

# Aristophanes

## Clouds

Translated by Ian Johnston  
Vancouver Island University  
Nanaimo, BC  
Canada

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# CLOUDS

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

In the text below the numbers in square brackets refer to the Greek text, the numbers without brackets refer to the English text. Consecutive partial lines are combined in reckoning the total.

The translator would like to acknowledge the valuable help provided by K. J. Dover's commentary on the play (Oxford University Press, 1968) and by Alan H. Sommerstein's notes in his edition of *Clouds* (Aris & Phillips, 1982).

## HISTORICAL NOTE

*Clouds* was first produced in the drama festival in Athens—the City Dionysia—in 423 BC, where it placed third. Subsequently the play was revised, but the revisions were never completed. The text which survives is the revised version, which was apparently not performed in Aristophanes' time but which circulated in manuscript form. This revised version does contain some anomalies which have not been fully sorted out (e.g., the treatment of Cleon, who died between the original text and the revisions).

At the time of the first production, the Athenians had been at war with the Spartans, off and on, for a number of years.

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

STREPSIADES: a middle-aged Athenian

PHEIDIPPIDES: a young Athenian, son of Strepsiades

XANTHIAS: a slave serving Strepsiades

STUDENT: one of Socrates' pupils in the Thinkery

SOCRATES: chief teacher in the Thinkery

CHORUS OF CLOUDS

THE BETTER ARGUMENT: an older man

THE WORSE ARGUMENT: a young man

PASIAS: one of Strepsiades' creditors

WITNESS: a friend of Pasias

AMYNIAS: one of Strepsiades' creditors

STUDENTS OF SOCRATES

## CLOUDS

[Scene: In the centre of the stage area is a house with a door to Socrates' educational establishment, the Thinkery.<sup>1</sup> On one side of the stage is Strepsiades' house, in front of which are two beds. Outside the Thinkery there is a small clay statue of a round goblet, and outside Strepsiades' house there is a small clay statue of Hermes. It is just before dawn. Strepsiades and Pheidippides are lying asleep in the two beds. Strepsiades tosses and turns restlessly. Pheidippides lets a very loud fart in his sleep. Strepsiades sits up wide awake]

### STREPSIADES

Damn! Lord Zeus, how this night drags on and on!  
It's endless. Won't daylight ever come?  
I heard a cock crowing a while ago,  
but my slaves kept snoring. In the old days,  
they wouldn't have dared. O damn and blast this war—  
so many problems. Now I'm not allowed  
to punish my own slaves.<sup>2</sup> And then there's him—  
this fine young man, who never once wakes up,  
but farts the night away, all snug in bed,  
wrapped up in five wool coverlets. Ah well,  
I guess I should snuggle down and snore away.

10 [10]

[Strepsiades lies down again and tries to sleep. Pheidippides farts again. Strepsiades finally gives up trying to sleep]

### STREPSIADES

I can't sleep. I'm just too miserable,  
what with being eaten up by all this debt—  
thanks to this son of mine, his expenses,  
his racing stables. He keeps his hair long  
and rides his horses—he's obsessed with it—  
his chariot and pair. He dreams of horses.<sup>3</sup>  
And I'm dead when I see the month go by—

<sup>1</sup>The Greek word *phrontisterion* (meaning school or academy) is translated here as Thinkery, a term borrowed from William Arrowsmith's translation of *The Clouds*.

<sup>2</sup>During the war it was easy for slaves to run away into enemy territory, so their owners had to treat them with much more care.

<sup>3</sup>Wearing one's hair long and keeping race horses were characteristics of the sons of very rich families.

## CLOUDS

with the moon's cycle now at twenty days,  
as interest payments keep on piling up.<sup>1</sup>

20

*[Calling to a slave]*

Hey, boy! Light the lamp. Bring me my accounts.

*[Enter the slave Xanthias with light and tablets]*

Let me take these and check my creditors.  
How many are there? And then the interest—  
I'll have to work that out. Let me see now . . .  
What do I owe? "Twelve minai to Pasias?"  
Twelve minai to Pasias! What's that for?  
Oh yes, I know—that's when I bought that horse,  
the pedigree nag. What a fool I am!  
I'd sooner have a stone knock out my eye.<sup>2</sup>

[20]

PHEIDIPPIDES *[talking in his sleep]*

Philon, that's unfair! Drive your chariot straight.

30

STREPSIADES

That there's my problem—that's what's killing me.  
Even fast asleep he dreams of horses!

PHEIDIPPIDES *[in his sleep]*

In this war-chariot race how many times  
do we drive round the track?

STREPSIADES

You're driving me,  
your father, too far round the bend. Let's see,  
after Pasias, what's the next debt I owe?  
"Three minai to Amynias." For what?  
A small chariot board and pair of wheels?

[30]

PHEIDIPPIDES *[in his sleep]*

Let the horse have a roll. Then take him home.

STREPSIADES

You, my lad, have been rolling in my cash.

40

<sup>1</sup>The interest on Strepsiadēs' loans would increase once the lunar month came to an end.

<sup>2</sup>Twelve minai is 100 drachmas, a considerable sum. The Greek reads "the horse branded with a *koppa* mark." That brand was a guarantee of its breeding.

## CLOUDS

Now I've lost in court, and other creditors  
are going to take out liens on all my stuff  
to get their interest.

PHEIDIPPIDES [*waking up*]

What's the matter, dad?  
You've been grumbling and tossing around there  
all night long.

STREPSIADES

I keep getting bitten—  
some bum bailiff in the bedding.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Ease off, dad.  
Let me get some sleep.

STREPSIADES

All right, keep sleeping.  
Just bear in mind that one fine day these debts  
will all be your concern.

[40]

[*Pheidippides rolls over and goes back to sleep*]

Damn it, anyway.  
I wish that matchmaker had died in pain—  
the one who hooked me and your mother up.  
I'd had a lovely time up to that point,  
a crude, uncomplicated, country life,  
lying around just as I pleased, with honey bees,  
and sheep and olives, too. Then I married—  
the niece of Megacles—who was the son  
of Megacles. I was a country man,  
and she came from the town—a real snob,  
extravagant, just like Coesyra.<sup>1</sup>  
When I married her and we both went to bed,  
I stunk of fresh wine, drying figs, sheep's wool—  
an abundance of good things. As for her,  
she smelled of perfume, saffron, long kisses,

50

60

[50]

<sup>1</sup>Megacles was a common name in a very prominent aristocratic family in Athens. Coesyra was the mother of a Megacles from this family, a woman well known for her wasteful expenditures and pride.

## CLOUDS

greed, extravagance, lots and lots of sex.<sup>1</sup>  
Now, I'm not saying she was a lazy bones.  
She used to weave, but used up too much wool.  
To make a point I'd show this cloak to her  
and say, "Woman, your weaving's far too thick."<sup>2</sup>

*[The lamp goes out]*

XANTHIAS

We've got no oil left in the lamp.

STREPSIADES

Damn it!

Why'd you light such a thirsty lamp? Come here.  
I need to thump you.

70

XANTHIAS

Why should you hit me?

STREPSIADES

Because you stuck too thick a wick inside.

*[The slave ignores Strepsiades and walks off into the house]*

After that, when this son was born to us—  
I'm talking about me and my good wife—  
we argued over what his name should be.  
She was keen to add *-hippos* to his name,  
like Xanthippos, Callipedes, or Chaerippos.<sup>3</sup>  
Me, I wanted the name Pheidonides,  
his grandpa's name. Well, we fought about it,  
and then, after a while, at last agreed.  
And so we called the boy Pheidippides.  
She used to cradle the young lad and say,  
"When you're grown up, you'll drive your chariot  
to the Acropolis, like Megacles,

[60]

80

<sup>1</sup>The Greek has "of Colias and Genetyllis" names associated with festivals celebrating women's sexual and procreative powers.

<sup>2</sup>Packing the wool tight in weaving uses up more wool and therefore costs more. Strepsiades holds up his cloak which is by now full of holes.

<sup>3</sup>The suffix *-hippos* means "horse." The mother presumably wanted her son to have the marks of the aristocratic classes. Xanthippos was the name of Pericles' father and his son. The other names are less obviously aristocratic or uncommon.

## CLOUDS

in a full-length robe . . .” I’d say, “No—  
you’ll drive your goat herd back from Phelleus,  
like your father, dressed in leather hides . . .”

He never listened to a thing I said.

And now he’s making my finances sick—  
a racing fever. But I’ve spent all night  
thinking of a way to deal with this whole mess,  
and I’ve found one route, something really good—  
it could work wonders. If I could succeed,  
if I could convince him, I’d be all right.

Well, first I’d better wake him up. But how?

What would be the gentlest way to do it?

*[Strepsiades leans over and gently nudges Pheidippides]*

Pheidippides . . . my little Pheidippides . . .

PHEIDIPPIDES *[very sleepily]*

What is it, father? [80]

STREPSIADES

Give me a kiss—

then give me your right hand.

*[Pheidippides sits up, leans over, and does what his father has asked]*

PHEIDIPPIDES

All right. There.

What’s going on?

STREPSIADES

Tell me this—do you love me? 100

PHEIDIPPIDES

Yes, I do, by Poseidon, lord of horses.

STREPSIADES

Don’t give me that lord of horses stuff—  
he’s the god who’s causing all my troubles.  
But now, my son, if you really love me,  
with your whole heart, then follow what I say.

PHEIDIPPIDES

What do you want to tell me I should do?

## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES

Change your life style as quickly as you can,  
then go and learn the stuff I recommend.

PHEIDIPPIDES

So tell me—what are you asking me?

STREPSIADES

You'll do just what I say?

PHEIDIPPIDES

Yes, I'll do it—

110 [90]

I swear by Dionysus.

STREPSIADES

All right then.

Look over there—you see that little door,  
there on that little house?

PHEIDIPPIDES

Yes, I see it.

What are you really on about, father?

STREPSIADES

That's the Thinkery—for clever minds.  
In there live men who argue and persuade.  
They say that heaven's an oven damper—  
it's all around us—we're the charcoal.  
If someone gives them cash, they'll teach him  
how to win an argument on any cause,  
just or unjust.

120

PHEIDIPPIDES

Who are these men?

STREPSIADES

I'm not sure  
just what they call themselves, but they're good men,  
fine, deep-thinking intellectual types.

[100]

PHEIDIPPIDES

Nonsense! They're a worthless bunch. I know them—  
you're talking about pale-faced charlatans,



## CLOUDS

who haven't any shoes, like those rascals  
Socrates and Chaerephon.<sup>1</sup>

STREPSIADES

Shush, be quiet.  
Don't prattle on such childish rubbish.  
If you care about your father's daily food,  
give up racing horses and, for my sake,  
join their company.

130

PHEIDIPPIDES

By Dionysus, no!  
Not even if you give me as a gift  
pheasants raised by Leogoras.<sup>2</sup>

STREPSIADES

Come on, son—  
you're the dearest person in the world to me.  
I'm begging you. Go there and learn something.

[110]

PHEIDIPPIDES

What is it you want me to learn?

STREPSIADES

They say  
that those men have two kinds of arguments—  
the Better, whatever that may mean,  
and the Worse. Now, of these two arguments,  
the Worse can make an unjust case and win.  
So if, for me, you'll learn to speak like this,  
to make an unjust argument, well then,  
all those debts I now owe because of you  
I wouldn't have to pay—no need to give  
an obol's worth to anyone.<sup>3</sup>

140

PHEIDIPPIDES

No way.

<sup>1</sup>Chaerephon was a well-known associate of Socrates.

<sup>2</sup>Pheasants were a rich rarity in Athens. Leogoras was a very wealthy Athenian.

<sup>3</sup>An obol was a relatively small amount, about a third of a day's pay for a jury member.

## CLOUDS

I can't do that. With no colour in my cheeks  
I wouldn't dare to face those rich young Knights.<sup>1</sup>

[120]

### STREPSIADES

Then, by Demeter, you won't be eating  
any of my food—not you, not your yoke horse,  
nor your branded thoroughbred. To hell with you—  
I'll toss you right out of this house.<sup>2</sup>

150

### PHEIDIPPIDES

All right—  
but Uncle Megacles won't let me live  
without my horses. I'm going in the house.  
I don't really care what you're going to do.

*[Pheidippides stands up and goes inside the house. Strepsiadest gets out of bed]*

### STREPSIADES

Well, I'll not take this set back lying down.  
I'll pray to the gods and then go there myself—  
I'll get myself taught in that Thinkery.  
Still, I'm old and slow—my memory's shot.  
How'm I going to learn hair-splitting arguments,  
all that fancy stuff? But I have to go.  
Why do I keep hanging back like this?  
I should be knocking on the door.

[130]

160

*[Strepsiadest marches up to the door of the Thinkery and knocks]*

Hey, boy . . . little boy.

STUDENT *[from inside]*

Go to Hell!

*[The door opens and the student appears]*

Who's been knocking on the door?

<sup>1</sup>Knights is a term used to describe the affluent young men who made up the cavalry. Pheidippides has been mixing with people far beyond his father's means.

<sup>2</sup>A yoke horse was part of the four-horse team which was harnessed to a yoke on the inside.

## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES

I'm Strepsiades, the son of Pheidon,  
from Cicyna.

STUDENT

By god, what a stupid man,  
to kick the door so hard. You just don't think.  
You made a newly found idea miscarry!

STREPSIADES

I'm sorry. But I live in the country,  
far away from here. Tell me what's happened.  
What's miscarried?

STUDENT

It's not right to mention it,  
except to students.

170 [140]

STREPSIADES

You needn't be concerned—  
you can tell me. I've come here as a student,  
to study at the Thinkery.

STUDENT

I'll tell you, then.  
But you have to think of these as secrets,  
our holy mysteries. A while ago,  
a flea bit Chaerephon right on the eye brow,  
and then jumped onto Socrates' head.  
So Socrates then questioned Chaerephon  
about how many lengths of its own feet  
a flea could jump.

STREPSIADES

How'd he measure that?

180

STUDENT

Most ingeniously. He melted down some wax,  
then took the flea and dipped two feet in it.  
Once that cooled, the flea had Persian slippers.  
He took those off and measured out the space.

[150]

STREPSIADES

By Lord Zeus, what intellectual brilliance!

## CLOUDS

STUDENT

Would you like to hear more of Socrates,  
another one of his ideas? What do you say?

STREPSIADES

Which one? Tell me . . .

*[The student pretends to be reluctant]*

I'm begging you.

STUDENT

All right.

Chaerephon of Sphettus once asked Socrates  
whether, in his opinion, a gnat buzzed  
through its mouth or through its anal sphincter.

190

STREPSIADES

What did Socrates say about the gnat?

STUDENT

He said that the gnat's intestinal tract  
was narrow—therefore air passing through it,  
because of the constriction, was pushed with force  
towards the rear. So then that orifice,  
being a hollow space beside a narrow tube,  
transmits the noise caused by the force of air.

[160]

STREPSIADES

So a gnat's arse hole is a giant trumpet!  
O triply blessed man who could do this,  
anatomize the anus of a gnat!  
A man who knows a gnat's guts inside out  
would have no trouble winning law suits.

200

STUDENT

Just recently he lost a great idea—  
a lizard stole it!

STREPSIADES

How'd that happen? Tell me.

[170]

STUDENT

He was studying movements of the moon—  
its trajectory and revolutions.  
One night, as he was gazing up, open mouthed,

## CLOUDS

staring skyward, a lizard on the roof  
relieved itself on him.

STREPSIADES

A lizard crapped on Socrates!  
That's good!

210

STUDENT

Then, last night we had no dinner.

STREPSIADES

Well, well. What did Socrates come up with,  
to get you all some food to eat?

STUDENT

He spread some ashes thinly on the table,  
then seized a spit, went to the wrestling school,  
picked up a queer, and robbed him of his cloak,  
then sold the cloak to purchase dinner.<sup>1</sup>

STREPSIADES

And we still admire Thales after that?<sup>2</sup>  
Come on, now, open up the Thinkery—  
let me see Socrates without delay.  
I'm dying to learn. So open up the door.

[180]

220

*[The doors of the Thinkery slide open to reveal Socrates' students studying on a porch (not inside a room). They are in variously absurd positions and are all very thin and pale]*

By Hercules, who are all these creatures!  
What country are they from?

STUDENT

You look surprised.  
What do they look like to you?

STREPSIADES

Like prisoners—

<sup>1</sup>I adopt Sommerstein's useful reading of this very elliptical passage, which interprets the Greek word *diabetes* as meaning a passive homosexual (rather than its usual meaning, "a pair of compasses"—both senses deriving from the idea of spreading legs apart). The line about selling the cloak is added to clarify the sense.

<sup>2</sup>Thales was a very famous thinker from the sixth century BC.

## CLOUDS

those Spartan ones from Pylos.<sup>1</sup> But tell me—  
Why do these ones keep staring at the earth?

STUDENT

They're searching out what lies beneath the ground.

STREPSIADES

Ah, they're looking for some bulbs. Well now,  
you don't need to worry any longer,  
not about that. I know where bulbs are found,  
lovely big ones, too. What about them?  
What are they doing like that, all doubled up?

230 [190]

STUDENT

They're sounding out the depths of Tartarus.

STREPSIADES

Why are their arse holes gazing up to heaven?

STUDENT

Directed studies in astronomy.

*[The Student addresses the other students in the room]*

Go inside. We don't want Socrates  
to find you all in here.

STREPSIADES

Not yet, not yet.  
Let them stay like this, so I can tell them  
what my little problem is.

STUDENT

It's not allowed.  
They can't spend too much time outside,  
not in the open air.

240

*[The students get up from their studying positions and disappear into the interior of the Thinkery. Strepsiades starts inspecting the equipment on the walls and on the tables]*

<sup>1</sup>The Athenians had captured a number of Spartans at Pylos in 425 and brought them to Athens where they remained in captivity and in poor physical condition.

## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES

My goodness,  
what is this thing? Explain it to me.

[200]

STUDENT

That there's astronomy.

STREPSIADES

And what's this?

STUDENT

That's geometry.

STREPSIADES

What use is that?

STUDENT

It's used to measure land.

STREPSIADES

You mean those lands  
handed out by lottery.<sup>1</sup>

STUDENT

Not just that—  
it's for land in general.

STREPSIADES

A fine idea—  
useful . . . democratic, too.

STUDENT

Look over here—  
here's a map of the entire world. See?  
Right there, that's Athens.

STREPSIADES

What do you mean?  
I don't believe you. There are no jury men—  
I don't see them sitting on their benches.

250

<sup>1</sup>Athenians sometimes apportioned land by lot outside the state which they had appropriated from other people.

## CLOUDS

STUDENT

No, no—this space is really Attica.<sup>1</sup>

STREPSIADES

Where are the citizens of Cicynna,  
the people in my deme?<sup>2</sup>

[210]

STUDENT

They're right here.  
This is Euboea, as you can see,  
beside us, really stretched a long way out.

STREPSIADES

I know—we pulled it apart, with Pericles.<sup>3</sup>  
Whereabouts is Sparta?

STUDENT

Where is it? Here.

STREPSIADES

It's close to us. You must rethink the place—  
shift it—put it far away from us.

260

STUDENT

Can't do that.

STREPSIADES [*threatening*]

Do it, by god, or I'll make you cry!

[*Strepsiadēs notices Socrates descending from above in a basket suspended from a rope*]

Hey, who's the man in the basket—up there?

STUDENT

The man himself.

STREPSIADES

Who's that?

<sup>1</sup>Attica is the territory surrounded by and belonging to Athens.

<sup>2</sup>A deme was a political unit in Athens. Membership in a particular deme was a matter of inheritance from one's father.

<sup>3</sup>In 446 BC the Athenians under Pericles put down a revolt in Euboea, a large island just off the coast of Attica.



## CLOUDS

STUDENT

Socrates.

STREPSIADES

Socrates! Hey, call out to him for me—  
make it loud.

[220]

STUDENT

You'll have to call to him yourself.  
I'm too busy now.

*[The Student exits into the interior of the house]*

STREPSIADES

O Socrates . . .  
my dear little Socrates . . . hello . . .

SOCRATES

Why call on me, you creature of a day?

STREPSIADES

Well, first of all, tell me what you're doing.

270

SOCRATES

I tread the air, as I contemplate the sun.

STREPSIADES

You're looking down upon the gods up there,  
in that basket? Why not do it from the ground,  
if that's what you're doing?

SOCRATES

Impossible!  
I'd never come up with a single thing  
about celestial phenomena,  
if I did not suspend my mind up high,  
to mix my subtle thoughts with what's like them—  
the air. If I turned my mind to lofty things,  
but stayed there on the ground, I'd never make  
the least discovery. For the earth, you see,  
draws moist thoughts down by force into itself—  
the same process takes place with water cress.

[230]

280

STREPSIADES

What are you talking about? Does the mind  
draw moisture into water cress? Come down,

## CLOUDS

my dear little Socrates, down here to me,  
so you can teach me what I've come to learn.

*[Socrates' basket slowly descends]*

SOCRATES

Why have you come?

STREPSIADES

I want to learn to argue.  
I'm being pillaged—ruined by interest  
and by creditors I can't pay off—  
they're slapping liens on all my property.

[240]

290

SOCRATES

How come you got in such a pile of debt  
without your knowledge?

STREPSIADES

I've been ravaged  
by disease—I'm horse sick. It's draining me  
in the most dreadful way. But please teach me  
one of your two styles of arguing, the one  
which never has to discharge any debt.  
Whatever payment you want me to make,  
I promise you I'll pay—by all the gods.

SOCRATES

What gods do you intend to swear by?  
To start with, the gods hold no currency with us.

300

STREPSIADES

Then, what currency do you use to swear?  
Is it iron coin, like in Byzantium?

SOCRATES

Do you want to know the truth of things divine,  
the way they really are?

[250]

STREPSIADES

Yes, by god, I do,  
if that's possible.

SOCRATES

And to commune and talk  
with our own deities the Clouds?

## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES

Yes, I do.

SOCRATES

Then sit down on the sacred couch.

STREPSIADES

All right.

I'm sitting down.

SOCRATES

Take this wreath.

STREPSIADES

Why a wreath?

O dear, Socrates, don't offer me up  
in sacrifice, like Athamas.<sup>1</sup>

310

SOCRATES

No, no.

We go through all this for everyone—  
it's their initiation.

STREPSIADES

What do I get?

SOCRATES

You'll learn to be a clever talker,  
to rattle off a speech, to strain your words  
like flour. Just keep still.

[260]

*[Socrates sprinkles flour all over Strepsiades]*

STREPSIADES

By god, that's no lie!

I'll turn into flour if you keep sprinkling me.

SOCRATES

Old man, be quiet. Listen to the prayer.

*[Socrates shuts his eyes to recite his prayer]*

<sup>1</sup>Athamas was a character in one of Sophocles' lost plays who was prepared for sacrifice and rescued by Hercules.

## CLOUDS

O Sovereign Lord, O Boundless Air,  
who keeps the earth suspended here in space, 320  
O Bright Sky, O Sacred Goddesses—  
the Thunder-bearing Clouds—arise,  
you holy ladies, issue forth on high,  
before the man who holds you in his mind.

STREPSIADES: [*lifting his cloak to cover his head*]  
Not yet, not yet. Not 'til I wrap this cloak  
like this so I don't get soaked. What bad luck,  
to leave my home without a cap on.

SOCRATES: [*ignoring Strepsiades*]  
Come now, you highly honoured Clouds, come—  
manifest yourselves to this man here—  
whether you now sit atop Olympus, 330 [270]  
on those sacred snow-bound mountain peaks,  
or form the holy choruses with nymphs  
in gardens of their father Ocean,  
or gather up the waters of the Nile  
in golden flagons at the river's mouths,  
or dwell beside the marsh of Maeotis  
or snowy rocks of Mimas—hear my call,  
accept my sacrifice, and then rejoice  
in this holy offering I make.

CHORUS [*heard offstage*]  
Everlasting Clouds— 340  
let us arise, let us reveal  
our moist and natural radiance—  
moving from the roaring deep  
of father Ocean to the tops  
of tree-lined mountain peaks, [280]  
where we see from far away  
the lofty heights, the sacred earth,  
whose fruits we feed with water,  
the murmuring of sacred rivers,  
the roaring of the deep-resounding sea. 350  
For the unwearied eye of heaven  
blazes forth its glittering beams.  
Shake off this misty shapelessness

## CLOUDS

from our immortal form and gaze upon  
the earth with our far-reaching eyes.

[290]

SOCRATES

O you magnificent and holy Clouds,  
you've clearly heard my call.

*[To Strepsiades]*

Did you hear that voice  
intermingled with the awesome growl of thunder?

STREPSIADES

O you most honoured sacred goddesses,  
in answer to your thunder call I'd like to fart—  
it's made me so afraid—if that's all right . . .

360

*[Strepsiades pull down his pants and farts loudly in the direction of the offstage Chorus]*

Oh, oh, whether right nor not, I need to shit.

SOCRATES

Stop being so idiotic, acting like  
a stupid damn comedian. Keep quiet.  
A great host of deities is coming here—  
they're going to sing.

CHORUS *[still offstage]*

O you maidens bringing rain—  
let's move on to that brilliant place,  
to gaze upon the land of Pallas,  
where such noble men inhabit  
Cecrops' lovely native home,  
where they hold those sacred rites  
no one may speak about,  
where the temple of the mysteries  
is opened up in holy festivals,  
with gifts for deities in heaven,  
what lofty temples, holy statues,  
most sacred supplication to the gods,  
with garlands for each holy sacrifice,  
and festivals of every kind  
in every season of the year,  
including, when the spring arrives,

[300]

370

380 [310]

## CLOUDS

that joyful Dionysian time,  
with rousing choruses of song,  
resounding music of the pipes.<sup>1</sup>

### STREPSIADES

By god, Socrates, tell me, I beg you,  
who these women are who sing so solemnly.  
Are they some special kind of heroines?

### SOCRATES

No—they're heavenly Clouds, great goddesses  
for lazy men—from them we get our thoughts,  
our powers of speech, our comprehension,  
our gift for fantasy and endless talk,  
our power to strike responsive chords in speech  
and then rebut opponents' arguments.

390

### STREPSIADES

Ah, that must be why, as I heard their voice,  
my soul took wing, and now I'm really keen  
to babble on of trivialities,  
to argue smoke and mirrors, to deflate  
opinions with a small opinion of my own,  
to answer someone's reasoned argument  
with my own counter-argument. So now,  
I'd love to see them here in front of me,  
if that's possible.

[320]

400

### SOCRATES

Just look over there—  
towards Mount Parnes. I see them coming,  
slowly moving over here.<sup>2</sup>

### STREPSIADES

Where? Point them out.

### SOCRATES

They're coming down here through the valleys—

<sup>1</sup>Cecrops was a legendary king of Athens. Pallas is Pallas Athena, patron goddess of Athens. The phrase holy festivals refers to the Eleusinian mysteries, a traditionally secret and sacred festival for those initiated into the band of cult worshippers.

<sup>2</sup>Mount Parnes was a mountain range to the north of Athens.

## CLOUDS

a whole crowd of them—there in the thickets,  
right beside you.

STREPSIADES

This is weird. I don't see them.

SOCRATES [*pointing into the sides of the theatre*]  
There—in the entrance way.

STREPSIADES

Ah, now I see—  
but I can barely make them out.

[*The Clouds enter from the side*]

SOCRATES

There—  
surely you can see them now, unless your eyes  
are swollen up like pumpkins.

410

STREPSIADES

I see them.  
My god, what worthy noble presences!  
They're taking over the entire space.

SOCRATES

You weren't aware that they are goddesses?  
You had no faith in them?

STREPSIADES

I'd no idea.  
I thought clouds were mist and dew and vapour.

[330]

SOCRATES

You didn't realize these goddesses  
support a multitude of charlatans—  
prophetic seers from Thurium, quacks  
who specialize in books on medicine,  
lazy long-haired types with onyx signet rings,  
poets who produce the twisted choral music  
for dithyrambic songs, those with airy minds—  
all such men so active doing nothing  
the Clouds support, since in their poetry  
these people celebrate the Clouds.

420

## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES

Ah ha, so that's why they poeticize  
"the whirling radiance of watery clouds  
as they advance so ominously,"  
"waving hairs of hundred-headed Typho,"  
with "roaring tempests," and then "liquid breeze,"  
or "crook-taloned, sky-floating birds of prey,"  
"showers of rain from dewy clouds"—and then,  
as a reward for this, they stuff themselves  
on slices carved from some huge tasty fish  
or from a thrush.<sup>1</sup>

430

SOCRATES

Yes, thanks to these Clouds.

[340]

Is that not truly just?

STREPSIADES

All right, tell me this—  
if they're really clouds, what's happened to them?  
They look just like mortal human women.  
The clouds up there are not the least like that.

440

SOCRATES

What are they like?

STREPSIADES

I don't know exactly.  
They look like wool once it's been pulled apart—  
not like women, by god, not in the least.  
These ones here have noses.

SOCRATES

Let me ask you something.

Will you answer me?

STREPSIADES

Ask me what you want.

Fire away.

<sup>1</sup>Typho was a monster with a hundred heads, father of the storm winds (hence, our word *typhoon*). Meat from a thrush was considered a delicacy, something that might be given to the winner of a public competition. These lines are mocking the dithyrambic poets (perhaps in comparison with the writers of comic drama).



## CLOUDS

SOCRATES

Have you ever gazed up there  
and seen a cloud shaped like a centaur,  
or a leopard, wolf, or bull?

STREPSIADES

Yes, I have.

So what?

SOCRATES

They become anything they want to be.  
So if they see some hairy savage type,  
one of those really wild and wooly men,  
like Xenophantes' son, they mock his moods,  
transforming their appearance into centaurs.<sup>1</sup>

450

[350]

STREPSIADES

What if they glimpse a thief of public funds,  
like Simon? What do they do then?<sup>2</sup>

SOCRATES

They expose  
just what he's truly like—they change at once,  
transform themselves to wolves.

STREPSIADES

Ah ha, I see.  
So that's why yesterday they changed to deer.  
They must have caught sight of Cleonymos—  
the man who threw away his battle shield—  
they knew he was fearful coward.<sup>3</sup>

460

SOCRATES

And now it's clear they've seen Cleisthenes—  
that's why, as you can see, they've changed to women.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The phrase *Xenophantes' son* is a reference to Hieronymos, a dithyrambic and tragic poet. A centaur was known for its savage temper and wild appearance.

<sup>2</sup>Simon was an allegedly corrupt Athenian public official.

<sup>3</sup>Cleonymos was an Athenian accused of dropping his shield and running away from a battle.

<sup>4</sup>Cleisthenes was a well-known homosexual whom Aristophanes never tires of holding up to ridicule.

## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES [*to the Chorus of Clouds*]

All hail to you, lady goddesses.  
And now, if you have ever spoken out  
to other men, let me hear your voice,  
you queenly powers.

CHORUS LEADER

Greetings to you, old man born long ago,  
hunter in love with arts of argument—  
you, too, high priest of subtlest nonsense, 470  
tell us what you want. Of all the experts [360]  
in celestial matters at the present time,  
we take note of no one else but you—  
and Prodicus—because he's sharp and wise,  
while you go swaggering along the street,  
in bare feet, shifting both eyes back and forth.<sup>1</sup>  
You keep moving on through many troubles,  
looking proud of your relationship with us.

STREPSIADES

By the Earth, what voices these Clouds have— 480  
so holy, reverent, and marvelous!

SOCRATES

Well, they're the only deities we have—  
the rest are just so much hocus pocus.

STREPSIADES

Hang on—by the Earth, isn't Zeus a god,  
the one up there on Mount Olympus?

SOCRATES

What sort of god is Zeus? Why spout such rubbish?  
There's no such being as Zeus.

STREPSIADES

What do you mean?  
Then who brings on the rain? First answer that.

<sup>1</sup>Prodicus was a well-known Athenian intellectual, who wrote on a wide variety of subjects. Linking Socrates and Prodicus as equals would strike many Athenians as quite absurd.

## CLOUDS

SOCRATES

Why, these women do. I'll prove that to you  
with persuasive evidence. Just tell me—  
where have you ever seen the rain come down  
without the Clouds being there? If Zeus brings rain,  
then he should do so when the sky is clear,  
when there are no Clouds in view.

490 [370]

STREPSIADES

By Apollo, you've made a good point there—  
it helps your argument. I used to think  
rain was really Zeus pissing through a sieve.  
Tell me who causes thunder? That scares me.

SOCRATES

These Clouds do, as they roll around.

STREPSIADES

But how?

Explain that, you who dares to know it all.

500

SOCRATES

When they are filled with water to the brim  
and then, suspended there with all that rain,  
are forced to move, they bump into each other.  
They're so big, they burst with a great boom.

STREPSIADES

But what's forcing them to move at all?  
Doesn't Zeus do that?

SOCRATES

No—that's the aerial Vortex.<sup>1</sup>

STREPSIADES

Vortex? Well, that's something I didn't know.  
So Zeus is now no more, and Vortex rules  
instead of him. But you still have not explained  
a thing about those claps of thunder.

[380]

510

<sup>1</sup>Vortex is a translation the Greek word is *dinos* meaning a *whirl* or *eddy*. I adopt Sommerstein's suggestion for this word here.

## CLOUDS

SOCRATES

Weren't you listening to me? I tell you,  
when the Clouds are full of water and collide,  
they're so thickly packed they make a noise.

STREPSIADES

Come on now—who'd ever believe that stuff?

SOCRATES

I'll explain, using you as a test case.  
Have you ever gorged yourself on stew  
at the Panathenaea and later  
had an upset stomach—then suddenly  
some violent movement made it rumble?<sup>1</sup>

STREPSIADES

Yes, by Apollo! It does weird things—  
I feel unsettled. That small bit of stew  
rumbles around and makes strange noises,  
just like thunder. At first it's quite quiet—  
“pappax pappax”—then it starts getting louder—  
“papapappax”—and when I take a shit,  
it really thunders “papapappax”—  
just like these Clouds.

520 [390]

SOCRATES

So think about it—  
if your small gut can make a fart like that,  
why can't the air, which goes on for ever,  
produce tremendous thunder. Then there's this—  
consider how alike these phrases sound,  
“thunder clap” and “fart and crap.”

530

STREPSIADES

All right, but then explain this to me—  
Where does lightning come from, that fiery blaze,  
which, when it hits, sometimes burns us up,  
sometimes just singes us and lets us live?  
Clearly Zeus is hurling that at perjurers.

<sup>1</sup>Panathenaea was the name of a major annual festival in Athens.

## CLOUDS

### SOCRATES

You stupid driveling idiot, you stink  
of olden times, the age of Cronos!<sup>1</sup> If Zeus  
is really striking at the perjurers, 540  
how come he's not burned Simon down to ash,  
or else Cleonymos or Theorus?  
They perjure themselves more than anyone. [400]  
No. Instead he strikes at his own temple  
at Sunium, our Athenian headland,  
and at his massive oak trees there. Why?  
What's his plan? Oak trees can't be perjured.

### STREPSIADES

I don't know. But that argument of yours  
seems good. All right, then, what's a lightning bolt?

### SOCRATES

When a dry wind blows up into the Clouds 550  
and gets caught in there, it makes them inflate,  
like the inside of a bladder. And then  
it has to burst them all apart and vent,  
rushing out with violence brought on  
by dense compression—its force and friction  
cause it to consume itself in fire.

### STREPSIADES

By god, I went through that very thing myself—  
at the feast for Zeus. I was cooking food,  
a pig's belly, for my family. I forgot  
to slit it open. It began to swell— 560 [410]  
then suddenly blew up, splattering blood  
in both my eyes and burning my whole face.

### CHORUS LEADER

O you who seeks from us great wisdom,  
how happy you will be among Athenians,  
among the Greeks, if you have memory,  
if you can think, if in that soul of yours  
you've got the power to persevere,  
and don't get tired standing still or walking,

<sup>1</sup>Cronos was the divine father of Zeus, the age of Cronos is part of the mythic past.

## CLOUDS

nor suffer too much from the freezing cold,  
with no desire for breakfast, if you abstain 570  
from wine, from exercise, and other foolishness,  
if you believe, as all clever people should,  
the highest good is victory in action,  
in deliberation and in verbal wars.

### STREPSIADES

Well, as for a stubborn soul and a mind [420]  
thinking in a restless bed, while my stomach,  
lean and mean, feeds on bitter herbs, don't worry.  
I'm confident about all that—I'm ready  
to be hammered on your anvil into shape.

### SOCRATES

So now you won't acknowledge any gods 580  
except the ones we do—Chaos, the Clouds,  
the Tongue—just these three?

### STREPSIADES

Absolutely—  
I'd refuse to talk to any other gods,  
if I ran into them—and I decline  
to sacrifice or pour libations to them.  
I'll not provide them any incense.

### CHORUS LEADER

Tell us then what we can do for you.  
Be brave—for if you treat us with respect,  
if you admire us, and if you're keen  
to be a clever man, you won't go wrong. 590

### STREPSIADES

O you sovereign queens,  
from you I ask one really tiny favour—  
to be the finest speaker in all Greece, [430]  
within a hundred miles.

### CHORUS LEADER

You'll get that from us.  
From now on, in time to come, no one will win  
more votes among the populace than you.

## CLOUDS

### STREPSIADES

No speaking on important votes for me!  
That's not what I'm after. No, no. I want  
to twist all legal verdicts in my favour,  
to evade my creditors.

### CHORUS LEADER

You'll get that,  
just what you desire. For what you want  
is nothing special. So be confident—  
give yourself over to our agents here.

600

### STREPSIADES

I'll do that—I'll place my trust in you.  
Necessity is weighing me down—the horses,  
those thoroughbreds, my marriage—all that  
has worn me out. So now, this body of mine  
I'll give to them, with no strings attached,  
to do with as they like—to suffer blows,  
go without food and drink, live like a pig,  
to freeze or have my skin flayed for a pouch—  
if I can just get out of all my debt  
and make men think of me as bold and glib,  
as fearless, impudent, detestable,  
one who cobbles lies together, makes up words,  
a practised legal rogue, a statute book,  
a chattering fox, sly and needle sharp,  
a slippery fraud, a sticky rascal,  
foul whipping boy or twisted villain,  
troublemaker, or idly prattling fool.  
If they can make those who run into me  
call me these names, they can do what they want—  
no questions asked. If, by Demeter, they're keen,  
they can convert me into sausages  
and serve me up to men who think deep thoughts.

[440]

610

[450]

620

### CHORUS

Here's a man whose mind's now smart,  
no holding back—prepared to start  
When you have learned all this from me  
you know your glory will arise  
among all men to heaven's skies.

[460]

630

## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES

What must I undergo?

CHORUS

For all time, you'll live with me  
a life most people truly envy.

STREPSIADES

You mean I'll really see that one day?

CHORUS

Hordes will sit outside your door  
wanting your advice and more—  
to talk, to place their trust in you  
for their affairs and lawsuits, too,  
things which merit your great mind.  
They'll leave you lots of cash behind.

[470]

640

CHORUS LEADER [*to Socrates*]

So get started with this old man's lessons,  
what you intend to teach him first of all—  
rouse his mind, test his intellectual powers.

SOCRATES

Come on then, tell me the sort of man you are—  
once I know that, I can bring to bear on you  
my latest batteries with full effect.

[480]

STREPSIADES

What's that? By god, are you assaulting me?

SOCRATES

No—I want to learn some things from you.  
What about your memory?

STREPSIADES

To tell the truth  
it works two ways. If someone owes me something,  
I remember really well. But if it's poor me  
that owes the money, I forget a lot.

650

SOCRATES

Do you have any natural gift for speech?

STREPSIADES

Not for speaking—only for evading debt.



## CLOUDS

SOCRATES

So how will you be capable of learning?

STREPSIADES

Easily—that shouldn't be your worry.

SOCRATES

All right. When I throw out something wise  
about celestial matters, you make sure  
you snatch it right away.

[490]

STREPSIADES

What's that about?

Am I to eat up wisdom like a dog?

660

SOCRATES *[aside]*

This man's an ignorant barbarian!  
Old man, I fear you may need a beating.

*[to Strepsiades]*

Now, what do you do if someone hits you?

STREPSIADES

If I get hit, I wait around a while,  
then find witnesses, hang around some more,  
then go to court.

SOCRATES

All right, take off your cloak.

STREPSIADES

Have I done something wrong?

SOCRATES

No. It's our custom  
to go inside without a cloak.

STREPSIADES

But I don't want  
to search your house for stolen stuff.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Legally an Athenian who believed someone had stolen his property could enter the suspect's house to search. But he first had to remove any garments in which he might conceal something which he might plant in the house.

## CLOUDS

SOCRATES: What are you going on about? Take it off.

670

STREPSIADES [*removing his cloak and his shoes*]

So tell me this—if I pay attention  
and put some effort into learning,  
which of your students will I look like?

[500]

SOCRATES

In appearance there'll be no difference  
between yourself and Chaerephon.

STREPSIADES

Oh, that's bad.  
You mean I'll be only half alive?

SOCRATES

Don't talk such rubbish! Get a move on  
and follow me inside. Hurry up!

STREPSIADES

First, put a honey cake here in my hands.  
I'm scared of going down in there. It's like  
going in Trophonios' cave.<sup>1</sup>

680

SOCRATES:

Go inside.  
Why keep hanging round this doorway?

*[Socrates picks up Strepsiades' cloak and shoes. Then Strepsiades and Socrates exit into the interior of the Thinkery]*

CHORUS LEADER

Go. And may you enjoy good fortune,  
a fit reward for all your bravery.

[510]

CHORUS

We hope this man  
thrives in his plan.  
For at his stage  
of great old age  
he'll take a dip

690

<sup>1</sup>Trophonios' cave was a place people went to get prophecies. A suppliant carried a honey cake as an offering to the snakes in the cave.

## CLOUDS

in new affairs  
to act the sage.

CHORUS LEADER [*stepping forward to address the audience directly*]

You spectators, I'll talk frankly to you now,  
and speak the truth, in the name of Dionysus,  
who has cared for me ever since I was a child.  
So may I win and be considered a wise man.<sup>1</sup> [520]  
For I thought you were a discerning audience  
and this comedy the most intelligent  
of all my plays. Thus, I believed it worth my while  
to produce it first for you, a work which cost me 700  
a great deal of effort. But I left defeated,  
beaten out by vulgar men—which I did not deserve.  
I place the blame for this on you intellectuals,  
on whose behalf I went to all that trouble.  
But still I won't ever willingly abandon  
the discriminating ones among you all,  
not since that time when my play about two men—  
one was virtuous, the other one depraved—  
was really well received by certain people here, 710  
whom it pleases me to mention now. As for me,  
I was still unmarried, not yet fully qualified [530]  
to produce that child. But I exposed my offspring,  
and another woman carried it away.  
In your generosity you raised and trained it.<sup>2</sup>  
Since then I've had sworn testimony from you  
that you have faith in me. So now, like old Electra,  
this comedy has come, hoping she can find,  
somewhere in here, spectators as intelligent.

<sup>1</sup>This mention of winning is a reference to the fact that the play is part of a competition. The speech obviously is part of the revisions made after the play failed to win first prize in its initial production. The speaker may have been Aristophanes himself or the Chorus Leader speaking on his behalf.

<sup>2</sup>This passage is a reference to Aristophanes' first play, *The Banqueters*, and to those who helped him get the work produced. The child mentioned is a metaphorical reference to that work or to his artistic talent generally. The other woman is a metaphorical reference to Callistratos, who produced *The Banqueters*.

## CLOUDS

If she sees her brother's hair, she'll recognize it.<sup>1</sup> 720  
 Consider how my play shows natural restraint.  
 First, she doesn't have stitched leather dangling down,  
 with a thick red knob, to make the children giggle.<sup>2</sup>  
 She hasn't mocked bald men or danced some drunken reel. [540]  
 There's no old man who talks and beats those present  
 with a stick to hide bad jokes. She doesn't rush on stage  
 with torches or raise the cry "Alas!" or "Woe is me!"  
 No—she's come trusting in herself and in the script.  
 And I'm a poet like that. I don't preen myself.  
 I don't seek to cheat you by re-presenting here 730  
 the same material two or three times over.  
 Instead I base my art on framing new ideas,  
 all different from the rest, and each one very deft.  
 When Cleon was all-powerful, I went for him.  
 I hit him in the gut. But once he was destroyed,  
 I didn't have the heart to kick at him again. [550]  
 Yet once Hyperbolos let others seize on him,  
 they've not ceased stomping on the miserable man—  
 and on his mother, too.<sup>3</sup> The first was Eupolis—  
 he dredged up his *Maricas*, a wretched rehash 740  
 of my play the *Knights*—he's such a worthless poet—  
 adding an aging female drunk in that stupid dance,  
 a woman Phrynichos invented years ago,  
 the one that ocean monster tried to gobble up.<sup>4</sup>  
 Then Hermippos wrote again about Hyperbolos,  
 Now all the rest are savaging the man once more,  
 copying my images of eels. If anyone  
 laughs at those plays, I hope mine don't amuse him. [560]

<sup>1</sup>Electra was the sister of Orestes and spent a long time waiting to be reunited with him. That hope kept her going. When she saw her brother's lock of hair on their father's tomb, she was overjoyed that he had come back. The adjective "old" refers to the story, which was very well known to the audience.

<sup>2</sup>These lines may indicate that in *Clouds* the male characters did not wear the traditional phalluses or that the phalluses they did wear were not of a particular kind.

<sup>3</sup>Cleon was a very powerful Athenian politician after Pericles. Aristophanes savagely attacked him in *Knights*. Cleon was killed in battle (in 422). Hyperbolos became a very influential politician after Cleon's death.

<sup>4</sup>Eupolis, Phrynichos, and Hermippos were comic playwrights, rivals of Aristophanes.

## CLOUDS

But if you enjoy me and my inventiveness,  
then future ages will commend your worthy taste. 750

### CHORUS

For my dance I first here call  
on Zeus, high-ruling king of all  
among the gods—and on Poseidon,  
so great and powerful—the one  
who with his trident wildly heaves  
the earth and all the brine-filled seas,  
and on our famous father Sky,  
the most revered, who can supply [570]  
all things with life. And I invite  
the Charioteer whose dazzling light 760  
fills this wide world so mightily  
for every man and deity.

### CHORUS LEADER

The wisest in this audience should here take note—  
you've done us wrong, and we confront you with the blame.  
We confer more benefits than any other god  
upon your city, yet we're the only ones  
to whom you do not sacrifice or pour libations,  
though we're the gods who keep protecting you.  
If there's some senseless army expedition, [580]  
then we respond by thundering or bringing rain. 770  
And when you were selecting as your general  
that Paphlagonian tanner hated by the gods,  
we frowned and then complained aloud—our thunder pealed  
among the lightning bursts, the moon moved off her course,  
the sun at once pulled his wick back inside himself,  
and said if Cleon was to be your general  
then he'd give you no light.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, you chose him.  
They say this city likes to make disastrous choices,  
but that the gods, no matter what mistakes you make,  
convert them into something better. If you want 780

<sup>1</sup>The phrase *Paphlagonian tanner* is a reference to Cleon, who earned his money from tanneries. Paphlagonia is an area in Asia Minor. The word here implies that Cleon was not a true Athenian. The words also is close to the verb meaning to *bluster* (a reference to Cleon's loud and aggressive political style).

## CLOUDS

your recent choice to turn into a benefit,  
I can tell you how—it's easy. Condemn the man— [590]  
that seagull Cleon—for bribery and theft.<sup>1</sup>  
Set him in the stocks, a wooden yoke around his neck.  
Then, even if you've made a really big mistake,  
for you things will be as they were before your vote,  
and for the city this affair will turn out well.

### CHORUS

Phoebus Apollo, stay close by,  
lord of Delos, who sits on high,  
by lofty Cynthos mountain sides; 790  
and holy lady, who resides  
in Ephesus, in your gold shrine,  
where Lydian girls pray all the time; [600]  
Athena, too, who guards our home,  
her aegis raised above her own,  
and he who holds Parnassus peaks  
and shakes his torches as he leaps,  
lord Dionysus, whose shouts call  
amid the Delphic bacchanal.<sup>2</sup>

### CHORUS LEADER

When we were getting ready to move over here, 800  
Moon met us and told us, first of all, to greet,  
on her behalf, the Athenians and their allies.  
Then she said she was upset—the way you treat her [610]  
is disgraceful, though she brings you all benefits—  
not just in words but in her deeds. To start with,  
she saves you at least one drachma every month  
for torchlight— in the evening, when you go outside,  
you all can say, “No need to buy a torch, my boy,  
Moon's light will do just fine.” She claims she helps you all

<sup>1</sup>The seagull was a bird symbolic of thievery and greed. The contradiction in these speeches in the attitude to Cleon (who died the year following the original production) may be accounted for by the incomplete revision of the script.

<sup>2</sup>The phrase *holy lady* is a reference to the goddess Artemis. The aegis is a divine cloak which has invincible powers to strike fear into the god's enemies. Here it is invoked as a protection for Athens, Athena's city. Dionysus lived in Delphi when Apollo was absent from the shrine during the winter.

## CLOUDS

in other ways, as well, but you don't calculate  
your calendar the way you should—no, instead  
you make it all confused, and that's why, she says,  
the gods are always making threats against her,  
when they are cheated of a meal and go back home  
because their celebration has not taken place  
according to a proper count of all the days.<sup>1</sup>  
And then, when you should be making sacrifice,  
you're torturing someone or have a man on trial.  
And many times, when we gods undertake a fast,  
because we're mourning Memnon or Sarpedon,\*  
you're pouring out libations, having a good laugh.  
That's the reason, after his choice by lot this year  
to sit on the religious council, Hyperbolos  
had his wreath of office snatched off by the gods.<sup>2</sup>  
That should make him better understand the need  
to count the days of life according to the moon.<sup>3</sup>

810

[620]

820

*[Enter Socrates from the interior of the Thinkery]*

SOCRATES

By Respiration, Chaos, and the Air,  
I've never seen a man so crude, stupid,  
clumsy, and forgetful. He tries to learn  
the tiny trifles, but then he forgets  
before he's even learned them. Nonetheless,  
I'll call him outside here into the light.

830 [630]

*[Socrates calls back into the interior of the Thinkery]*

Strepsiades, where are you? Come on out—  
and bring your bed.

<sup>1</sup>Athenians followed a lunar calendar, but there were important discrepancies due to a very careless control over inserting extra days.

<sup>2</sup>Memnon, the son of Dawn, was killed at Troy, as was Sarpedon, a son of Zeus, and leader of the Lycian allies of the Trojans.

<sup>3</sup>The Amphictyonic Council, which controlled some important religious shrines, was made up of delegates from different city states. In Athens the delegate was chosen by lot. It's not clear how the gods could have removed the wreath in question.

## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES [*from inside*]

I can't carry it out—  
the bugs won't let me.

SOCRATES

Get a move on. Now!

[*Strepsiades enters carrying his bedding*]

SOCRATES

Put it there. And pay attention.

STREPSIADES [*putting the bed down*]

There!

SOCRATES

Come now, of all the things you never learned  
what to you want to study first? Tell me.

[*Strepsiades is very puzzled by the question*]

SOCRATES

Poetic measures? Diction? Rhythmic verse?

STREPSIADES

I'll take measures. Just the other day  
the man who deals in barley cheated me—  
about two quarts.

840

[640]

SOCRATES

That's not what I mean.  
Which music measure is most beautiful—  
the triple measure or quadruple measure?

STREPSIADES

As a measure nothing beats a gallon.

SOCRATES

My dear man, you're just talking nonsense.

STREPSIADES

Then make me a bet—I say a gallon  
is made up of quadruple measures.

SOCRATES

O damn you—you're such a country bumpkin—



## CLOUDS

so slow! Maybe you can learn more quickly  
if we deal with rhythm.

850

STREPSIADES

Will these rhythms  
help to get me food?

SOCRATES

Well, to begin with,  
they'll make you elegant in company—  
and you'll recognize the different rhythms,  
the enoplian and the dactylic,  
which is like a digit.<sup>1</sup>

[650]

STREPSIADES

Like a digit!  
By god, that's something I do know!

SOCRATES

Then tell me.

STREPSIADES

When I was a lad a digit meant this!

*[Strepesides sticks his middle finger straight up under Socrates' nose]*

SOCRATES

You're just a crude buffoon!

STREPSIADES

No, you're a fool—  
I don't want to learn any of that stuff.

860

SOCRATES

Well then, what?

STREPSIADES

You know, that other thing—  
how to argue the most unjust cause.

SOCRATES

But you need to learn these other matters

<sup>1</sup>The *dactyl* is named from the Greek word for finger because it consists of one long stress followed by two short stresses, like the structure of bones in a finger. The phrase "which is like a digit" has been added to make the point clearer.

## CLOUDS

before all that. Now, of the quadrupeds  
which one can we correctly label male?

STREPSIADES

Well, I know the males, if I'm not witless—  
the ram, billy goat, bull, dog, and fowl.

[660]

SOCRATES

And the females?

STREPSIADES

The ewe, nanny goat,  
cow, bitch and fowl.<sup>1</sup>

SOCRATES:                    You see what you're doing?  
You're using that word "fowl" for both of them,  
Calling males what people use for females.

870

STREPSIADES

What's that? I don't get it.

SOCRATES:                    What's not to get?  
"Fowl" and "Fowl" . . .

STREPSIADES

By Poseidon, I see your point.  
All right, what should I call them?

SOCRATES

Call the male a "fowl"—  
and call the other one "fowlette."

STREPSIADES

   "Fowlette?"  
By the Air, that's good! Just for teaching that  
I'll fill your kneading basin up with flour,  
right to the brim.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>I adopt Sommerstein's suggested insertion of this line and a half in order to clarify what now follows in the conversation, which hinges on the gender of words (masculine, feminine, or neuter) and the proper ascription of a specific gender to words which describe male and female objects. The word "fowl" applies to both male and females and therefore is not, strictly speaking masculine. This whole section is a satire on the "nitpicking" attention to language attributed to the sophists.

<sup>2</sup>A kneading basin was trough for making bread.

## CLOUDS

SOCRATES

Once again, another error!  
You called it basin—a masculine word—  
when it's feminine.

[670]

STREPSIADES

How so? Do I call  
the basin masculine?

880

SOCRATES

Indeed you do.  
It's just like Cleonymos.<sup>1</sup>

STREPSIADES

How's that?  
Tell me.

SOCRATES

You treated the word basin  
just as you would treat Cleonymos.

STREPSIADES [*totally bewildered by the conversation*]

But my dear man, he didn't have a basin—  
not Cleonymos—not for kneading flour.  
His round mortar was his prick—the wanker—  
he kneaded that to masturbate.<sup>2</sup>  
But what should I call a basin from now on?

SOCRATES

Call it a basinette, just as you'd say  
the word Sostratette.

890

STREPSIADES

Basinette—it's feminine?

SOCRATES

It is indeed.

<sup>1</sup>Cleonymos was an Athenian politician who allegedly ran away from the battlefield, leaving his shield behind.

<sup>2</sup>The Greek here says literally "Cleonymos didn't have a kneading basin but kneaded himself with a round mortar [i.e., masturbated]."

## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES

All right, then, I should say  
Cleonymette and basinette.<sup>1</sup>

[680]

SOCRATES

You've still got to learn about people's names—  
which ones are male and which are female.

STREPSIADES

I know which ones are feminine.

SOCRATES

Go on.

STREPSIADES

Lysilla, Philinna, Cleitagora,  
Demetria . . .

SOCRATES

Which names are masculine?

STREPSIADES

There are thousands of them—Philoxenos,  
Melesias, Amynias . . .

SOCRATES

You fool,  
those names are not all masculine.<sup>2</sup>

900

STREPSIADES

What?  
You don't think of them as men?

SOCRATES

Indeed I don't.  
If you met Amynias, how would you greet him?

<sup>1</sup>The point of this very laboured joke seems to be making Cleonymos feminine, presumably because of his cowardice (running away in battle).

<sup>2</sup>The three names mentioned belong to well known Athenians, who may have all been famous for their dissolute life style. Socrates is taking issue with the spelling of the last two names which (in some forms) look like feminine names. StrepsiaDES, of course, thinks Socrates is talking about the sexuality of the people.

## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES

How? Like this, "Here, Amynia, come here."<sup>1</sup>

[690]

SOCRATES: You see? You said "Amynia," a woman's name.

STREPSIADES

And that's fair enough, since she's unwilling  
to do army service. But what's the point?  
Why do I need to learn what we all know?

SOCRATES

That's irrelevant, by god. Now lie down—

*[Socrates points to the bed]*

right here.

STREPSIADES

And do what?

SOCRATES

You should contemplate—  
think one of your own problems through.

910

STREPSIADES

Not here,  
I beg you—no. If I have to do it,  
let me do my contemplating on the ground.

SOCRATES

No—you've got no choice.

STREPSIADES *[crawling very reluctantly into the bedding]*

Now I'm done for—  
these bugs are going to punish me today.

*[Socrates exits back into the Thinkery]*

CHORUS

Now ponder and think,  
focus this way and that.  
Your mind turn and toss.  
And if you're at a loss,

[700]

<sup>1</sup>In Greek (as in Latin) the name changes when it is used as a direct form of address. In this case the last letter is dropped, leaving a name ending in *-a*, normally a feminine ending.

## CLOUDS

then quickly go find  
a new thought in your mind.  
From your eyes you must keep  
all soul-soothing sleep.

920

STREPSIADES

O god . . . ahhhhh . . .

CHORUS

What's wrong with you? Why so distressed?

STREPSIADES

I'm dying a miserable death in here!  
These Corinthian crawlers keep biting me.<sup>1</sup>  
gnawing on my ribs,  
slurping up my blood,  
yanking off my balls,  
tunneling up my arse hole—  
they're killing me!

[710]

930

CHORUS

Don't complain so much.

STREPSIADES

Why not? When I've lost my goods,  
lost the colour in my cheeks, lost my blood,  
lost my shoes, and, on top of all these troubles,  
I'm here like some night watchman singing out—  
it won't be long before I'm done for.

[720]

*{Enter Socrates from inside the Thinkery}*

SOCRATES

What are you doing? Aren't you thinking something?

STREPSIADES

Me? Yes I am, by Poseidon.

SOCRATES

What about?

940

<sup>1</sup>Corinthian is obviously a reference to bed bugs, but the link with Corinth is unclear (perhaps it was a slang expression).

## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES

Whether there's going to be any of me left  
once these bugs have finished.

SOCRATES

You imbecile,  
why don't you drop dead!

*[Socrates exits back into the Thinkery]*

STREPSIADES

But my dear man,  
I'm dying right now.

CHORUS LEADER

Don't get soft. Cover up—  
get your whole body underneath the blanket.  
You need to find a good idea for fraud,  
a sexy way to cheat.

STREPSIADES

Damn it all—  
instead of these lambskins here, why won't someone  
throw over me a lovely larcenous scheme?

[730]

*[Strepsiades covers his head with the wool blankets. Enter Socrates from the Thinkery and looks around thinking what to do]*

SOCRATES

First, I'd better check on what he's doing.  
You in there, are you asleep?

950

STREPSIADES *[uncovering his head]*

No, I'm not.

SOCRATES

Have you grasped anything?

STREPSIADES

No, by god, I haven't.

SOCRATES

Nothing at all?

STREPSIADES

I haven't grasped a thing—  
except my right hand's wrapped around my cock.

## CLOUDS

SOCRATES

Then cover your head and think up something—  
get a move on!

STREPSIADES

What should I think about?  
Tell me that, Socrates.

SOCRATES

First you must formulate  
what it is you want. Then tell me.

STREPSIADES

You've heard  
what I want a thousand times—I want to know  
about interest, so I'll not have to pay  
a single creditor.

960

SOCRATES

Come along now,  
cover up.

*[Strepsiades covers his head again, and Socrates speaks to him through the blanket]*

Now, carve your slender thinking  
into tiny bits, and think the matter through,  
with proper probing and analysis.

[740]

STREPSIADES

Ahhh . . . bloody hell!

SOCRATES

Don't shift around.  
If one of your ideas is going nowhere,  
let it go, leave it alone. Later on,  
start it again and weigh it one more time.

STREPSIADES

My dear little Socrates . . .

SOCRATES

Yes, old man,  
what is it?



## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES

I've got a lovely scheme  
to avoid paying interest.

970

SOCRATES

Lay it out.

STREPSIADES

All right. Tell me now . . .

SOCRATES

What is it?

STREPSIADES

What if I purchased a Thessalian witch  
and in the night had her haul down the moon—  
then shut it up in a circular box,  
just like a mirror, and kept watch on it.

[750]

SOCRATES

How would that provide you any help?

STREPSIADES

Well, if no moon ever rose up anywhere,  
I'd pay no interest.

SOCRATES

And why is that?

STREPSIADES

Because they lend out money by the month.

980

SOCRATES

That's good. I'll give you another problem—  
it's tricky. If in court someone sued you  
to pay five talents, what would you do  
to get the case discharged.

STREPSIADES

How? I don't know.

I'll have to think.

[760]

SOCRATES

These ideas of yours—  
don't keep them wound up all the time inside you.

## CLOUDS

Let your thinking loose—out into the air—  
with thread around its foot, just like a bug.<sup>1</sup>

STREPSIADES

Hey, I've devised a really clever way  
to make that lawsuit disappear—it's so good,  
you'll agree with me.

990

SOCRATES

What's your way?

STREPSIADES

At the drug seller's shop have you seen  
that beautiful stone you can see right through,  
the one they use to start a fire?

SOCRATES

You mean glass?

STREPSIADES

Yes.

SOCRATES

So what?

STREPSIADES

What if I took that glass,  
and when the scribe was writing out the charge,  
I stood between him and the sun—like this—  
some distance off, and made his writing melt,  
just the part about my case?<sup>2</sup>

[770]

SOCRATES

By the Graces,  
that's a smart idea!

STREPSIADES

Hey, I'm happy—  
I've erased my law suit for five talents.

1000

<sup>1</sup>Children sometimes tied a thread around the foot of a large flying bug and played with it.

<sup>2</sup>The scribe would be writing on a wax tablet which the heat would melt.

## CLOUDS

SOCRATES

So hurry up and tackle this next problem.

STREPSIADES

What is it?

SOCRATES

How would you evade a charge  
and launch a counter-suit in a hearing  
you're about to lose without a witness?

STREPSIADES

No problem there—it's easy.

SOCRATES

So tell me.

STREPSIADES

I will. If there was a case still pending,  
another one before my case was called,  
I'd run off and hang myself.

[780]

SOCRATES

That's nonsense.

STREPSIADES

No, by the gods, it's not. If I were dead,  
no one could bring a suit against me.

1010

SOCRATES

That's rubbish. Just get away from here.  
I'll not instruct you anymore.

STREPSIADES

Why not?

Come on, Socrates, in god's name.

SOCRATES

There's no point—  
as soon as you learn anything, it's gone,  
you forget it right away. Look, just now,  
what was the very first thing you were taught?

STREPSIADES

Well, let's see . . . The first thing—what was it?

## CLOUDS

What was that thing we knead the flour in?  
Damn it all, what was it?

SOCRATES

To hell with you!  
You're the most forgetful, stupidest old man . . .  
Get lost!

1020

[790]

STREPSIADES

O dear! Now I'm in for it.  
What going to happen to me? I'm done for,  
if I don't learn to twist my words around.  
Come on, Clouds, give me some good advice.

CHORUS LEADER

Old man, here's our advice: if you've a son  
and he's full grown, send him in there to learn—  
he'll take your place.

STREPSIADES

Well, I do have a son—  
a really good and fine one, too—trouble is  
he doesn't want to learn. What should I do?

1030

CHORUS LEADER

You just let him do that?

STREPSIADES

He's a big lad—  
and strong and proud—his mother's family  
are all high-flying women like Coesyra.  
But I'll take him in hand. If he says no,  
then I'll evict him from my house for sure.  
[To Socrates] Go inside and wait for me a while.

[800]

*[Strepsiades moves back across the stage to his own house]*

CHORUS *[to Socrates]*

Don't you see you'll quickly get  
from us all sorts of lovely things  
since we're your only god?  
This man here is now all set  
to follow you in anything,  
you simply have to prod.

1040

## CLOUDS

You know the man is in a daze.  
He's clearly keen his son should learn.  
So lap it up—make haste—  
get everything that you can raise.  
Such chances tend to change and turn  
into a different case.

[810]

*[Socrates exits into the Thinkery. Strepsiades and Pheidippides come out of their house. Strepsiades is pushing his son in front of him]*

STREPSIADES

By the foggy air, you can't stay here—  
not one moment longer! Off with you—  
go eat Megacles out of house and home!

1050

PHEIDIPPIDES

Hey, father—you poor man, what's wrong with you?  
By Olympian Zeus, you're not thinking straight.

STREPSIADES

See that—"Olympian Zeus"! Ridiculous—  
to believe in Zeus—and at your age!

PHEIDIPPIDES

Why laugh at that?

STREPSIADES

To think you're such a child—  
and your views so out of date. Still, come here,  
so you can learn a bit. I'll tell you things.  
When you understand all this, you'll be a man.  
But you mustn't mention this to anyone.

1060

PHEIDIPPIDES

All right, what is it?

STREPSIADES

You just swore by Zeus.

PHEIDIPPIDES

That's right. I did.

STREPSIADES

You see how useful learning is?  
Pheidippides, there's no such thing as Zeus.

## CLOUDS

PHEIDIPPIDES

Then what is there?

STREPSIADES

Vortex now is king—

he's pushed out Zeus.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Bah, that's nonsense!

STREPSIADES

You should know that's how things are right now.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Who says that?

STREPSIADES

Socrates of Melos

[830]

and Chaerephon—they know about fleas' footprints.<sup>1</sup>

PHEIDIPPIDES

Have you become so crazy you believe  
these fellows? They're disgusting!

STREPSIADES

Watch your tongue.

1070

Don't say nasty things about such clever men—  
men with brains, who like to save their money.  
That's why not one of them has ever shaved,  
or oiled his skin, or visited the baths  
to wash himself. You, on the other hand,  
keep on bathing in my livelihood,  
as if I'd died.<sup>2</sup> So now get over there,  
as quickly as you can. Take my place and learn.

PHEIDIPPIDES

But what could anyone learn from those men  
that's any use at all?

[840]

<sup>1</sup>Strepsiadēs presumably is confusing Socrates with Diagoras, a well known materialistic atheist, who came from Melos (whereas Socrates did not).

<sup>2</sup>Part of the funeral rituals in a family required each member to bathe thoroughly.

## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES

You have to ask?

1080

Why, wise things—the full extent of human thought.  
You'll see how thick you are, how stupid.  
Just wait a moment here for me.

*[Strepsiades goes into his house]*

PHEIDIPPIDES

O dear,

What will I do? My father's lost his wits.  
Do I haul him off to get committed,  
on the ground that he's a lunatic,  
or tell the coffin-makers he's gone mad.

*[Strepsiades returns with two birds, one in each hand. He holds out one of them]*

STREPSIADES

Come on now, what do you call this? Tell me.

PHEIDIPPIDES

It's a fowl.

STREPSIADES

That's good. What's this?

PHEIDIPPIDES

That's a fowl.

STREPSIADES

They're both the same? You're being ridiculous.  
From now on, don't do that. Call this one "fowl,"  
and this one here "fowlette."

1090

[850]

PHEIDIPPIDES

"Fowlette"? That's it?

That's the sort of clever stuff you learned in there,  
by going in with these Sons of Earth?<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Sons of Earth* is a phrase usually referring to the Titans who fought against the Olympian gods. Here it also evokes a sense of the materialism of Socrates' doctrine in the play and, of course, ironically ridicules the Thinkery.

## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES

Yes, it is—  
and lots more, too. But everything I learned,  
I right away forgot, because I'm old.

PHEIDIPPIDES

That why you lost your cloak?

STREPSIADES

I didn't lose it—  
I gave it to knowledge—a donation.

PHEIDIPPIDES

And your sandals—what you do with them,  
you deluded man?

STREPSIADES

Just like Pericles,  
I lost them as a "necessary expense."<sup>1</sup>  
But come on, let's go. Move it. If your dad  
asks you to do wrong, you must obey him.  
I know I did just what you wanted long ago,  
when you were six years old and had a lisp—  
with the first obol I got for jury work,  
at the feast of Zeus I got you a toy cart.

1100

[860]

PHEIDIPPIDES

You're going to regret this one fine day.

STREPSIADES

Good—you're doing what I ask.

*[Strepsiades calls inside the Thinkery]*

Socrates,

come out here . . .

*[Enter Socrates from inside the Thinkery]*

<sup>1</sup>The phrase *necessary expense* refers to the well-known story of Pericles who in 445 BC used this phrase in official state accounts to refer to an expensive but secret bribe he paid to a Spartan general to withdraw his armies from Athenian territories around Athens. No one asked any embarrassing questions about the entry,



## CLOUDS

Here—I've brought my son to you.  
He wasn't keen, but I persuaded him.

1110

SOCRATES

He's still a child—he doesn't know the ropes.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Go hang yourself up on some rope,  
and get beaten like a worn-out cloak.

[870]

STREPSIADES

Damn you! Why insult your teacher?

SOCRATES

Look how he says "hang yourself"—it sounds  
like baby talk. No crispness in his speech.<sup>1</sup>  
With such a feeble tone how will he learn  
to answer to a charge or summons  
or speak persuasively? And yet it's true  
Hyperbolos could learn to master that—  
it cost him one talent.<sup>2</sup>

1120

STREPSIADES

Don't be concerned.  
Teach him. He's naturally intelligent.  
When he was a little boy—just that tall—  
even then at home he built small houses,  
carved out ships, made chariots from leather,  
and fashioned frogs from pomegranate peel.  
You can't imagine! Get him to learn  
those two forms of argument—the Better,  
whatever that may be, and the Worse.  
If not both, then at least the unjust one—  
every trick you've got.

[880]

1130

SOCRATES

He'll learn on his own  
from the two styles of reasoning. I'll be gone.

<sup>1</sup>The Greek says "with his lips sagging [or loosely apart]." Socrates is criticizing Pheidippides' untrained voice.

<sup>2</sup>One talent was an enormous fee to pay for lessons in rhetoric. Socrates is, of course, getting Strepsiadess ready to pay a lot for his son's education.

## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES

But remember this—he must be able  
to speak against all just arguments.

*[Enter the Better Argument from inside the Thinkery, talking to the Worse Argument who is still inside]*

BETTER ARGUMENT

Come on. Show yourself to the people here—  
I guess you're bold enough for that.

[890]

*[The Worse Argument emerges from the Thinkery]*

WORSE ARGUMENT

Go where you please.  
The odds are greater I can wipe you out  
with lots of people there to watch us argue.

BETTER ARGUMENT

You'll wipe me out? Who'd you think you are?

1140

WORSE ARGUMENT

An argument.

BETTER ARGUMENT

Yes, but second rate.

WORSE ARGUMENT

You claim that you're more powerful than me,  
but I'll still conquer you.

BETTER ARGUMENT

What clever tricks  
do you intend to use?

WORSE ARGUMENT

I'll formulate  
new principles.

BETTER ARGUMENT *[indicating the audience]*

Yes, that's in fashion now,  
thanks to these idiots.

WORSE ARGUMENT

No, no. They're smart.

## CLOUDS

BETTER ARGUMENT

I'll destroy you utterly.

WORSE ARGUMENT

And how?

Tell me that.

BETTER ARGUMENT

By arguing what's just.

[900]

WORSE ARGUMENT

That I can overturn in my response,  
by arguing there's no such thing as Justice.

1150

BETTER ARGUMENT

It doesn't exist? That's what you maintain?

WORSE ARGUMENT

Well, if it does, where is it?

BETTER ARGUMENT

With the gods.

WORSE ARGUMENT

Well, if Justice does exist, how come Zeus  
hasn't been destroyed for chaining up his dad.<sup>1</sup>

BETTER ARGUMENT

This is going from bad to worse. I feel sick.  
Fetch me a basin.

WORSE ARGUMENT

You silly old man—  
you're so ridiculous.

BETTER ARGUMENT

And you're quite shameless,  
you pervert.

WORSE ARGUMENT

Those words you speak—like roses!

<sup>1</sup>Zeus overthrew his father, Cronos, and the Titans and imprisoned them deep inside the earth.

## CLOUDS

BETTER ARGUMENT

Buffoon!

[910]

WORSE ARGUMENT

You adorn my head with lilies.

BETTER ARGUMENT

You destroyed your father!

WORSE ARGUMENT

You don't mean to,  
but you're showering me with gold.

1160

BETTER ARGUMENT

No, not gold—  
before this age, those names were lead.

WORSE ARGUMENT

But now,  
your insults are a credit to me.

BETTER ARGUMENT

You're too degenerate

WORSE ARGUMENT

You're archaic.

BETTER ARGUMENT

It's thanks to you that none of our young men  
is keen to go to school. The day will come  
when the Athenians will all realize  
how you teach these silly fools.

WORSE ARGUMENT

You're dirty—  
it's disgusting.

BETTER ARGUMENT

But you're doing very well—  
although in earlier days you were a beggar,  
claiming to be Telephos from Mysia,

[920]

1170

## CLOUDS

eating off some views of Pandeletos,  
which you kept in your wallet.<sup>1</sup>

WORSE ARGUMENT

That was brilliant—  
you just reminded me . . .

BETTER ARGUMENT

It was lunacy!  
Your own craziness—the city's, too.  
It fosters you while you corrupt the young.

WORSE ARGUMENT

You can't teach this boy—you're old as Cronos.

BETTER ARGUMENT

Yes, I must—if he's going to be redeemed  
and not just prattle empty verbiage. [930]

WORSE ARGUMENT: *[to Pheidippides]*

Come over here—leave him to his foolishness. 1180

BETTER ARGUMENT

You'll regret it, if you lay a hand on him.

CHORUS LEADER

Stop this fighting, all these abusive words.

*[addressing first the Better Argument and then the Worse Argument]*

Instead, explain the things you used to teach  
to young men long ago—then you lay out  
what's new in training now. He can listen  
as you present opposing arguments  
and then decide which school he should attend.

BETTER ARGUMENT

I'm willing to do that.

WORSE ARGUMENT

All right with me.

<sup>1</sup>Telephos from Mysia was a hero in a play by Euripides in which a king was portrayed as a beggar. Pandeletos was an Athenian politician. The imputation here is that the Worse Argument once did very badly, barely surviving on his wits and borrowed ideas.

## CLOUDS

### CHORUS LEADER

Come on then, which one of you goes first? [940]

### WORSE ARGUMENT

I'll grant him that right. Once he's said his piece, 1190  
I'll shoot it down with brand-new expressions  
and some fresh ideas. By the time I'm done,  
if he so much as mutters, he'll get stung  
by my opinions on his face and eyes—  
like so many hornets—he'll be destroyed.

### CHORUS

Trusting their skill in argument,  
their phrase-making propensity, [950]  
these two men here are now intent  
to show which one will prove to be  
the better man in oratory. 1200  
For wisdom now is being hard pressed—  
my friends, this is the crucial test.

### CHORUS LEADER [*addressing the Better Argument*]

First, you who crowned our men in days gone by  
with so much virtue in their characters,  
let's hear that voice which brings you such delight—  
explain to us what makes you what you are. [960]

### BETTER ARGUMENT

All right, I'll set out how we organized  
our education in the olden days,  
when I talked about what's just and prospered,  
when people wished to practise self-restraint. 1210  
First, there was a rule—children made no noise,  
no muttering. Then, when they went outside,  
walking the streets to the music master's house,  
groups of youngsters from the same part of town  
went in straight lines and never wore a cloak,  
not even when the snow fell thick as flour.  
There he taught them to sing with thighs apart.<sup>1</sup>  
They had memorize their songs—such as,  
“Dreadful Pallas Who Destroys Whole Cities,”

<sup>1</sup>Keeping the thighs together was supposed to enable boys to stimulate themselves sexually.

## CLOUDS

and “A Cry From Far Away.” These they sang 1220  
in the same style their fathers had passed down.  
If any young lad fooled around or tried  
to innovate with some new flourishes,  
like the contorted sounds we have today  
from those who carry on the Phrynis style, [970]  
he was beaten, soundly thrashed, his punishment  
for tarnishing the Muse.<sup>1</sup> At the trainer’s house,  
when the boys sat down, they had to keep  
their thighs stretched out, so they would not expose  
a thing which might excite erotic torments 1230  
in those looking on. And when they stood up,  
they smoothed the sand, being careful not to leave  
imprints of their manhood there for lovers.  
Using oil, no young lad rubbed his body  
underneath his navel—thus on his sexual parts  
there was a dewy fuzz, like on a peach.  
He didn’t make his voice all soft and sweet  
to talk to lovers as he walked along,  
or with his glances coyly act the pimp. [980]  
When he was eating, he would not just grab 1240  
a radish head, or take from older men  
some dill or parsley, or eat dainty food.  
He wasn’t allowed to giggle, or sit there  
with his legs crossed.

### WORSE ARGUMENT

Antiquated rubbish!  
Filled with festivals for Zeus Polieus,  
cicadas, slaughtered bulls, and Cedeides.<sup>2</sup>

### BETTER ARGUMENT

But the point is this—these very features  
in my education brought up those men  
who fought at Marathon. But look at you—  
you teach these young men now right from the start 1250

<sup>1</sup>Phrynis was a musician who introduced certain innovations in music around 450 BC.

<sup>2</sup>Cedeides was a dithyrambic poet well known for his old-fashioned style. The other references are all too ancient customs and rituals (like the old tradition of wearing a cicada broach or the ritual killing of oxen).

## CLOUDS

to wrap themselves in cloaks. It enrages me  
when the time comes for them to do their dance  
at the Panathenaea festival  
and one of them holds his shield low down,  
over his balls, insulting Tritogeneia.<sup>1</sup>  
And so, young man, that's why you should choose me,  
the Better Argument. Be resolute. [990]  
You'll find out how to hate the market place,  
to shun the public baths, to feel ashamed  
of shameful things, to fire up your heart 1260  
when someone mocks you, to give up your chair  
when older men come near, not to insult  
your parents, nor act in any other way  
which brings disgrace or which could mutilate  
your image as an honourable man.  
You'll learn not to run off to dancing girls,  
in case, while gaping at them, you get hit  
with an apple thrown by some little slut,  
and your fine reputation's done for,  
and not to contradict your father, 1270  
or remind him of his age by calling him  
Iapetus—not when he spent his years  
in raising you from infancy.<sup>2</sup>

### WORSE ARGUMENT

My boy, if you're persuaded by this man,  
then by Dionysus, you'll finish up [1000]  
just like Hippocrates' sons—and then  
they'll all call you a sucker of the tit.<sup>3</sup>

### BETTER ARGUMENT

You'll spend your time in the gymnasium—  
your body will be sleek, in fine condition.  
You won't be hanging round the market place, 1280

<sup>1</sup>Marathon was the site of a battle in 490 BC in which a small band of Greeks, mainly Athenians, defeated the Persian armies which had landed near Athens. The Panathenaea was a major religious festival in Athens. Tritogeneia was one of Athena's titles.

<sup>2</sup>Iapetus was a Titan, a brother of Cronos, and hence very ancient.

<sup>3</sup>Hippocrates was an Athenian, a relative of Pericles. He had three sons who had a reputation for childishness.



## CLOUDS

chattering filth, as boys do nowadays.  
You won't keep on being hauled away to court  
over some damned sticky fierce dispute  
about some triviality. No, no.  
Instead you'll go to the Academy,  
to race under the sacred olive trees,  
with a decent friend the same age as you,  
wearing a white reed garland, with no cares.<sup>1</sup>  
You'll smell yew trees, quivering poplar leaves,  
as plane trees whisper softly to the elms,  
rejoicing in the spring. I tell you this—  
if you carry out these things I mention,  
if you concentrate your mind on them,  
you'll always have a gleaming chest, bright skin,  
broad shoulders, tiny tongue, strong buttocks,  
and a little prick. But if you take up  
what's in fashion nowadays, you'll have,  
for starters, feeble shoulders, a pale skin,  
a narrow chest, huge tongue, a tiny bum,  
and a large skill in framing long decrees.<sup>2</sup>  
And that man there will have you believing  
what's bad is good and what's good is bad.  
Then he'll give you Antimachos' disease—  
you'll be infected with his buggery.<sup>3</sup>

1290

[1010]

1300

[1020]

## CHORUS

O you whose wisdom stands so tall,  
the most illustrious of all.  
The odour of your words is sweet,  
the flowering bloom of modest ways—  
happy who lived in olden days!

*[To the Worse Argument]*

<sup>1</sup>The word *Academy* refers, not to Plato's school (which was not in existence yet) but to a public park and gymnasium in Athens.

<sup>2</sup>The Greek says "and a long decree," which makes little sense in English. The point of the joke is to set the audience up to expect "and a long prick" (which was considered a characteristic of barbarians).

<sup>3</sup>Antimachos was satirized in comedy as a particularly effeminate man.

## CLOUDS

Your rival's made his case extremely well,  
so you who have such nice artistic skill.  
must in reply give some new frill.

1310  
[1030]

### CHORUS LEADER

If you want to overcome this man  
it looks as if you'll need to bring at him  
some clever stratagems—unless you want  
to look ridiculous.

### WORSE ARGUMENT

It's about time!  
My guts have long been churning with desire  
to rip in fragments all those things he said,  
with counter-arguments. That's why I'm called  
Worse Argument among all thinking men,  
because I was the very first of them  
to think of coming up with reasoning  
against our normal ways and just decrees.  
And it's worth lots of money—more, in fact,  
than drachmas in six figures<sup>1</sup>—to select  
the weaker argument and yet still win.  
Now just see how I'll pull his system down,  
that style of education which he trusts.  
First, he says he won't let you have hot water  
when you take a bath. What's the idea here?  
Why object to having a warm bath?

1320  
[1040]  
1330

### BETTER ARGUMENT

The effect they have is very harmful—  
they turn men into cowards.

### WORSE ARGUMENT

Wait a minute!  
The first thing you say I've caught you out.  
I've got you round the waist. You can't escape.  
Tell me this—of all of Zeus' children  
which man, in your view, had the greatest heart  
and carried out the hardest tasks? Tell me.

<sup>1</sup>The Greek has "more than ten thousand staters." A stater was a general term for non-Athenian coins, usually of high value. The idea, of course, is equivalent to "a ton of money."

## CLOUDS

### BETTER ARGUMENT

In my view, no one was a better man  
than Hercules.

[1050]

### WORSE ARGUMENT

And where'd you ever see  
cold water in a bath of Hercules? But who  
was a more manly man than him?<sup>1</sup>

1340

### BETTER ARGUMENT

That's it, the very things which our young men  
are always babbling on about these days—  
crowding in the bath house, leaving empty  
all the wrestling schools.

### WORSE ARGUMENT

Next, you're not happy  
when they hang around the market place—  
but I think that's good. If it were shameful,  
Homer would not have labelled Nestor—  
and all his clever men—great public speakers.<sup>2</sup>  
Now, I'll move on to their tongues, which this man  
says the young lads should not train. I say they should.  
He also claims they should be self-restrained.  
These two things injure them in major ways.  
Where have you ever witnessed self-restraint  
bring any benefit to anyone?  
Tell me. Speak up. Refute my reasoning.

1350

[1060]

### BETTER ARGUMENT

There are lots of people. For example,  
Peleus won a sword for his restraint.<sup>3</sup>

### WORSE ARGUMENT

A sword! What a magnificent reward

1360

<sup>1</sup>*Bath of Hercules* was a term commonly applied to thermal hot springs.

<sup>2</sup>This part of the argument is difficult to render quickly in English. Homer's word is *agoretes*, meaning "speaking in the assembly." The Worse Argument is implying that, since the word *agora* means market place, Homer is commending these men for "talking the market place."

<sup>3</sup>Peleus once refused the sexual advances of the wife of his host. She accused him of immoral activity, and her husband set Peleus unarmed on a mountain. The gods admired Peleus' chastity and provided him a sword so he could defend himself against the wild animals.

## CLOUDS

the poor wretch received! While Hyperbolos,  
who sells lamps in the market, is corrupt  
and brings in lots of money, but, god knows,  
he's never won a sword.

### BETTER ARGUMENT

But his virtue  
enabled Peleus to marry Thetis.<sup>1</sup>

### WORSE ARGUMENT

Then she ran off, abandoning the man,  
because he didn't want to spend all night  
having hard sweet sex between the sheets—  
that rough-and-tumble love that women like.  
You're just a crude old-fashioned Cronos.

1370 [1070]

Now, my boy, just think off all those things  
that self-restraint requires—you'll go without  
all sorts of pleasures—boys and women,  
drunken games and tasty delicacies,  
drink and riotous laughter. What's life worth  
if you're deprived of these? So much for that.

I'll now move on to physical desires.

You've strayed and fallen in love—had an affair  
with someone else's wife. And then you're caught.

You're dead, because you don't know how to speak.

1380

But if you hang around with those like me,  
you can follow what your nature urges.

You can leap and laugh and never think  
of anything as shameful. If, by chance,  
you're discovered screwing a man's wife,  
just tell the husband you've done nothing wrong.

Blame Zeus—alleging even he's someone  
who can't resist his urge for sex and women.

[1080]

And how can you be stronger than a god?

You're just a mortal man.

<sup>1</sup>Peleus, a mortal king, married Thetis, a sea goddess, with the blessing of the gods. Their child was the hero Achilles. She later left him to return to her father (but not for the reason given in the lines following).

## CLOUDS

### BETTER ARGUMENT

All right—but suppose  
he trusts in your advice and gets a radish  
rammed right up his arse, and his pubic hairs  
are burned with red-hot cinders. Will he have  
some reasoned argument to demonstrate  
he's not a loose-arsed bugger?<sup>1</sup>

1390

### WORSE ARGUMENT

So his asshole's large—  
why should that in any way upset him?

### BETTER ARGUMENT

Can one suffer any greater harm  
than having a loose asshole?

### WORSE ARGUMENT

What will you say  
if I defeat you on this point?

### BETTER ARGUMENT

I'll shut up.  
What more could a man say?

### WORSE ARGUMENT

Come on, then—  
Tell me about our legal advocates.  
Where are they from?

1400

### BETTER ARGUMENT

They come from loose-arsed buggers.

### WORSE ARGUMENT

I grant you that. What's next? Our tragic poets,  
where they from?

[1090]

### BETTER ARGUMENT

They come from major assholes.

<sup>1</sup>Someone caught in the act of adultery was punished by having a radish shoved up his anus and his pubic hair singed with hot ash. The various insults here ("loose-arsed bugger," "gigantic asshole," and so on) stand for the Greek pejorative phrase "wide arsed," which, in addition to meaning "lewd" or "disgusting," also carries the connotation of passive homosexuality, something considered ridiculous in mature men. Terms like "bum fucker" are too active to capture this sense of the insult.

## CLOUDS

### WORSE ARGUMENT

That's right. What about our politicians—  
where do they come from?

### BETTER ARGUMENT

From gigantic assholes!

### WORSE ARGUMENT

All right then—surely you can recognize  
how you've been spouting rubbish? Look out there—  
at this audience—what sort of people  
are most of them?

### BETTER ARGUMENT

All right, I'm looking at them.

1410

### WORSE ARGUMENT

Well, what do you see?

### BETTER ARGUMENT

By all the gods,  
almost all of them are men who spread their cheeks.  
It's true of that one there, I know for sure . . .  
and that one . . . and the one there with long hair.

[1100]

### WORSE ARGUMENT

So what do you say now?

### BETTER ARGUMENT

We've been defeated.  
Oh you fuckers, for gods' sake take my cloak—  
I'm defecting to your ranks.

*[The Better Argument takes off his cloak and exits into the Thinkery]*

### WORSE ARGUMENT *[to Strepsiaides]*

What now?  
Do you want to take your son away?  
Or, to help you out, am I to teach him  
how to argue?

### STREPSIADES

Teach him—whip him into shape.  
Don't forget to sharpen him for me,  
one side ready to tackle legal quibbles.

1420

## CLOUDS

On the other side, give his jaw an edge  
for more important matters.

[1110]

### WORSE ARGUMENT

Don't worry.  
You'll get back a person skilled in sophistry.

### PHEIDIPPIDES

Someone miserably pale, I figure.

### CHORUS LEADER

All right. Go in.  
I think you may regret this later on.

*[Worse Argument and Pheidippides go into the Thinkery, while Strepsiades returns into his own house]*

### CHORUS LEADER

We'd like to tell the judges here the benefits  
they'll get, if they help this chorus, as by right they should.  
First, if you want to plough your lands in season, 1430  
we'll rain first on you and on the others later.  
Then we'll protect your fruit, your growing vines,  
so neither drought nor too much rain will damage them. [1120]  
But any mortal who dishonours us as gods  
should bear in mind the evils we will bring him.  
From his land he'll get no wine or other harvest.  
When his olive trees and fresh young vines are budding,  
we'll let fire with our sling shots, to smash and break them.  
If we see him making bricks, we'll send down rain,  
we'll shatter roofing tiles with our round hailstones. 1440  
If ever there's a wedding for his relatives,  
or friends, or for himself, we'll rain all through the night,  
so he'd rather live in Egypt than judge this wrong. [1130]

*[Strepsiades comes out of his house, with a small sack in his hand]*

### STREPSIADES

Five more days, then four, three, two—and then  
the day comes I dread more than all the rest.  
It makes me shake with fear—the day that stands  
between the Old Moon and the New—the day  
when any man I happen to owe money to  
swears on oath he'll put down his deposit,

## CLOUDS

take me to court.<sup>1</sup> He says he'll finish me, 1450  
do me in. When I make a modest plea  
for something fair, "My dear man, don't demand  
this payment now, postpone this one for me,  
discharge that one," they say the way things are  
they'll never be repaid—then they go at me, [1140]  
abuse me as unfair and say they'll sue.  
Well, let them go to court. I just don't care,  
not if Pheidippides has learned to argue.  
I'll find out soon enough. Let's knock here,  
at the thinking school.

*[Strepsiades knocks on the door of the Thinkery]*

Boy . . . Hey, boy . . . boy! 1460

*[Socrates comes to the door]*

SOCRATES

Hello there, Strepsiades.

STREPSIADES

Hello to you.

First of all, you must accept this present.

*[Strepsiades hands Socrates the small sack]*

It's proper for a man show respect  
to his son's teacher in some way. Tell me—  
has the boy learned that style of argument  
you brought out here just now?

SOCRATES

Yes, he has.

STREPSIADES

In the name of Fraud, queen of everything,  
that's splendid news!

SOCRATES

You can defend yourself  
in any suit you like—and win.

<sup>1</sup>The person making the charge in court had to make a cash deposit which was forfeit if he lost the case.



## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES

I can?

Even if there were witnesses around  
when I took out the loan?

1470

SOCRATES

The more the better—  
even if they number in the thousands.

STREPSIADES [*in a parody of tragic style*]

Then I will roar aloud a mighty shout—  
Ah ha, weep now you petty money men,  
wail for yourselves, wail for your principal,  
wail for your compound interest. No more  
will you afflict me with your evil ways.  
On my behalf there's growing in these halls  
a son who's got a gleaming two-edged tongue—  
he's my protector, saviour of my home,  
a menace to my foes. He will remove  
the mighty tribulations of his sire.  
Run off inside and summon him to me.

[1160]

1480

[*Socrates goes back into the Thinkery*]

My son, my boy, now issue from the house—  
and hearken to your father's words.

[*Socrates and Pheidippides come out of the Thinkery. Pheidippides has been transformed in appearance, so that he now looks, moves, and talks like the other students in the Thinkery*]

SOCRATES

Here's your young man.

STREPSIADES

Ah, my dear, dear boy.

SOCRATES

Take him and go away.

[*Socrates exits back into the Thinkery*]

STREPSIADES

Ah ha, my lad—  
what joy. What sheer delight for me to gaze,  
first, upon your colourless complexion,

[1170]

## CLOUDS

to see how right away you're well prepared  
to deny and contradict—with that look  
which indicates our national character  
so clearly planted on your countenance—  
the look which says, "What do you mean?"—the look  
which makes you seem a victim, even though  
you're the one at fault, the criminal.  
I know that Attic stare stamped on your face.  
Now you must rescue me—since you're the one  
who's done me in.

1490

PHEIDIPPIDES

What are you scared about?

STREPSIADES

The day of the Old Moon and the New.

1500

PHEIDIPPIDES

You mean there's a day that's old and new?

STREPSIADES

The day they say they'll make deposits  
to charge me in the courts!

[1180]

PHEIDIPPIDES

Then those who do that  
will lose their cash. There's simply no way  
one day can be two days.

STREPSIADES

It can't?

PHEIDIPPIDES

How?

Unless it's possible a single woman  
can at the same time be both old and young.

STREPSIADES

Yet that seems to be what our laws dictate.

PHEIDIPPIDES

In my view they just don't know the law—  
not what it really means.

STREPSIADES

What does it mean?

1510

## CLOUDS

PHEIDIPPIDES

Old Solon by his nature loved the people.<sup>1</sup>

STREPSIADES

But that's got no bearing on the Old Day—  
or the New.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Well, Solon set up two days  
for summonses—the Old Day and the New,  
so deposits could be made with the New Moon.<sup>2</sup>

[1190]

STREPSIADES

Then why did he include Old Day as well?

PHEIDIPPIDES

So the defendants, my dear fellow,  
could show up one day early, to settle  
by mutual agreement, and, if not,  
they should be very worried the next day  
was the start of a New Moon.

1520

STREPSIADES

In that case,  
why do judges not accept deposits  
once the New Moon comes but only on the day  
between the Old and New?

PHEIDIPPIDES

It seems to me  
they have to act like those who check the food—  
they want to grab as fast as possible  
at those deposits, so they can nibble them  
a day ahead of time.

[1200]

<sup>1</sup>Solon was a very famous Athenian law maker. In the early sixth century he laid down the basis for Athenian laws.

<sup>2</sup>Pheidippides' hair-splitting argument which follows supposedly establishes that the law suits against Strepsiades are illegal and should be tossed out because (in brief) the court had taken the deposit, which the creditor had to make to launch the suit, on the wrong day (the last day of the month instead of the first day of the new month). The case rests on a misinterpretation of the meaning of the term Old and New Day—which was single day between the old and the new moon. The passage is, of course, a satire on sophistic reasoning and legal quibbling for self-interest.

## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES

That's wonderful!

[To the audience]

You helpless fools! Why do you sit there—  
so idiotically, for us wise types  
to take advantage of? Are you just stones,  
ciphers, merely sheep or stacked-up pots?  
This calls for a song to me and my son here,  
to celebrate good luck and victory.

1530

[He sings]

O Strepsiades is truly blessed  
for cleverness the very best,  
what a brainy son he's raised.  
So friends and townsfolk sing his praise.  
Each time you win they'll envy me—  
you'll plead my case to victory.  
So let's go in—I want to treat,  
and first give you something to eat.

1540 [1210]

[*Strepsiades and Pheidippides go together into their house. Enter one of Strepsiades' creditors, Pasias, with a friend as his witness*]

PASIAS

Should a man just throw away his money?  
Never! But it would have been much better,  
back then at the start, to forget the loan  
and the embarrassment than go through this—  
to drag you as a witness here today  
in this matter of my money. I'll make  
this man from my own deme my enemy.<sup>1</sup>  
But I'll not let my country down—never—  
not as long as I'm alive. And so . . .

1550

[1220]

[Raising his voice]

I'm summoning Strepsiades . . .

<sup>1</sup>The deme was the basic political unit in Athens. Membership in it passed down from one's father.

## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES

Who is it?

PASIAS

. . . on this Old Day and the New.

STREPSIADES

I ask you here  
to witness that he's called me for two days.  
What's the matter?

PASIAS

The loan you got, twelve minai,  
when you bought that horse—the dapple grey.

STREPSIADES

A horse? Don't listen to him. You all know  
how I hate horses.

PASIAS

What's more, by Zeus,  
you swore on all the gods you'd pay me back.

1560

STREPSIADES

Yes, by god, but Pheidippides back then  
did not yet know the iron-clad argument  
on my behalf.

PASIAS

So now, because of that,  
you're intending to deny the debt?

[1230]

STREPSIADES

If I don't, what advantage do I gain  
from everything he's learned?

PASIAS

Are you prepared  
to swear you owe me nothing—by the gods—  
in any place I tell you?

STREPSIADES

Which gods are those?

PASIAS

By Zeus, by Hermes, by Poseidon.

## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES

Yes, indeed, by Zeus—and to take that oath  
I'd even pay three extra obols.<sup>1</sup>

1570

PASIAS

You're shameless—may that ruin you some day!

STREPSIADES [*patting Pasias on the belly*]

This wine skin here would much better off  
if you rubbed it down with salt.<sup>2</sup>

PASIAS

Damn you—  
you're ridiculing me!

STREPSIADES [*still patting Pasias' paunch*]

About four gallons,  
that's what it should hold.

PASIAS

By mighty Zeus,  
by all the gods, you'll not make fun of me  
and get away with it!

STREPSIADES

Ah, you and your gods—  
that's so incredibly funny. And Zeus—  
to swear on him is quite ridiculous  
to those who understand.

[1240]

1580

PASIAS

Some day, I swear,  
you're going to have to pay for all of this.  
Will you or will you not pay me my money?  
Give me an answer, and I'll leave.

STREPSIADES

Calm down—  
I'll give you a clear answer right away.

<sup>1</sup>StrepsiaDES means here that swearing the oath will be such fun he's prepared to pay for the pleasure—an obvious insult to Pasias.

<sup>2</sup>Leather was rubbed down with salt as part of the tanning process. The phrase "wine skin" has been added to clarify the sense.

## CLOUDS

*[Strepsiades goes into his house, leaving Pasiás and the Witness by themselves]*

PASIAS

Well, what do you think he's going to do?  
Does it strike you he's going to pay?

*[Enter Strepsiades carrying a kneading basin]*

STREPSIADES

Where's the man who's asking me for money?  
Tell me—what's this?

PASIAS

What's that? A kneading basin.

STREPSIADES

You're demanding money when you're such a fool?  
I wouldn't pay an obol back to anyone  
who called a basinette a basin.

1590

[1250]

PASIAS

So you won't repay me?

STREPSIADES

As far as I know,  
I won't. So why don't you just hurry up  
and quickly scuttle from my door.

PASIAS

I'm off.  
Let me tell you—I'll be making my deposit.  
If not, may I not live another day!

*[Pasiás exits with the Witness]*

STREPSIADES *[calling after them]*

That'll be more money thrown away—  
on top of the twelve minai. I don't want  
you going thorough that just because you're foolish  
and talk about a kneading basin.

1600

*[Enter Amynias, another creditor, limping. He has obviously been hurt in some way]*

AMYNIAS

O it's bad. Poor me!

## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES

Hold on. Who's this  
who's chanting a lament? Is that the cry  
of some god perhaps—one from Carcinus?<sup>1</sup>

[1260]

AMYNIAS

What's that? You wish to know who I am?  
I'm a man with a miserable fate!

STREPSIADES

Then go off on your own.

AMYNIAS [*in a grand tragic manner*]

“O cruel god,  
O fortune fracturing my chariot wheels,  
O Pallas, how you've annihilated me!”<sup>2</sup>

STREPSIADES

Has Tlepolemos done nasty things to you?<sup>3</sup>

1610

AMYNIAS

Don't laugh at me, my man—but tell your son  
to pay me back the money he received,  
especially when I'm going through all this pain.

STREPSIADES

What money are you talking about?

AMYNIAS

The loan he got from me.

[1270]

STREPSIADES

It seems to me  
you're having a bad time.

AMYNIAS

By god, that's true—  
I was driving in my chariot and fell out.

<sup>1</sup>Carcinus was an Athenian writer of tragic drama.

<sup>2</sup>Amynias is here quoting from a tragedy written by Carcinus' son Xenocles.

<sup>3</sup>Tlepolemos is a character in the tragedy mentioned in the previous note.



## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES

Why then babble on such utter nonsense,  
as if you'd just fallen off a donkey?

AMYNIAS

If I want him to pay back my money  
am I talking nonsense?

1620

STREPSIADES

I think it's clear  
your mind's not thinking straight.

AMYNIAS

Why's that?

STREPSIADES

From your behaviour here, it looks to me  
as if your brain's been shaken up.

AMYNIAS

Well, as for you,  
by Hermes, I'll be suing you in court,  
if you don't pay the money.

STREPSIADES

Tell me this—  
do you think Zeus always sends fresh water  
each time the rain comes down, or does the sun  
suck the same water up from down below  
for when it rains again?

[1280]

AMYNIAS

I don't know which—  
and I don't care.

1630

STREPSIADES

Then how can it be just  
for you to get your money reimbursed,  
when you know nothing of celestial things?

AMYNIAS

Look, if you haven't got the money now,  
at least repay the interest.

STREPSIADES:

This "interest"—  
What sort of creature is it?

## CLOUDS

AMYNIAS

Don't you know?

It's nothing but the way that money grows,  
always getting larger day by day  
month by month, as time goes by.

STREPSIADES

That's right.

What about the sea? In your opinion,  
is it more full of water than before?

1640 [1290]

AMYNIAS

No, by Zeus— it's still the same. If it grew,  
that would violate all natural order.

STREPSIADES

In that case then, you miserable rascal,  
if the sea shows no increase in volume  
with so many rivers flowing into it,  
why are you so keen to have your money grow?  
Now, why not chase yourself away from here.

*[Calling inside the house]*

Bring me the cattle prod!

AMYNIAS

I have witnesses!

*[The slave comes out of the house and gives Strepsiades a cattle prod.  
Strepsiades starts poking Amynias with it]*

STREPSIADES

Come on! What you waiting for? Move it,  
you pedigree nag!

1650

AMYNIAS

This is outrageous!

STREPSIADES *[continuing to poke Amynias away]*

Get a move on—or I'll shove this prod  
all the way up your horse-racing rectum!

[1300]

*[Amynias runs off stage]*

## CLOUDS

You running off? That's what I meant to do,  
get the wheels on that chariot of yours  
really moving fast.

*[Strepsiades goes back into his house]*

### CHORUS

O it's so nice  
to worship vice.  
This old man here  
adores it so  
he will not clear  
the debts he owes.  
But there's no way  
he will not fall  
sometime today,  
done in by all  
his trickeries,  
he'll quickly fear  
depravities  
he's started here.

1660

1670

It seems to me  
he'll soon will see  
his clever son  
put on the show  
he wanted done  
so long ago—  
present a case  
against what's true  
and beat all those  
he runs into  
with sophistry.  
He'll want his son  
(it may well be)  
to be struck dumb.

1680

[1320]

*[Enter Strepsiades running out of his house with Pheidippides close behind him hitting him over the head]*

### STREPSIADES

Help! Help! You neighbours, relatives,  
fellow citizens, help me—I'm begging you!

## CLOUDS

I'm being beaten up! Owwww, I'm in such pain—  
my head . . . my jaw.

*[To Pheidippides]*

You good for nothing,  
are you hitting your own father?

PHEIDIPPIDES

Yes, dad, I am.

STREPSIADES

See that! He admits he's beating me.

1690

PHEIDIPPIDES

I do indeed.

STREPSIADES

You scoundrel, criminal—  
a man who abuses his own father!

PHEIDIPPIDES

Go on—keep calling me those very names—  
the same ones many times. Don't you realize  
I just love hearing streams of such abuse?

STREPSIADES

You perverted asshole!

PHEIDIPPIDES

Ah, some roses!  
Keep pelting me with roses!

[1330]

STREPSIADES

You'd hit your father?

PHEIDIPPIDES

Yes, and by the gods I'll now demonstrate  
how I was right to hit you.

STREPSIADES

You total wretch,  
how can it be right to strike one's father?

1700

PHEIDIPPIDES

I'll prove that to you—and win the argument.

## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES

You'll beat me on this point?

PHEIDIPPIDES

Indeed, I will.

It's easy. So of the two arguments  
choose which one you want.

STREPSIADES

What two arguments?

PHEIDIPPIDES

The Better or the Worse.

STREPSIADES

By god, my lad,  
I really did have you taught to argue  
against what's just, if you succeed in this—  
and make the case it's fine and justified  
for a father to be beaten by his son.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Well, I think I'll manage to convince you,  
so that once you've heard my arguments,  
you won't say a word.

1710

STREPSIADES

Well, to tell the truth,  
I do want to hear what you have to say.

CHORUS

You've some work to do, old man.  
Think how to get the upper hand.  
He's got something he thinks will work,  
or he'd not act like such a jerk.  
There's something makes him confident—  
his arrogance is evident.

[1350]

CHORUS LEADER *(addressing StrepsiaDES)*

But first you need to tell the Chorus here  
how your fight originally started.  
That's something you should do in any case.

1720

STREPSIADES

Yes, I'll tell you how our quarrel first began.

## CLOUDS

As you know, we were having a fine meal.  
I first asked him to take up his lyre  
and sing a lyric by Simonides—  
the one about the ram being shorn.<sup>1</sup>  
But he immediately refused—saying  
that playing the lyre while we were drinking  
was out of date, like some woman singing  
while grinding barley.

1730

## PHEIDIPPIDES

Well, at that point,  
you should have been ground up and trampled on—  
asking for a song, as if you were feasting  
with cicadas.

[1360]

## STREPSIADES

The way he's talking now—  
that's just how he was talking there before.  
He said Simonides was a bad poet.  
I could hardly stand it, but at first I did.  
Then I asked him to pick up a myrtle branch  
and at least recite some Aeschylus for me.<sup>2</sup>  
He replied at once, "In my opinion,  
Aeschylus is first among the poets  
for lots of noise, unevenness, and bombast—  
he piles up words like mountains." Do you know  
how hard my heart was pounding after that?  
But I clenched my teeth and kept my rage inside,  
and said, "Then recite me something recent,  
from the newer poets, some witty verse."  
So he then right off started to declaim  
some passage from Euripides in which,  
spare me this, a brother was enjoying sex  
with his own sister— from a common mother.  
I couldn't keep my temper any more—  
so on the spot I verbally attacked  
with all sorts of nasty, shameful language.

1740

[1370]

1750

<sup>1</sup>Simonides was a well-known lyric poet of the previous century.

<sup>2</sup>Traditionally a person singing at a drinking party held a myrtle branch unless he was playing a musical instrument.

## CLOUDS

Then, as one might predict, we went at it—  
hurling insults at each other back and forth.  
But then he jumped up, pushed me, thumped me,  
choked me, and started killing me.

### PHEIDIPPIDES

Surely I was entitled to do that  
to a man who will not praise Euripides,  
the cleverest of all.

1760

### STREPSIADES

Him? The cleverest? Ha!  
What do I call you? No, I won't say—  
I'd just get beaten one more time.

### PHEIDIPPIDES

Yes, by Zeus,  
you would—and with justice, too.

### STREPSIADES

How would that be just? You shameless man,  
I brought you up. When you lisped your words,  
I listened 'til I recognized each one.  
If you said "waa," I understood the word  
and brought a drink; if you asked for "foo foo,"  
I'd bring you bread. And if you said "poo poo"  
I'd pick you up and carry you outside,  
and hold you up. But when you strangled me  
just now, I screamed and yelled I had to shit—  
but you didn't dare to carry me outside,  
you nasty brute, you kept on throttling me,  
until I crapped myself right where I was.

1770

[1390]

### CHORUS

I think the hearts of younger spry  
are pounding now for his reply—  
for if he acts in just this way  
and yet his logic wins the day  
I'll not value at a pin  
any older person's skin.

1780

### CHORUS LEADER

Now down to work, you spinner of words,  
you explorer of brand new expressions.

## CLOUDS

Seek some way to persuade us, so it will appear  
that what you've been saying is right.

PHEIDIPPIDES

How sweet it is to be conversant with  
things which are new and clever, capable  
of treating with contempt established ways.  
When I was only focused on my horses,  
I couldn't say three words without going wrong.  
But now this man has made me stop all that,  
I'm well acquainted with the subtlest views,  
and arguments and frames of mind. And so,  
I do believe I'll show how just it is  
to punish one's own father.

[1400]

1790

STREPSIADES

By the gods,  
keep on with your horses then—for me  
caring for a four-horse team is better  
than being beaten to a pulp.

PHEIDIPPIDES

I'll go back  
to where I was in my argument,  
when you interrupted me. First, tell me this—  
Did you hit me when I was a child?

1800

STREPSIADES

Yes.  
But I was doing it out of care for you.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Then tell me this: Is it not right for me  
to care for you in the same way—to beat you—  
since that's what caring means—a beating?  
Why must your body be except from blows,  
while mine is not? I was born a free man, too.  
“The children howl—you think the father  
should not howl as well?” You're going to claim  
the laws permit this practice on our children.  
To that I would reply that older men  
are in their second childhood. More than that—  
it makes sense that older men should howl

1810



## CLOUDS

before the young, because there's far less chance  
their natures lead them into errors.

STREPSIADES

There's no law that fathers have to suffer this.

[1420]

PHEIDIPPIDES

But surely some man first brought in the law,  
someone like you and me? And way back then  
people found his arguments convincing.  
Why should I have less right to make new laws  
for future sons, so they can take their turn  
and beat their fathers? All the blows we got  
before the law was brought in we'll erase,  
and we'll demand no payback for our beatings.  
Consider cocks and other animals—  
they avenge themselves against their fathers.  
And yet how are we different from them,  
except they don't propose decrees?

1820

STREPSIADES

Well then,  
since you want to be like cocks in all you do,  
why not sleep on a perch and feed on shit?

[1430]

1830

PHEIDIPPIDES

My dear man, that's not the same at all—  
not according to what Socrates would think.

STREPSIADES

Even so, don't beat me. For if you do,  
you'll have yourself to blame.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Why's that?

STREPSIADES

Because I have the right to chastise you,  
if you have a son, you'll have that right with him.

PHEIDIPPIDES

If I don't have one, I'll have cried for nothing,  
and you'll be laughing in your grave.

## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES [*addressing the audience*]

All you men out there my age, it seems to me  
he's arguing what's right. And in my view,  
we should concede to these young sons what's fair.  
It's only right that we should cry in pain  
when we do something wrong. 1840

PHEIDIPPIDES

Consider now another point.

STREPSIADES

No, no.

It'll finish me! [1440]

PHEIDIPPIDES

But then again  
perhaps you won't feel so miserable  
at going through what you've suffered.

STREPSIADES

What's that?

Explain to me how I benefit from this.

PHEIDIPPIDES

I'll thump my mother, just as I hit you. 1850

STREPSIADES

What did you just say? What are you claiming?  
This second point is even more disgraceful.

PHEIDIPPIDES

But what if, using the Worse Argument,  
I beat you arguing this proposition—  
that it's only right to hit one's mother?

STREPSIADES

What else but this—if you do a thing like that,  
then why stop there? Why not throw yourself  
and Socrates and the Worse Argument  
into the execution pit? [1450]

[*StrepsiaDES turns towards the Chorus*]

It's your fault,  
you Clouds, that I have to endure all this.  
I entrusted my affairs to you. 1860

## CLOUDS

CHORUS LEADER

No.

You're the one responsible for this.  
You turned yourself toward these felonies.

STREPSIADES

Why didn't you inform me at the time,  
instead of luring on an old countryman?

CHORUS

That's what we do each time we see someone  
who falls in love with evil strategies,  
until we hurl him into misery,  
so he may learn to fear the gods.

[1460]

STREPSIADES

O dear. That's harsh, you Clouds, but fair enough.  
I shouldn't have kept trying not to pay  
that cash I borrowed. Now, my dearest lad,  
come with me—let's exterminate those men,  
the scoundrel Chaerephon and Socrates,  
the ones who played their tricks on you and me.

1870

PHEIDIPPIDES

But I couldn't harm the ones who taught me.

STREPSIADES

Yes, you must. Revere Paternal Zeus.<sup>1</sup>

PHEIDIPPIDES

Just listen to that—Paternal Zeus.  
How out of date you are! Does Zeus exist?

STREPSIADES

He does.

PHEIDIPPIDES

No, no, he doesn't—there's no way,  
for Vortex has now done away with Zeus  
and rules in everything.

1880 [1470]

<sup>1</sup>The phrase *Paternal Zeus* seems to be an appeal to Zeus as the guardian of the father's rights and thus a way of urging Pheidippides to go along with what his father wants. The line may be a quote from a lost tragedy.

## CLOUDS

STREPSIADES

He hasn't killed him.

*[He points to a small statue of a round goblet which stands outside Thinkery]*

I thought he had because that statue there,  
the cup, is called a vortex.<sup>1</sup> What a fool  
to think this piece of clay could be a god!

PHEIDIPPIDES

Stay here and babble nonsense to yourself.

*[Pheidippides exits]<sup>2</sup>*

STREPSIADES

My god, what lunacy. I was insane  
to cast aside the gods for Socrates.

*[Strepsiades goes up and talks to the small statue of Hermes outside his house]*

But, dear Hermes, don't vent your rage on me,  
don't grind me down. Be merciful to me.  
Their empty babbling made me lose my mind.  
Give me your advice. Shall I lay a charge,  
go after them in court. What seems right to you?

1890

[1480]

*[He looks for a moment at the statue]*

You counsel well. I won't launch a law suit.  
I'll burn their house as quickly as I can,  
these babbling fools.

*[Strepsiades calls into his house]*

Xanthias, come here.

Come outside—bring a ladder—a mattock, too.

<sup>1</sup>*Vortex* comes from the Greek word *dinos*, meaning “whirl,” “eddy,” or “vortex.” It also means a round goblet. The statue of such a goblet outside the Thinkery represents the presiding deity of the house.

<sup>2</sup>It's not clear whether Pheidippides goes back into his house or back into the school. If he does the latter, then the comic violence at the end of the play takes on a much darker tone, since Strepsiades' murderous anger includes his son. In fact, the loss of his son might be the key event which triggers the intensity of the final destruction.

## CLOUDS

then climb up on top of that Thinkery  
and, if you love your master, smash the roof,  
until the house collapses in on them.

1900

*[Xanthias comes out with ladder and mattock, climbs up onto the Thinkery and starts demolishing the roof]*

Someone fetch me a flaming torch out here.  
They may brag all they like, but here today  
I'll make somebody pay the penalty  
for what they did to me.

[1490]

*[Another slave comes out and hands Strepsiades a torch. He joins Xanthias on the roof and tries to burn down the inside of the Thinkery]*

STUDENT *[from inside the Thinkery]*  
Help! Help!

STREPSIADES

Come on, Torch, put your flames to work.

*[Strepsiades sets fire to the roof of the Thinkery. A student rushes outside and looks at Strepsiades and Xanthias on the roof]*

STUDENT

You there, what are you doing?

STREPSIADES

What am I doing?

What else but picking a good argument  
with the roof beams of your house?

*[A second student appears at a window as smoke starts coming out of the house]*

STUDENT

Help! Who's setting fire to the house?

STREPSIADES

It's the man  
whose cloak you stole.

STUDENT

We'll die. You'll kill us all!

1910

STREPSIADES

That's what I want—unless this mattock

## CLOUDS

disappoints my hopes or I fall through somehow  
and break my neck.

[1500]

*[Socrates comes out of the house in a cloud of smoke. He is coughing badly]*

SOCRATES

What are you doing up on the roof?

STREPSIADES

I walk on air and contemplate the sun.

SOCRATES *[coughing]*

This is bad—I'm going to suffocate.

STUDENT *[still at the window]*

What about poor me? I'll be burned up.

*[Strepsiades and Xanthias come down from the roof]*

STREPSIADES *[to Socrates]*

Why were you so insolent with gods  
in what you studied and when you explored  
the moon's abode? Chase them off, hit them,  
throw things at them—for all sorts of reasons,  
but most of all for their impiety.

1920

*[Strepsiades and Xanthias chase Socrates and the students off the stage and exit after them]*

CHORUS LEADER

Lead us on out of here. Away!  
We've had enough of song and dance today.

*[The Chorus exits]*

## CLOUDS

### A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATOR

Ian Johnston is a retired instructor (now a Research Associate) at Vancouver Island University, Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada. His translations include the following:

Aeschylus, *Oresteia*  
Aristophanes, *Birds*  
Aristophanes, *Clouds*  
Aristophanes, *Frogs*  
Aristophanes, *Knights*  
Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*  
Aristophanes, *Peace*  
Cuvier, *Discourse on Revolutionary Upheavals on the Surface of the Earth*  
Descartes, *Discourse on Method*  
Euripides, *Bacchae*  
Euripides, *Medea*  
Euripides, *Orestes*  
Homer, *Iliad* (Complete and Abridged)  
Homer, *Odyssey* (Complete and Abridged)  
Kant, *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*  
Kant, *On Perpetual Peace*  
Lucretius, *The Nature of Things*  
Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*  
Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy*  
Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*  
Nietzsche, *Uses and Abuses of History*  
Sophocles, *Ajax*  
Sophocles, *Antigone*  
Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*  
Sophocles, *Philoctetes*

A number of these translations have been published by Richer Resources Publications, and some of these titles are available as recordings from Naxos Audiobooks.

Ian Johnston maintains a website at the following address:

[records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/index.htm](http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/index.htm).

For comments and questions, please contact Ian Johnston (at [ian.johnston@viu.ca](mailto:ian.johnston@viu.ca)).