

Examples of the “Touching” Euphemism in Ancient Greek Texts

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Examples² of the touching euphemism employing the verb ἅπτω:

Plato, *Leges* 8.836c: In the midst of a conversation about sexual desires or cravings and how to get young people to abstain from them, Plato refers to the possibility of writing a law asserting ‘that it was correct to avoid, with males and youths, sexual relations like those one has with females, bringing as a witness the nature of the beasts and demonstrating that males don’t touch males with a view to such things because it is not according to nature to do so [καὶ δεικνὺς πρὸς τὰ τοιαῦτα οὐχ ἀπτόμενον ἄρρενα ἄρρενος διὰ τὸ μὴ φύσει τοῦτο εἶναι]’ (translation of Pangle 1980: 227). Here the euphemism is used of sexual intercourse between men, a ‘touching’ that is not condoned and which in context is described as an unnatural response to sexual urges.

Plato, *Leges* 8.837b-d: As the discussion mentioned in the previous paragraph goes on it addresses the problem of a man who, ‘drawn in opposite directions by the two loves [the love of the body and love of the soul], ... finds himself at a loss, with one bidding him to pick [lit. touch] the bloom of youth [κελεύοντος τῆς ὥρας ἅπτεσθαι] and the other telling him not to. For the man who loves the body, hungering for the bloom as for ripe fruit, bids himself take his fill without honoring the disposition of soul of the beloved. The other sort of lover holds the desire for the body to be secondary; looking at it rather than loving it, with his soul he really desires the soul of the other and considers the gratification of body by body to be wantonness’ (Pangle 1980: 228-9). Here the problem is not sex itself, but acting out of a desire to gratify the body rather than a concern for the soul of the other. According to Plato it is self-gratification that leads the man to ‘touch’ the object of his desire. Here to ‘touch’ seems to be related to ‘taking one’s fill without honoring the disposition of the soul of the beloved.’

Plato, *Leges* 8.838b: The conversation turns to a discussion of approaches to getting young people to reject sexual passions and the fact that people do not find themselves tempted to sleep with a beautiful brother, sister, son or daughter. In fact, ‘with regard to a son or daughter, the same unwritten law guards in a very effective way, as it were, against touching them [ἅπτεσθαι τούτων]—by open or secret sleeping together, or by any other sort of embracing. In fact, among the many there isn’t the slightest desire for this sort of intercourse’ (Pangle 1980: 229). Again, these hypothetical acts of touching are condemned (in 838c we are told they are hated by God and incredibly shameful). Here the euphemism is used for engaging in sexual relations grounded in a desire for sexual pleasure rather than a rational act based on loftier motivations.

Plato, *Leges* 8.840a: Still wrestling with the same issue, namely, how to get a man to abstain from indulging in sexual pleasures (839d), it is suggested that physical training increases one’s self-discipline and restraint, and the example of Iccus of Tarentum, the famous athlete, is brought up. We are told that he ‘was so filled with love of victory, and possessed in his soul such art, and such courage mixed with moderation, that he never touched a woman—or a boy,

¹ Special thanks go to Edward J Kotynski, who has provided several of these examples, as well as other related texts. I am responsible for the selection and comments found here.

² Unless otherwise indicated, English translations are (usually) from the Loeb Classical Library (sometimes slightly adapted).

for that matter [οὔτε τινὸς πώποτε γυναικὸς ἤψατο οὐδ' αἰ παιδὸς]—during the entire time of his intensive training' (Pangle 1980: 231). Here again the focus is on restraining oneself from using another person for one's sexual self-gratification and the one who refrains from 'touching' is praised.

Plato, *Leges* 8.841d: A bit further on the discussion turns to the goal of enforcing 'one of two ordinances regarding erotic matters: Either no one is to dare to touch any well-born and free person except the woman who is his wife [περὶ ἐρωτικῶν, ἢ μηδένα τολμᾶν μηδενὸς ἄπτεσθαι τῶν γενναίων ἅμα καὶ ἐλευθέρων πλὴν γαμετῆς ἑαυτοῦ γυναικός], and no one is to sow unhallowed bastard sperm in concubines or go against nature and sow sterile seed in males; or we should abolish erotic activity between males altogether' (Pangle 1980: 233).

While the main emphasis is on the impropriety of touching other people of elite or free status, at first glance it seems touching one's wife might be acceptable. However, when πλὴν is used as a preposition denoting an exception (typically, as here, following a negative statement), it can introduce a disjunctive thought that often does not function as a simple exception. For example, in Acts 15:28, the decision 'to lay no great burden on you except these essentials [ἡμῖν μηδὲν πλέον ἐπιτίθεσθαι ὑμῖν βᾶρος πλὴν τούτων τῶν ἐπάναγκες]', probably means 'to lay no great burden on you (at all), but only require these essentials'. In Mark 12:32 the statement (regarding God) that he 'is one and there is no other except him [εἷς ἐστὶν καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλος πλὴν αὐτοῦ]' means he 'is one and there is no other – only he exists'. There is no exception to the statement that 'there is no other'. More clearly yet, in Acts 27:22 Paul promises 'there will be no loss of life among you except the ship [ἀποβολὴ γὰρ ψυχῆς οὐδεμία ἔσται ἐξ ὑμῶν πλὴν τοῦ πλοίου]'. What he means is there will be no loss of life *at all*; only the ship will be lost (cf. NRSV). So also in this case, given the rest of the evidence, it seems that no one should 'dare to touch any well-born and free person except the woman who is his wife' should be taken to mean no one should 'dare to touch any well-born and free person but only engage in sexual relations with the woman who is his wife'.³

Plato, *Respublica*, 3.403.b: "So it looks as if you are going to make a law in the state we are founding that a lover of young men may kiss, associate with and touch his beloved, if the beloved can be persuaded, as he would a son for the sake of all that is good (φιλεῖν μὲν καὶ συνεῖναι καὶ ἄπτεσθαι ὡσπερ υἱὸς παιδικῶν ἐραστήν τῶν καλῶν χάριν, ἐὰν πείθῃ); but in all other respects he should associate with the object of his desires so as to prevent any association ever going farther than this; if not, it will lay him open to a charge of lack of education and taste." At first sight it seems to refer to pederastic sex, but then what would it mean to say they shouldn't ever go "farther than this"? So it seems less clear. I am not convinced this is an example of the use of the euphemism but have included it here for the sake of completeness. In any case, if it is an example of the euphemism it does not seem to add to what we have seen in other occurrences where it refers to pederasty.

Plato, *Respublica* 5.461a-b: It is suggested that 'if anyone older or younger than the prescribed age meddles with procreation for the state, we shall say that his error is an impiety and an injustice, since he is begetting for the city a child whose birth, if it escapes discovery, will not be attended by the sacrifices and the prayers which the priests and priestesses and the entire city prefer at the ceremonial marriages, that ever better offspring may spring from good sires and

³ There is a similar construction in 1 Cor 7:5, where Paul says spouses should not rob or defraud each other of their sexual rights "except perhaps by agreement..." which certainly should not be understood to mean they might agree to rob or defraud each other for a limited period, but rather, "do not defraud each other of your sexual rights, but you may abstain by mutual agreement..."

from fathers helpful to the state sons more helpful still. But this child will be born in darkness and conceived in foul incontinence'. Furthermore, 'the same rule will apply ... if any of those still within the age of procreation goes in to [lit. 'touches'] a woman of that age with whom the ruler has not paired him [ἐάν τις τῶν ἔτι γεννώντων μὴ συνέρξαντος ἄρχοντος ἄπτηται τῶν ἐν ἡλικίᾳ γυναικῶν]. We shall say that he is imposing on the state a base-born, uncertified, and unhallowed child' (Shorey's translation [LCL]).⁴ The sexual contact with an unapproved person is considered another act of 'impiety and ... injustice'.

Plato, *Respublica* 5.461e: The section on prohibited relations concludes by referring to 'that which we have just now said, (which is) not to touch one another [ὁ συνηδὴ ἐλέγομεν, ἀλλήλων μὴ ἄπτεσθαι]. But the law will allow brothers and sisters to cohabit [συνοικεῖν] if the lot so falls out and the Delphic oracle approves' (Shorey's translation [LCL], modified). The prohibited relations are referred to in terms of the insistence that people not touch one another, while the next line refers to approved sexual relations using a different verb.

Plato, *Symposium* 209.C (A-C): "Now by far the highest and fairest part of prudence is that which concerns the regulation of cities and habitations; it is called sobriety [209b] and justice. So when a man's soul is so far divine that it is made pregnant with these from his youth, and on attaining manhood immediately desires to bring forth and beget, he too, I imagine, goes about seeking the beautiful object whereon he may do his begetting, since he will never beget upon the ugly. Hence it is the beautiful rather than the ugly bodies that he welcomes in his pregnancy, and if he chances also on a soul that is fair and noble and well-endowed, he gladly cherishes the two combined in one; and straightway in addressing such a person he is resourceful in discoursing of virtue and of what should be [209c] the good man's character and what his pursuits; and so he takes in hand the other's education. For I hold that by contact with the fair one and by consorting with him (ἀπτόμενος γὰρ οἶμαι τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ὁμιλῶν αὐτῷ) he bears and brings forth his long-felt conception, because in presence or absence he remembers his fair. Equally too with him he shares the nurturing of what is begotten, so that men in this condition enjoy a far fuller community with each other than that which comes with children, and a far surer friendship, since the children of their union are fairer and more deathless." (LCL translation of Harold N. Fowler).

Aristotle, *Politica* 7.14.12 [1335b]: After discussing the appropriate ages for men and women to marry and begin to have children (and suggesting that once one is past the best years for procreation a man should only have intercourse 'for the sake of health or for some other similar reason'), we are told regarding 'intercourse with another woman or man' that 'in general it should be considered a disgrace to be detected "touching" in any way whatsoever while one is a husband and addressed as such [περὶ δὲ τῆς πρὸς ἄλλην ἢ πρὸς ἄλλον, ἔστω μὲν ἀπλῶς μὴ καλὸν ἀπτόμενον φαίνεσθαι μηδαμῆ μηδαμῶς, ὅταν ἦ καὶ προσαγορευθῆ πόσις]', and that 'any who may be discovered doing anything of the sort during their period of parentage must be punished with a loss of privilege suited to the offence'.⁵

⁴ We note that when it goes on to say (461b-c) that men and women who "have passed the age of lawful procreation" are "free to form such relations with whomsoever they please [συγγίγνεσθαι ὧ ἄν ἐθέλωσι]," a different verb is used.

⁵ The translation up to the inserted Greek text is the author's. The translation following the inserted Greek text is that of H. Rackham (LCL). Not recognizing that "touching" is a euphemism only used of men's sexual activity, Rackham improperly transformed the first part into a statement that applies equally to men and women: "As to intercourse with another woman or man, in general it must be dishonorable for them to be known to take any part in it in any circumstances whatsoever as long as they are husband and wife and bear those names." He evidently did not realize that the touching euphemism is not used of a woman and that here what is contemplated is a man

The euphemism is thus used for an extra-marital affair, an act of sexual intercourse that is not consistent with the highly reasoned and rational grounds and purposes proposed by Aristotle.

Epictetus, *Encheiridion*, 33.8: In things that pertain to the body take only as much as your bare need requires, I mean such things as food, drink, clothing, shelter, and household slaves; but cut down everything which is for outward show or luxury. In your sex-life preserve purity, as for as you can, before marriage, and, if you indulge, take only those privileges which are lawful (Περὶ ἀφροδίσια εἰς δύναμιν πρὸ γάμου καθαρευτέον· ἀπτομένῳ δὲ ὧν νομιμὸν ἐστὶ μεταληπτέον). However, do not make yourself offensive, or censorious, to those who do indulge, and do not make frequent mention of the fact that you do not yourself indulge.”

Philostratus, *Imagines*, 2.17 (367.K.2): “But you are bold enough, my boy, not to fear even the Seilenus here that guards the island, though he is both drunken and is trying to seize [“touch”] a Bacchante (φοβεῖσθαι μεθύοντά τε καὶ ἀπτόμενον τῆς Βάκχης). She, however, does not deign to look at him, but since she loves Dionysus she fashions his image in her mind and pictures him and sees him, absent though he is; for though the look of the Bacchante’s eyes is wavering, yet assuredly it is not free from dreams of love.” (LCL translation of Arthur Fairbanks)

Genesis 20:4, 6 LXX: Although Abimelech took Sarah into his harem, v. 4 tells us that he ‘had not [yet] touched her [οὐχ ἥψατο αὐτῆς]’. God intervened, according to v. 6, telling him, ‘I spared you from sinning against me. So I did not let you touch her [οὐκ ἀφῆκά σε ἄψασθαι αὐτῆς]’. Twice in the space of three verses the euphemism is used for the (potential) violation of another man’s wife by a powerful man who had unknowingly taken her into his harem (cf. Gen. 12:11-19). The euphemism is used several other times in cases of the violation of women at the mercy of their captors or owners, having been either captured in battle or brought into the household as slaves.

In each of these cases the sexual relations referred to by the touching euphemism are considered inappropriate and the authors employing the idiom think it is/was good that the man involved did not touch the woman (or people) who had come to be subject to him. We note that the Hebrew passage has קרב (‘to draw near’) in v. 4 and נגע (‘to touch’) in v. 6. The use of the latter term suggests the same euphemism was known in Hebrew (as also suggested by the following two passages) while in v. 4 the LXX translator(s) has employed the touching euphemism instead of the different one found in the Hebrew passage.

Ruth 2:9 LXX: Boaz invites Ruth to glean in his field, assuring her that he has ‘ordered the young men not to touch you [ἐνετείλάμην τοῖς παιδαρίοις τοῦ μὴ ἄψασθαί σου]’. Chrys Caragounis (1996: 547 n. 15) has argued that this verse ‘has nothing to do with sex; the term refers to molestation (cf. vv. 15-16).’ Admitting this case may be ambiguous, Gordon Fee (2003: 205) thinks it ‘altogether possible that the language here could just as easily be intended as instruction not to try to have sex with her.’ If this is another example of the euphemism, and it probably is, ‘to try to have sex with her’ may be too mild. While the idiom does not necessarily imply force, the context seems similar to others where the word has to do with taking advantage of a defenseless woman. In any case, this example is consistent with others in that the sexual relations referred to by it are not condoned by the author but considered inappropriate.

Proverbs 6:29 LXX: The preceding verses describe the disastrous consequences of going to a prostitute or sleeping with another man’s wife as scorching fire that burns a foolish

touching either another man or a woman, and not of a man touching another man or a woman touching another woman.

man. This verse goes on to say, ‘So is the one who goes in to a married woman; he will not be held guiltless, nor anyone who touches her [πᾶς ὁ ἀπτόμενος αὐτῆς].’ The euphemism, found here in both the Hebrew text and the LXX, is being applied to an adulterous relationship or possibly rape (if the last clause is distinguished from the preceding one).

Testament of Solomon A 2:3: A demon says, “while in a trance I undergo three transformations. Sometimes I am a man who craves the bodies of effeminate boys and when I touch them, they suffer great pain [ἀπτομένου μου ἀλγῶσι πάνυ]” (translation of D. C. Duling in *OTP* 1:963).

Josephus, *Antiquitates judaicae* 1.163-164: Fearing ‘the Egyptians’ frenzy for women’ and its potential danger to his life, Abraham and Sarah pretend she is his sister. Pharaoh became ‘fired with a desire to see her and on the point of laying hands on her [lit., ‘and was about to touch Sarah’; ἦν ἄψασθαι τῆς Σάρρας]. But God thwarted his criminal passion [τὴν ἄδικον ἐπιθυμίαν]’ (Thackeray’s translation [LCL]). This fits a pattern we have seen before of a woman being taken by force by a powerful man whose sexual advances are motivated by his sexual passion.

Dio Chrysostom 56.15: “And, by the gods, he not only called [Agamemnon] to account by his words but even laid upon him the heaviest penalty of all for his misconduct. For he bids him entreat Achilles and go to all lengths to persuade him. And Agamemnon, like men convicted in the courts, first makes a counter proposal of a fine, such as he says he is able to pay, as compensation for his insult; then, among other things, he undertakes to offer sacrifice and to swear an oath regarding Briseis, that he has not even touched her since the day he took her from Achilles (ἢ μὴν αὐτῆς μηδὲ ἄψασθαι λαβών); and in payment for merely having removed her from one tent to another, he offers to give much gold, horses, tripods, cauldron, women, and cities; and finally, thinking this not enough, he offers Achilles whichever of his three daughters he may desire to have as wife.” Another example of the euphemism used to refer to the sexual exploitation of a woman taken in battle.

Plutarch, *Alexander* 21.9: We are told that Alexander’s self-mastery is reflected in the fact that he did not lay hands on captive women or ‘know’ any of them before marriage, except Barsiné: ‘This woman, Memnon’s widow, was taken prisoner at Damascus. And since she had received a Greek education, and was of an agreeable disposition, and since her father, Artabazus, was son of a king’s daughter, Alexander determined (at Parmenio’s instigation, as Aristobulus says) to attach himself to [lit., ‘to touch’] a woman of such high birth and beauty [καλῆς καὶ γενναίας ἄψασθαι γυναικός]. But as for the other captive women, seeing that they were surpassingly stately and beautiful, he merely said jestingly that Persian women were torments to the eyes’ (Perrin’s translation [LCL]). Again we are dealing with a captor’s decision to enjoy sex with captive women or to restrain himself. This, we are told, is the one case of a captive woman of such great beauty and status that Alexander did not restrain himself from engaging in sexual relations with her before marrying her.

Plutarch, *Pompey*, 2.3: “We are told that Flora the courtesan, when she was now quite old, always took delight in telling about her former intimacy with Pompey, saying that she never left his embraces without bearing the marks of his teeth. Furthermore, Flora would tell how Geminius, one of Pompey’s companions, fell in love with her and annoyed her greatly by his attentions; and when she declared that she could not consent to his wishes because of Pompey, Geminius laid the matter before Pompey. Pompey, accordingly, turned her over to Geminius, but he never again touched or conversed with her (μηκέτι δὲ αὐτὸν ἄψασθαι τὸ παράπαν μηδὲ ἐντυχεῖν αὐτῇ), although he was thought to be enamoured of her.

Plutarch, *Quaestionum convivialum* 634a: Plutarch discusses the varying ways in which lovers respond to jokes about their relationship.

In the presence of those they love, men find it very agreeable to be teased about love itself, but about nothing else. And if they happen to be in love with their own wives or to have a generous love for elegant young men, they are perfectly delighted and proud to be teased about them. Accordingly, when at one of the lectures of Arcesilaus an auditor at the moment engaged in a love-affair advanced the following proposition, ‘In my opinion nothing touches anything else,’ Arcesilaus pointed to a youth who was sitting beside the gentleman—a fine handsome young man—and said, ‘Am I to infer that you in particular are not touching this lad [τοῦδ’ ἄπτῃ]?’ (Clement’s translation [LCL]).

While there is no clear evidence that Plutarch or Arcesilaus disapproved of the relationship, Arcesilaus is using wordplay to make a joke at the expense of the pederast, and in the distinction between sex for pleasure vs. sex for procreation, this example falls under the same category as all of the others.

Plutarch, *Quaestionum convivialum* 717e: Florus ‘mentioned the vision that is said to have appeared to Ariston, Plato’s father, in his sleep, which spoke and forbade him to have intercourse with his wife, or to touch her, for ten months [μὴ συγγενέσθαι τῇ γυναικὶ μηδ’ ἄψασθαι δέκα μηνῶν]’ (Minar’s translation [LCL]). On first reading, ‘touching’ here seems to suggest simply having sexual intercourse with his wife, although the statement seems rather redundant, with two different words for sexual intercourse. But Minar reminds us to read about the situation to which Florus is referring in Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 3.2. There we discover that the story was ‘that Ariston made violent love [βιάζεσθαι] to Perictione, then in her bloom, and failed to win her; and that, when he ceased to offer violence [παυόμενόν τε τῆς βίας], Apollo appeared to him in a dream, whereupon he left her unmolested until her child was born.’ As it turns out, then, the sexual intercourse he was having with his wife (which Plutarch refers to as ‘touching’) was a kind that was not considered morally acceptable. In fact Apollo himself (who was no prude, being known for his many male and female lovers) did not approve of it.

Plutarch, *Amatorius* 752a: Daphnaeus argues as follows: ‘Boy-love denies pleasure; that is because it is ashamed and afraid. It needs a fair pretext for approaching [lit., touching] the young and beautiful [δεῖ δέ τινος εὐπρεπείας ἀπτομένῳ καλῶν καὶ ὠραίων], so it pretends friendship and virtue’ (Helmbold’s translation [LCL]). Daphnaeus clearly disapproves of pederasty and his use of the euphemism to refer to it is consistent with what we have found elsewhere.

Plutarch, *De Alexandri magni fortuna aut virtute* 339e: Plutarch tells us that “among the captives taken at Damascus was a courtesan from Pella, by name Antigona.... She was comely enough to look upon and, after Philotas had touched her [καὶ τὸν Φιλώταν ἀψάμενον αὐτῆς] she had complete possession of him. Indeed that man of iron was so softened that he was not in control of his reasoning powers amid his pleasures...” [adapted from the LCL translation]).

Testament of Reuben 3:15: After Reuben defiles his father’s concubine, Bilhah, by sleeping with her, an angel reveals the fact to his father and he, in turn, ‘came and made lamentation over me, and never again touched her [μηκέτι ἀψάμενος αὐτῆς]’ (Kee’s translation

[OTP]). Once Bilhah has been defiled through Reuben's incestuous act of πορνεία it is not appropriate for Jacob to have any further sexual relationship with her.⁶

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 1.17: Marcus Aurelius gives thanks, among other things, that 'I did not touch Benedicta or Theodotus [τὸ μῆτε Βενεδίκτης ἄψασθαι μῆτε Θεοδότου], but that even afterwards, when I did give way to amatory passions [ὑστερον ἐν ἐρωτικοῖς πάθεσι], I was cured of them' (Haines' translation [LCL]). Although we do not know for certain who Benedicta and Theodotus were, it seems that they were most likely slaves of the imperial household (Rutherford 1998: 151, and Farquharson 1961: 97).⁷ This is universally agreed to be an example of the euphemism and the logic of the passage suggests touching would have entailed another case of giving way to amatory passions.

Aelian, *On Animals* 1.13: "It seems however that fish are also models of continence. At any rate when the 'Etna-fish' as it is called, pairs with its mate as with a wife and achieves the married state, it does not touch another female (ἐπὶ τῇ ἑαυτοῦ συννόμῳ οἰονεὶ γαμετῆ τινὶ συνδυασθεῖς κληρώσεται τὸ λέχος, ἄλλης οὐχ ἄπτεται); it needs no covenants to maintain its fidelity, no dowry; it even stands in no fear of an action for ill-usage, nor is Solon to it a name of dread. What noble laws, how worthy of veneration!—And man, the libertine, feels no scruple at disobeying them."

Aristaenetus, *Epistulae*, 2.21: In a fictitious erotic letter, "Habrokomes" writes "His Beloved Delphis": "I am in a state of permanent curiosity about the female sex, by Zeus, not because I want to touch them [Περίεργος διατελῶ πρὸς τὰ γυναῖα πανταχῆ, μὰ Δία, οὐχ ἵνα τούτων ἄψαιμι] (don't misunderstand my words), but so as to make an accurate comparison between you and the rest—you who surpass all women in beauty—picturing you all side by side and judging one against the other." (Translation of Peter Bing and Regina Höschele).

Greek Anthology, 5.243: "I held the girl who loves a good laugh tight in my arms in a dream. She yielded entirely to me and allowed me to touch her body in every sexual way (παντοίῃ σώματος ἀπτομένου). But Love is an exceedingly envious character; he lay in ambush through the night, then poured my love away and scattered my sleep. So even in the dreams of my sleep Love envies me the attainment of sweet union." This is another case that references touching the "body" which is a variation on the usual use of the euphemism.

Euphorion, *Poetic Fragments*, 69 (Scholiast on Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica*): This is a fine example, despite the misleading Loeb translation. "He (Tityos) is punished in Hades for having overpowered Leto as she was on her way to Pytho, as when Homer mentions "Tityos son of Earth". Euphorion says that he laid hands on Artemis, and that that is the reason for his punishment (ὁ δὲ Εὐφορίων Ἀρτέμιδος φησιν αὐτὸν ἤφθαι καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τιμωρεῖσθαι)." The standard story was that Tityos raped Artemis's mother, Leto. The point here seems to be that according to Euphorion it was Artemis who was raped (and that is what is referred to in the euphemism of "touching"). So I think the Loeb translation should be closer to: He (Tityos) is punished in Hades for having overpowered Leto as she was on her way to Pytho, as when Homer mentions "Tityos son of Earth". But Euphorion says that he "touched" [that is, in this case,

⁶ It is not clear if *T. Reuben* considers Bilhah partly responsible for Reuben's act. Reuben says "if I had not seen Bilhah bathing in a sheltered place, I would not have fallen into this great lawless act. For so absorbed were my senses by her naked femininity that I was not able to sleep until I had performed this revolting act" (3:11-12). Furthermore, Reuben argues that "women are evil" and "scheme treacherously how they might entice [men] to themselves by means of their looks" (5:1-2), taking them captive in the sexual act (5:3).

⁷ It has also been suggested that Benedicta might have been Hadrian's concubine, who is mentioned earlier in the same passage (cf. Africa 1961: 98 n. 9, and the index of proper names in Haines [LCL]).

raped] Artemis, and that that is the reason for his punishment).

Examples of the touching euphemism employing the verb ψαύω:

Philo, *De specialibus legibus* 3.32: Philo expounds Lev. 18:19 and its prohibition against touching (having sex with) a woman during her monthly period (μη ψαυέτω γυναικὸς ἀνήρ).

Josephus, *Antiquitates judaicae* 2.57: Josephus recounts the complaint of Potiphar's wife that her husband would allow his servant to touch his wife (τῆς σῆς ψαύειν γυναικός). In context, of course, she is accusing Joseph of attempted rape.

***Pseudo-Phocylides* 179:** The author exhorts: "Do not touch your stepmother, your father's second wife (μητρειῆς μὴ ψαῦε τὰ δεύτερα λέκτρα γονῆος)."

See also on Philostratus the Elder, *Letters*, 47, in the next section below.

Examples of the touching euphemism employing the verb θιγγάνω:

Greek Lyric: Anonymous Fragments, 1037 (Louvre inscription) lines 18-19:

... uttering cries of mockery, and no rein . . . from unbridled mouths . . . tongue . . ., but necessity checks bodily insult, for around . . . restraining them from touching (a female) [ἀμφὶ γὰρ οἰσ[θηλυτέρων ἀπερύκουσα θιγεῖν]. This seems to be an example of the euphemism, but is too fragmentary to contribute much.

Euripides, *Electra* 50-51: Electra's husband makes it clear that he refused to touch a virgin/young girl (παρθένον μὴ θιγγάνω) entrusted to his care because such an act would have been inappropriate.

Euripides, *Hippolytus* 1044: The idiom is used to refer to the rape or seduction of the wife of a man's father by his son: "For if you were my son and I your father, I would not have banished but killed you, if you had dared to put your hand to my wife (γυναικὸς ἡξίους ἐμῆς θιγεῖν)." We note that this is the scenario Paul describes as πορνεία in 1 Corinthians 5:1.

Euripides, *Hecuba*, 605: But you, sir, go and bear this message to the Argives, that no one should touch my daughter but that they should fence off the multitude from her body (μη θιγγάνειν μοι μηδέν', ἀλλ' εἴργειν ὄχλον, τῆς παιδός). In a great host the mob is unruly, and the riotous behavior of sailors is harder to check than a fire.

Diodorus of Sicily *The Library of History*, 3.57.7: Basileia, whose children were murdered, swoons as she looks for one of them. "When she was aroused from the swoon she recounted to the common crowd both the dream and the misfortunes which had befallen her, asking that they render to the dead honours like those accorded to the gods and asserting that no man should thereafter touch her body (τοῦ δ' αὐτῆς σώματος μηκέτι μηδένα θιγεῖν).

Philostratus the Elder, *Letters*, 19: Love letter sent "To a Boy who is a Prostitute": You offer yourself for sale... We drink of you as of the streams; we touch you as we touch roses (οὔτως ἀπτόμεθα ὡς τῶν ῥόδων).

Philostratus the Elder, *Letters*, 47: There are two interesting things in this letter. First, the reference to "feeling the touch of love" may be related to the euphemism. Secondly, when Philostratus tells the woman to "bring the play to its conclusion, so that you may touch me, even though it be with a sword (ἵνα μου ψαύσης κἀν ξίφει)" one wonders if this is a case of the euphemism being applied to a woman's sexual encounter with a man [despite it being a man

touching the object of his desire in every other instance of the euphemism], or if it refers simply to his desire to be touched and embraced (as he writes, “even though it be with a sword”). The introduction of a sword into the sentence perhaps militates against the identification of a euphemism here, as is perhaps also the simple case that he writes of being touched by a woman. “Love letter sent to a woman: But even if you are a barbarian and one of the maidens from the Thermodon, still ’tis rumoured that even these allow young men’s embraces and have children born from secret amours. You are not a Thracian or a Sidonian, are you? Yet surely they too felt the touch of love (καὶ μὴν καὶ τούτων ἔρωσ ἦψατο); and one allowed the embrace of Ninus, and the other the embrace of Boeotus. I think I’ve found out who you are—unless I’m a bad and incompetent physiognomist: Danaüs was your father, and there’s the hand and there the murderous will. Yet even of those husband slaying maidens one spared her youthful lover. I do not beseech you; I do not shed tears; bring the play to its conclusion, so that you may touch me, even though it be with a sword (ἵνα μου ψαύσης κἂν ξίφει).”

Plutarch, *De Alexandri magni fortuna aut virtute* 339f: For among the captives taken at Damascus was a courtesan from Pella, by name Antigonā... Craterus brought Antigonā herself secretly to Alexander, who did not touch her person, but restrained himself (καὶ τοῦ μὲν σώματος οὐκ ἔθιγεν ἀλλ’ ἀπέσχετο).

Plutarch, *De virtute morali*, 442e: An evident proof of this is also the shrinking and withdrawal of the private parts, which hold their peace and remain quiet in the presence of such beautiful maidens and youths as neither reason nor law allows us to touch (οἴων οὐκ ἔῃ λόγος οὐδὲ νόμος θιγεῖν). This is particularly the case with those who first fall in love and then hear that they have unwittingly become enamoured of a sister or a daughter; for lust cowers as reason asserts itself and, at the same time, the body brings its parts into decent conformity with the judgement.

Plutarch, *Amatorius* 760D: Plutarch explains that Alexander the Great was tempted to exercise his power to acquire and take advantage of the object of his sexual desire (a minstrel) but refused to do so when he learned that her patron (his friend) loved her. Then “he restrained himself and did not touch the woman (μὴ θιγεῖν τῆς γυναικός).”

Pseudo-Clementine Homilies 17.17: The homily recounts how Abimelech was warned not to touch Sarah (μὴ θιγεῖν αὐτῆς) in Gen. 20:3-6.

Cases where the euphemism may be assumed as part of a play on words, or double entendre, or that are more ambiguous than other examples

Plato, *Republic*, 7.535c: “The reason that philosophy has fallen into such ill repute, is, as I said before, because it is unworthy people who take it up. It should not have been bastards who took it up, but people of genuine pedigree (ἀξίαν αὐτῆς ἀπτονται· οὐ γὰρ νόθους ἔδει ἀπτεσθαι, ἀλλὰ γνησίους).” This may entail a case of double entendre, with Philosophy’s reputation described in terms evocative of the reputation of a woman. But then a woman’s reputation wouldn’t be preserved if she were known to be “touched” even by people of good pedigree. I’m therefore uncertain, but included this text here for the sake of completeness.

Plato, *Symposium*, 195: “The tempers and souls of gods and men are his chosen habitation: not indeed any soul as much as another; when he comes upon one whose temper is hard, away he goes, but if it be soft, he makes his dwelling there. So if with feet and every way he is wont ever to get hold of the softest parts of the softest creatures (ἀπτόμενον οὖν αἰεὶ καὶ ποσὶ καὶ

πάντη ἐν μαλακωτάτοις τῶν μαλακωτάτων), he needs must be most delicate.” This seems to entail a double entendre.

Philostratus the Elder, *Letters*, 54: “Though you shun me, yet do at least accept the roses in my place. And I pray you not only to garland yourself with them but also to sleep on them. For indeed they are both beautiful to behold, possessing splendour as of fire, and delicate to touch (ἄψασθαι δὲ μαλακὰ) and softer than any bed, surpassing the Babylonian scarlet and the Tyrian purple.” Possibly a double entendre as the roses are described in ways that parallel his thoughts about the woman.

***Daphnis and Chloe*, 1.13.2, 5; 1.26.1:** 1.13.2: “When she washed his back, his skin yielded softly to her touch, so that she kept touching herself stealthily to find out whether he was more velvety than she (ὥστε λαθοῦσα ἑαυτῆς ἤψατο πολλάκις, εἰ τρυφερώτερος εἴη πειρωμένη). 1.13.5: She also persuaded him to have another wash, and she watched him while he washed, and after watching she touched him (καὶ ἰδοῦσα ἤψατο), and again she came away in admiration, and that admiration was the beginning of love. She did not know what was happening to her, being but a young girl raised in the country, who had never even heard anyone speak of love. Her heart began to ache, she could not control her eyes, she was always talking about Daphnis. 1.26.1: As he went on with these pronouncements a cicada, on the run from a swallow looking to capture it, dropped into Chloe’s shirt. The swallow followed and could not catch it, but in its pursuit came close enough to touch her cheeks with its wings (καὶ ἡ χελιδὼν ἐπομένη τὸν μὲν οὐκ ἠδυνήθη λαβεῖν, ταῖς δὲ πτέρυξιν ἐγγὺς διὰ τὴν δίωξιν γενομένη τῶν παρεῖων αὐτῆς ἤψατο). The language is suggestive (for anyone familiar with the euphemism). It seems to me that the earlier texts 1.13.2, 5 describe actual touching of skin as part of a description of a process of becoming romantically infatuated (she is experiencing the feelings of love for the first time and doesn’t even have words for it), but it may entail a word play which doesn’t exactly employ the euphemism but depends on the euphemism for its effect.

Lucian, *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, 1.1.13: Reminded of a patron who won’t be visiting her anymore, Glycera says, “Yes, Thais, and it’s hurt me very much (Ναί, ὦ Θαι, καὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα οὐ μετρίως μου ἤψατο). It seems the “touching”/“hurt” here is due to the end of a sexual relationship. But a play on words is quite likely, with πρᾶγμα often serving as a euphemism for a penis or vagina (as a “thingy”) so “the matter hurts me a lot” carries the playful reminder of what used to be: “the thingy touches me a lot.” It seems to be another word play which doesn’t exactly employ the euphemism in a straightforward way but depends on the euphemism for its effect.

***Dionysiaca*, 35.33:** he “touched her limbs, handled often the swelling rosy breast even now like an apple (καὶ μελέων ἔψαυσε, καὶ ἤψατο πολλάκι μαζοῦ οἰδαλέου ροδόεντος, εἰκότος εἰσέτι μήλω); he would even have mingled with her in love—but at last, tired, he let these foolish words of desire escape him...”; **35.206:** “But when Morrheus had seen a lonely spot suitable for lying down, he stretched out a daring hand towards the modest girl and caught the chaste maiden’s inviolate dress. And now he would have seized her and girt her about with a strong man’s arms, and ravished the maiden votary in the flame of a bridegroom’s desire; but a serpent darted out of her immaculate bosom to protect the virgin maid, and curled about her waist guarding her body all round with its belly’s coils (Ἄλλ’ ὅτε χῶρον ἔρημον ἐσέδρακεν ἄρμενον εὐναῖς, πολμηρὴν παλάμην ὀρέγων αἰδήμονι νύμφῃ εἵματος ἀψαύστοιο σαόφρονος ἤψατο κούρης).” In both cases the language is suggestive (for anyone familiar with the euphemism) but we are told the touching did not actually entail sexual relations. So perhaps word plays which don’t exactly employ the euphemism but depend on the euphemism for their effect.

Plutarch, *Moralia*, 752.D: In a context discussing marriage and pederasty we read, “But Daphnaeus, I perceive, is acting like copper. It is a fact that copper is not so much affected by fire as it is by molten copper; when this is poured over it, it softens bit by bit and becomes fluid. And it is not Lysandra’s beauty that troubles him. Rather by his proximity and contact with one who is all ablaze and burning he is now himself catching fire (ἀλλὰ συνδιακεκαυμένῳ καὶ γέμοντι πυρὸς ἤδη πολλὸν χρόνον πλησιάζων καὶ ἀπτόμενος ἀναπίμπραται). It’s evident that if he doesn’t come running to us, he too will go soft.”

Pseudo-Lucian, *Lucius (or The Ass)*, 6: “Palaestra, you lovely creature, how rhythmically you turn and tilt your buttocks in time with the saucepan! And my word, how nimble too is the motion of your waist. Happy the man who dips his piece in such a dish!” She, being a most lively and attractive little wench, said, “You’d run away, young fellow, if you had any sense and any desire to go on living, for it’s all full of fire and steam here. If you so much as touch it (αὐτοῦ μόνον ἄψη), you’ll have a nasty burn, and won’t be able to budge from here.” This text entails a double entendre. It doesn’t fit the normal pattern quite exactly (because it speaks of touching “it” (a specific part of her body), but perhaps close enough (the part is left vague enough). I include it here for the sake of completeness.

Greek Anthology, 5.112: “I loved. Who hath not? I made revels in her honour. Who is uninitiated in those mysteries? But I was distraught. By whom? Was it not by a god?—Good-bye to it; for already the grey locks hurry on to replace the black, and tell me I have reached the age of discretion. While it was playtime I played; now it is over I will turn to more worthy thoughts (λωϊτέρης φροντίδος ἀψόμεθα).” This may be a case of double entendre. He has reached the time in life to turn from focusing on one kind of touching to another.

Greek Anthology, 12.160: “Bravely shall I bear the sharp pain in my vitals and the bond of the cruel fetters. For it is not now only, Nicander, that I learn to know the wounds of love, but often have I tasted desire (πόθων πολλάκις ἠψάμεθα = often we’ve touched desire). Do both thou,Adrasteia, and thou, Nemesis, bitterest of the immortals, exact due vengeance for his evil resolve.” The passage does not fit the pattern exactly (with the reference to touching πόθων rather than referencing the touching of a woman), but it came close enough to be included here for the sake of completeness.

The current total is 45 certain or likely examples of the Greek euphemism, with 10 suggested cases of word-play or double entendre dependent on familiarity with the euphemism. I plan to update this document as more examples come to my attention (please send candidates to rciampa@americanbible.org.

Note: Two other idioms should also be mentioned. To touch (or kindle) one’s own marriage, marriage-bed or wedding torch (γάμων/εὐνής/γαμήλιον) is to consummate a marriage (not merely engage in sexual relations with one’s wife; cf. Euripides, *Phoen.* 946; Plutarch, *Fort. Rom.* 321c; Josephus, *A.J.* 4.257; Euripides, *Hipp.* 14; Libanius, *Declamation* 40. 2. 27; Nonnus, *Dionysiaca*, 48.209; *Greek Anthology*, 14.126.5; Gregorius Nyssenus, *De deitate filii et spiritus sancti*, 46.568. 55; Basilus, *De vita et miraculis sanctae Theclae*, Book 1.6.67), while to touch someone else’s marriage or marriage-bed is to defile the marriage-bed through adultery (cf. Euripides, *Hipp.* 885; 1026).