

Macrobius wrote, and a copyist omitted, *καὶ τόνον*; perhaps the corruption was present in the text of his source. Some have adduced the obscure sentence in Arist. *Metaph.* N 6 (1093b2–4) *καὶ ὅτι ἴσον τὸ διάστημα ἔν τε τοῖς γράμμασιν ἀπὸ τοῦ Α πρὸς τὸ Ω, καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ βόμβυκος ἐπὶ τὴν ὀξύτατην ἐν αὐλοῖς, ἧς ὁ ἀριθμὸς ἴσος τῇ οὐλομέλειᾳ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ*, since the ratio 24:1 would generate four octaves and a fifth.¹² But it is by no means clear that the *οὐλομέλεια* of heaven has, even in Aristotle's understanding, anything to do with *μέλος* in its musical sense rather than *μέλος* 'limb'; Alexander of Aphrodisias (*In Metaph.* 835.16–18 Hayduck) took the number 24 to be the total of the 12 signs of the zodiac, the 8 spheres, and the 4 elements.

Nevertheless, despite these difficulties, in order to posit a range of four twelfths we must suppose that Macrobius did not understand what he was translating. We should indeed be wary of underestimating the ignorance of one whose cumulative multiplication of planetary distances at 2.3.14 would imply a cosmic range of 46,656:1, or fifteen octaves and a tritone;¹³ but his own and other Latin writers' use of *καί* for *et* entitles him to the benefit of the doubt.

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¹² Reinach (n. 10), 447; W. D. Ross, *ad loc.* Arist.; Handschin, *loc. cit.*

¹³ Macr. claims in §15 to derive his exposition from Porph. *In Tim.* (fr. 72 Sodano); one may more easily suppose misunderstanding than ascribe such a doctrine to the author of *In Ptol. Harm.* 115.29–30, but even if Macrobius is correct, he is still uncritical.

NOT AT HOME: NASICA'S WITTICISM AND OTHER STORIES

Cicero's discussion of wit in the *de oratore* includes an entertaining story about Ennius and a certain Nasica (whom it is almost certainly wasted energy to attempt to identify) (2.275–6): 'Valde haec ridentur et hercule omnia quae a prudentibus per simulationem subabsurde salseque dicuntur. Ex quo genere est etiam non videri intellegere quod intellegas... ut illud Nasicae, qui cum ad poetam Ennium venisset eique ab ostio quaerenti Ennium ancilla dixisset domi non esse, Nasica sensit illam domini iussu dixisse et illum intus esse; paucis post diebus cum ad Nasicam venisset Ennius et eum ad ianuam quaereret, exclamat Nasica domi non esse, tum Ennius "quid? ego non cognosco vocem?" inquit "tuam?"' Hic Nasica "homo es impudens: ego cum te quaerem ancillae tuae credidi te domi non esse, tu mihi non credis ipsi?"' This anecdote, devitalized by its divorce from a well-known name, finds a place in the *Philogelos*, a compendium of jokes compiled in late antiquity and ascribed to the otherwise unidentifiable Hierocles and Philagrius, (193): *Δύσκολόν τις ἐζήτει. ὁ δὲ ἀπεκρίνατο· Οὐκ εἰμὶ ὧδε. τοῦ δὲ γελάσαντος καὶ εἰπόντος· Ψεύδῃ· τῆς γὰρ φωνῆς σου ἀκούω – εἶπεν· Ὡ κάθαρμα, εἰ μὲν ὁ δοῦλός μου εἶπεν, εἶχες ἂν αὐτῷ πιστεῦσαι· ἐγὼ δέ σοι οὐ φαίνομαι ἀξιόπιστότερος ἐκείνου εἶναι;*

Like many of the *Philogelos*' jokes this anecdote could be refurbished. The following story was told of William Hobson, a London haberdasher who died in 1581:¹ 'On a time Master Hobson upon some occasion came to Master Fleetewoods house to speak with him, being then new chosen the recorder of London, and asked one of his men if he were within, and he said he was not at home, but Maister Hobson perceiving that his master bade him say so, and that he was within, not being willing (at that time) to be spoken withall, for that time dessembling the matter he went his

¹ J. O. Halliwell-Phillips (ed.), *The Pleasant Conceits of Old Hobson the Merry Londoner* (*Percy Soc.* 9, London, 1843), pp. 36f. The interesting discussion of this passage by Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1990), p. 196, overlooks the classical precedent.

way; within a few days after it was Maister Fleetwoods chaunse to come to Maister Hobsons, and knocking at the dore, asked if he were within? Maister Hobson hearing and knowing how he was denied Maister Fleetwoods speach before time, speake himselfe aloud, and said hee was not at home; then sayd Maister Fleetwood, what Master Hobson, thinke you that I know not your voyce? whereunto Maister Hobson answered and said, now Maister Fleetwood am I quit with you, for when I came to speake with you, I beleeved your man that said you were not at home, and now you will not beleeeve mine owne selfe and this was the mery conference betwixt these two merry gentlemen.'

The anonymous grouch of the *Philogelos* makes little impression on us; the story is infinitely more effectively presented as a factual relation about a real person, whether in republican Rome or in Elizabethan England. But this is not the only case where an anecdote which in the *Philogelos* is colourlessly attached to a representative of a type of character is associated in an earlier source with a historical figure. We have prototypes for two stories about εὐτράπελοι in Plutarch's *Moralia*. Compare 148, Εὐτράπελος φλυάρου κουρέως ἐρωτήσαντος· Πῶς σε κείρω; Σιωπῶν ἔφη, and *Mor.* 177a (of Archelaus of Macedon), Ἀδολέσχου δὲ κουρέως ἐρωτήσαντος αὐτόν· Πῶς σε κείρω; Σιωπῶν ἔφη. Similarly, the courtroom vignette of 264, Εὐτράπελος ἐπὶ ἡγεμόνος ἐδικάζετο, τοῦ δὲ νυστάζοντος ἐβόησεν· Ἐκκαλοῦμαι. ὁ δὲ ἔφη· Ἐπὶ τίνα; καὶ κείνος· Ἐπὶ σὲ γρηγοροῦντα, recalls a story related by Plutarch in connection with Philip II (*Mor.* 178f–179a): Μαχαίτα δὲ τινὶ κρίνων δίκην καὶ ὑπονυστάζων οὐ πάνυ προσείχε τοῖς δικαίοις ἀλλὰ κατέκρινεν· ἐκείνου δ' ἀναβοήσαντος ἐκκαλεῖσθαι τὴν κρίσιν διοργισθεὶς Ἐπὶ τίνα; εἶπε· καὶ ὁ Μαχαίτας· Ἐπὶ σέ, βασιλεῦ, αὐτόν, ἂν ἐγρηγορῶς καὶ προσέχων ἀκούης. Τότε μὲν οὖν ἀνέστη· γενόμενος δὲ μᾶλλον ἐφ' ἑαυτῷ καὶ γνοὺς ἀδικούμενον τὸν Μαχαίταν τὴν μὲν κρίσιν οὐκ ἔλυσε, τὸ δὲ τίμημα τῆς δίκης αὐτὸς ἐξέτισεν.

The humour of the *Philogelos* is not generally highly rated, though many of the stories still have a good deal of life left in them.² Obviously, the collection was not intended for continuous reading. But it seems worth raising the question whether it was really intended as a joke-book, or whether it embodies an attempt at a motif-index, compiled, perhaps, to assist an analysis of various forms of wit and humour.

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² Many anecdotes very similar to, occasionally practically identical with, *Philogelos* stories are included in Leo Rosten's fascinating *The Joys of Yiddish* (Harmondsworth, 1971); as light relief among much serious discussion of Ashkenazic lore and customs they are extremely effective.