

ARISTOPHANES
Lysistrata and Other Plays

THE ACHARNIANS,
THE CLOUDS, LYSISTRATA

Translated with an Introduction and Notes by
ALAN H. SOMMERSTEIN

REVISED EDITION

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Preface to *The Clouds*

In the 420s BC Greece, and in particular Athens, was in an intellectual ferment. New forms of education were being developed; fundamental questions were being asked about ethics and values; teachers of rhetoric were training their pupils to argue for and against the same thesis with equal persuasiveness; scientific explanations of natural phenomena were challenging traditional assumptions that they were the acts of gods; the very existence of the gods and the possibility of objective knowledge were being called into doubt. Inevitably it was in general the young and impressionable who were most likely to take up the new thinking with enthusiasm. Their fathers, brought up in the old ways, might reject the new ideas simply because they were new, or might very rationally fear that a society not built on a firm foundation of accepted values would lack cohesion and could easily slide into anarchy or despotism – or be defeated, and possibly destroyed, by its external enemies, who, being Spartan, would certainly not be obliging enough to handicap themselves in the same way. And who were these men who made a living as teachers of this new learning – the sophists, as they were called?¹ What were they, some felt, but quacks and spongers, taking money from the gullible for corrupting them intellectually and morally?

Aristophanes was himself a man of the new generation, and at least one of his rivals saw him as being strongly influenced by the new learning (see Introduction, p. xxi); but in this respect, as in others, his comedies take the traditionalist point of view. In his very first play, *The Banqueters*, he had dramatized a contrast, and a contest, between two brothers, one with a tra-

ditional and the other with a sophistic education; and in *The Clouds*, produced at the City Dionysia of 423, he returns to this theme, as a rustic father and his cityfied son come into contact with the new learning in all its major aspects – natural science, rhetoric, the new morality and the new irreligion.

It made good dramatic sense for all these tendencies to be embodied in a single individual. Aristophanes could have created, if he had wanted to, a fictitious composite of the leading ‘sophists’ of the day – Protagoras, Antiphon, Diogenes of Apollonia, and others. Many, indeed, would argue that that was precisely what he did. But the tradition of Old Comedy was that major satirical targets should be given the identities, and usually the names, of actual contemporaries (like Lamachus in *The Acharnians* and Cleon [‘Paphlagon’] in *The Knights*); and Aristophanes gave his fictitious composite the identity and the name of Socrates.

Socrates is now widely thought of as the father of Western philosophy, a status he owes principally to the literary, dramatic and intellectual genius of his follower Plato. There is no evidence that his contemporaries in general regarded him as a man of any exceptional merit at all. He was known to be interested in ethical issues; he was a tireless interrogator who would not let any assertion pass unquestioned, no matter how widely believed it might be; he showed a striking disregard for the accepted comforts and pleasures of life, to the extent that he must often have been fairly smelly (Plato confirms, what we might otherwise have supposed to be a comic slander, that he rarely bathed or wore shoes). He had attracted to himself a significant number of young men of wealthy families who discussed intellectual questions with him and each other, listened to his conversations and sometimes tried to imitate his methods themselves. In late 424 he had come to public notice in another way, by having behaved with notable courage during the Athenian retreat after the battle of Delium – typically not noticing or caring if his confident bearing was interpreted by his comrades as evidence of a disdainful attitude towards them. If for this reason he was particularly unpopular in the winter of 424/3, it may help to explain why he was made a significant figure in *two* of the

comedies produced the following spring (the other was *Comus*, by Ameipsias). On the other hand, there is no good evidence that he questioned the existence or power of the gods, or neglected (or encouraged others to neglect) their traditional worship,² nor that he taught rhetoric, nor that he propounded specific doctrines about natural phenomena as he is made to do in *The Clouds*. Why then does Aristophanes in this play attribute to him all those characteristics of *other* intellectuals that were widely regarded as subversive?

In the first place, once he had decided to have a single major sophist as a central figure in his play, and to identify him with an actual person, Socrates was the obvious choice. Most of the (other) leading sophists³ were not Athenians, and even those who were (like Antiphon), taught mainly in private and had public reputations based more on hearsay (or, for the minority who read books, on their writings) than on first-hand knowledge. Socrates was always in public places; his lifestyle was in certain respects unconventional, as we have noted; and (if we are to believe Plato) his appearance had something of the comically ugly about it. In the second place, while *questioning* received wisdom is a very different thing from *denying* it, there were undoubtedly many in Socrates’ time, as there are now, who did not understand the difference – and who assumed, furthermore, that anyone who questioned/denied *some* traditional beliefs probably rejected *all* of them. And (if, again, we are to trust Plato) Socrates, while constantly questioning the beliefs of others, generally avoided any explicit statement of his own beliefs. It could plausibly be argued that of all the intellectuals of the late fifth century, he would seem to the outsider to be the one who excelled in negative criticism but had least to offer in the way of constructive ideas.

On the face of it, *The Clouds* might well seem to be, in the words of Sir Kenneth Dover, ‘an invitation to violence or repressive legislation’ against Socrates and other sophists. In fact it is unlikely that Aristophanes or anyone else, in 423, dreamed that it might have such consequences. Euripides too was portrayed in comedy as an atheist and a subverter of morality, but he never seems to have had any difficulty in getting

a chorus for the City Dionysia when he wanted one. When, twenty-four years later, Socrates was prosecuted for 'corrupting the young' and for 'not believing in the City's gods but in other strange deities', it is likely that the prosecution was in reality a political one. Several of Socrates' close associates had been among the thirty-man junta who had tyrannized over Athens in 404/3, among them the junta's most extremist leader, Critias; and the many traditional practices which he had been known to question had apparently included the Athenian democratic practice of appointing most magistrates by lot. But to question a specific political institution was not an offence; and even if a jury could have been persuaded that Socrates had incited Critias and others to overthrow the democracy in 404, such a prosecution would have been barred by the amnesty to which every citizen had sworn when democracy was restored.⁷ Accordingly a charge was laid under the conveniently vague rubric of 'impiety' – and backed by exploiting, among other things, the jurors' recollections of *The Clouds* and other comedies. The object was probably no more than to frighten Socrates into leaving Athens; the main author of Socrates' death was Socrates himself.⁴ And if this was true in 399, certainly in 423 no one could have imagined that this man, tiresome and useless eccentric though he was, would one day be put to death for it.⁵

In any case, Socrates is hardly the only unsympathetic character in this play – even leaving aside the figure of Wrong,⁶ the personification of the immoralism allegedly taught in his school. The initial predicament of the play's central character, Strepsiadēs (whose name means 'Twister'), may be more his misfortune than his fault (though it was proverbially foolish to marry a wife accustomed to a lifestyle beyond the husband's resources), but he is ready and indeed eager to evade the payment of just debts by dishonest means (the chorus twice describe him as 'in love' with wickedness). His son Pheidippides is no model of sonship or piety even before he goes to Socrates' school; in the very first scene of the play we see him not only disobeying his father but breaking an oath,⁷ and we already know that his extravagance has been a major cause of his father's financial plight.⁸ Wrong's antagonist, Right, the champion of the old

education, has an erotic interest in young boys which is overdone even for fifth-century Athens, particularly in the case of one who holds himself out as a teacher.⁹ And the Clouds, as they in the end admit, act as *agents provocateurs*: perceiving that Strepsiades and Socrates are minded to follow the path of vice, they positively and explicitly encourage them both to stay on that path, in order that they may fall over the cliff at the end of it, as they duly do. That, to be sure, is for fifth-century Greeks a recognized pattern of divine behaviour; but it is a tragic, not a comic, pattern.¹⁰ Indeed, the plot of *The Clouds* as a whole is tragic in basic structure, though not of course in its detailed execution: two criminal enterprises (Strepsiades' plan to practise dishonesty, and Socrates' to teach it) interact in such a fashion that, partly through divine action, they recoil on their originators – though others (notably the innocent if rather ludicrous Creditors) also suffer along the way.

The Clouds, in fact, is an unusually dark comedy, and it was apparently too dark for its original audience. When it was produced at the City Dionysia of 423, it proved a flop.¹¹ The winner was Cratinus, who had been ridiculed in *The Acharnians* and *The Knights* as a senile, smelly, incontinent drunkard, but who now triumphed with *The Wicker Flask*, a brilliant satire on . . . himself. As we can see from the parabasis of *The Wasps* (lines 1016–17, 1043–50), Aristophanes bitterly resented this failure, and in or about 419 he set to work revising the play, apparently with a view to a second production. The revision, however, was never completed, possibly because the Archon refused to grant a chorus for what was, after all, not a new play; the revised play was never produced in Athens, and indeed the script as we have it could not have been staged under the rules of the Athenian comic competition¹² and contains passages that are inconsistent with each other,¹³ though the inconsistencies do not affect the plot. There survive about a dozen quotations from the 'first' *Clouds* (two of which are identical with passages in the surviving text),¹⁴ and they tend to support the statement in one of the play's ancient headnotes (hypotheses) that while there were many minor differences between the two versions,¹⁵ the only passages to have undergone fundamental change are

(i) the speech in the parabasis (lines 518–62) in which the failure of the original production is discussed, (ii) the debate between Right and Wrong (or more probably some part of it), and (iii) the ending ('where the school of Socrates is burned' – it is not clear how early this section is to be taken as commencing).¹⁶ In a modern production, it can safely be assumed that the various rough edges will not be noticed.

NOTES

1. The word *sophistes* originally meant merely an actual or professed expert; but since every field of traditional expertise already had a specific designation, this non-specific term came to designate those who claimed to be expert not in any traditional field but in the new intellectual pursuits. By the 420s it had already acquired a derogatory tone (see, e.g., line 331).
2. He may well have questioned the truth of certain *myths* (for example, those telling of conflicts among the gods), but there was nothing improper about this: no two poets narrating or dramatizing a myth ever did so in quite the same way, and Pindar, that arch-praiser of traditional aristocratic virtues, more than once explicitly condemns a well-established myth as immoral.
3. There is little reason to doubt that most of Socrates' contemporaries, if asked whether he was a sophist, would have replied that he was; over half a century after his death a speaker in an Athenian court refers offhandedly to 'Socrates the sophist' (Aeschines, *Against Timarchus* 173).
4. He could have saved himself by leaving Athens before his trial; or by taking a more conciliatory attitude towards the jury during it, especially when arguing against the prosecution's demand for the death penalty; or by escaping from prison during the interval of a month between his conviction and execution.
5. The only person known to have been sentenced to death in classical Athens purely for religious unorthodoxy is Diagoras of Melos (alluded to in line 830), who seems to have gone beyond theoretical arguments and attacked specific religious observances, notably the Eleusinian Mysteries.
6. I use Dover's names Right and Wrong for the two characters who in the Greek text are called, literally, 'the Superior Argument' and 'the Inferior Argument'.

7. Not every oath in the dialogue of Greek comedy is necessarily to be taken at its full value, but we are surely meant to notice the contradiction when Pheidippides first promises, with an oath 'by Dionysus', to do whatever it is his father wants him to do (lines 90–91), and then, seventeen lines later, having heard what his father's request is, says, with an oath 'by Dionysus', that he will not comply at any price.
8. Note that a man who had squandered his inherited property was disqualified from speaking in the Assembly (like, e.g., those who had assaulted a parent, thrown away their shield in battle, or engaged in male prostitution). Pheidippides' offence is in one way even worse, since he is squandering property which he has *not* yet inherited.
9. That Athenians were concerned about the possibility of sexual exploitation of boys by their teachers is evident from the existence in the fourth century of a law forbidding teachers to open their schools before sunrise or keep them open after sunset (Aeschines, *Against Timarchus* 10).
10. Given lapidary expression by the ghost of Darius in Aeschylus' *Persians* (line 742), in reference to the disaster that has befallen his son Xerxes: 'When a man is eager for something, the god lends him a hand.'
11. How bad a flop we do not know for sure, since it is uncertain how many comedies were produced at this festival (see Introduction, note 37). If there were three, *The Clouds* finished third; if there were five, it may well have come fourth or fifth.
12. In lines 885–92, as the text stands, five actors are required (for Socrates, Strepsiades, Right, Wrong and Pheidippides). Had the revised play ever been produced, there would doubtless have been a choral song between what are now lines 888 and 889.
13. In the *parabasis*, one speech (lines 575–94) urges the Athenians to punish Cleon, with reference to events of 425 and 424, while in another (lines 553–9) mention is made of several plays of which the earliest, Eupolis' *Marikas*, is known to have been produced after Cleon's death. Outside the *parabasis*, however, the surviving text contains nothing that needs to be taken as a reference or allusion to any event later than spring 423.
14. The remaining ten have a combined length of thirty-five Greek words.
15. In particular, one or two self-contained passages such as choral songs seem to have been deleted and had not yet been replaced by new material at the time work on the revision was abandoned. What was probably once a complete second *parabasis*, comprising two songs and two speeches, is now represented by a minute snatch of lyric and a single speech (lines 1113–30).

SCENE: For the time being, an indeterminate space, possibly to be thought of as the courtyard of Strepsiades' house. Two men are lying asleep – or rather, one, Pheidippides, is sleeping soundly under an enormous weight of blankets, while his father Strepsiades is restlessly tossing and turning. Finally he abandons all attempts at sleep, and sits up.

STREPSIADES: O Lord Zeus, how long the night is! Will it never end? When will it be day? Come to think of it, I heard the cock crow ages ago. And the servants are still snoring! They'd never have dared to in the old days. Damn this war! One can't even discipline one's own slaves.¹ And what about this dutiful son of mine? He never wakes up before sunrise either; just farts merrily away wrapped up in five or six blankets. Well, there's nothing for it: let's cover up and snore too. |He lies down again and tries to sleep, but soon gives up. |It's no good, I can't. I'm being bitten all over. Not by bugs – by horses and bills and debts, on account of this son of mine, him and his long hair² and his riding and his chariot and pair. Even his dreams are all about horses. Result, every time the date gets past the twentieth, I'm fairly dying with fear as the interest gets ready to take another step up.³ |Calling through the door behind him] Boy! |A SLAVE appears.] Light a lamp and bring my accounts here. I want to see how many people I owe money to and how much the interest comes to.

[The SLAVE goes out, and presently returns with a lamp and a number of waxed tablets. He gives STREPSIADES

the tablets, and stays holding the lamp for him to read by.]
Let me see now, what have we got? To Pasiás, twelve hundred drachmas.⁴ What was that for? Why did I borrow it? Oh yes, when I bought the koppa-bred horse. Heavens, I might just as well have copped it right then and there!⁵

25 PHEIDIPPIDES [*in his sleep*]: Watch it, Philon, you're cheating. Stop cutting across me.

STREPSIADES: You see? That's what's ruined me. Even in his sleep it's racing, racing, racing.

PHEIDIPPIDES: How many laps is the war-chariot race?

30 STREPSIADES: Not as many bends as you've driven your father round! [*Looking at his accounts again*] Now what was the next one after Pasiás? Mm – three hundred for a small foot-board and a pair of wheels.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Let the horse have a roll, groom, and take him home.

STREPSIADES: A roll! *You've* been rolling all right – in *my* money! I've already got court judgments against me, and there are creditors threatening to seize my goods in lieu of interest! [STREPSIADES' voice has now risen so much that it wakes his son up.]

35 PHEIDIPPIDES: Really, dad, what's wrong with you, tossing and twisting about all night long?

STREPSIADES: I'm getting bitten by a bailiff, or something, in the bedclothes.

PHEIDIPPIDES: With all respect, could you let me get a bit of sleep? [*He lies down as before.*]

40 STREPSIADES: Fine, you do that. But just remember that all my debts will be yours one day! Gods, I wish I could strangle the matchmaker who put the idea in my head of marrying your mother! I had a marvellous life in the country, not caring about etiquette or tidiness or washing, rich in bees and sheep and olives. And then I married this city girl, the niece of Megacles the son of Megacles, no less, a stuck-up, spoilt little Coesyra of a woman!⁶ On our wedding night, I went to bed
45 smelling of new wine, drying-racks, fleeces and affluence – and she of perfume, saffron, french kisses, spending, over-eating and erotic rituals. Don't get the idea she was idle,
50

though. She did work at clothes-making – got through a great deal of wool – until I showed her this cloak of mine and said [*holding up his threadbare cloak – under which he has been sleeping – and revealing a distinctly flaccid phallus*], 'Missus, you're wearing away my resources!'⁷

[*The lamp held by the slave goes out.*]

SLAVE: The lamp's out of oil, sir.

STREPSIADES: Well, did I ask you to use the thirsty one? Come here – I'll make you regret it.

SLAVE [*evading him*]: Why should I? [*He disappears through the door.*]

STREPSIADES [*calling after him*]: Because you put in such a fat wick, that's why. [*During the next few lines he is getting up and putting on the cloak.*] Well, when me and my [*with heavy sarcasm*] good lady had this boy, we had a great row about what to call him. She insisted on getting a horse into the name, something ending in *-hippus* or the like – Xanthippus, Chaerippus, Callippides⁸ – while I wanted to name him Pheidonides after his grandad. Well, we argued for quite some time, but in the end we came to terms and settled for Pheidippides.⁹ Then she used to hold him in her arms and say, 'When you're a big boy and drive in procession to the Acropolis in your chariot, wearing a lovely smooth robe, like your Uncle Megacles . . .', until I took him and said, 'When you drive the goats home from the fells, like your daddy did before you, wearing a leather smock . . .' But it was no good. He never took any notice of anything I said, and now he's brought the family fortunes down with *galloping consumption*.¹⁰ Well, anyway, I've been hunting all night for a way out, and I've found one – a narrow path, but a marvellous one. It'll lead me out of the wood, if I can only get that boy to help. But I need to wake him up first. Now what's the sweetest way to wake him up? Hmm . . . [*Bending over* PHEIDIPPIDES; *in sugary tones*] Pheidippides! Pheidippides, darling!

80 PHEIDIPPIDES [*waking up, and sluggishly rising*]: Whar-risiddad?

STREPSIADES: I want you to kiss me and put your right hand in mine.¹¹

PHEIDIPPIDES [*doing so*]: There you are. What's up?

STREPSIADES: Tell me, do you love me?

PHEIDIPPIDES [*pointing to a statue near the door*]: Yes, by Poseidon here, the Lord of horses.

85 STREPSIADES: No Lord of horses, *please!* He's the god that's brought all this trouble on me. Well, my boy, if you really love me from your heart, will you do something for me?

PHEIDIPPIDES: What do you want me to do for you?

STREPSIADES: To change your ways, right now, and go and take the course of study I'm going to suggest.

90 PHEIDIPPIDES: Come on, now, what are you *asking* for?

STREPSIADES: You'll do it?

PHEIDIPPIDES: I will, by Dionysus.

[*By now the remaining bedclothes have been removed, and the two men are out in the orchestra. We can imagine them, therefore, as being in the street. Behind them, we now perceive, are two houses. One is their home.* STREPSIADES *points to the other.*]

STREPSIADES: Look over this way. You see that nice little door and that nice little house?

PHEIDIPPIDES: Yes. What is it, actually, father?

95 STREPSIADES: It is a Thinkery for intellectual souls.¹² That's where the people live who try to prove that the sky is like a baking-pot all round us, and we're the charcoal inside it.¹³ And if you pay them well, they can teach you how to win a case whether you're in the right or not.

100 PHEIDIPPIDES: Who are these people?

STREPSIADES: I don't quite remember their name. They're very fine reflective intellectuals.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Yecch! I know the villains. You mean those pale-faced bare-footed quacks such as that wretched Socrates and Chaerephon.

105 STREPSIADES: Now, now, quiet there, don't talk so childishly! If [*emotionally*] you care at all whether your father gets his daily bread, do please forget about racing and go and join them.

PHEIDIPPIDES: By Dionysus, no, not if you gave me all Leogoras' pheasants.¹⁴

STREPSIADES [*desperately*]: My most beloved son – I beg of you – do go and study with them! 110

PHEIDIPPIDES: What do you want me to learn?

STREPSIADES: They say they have two Arguments in there – Right and Wrong, they call them – and one of them, Wrong, can always win its case even when justice is against it. Well, if you can learn this Wrongful Argument, then of all these debits I've run into because of you, I needn't pay anyone an obol!¹⁵ of them ever.

PHEIDIPPIDES: I'm not going to do it. How could I ever look my cavalry friends in the eye again, with a face looking as though all the colour had been scraped off it? 120

STREPSIADES: Then, holy Demeter! you'll never eat anything of mine again, not you nor any of your damn thoroughbreds.¹⁶ I'll throw you out of my house and you can go to hell.

PHEIDIPPIDES: No, to Uncle Megacles, if necessary. He won't leave me horseless. But actually, *this* is where I'm going [*pointing towards his own house*], and I couldn't care less what you say! [*He goes inside.*] 125

STREPSIADES [*to himself*]: That was a hard knock, but I'm not going to take it lying down. So may it please the gods, I shall go to the Thinkery and get taught there myself. [*Hesitating*] But how can I? I'm old and slow and forgetful; how can I study all this logic-chopping and hair-splitting? [*Emboldened again*] But I've got to. No more dilly-dallying; let me knock. [*He knocks on the school door, and calls in sugary tones*] Boy! Boyeece! 130

STUDENT [*from inside*]: Go to blazes! [*Opening the door*] Who's been making all that racket?

STREPSIADES: Strepsiades is my name, son of Pheidon, from Cicyna.¹⁷

STUDENT: What kind of fool are you? Do you realize that by your violent and unphilosophical kicking of the door¹⁸ you have rendered an important discovery totally abortive? 135

STREPSIADES: Do forgive me; I live a long way off in the country. But do tell me, what was it that aborted?

STUDENT [*mysteriously*]: It is not permitted to divulge it to non-members of the institute. 140

STREPSIADES: Well, that's all right, you can tell me. I've come to the Thinkery in order to *be* a member.

STUDENT [*coming out and closing the door*]: Very well, but you must treat this as a holy secret.¹⁹ Socrates, a moment ago, asked Chaerephon how many of its own feet a flea could jump. One of them had just bitten Chaerephon's eyebrow and jumped over on to Socrates' head.

STREPSIADES: And how did he measure it?

STUDENT: In a very elegant way. He melted some wax and put the flea's feet into it, so that when it set the flea had a stylish pair of slippers on. And then he took the slippers off and used them to measure out the distance [*illustrating by taking a step or two, toe touching heel*].

STREPSIADES: Lord Zeus, what a subtle intellect!

STUDENT: Like to hear about another of Socrates' clever ideas?

STREPSIADES: I beg you, yes, please tell me.

STUDENT: Chaerephon of Sphettus²⁰ once asked Socrates whether he was of the opinion that gnats produced their hum by way of the mouth or the rear end.

STREPSIADES: So what was his opinion about the gnat?

STUDENT: 'The intestinal passage of the gnat', he said, 'is very narrow, and consequently the wind is forced to go straight through to the rear end. And then the arsehole, being an orifice forming the exit from this narrow passage, makes a noise owing to the force of this wind.'

STREPSIADES: So a gnat's arsehole is like a trumpet. How gutterly marvellous! I can see that defending a lawsuit successfully is going to be dead easy for someone who has such precise knowledge of the guts of gnats.

STUDENT: Then the day before yesterday he was robbed of a great thought by a lizard.

STREPSIADES: How on earth did that happen?

STUDENT: Well, he was doing some research on the movements and revolutions of the moon, gazing upwards, open-mouthed, and then this gecko shat on him from the ceiling²¹ in the dark.

STREPSIADES [*laughing heartily*]: Oh, I liked that one – a gecko shitting in Socrates' face!

STUDENT: And then yesterday we found we had nothing to eat at dinner time. 175

STREPSIADES: Well then, what trick did he pull off?

STUDENT: He sprinkled a little ash on the table, bent a skewer to make a pair of compasses, and then . . . nicked somebody's cloak while he was in the gym wrestling.²²

STREPSIADES: And we still admire old Thales?²³ Come on, hurry up, open the door, and let me see Socrates right away! I'm bursting to learn! Open the door! 180

[*The STUDENT opens the school door. A wheeled platform is rolled out, on which are a number of other STUDENTS, thin, pale and sickly looking, all motionless in attitudes presently to be described, as if utterly absorbed in scientific thought.*]

STREPSIADES: In Heracles' name, where did you catch these creatures?

STUDENT: What are you so surprised about? What did you think they were? 185

STREPSIADES: Spartan prisoners from Pylos,²⁴ if you ask me. Why on earth are those ones [*pointing to one group of students*] staring at the ground?

STUDENT: They are doing research on things that are under the earth.

STREPSIADES: Oh, looking for edible bulbs, you mean! Well, you don't need to search for them any more; I know where you can find lovely big ones. But what are that lot up to [*pointing*]? They're completely doubled up! 190

STUDENT: They are investigating the lowest reaches of the underworld.

STREPSIADES: So why is their arsehole looking at the sky?

STUDENT: It's learning to do astronomy all by itself. [*To the other students*] Go inside; what'll *he* say if he sees you out here? 195

STREPSIADES: No, not yet! Can't they stay a bit? I want to tell them about a little problem I have.

STUDENT: Can't do that. Mustn't stay too long outside in the fresh air.

[*The other STUDENTS go inside. At the rear of the platform*

can now be seen a map and a number of mathematical and scientific instruments.]

200 STREPSIADES [examining some of the instruments]: What on earth are these things?

STUDENT: This is for astronomy.

STREPSIADES: And this?

STUDENT: Geometry.

STREPSIADES: Geometry? What's that useful for?

STUDENT: Well, measuring out land,²⁵ for instance.

STREPSIADES: You mean in an overseas settlement?²⁶

STUDENT: Any land you want.

205 STREPSIADES: What a marvellous idea! A really democratic, beneficial invention!

STUDENT: And this, you see, is a map of the whole world. Look, here's Athens.

STREPSIADES [inspecting the map]: How do you make that out? Doesn't look like Athens to me; I can't see any jurymen on their benches.

STUDENT: No, really, this area is Attica all right.

STREPSIADES: Then where is my village, Cicyna?

210 STUDENT: It's there.²⁷ And look, here's the island of Euboea, lying stretched out opposite us, all along here.

STREPSIADES: Yes, we stretched it flat all right, me and Pericles and the rest of us.²⁸ Where's Sparta?

STUDENT [pointing]: Right here.

215 STREPSIADES: Too near, too near! You'd better have another thought or two about that – get it to be a very long way away from us.

STUDENT: It's not possible.

STREPSIADES [raising his stick]: Isn't it? Then take that! [But before he can strike the Student, SOCRATES swings into view, airborne, like a god in tragedy, standing on a board suspended by four cords from the jib of a crane.] Who in heaven's name is that man hanging from the meathook?

STUDENT: It's him!

STREPSIADES: Him? Who's him?

STUDENT: Socrates.

STREPSIADES [reverentially]: Socrates! Could you give him a good shout, please?

STUDENT: No, I haven't got time, you do it yourself. [Exit 220 hastily and fearfully into the school.]

STREPSIADES [gazing up at Socrates; in sugary tones]: Socrates! Socrates, darling!

SOCRATES [godlike]: Why call'st thou me, O creature of a day? STREPSIADES: Well, for a start, I'd very much like to know what you're doing up there.

SOCRATES: I am walking upon air and attacking the mystery of 225 the sun.

STREPSIADES: Well, if you *must* attack the Mysteries²⁹ of the gods, why can't you do so on the ground?

SOCRATES: Why, for accurate investigation of meteorological phenomena it is indispensable to get one's thoughts into a state of *suspension* and mix its minute particles into the air 230 which they so closely resemble. If I had remained on the ground and investigated the upper regions from there, I would never have made any discoveries – the earth exercises too powerful an attraction upon the moisture contained in thought. The same thing occurs in the case of cress.³⁰

STREPSIADES [baffled]: I don't know what you mean, all this 235 about thought attracting moisture to cress. Do come down to me, Socrates darling, so you can teach me what I've come to learn.

SOCRATES [as he is lowered to ground level]: And what *have* you come to learn?

STREPSIADES: I want to be made an orator. Interest bills and 240 heartless creditors are laying me waste with fire, the sword and distress warrants.

SOCRATES: How did you manage to get so much in debt, unawares?

STREPSIADES: I was laid low by a vicious attack of horse-fever. But anyway, I want you to teach me one of your two Arguments – the one that always pays off and never pays up. It 245 doesn't matter what fees you charge; I'm prepared to swear by the gods that I'll pay them.

SOCRATES: What do you mean, swear by the gods? The first thing you'll have to learn is that with us the gods are no longer current.

STREPSIADES [*confused*]: Then what is the currency you swear by? Iron coins like they have at Byzantium?

250 SOCRATES: Do you want to learn for yourself the real, plain truth about religion?

STREPSIADES: Why, yes, if that's possible.

SOOCRATES: And to talk face to face with *our* divinities, the Clouds?

STREPSIADES: Definitely.

SOOCRATES [*motioning him towards the vacant platform*]: Then please sit on the sacred bed.

255 STREPSIADES [*doing so*]: There you are.

SOOCRATES [*giving him a wreath of unattractive-looking vegetation*]: Now put this on your head.

STREPSIADES [*alarmed*]: What's this for? Socrates, please, don't go and make a sacrifice of me, like that Athamas.³¹

SOOCRATES: No, this is just part of our normal initiation ceremony.

STREPSIADES: But what good will it do me?

260 SOOCRATES [*picking up a bag*]: You'll become a really smooth, smarmy talker – the finest flower in the oratorical garden.

Now don't move. [*He sprinkles flour from the bag over Strepsiaides.*]

STREPSIADES: Did you say *become* fine flour, or be *plastered* with it?!

SOOCRATES:

Keep silence now, and hear my prayer.

O Lord, O King, O boundless Air,

On whom the earth supported rides,

O Ether bright, and you besides

Who make the thunder roar so loud,

You awesome Goddesses of Cloud,

O hearken to your Thinker here:

Arise and in the sky appear!

265

STREPSIADES [*hastily pulling his cloak over his head*]:

Not yet, not yet, don't let them soak

Me till I'm covered with my cloak.

Why was I such a silly chap

That I left home without a cap?

SOOCRATES:

Come, glorious Clouds, display your power.

[*Turning successively to the four points of the compass*]³²

Whether in father Ocean's bower

You join the Nymphs in sacred rites,

Or on Olympus' snow-swept heights

You sit, or draw with pails of gold

From Egypt's streams, or brave the cold

Of Mimas' peak (if there you be)

Or round Macotis' inland sea:

Where'er you be, my prayer hear,

Accept my offering, and appear!

[*He pours a little incense on the altar in front of his door, and sets light to it. After a short silence, the CHORUS are heard singing in the distance.*]

270

CHORUS:

Let us rise, we Clouds eternal,

Shining bright with radiant dew,

From the roaring Ocean's bosom

To the sky,³³ the world to view.

275

Let us see the distant mountains

And the holy earth below,

Where we irrigate the tillage

And the babbling rivers flow,

280

While far off the breakers thunder [*roll of thunder*]

'Neath the sun's unwearied rays:

Shake the rainy mist from off you

And to earth direct your gaze.

285

290

SOCRATES: Almighty Clouds, you heard my prayer indeed. [*To Strepsiades*] Did you hear their voice, and the awe-inspiring bellow of thunder that accompanied it?

STREPSIADES: Yes, and I revere them immensely—so much that in response to that thunder I'm wanting to make a great big noise down below,³⁴ they make me shake so with fear. If it's lawful—well, actually, even if it's not—I need a *crap!*

295

SOCRATES: No buffoonery, please; you're not acting in a comedy now! Keep silence; there is a great swarm of divinities in musical movement.

CHORUS [*nearer*]:

Maidens of Rain, come now where Pallas

Rules the loveliest land on earth,

Rich and shining land of Cecrops

Full of men of valiant worth;

300

Where the initiated worship

At the great Eleusis shrine,

Through its opened gates beholding

Secrets of the world divine;

Where stand lofty, beauteous temples

Full of gifts beyond all price;

Where no season lacks its share of

Feast, procession, sacrifice;

305

Where they hold to Dionysus

Joyous feast at start of spring,

Hear the pipes and hear the chorus

In melodious contest sing.³⁵

310

STREPSIADES: Do tell me, Socrates, who are these ladies who sing so majestically? They're not some kind of female heroes, are they?³⁶

315

SOCRATES: No, indeed. They are the celestial Clouds, the patron goddesses of the layabout. From them we get our intelligence,

our dialectic, our reason, our fantasy and all our argumentative talents.

STREPSIADES: No wonder that when I hear their voice, my soul feels it could fly! I want to be a quibbler! I want to split hairs! I want to be able to deflate my opponent with a pointed little sound-bite and bring arguments to undermine his! If there's any way to do it, I do so want to see them face to face!

320

[*At this point the first of the CHORUS begin to appear at the top of the auditorium; during the following dialogue they file down silently along the gangways, form up at the bottom, and enter the orchestra. They have the faces of young women; only their costumes suggest anything cloudlike.*]³⁷

SOCRATES [*pointing towards the top of the auditorium*]: Look over there, towards Mount Parnes.³⁸ I can see them coming quietly down now.

STREPSIADES: Where, where? Show me.

SOCRATES [*pointing lower and to his left*]: Yes, here they come, a whole host of them, through the glens and the woods—
[*noticing that STREPSIADES is staring at the empty sky*] no, here, a bit to the side.

325

STREPSIADES [*looking in the indicated direction, but too late to see the Chorus*]: What are you talking about? I can't see a thing.

SOCRATES [*pointing to where the CHORUS are forming up in ranks*]: There in the entryway!

STREPSIADES: Ah yes, I can just see them now.

SOCRATES: So you should, unless you've got pumpkins where your eyes should be.

STREPSIADES: Yes, I do—and how wonderful! The whole place is full of them.

SOCRATES: And you mean you never knew, never thought, that they were goddesses?

STREPSIADES: Heavens, no—I thought they were mist, dew, vapour, that sort of thing.

330

SOCRATES: You're obviously not aware that they give sustenance to a vast tribe of sophists, high-powered prophets,³⁹

teachers of medicine, long-haired idlers with fancy signet-rings – and especially the airy quacks who write those convoluted dithyrambs. They're very happy to sustain *them* in idleness, because they bring clouds so much into their poetry.

335 STREPSIADES: Ah, that accounts for all that about 'the fearsome advance of watery clouds edged with twists of radiance' and 'locks of the hundred-headed Typhon' and 'conflagrating squalls' and 'crook-taloned air-floating birds of the airy sea' and 'showers of moisture from the dewy clouds'. And for that rubbish they get feasted⁴⁰ on gorgeous slices of barracuda and the avian flesh of thrushes!

340 SOCRATES: All thanks to these ladies, and quite right too.

STREPSIADES: Tell me, though, if they really are clouds, how come they look so human, so much like women? The other clouds – I mean the real ones – don't look like that at all.

SOCRATES: Oh, how *do* they look?

STREPSIADES: Well, it's hard to say exactly, but they sort of look like fleeces laid out to dry, and certainly not in the least like women. I mean, *these* ones have *noses*!

345 SOCRATES: Well, can I ask you a question or two?

STREPSIADES: Go right ahead.

SOCRATES: You've looked at the sky sometimes, haven't you, and seen a cloud shaped like a centaur, or a leopard, or a wolf, or a bull?

STREPSIADES: Yes; so what?

SOCRATES: They can take any shape they fancy. So if they see one of those shaggy long-haired savages like the son of Xenophantus,⁴¹ they make fun of his mania by turning themselves into centaurs.

STREPSIADES: And if they catch sight of someone who helps himself to public money, like Simon,⁴² what do they do?

SOCRATES: They expose him by turning into wolves.

STREPSIADES: Ah, now I understand why they looked like deer yesterday! They must have seen that great coward Cleonymus, the one who dropped his shield!

355 SOCRATES: That's right; and now, you see, they've just seen Cleisthenes,⁴³ so they've turned into women!

STREPSIADES [*to the Chorus*]: Then hail to you, mighty Ladies; could you – if you ever do, do this – could you, Queens of the Universe, show me the power of your heavenly voices?

CHORUS:

Hail, grey-headed seeker for language artistic,
And you, our high priest of fine twaddle!

For although, among specialists cosmologic,
Old Prodicus⁴⁴ has the best noddle,

Still we favour you greatly, because of the way
You swagger and glance with disdain,⁴⁵

Endure much derision, go barefoot all day,
And on our account act really vain.

STREPSIADES: Holy Earth, *what* a voice! How divine, how awesome, how fantastic!

365 SOCRATES: Yes, you know, these are the only real divinities; all the rest is bunkum.

STREPSIADES: What on earth do you mean? You don't think Olympic Zeus is a god?

SOCRATES: Zeus? Who's Zeus? What rubbish you talk! There is no Zeus!

STREPSIADES: What do you mean? Who makes the rain, then? That's the first thing I want to know.

370 SOCRATES [*indicating the Chorus*]: *They* do, of course, and I'll prove it to you very clearly. Have you ever seen it raining when the sky was blue? Surely Zeus, if it *was* him, would be able to send rain even when the Clouds were out of town!

STREPSIADES: You've certainly got a good point there – though I really did think before that rain was just Zeus pissing through a sieve. But tell me too, who makes the thunder that sends shivers up my spine?

SOCRATES: *They* do too, when they roll about.

375 STREPSIADES: You'll stop at nothing. How do you mean?

SOCRATES: When they are suspended in the sky, filled with a large quantity of water, they are necessarily compelled to move while full of rain, collide with each other, and owing to their weight they burst open with a crash.

STREPSIADES: Ah, but who compels them to move? *That's* got to be Zeus!

SOCRATES: No, it's a celestial vortex.

STREPSIADES: Vortex? I never knew that before. So Zeus is dead, and Vortex has taken his place on the throne! But you still haven't explained to me what causes the thunder.

SOCRATES: Didn't you hear? I said that it occurs when water-filled clouds collide with each other and owing to their density this makes a noise.

STREPSIADES: Who's going to believe that?

SOCRATES: You yourself are a living proof of it. You have, no doubt – say at the Panathenaea⁴⁶ – had a bit too much soup and got an upset stomach, and then suddenly a bit of wind has set it all rumbling?

STREPSIADES: That's just right. It makes a great nuisance of itself right away, and the soup crashes around and roars fearfully just like thunder. First quite quietly, 'prrrr prrrr', then it takes a step up, 'prrrr prrrr', and then when I crap, it really is a thundercrap, 'prrrrrrrrrrrrr!', just like they do [*indicating the Chorus*].

SOCRATES: Well, if a little tummy like yours can create a fart like that, is it surprising that from an infinity of air you can get a mighty roll of thunder?

STREPSIADES: I see; so *that's* why we talk about a 'thunderous fart'!⁴⁷ But how about the fiery thunderbolt? Where does it come from, to strike us and burn us to a cinder, or maybe singe us alive? Obviously that's Zeus' weapon against people who perjure themselves.

SOCRATES: You stupid, antiquated relic! If Zeus strikes down perjurers, why hasn't he burned up Simon, Cleonymus and Theorus? They're perjurers if anyone is! Instead of which, he strikes his own temple, and the holy headland of Sunium,⁴⁸ not to mention any number of his own sacred oak trees – or would you say *they* were guilty of perjury?

STREPSIADES: I don't know, but what you say does seem to make sense. What is the thunderbolt, in that case?

SOCRATES: When a dry wind rises to high altitude and is trapped inside a cloud, it blows the cloud up from within like a bladder

and so necessarily bursts it and rushes out with very high momentum owing to its density, which together with the accompanying friction causes it to self-ignite.

STREPSIADES: Why, that's exactly what happened to me once at the Diasia.⁴⁹ I was roasting a haggis for the family, I forgot to slit it, and it puffed itself up and then went off with a bang, spitting blood right in my eyes and giving me burns in the face.

SOCRATES: I assume, then, that in future you will recognize only the gods that we believe in, that is, Chaos, the Clouds and the Tongue?

STREPSIADES: I will never sacrifice or pour libation or burn incense to any other god. And if I met one in the street I wouldn't speak to him.⁵⁰

CHORUS:

O you who desire our high wisdom to learn,
What kudos in Athens and Greece you will earn –

If you're ready to toil, if your memory's good,
If you've got the ability to think,

If standing and walking don't tire you, nor
Deprivation of warmth, food and drink,
If exercise, wine and all follies you shun,

If your values are those of the smart,
Who worship success both in counsel and deed
And in deft oratorical art!

STREPSIADES: Well, I'm tough all right, and I do a lot of thinking – mostly of a sleepless night – and my digestion is used to strict economy and quite ready to dine off nothing but herbs; so have no fear – I meet your qualifications – here I am – get to work on me!

LEADER: Just tell us, then, what you want us to do for you. As a worshipper of ours and a seeker after wisdom, you will never come to grief.

STREPSIADES: It's only just one tiny little thing I want, holy Clouds: to be the best orator in Greece, by at least a hundred miles.

LEADER: No problem. In future there will be nobody who carries more resolutions in the Assembly than you do.

STREPSIADES: Not big political speeches, that's not what I'm after. I just want to be able to twist and turn my way through the thickets of the law and give my creditors the slip.

435 LEADER: Well, that's certainly not much to ask. We'll see you get it. Just put yourself confidently in the hands of our ministers here.

STREPSIADES: I'll trust you, and do it. I'm *necessarily compelled* to do it, by pedigree horses and a blasted pedigree wife!

440 So I give myself entirely to the school – I'll let them beat me, Starve me, freeze me, parch me, flay me, I don't care how they ill-treat me, If they teach me how to dodge my debts and get the reputation

445 Of the cleverest, slyest fox that ever baffled litigation. Let men call me glib, audacious, rash, a liar bold and nimble,

Lawcourt veteran, walking statute-book, a pest, a tinkling cymbal, Loathsome supple rogue, dissembler, sticky customer and bragger,

450 Villain, whipping-post and twister, or a logic-chopping nagger – Let them call me any name they choose, and over and above it

Let them chase me through each court, and I assure you that I'll love it!

455 If the Thinkery can make of me a real forensic winner, I don't mind if they take out my guts and serve them up for dinner!

CHORUS:

We can see you're not a coward, and you've got the disposition

460 To become, if taught by us, a great and famous rhetorician,

With an enviable lifestyle –

STREPSIADES:

Can I credit what you're telling? 465

CHORUS:

Yes, they'll sit all night with patience at the entrance to your dwelling

To consult you and to pick your brains and learn a method shifty 470

To escape from paying damages of forty grand or fifty; And by hiring out your intellect you'll gain a reputation That will reach right up to heaven and resound in every nation!⁵¹ 475

LEADER [*to Socrates*]: Time to take your pupil through the preliminaries. You must stir up his mind a bit, test his intelligence.

SOCRATES: Tell me, what kind of a mind do you have? I must know that in order to bring my latest artillery to bear on you. 480

STREPSIADES: Pardon? Are you planning to lay siege to me or something?

SOCRATES: No, only to ask you a few questions. Do you have a good memory?

STREPSIADES: Yes and no. Very good if somebody owes me something – very bad if I owe it to someone else. 485

SOCRATES: I see. Do you think you're a natural speaker?

STREPSIADES: A natural speaker, no. A natural swindler, yes.

SOCRATES: Well, how on earth do you expect to learn anything?

STREPSIADES: I'll manage.

SOCRATES: Very well, if I set a choice morsel of cosmology in front of you, you must make sure you snap it up. 490

STREPSIADES: I'm not going to be fed learning like a dog!

SOCRATES [*aside*]: Do Greeks come this stupid?⁵² [*To Strepsia-* *ades*] I fear, old sir, that in the course of your education physical punishment may be necessary. [*An anxiety strikes him*] Tell me, what do you do if someone hits you?

STREPSIADES: After getting hit I wait a short time, then raise a cry of assault, then wait a *very* short time, and then go to law. 495

SOCRATES: All right; take off your cloak, please. [*He lays his hand on StrepsiaDES' cloak.*]

STREPSIADES [*resisting, evidently on the assumption that he is about to be beaten*]: Why, what have I done wrong?
 SOCRATES: Nothing; only the rule here is, no outer garments in the inner sanctum.

STREPSIADES [*still clinging to the garment*]: What do you think I'm planning to do? Plant something inside and then accuse you of stealing it?⁵³

500 SOCRATES: Do stop talking nonsense and take it off! [STREPSIADES *reluctantly complies, leaving the cloak on the ground.*]

STREPSIADES: Tell me, Socrates, if I'm a really keen and hard-working student, which of your other pupils will I most resemble?

SOCRATES: Nobody will be able to tell you from Chaecephon.

STREPSIADES: I'll be one of the walking dead!

SOCRATES [*going to the school door, picking up Strep-siades' cloak on the way*]: Will you stop blethering and hurry up and come in here with me?

STREPSIADES: I will if you give me a honey-cake to feed the serpents with. I'm frightened of going down into that cave!⁵⁴

[STREPSIADES *moves gingerly towards the door. On reaching it, he hesitates to cross the threshold, fearfully eyeing the floor within.*]

SOCRATES: What are you peering down like that for? Get a move on!

[STREPSIADES *goes inside, followed by SOCRATES.*]

CHORUS:

510 Go in, brave pilgrim, and be sure
 That Fortune will be gracious,
 And blessing in profusion pour
 On your attempt audacious,
 Because, though far advanced in years,
 You do not find it scary
 To get a tincture of ideas
 Quite revolutionary!

515

LEADER [*addressing the audience*]:⁵⁵

I swear by Dionysus, him who nurtured me in youth, Athenians, that I'll tell you now the frank and simple truth. So may I be victorious and men think well of me,

520

I thought that you an audience intelligent would be, And also thought I'd never written any play so witty As this – and that is why I first produced it in this city. A lot of toil went into it – and yet my play retreated By vulgar works of vulgar men unworthily defeated. For your sake I took all these pains, and this was all your

525

gratitude!

But even so, I promise I will never take that attitude To you, or ever let you down. For since I earned the attention

And praise of certain men (whom it's a pleasure just to mention)

530 With *Model Son and Pansy Boy*,⁵⁶ which, like an unwed mother,

I left outdoors in hopes it would be picked up by another (It was; she brought it home to you,⁵⁷ and you with kindness great

Adopted it and made it yours to rear and educate) –

Since then, I say, I have from you a pledge as good as sworn To look with favour on all plays that might of me be born. So here's my latest, like Electra looking here and there

535

To find an audience that's a lock cut from her brother's hair.⁵⁸

And what a modest girl she is!⁵⁹ She doesn't play the fool

By bringing on a great thick floppy red-tipped leather too!⁶⁰

540

To give the kids a laugh, or making fun of men who're bald;⁶¹

Requests to dance a cordax⁶² simply leave the lass appalled, And no old man with walking-stick beats up some tiresome pest

In hopes to drown the groaning at another feeble jest.

No torches, yelps, or violence, or other weak distraction: She comes before you trusting in her words and in her action.

545 I'm like that too: I'm not stuck up, nor yet a smooth-faced
cheat

Who pretends a play is new when it is really a repeat:⁶³
I always think up new ideas, not one of which is ever
The same as those that went before, and all of them are
clever.

550 I went for Cleon, hard and low, when he was in his pomp,
But never would I have the flat effrontery to stomp
Upon him, once I'd floored him – quite unlike these tedious
others

Harping upon Hyperbolus,⁶⁴ his failings and his mother's!
The first of them was Eupolis, the stinking thief, who
bashed

555 Hyperbolus in *Maricas*,⁶⁵ which was my *Knights* rehashed
(He also plundered Phrynichus, though on a smaller scale:
A cordax-dancing drunk old woman,⁶⁶ gobbled by a whale.)

560 Hermippus then and all the rest on one another's heels
Attacked Hyperbolus – and stole my image of the eels!⁶⁷
If anyone still laughs at them, well, I can't say I mind
If fools like that to humour such as I provide are blind;
But if my comic novelties receive your approbation,
Posterity will praise the wisdom of this generation.

CHORUS:

563 Zeus, thou almighty Ruler⁶⁸ of the heavens,
Thee first we call to join our dance today;
Thou too who wield'st the stern and savage trident,
Lord of the Earthquake, come to us, we pray.
570 Father renowned who nourishest all creatures,
Ether, most holy, thee we also call;
And him who drives the fiery solar chariot,
Whose brilliant rays pervade earth, sky and all.

LEADER:

575 We Clouds, my dear spectators, feel we must
Say that the way you treat us is unjust.
More blessings than all other gods we bring
To you; yet you make us no offering,

Not even a libation. Just reflect
What care we take your city to protect.

580 If you send troops out on a foolish mission,
Our rain or thunder stops the expedition.⁶⁹

Then, before you with high command invested
That Paphlagonian tanner,⁷⁰ we protested:

With knitted brow we thundered, lightning flared,
The moon forsook her path,⁷¹ the sun declared

585 That, if that villain won, he'd quench his flame.⁷²
And you elected Cleon just the same!

Athenians *always* make the wrong decision
The first time round; we gods, though, make provision
To see you get a second opportunity
To rectify your blunders with impunity.

We'll tell you how to do so this time too.

590

Get Cleon charged with theft, that's what to do,
And bribery, convict him, shove his head

Into the stocks, and then, just like we said,
Whatever errors you have made before,
You'll get back all you lost by them, and more!

CHORUS:

Thou who art throned on Cynthus' rocky summit,⁷³

595

Graciously hear us, Phoebus, Delian Lord;

Thou too, blest Maid,⁷⁴ who dwell'st in the Ephesians'

600

Temple of gold, by Lydian maids adored.

Thou our Protectress,⁷⁵ wielder of the aegis,
Athens' own goddess, Pallas, hear our song;

605

Last him whose torches blaze on Mount Parnassus,
Bacchus, we call, amid his revel-throng.

LEADER:

Before we started on our journey here

610

We met the Moon, who said she wished good cheer

To Athens and to all her allies true,
But had a bone or two to pick with you.

She says you wrong her, seeing she has blessed
You always in a way that's manifest.

For instance, each of you, each month, can save
 A drachma, which you'd have to give a slave
 For torches, when you're going out at night:
 615 So much, and more, you profit by her light.
 But for all this, she says, your thanks are scurvy –
 You've turned the calendar all topsy-turvy.⁷⁶
 The gods turn up for meals and have to wait
 Because you've sacrificed a day too late,
 620 Then blame and threaten *her* – and meanwhile you,
 Instead of feasting, torture, rack and sue.⁷⁷
 And when we mourn some hero of the past⁷⁸ –
 Memnon, Sarpedon – keeping solemn fast,
 Too often, down on earth, we see you revel.
 Some of our wrath we vented on that devil,
 This year's chief envoy to Thermopylae,⁷⁹
 625 Hyperbolus: we took his wreath away,⁸⁰
 In hopes that he would realize, late or soon,
 That days are rightly reckoned by the Moon!

[SOCRATES *comes out of the school, looking exasperated.*]

SOCRATES: In the name of Respiration and Chaos and Air and
 all that's holy, I've never met such a clueless stupid forgetful
 630 bumpkin in all my life! The most trifling little thing I teach
 him, he forgets before he's even learnt it! Never mind, I'll
 bring him out here in the daylight and see if that helps.
 [*Calling towards the door*] Strepsiades! Where are you? Can
 you bring your bed out here?

STREPSIADES [*coming out, dragging a bed*]: If the bugs will let
 me.

635 SOCRATES: Come on, lay it down there, and then pay attention.

STREPSIADES [*doing so*]: All right.

SOCRATES: Now what do you want to be taught first, that you
 haven't ever been taught before? Come on now. Words?
 Rhythms? Measures?⁸¹

640 STREPSIADES [*eagerly*]: Measures is what *I* want to know more
 about! Only the other day a corn-dealer cheated me out of
 two whole quarts.

SOCRATES [*impatiently*]: That's not what I'm talking about.

What measure do you consider the most aesthetically attrac-
 tive – the three-measure or the four-measure?⁸²

STREPSIADES [*confidently*]: I think nothing beats the gallon.

SOCRATES: What on earth are you wittering about?

STREPSIADES: You want to bet that there aren't four measures
 in a gallon?⁸³ 645

SOCRATES: Oh, to hell with you, you stupid peasant! Let's try
 rhythms, perhaps you'll understand those better.

STREPSIADES: I will if they'll help me feed my family.

SOCRATES: It'll do wonders for you in social conversation, if
 you understand what kind of rhythm is armamental and what
 kind is digital.⁸⁴ 650

STREPSIADES: Digital? But I know all about that already.

SOCRATES: Tell me what you know.

STREPSIADES: Ever since I was a boy, it's meant *this* [*sticking
 out his middle finger*]⁸⁵.

SOCRATES: You rustic moron!

STREPSIADES: But dammit, I don't *want* to learn any of this
 kind of stuff. 655

SOCRATES: What *do* you want to learn, then?

STREPSIADES: That – that argument, the one you call Wrong!

SOCRATES: Ah, there are many other things you have to learn
 first. For instance, which animals are truly masculine?

STREPSIADES: Well, I know *that*, if I haven't gone potty. Ram,
 billygoat, bull, dog, fowl. 660

SOCRATES: And feminine?

STREPSIADES: Ewe, nannygoat, cow, bitch, fowl.⁸⁶

SOCRATES: See what you're doing? You're calling the male and
 female by the same name 'fowl'.

STREPSIADES: How do you mean?

SOCRATES: How do I mean? 'Fowl' – 'fowl'.

STREPSIADES [*after some thought*]: Ah, I get you! What ought
 I to call them? 665

SOCRATES: 'Fowless', and for the male 'fowler'.⁸⁷

STREPSIADES: Fowless? Holy Air, that's brilliant! Just for tell-
 ing me that I'll fill your kneading-trough with barley meal.

SOCRATES: Hold it again. You called it a trough. Much too
 masculine a name for such a feminine object.⁸⁸ 670

STREPSIADES: What do you mean, a masculine name for a feminine object?

SOCRATES: In the same way as Cleonymus is.⁸⁹

STREPSIADES: I don't understand.

SOCRATES: 'Trough' is parallel to 'Cleonymus'.

675 STREPSIADES: But Cleonymus never had a trough to his name – he did his *kneading* in a round mortar⁹⁰ [*he illustrates his meaning with the help of his phallus*]. Well, what *should* I call it from now on?

SOCRATES: 'Trough-ena', like you say 'Ath-ena'.

STREPSIADES: Troughena, that's feminine?

SOCRATES: That's right.

680 STREPSIADES: So I should have said 'Cleonymena never had a troughena'?

SOCRATES: But you've still got to learn about names, which of them are masculine and which are feminine.

STREPSIADES: No, I know which are feminine.

SOCRATES: Which?

STREPSIADES: Lysilla, Philinna, Cleitagora, Demetria.

685 SOCRATES: And which are masculine?

STREPSIADES: Lots. [*Thinks hard*] Philoxenus . . . Melesias . . . Amynias⁹¹ . . .

SOCRATES: Silly, those aren't masculine.

STREPSIADES: You don't think they are?

SOCRATES: Not a bit. If you met Amynias, what would be the first thing you'd say to him?

690 STREPSIADES: I'd say – I'd say 'Hello, Minnie!'

SOCRATES: There you are; you've called *her* a woman.

STREPSIADES: And rightly too – the way *she* manages to dodge the call-up. But what's the point of my learning all these things? Everybody knows them already.

SOCRATES: Never mind that. Just lie down there [*indicating the bed*] –

STREPSIADES: And?

695 SOCRATES: And try and think out one of your own problems.

STREPSIADES: Not there, I beg you! If that's what you want me to do, can't I do it lying on the ground?

SOCRATES: That is not an option.

STREPSIADES [*taking off his shoes, lying on the bed and pulling the covers over him*]: God help me, I've really been thrown to the bugs now!

[SOCRATES goes into the school, taking Strepsiades' shoes with him.]

CHORUS:

Think closely, follow every track,
And twist and turn and double back,

700

And when you don't know how

To come to a conclusion true,

Jump to another point of view,

And banish sleep –

705

STREPSIADES:

Yow-ow!!

CHORUS:

What ails thee, friend? Why criest so?

STREPSIADES:

I'm being ravaged by a foe,

These buggers⁹² from the bed;

710

They gnaw my ribs, they drain my soul,

Pull out my balls and probe my hole [*indicating his anus*] –

They'll quickly have me dead!

715

CHORUS:

Nay, bear it not so grievously.

STREPSIADES:

That's fine advice to offer me,

The state I'm in right now!

No cash, no tan, no shoes, no blood,

Just whistling in the dark and mud,

720

And all but done for – yoww!

[*He returns to his private agony. SOCRATES puts his head out of an upstairs window.*]

SOCRATES: Hey, you, what are you up to? Thinking, I trust?

STREPSIADES: Yes, very much so.

SOCRATES: And what thoughts have you had?

725 STREPSIADES: Mainly about whether there'll be any of me left when the bugs have finished!

SOCRATES: Oh, go to blazes! [*He disappears from the window.*]

STREPSIADES [*shouting in his general direction*]: I'm there already, mate! [*He moves as if intending to get out of bed.*]

LEADER: Now, now, don't be a softie; cover yourself up well. You've got to find some really juicy ideas to cheat your creditors.

730 STREPSIADES [*meekly retreating under the bedclothes*]: I only wish someone *would* throw a juicy, sexy . . . idea or two over me, instead of these!

SOCRATES [*coming out, and going up to StrepsiaDES*]: Let's have a look and see what this fellow is doing. [*Kicking StrepsiaDES through the bedclothes*] Here, are you asleep?

STREPSIADES [*uncovering his head*]: No, I'm not.

SOCRATES: Well, have you got hold of anything yet?

STREPSIADES: No.

SOCRATES: What, nothing?

STREPSIADES [*throwing off the bedclothes with his left hand*]:

Only one thing – *my* thing – I've got hold of that!

735 SOCRATES [*throwing the bedclothes back over him*]: Cover up, will you, and get thinking, right away!

STREPSIADES: What about? Do tell me, Socrates.

SOCRATES: No, *you* tell *me* what you want to discover first.

STREPSIADES: If I've told you once I've told you a thousand times. About interest – how not to pay it.

740 SOCRATES: All right; cover yourself up, open out your thinking, refine it, and explore the matter in detail, making sure you draw the correct analytical distinctions.

STREPSIADES [*obeying*]: Yoww! They're at me again!

SOCRATES: Keep still. And if one of your ideas seems to have reached a dead end, let go of it, withdraw for a bit, and then

745 get your mind at work on it again, shifting it around and weighing it up.

STREPSIADES [*getting eagerly and thankfully out of bed*]: Socrates! My beloved Socrates!

SOCRATES: Yes, old man?

STREPSIADES: I've got an evasive idea for dealing with interest.

SOCRATES: Present it to me.

STREPSIADES: Tell me –

SOCRATES: Yes?

STREPSIADES: Suppose I bought a woman slave from Thessaly, a witch, and got her to draw down the moon one night, and then put it in a big round box, like they do mirrors, and kept a close watch on it. 750

SOCRATES: What good would that do you?

STREPSIADES: Why, if the moon never rose, I'd never pay any interest. 755

SOCRATES: Why not?

STREPSIADES: Why not? Because it's reckoned by the month, of course.

SOCRATES: Very good. Let me give you another one. Someone sues you for 30,000 drachmas. How do you get rid of the case? 760

STREPSIADES: How – how – I don't know. Let me work it out.

SOCRATES [*as STREPSIADES cogitates*]: Don't keep your thought penned up inside you all the time. Try letting it out into the air for a bit, dangling it on a string like a pet beetle.

STREPSIADES: I've found a marvellous way of stopping that lawsuit. I fancy you'll think so too. 765

SOCRATES: Like what?

STREPSIADES: Have you seen that stone the druggists sell – the beautiful transparent one you can light fires with?

SOCRATES: You mean glass?⁹³

STREPSIADES: That's right. Well, suppose when the clerk was entering the case on his tablet, I stood like this with the glass between him and the sun and melted the wax where the entry for my case was? 770

SOCRATES: Nice one, by the Graces!

STREPSIADES: Whew, I'm glad I managed to strike that 30,000-drachma case off the list!

SOCRATES: See if you can get this one.

STREPSIADES: Yes? 775

SOCRATES: You're a defendant, you've got no witnesses, you've nearly lost the case – how would you avoid conviction?

STREPSIADES: That's child's play.

SOCRATES: Go on.

STREPSIADES: Like this. When there was still one case to be heard before mine was called – I'd run off and hang myself.

780 SOCRATES: That's no good.

STREPSIADES: Why not? Once I'm dead, I can't be put on trial!
SOCRATES: You're talking twaddle. Get out. I'm not going to teach you any more.

STREPSIADES: Oh, why? Do, please, Socrates, for the gods' sake.

785 SOCRATES: But anything you do learn, you forget straight away.
For instance, tell me now, what was the first thing I taught you?

STREPSIADES: Let me see now, what came first? First, what was first? Something we were kneading barley meal in – help, what was it?

790 SOCRATES: Oh, to hell with you, you amnesiac old fool! [*He turns his back on Strepsiades, but remains within earshot.*]

STREPSIADES [*in despair*]: Help, what will become of me now? If I can't learn tongue-wrestling, I'm done for. Holy Clouds, can you give me any advice?

795 LEADER: Well, what we advise is this: if you have a grown-up son, send him here to be a student instead of you.

STREPSIADES: Yes, I've a son, [*sarcastically*] a fine fellow. What am I to do, though? He doesn't want to study.

LEADER: And you can't make him?

800 STREPSIADES: No. He's too strong to bully, and he comes from a long line of stinking rich women.⁹⁴ Never mind, though, I'll go for him; and if he won't come, make no mistake, I'll throw him out of my house. [*To Socrates*] Go inside and wait till I come back; I won't be long. [*He moves towards his own house.*]

CHORUS [*addressing Strepsiades as he goes into his house*]:

How greatly blest you soon will be,

Only through our aid!

Your lightest wish this man will see

Swiftly is obeyed.

805

[*Turning to Socrates as he goes into the school*]

You see how high his heart's uplifted –

Make your profit fast!

For favouring winds ere now have shifted –

Luck don't always last.

[*STREPSIADES, very angry, comes out of his house, driving a bewildered PHEIDIPPIDES before him.*]

815 STREPSIADES: In the name of Mist, leave this house at once. Go and nibble at Megacles' pillared portico.

PHEIDIPPIDES: What on earth's happened to you, dad? Why, Zeus in heaven, you act as though you were out of your mind!

STREPSIADES: 'Zeus in heaven' – ha! How stupid can you get? Believing in Zeus – a big boy like you? [*He laughs heartily.*]

820 PHEIDIPPIDES: What's so funny about that?

STREPSIADES: That you could be such a baby and have such primitive ideas. Never mind. Come to daddy and he'll tell you something that a grown-up needs to know. [*PHEIDIPPIDES comes over, and STREPSIADES whispers, audibly, in his ear.*]

Promise you'll never tell this to anyone?

825 PHEIDIPPIDES [*giving his right hand in pledge*]: Promise. What's the secret?

STREPSIADES: You were swearing by Zeus just now, weren't you?

PHEIDIPPIDES: Yes.

STREPSIADES: Well now, isn't education a wonderful thing? Pheidippides – there is no Zeus.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Then who's taken over?

STREPSIADES: Vortex is king now; he's driven Zeus from power.

PHEIDIPPIDES: What on earth are you blethering about?

STREPSIADES: I assure you, it's perfectly true.

830 PHEIDIPPIDES: Who says so, anyway?

STREPSIADES: Socrates of Melos,⁹⁵ and Chaerephon, you know, the expert on fleas' feet.

PHEIDIPPIDES: And you believe nutters like that? You must be totally off your head.

STREPSIADES: Hush! Don't talk rudely about them. They're

- 835 brilliant men, and so sensible too – they live so economically: they never get their hair cut, never oil themselves, never pay for a wash in the public baths – whereas *you* go there so often, you’ve washed away my estate, as if I were dead and it was yours to squander! Now you go to them, right away, and let them teach you instead of me.
- 840 PHEIDIPPIDES: Huh! What can that lot teach that’s any use?
STREPSIADES: What a thing to ask! They teach you everything that’s worth knowing. They’ll soon teach *you* how dense and stupid you are. Here, just wait a moment, will you? [*He goes into his house.*]
- 845 PHEIDIPPIDES [*to himself*]: Gods help me, my father really is mad. What am I to do? Get the court to certify him, or just drop a word about it to the undertaker?
[*His reflections are interrupted by the return of STREPSIADES, followed by a SLAVE who carries two wicker cages containing, respectively, a cock and a hen.*]
- STREPSIADES [*pointing to the cock*]: Tell me now, what do you call this?
PHEIDIPPIDES: A fowl.
STREPSIADES: That’s very good. And this one?
PHEIDIPPIDES: A fowl.
STREPSIADES: What, both the same? You *are* making yourself
850 a laughing-stock! You’d better not do it again. In future call this one a fowless and the other one a fowler.
- PHEIDIPPIDES: Fowless? Was that the kind of bright idea you were taught while you were with those sons of the soil?⁹⁶
- 855 STREPSIADES: Yes, and a great deal more too; but every time I was taught anything I forgot it straight away – I’m just too old for that sort of thing.
- PHEIDIPPIDES: I suppose that’s how you came to lose your cloak?
STREPSIADES: I didn’t lose it, I – I invested it in education.
PHEIDIPPIDES: And your shoes? What did you do with them, you old fool?
STREPSIADES: I lost them ‘for essential purposes’, as Pericles
860 once said.⁹⁷ Come on now, let’s go. If you think you’re doing wrong, remember you’re doing what I asked you. I remember

- [*emotionally*] that I was already doing what *you* were asking me when you were a babbling six year old. I spent my very first obol of jury pay to get you a little toy cart for the Diasia!
- 865 PHEIDIPPIDES: I swear you’ll be sorry for this one day. [*But he reluctantly follows STREPSIADES over to the door of the Thinkery.*]
- STREPSIADES: Good for you, my boy! Socrates! Come out and see what I’ve got here! [*SOCRATES comes out.*] Here’s my son. He didn’t want to come, but I managed to persuade him.
- SOCRATES: I dare say he’s immature and doesn’t yet know the ropes here.
- 870 PHEIDIPPIDES [*aside*]: I’d like to see you tied up with some, and getting a good lashing!⁹⁸
- STREPSIADES: Damn you, how dare you curse your teacher?
SOCRATES: Did you hear his slack pronunciation – the drawl, the sagging lips? It’s not going to be easy to teach him to win cases and master the technicalities and make good, empty
875 debating points. And yet it’s true that for six grand, Hyperbolus did manage to learn it.
- STREPSIADES: Don’t worry, you can teach him. He’s always been precocious. Do you know, when he was a little boy only that high [*indicating with his hand*], he was building toy
880 houses at home, and making model boats, and little carts of figwood, and – can you imagine? – frogs out of pomegranate peel! Well, anyway, make sure he learns your two Arguments – Right, or whatever you call it, and Wrong, the one that
885 takes a bad case and defeats Right with it. If he can’t manage both, then at least Wrong – that’s essential.
- SOCRATES: He’ll be taught by the Arguments in person; I won’t be there.⁹⁹
- STREPSIADES [*as SOCRATES goes inside*]: Don’t forget, he’s got to be able to argue against any kind of justified claim at all.¹⁰⁰
[*Enter, from the school, RIGHT, a distinguished-looking old man dressed in the style thought to be typical of Athenian aristocrats of the Persian War period. He is followed by the smirking figure of WRONG, a young man of about Pheidippides’ age but of much less healthy appearance – except for his large phallus.*]

LEADER [*to Right*]:

Now, you who fostered by your education
The glorious ancient virtues of our nation,
Deploy for us the voice you love to use,
Explain your personality and views.

960

RIGHT: I'll tell you about the way boys were brought up in the old days – the days when I was all the rage and it was actually fashionable to be decent. First of all, children were supposed to be seen and not heard – not a sound. Then, all the boys of the district were expected to walk together through the streets to their music-master's, quietly and with decorum, and without cloaks, even if it was snowing confetti – and they did. And when they got there he would make them learn some of the old songs by heart – like 'Pallas, great sacker of cities' or 'Let the glad strain sound afar' – singing them to the traditional tunes their fathers handed down, and on *no* account pressing their thighs together. And if any of them did anything disreputable, tying up the melody in knots with changes of mode and rhythm – the sort of thing Phrynis¹⁰⁷ introduced, which they all do now – why, he was given a sound thrashing for insulting the Muses. Then in the gymnasium, when they sat down, they were expected to keep their legs well up, so as not to – so as not to torment us with desire; and when they got up, they had to smooth down the sand, so as not to leave any marks on it for their admirers to feast their eyes on. What's more, [*sternly*] they never oiled themselves below the belt, [*dreamily*] and their privates looked like peaches, all velvety and dewy; and you wouldn't see a boy being his own pimp, walking along making eyes at his lovers and putting on a soft tender voice, oh no! They weren't allowed to take so much as a radish head at dinner, or any of the dill or celery if their elders wanted it; they never ate posh fish, they never giggled, they never stood with their legs crossed –

WRONG [*mockingly*]: How thoroughly quaint! How redolent of cicada brooches,¹⁰⁸ oxslaughter trials¹⁰⁹ and Cedeides!¹¹⁰

RIGHT: Be that as it may, that's the sort of discipline that I used to rear the men who fought at Marathon. What does *your*

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kind do for our young men? You teach them to wrap themselves in cloaks up to the eyebrows. And when I saw one of them dancing at the Panathenaea,¹¹¹ and he let his shield drop to his haunches, why, I nearly choked – the insult to our beloved goddess! [*To Pheidippides*] So choose Right, my lad, choose me, and have no fear. Keep away from the Market Square, and the public baths too. If ever you do something shameful, show you're ashamed. If someone makes fun of you, flare up. If you're sitting down and an older person approaches, stand up. Don't show disrespect for your parents, or do anything disgraceful that would defile the face of Modesty.¹¹² Don't run after dancing-girls; you never know what may happen – suppose some little whore chucks an apple at you as a come-and-get-me?¹¹³ your reputation's gone in an instant. Don't ever contradict your father or call him an antediluvian;¹¹⁴ of course he's older than you, that's how he was able to bring you up before you could fly on your own, so you shouldn't insult him with it.

WRONG: Don't listen to him, lad – otherwise, by Dionysus, you'll end up just like the sons of Hippocrates and be called a boring little baby.¹¹⁵

1000

RIGHT: What matters is that you'll be spending your time in the gymnasium, getting sleek and healthy, not like these people who are always chattering away in the Market Square about some abstruse topic or other, or being dragged into court over some piffing quibbling filthy little dispute. No, you'll go down to Academe's Park¹¹⁶ and take a training run under the sacred olive trees, a wreath of white reeds on your head, with a nice decent companion of your own age; in autumn you'll share the fragrance of leafy poplar and carefree convolvulus, and you'll take delight in the spring when the plane tree whispers to the elm!

1005

If my sound advice you heed, if you follow where I lead,

You'll be healthy, you'll be strong and you'll be sleek;

You'll have muscles that are thick and a pretty little prick –

You'll be proud of your appearance and physique.

1010

1015 If contrariwise you spurn my society and turn
 To these modern ways, you'll have a pale complexion,
 And with two exceptions, all of your limbs will be too
 small –
 The exceptions are the tongue and the e-lection;¹¹⁷

1020 You will sing the trendy song 'To be virtuous is wrong,
 And every kind of wickedness is right',
 And you'll catch the current craze for Antimachus's
 ways –
 That is, for getting bugged every night.

CHORUS:

1025 O how sweet are your words and how modest your
 thought,
 You noble and glorious sage!
 How we envy the happiness of those whom you
 taught –
 They lived in a real Golden Age!

[To Wrong]

1030 He's impressed us tremendously, and we advise
 That you should be careful to choose
 Some real novel arguments, sure to surprise,
 And to showcase your sexiest Muse.

LEADER:

It looks as though you'll need the newest weapons of your
 school

1035 In order to defeat your foe and not face ridicule.

WRONG: As a matter of fact, right through his speech I've been
 positively bursting with eagerness to refute it and smash it to
 smithereens. That's why the people at the Thinkery call me
 1040 Wrong: I was the one who invented ways of proving anything
 wrong, established laws, soundly based accusations, you
 name it. Isn't that worth millions – to be able to have a
 really bad case and yet win? Well, let's have a look at this
 educational system he's so proud of. He says, for example,

[turning to Pheidippides] that he won't let you have any hot
 baths. [To Right] On what principle do you object to them? 1045
 RIGHT: Hot baths are *bad*. They make a man a coward.

WRONG: Hold it! I've scored one there, right away, and there's
 no way you can wriggle out of it. Tell me, of the sons of Zeus,
 who would you say was the bravest man and performed the
 greatest number of labours?

RIGHT: The best of them was unquestionably Heracles. 1050

WRONG: And have you ever heard of Heracles having a *cold*
 bath?¹¹⁸ [RIGHT is *speechless*.] Well, was he the bravest of
 them all, or wasn't he?

RIGHT [*spluttering*]: That – that – that's just the sort of clever
 stuff that you hear the young lads coming out with all day! So
 they flock to the public baths and leave the wrestling-schools
 empty.

WRONG: Then you object to their hanging around the Market 1055
 Square. I see nothing wrong with it at all; quite the contrary.
 If it was such a bad thing, Homer would never have described
 all his sages, such as Nestor, as 'marketeers'.¹¹⁹ To consider
 next the tongue. He says it's bad for the young to exercise it
 too much; well, I say it's good. And then he talks about 1060
 modesty or decency or something – another pernicious evil!
 Come on, prove me wrong; tell me of anyone who's been
 done any good by being modest and decent.

RIGHT: Many people. For example, that was how Peleus came
 to be given a knife.¹²⁰

WRONG: A knife! Well, well! What a rich haul, I must say! Even 1065
 Hyperbolus from the lamp market – now *he's* made a mint
 by being wicked, but he never got a knife!

RIGHT: And it was also because of Peleus' virtue that he got
 Thetis as his wife.¹²¹

WRONG: Yes, and that was why she deserted him as well.¹²² If
 he'd been a little less virtuous he might have been a more
 satisfactory performer under the covers. Women do *like* some 1070
 disrespectful handling in bed, you know, you hulking old
 ruin! [To Pheidippides] Listen to all the things that virtue
 can't do for you, my lad – all the pleasures you won't be able
 to have. No boys. No women. No gambling. No fancy food.

- No booze. No belly laughs. Will your life be worth living, without all these? [PHEIDIPPIDES indicates the answer is 'no'.¹²³] I thought not. Let me turn now to – to the demands of Nature. Let us say you've fallen in love with a married woman – had a bit of an affair – and then got caught in the act. As you are now, without arguing skills, you're done for. But if you come and learn from me, then you can do what you like and get away with it – indulge your desires, laugh and play, have no shame. And then suppose you do get caught with somebody's wife, you can say to him, straight out, 'I've done nothing wrong. Just look at Zeus; isn't he always a slave to erotic desire? And do you expect a mere mortal like me to be stronger than a god?'
- RIGHT: And suppose your advice doesn't work? Suppose he gets radish-bugged and ash-plucked?¹²⁴ Then he'll have the arsehole of a faggot for the rest of his life. Argue yourself out of *that* one!
- 1085 WRONG: So if he does have the arsehole of a faggot, what's wrong with that?
- RIGHT: You mean, what could be *worse* than that?
- WRONG: What will you say if I prove you wrong about this?
- RIGHT: I'll have nothing to say after that.
- WRONG: Very well then. From what class of persons are prosecution advocates drawn?
- 1090 RIGHT: From the faggots.
- WRONG: I agree with you. And our actors – I mean, of course, the tragic ones?
- RIGHT: From the faggots.
- WRONG: Right again. And from what class do we get our politicians?
- RIGHT: From the faggots.¹²⁵
- 1095 WRONG: Then don't you see you were talking nonsense? Why, look at the audience; what do you think most of *them* are?
- RIGHT: I'm looking.
- WRONG: And what do you see?
- RIGHT: Good gods, the faggots have it by a street! At least, I

- know *he's* one [*pointing*], and him, and him there with the long hair – 1100
- WRONG: Well then?
- RIGHT: You win. Here, you sods out there, in the name of the gods, take my cloak – I'm defecting! [*He throws his cloak towards the right-hand side of the audience, in the direction of some of the men he has previously pointed out – to reveal that he is wearing underneath it an inner garment of distinctly feminine colour and line. He then runs into the auditorium and up a gangway on the left-hand side – pausing to dally flirtatiously with the odd spectator – and eventually vanishes from view at the rear.*]¹²⁶
- WRONG [*to Strepsiades*]: Well, now, which do you want? Are you going to take your son away, or do you want me to teach him to be an orator? 1105
- STREPSIADES: Oh, teach him – don't spare the rod, if necessary – and be sure to give his teeth a good cutting edge. He should be able to handle small cases with one side of his mouth while using the other side for the bigger ones. 1110
- WRONG: Don't worry; when you get him back, he'll be a top-class sophist.
- PHEIDIPPIDES [*aside*]: A pale-faced wretch, more like, if you ask me.
- CHORUS [*as WRONG leads PHEIDIPPIDES into the school and STREPSIADES turns towards his house*]:
Farewell; [*to Strepsiades*] but we bet it
You'll come to regret it!¹²⁷
- [STREPSIADES, *taking no notice, almost dances into his house in great joy.*]
- LEADER [*addressing the competition judges*]:
We would like to tell you, judges, of the blessings we'll
accord 1115
Those who give to both this chorus and this play their just
reward.

If you want to put the ploughshare to some fallow land
you've got,
Then we'll see that even in time of drought there's rain
upon your plot.

If you keep a vineyard, we'll protect it from the double
bane

1120 Both of soaking with too much and parching with too
little rain.

But if any mortal treats the Clouds of heaven with
despite,

We have power to reduce him to a miserable plight.
Both his olives and his grapes and all his other crops will
fail:

1125 From our powerful slings we'll smite them with those
slingshots you call hail.

If we see him making bricks, we'll rain, and then we'll give
him proof

Of our anger when our hailstones smash the tiling of his
roof.

And if he is getting married (or a friend, or a relation)
We will ruin the festivities with our precipitation.

So all in all, you judges, this we earnestly advise:

1130 You'd be better off in Egypt¹²⁸ than not giving us first
prize!

[STREPSIADES comes out of his house. He is counting on
his fingers.]

STREPSIADES: Twenty-sixth, twenty-seventh, twenty-eighth;
after that comes the twenty-ninth, and then that day I fear
and dread above all others, the last day of the month, 'Old
1135 and New Day'!¹²⁹ All my creditors swear that if I don't pay
up, they're going to hand in their court deposits¹³⁰ and see me
ruined. And when I ask them for a reasonable little favour –
'Please don't call the loan in now' – 'Give me some more time'
– 'Couldn't we just write it off?' – they all say that's not their
1140 idea of getting paid and call me a villain and say they'll sue.
Well, let them. If Pheidippides has really learned to be an
expert orator, they can't hurt me. I'll soon know if he has.

Let's go to the Thinkery. [*Knocking on the school door*] Boy! 1145
Here, I say! Boy!

SOCRATES [*opening the door*]: Delighted to see you, Strepsiades.

STREPSIADES: Same to you. [*Offering him a present*] I wonder
if you'd accept this?¹³¹ Just as a token of my appreciation. But
my son – has he learnt that Argument that we were listening
to not long ago?

SOCRATES: Yes, he has. 1150

STREPSIADES: Holy Fraud, how wonderful!

SOCRATES: Yes, you'll now be able to defend any and every
lawsuit successfully.

STREPSIADES: Even if the loan was made before witnesses?

SOCRATES: Even if there were a thousand of them.

STREPSIADES [*adopting a tragic pose and tone*]:

Then raise aloft a mighty cry of joy!

O weep, ye moneylenders, for yourselves, 1155
Your capital, and your compound interest!

No longer can ye work your will on me,
Such is the son that's reared within these halls,

The brilliant wielder of a two-edged tongue, 1160
My shield and bulwark, saviour of my house,

Bane of my foes, dispeller of my griefs!

Run, run within, and call him out to me.

[SOCRATES goes inside.]

Thy father calls, beloved son; appear. 1165

SOCRATES [*re-emerging with Pheidippides*]:

Here is your offspring.

STREPSIADES [*embracing him*]:

O my darling boy!

SOCRATES:

You may depart with him.

STREPSIADES:

I whoop with joy! 1170

[SOCRATES goes back into the school. STREPSIADES has a
good look at Pheidippides – whose face, we can see, is
many shades paler than previously – and lets out a cry of
rapture.]

STREPSIADES: What a gorgeous complexion, son! You've got 'Not guilty' and 'On the contrary' and that famous Attic phrase 'You can't be serious' written all over your face – and that injured-innocent look that does the trick even if you're caught red-handed! You were my ruin before; now you must be my salvation.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Why, what are you afraid of?

STREPSIADES: Old and New Day.

PHEIDIPPIDES: What, is there a day that's both old and new?

1175 STREPSIADES: Of course there is – and that's when they say they're going to hand in their court deposits.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Well, they're going to lose their money. It's not possible for one day to be two days.

STREPSIADES: How not possible?

PHEIDIPPIDES: Not unless it's also possible for one woman, say, to be old and young at the same time.

1185 STREPSIADES: But that's what the law says: 'summonses to be answerable on Old and New Day'.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Ah, but the meaning of the law has been misunderstood.

STREPSIADES: So what *does* it mean?

PHEIDIPPIDES: Well, our lawgiver Solon was a good democrat,¹³² right?

STREPSIADES: Yes, but what's that got to do with Old and New Day?

1190 PHEIDIPPIDES: So he fixed the summonses to be for two days, Old Day and New Day, intending that the deposits should be lodged on New Day, also known as New Moon.¹³³

STREPSIADES: Well, in that case, why mention Old Day at all?

1195 PHEIDIPPIDES: To give the defendant a chance to appear a day early and settle the dispute, so as not to have butterflies in his tummy on the morning of the New Moon.

STREPSIADES: But then why don't the magistrates accept deposits on the New Moon? They only accept them on the day before.

1200 PHEIDIPPIDES: They're acting like the people who taste the food the day before a festival: early taste, early steal.

STREPSIADES: Nice one! Here [*to the audience*], why are you

lot just sitting there like stones, not even laughing? They're a flock of sheep, a heap of earthenware – we intellectuals can exploit them as we please! [*To Pheidippides*] We're in luck, you and me, and I think a song of celebration is called for. 1205

'O blest Strepsiades,
What brilliance you display,
And what a son you have!
So everyone will say,
My friends and neighbours all, 1210
In envy at the sight,
When you go into court
And win each case you fight!

Come in now and let's have a party! [*They go into Strepsiades' house.*]

[*Enter FIRST CREDITOR – a very fat man – accompanied by his WITNESS.*]

FIRST CREDITOR: Why should anyone want to lend out his money? Better to face the embarrassment of saying no at the outset rather than have all this trouble afterwards. Here I am, having to bother you with my problems because I need a witness, and also having to make an enemy in my own village. All the same, while I live, I won't put Athens to shame.¹³⁴ [*He is now at Strepsiades' door, and calls out loudly*] I hereby summon Strepsiades – 1215

STREPSIADES [*coming out*]: Who's here?

FIRST CREDITOR: – to attend on Old and New Day.

STREPSIADES [*to the audience*]: I call you to witness that he summoned me for two different days. [*To the creditor*] What is this about? 1220

FIRST CREDITOR: The twelve hundred drachmas you borrowed to buy the ash-coloured horse. 1225

STREPSIADES: Horse! Can you believe it? And you all know that I hate everything to do with horses!

FIRST CREDITOR: Not only did you borrow it, but you swore by all the gods that you would pay.

STREPSIADES: Ah, well, that was before my Pheidippides had learnt his invincible Argument.

1230 FIRST CREDITOR: And now he has, you intend to repudiate the debt?

STREPSIADES: Well, you don't think I sent him to school for nothing, do you?

FIRST CREDITOR: Are you prepared to swear by the gods, in a place of my choosing,¹³⁵ that you don't owe me the money?

STREPSIADES: Swear by which gods?

FIRST CREDITOR: Zeus, Hermes and Poseidon.¹³⁶

1235 STREPSIADES: Delighted. I'd give you three obols for the privilege.

FIRST CREDITOR: Well, of all the shameless – !

STREPSIADES [*patting him on the stomach*]: You know, you'd make quite a good wine-skin once we'd cured your hide.

FIRST CREDITOR: You impudent – !

STREPSIADES: Four gallons it would hold, I think.

FIRST CREDITOR: By Zeus and all the gods, you needn't think

1240 you'll get away with this.

STREPSIADES [*laughing uproariously*]: 'The gods!' 'Zeus!' How incredibly funny – for those of us in the know!

FIRST CREDITOR: You'll pay for this, make no mistake. And I'm not leaving till you've given me a straight answer. Are you going to pay me back my money or not?

1245 STREPSIADES: Wait a moment and I'll tell you. [*He goes into his house.*]

FIRST CREDITOR [*to his witness*]: What do you think he's going to do? Pay, or what?

STREPSIADES [*coming out with a kneading-trough*]: Where's the man who was demanding money from me? [*To First Creditor*] Tell me what this is.

FIRST CREDITOR: That? A kneading-trough, of course.

1250 STREPSIADES: And an ignorant person like you dares demand to be paid? Do you expect me to pay so much as an obol to someone who speaks of a trough instead of a troughena?

FIRST CREDITOR: So you're not going to pay?

STREPSIADES: Not that I know of! Now clear off, will you? Get away from my door! Hurry up!

FIRST CREDITOR: All right, I'm going. But let me tell you, I'm going to lodge that deposit, or may I be damned! [*Exit, accompanied by WITNESS.*] 1255

STREPSIADES [*calling after them*]: Then you'll just be throwing it away after the twelve hundred. And I don't really want that to happen to you just because you were silly enough to use a word like 'trough'.

[*Enter SECOND CREDITOR, a much younger man. He is bruised and limping.*]

SECOND CREDITOR [*tragically, singing*]:

Ah me! Ah me!

STREPSIADES: Who's this singing laments? Not one of Carcinus' gods,¹³⁷ is it? 1260

SECOND CREDITOR:

Why wishest thou to know who I may be?

I am a man of sorrows.

STREPSIADES: Then keep them to yourself.

SECOND CREDITOR:

O cruel divinity that smashed my chariot!

Pallas, thou hast destroyed me utterly.¹³⁸ 1265

STREPSIADES: Why, what has Tlepolemus ever done you wrong?

SECOND CREDITOR: Stop making fun of me, my man. Tell your son to pay me back the money he had from me. He ought to anyway, and especially when I'm in a state like this.

STREPSIADES: What money is this you're talking about? 1270

SECOND CREDITOR: The money he borrowed.

STREPSIADES: Looks to me you *are* in a bad way!

SECOND CREDITOR: Yes, by the gods, I fell off my chariot.

STREPSIADES: The nonsense you talk suggests you fell off the proverbial donkey!¹³⁹

SECOND CREDITOR: Nonsense? I only want my own money back!

1275 STREPSIADES [*in the tones of a doctor breaking bad news*]: I doubt if you're ever going to recover fully.

SECOND CREDITOR: Why not?

STREPSIADES: I'm fairly sure that you're suffering from some form of concussion of the brain.

SECOND CREDITOR: *I'm* fairly sure that you're going to get a *summons* from me, if you don't pay up.

1280 STREPSIADES: Tell me now: do you think that when Zeus rains, it's new rain every time, or do you think the sun sucks up water from the ground so that he can use it again?

SECOND CREDITOR: I don't know, and I don't care.

STREPSIADES: Then how can you claim the right to have your money back, if you have no knowledge of meteorology?

1285 SECOND CREDITOR: Look, if you're short of cash, you can just pay the interest for now.

STREPSIADES: This 'interest' – what exactly is it?

SECOND CREDITOR: Why, it's just the way that a sum of money keeps getting bigger, month by month, day by day, as time runs on.

1290 STREPSIADES: All right. Now then: do you think the sea has more water in it now than it used to?

SECOND CREDITOR: No, it's the same size; there would be something wrong if it wasn't.

1295 STREPSIADES: So the rivers run into the sea and yet the sea doesn't get bigger – so how can you claim that as time runs on your money should get bigger? You wretched fool! Go and chase yourself away from this house! Boy – fetch me a goad!

[A SLAVE comes out with a charioteer's goad, and STREPSIADES immediately sets to work on the creditor with it.]

SECOND CREDITOR: Help! Assault!

STREPSIADES: Gee up! What are you waiting for? Get moving, you branded nag!

SECOND CREDITOR: This is criminal outrage!¹⁴⁰

1300 STREPSIADES: Move, won't you? Or else I'll get you moving by poking you right up your thoroughbred arse! [*The CREDITOR takes to his heels.*] Retreating, eh? I *thought* I'd get rid of you that way – you and your chariots and wheels and all! [*He goes inside.*]

CHORUS:

Is he not in love with evil,
This old man – in love, I say?

Having borrowed all this money,
He's determined not to pay! 1305

But before this day is ended
He'll be rendered broken-hearted,
And this sophist¹⁴¹ then will surely
Rue the wickedness he started. 1310

For his son's a rhetorician
(Which is what his dad desired)
Armed with Wrong to vanquish every
Argument by Right inspired. 1315

Any case, however righteous,
He is trained to overcome:
Soon his father will be praying
To the gods to strike him dumb! 1320

[*Screaming is heard from within, and a moment later STREPSIADES rushes out, clutching his face and in great agitation; PHEIDIPPIDES follows him, looking utterly unconcerned.*]

STREPSIADES: Help, neighbours! Help, kinsmen! Help, men of Cicyna! I'm being beaten up – rescue me! Zeus, my head – my cheeks! [*To Pheidippides*] You abominable villain, do you dare hit your father? 1325

PHEIDIPPIDES [*coolly*]: Yes, I do.

STREPSIADES [*to the Chorus and the audience*]: Do you hear him? He admits it!

PHEIDIPPIDES: Of course I do.

STREPSIADES: You loathsome young hooligan!¹⁴²

PHEIDIPPIDES: More, more! Don't you know I love being called bad names?

STREPSIADES: You gaping arsehole! 1330

PHEIDIPPIDES: Shower me with more of these roses!

STREPSIADES: How *dare* you hit your father?

PHEIDIPPIDES: I'll prove to you that I was perfectly justified in doing so.

STREPSIADES: *Justified!* You utter villain, how could that possibly be?

PHEIDIPPIDES: You argue your case, I'll argue mine, and I guarantee to prove it.

1335 STREPSIADES: *Prove* what you've just said?

PHEIDIPPIDES: Very easily. Now then, which of the two Arguments do you want?

STREPSIADES: Arguments? What Arguments?

PHEIDIPPIDES: You know – do you want Right or Wrong?

1340 STREPSIADES [*bitterly*]: I certainly *have* had you taught to argue against justice, if you're going to be able to argue convincingly that it's right and proper for a father to be beaten up by his son.

PHEIDIPPIDES: I fancy I will, though; when you've heard me, you won't have a word to utter against me.

STREPSIADES: I'll be very interested to hear what you'll have to say!

CHORUS:

1345 Consider carefully how you can win.

The facts compel us to believe

The boy has something up his sleeve:

1350 Observe the shameless frame of mind he's in!

LEADER:

Now tell us how it came about that this big row took place – Why trouble, though, to ask you to? You will in any case!

1355 STREPSIADES: I'll explain, right from the start, how the quarrel began. You know we were having a big feast. Well, I asked him to take his lyre and sing a song by Simonides, 'The Shearing of Mr Ram'.¹⁴³ And straight away he says, 'That's so antiquated, that is – playing the lyre and singing at a drinking party – what do you think we are, women grinding corn?'

1360 PHEIDIPPIDES: Exactly! I wonder I didn't clock you right then and there. Telling me to *sing*! Who did you think you were entertaining, a treeful of cicadas?

STREPSIADES: That's exactly the way he went on at me – just the way he's talking now. 'And,' he added, 'Simonides was a

rotten poet anyway.' Well, I could barely restrain myself – but I did. I asked him at least to take a myrtle branch¹⁴⁴ in his hand and recite me something from Aeschylus. That set him off again – 'Oh, yes, Aeschylus is a prince among poets – a prince of hot air and barbarous bombast, who creates words the size of mountains.' Well, by this time my heart was fairly thumping, you can imagine. But I bit my lip hard and said, 'All right then, you give us something from one of your sophisticated modern fellows, whoever they are.' So he launched straight into some speech by Euripides, about how a brother – the gods preserve us – how a brother was screwing his sister – his *full* sister!¹⁴⁵ Well, I just couldn't stand it any longer. I pitched into him, calling him all sorts of foul names, and then – you know what happens – we were shouting at each other hammer and tongs. And in the end he jumps up and starts giving me a pasting, hitting me, throttling me, 1365
1370
1375
pounding me to mincemeat.

PHEIDIPPIDES: And you deserved it. Slagging off Euripides! He's a genius!

STREPSIADES [*sarcastically*]: Oh, yes, a genius indeed, you – what can I call you? – oh, forget it, I'll only get hit all over again.

PHEIDIPPIDES: And you'll deserve it again, by Zeus.

1380 STREPSIADES: *Deserve* it? You impudent puppy, who was it brought you up from a baby, trying to understand from your infant babbling what it was that you wanted? If you said 'broo', I understood and gave you a drink. If you cried 'mamma', I'd fetch you bread. And the moment you said 'kakka', I'd grab you, take you outside and hold you over the 1385
1390
pit. Not like what happened when you were throttling me just now. I was screaming and shouting that I needed a crap – and did *you* take *me* outside, curse you? No, you just kept choking me until I did a kakka on the spot!

CHORUS:

Youth's all agog to hear *his* case, I ween.

For he's committed such a deed

That, should his coming plea succeed,

An old man's hide will not be worth a bean!

LEADER [*To Pheidippides*]:

It's up to you, disturber of old certainties, to light

Upon convincing arguments to show that you were right.

PHEIDIPPIDES: It's so delightful to be acquainted with the wisdom of today, and to be able to despise convention. There was a time, you know, when my thoughts were of nothing but horses, and in those days I couldn't say three words together that made sense. But now my father himself has enabled me to put all that behind me. I'm intimate with all the newest and subtlest ideas, principles and arguments, and I'm confident I can demonstrate that it is right and proper to chastise one's father.

1400

1405

STREPSIADES: I just wish you'd go back to your horses. I'd prefer it even if you kept four of the damn things, rather than beat me to a pulp like you've done now.

PHEIDIPPIDES: As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted – I will begin by asking you a question or two. When I was a child, did you beat me?

STREPSIADES: I did, because I cared for you and wanted to do you good.

1410

PHEIDIPPIDES: So beating equals caring. In that case, why is it not also right and proper for me to care for you in the same way, by beating *you*? On what principle can you claim to have the privilege of immunity from physical assault, when I did not? I was born free, after all, just as you were. To put it poetically: 'The son gets thumped; do you think the father shouldn't?'¹⁴⁶ You will, no doubt, argue that the custom is only for *children* to be beaten; but I would wish to point out that old age is proverbially a second childhood. And after all, one does expect a higher standard of behaviour from the old than the young, so it's only proper that when they do fall short they should be severely punished.

1415

STREPSIADES: But you won't find, anywhere, a law that allows this to be done to a *father*!

1420

PHEIDIPPIDES: So what? Every law must have been made at some time, and made by a human being like you or me, who used argument to persuade his contemporaries. Why should I be debarred from making another, new law for the future,

saying that sons may also beat their fathers? We won't seek reparations for all the times we were beaten before this law came into force; we'll wipe them off the slate. Consider, again, the animal kingdom – cockerels, for example – where offspring *fight* their fathers. And what difference is there between them and us, except that they don't move resolutions in assemblies?

1425

STREPSIADES: Well, if you're so keen on the life of a cockerel, why don't you go the whole way and eat manure and sleep on a perch?

1430

PHEIDIPPIDES: It's not the same thing, silly. Not according to Socrates it isn't.

STREPSIADES: Well, in that case you'd better not hit me, because if you do, you'll live to regret it.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Oh, why?

STREPSIADES: Because, just as I have the right to chastise you, so you will have the right to chastise your son, if you have one –

1435

PHEIDIPPIDES: And what if I *don't* have one? Then I'll *never* be able to get my own back for the beatings I got from you, and *you'll* be laughing all over your dead face!¹⁴⁷ And here's another point too for you to consider.

1436

1440

STREPSIADES: No more, please – they'll be the death of me.

PHEIDIPPIDES: Oh, I don't know. This experience you've had may prove less bad for you than you think.

STREPSIADES: Why, what good could this behaviour of yours possibly do me?

PHEIDIPPIDES: Easy. I'll beat up mum too.

STREPSIADES: *What?!* This is really too much!

PHEIDIPPIDES: Suppose I prove to you, with the help of my trusty Wrongful Argument, that it's right and proper to beat one's mother?

1445

STREPSIADES: If you do, you're very welcome to throw yourself off the Acropolis.¹⁴⁸ And you can take Socrates and that precious Argument with you. [*To the Chorus*] Clouds, this is your fault. I put my whole fate in your hands, and this is what you've done to me.

1450

LEADER:

No, not our fault; you brought it on yourself –
You turned¹⁴⁹ yourself to evil crookery.

1455

STREPSIADES: But why didn't you tell me at the time? I'm an old man, and a countryman too; why did you have to lead me on?

LEADER:

We do the same to anyone that we
Perceive to be in love with wickedness:
We cast him into misery, so he
May learn that it is right to fear the gods.

1460

STREPSIADES: Ah, holy Clouds, that's harsh – but you're right: I shouldn't have tried to cheat my creditors out of their money. [To *Pheidippides*] My dear, dear son – come with me and let's murder that villain Chaerephon¹⁵⁰ and Socrates for the way they swindled both of us.

1465

PHEIDIPPIDES: No, no! I couldn't harm my teachers!

STREPSIADES: Aye, aye! Reverse the great Paternal Zeus!

PHEIDIPPIDES: Paternal Zeus indeed! How out of date you are! Do you mean you think Zeus exists?

1470

STREPSIADES: He does.

PHEIDIPPIDES: No, he doesn't, he doesn't! 'Vortex is king now; he's driven Zeus from power.'

STREPSIADES: No, he hasn't. I only believed that because of this image here¹⁵¹ [pointing to a *whirlpool-shaped cup standing on a pillar in front of the Thinkery*]. How stupid could I be, to take a piece of earthenware like you for a god!

PHEIDIPPIDES: If you want to yammer to yourself, you can do it on your own. [He goes inside.]¹⁵²

1475

STREPSIADES: How mad, how insane I was, to let Socrates persuade me to discard the gods! [Addressing the *image of Hermes on a pillar in front of his house*] Dear Hermes, don't be cross with me, don't destroy me. Have pity on me, if a set of clever windbags made me take leave of my senses for a time. Give me some advice. Should I launch a prosecution

1480

against them,¹⁵³ or what do you think? [He pauses for a reply – and fancies he can see the *image moving its head to signify 'no'*.] You're right. I shouldn't bother cooking up lawsuits – I should go right away and set this school for slick talkers on fire. [Calling into his house] Xanthias, come here, and bring a ladder and a mattock with you! [His slave XANTHIAS comes out, carrying the items requested.] Now get up on the roof of that Thinkery and hack it down, if you love your master, until you've brought the whole house down on them! [XANTHIAS climbs up the ladder and sets to work.] And someone bring me a lighted torch. I'm going to make this lot pay for what they've done; it'll take more than big talk to save them this time!¹⁵⁴

1485

1490

[Another SLAVE gives him a torch. By now there is a large hole in the roof; many tiles must have fallen inside the building.]

A STUDENT [within]: Help, help!

[XANTHIAS comes down, passing the mattock to STREPSIADES, who, with the torch in his other hand, climbs up the ladder.]

STREPSIADES: Do your job, torch; let's light things up!¹⁵⁵ [He throws the torch into the building, and a fire is soon blazing; meanwhile STREPSIADES backs away at the rafters with the mattock. Several STUDENTS rush out of the front door, and see him above them.]

STUDENT: Hey, you, what are you doing there?

1495

STREPSIADES: Doing? Chopping logic with your rafters, of course.

[CHAEREPHON appears at an upper window. He has a deathly pale face, with large eyes and the ears of a bat.]

CHAEREPHON: Help, who's set our house on fire?

STREPSIADES: Remember the last cloak you stole? That's who.

CHAEREPHON: You'll kill us, you'll kill us!

STREPSIADES: That's just what I want to do – if my mattock

1500

doesn't fail me, and if I don't fall off and break my neck first.

SOCRATES [coming out as smoke billows through the door]: You there on the roof, what are you doing?

STREPSIADES: 'I am walking upon air and attacking the mystery of the sun.'¹⁵⁶

SOCRATES [*coughing*]: Help, I'm going to suffocate!

CHAEREPHON [*still at his window, seemingly trapped*]: Help, I'm going to be burnt alive! [*He climbs through the window and jumps – straight on to Socrates, who is knocked flat.*]

STREPSIADES [*descending the ladder, while SOCRATES and*

CHAEREPHON *disengage themselves from each other and scramble to their feet*]: What did you expect, the way you

wantonly insulted the gods and scrutinized the back side¹⁵⁷ of the Moon? [*To his slaves, as SOCRATES, CHAEREPHON and the STUDENTS take to flight*] Chase them, stone them, hit them, for all their crimes! Remember, they wronged the gods!

[*STREPSIADES and the SLAVES pursue Socrates and Co., the SLAVES hurling some stones after them. When both pursued and pursuers have disappeared, the LEADER turns to her colleagues.*]

LEADER:

Lead the way out: we've done, I think I'd say,
Sufficient choral service for today.