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Αὐτόκωλος

Part of Semonides' description of the 'monkey-woman' (7.73—76 West) runs as follows:

τοιαύτη γυνή
εἶσιν δι' ἄστεος πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις γέλως·
ἐπ' αὐχένα βραχεῖα κινεῖται μόγις·
ἄπυρος, αὐτόκωλος.

The meaning of αὐτόκωλος is not self-evident. West himself proposes the tentative translation 'she has no buttocks, it's just leg', *πυγὴν οὐκ ἔχει ἀλλ' αὐτὰ κῶλα*: *Studies in Greek Elegy and Iambus* (1974) 178. That is certainly possible. But it seems equally possible that Semonides here refers not to the *appearance* of the woman, grotesque though it is, but to her *gait* or *manner of movement*. It is her going (εἶσιν) through the town that arouses laughter; and she moves with difficulty (κινεῖται μόγις). Hence we may see in the compound αὐτόκωλος a conflation of αὐτόματος and κῶλον: the woman's movements are so awkward (so unco-ordinated, as we say) that her legs appear to move of their own accord.

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