

SHORTER NOTES

HOMER, *ODYSSEY* 17.221

ὅς πολλῆς φλιῆσι παραστάς θλίβεται ὤμους

In the discussions and debates about the precise nature of Melanthios' abuse of Eumaios and Odysseus at *Od.* 17.215–32 and especially the meaning of *μολοβρόν* at 219, an important point appears to have been missed.

Translating line 221 is simple enough, 'will rub his shoulders on many doorposts' (so Russo, *ad loc.* [Oxford, 1992]; Stanford, *ad loc.* [London², 1958] almost exactly the same). But nobody seems to pay attention to the interesting language. Merry's comment (*ad loc.* [Oxford, 1892]) is as much as we get from the commentators, 'he is represented as hanging about the doorway, importunate and unsatisfied'. But in fact the precise and graphic language is exactly the point.

Pigs were known for rubbing their bodies against trees. As Aristotle wrote of them, *τὸ δέρμα . . . πρὸς τὰ δένδρα τρίβοντες* (*H.A.* 6.18, 571b).¹ Lucilius evidently used this fact for his vituperative purposes, *scaberat ut porcus contritis arbore costis* (333M = 331K). Since Odysseus comes with the swineherd, it is pointed that his begging should be described in language that aligns him with pigs: he rubs his body against doorposts, as pigs do against trees. And this of course virtually guarantees that the unusual and still-debated word that Melanthios uses of Odysseus at 219, *μολοβρόν*, does mean 'pig', as most commentators now believe.

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¹ Aristotle also thought that the cryptic description of the Calydonian boar at *Il.* 9.539 had something to do with the pigs' habit of rubbing their bodies against trees, though in the latter case the rubbing was of a different sort (*H.A.* 6.28, 578b).

HOMERIC HYMN TO HERMES 296: τλήμονα γαστρὸς ἔριθον

‘Ὡς ἄρ’ ἔφη καὶ παῖδα λαβὼν φέρε Φοῖβος Ἀπόλλων.
 σὺν δ’ ἄρα φρασσάμενος τότε δὴ κρατὺς Ἀργειφόντης
 οἰωνὸν προέηκεν ἀειρόμενος μετὰ χερσὶ, 295
 τλήμονα γαστρὸς ἔριθον ἀτάσθαλον ἀγγελιώτην.
 ἐσσυμένως δὲ μετ’ αὐτὸν ἐπέπταρε . . .

Among the many parodic elements in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* is the day-old baby's fart-omen. As is well-known, sneezing was considered prophetic in the ancient world,¹ and the humour of the scene comes from the immediately preceding fart and the fact that Hermes' bodily emissions are deliberate (σὺν . . . φρασσάμενος 'contriving').² Apollo has, in fact, gone in search of his baby brother on the basis of

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¹ The standard collection of the Greek and Roman evidence remains A. S. Pease, *CPh* 6 (1911), 429–43. See also W. Wimmel, *Hermes* 99 (1971), 156–63 (= *Collectanea: Augusteertum und späte Republik*, ed. K. Kubusch [Stuttgart, 1987], pp. 264–71).

² For a good, if dated, overview of the issues and questions that have most occupied scholars, see T. W. Allen and E. E. Sikes (edd.), *The Homeric Hymns* (London, 1904), p. 168, at 295–303—better, remarkably, than T. W. Allen, W. R. Halliday, and E. E. Sikes (edd.), *The Homeric Hymns* (Oxford, 1936²), pp. 320–1, at 295.