμηκες οἱ τοιοῦτοι ἱμάντες, ὅθεν καὶ τὸ ἀστεῖον ἐκεῖνο ἰστόρηται, ὡς ἀνὴρ ἀχρεῖος τὴν πυγμακίην καὶ πολλὰς παθῶν πληγὰς, τόπον ὠνούμενος ἐν ᾧ μάθοι πολλοὺς εἶναι μύρμηκας, ἀφῆκε συναλλάξαι, βαρυνθεὶς ὡς εἴπερ καὶ ἐπλήγη τῷ τῶν μυρμηκῶν ὀνόματι.

<sup>68</sup> While in the *Philogelos* the boxer is a δειλός, Lucillius is more generically interested in his incompetence.

<sup>69</sup> See also *Philog.* 172, where the same pun is used to mock the stupidity of Cymeans: Κυμαῖος πύκτην ἰδὼν πολλὰ τραύματα ἔχοντα ἠρώτα πόθεν ἔχει ταῦτα. τοῦ δὲ εἰπόντος· Ἐκ τοῦ μύρμηκος, ἔφη· Διὰ τί γὰρ χαμαὶ κοιμᾷ; (“Seeing a boxer covered with wounds, a man from Cyme asked how he had got them all. ‘From the *myrmex*’, someone said. ‘Oh! But why did he sleep on the ground?’”).

same joke can have been modified and reworked according to different focuses and purposes, or can have been independently invented<sup>70</sup>—as is reasonable to infer when only small and/or surface similarities are detectable. Be that as it may, comparisons between skoptic epigrams and surviving ancient jokes did not make it possible to detect *direct* connections: even when the stronger similarities are recognizable, there is no evidence of a direct dependence; at best, one can suspect the reworking of the same (possibly oral) source. Nevertheless, the similarities—even when they are very generic—show that the same repertoire of misconstructions and misinterpretations, of comic structures and situations is at use; skoptic epigram, among its sources, certainly had this popular substratum.

This is confirmed by comparisons between skoptic epigrams and popular materials coming from other sources, such as proverbs, comic anecdotes, etc. A couple of examples will suffice to illustrate this point.

We can assume that the punch line in Lucillius *Anth. Gr.* 11.85 is based on the refinement of a ‘popular’ comic idea:

Νύκτα μέσσην ἐποίησε τρέχων ποτὲ Μάρκος ὀπλίτης,  
 ὥστ’ ἀποκλεισθῆναι πάντοθε τὸ στάδιον.  
 οἱ γὰρ δημόσιοι κείσθαι τινα πάντες ἔδοξαν  
 ὀπλίτην τιμῆς εἵνεκα τῶν λιθίνων.  
 καὶ τί γάρ; εἰς ὥρας ἠνοιέτο· καὶ τότε Μάρκος  
 ἦλθε προσελλείπων τῷ σταδίῳ στάδιον.

Marcus once, running in armour, went on until it was midnight, so that the course was closed on all sides; for the public servants all thought that he was one of the honorary stone statues of men in armour set up there. What happened? Next year they opened, and Marcus came in, but a whole stadion behind.

A runner is so slow that he does not move at all. As A. Linnenkugel noted,<sup>71</sup> the situation is reminiscent of the proverb

<sup>70</sup> For a discussion of the two theories of monogenesis and polygenesis see Andreassi, *Le facezie* 81–83 (with further bibliography).

<sup>71</sup> A. Linnenkugel, *De Lucillo Tarrhaeo, epigrammatum poeta, grammatico, rhetore* (Paderborn 1926) 47.

Κάλλιππος τρέχει,<sup>72</sup> explained by Suet. *Tib.* 38 as a reference to the 'stationary' run of the character (*Callippides ... quem cursitare ac ne cubiti quidem mensuram progredi proverbio Graeco notatum est*). In a similar way, it is tempting to detect in Lucill. 11.100,

Οὔτω κουφότατος πέλε Γάιος, ὅστ' ἐκολύμβῃ  
τοῦ ποδὸς ἐκκρεμάσας ἢ λίθον ἢ μόλιβον.

Gaius was so very light that he used to dive with a stone or lead hung from his foot.

an echo of the anecdote about Philitas, who, according to a story known in two variants,<sup>73</sup> and possibly originating in the sphere of ancient comedy, was so thin that he had to wear lead weights on his shoes to avoid being blown about by the wind.<sup>74</sup> In *Anth.Gr.* 11.278, on a grammarian who teaches the suffering that Menelaus underwent because of Helen but does not know that he himself is being betrayed by his wife, Lucillius seems to rework the common idea, widespread in fables and proverbs, that men clearly perceive what concerns others but are blind when they are personally involved (e.g. Aesop 266 Perry; Babr. 66):

Ἐξω παιδεύεις Πάριδος κακὰ καὶ Μενελάου  
ἐνδον ἔχων πολλοὺς σῆς Ἑλένης Πάριδας.

Outside you teach the sufferings of Paris and Menelaus, having at home plenty of Parises for your Helen.

In particular, the idea that a grammarian cares for others' misfortunes (i.e. for the misfortunes of the mythical characters he finds in the epic poems that are the object of his teaching and studies) but ignores his own, is paralleled by Diog. Laert. 6.27 (Diogenes the Cynic), τοὺς τε γραμματικούς ἐθαύμαζε τὰ μὲν τοῦ Ὀδυσσεύος κακὰ ἀναζητοῦντας, τὰ δ' ἴδια ἀγνοοῦντας, and may reflect a commonplace that Lucillius reworks in the

<sup>72</sup> *Mant.Prov.* 1.87 (*Corp.Paroem.Gr.* II 757).

<sup>73</sup> Ael. *VH* 9.14, test. 6 Sbardella; Athen. 552B, test. 8 Sbardella.

<sup>74</sup> For a discussion of this anecdote and its meaning see especially Alan Cameron, "How Thin was Philitas?" *CQ* 41 (1991) 534–538.

specific direction of marital infidelity, playing with the mythical paradigm of Helen, Paris, and Menelaus—often cited as the typical sentimental triangle (e.g. *Ov. AA* 2.359–360; *Cic. Att.* 1.18.3). Once again, it is impossible to state whether or not the epigrammatist is precisely reworking the materials indicated—proverbs and popular wisdom, comic anecdotes—but it is clear that he is playing with common images and ideas.

*Formal similarities: a comic scheme?*

From a purely formal point of view, a syntactic structure common to several jokes and epigrams, differently elaborated as far as contents are concerned, asks for our attention: a situation is set, through a nominative participle agreeing with a subject whose membership in a specific human category is indicated by an adjective or noun; a principal sentence, sometimes accompanied by a dependent clause, follows, to explain the (incongruous) consequences resulting from that situation.<sup>75</sup> So e.g. *Ammian. or Nicarch. Anth.Gr.* 11.102, ἐξάϊρων ποτ' ἄκανθαν ὁ λεπτακινὸς Διόδωρος / αὐτὸς ἐτύπησεν τῷ ποδὶ τὴν βελόνην (“Thin little Diodorus once in taking a thorn out made a hole in the needle with his foot”); *Lucill.* 11.90 Τῷ πατρὶ θυμωθεὶς, Διονύσιε, Μάρκος ὁ μικρὸς / πυρῆνα στήσας αὐτὸν ἀπηγχόνισεν (“Little Marcus, being angry with his father Dionysius, set on end a needle and hanged himself on it”); *Lucill.* 11.264, Ποιήσας δαπάνην ἐν ὕπνοις ὁ φιλάργυρος Ἑρμῶν / ἐκ περιωδυνίας αὐτὸν ἀπηγχόνισεν (“Hermon the miser, having spent money in his sleep, hanged himself from vexation”); *Philog.* 20, Σχολαστικοὶ δύο ἀπὸ δείπνου ἀλλήλους ἀποκαθιστῶντες κατὰ τιμὴν οὐκ ἐκοιμήθησαν (“After a dinner party two eggheads kept taking turns to escort the other home in accordance with the rules of etiquette. The result—neither of them ever got to bed”); 41 (~ 156), Σχολαστικὸς οἰκίαν πωλῶν λίθον ἀπ' αὐτῆς εἰς δεῖγμα περιέφερον (“Having bought a house, an egghead went around carrying a single stone from it

<sup>75</sup> Attention to this structure was called already by M. Lausberg, *Das Einzeldistichon. Studien zum antiken Epigramm* (Munich 1982) 397.

in order to show people what it was like"); 109 Μωρὸς ἀκούσας ὅτι ἐν Ἅιδου δίκαια τὰ κριτήρια, πρᾶγμα ἔχων ἀπήγγξατο ("A simpleton who was involved in a lawsuit was told that the fairest judgements were those in Hades. So he hanged himself"), etc.

As one might expect, while word order in prose comic tales showing this structure is plain and colloquial, epigrams accommodate the scheme to the dactylic meter. Thus, the nominative participle tends to be put at the very beginning of the hexameter, while the name of the character, accompanied by a specifying adjective/noun, usually occupies a position after the main caesura (mostly bucolic diaeresis); the main clause is mostly in the pentameter.<sup>76</sup> Epigrams built around this structure are usually composed of a single distich;<sup>77</sup> only rarely is the scheme used as a minor constituent unit.<sup>78</sup> To support the idea that a comic scheme is in play, it is worth noting that, at least as far as Lucillius' epigrams are concerned, a tendency is detectable to reuse the same linguistic materials in analogous metrical positions in poems built around this structure, as if formulaic expressions were employed: *Anth.Gr.* 11.90.2 = 91.2 = 111.2 = 264.2 (and see also 249.2) αὐτὸν ἀπηγγόνισεν; 11.93.1 = 94.1 Μάρκος ὁ λεπτός (and, with a slight variant, 90.1 Μάρκος ὁ μικρός); 101.1 = 257.1 = 264.1 = 277.1 ἐν ὕπνοις (although in different metric sedes); 276.1 = 277.1 Μάρκος ὁ ἀργός (again in a different position). The reuse of the same expressions, together with a common syntactic structure, is a typical feature, then as now, of the so-called subliterature of insults,<sup>79</sup> or of

<sup>76</sup> Variations of this scheme are found in Lucill. *Anth.Gr.* 11.93, 101, 172, 192, 257.

<sup>77</sup> Lucill. *Anth.Gr.* 11.93, 94, 101, 111, 172, 192, 257, 276, 277.

<sup>78</sup> See Lucill. *Anth.Gr.* 11.91, 99.

<sup>79</sup> For the ancient world, see *P.Heid.* I 190, where several comic comparisons, introduced by similar stylistic elements, are set out: οὐ πρόσωπον ἔχεις, ἀλλ' (lines 68–75); οὐ κεφαλὴν ἔχεις, ἀλλὰ κτλ. (87). Contemporary examples taken from an anonymous collection *Lines for All Occasions. Insults and Comebacks* (Venice [Calif.] 2008) include: (for "ugly" people) You have such an exotic look; You have such great hair; You have such a great

popular comic forms such as the Italian *colmi*, or the punch lines of the “my wife/mother-in-law sure is...” jokes made famous by stand-up comedians.<sup>80</sup> Clearly, the situation here is to an extent different: analogous syntagmas are used in similar situations, but we are not confronted with a proper fixed scheme with strict compositional rules. The similarity is nonetheless striking: a syntactic scheme, clearly recognisable as such, encourages the reuse of analogous combinations of words.

The idea that skoptic epigram is sometimes based on popular syntactic comic schemes can be reinforced by noting that comic structures that are still familiar today are occasionally detectable. See for instance epigrams built around hyperbolic consecutive phrases (“A is so B, that...”):<sup>81</sup> e.g. Lucill. *Anth.Gr.* 11.100 (quoted 656 above); 311.1–2, οὕτως ἔστ’ ἀργὸς Πανταίνετος, ὥστε πυρέξας / μηκέτ’ ἀναστῆναι παντὸς ἐδεῖτο θεοῦ (and the same structure is found elsewhere in humorous classical literature: e.g. Vell. Pat. 1.13.4, *Mummius tam rudis fuit ut...*).<sup>82</sup>

#### *Final remarks*

The comparisons—both structural, thematic, and formal—have served to reveal the similarities in the mechanisms, ideas, and structural schemes underlying popular jokes and skoptic epigrams.

It is usually assumed that joke books were not intended as an immediate end in themselves, but as a means to a further end. This is suggested by the manner in which written comic tales

personality.

<sup>80</sup> As noted by B. Nystrom, *An English Translation of the Poetry of Lucillius* (Lewiston 2004) 16.

<sup>81</sup> Modern examples from the anonymous collection mentioned above (n. 79) include: (for “liars and cheats”) You’re so dishonest, I can’t even be sure that what you tell me are lies; You’re so full of shit, your eyes are brown; You’re so two-faced, your spouse will be a bigamist.

<sup>82</sup> For this anecdote, as compared to *Philog.* 78, see Andreassi, *Le facezie* 71–73, who interprets the connections as an example of a transition “dallo ‘storico’ al ‘tipico’.”

are recounted, where only the essence of the joke is given, in such a way that the reader can work it up for retelling on a future occasion. Social gatherings, such as symposia, were the ideal places to tell a joke, and it was probably on these occasions in particular that collections of jokes were used—especially by professional entertainers.<sup>83</sup> If ancient jest books were conceived of more as source books than as literature, we cannot rule out the possibility that authors of skoptic epigrams actually read them in search of inspiration, or of ready-made jokes to elaborate on and refine—much as authors of epideictic and hortatory verses in search of themes and ideas are likely to have drawn on collections of anecdotes, such as *χρῆται* and similar books.<sup>84</sup> Unfortunately, because our evidence is so scanty, and among ancient collections of jokes only the *Philogelos* has survived, we cannot reach more definite conclusions, and we can only speculate about this possibility.

What we can certainly conclude is that authors of skoptic epigrams, learned and refined as they could be, drew on, among other sources, the popular reservoir of commonplaces, jokes and punch lines when writing their poems.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Cf. J. Bremmer, “Jokes, Jokers and Jokebooks in Ancient Greek Culture,” in J. Bremmer and H. Roodenburg (eds.), *A Cultural History of Humour. From Antiquity to the Present Day* (Cambridge 1997) 11–28; Hansen, *Anthology of Ancient Greek Popular Literature* 272–274; Andreassi, *Le facezie* 19–25.

<sup>84</sup> As was suggested by A. S. F. Gow, *Machon. The Fragments* (Cambridge 1965) 14–15.

<sup>85</sup> This essay is based on a talk given at a conference “Locating Popular Culture in the Ancient World,” organized by Lucy Grig at the School of History, Classics and Archaeology, University of Edinburgh, 4–6 July 2012. I am very grateful to the audience for the feedback I received on that occasion, and to the anonymous reviewers of *GRBS* for their useful comments.