

There are difficulties about taking the evidence of comedy at face-value.² But in this context I think it unlikely that there is anything comically rustic about Gorgias' scale of values and altogether more likely that he faithfully reflects a (not very surprising) view which was held at the time in Athens.

From the girl's point of view (or rather, from the perspective of men passing judgement on her), the matter may well have been more complicated. No doubt Menander's audience would not have thought well of a citizen girl who willingly consented to her seduction. For this reason, when girls in his plays have become pregnant it is either left unclear quite how they came to lose their virginity, or it is made clear that force was used; and a young man who did use force did not necessarily incur the strong disapproval of the audience.³ But the words of the upright Gorgias suggest that he might sometimes incur the strong disapproval of some inhabitants of Attika; and they provide further evidence (in addition to Harris's discussion of the legal position) against uncritical acceptance of Euphiletos' argument in *Lysias* 1.

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² See (for instance) K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford, 1974), ch. I ('Interpretation of the Sources'). Dover regards New Comedy as less problematical than Old Comedy in this respect.

³ So A. W. Gomme and F. H. Sandbach, *Menander: a Commentary* (Oxford, 1973), p. 33: 'If the girl had been a consenting partner, that would have lowered her in the eyes of the fourth-century Athenian. On the other hand, although rape was regarded as a disgraceful act, it was by no means an unpardonable or unthinkable one.' See also Jasper Griffin, *Latin Poets and Roman Life* (London, 1985), pp. 126-7.

HOW THIN WAS PHILITAS?

The poet Philitas was so thin, they say, that he had to wear lead weights on his shoes to avoid being blown away by a gust of wind. We have two versions of the anecdote. First Aelian, *Varia Historia* 9.14:

Φιλίταν λέγουσι τὸν Κῶων λεπτότατον γενέσθαι τὸ σῶμα· ἐπεὶ τοῖνυν ἀνατραπήναι ῥάδιος ἦν ἐκ πάσης προφάσεως, μολύβδου φασὶ πεποιημένα εἶχεν ἐν τοῖς ὑποδήμασι πέλματα, ἵνα μὴ ἀνατρέπηται ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνέμων, εἰ ποτε σκληροὶ κατέπνεον.

They say that Philitas of Cos had an extremely thin body; since he could easily be knocked over by the slightest cause, they say he had lead soles on his shoes so as not to be knocked over by any fierce gusts of wind.

Second, Athenaeus xii.552b:

λεπτότερος δ' ἦν καὶ Φιλίτας ὁ Κῶος ποιητής, ὃς καὶ διὰ τὴν τοῦ σώματος ἰσχνότητα σφαίρας ἐκ μολύβδου πεποιημένας εἶχε περὶ τῶν πόδεω ὥς μὴ ὑπὸ ἀνέμου ἀνατραπεῖν.

Philitas of Cos the poet was rather thin; because of the skinniness of his body he wore lead weights on his feet so as not to be knocked over by the wind.

The two versions are sufficiently similar in expression as well as content that we may reasonably infer that they derive from the same source. But what was that source, and why such a silly story?

Or is it so silly? In view of the importance of the concept of *λεπτότης* to the Alexandrian poets of the generation after Philitas, notably Aratus and Callimachus,¹

¹ E. Reitzenstein, *Festschrift R. Reitzenstein* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1931), pp. 25-39; M. Puelma Piwonka, *Lucilius und Kallimachos* (1948), pp. 160f.; W. Wimmel, *Kallimachos in Rom* (Wiesbaden, 1960), Stichwortindex s. v.; J.-M. Jacques, *REA* 62 (1960), 52-9; E. Vogt, *Antike und Abendland* 13 (1967), 84-7; G. Lohse, *ibid.* 19 (1973), 21-34; F. Cairns, *Tibullus: A*

it is natural to wonder whether the word might in fact bear literary connotations here too. It seems to have been Euripides who first used *λεπτός* in a positive sense, 'subtle', applied to the intellect.² But it seems to have been a controversial usage, since it is often turned against him and the philosophers in comedy.³ Could it have been Philitas who first applied it to literary refinement? Some such idea has long been lurking half-formulated at the back of scholarly minds,⁴ and has now been stated firmly and openly by E. Calderón Dorda.⁵ Without excluding the possibility that Philitas was indeed a man of notably slender physique, Calderón Dorda is sure that the primary reference is 'al carácter sutil de su poesía' (p. 129).

Aetia fr. 1.10–12 suggests that Callimachus praised Philitas' short poems, but inasmuch as he seems to criticise some longer poem or poems, the passage cannot be held to imply unqualified admiration. It would certainly be interesting if we could take this Callimachean notion of poetic refinement back a generation. Unfortunately the anecdote about Philitas' *λεπτότης* can be shown to having nothing whatever to do with poetry.

Calderón Dorda has only quoted one of the two relevant passages of Aelian. The second reveals clearly the source of the tradition (*Varia Historia* 10.6):

ἐκωμωδοῦντο ἐς λεπτότητα Σαννυρίων ὁ κωμωδίας ποιητῆς καὶ Μέλητος ὁ τραγωδίας ποιητῆς καὶ Κινησίας <ὁ> κυκλίων χορῶν καὶ Φιλίτας <ὁ> ποιητῆς ἐξαμέτρων.

Sannyrion the comic poet, Meletus the tragedian, Cinesias the poet of the circular choruses⁶ and Philetas the hexameter poet were all made fun of in comedy.

All these people were the butt of jokes in Attic comedy. The ultimate source for this passage can be identified with certainty. It is a list of thin people in Aristophanes' *Gerytades*:⁷

πρώτα μὲν Σαννυρίων
ἀπὸ τῶν τρυγῶδων, ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν τραγικῶν χορῶν
Μέλητος, ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν κυκλίων Κινησίας.

First Sannyrion from among the comedians, then Meletus from the tragic and Cinesias from the circular choruses.

There is even a trace in Aelian of Aristophanes' periphrasis for the sort of poetry Cinesias wrote. This passage is quoted in a long section in Athenaeus entirely devoted to people mocked in Attic comedy for their thinness (551a–552f).⁸ Athenaeus goes on at once to quote a passage of Strattis on Sannyrion's thinness (*περὶ δὲ τοῦ Σαννυρίωνος καὶ Στράττις ἐν Ψυχασταῖς φησιν*), and then quotes Sannyrion himself on Meletus (*περὶ δὲ τοῦ Μέλητος αὐτὸς ὁ Σαννυρίων*) and a series of passages on Cinesias. A page later no fewer than five texts are quoted on the thinness of a certain Philippides: the orator Hyperides and the comedians Alexis, Aristophon, Menander and Alexis again. The second passage of Aelian quoted above continues (like Athenaeus) with the cases of Panaretos and Hipponax and ends by quoting the

Hellenistic Poet at Rome (Cambridge, 1979), p. 5. I present a new perspective in my forthcoming book *Callimachus and his Critics* (Princeton, 1992), Ch. VIII.

² *Med.* 529; 1082; fr. inc. 924.

³ For a collection of examples, J. D. Denniston, *CQ* 21 (1927), 119; Dover on Ar. *Clouds* 153.

⁴ E.g. N. Hopkinson, *A Hellenistic Anthology* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 9, 90.

⁵ 'Ateneo y la *λεπτότης* de Filetas', *Emerita* 58 (1990), 125–9.

⁶ I.e. dithyrambic poet: for this term, A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy*² (Oxford, 1962), p. 32; *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*² (Oxford, 1968), pp. 74, 239.

⁷ Fr. 156.8–10 K.-A. (*PCG* III.2 [1984], 102).

⁸ It seems wasteful to consume half a page with learned references to successive volumes of Kassel–Austin when every passage can be found in context here; the references to Koch in Kaibel and Gulick will lead the curious to Kassel–Austin.

example of Philippides, mentioning (without quoting) the passages of Hyperides and Alexis, though (like Athenaeus) quoting the verb *πεφλιππιῶσθαι* = 'to be very thin' from Alexis. It is clear that Aelian drew on the same source here as Athenaeus, a collection of passages from comedy. The only detail he adds that is not in our extant text of Athenaeus is the explicit statement that it was in comedy that Philitas too was mocked for his thinness.

As is well known, in general there are far fewer allusions to contemporaries in Middle and New Comedy, but two categories of living contemporaries that continue to be the butt of jokes are thin people – and philosophers, 'pale ascetics... unpractical... out for private gain'.⁹ Another passage of Athenaeus shows that the popular image of Philitas was similar to that of the philosopher. He was after all one of the very first examples of a figure with a rich future on the comic stage: the professor.¹⁰ At 401d one of the interlocutors addresses Ulpian, the host of Athenaeus' banquet, as follows:

It is always your custom, Ulpian, to decline your share of any dish until you have learned whether the use of the word is ancient. Like Philitas of Cos, therefore, who pondered what he called 'the lying word', you run the risk of some day being quite dried up (*ἀφαναιθῆναι*). For he became very much emaciated in body through these studies (*ισχνὸς γὰρ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα διὰ τὰς ζητήσεις γενόμενος*¹¹) and died, as the epitaph on his tomb shows:

ξεῖνε, Φιλίτας εἰμί. λόγων ὁ ψευδόμενός με
ὤλεσε καὶ νυκτῶν φροντίδες ἐσπέριοι.

Stranger, I am Philitas. The lying word caused
my death, and night's evening thoughts.

This epigram has been most recently discussed by Denys Page, concluding that 'Philitas worried himself into his grave in the search for verbal errors (presumably in his own writings)'.¹² But his assumption that *ὁ ψευδόμενος* 'refers especially to literary usage which is not sanctioned by ancient authority' must be mistaken. The reference is to the so-called liar's paradox, said to have been propounded by Eubulides of Miletus and normally referred to as *ὁ ψευδόμενος*.¹³ There is no other evidence that Philitas concerned himself with logic, and we should no doubt conclude that the writer picked on the paradox simply as a classic example of the sort of futile quibble on which an unworldly pedant might waste his time. Significantly enough, Eubulides and his 'falsely pretentious arguments' (*ψευδαλαζόσιν λόγοις*) were mocked in an anonymous comic fragment.¹⁴ But it may be worth drawing attention

⁹ T. B. L. Webster, *Studies in Later Greek Comedy* (Manchester, 1953), p. 111; cf. his *Studies in Menander* (Manchester, 1950), pp. 186–8; I. Gallo, 'Commedia e filosofia in età ellenistica: Batone', *Vichiana* n.s. 5 (1976), 206–42; C. Habicht, *Hellenistic Athens and her Philosophers* (David Magie Lecture, Princeton, 1988), pp. 9–11.

¹⁰ On Philitas' position in the history of scholarship, see R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 88–9.

¹¹ Cf. Suda s.v. *Φιλήτας*: ...*ισχνυθεὶς ἐκ τοῦ ζητεῖν τὸν καλούμενον ψευδόμενον λόγον ἀπέθανεν*.

¹² *Further Greek Epigrams* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 442; 'nights' evening-thoughts' is certainly a 'very odd expression' (Page), but for a parallel see H. Lloyd-Jones, *CR* 32 (1982), 142 (= *Greek Comedy... (The Academic Papers of Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones)* [Oxford, 1990], 228), explaining it as 'night-worries that begin as early as the evening of the day before'. καὶ νυκτῶν, Kaibel, ingeniously enough, but what a strange way to refer to anxious evenings devoted to riddles.

¹³ Diogenes Laertius, 2.108; W. and M. Kneale, *The Development of Logic* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 113–15; for many (often depreciatory) references to the paradox in both Greek and Latin literature, see A. S. Pease's note on Cicero, *de div.* 2.11 (pp. 364–6). On Eubulides, E. G. Schmidt, *KP* ii (1967), 400.

¹⁴ Adesp. 294 = *CAF* 3.461–2 Koch.

to the rather similar story of the logician Diodorus Cronus being embarrassed by failing to solve some logical puzzles posed him by Stilpon of Megara, at a symposium in front of Ptolemy Soter.¹⁵

A passage of Plutarch helps to fill out the picture. When making the point that sickly people should not engage in public affairs he instances Prodicus the sophist and Philitas the poet, 'men who though young were thin and sickly and usually bedridden' (νέους μὲν, ἰσχνούς δὲ καὶ νοσώδεις καὶ τὰ πολλὰ κλινοπετεῖς).¹⁶ The famous description of Prodicus holding court while 'still in bed, wrapped up in fleeces and rugs' in Plato's *Protagoras* (315d) corroborates the poor health of Prodicus, and there is no reason to doubt that Philitas suffered and in due course died from some wasting disease, which contemporaries jokingly attributed to the consuming passion of his pedantry.¹⁷

His pedantry too was a subject of jokes in the comedies of the day. Still another passage of Athenaeus quotes a long fragment from Strato's *Phoenicides* in which the speaker is complaining that his cook keeps using archaic words he does not understand, 'so that he had to get some of Philitas' books and look up the meaning of every word':¹⁸

μίστυλλα, μοίρας, δίπτυχ', ὀβελοῦς, ὥστ' ἔδει
τὰ τοῦ Φιλίτα λαμβάνοντα βιβλία
σκοπεῖν ἕκαστον τί δύναται τῶν ῥημάτων.

Strato wrote at the turn of the fourth and third centuries. If a didascalia fragment is correctly restored, he may have won fourth prize in the Dionysia of 302 B.C.¹⁹ If one passage of comedy can joke about Philitas' thinness and another about his pedantry, it is reasonable to assume that the idea of linking the two also derives from a joke in comedy. The joke can be better appreciated if it is borne in mind that a high proportion of the surviving examples of Philitas' scholarship concern rare words for various types of cakes and drinking-cups.²⁰ Food was a favourite theme of Attic comedy.²¹ He could be portrayed as quite literally so obsessive about checking the linguistic pedigree of every dish and cup at table that the food was all gone by the time he was ready to eat.

According to A. W. Bulloch,²²

near contemporaries speak of [Philitas] wearing himself out with intellectual effort (a theme which later biographers developed into an account of his extraordinary physical slightness which necessitated his wearing weights on his feet in strong winds).

This is to put the cart before the horse. Not a case of fictions invented by later biographers, but jokes by contemporary comedians repeated by later biographers. It was Philitas' real physical slightness – a favourite comic theme – that contemporaries humorously explained as a consequence of his pedantry.

The word used for thin in almost every one of the passages assembled by Athenaeus

¹⁵ Diog. Laertius 2.111; Sext. Empir. *Math.* 1.309; cf. David Sedley, *Proc. Camb. Phil. Soc.* 203 (1977), 79–80.

¹⁶ *An seni sit respublica gerenda* 791e.

¹⁷ R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship*, p. 41 (cf. 91), cites the text of Plutarch, but does not link its ἰσχνούς with the other texts on Philitas' thinness, nor does he link his thinness with his pedantry.

¹⁸ Athen. 382b–383b, with some corrections from P. Cair. 65445; Strato fr. 1.42–4 (*PCG* vii [1989], 620).

¹⁹ Kassel and Austin, *PCG* vii (1989), p. 617.

²⁰ G. Kuchenmüller, *Philetae Coi Reliquiae* (Diss. Berlin, 1927), pp. 29–59.

²¹ Webster, *Studies in Later Greek Comedy*, p. 6; *Studies in Menander*, pp. 163–4; H. Dohm, *Die Rolle des Kochs in der griechisch-römischen Komödie* (Munich, 1965).

²² *Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, i (Cambridge, 1985), p. 545.

as well as in both passages of Aelian is λεπτός. It is also the word used in twelve out of fourteen scoptic epigrams of the Neronian age by Lucilius and Nicarchus.²³ It will be enough to quote a characteristic example by Lucilius, *AP* xi. 93:

τῶν Ἐπικουρείων ἀτόμων ποτὲ Μάρκος ὁ λεπτός,
τῇ κεφαλῇ τρήσας, εἰς τὸ μέσον διέβη.

Thin Marcus once made a hole in one of Epicurus's atoms
with his head, and went right through the middle of it.

Nicarchus writes of three men competing to see who was the thinnest (11.110.1–2):

τρεις λεπτοὶ πρῶν περὶ λεπτοσύνης ἐμάχοντο,
τίς προκριθεὶς εἴη λεπτεπιλεπτότερος...

The other day three thin men competed about thinness to see
who would be judged the very thinnest of them all...

Their respective claims are worth of Henny Youngman.

Closest to the anecdote about Philitas is the story of Gaius, who (according to Lucilius, 11.100) was so thin that he used to dive (ἐκολύμβα) with a stone or lead weight attached to his foot (τοῦ ποδὸς ἐκκρεμάσας ἢ λίθον ἢ μόλιβον). Brecht suggested that the story about Philitas derived from an epigram of this nature, but the scoptic epigram as we find it fully developed in Lucilius and Nicarchus seems to be an original creation of the early empire.²⁴ The epigram 'on his tomb' quoted by Athenaeus fits into an entirely different and abundantly documented Hellenistic tradition, the pretended funerary epigram. It too was surely written by a contemporary, almost certainly while Philitas was still alive.²⁵

It seems natural to suppose some link between comedy and epigram,²⁶ but it would be implausible to postulate direct derivation.²⁷ Jokes have a way of travelling through time and space independently of written sources, and the examples in comedy normally lack the element of paradox that is the essence of the scoptic epigram. Like vogueish joke-sequences today (knock-knock jokes and light-bulb jokes), the idea itself is enough to spawn innumerable ingenious variations. The only coincidence in detail here between comedy and epigram – the lead weights on the feet – is also the most obvious. The original source of all these anecdotes about Philitas was surely Attic comedy.²⁸ The story of his λεπτότης is just another of those evergreen thin jokes.²⁹

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²³ *AP* xi. 91–4, 99–103, 106–7, 110–11, 308; F. J. Brecht, *Motiv- und Typengeschichte des griechischen Spottepigramms* (Philologus Suppl. xxii. 2) (Leipzig, 1930), pp. 91–3.

²⁴ See my forthcoming book, *The Greek Anthology: from Meleager to Planudes* (Oxford, 1992), Ch. I. L. Robert's paper in *L'Épigramme grecque* (Entretiens Fondation Hardt, xiv), Geneva, 1968, 181–291, brilliantly showed that Lucilius' art derives more from life than literature.

²⁵ 'Epigramma irrisorium', T. Preger, *Inscriptiones graecae metricae ex scriptoribus praeter Anthologiam* (Leipzig, 1891), no. 266.

²⁶ It is curious that in neither comedy nor epigram do we find corresponding jokes about fat people, a much richer source of humour in modern times.

²⁷ So Brecht, p. 3: 'soll damit dem Dichter nicht eine direkte Herübernahme zugesprochen sein; es handelt sich nicht um subjektives Herübernehmen, sondern um objektiv begründete Motivwanderung.'

²⁸ The source (as is well known) of so many details in the biographies of the Attic tragedians: M. R. Lefkowitz, *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (London, 1981), *passim*.

²⁹ I am grateful to Debra Nails and Stephen White for comments.