

III

To sum up, the text that we propose is:

τίς δὲ μηδὲν ἐν φάει
καρδίαν δέει τρέφων
ἢ πόλις βροτός θ' ὁμοί-
ως ἔτ' ἄν σέβει Δίκαιον;

523 δέει vel φόβω

Which may be translated as follows: ‘What city or man who never in their life nurtured their heart on fear would still revere Justice?’

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doi:10.1017/S0009838822000118

ARISTOPHANES, *CLOUDS* 327: GROATS GET IN YOUR EYES*

ABSTRACT

In Aristophanes' Clouds, Socrates vents his frustration at his new pupil Strepsiades' inability to see the eponymous chorus with the line 'You would see them unless you have drops of rheum in your eyes as big as gourds (κολοκύνταις).' This line is problematic, because gourds relate to eyesight in no obvious way. However, Aristophanes might have ended the verse by referring to Socrates' initiation of Strepsiades sixty-five lines earlier by a liberal sprinkling of barley, and written 'or you're blear-eyed with barley-groats (σύλοχύταισι)'. If some reader added κρομ(μ)ύους 'with onions' to his text as a more universally valid explanation for an eye-affliction, a later scribe might have thought this an attempted correction, and substituted κολοκύνταις, which is both metrically correct and palaeographically closer to σύλοχύταισι than is κρομ(μ)ύους.

Keywords: Aristophanes; eyesight; initiation ritual; onions; proverbs; textual criticism

In Aristophanes' *Clouds*, Socrates invokes the eponymous chorus, and is distressed when his new pupil Strepsiades only barely sees them, even once told to look at the εἶσοδος. The latter has just been initiated into the school by a liberal sprinkling of barley in the manner of a sacrifice (σύλοχύται); as he says, καταπαπτόμενος γὰρ παιπᾶλη γενήσομαι 'for being sprinkled, I'll turn into fine flour' (262) and, later, ὕπ' ἀλφίταμοιβοῦ παρεκόπην διχονίκω 'I have been cheated of two quarts by a dealer

* I am grateful to *CQ*'s reader for much help with an earlier version of this note.

in barley' (640).¹ He is not yet versed in the ways of Socrates' world, and might be forgiven for looking for the Clouds in the sky. Even so, the philosopher vents his frustration with an anapaestic tetrameter catalectic line (327): νῦν γέ τοι ἴδῃ καθορᾶς αὐτάς, εἰ μὴ λημᾶς κολοκύνταις. The older scholia ad loc. (Holwerda 3.1: 81), followed by Van Daele and Taillardat,² remark: (a) νῦν αὐτάς ὀρᾶς, εἰ μὴ λήμας ἔχεις ἐν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς μεγάλας ὡς κολοκύντας. λήμη δέ ἐστι τὸ πεπηγὸς δάκρυον. (b) παροιμία ἐπὶ τῶν τὰ μεγάλα παρορώντων. ('You would see them unless you have drops of rheum in your eyes as big as gourds.³ Rheum is a hardened tear. A proverb about those who overlook big things.') This may reflect actual knowledge, since a very similar phrase right down to the conjunction is attested some five centuries later in Lucian: οὐκ, εἰ μὴ χύτραις λημῶντες τυγχάνοιεν 'not unless they happened to be blear-eyed with pipkins' (*Aduersum Indoctum* 23). Still, Lucian may simply be misremembering Aristophanes, since κολοκύνθαι were often used as storage-vessels.⁴ If so, the scholiast's explanation is more likely mere inference from context than a record of an actual proverb. LSJ s.v. λημάω translate 'to have one's eyes running *pumpkins*', as though κολοκύνταις were accusative rather than dative, which is indeed the reading of one manuscript, Neapolitanus 184. Rogers translates 'There, now you must see how resplendent they be, or your eyes must be pumpkins, I vow',⁵ gourds being proverbially dim(-witted), in Latin at least (Petron. *Sat.* 39.12, Apul. *Met.* 1.15.2).⁶ In their commentaries on the play Dover and Sommerstein pass over the line entirely.⁷

Conjunctivitis or pink-eye (ὀφθαλμία) afflicts sufferers with rheum (λήμη, Ar. *Plut.* 581), making them γλάμων, as happened to certain minor politicians, Archedemus (Ar. *Ran.* 588; Lys. 14.25) and Neocleides (Ar. *Eccl.* 254, 398, *Plut.* 716–25), and was sometimes severe enough to exempt one from military service.⁸ (Greeks were aware of various other eye-afflictions, such as styes [σῦκκα] on the eyelids [Ar. *Ran.* 1247] or redness and inflammation [έρυθήματα καὶ φλόγωσις, Thuc. 2.49.2] associated

¹ On barley-groats, see W. Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, transl. P. Bing (Berkeley / Los Angeles / London, 1983), 5 n. 16.

² H. Van Daele *apud* V. Coulon, *Aristophane: Les Acharniens, les cavaliers, les nuées* (Paris, 1923), 177: 'Cette fois, certes, tu les vois, à moins d'avoir aux yeux des grains de chassie gros comme des citrouilles'; and J. Taillardat, *Les images d'Aristophane: Études de langue et de style* (Paris, 1965), 270 §481 n. 6.

³ For the identification of κολοκύνθη, see A. Dalby, *Food in the Ancient World from A to Z* (London and New York, 2003), 90.

⁴ This use is attested for Rome (*sobolem dabit illa [= cucuribita] capacem | Naryciae picis, aut Actaei mellis Hymetti, | aut habilem lymphis hamulam, Bacchoue lagoenam* 'the gourd will give its fruit as holder of Narycian pitch or honey of Attic Hymettus, a handy little bucket for water or a flagon for wine', Columella, *Rust.* 10.385–7; *nuper in balnearum usum uenere urceolorum uice, iam pridem uero etiam cadorum ad uina condenda* 'recently they have come to be used in the baths in place of jugs, but already long ago indeed [in place] of jars for holding wine', Plin. *HN* 19.24.69–70), and it was likely in Greece as well: J. Janick, H.S. Paris and D.C. Parrish, 'The cucurbits of Mediterranean antiquity: identification of taxa from ancient images and descriptions', *Annals of Botany* 100 (2007), 1441–57.

⁵ B.B. Rogers, *Aristophanes: The Acharnians, the Clouds, the Knights, the Wasps* (London and Cambridge, MA, 1967), 293.

⁶ P.T. Eden, *Seneca Apocolocyntosis* (Cambridge, 1984), 3–4.

⁷ K.J. Dover, *Aristophanes Clouds* (Oxford, 1968), 144; A.H. Sommerstein, *The Comedies of Aristophanes. Vol. 3: Clouds* (Warminster, 1982), 178.

⁸ e.g. the Spartans Eurytus and Aristodemus at Thermopylae (Hdt. 7.229) and the fictional Athenian slave Xanthias at Arginusae (Ar. *Ran.* 192); B. Baldwin, 'Medical grounds for exemptions from military service at Athens', *CPh* 62 (1967), 42–3.

with plague.) The problem in Aristophanes' line, with which scholars grapple in different ways or judiciously ignore, is that gourds relate to pink-eye in no obvious way. This being so, might Aristophanes have ended his line with words grounded in the dramatic context, 'or you're blear-eyed with barley-groats (ἢ λημῶς οὐλοχύταισι)', in the same metre as the manuscripts' εἰ μὴ λημῶς κολοκύνταις.

Perhaps so, but how would 'barley-groats' have turned into 'gourds' in the paradosis? I suggest because some reader has recalled that onions adversely affect one's sight. The cliché of the tearful onion (*lacrimosa ... cepa*, Columella, *Rust.* 10.123) is well attested: *flebile cepe simul lacrimosaeque ordine tallae* 'at once the weeping onion and in layers the tearful onion-skins' (Lucil. fr. 194 Marx = 216 Warmington), *lippus edenda acri assiduo ceparius cepa* 'the trader in onions is bleary-eyed from constantly eating pungent onion' (Lucil. fr. 195 Marx = 217 Warmington) and *neque <ille> triste queritat sinapi | neque cepe maestum* 'he seeks neither grim mustard nor the mournful onion' (Enn. *Sat.* fr. 12–13 Vahlen = 14 Courtney = 8 Goldberg and Manuwald).⁹ Such a reader may have added κρομ(μ)ύοις 'with onions' to explain the force of λημῶς. It is true that onions dim one's sight with tears, not rheum, but their relevance here would have been comforted by what we know already from line 188, namely that, like purse-tassel bulbs (βολβοί), they are just the farmer Strepsiadēs' humble sort of fare.

Our hypothetical gloss would have cast any later scribe who viewed the note as a correction of οὐλοχύταισι into a quandary, for not only is κρομύοις unmetrical (with or without double mu), but the words are not much alike. It does, however, turn the mind to vegetables. Our scribe might have hit on a palaeographically easier one. I suppose that he saw in his copy:

ΚΡΟΜΜΥΟΙΣ
... ΗΛΗΜΑΙCΟΥΛΟΧΥΤΑΙCΙ,

that is, κρομύοις
... ἢ λημῶς οὐλοχύταισι,

and 'corrected' this to:

... ΕΙΜΗΛΗΜΑΙCΚΟΛΟΚΥΤΑΙC,

that is, ... εἰ μὴ λημῶς κολοκύνταις.

This involves changing the six letters printed in bold type, plus omitting the final iota of the original. I assume that our copyist represented nu by a high stroke over the preceding letter (in this case, upsilon), a convention used by some.¹⁰ This need not have happened, but would have slightly facilitated the change.

The resulting line is errant nonsense, but generations of readers have taken comfort in the scholiast's thought that it is a proverb, and so indeed once meant something to someone. Among their number will have been Lucian, who gave the phrase his personal twist, though he seems to have thought not of a gourd itself, but of the calabash made from it.

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doi:10.1017/S0009838822000052

⁹ Cf. Diog. Laert. 1.83; Plut. *Mor.* 153E; Gal. *Ars med.* 2.5 (page 114 Kühn).

¹⁰ E.G. Turner, *Greek Manuscripts of the Ancient World* (Princeton, 1971), 108 §63, 120 §71.