

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' ἀπὸ πάντων μεταφέρει, πορνῶδιων,
σκολίων Μελήτου, Καρικῶν ἀλύμμάτων,
θρήνων, χορειῶν.

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)¹

2. ARISTOPHANES, *GĒRYTADĒS*

2. Aristophanes, fr. 156 K.–A. (*Gērytadēs*)

(A.) καὶ τίς νεκρῶν κευθμῶνα καὶ σκότου πύλας
ἔτλη κατελθεῖν; (B.) ἓνα † δ' ἀφ' ἐκάστης τέχνης
εἰλόμεθα κοινῇ γενομένης ἐκκλησίας,
οὓς ἦισμεν ὄντας ἀδοφοίτας καὶ θαμὰ
ἐκείσε φιλοχωροῦντας. (A.) εἰσὶ γάρ τινες 5
ἄνδρες παρ' ὑμῖν ἀδοφοῖται; (B.) νῆ Δία
μάλιστά γ'. (A.) ὥσπερ Θρακκοφοῖται; (B.) πάντ' ἔχεις.
(A.) καὶ τίνες ἂν εἶεν; (B.) πρῶτα μὲν Σαννυρίων
ἀπὸ τῶν τρυγῶδων, ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν τραγικῶν χορῶν
Μέλητος, ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν κυκλίων Κινησίας. 10
(A.) ὡς σφόδρ' ἐπὶ λεπτῶν ἐλπίδων ὠχεῖσθ' ἄρα.
τούτους γάρ, ἦν πολλῶ ζυνέλθῃ, ξυλλαβῶν
ὁ τῆς διαρροίας ποταμὸς οἰχίσεται

Ath. 12.551b

καὶ Ἀριστοφάνης δ' ἐν Γηρυτάδῃ λεπτοὺς τούσδε καταλέγει, οὓς καὶ πρέσβεις ὑπὸ τῶν ποιητῶν φησιν εἰς Ἄιδου πέμοεσθαι πρὸς τοὺς ἐκεῖ ποιητὰς λέγων οὕτωσι (οὕτωσ. εἰ Α') καὶ τίς – Κινεσίας (vv. 1–10).

Ath. 12.551c

εἶθ' ἔξης φησιν ὡς – οἰχίσεται (vv. 11–13).

Ath. epit. 12.551b

καὶ Ἀριστοφάνης δὲ λεπτοὺς καταλέγει Σαννυρίωνα τραγῶδον καὶ Μέλητον (Μέλητον Α: Μέλιτον CE) καὶ Κινησίαν (vv. 8–10), οὓς καὶ πρέσβεις ὑπὸ τῶν ποιητῶν φησιν εἰς Ἄιδου πέμπεσθαι πρὸς τοὺς ἐκεῖ ποιητὰς, καὶ αἰδοφοίτας τούτους καλεῖ (v. 4), οὓς φησι καὶ ἐπὶ λεπτῶν ἐλπίδων ὀχεῖσθαι (v. 11).

Ael. VH 10.6

ἐκωμωδοῦντο δὲ εἰς λεπτότητα Σαννυρίων ὁ κωμωδίας ποιητῆς καὶ Μέλητος ὁ τραγῶδίας ποιητῆς καὶ Κινησίας κυκλίων χορῶν (vv. 8–10) καὶ Φιλητᾶς ποιητῆς ἑξαμέτρων.

¹ A.H. Sommerstein, *The Comedies of Aristophanes*. Vol. IX: *Frogs*. Edited with translation and notes by Alan H. Henderson, Warminster 1996.

Eust. in Il. p. 1288,41–43

καταλέγονται δὲ τοιοῦτοι παρὰ Ἀριστοφάνει Σαννυρίων τραγωδὸς καὶ Μέλitos καὶ Κινησίας (vv. 8–10), οὓς καὶ πρέσβεις ὑπὸ τῶν ποιητῶν φησιν εἰς Ἄιδου πέμπεσθαι πρὸς τοὺς ἐκεῖ ποιητάς, καὶ αἰδοφοίτας τούτους καλεῖ (v. 4) καὶ ἐπὶ λεπτῶν ἐλπίδων ὀχεῖσθαι φησι (v. 11).

Hsch. α 1793

ἄδοφοῖται· οἱ λεπτοὶ καὶ ἰσχυροὶ καὶ ἐγγὺς θανάτου ὄντες (v. 4).

(A.) And who to the pit of the dead and the gates of gloom
has dared descend? (B.) One from each poetic craft
we choose together, meeting as an assembly:
Those we knew as Hades-Haunters and regularly
fond of yonder parts. (A.) So there are men among you
who are Hades-haunters? (B.) Indeed there are!
(A.) Like Trace-haunters? (B.) You've got it!
(A.) And who might they be? (B.) First, Sannyrion
represents the trygic choruses, and the tragic ones
Meletus, and the dithyrambic ones Cinesias.
(A.) How very slender the hopes you're riding on!
For the diarrhoea river, if it's in spate,
will take these fellows and carry them away
(Transl. Henderson 2007, V, 187)²

3. Euripides, *Hecuba* 1–2

ΠΟΛΥΔ. ἤκω νεκρῶν κευθμῶνα καὶ σκότου πύλας
λιπῶν,

POLYDORUS' GHOST: I have come from the hiding place of the dead and the gates of darkness

(Transl. Kovacs 1995, 401)³

4. Plato Comicus, fr. 61 K.–A. (*Kleophōn*)

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

Θρηκία χελιδῶν ἵνα διαβάλλῃ αὐτὸν ὡς βάρβαρον. κωμωδεῖται δὲ ὡς υἱὸς Θράσσης. οὗτος δὲ ἦν ὁ καλούμενος Κλεοφῶν ὁ λυροποιός. καὶ Πλάτων ἐν Κλεοφῶντι δράματι β α ρ β α ρ ι ζ ο υ σ α ν πρὸς αὐτὸν πεποίηκε τ ἡ ν μ η τ ἔ ρ α. καὶ αὐτὴ δὲ Θράσση ἐλέγετο.

“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)⁴

5. Aristophanes, fr. 117 K.–A. (*Geōrgoi*) = fr. 453 K.–A. (*Pelargoi*)

Areth. schol. (B¹) Plat. Apol. 18b, p. 420 Greene = 7 p. 13 Cufalo

Μέλητος δὲ τραγωδίας φαῦλος ποιητής. [Θρ]ᾶξ γένος, ὡς Ἀριστοφάνης Βατράχοις (1302), Πελαργοῖς (fr. 453) Λαίον υἱὸν αὐτὸν λέγων, ἐ[πεὶ ὧ] ἔτει οἱ Πελαργοὶ ἐδιδάσκοντο, καὶ ὁ Μέλητος Οἰδιπόδειαν (*TrGF* I² 48 F 1) †ἔθηκεν† (ἔθηκεν cod. : καθῆκεν corr. Meineke), ὡς Ἀριστοτέλης Διδασκαλίαις (fr. 628 R.³ = *FHG* II 185 F 268 = fr. 544 Gigon = *TrGF* I² DID C 24). ἐν δὲ Γεωργοῖς ὡς Καλλίαν περαίνοντος αὐτοῦ (ὡς Καλλίου περαίνοντος αὐτὸν corr. Bergk) μέμνηται. μέμνηται αὐτοῦ καὶ Λυσίας ἐν Σωκράτους ἀπολογίαι (fr. 275 Carey = 223 Sauppe)

² J. Henderson, *Aristophanes*. Vol. V: *Fragments*. Edited and translated by Jeffrey Henderson, Cambridge, MA 2007.

³ D. Kovacs, *Euripides. Children of Heracles. Hippolytus. Andromache. Hecuba*. Edited and translated by David Kovacs, Cambridge, MA 1995.

⁴ I.C. Storey, *Fragments of Old Comedy*. Vol. III: *Philonicus to Xenophon. Adespota*. Edited and translated by Ian C. Storey, Cambridge, MA 2011.

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 Rose³). In *Farmers* he (Ar.) mentions him as “screwing Callias”

(Transl. Henderson 2007, V, 169)

6. *trag. adesp.* *55 Kn.–Sn. = Aristophanes, *Knights* 1244

λεπτὴ τις ἐλπίς ἐστ' ἐφ' ἧς ὀχοῦμεθα

There's but a splinter of hope keeping me afloat

(Transl. Henderson 1998, I, 385)⁵

7. Aristophanes, *Frogs* 366

ΧΟ. ἡ κατατιλᾷ τῶν Ἑκαταίων κυκλίοισι χοροῖσιν ὑπάδων

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. οὐ τί που
Κινησίας σου κατατετίληκέν ποθεν

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

HP. εἶτα βόρβορον πολὺν 145
καὶ σκῶρ ἀείνων: ἐν δὲ τούτῳ κειμένους,
εἶ που ξένον τις ἠδίκησε πώποτε,
ἢ παῖδα κινῶν τάργυριον ὑφείλετο,
ἢ μητέρ' ἠλόασεν, ἢ πατρὸς γνώθον
ἐπάταξεν, ἢ 'πίορκον ὄρκον ὤμοσεν, 150
ἢ Μορσίμου τις ῥῆσιν ἐξεγράψατο.

ΔΙ. νῆ τοὺς θεοὺς ἐχρῆν γε πρὸς τούτοισι κεί
τὴν πυρρίχην τις ἔμαθε τὴν Κινησίου.

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 it 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. (*Gelōs*)

Ϝ – Μέλητον τὸν ἀπὸ Ληναίου νεκρὸν

Meletus, the corpse from the Lenaean

(Transl. Storey 2011, III, 221)

⁵ J. Henderson, *Aristophanes*. Vol. I: *Acharnians*. *Knights*. Edited and translated by Jeffrey Henderson, Cambridge, MA 1998.

⁶ A.H. Sommerstein, *The Comedies of Aristophanes*. Vol. X: *Ecclesiazusae*. Edited with translation and notes by Alan H. Sommerstein, Warminster 1998.

11. Aristophanes, *Clouds* 359

ΧΟ. σύ τε λεπτοτάτων λήρων ἱερεῦ, φράζεε πρὸς ἡμᾶς ὃ τι χηρήσεις

CHORUS: [to Socrates] and you too, priest of subtlest hogwash, tell us what you desire
(Transl. Henderson 1998, II, 59)⁷

12. Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1108–11

ΧΟ. κάποκινδυνεύετον λεπτὸν τι καὶ σοφὸν λέγειν.
εἰ δὲ τοῦτο καταφοβεῖσθον, μὴ τις ἀμαθία προσῆ
τοῖς θεωμένοισιν, ὡς τὰ
λεπτὰ μὴ γνῶναι λεγόντων,
μηδὲν ὀρωδεῖτε τοῦθ' ὡς οὐκέθ' οὔτω ταῦτ' ἔχει.

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 apprehensive, because things aren't like that any more.

(Text Dover 1993, 172. Transl. Sommerstein 1996, IX, 125)

13. Alexis, fr. 223, 7–9 K.–A. (*Tarantinoi*)

(A.) πυθαγορισμοὶ καὶ λόγοι
λεπτοὶ διεσμλευμένοι τε φροντίδες
τρέφουσ' ἐκείνους, τὰ δὲ καθ' ἡμέραν 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. (*Kleophanēs*)

ἦ τί ποτε; τὸν σποθδαῖον ἀκολουθεῖν ἐρεῖς
ἐν τῷ Λυκείῳ μετὰ σοφιστῶν νῆ Δία
λεπτῶν, ἀσίτων, συκίνων,

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

εἰ δὲ ἀληθῆ μὲν λεπτὰ δὲ καὶ ἀκριβῆ, οὐκ ἐγὼ ὁ λέγων, ἀλλ' ὁ πράξας τὴν ἀπέχθειαν αὐτῶν δίκαιος φέρεσθαί 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

‘.....]... ἀοιδέ, τὸ μὲν θύος ὅτι πάχιστον
θρέψαι, τῆ]ν Μοῦσαν δ' ὡγαθὲ λεπταλέην'

⁷ J. Henderson, *Aristophanes. Clouds. Wasps. Peace*. Edited and translated by Jeffrey Henderson. Cambridge, MA 1998.

⁸ S.D. Olson, *Broken Laughter. Selected Fragments of Greek Comedy*, Oxford 2007.

⁹ S.D. Olson, *Antiphanes. Zakynthois – Progonoi (fr. 101–193). Translation and Commentary* (Fragmenta Comica 19.2), Göttingen 2022.

¹⁰ K.J. Maidment, *Minor Attic Orators*. Vol. 1: *Antiphon. Andocides*. With an English translation by K.J. Maidment, Cambridge, MA 1941.

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

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¹¹ C.A. Trypanis, *Callimachus. Aetia. Iambi. Lyric poems. Hecale. Minor epic and elegiac poems. Fragments of epigrams. Fragments of uncertain location*. Text, translation and notes by C.A. Trypanis, Cambridge, MA 1958.