Was Meletus the Ancient “Slender Man”? Comic Fragments and Poetic Slenderness

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1. WHO WAS MELETUS?

1. Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1300–2

ΑΙΣ. οὗτος δ’ ἀπό πάντων μεταφέρει, πορνωδιών, σκολιών Μελήτου, Καρικῶν αὐλημάτων, θρήνων, χορειών.

AESCHYLUS: But *this* fellow collects his honey from any old source – prostitute’s songs, drinking-songs by Meletus, pipe-tunes and dirges and dances from Caria.

(Transl. Sommerstein 1996, IX, 137)


(A.) καὶ τίς νεκρῶν κευθὲν αἰτείται καὶ σκότους πύλας ἐτλῆ κατελθεῖν; (B.) ἕνα † δ’ ἀφ’ ἑκάστης τέχνης ἐκκλησίας, οὔς ἔμεθαν ὃς ἱδροφοίτας καὶ θεῖα ἕκεισι φιλοχωρουσίας. (A.) εἰσὶ γάρ τινες 5 ἄνδρες παρ’ ἑαυτῶν ἐλπίδων ὀχεῖσθαι; (B.) νὴ Δία μάλιστα γ’. (A.) ὅσπερ Θρᾴκοφοίται; (B.) πάντ’ ἔχεις.

(A.) καὶ τίνες ἄν έεῖν; (B.) πρῶτα ἐν τοῖς Σαννυρίους ἀπὸ τῶν τραγῳδών, ἀπὸ τῶν τραγικῶν χορῶν Μέλητος, ἀπὸ τῶν κυκλίων Κινησίας.

(A.) ὡς σφόδρ’ ἐπὶ λεπτῶν ἔλπιδῶν ὑμεῖς ἄρα τούτους γάρ, ἣν πολλῷ ἐξελήθη, ξυλλαβών ὁ τῆς διαρροίας ποταμὸς οἰχήσεται

Ath. 12,551b καὶ Ἀριστοφάνης δ’ ἐν Γηρυτάδῃ λεπτοὺς τούσδε καταλέγει, οὓς καὶ πρέσβεις ὑπὸ τῶν ποιητῶν φησιν εἰς Ἅιδου πέμψεσθαι πρὸς τοὺς ἕκει ποιητὰς λέγοντας ὑπὸ τῆς διαρροίας ποταμὸς οἰχήσεται (A). καὶ τίς – Κινεσίας (vv. 1–10).

Ath. 12,551c εἶθ’ ἐξῆς φησιν· ως – οἰχήσεται (vv. 11–13).

Ath. epit. 12,551b καὶ Ἀριστοφάνης δ’ ἐν Γηρυτάδῃ λεπτοὺς τούσδε καταλέγει, οὓς καὶ πρέσβεις ὑπὸ τῶν ποιητῶν φησιν εἰς Ἅιδου πέμψεσθαι πρὸς τοὺς ἕκει ποιητὰς, καὶ ἱδροφοίτας τούτους καλεῖ (v. 4), οὓς φησι καὶ ἐπὶ λεπτῶν ἐλπίδων ὑμεῖς ἄρα τούτους γάρ, ἣν πολλῷ ἐξελήθη, ξυλλαβών ὁ τῆς διαρροίας ποταμὸς οἰχήσεται (v. 11).

Ael. VH 10.6 ἐκω οἰδών δὲ τοὺς καταλέγοντας Σαννυρίους καὶ Μέλητος τον τραγῳδίας ποιητήν ὁ τραγῳδίας ποιητής καὶ Κινεσίας κυκλίων χορῶν (vv. 8–10) καὶ Φιλητᾶς ποιητής ἔξωμέτρων.

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scho. vet. (VMEΘBarb(Ald)) Ar. Ran. 681a–b, III Ia, p. 94 Chantry

“Thracian swallow”: so that the might attack him as a foreigner. He is made fun for being the son of a Thracian woman. This is the man called “Cleophon”, the lyre maker. Platon in his play Cleophon depicts his mother talking to him in a foreign tongue. She was said to be a Thracian.

(Transl. Storey 2011, III, 119)³


Areth. scho. (Bt) Plat. Apol. 18b, p. 420 Greene = 7 p. 13 Cufalo


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Meletus the bad tragic poet was of Thracian birth, as Ar. in Frogs (1302) and Storks (fr. 453), calling him Laius’ son, since at the time of the production of Storks Meletus was competing with his Oedipodea, as Aristotle says in Productions (fr. 628 Rose⁵). In Farmers he (Ar.) mentions him as "screwing Callias" (Transl. Henderson 2007, V, 169)


λεπτή τις ἐλπίς ἐστὶν ἑν’ ὑπ’ ᾧ ῥοχούμεθα
There’s but a splinter of hope keeping me afloat
(Transl. Henderson 1998, I, 385)⁵

7. Aristophanes, Frogs 366

ΧΟ. ἢ κατατιλῇ τῶν Ἑκαταιῶν κυκλίοισι χοροῖσιν ὑπάρχον
Or is a soloist in cyclic choral performances who shits on the offerings to Hecate
(Transl. Sommerstein 1996, IX, 67)

8. Aristophanes, Ecclesiazusae 329–30

ΓΕΙ. οὗ τί που
Κινησίας σου κατατετίληκέν ποθὲν
NEIGHBOUR: Cinesias hasn’t by any chance been shitting over you, has he?
(Transl. Sommerstein 1998, X, 67, 69)⁶

9. Aristophanes, Frogs 145–53

ΔΙ. δὲ τοὺς θεοὺς ἐχρῆν γε πρὸς τούτοις κεῖν
tὴν πυρρίχην τις ἔμαθε τὴν Κινησίον.
HERACLES: And then a vast sea of mud and ever-flowing dung, in which there lies anyone who has ever, say, broken the laws of hospitality, or slyly grabbed back a rent-boy’s money while having if off with him, or struck his mother, or given his father a sock in the jaw, or sworn a perjured oath, or had someone copy out a speech by Morsimus.
DIONYSUS: They ought to add to those, by the gods, anyone who’s learnt that war-dance by Cinesias!
(Transl. Sommerstein 1996, IX, 49)

3. MELETUS AS A “SLENDER” TRAGIC POET IN ANCIENT COMEDY

10. Sannyrio, fr. 2 K.–A. (Gelös)

σ—Μέλητον τὸν ἀπὸ Ληναίου νεκρόν
Meletus, the corpse from the Lenaeum
(Transl. Storey 2011, III, 221)

11. Aristophanes, *Clouds* 359
ΧΟ. σὺ τε λεπτότατοι λῆμνοι ἱερεῦ, φράζε πρὸς ἡμᾶς ὁ τι χρῄζεις
CHORUS: [Io Socrates] and you too, priest of subtlest hogwash, tell us what you desire
(Transl. Henderson 1998, II, 59)7

ΧΟ. κἀποκινδυνεύετον λεπτόν τι καὶ σοφὸν λέγειν. εἰ δὲ τοῦτο καταφοβεῖσθον, μὴ τις ἀμαθία προσῇ
tοῖς θεωμένοισιν, ὡς τὰ λεπτὰ μὴ γνώναι λεγόντοιν,
μηδὲν ὅρρωδείτε τοὐθ’ ὡς οὐκέθ’ οὕτοι ταῦτ’ ἐχει.
CHORUS: and take a gamble on saying something subtle and clever. If you want you’re frightened of is that there may
be some slow-wittedness in the audience, so that they may not understand the subtle things you say, don’t be
 appréhensive, because things aren’t like that any more.

(A.) πυθαγορισµοὶ καὶ λόγοι λεπτοὶ διεσιλευμέναι τε φροντίδες
tρέψοντε ἐκεῖνος, τὰ δὲ καθ’ ἦμεραν τάδε.
(A.) Pythagorean terms, over-subtle arguments, and finely chiselled thoughts provide their nourishment, but what they
have on a daily basis is the following
(Transl. Olson 2007, 447 [F10])8

14. Antiphanes, fr. 120, 2–4 K.–A. (*Kleophanes*)
ἡ τι ποτε: τὸν σποθδαῖον ἀκολουθεῖν ἐρεῖς
ἐν τῷ Λυκείῳ μετὰ σοφιστῶν νὴ ∆ία
λεπτῶν, ἁστίων, συκίων,
Or whatever? You’ll say the serious man trails along
at the Lyceum with a crowd of sophists, by Zeus,
who are scrawny, starving and made of fig-wood
(Transl. Olson 2022, 73)9

15. Antiphon, *Tetr.* 2.4.2
ei δὲ ἄληθὶ μὲν λεπτὰ δὲ καὶ ἄκριβῃ, οὐκ ἐγὼ ὁ λέγων, ἀλλ’ ὁ πράξας τὴν ἀπέχθειαν αὐτῶν δίκαιος φέρεσθαι ἐστιν
On the other hand, if my arguments have been honest, but close and subtle, it is not I who used them, but he whose
conduct made them necessary, upon whom the displeasure which they have caused should properly fall.
(Transl. Maidment 1941, 109)10

16. Callimachus, fr. 1.23–4 Pfeiffer
1 ... [ ... ὁδὲ, τὸ μὲν θεὸς ὅτι πάχιστον ἑρέψαι, τῇ] μούσαν δ’ ὁμοθε λεπταλῆν

... poet, feed the victim to be as fat as possible but, my friend, keep the muse slender
(Transl. Trypanis 1958, 7)\textsuperscript{11}

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