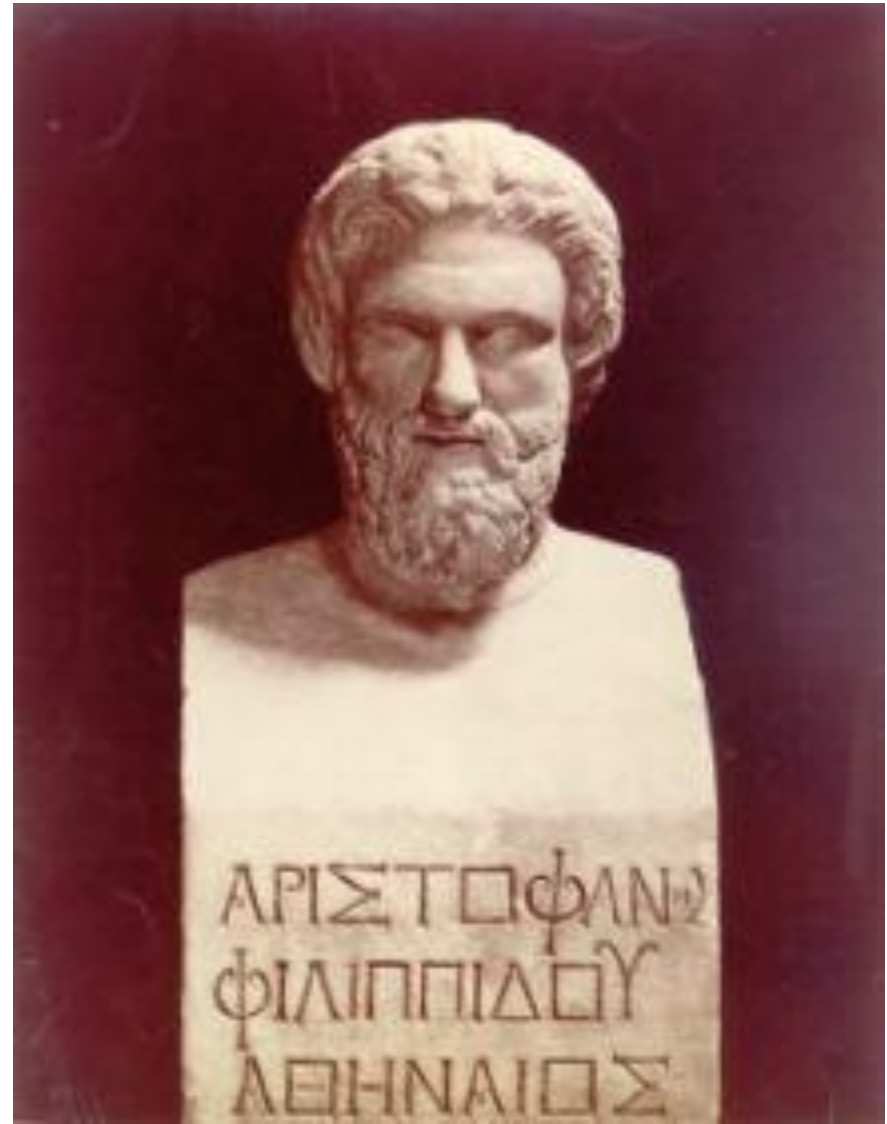


Greek Comedy: *Lysistrata* and the *Clouds*

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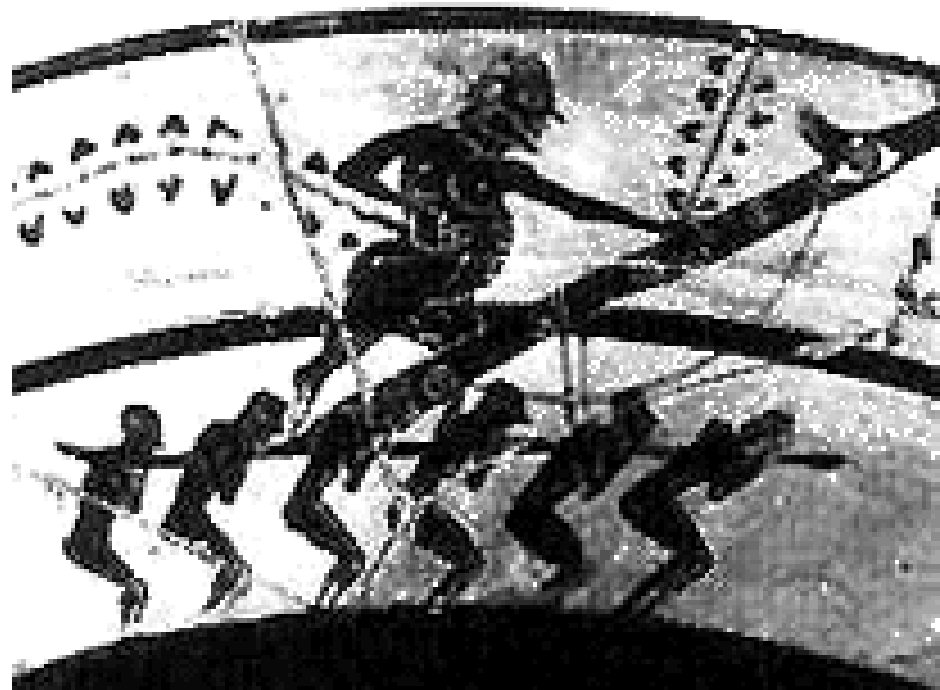
Aristophanes, 446-385

- Wrote during the Peloponnesian War
- Played the part of Cleon himself in *The Knights*, an anti-war play.
- Was prosecuted for libel
- Associated with landed class; hence, conservative



Procession of Phallus

- Aristotle: Comedy began as a rural Phallus Procession
- Komos: drunken procession
- Komos, Oide, Komos Song
- Actors wore padded buttocks and leather phallus'



Komos and Animal Costumes: Birds, Frogs, Flies



Lysistrata, 411

- Two years after disaster of Syracuse
- 22 years into War
- Anti-War Theme
- Characters: Lysistrata (Army Loosener); Lampita, Shining One; Myrrina (Myrtle); Kinesias (set in motion, stir up; sexual pun)

Plot

- Lysistrata Summons Women; Old Women Seize the Acropolis
- The Plan; The Women Resist
- Swear Oath
- “Combat” with Old Male Chorus and Magistrate
- Peace: Metaphors of weaving
- Women Weaken:
- Kinesias and Myrrine: You need a bed, mattress, pillow, blanket, perfume...
- Spartan Herald: Lysistrata reminds both of mutual obligations from past
- Invited to feast on the Acropolis and then go home with Wives

Interpretation

- Feminist: Power of Female
- Reality: Women were not powerful and the audience knew it. This is what makes it “funny” to the all male audience
- Plays upon male fears of women
- Frustration with a war that men have not been able to settle and that has nearly ruined Athens.

The Clouds

- Produced in 423 at Great Dionysia
- Came in last! Perhaps the audience did not share Aristophanes' comic disdain for Socrates.
- Critique of Sophists
- But, Socrates, a critic of the Sophists, is lumped in as the greatest Sophist
- Yet, he did not accept fees for his teaching and did not teach moral relativism as the Sophists did

Political Satire

- Cleon, who was the successful general in the battle at Pylos, 425, and died in battle in 422.
- Chorus: The Sun in anger would no longer give light “should you choose that mischief-worker, Cleon, whom the Gods abhor, Tanner, Slave, and Paphlagonian, to lead your hosts to war.”

Sophists Described

- Father to son: go to school there where “they’ll teach (only they’ll want some money) how one may speak and conquer, right or wrong.”
- Two Logics (logos), one just and one unjust; go learn the unjust, so that you can save me from my debt.

Strepsiades at the Thinkery

- Student reveals new discoveries:
- Unit of measurement for measuring a flea's jump—a flea's foot
- The cause of a gnat's buzzing—it has a butt like a trumpet
- A large compass adapted to steal cloaks from over a wall at the Gymnasium
- None of this is practical but Strepsiades is impressed

Socrates in the Clouds

- “I walk on air, and contemplate the Sun.”
- Would have actually used a machine to have the actor playing Socrates up in the air
- Metaphor for the way he discusses Ideas that do not exist in this world but exist in some heavenly, immortal world—up in the sky.

The Physical Metaphors and the Denial of the Gods

- Socrates was prone to using down to earth metaphors to examine his ideas.
- There are no Gods; Clouds (ideas?);
- If there is no Zeus, how does it thunder and lightning?
- “When a wind that is dry, being lifted on high, is suddenly pent into these, it swells up their skin, like a bladder...until compressed very tight, it burst them outright.”
- Fart...

Strepsiades is a Bad Student

- Socrates complains about the father's ineptitude
- He has him lay down under a blanket while thoughts are supposed to arise naturally in his mind: he ends up masturbating
- The Clouds advise him to find someone younger to study in his place—so back to his son.

Son, Pheidippides, Goes to Thinkery

- Father threatens him and son agrees to go to school
- Greater and Lesser Argument argue over who gives the best education
- Greater Argument: Justice and Gods; teaches a life of discipline and virtue
- Lesser Argument: denies Justice, promotes pleasure and teaches how to get out of trouble

Lesser Argument Wins

- Debate between two Arguments is an example of Agon
- A poll of the audience shows that most men in power followed Lesser Argument
- Pheidippides is led into Thinkery by Lesser Argument
- Father shows up looking for his son

Roosters: Greater and Lesser Arguments in *Clouds*?



Creditors

- Father rudely sends his creditors away, confident his son can now contend with them in court and dismiss his debts
- Quizzes first creditor on the gender nouns and refuses to appear in court because of his ignorance
- Second creditor appears and he is abused for his belief in Gods and Lesser Argument is used to deny responsibility for any debt

Son Abuses Father

- Son beats his father and uses Lesser Argument to justify it: It is just for the wise to punish the unwise. Father claims Gods do not approve but son denies Gods exist
- Son argues that he has a right to beat his father and threatens to beat his mother too
- Father goes into a rage about the Thinkery
- He leads a group of slaves and burns the school, driving off the students

Observations

- Greek Comedy was Political
- Greek Comedy Evolved out of a Religious Ritual
- Sophistry was the Social Media Influencer of its day—the hot new thing to get ahead.
- Unlike our comedy which tends to be progressive, this comedy is conservative. It makes fun of the new and different.
- While we see this portrayal of Socrates as unfair, it is hard to know how it was seen in its day. Ironically, many of the arguments made against Socrates in his trial are similar: corrupt the youth, taught disbelief in the gods, taught immorality, taught how to make the Wrong Argument appear Stronger.