

Strepsiades as a Comic Ixion

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Many readers of Aristophanes' *Clouds* have regarded Strepsiades as a disappointing as well as disappointed hero. Unlike Dicaeopolis, Trygaeus, Peisthetaerus, and Lysistrata, who sweep away all obstacles to their Pgreathearted schemes, Strepsiades goes from helpless to humiliated: from family and money problems, through academic failure, to the final indignity of being beaten and out-argued by his own son. Even his revenge against Socrates has seemed more bitter than triumphant, an inadequate reply to so many failures. In Whitman's influential view, Strepsiades' *πονηρία* was flawed, his ambitions too petty to warrant success. He was just not up to the requirements of a comic hero.¹

My arguments for raising Strepsiades' grade (and with it, that of the play itself) require time and space not presently available. To read the *Clouds* is not always to see it; and I would suggest that performance brings out Strepsiades' comic strengths—among them, his engaging simple-mindedness, his openness to experience, his resilience, and what we might call his sheer survivability—in ways the unadorned text does not. I would also suggest that Strepsiades, more than most protagonists, exemplifies comedy's gift of enduring frustration, surviving humiliation, persevering through failure to try and try again. "I may have fallen, but I won't just lie there," is his watchword. He is descended not from Achilles or Ajax, who cannot endure indignity, but from Odysseus, who can. He exemplifies, not the self-assertion of the tragic hero transposed to comedy's metaphysical universe, but the even greater strength of *not needing* to be a tragic hero in the first place.

The point may seem obvious, but its application to Strepsiades has mostly been ignored. That is, in part, because his style and fortunes have no obvious tragic counterpart. Dicaeopolis, in the *Acharnians*, is played

¹ C. H. Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero* (Cambridge, MA 1964) 119–20. Cf. the recent condemnation of Strepsiades by T. K. Hubbard, "Old Men in the Youthful Plays of Aristophanes," in *Old Age in Greek and Latin Literature*, edd. T. M. Falkner and J. deLuce (Albany 1989) 103: "Whereas the old men of Aristophanes' other plays in this period are all essentially sympathetic characters, despite their flaws and obsessions, Strepsiades is a malign parody of the usual comic hero—stupid rather than clever, socially

against the "miserable Telephus," whose persona he borrows from Euripides' rag-and-mask shop, but whose tragic rhetoric and pathos he ultimately throws off, in Odyssean fashion, to resume his own comic way.² Trygaeus, in the *Peace*, takes a loathsome dung-beetle for his paratragic steed, rides to Olympus, and recovers the lovely goddess Peace—as against Euripides' Bellerophon, who tried to ride Pegasus to Olympus and was struck down by Zeus' thunderbolt for his presumption. There is no comparable role-model for Strepsiades. I do have one, less obvious, in mind; but let me prepare the way with two blatantly paratragic passages from the *Clouds*. The first is Strepsiades' lament at 717–22:

ΣΤ. Καὶ πῶς; ὅτε μου
 φροῦδα τὰ χρήματα, φρούδη χροιά,
 φρούδη ψυχή, φρούδη δ' ἐμβάς·
 καὶ πρὸς τούτοις ἔτι τοῖσι κακοῖς
 φρουράς ἄδων
 ὀλίγου φροῦδος γεγένημαι.

The anaphora, the anapaestic rhythm, the pathetic evocations of φροῦδος are probably derived from Euripides. Rau compares Hecuba's lament at *Hec.* 159–61 (her aged husband is gone, her children are gone—more than she yet realizes), and also Peleus' lament at *Andr.* 1070 [actually, 1078]—his voice is gone, his limbs are gone—as he collapses on learning of his grandson's assassination at Delphi.³ The two passages have much in common, and Aristophanes may be conflating them intentionally. He enjoys the Euripidean term φροῦδος, savors it, and by the heavy-handed play on φροῦδος/φρουράς, builds it into a brief comic aria whose force might be conveyed by a modern parody to the tune of "Old Man River" (from Jerome Kern's "Showboat"):

Lost my money,
 I've lost my color,
 I've lost my spirit,
 I've lost my sneakers . . .

The tragic possibilities are real enough, for Aristophanes as well as for Euripides. Strepsiades has ventured into the (literally and figuratively) mist-shrouded world of the Phrontisterion, where Socrates guides, or misguides, souls. It is a tricky atmosphere, one in which values and possessions tend to disappear. The absurd juxtapositions, the culmination of the lament's first section in ἐμβάς, bypass high tragic pain. Strepsiades worries more about losing his money and shoes than about losing his soul,

destructive rather than constructive, and totally unsuccessful in achieving any transcendent vision."

² Cf. K. J. Reckford, *Aristophanes' Old-and-New Comedy* (Chapel Hill 1987) 172–86, 194–96.

³ P. Rau, *Paratragodia*, *Zetemata* 45 (Munich 1967) 190.

and rightly so; he is too earthbound to suffer the alienating enchantment of the philosopher's Siren song, to "vanish" into the invisible world of Socratic abstraction. His problem for now is bedbugs. He is not a tragic hero(ine)—is not Hecuba or even old Peleus, nor meant to be. And that is, despite his discomfort and humiliation, wonderfully reassuring.

Strepsiades' self-laudatory triumph song at *Clouds* 1154–66 is another, more ambitious pastiche of tragic tags and motifs. The opening lines come from a lost *Peleus* of (the scholia say) Euripides; Rau argues persuasively that they come from one of those Sophoclean hyporchemes that raise high, delusive hopes just before the catastrophe.⁴ But lines 1165–66,

ΣΤ. ὦ τέκνον, ὦ παῖ, ἔξελθ' οἴκων,
ἄε σοῦ πατρός,

are certainly taken (as the scholiasts observe) from Euripides' *Hecuba*, as that *mater dolorosa* calls forth her daughter Polyxena to tell her of her fate (171–73):

ὦ τέκνον, ὦ παῖ
δυστανοτάτας—ἔξελθ' ἔξελθ'
οἴκων—ἄε ματέρος αὐδάν.

The verbal and musical echoes of tragedy carry, at least implicitly, evocations of pain and loss. Like the brave hopes of Sophocles' hyporchemes, Strepsiades' enjoyment of triumph proves short-lived (even though the catastrophe is deferred until after the two outrageous scenes with the creditors). There may be a further hint that his loss of a son to the new education is comparable, in its way, to Hecuba's demoralizing loss of her daughter (and later, of her son). The themes of demoralization, loss of innocence, and the disappearance of traditional values are prominent and disturbing in *Hecuba*, and they supply a partial backdrop to the *Clouds*, along with the unmediated social and historical changes to which Euripides and Aristophanes (and Thucydides) were alike responding. We should, I think, admire Aristophanes' courage in taking on so much tragedy—the pain of the aging Hecuba or Peleus as they lose their human props and supports, and the underlying pain of an Athens that has been losing its moral and spiritual bearings under pressure of war, suffering, and change. But, still more, we should enjoy the sureness with which Aristophanes transmutes tragic pity and terror into comic laughter and comic reassurance. For Strepsiades never yields to misfortune. He always bounces back. He survives, that is, in ways that Peleus, Hecuba, and the others never can.

Two of the most important things, then, that we can say about Strepsiades are: (1) that he is not a tragic hero(ine) out of Euripides, and (2) that he comes perilously close to being one. Words and phrases, songs and

⁴ Rau (previous note) 148–50. Scholia are cited from D. Holwerda and W. J. W. Koster (edd.), *Scholia in Aristophanem* I. 3. 1–2, in *Nubes* (Groningen 1977).

scenes, enforce this point throughout the *Clouds*, much as they will do throughout the *Wasps*, where Philocleon is like and yet unlike a tragic heroine consumed by unrequited love or a defeated tragic hero who must fall upon his sword. But what we miss in the *Clouds*, as in the *Wasps*, is a certifiable tragic foil for our paratragic or "trygic" hero. The suggestion that Strepsiades plays a comic Ixion cannot (because no Ixion-tragedy is extant) fill the gap; but it may help. By reminding us, once more, of what Strepsiades is not, it may add somewhat to our appreciation of what, in vital and comic terms, he is.

The Ixion legend, of uncertain origins,⁵ is best known from Pindar's Second Pythian Ode. (1) This version presupposes, but barely alludes to, Ixion's treacherous murder of his father-in-law and his subsequent purification by Zeus himself. (2) As Pindar tells it, Ixion proved ungrateful (much like Tantalus in *Olympian* 1); he conceived a mad passion for Hera, whom he tried to assault. "His hybris roused him to arrogance, blind infatuation and ruin." (3) His sins bore fruit. He lay with a cloud in Hera's shape; their offspring was Kentauros, who sired the hybridic race of centaurs on Magnesian mares. (4) And now Ixion is bound to the four-spoked wheel, on which he forever turns.

Aristophanes may well have known and used *Pythian* 2 (I shall return to the parallels). He may also have been influenced by an Aeschylean trilogy, including *Perrhaebides* and *Ixion*, and perhaps involving the tragic sequence of murder, alienation, forgiveness, new crime, and new punishment. Whether Aeschylus included Zeus' (earlier) seduction of Ixion's wife Dia, who bore Perithous to him, we do not know. Euripides' Ixion, as Plutarch reports, was a "vile and impious" man: The audience was scandalized, "but I didn't remove him from the stage," said Euripides, "before nailing him to the wheel."⁶ The story sounds apocryphal, but the scandal was likely enough, to judge from other plays and other reports. In two surviving fragments, Ixion apparently rejects counsels of moderation, asserting his drive for power and fulfillment.⁷ Did he justify his criminal behavior later, in familiar rationalizations? "I can't help my nature," he might have said; or else, "that is how Zeus behaved—and how can I, a mortal, be stronger than Zeus?" The Oedipal wishes, thinly disguised, the fear of punishment, and the modern, sophistic arguments by which moral inhibitions are waived: All this would be very Euripidean, and very powerful. I am tempted to claim Euripides' Ixion as a forerunner of

⁵ For the development of the Ixion legend and its representations in literature and art, see J. L. Boyce, *Ixion. Origins and Meanings of a Myth* (University of N.C. dissertation: Chapel Hill 1974). Citations by courtesy of the author.

⁶ Plut. *De aud. poetis* 19e.

⁷ Euripides, frs. 425, 426 in *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, ed. A. Nauck, suppl. by B. Snell (Hildesheim 1964): first a plea against greed (and perhaps tyranny), then a defense of risk-taking for "great results" (including tyranny). The parallel with Eteocles in *Phoen.* is striking.

Pheidippides, who comes very close (in comic terms) to parricide and incest; but unfortunately, there is no evidence either that the play was produced before 423 or that Aristophanes referred to it. We must therefore return to Pindar's cloud-centaur combination, as it evokes the inner nature of Ixion's sin, and as, very differently, it heralds Strepsiadēs' comic enterprise and fall.

For what Pindar emphasizes, what he so emphatically rejects in telling Ixion's story, is vanity. The delusion inflicted on Ixion, of lying with a cloud, at once reflects his crime, punishes it, and bodies forth the sinner's spiritual and psychological state, much as the punishments in Dante's *Inferno*, from drifting on the winds (Paolo and Francesca) to being changed into serpents (the thieves), mirror that loss of human freedom and integrity which, for Dante, results from the increasing compulsions of sin. Ixion's intercourse with a cloud, an image, marks the degrading and unreal essence of ἄρη, blind infatuation and delusion. It focuses our attention on the negative, the sheer emptiness of Ixion's wish and act. Here Pindar draws on many sources in folklore and legend. Gods often deceive mortals with images, in dream or waking vision, on the battlefield or in the bedchamber. Sexual impulses are strangely disguised, and strangely frustrated, from Menelaus' dream-image of Helen in the sad *Agamemnon* ode (414–26) to the nightmare figures of incubus and succubus surviving into modern Greek folklore. As for the monstrous Κένταυρος, Pindar may already have known his derivation in popular etymology from κεντεῖν + αὔραν, to "stab the air."⁸ He is the very embodiment of lying with a cloud.

Pindar draws a threefold moral in *Pythian* 2. One should show gratitude to benefactors, realize that the gods bring hopes to accomplishment, and avoid vain thoughts. (The latter are characterized as deceptions, ἀπάται, and also as empty, κενεά. Pindar suggestively links κενεός with κένταυρος, offspring of vanity.)⁹ Scholars have debated the ode's more particular applicability to Pindar or Hieron. It may be that, as Finley suggests, Pindar is himself the chief recipient of his own warning to avoid vain thinking, to remain grateful, not resentful.¹⁰ (Was he passed over in

⁸ P. Von der Mühl, "Weitere pindarische Notizie," *MH* 25 (1968) 226–29, argues that the *Volksetymologie* κένταυρος < κεντεῖν αὔραν probably formed a bridge between Ixion and the centaurs, influencing the legend's development in the direction inherited by Pindar. Although this smacks of later Hellenistic rationalizing, it suits Pindar's fondness for significant word-play (e.g., κένταυρον 44 / κενεά 61) and Aristophanes' (cf. below, notes 14, 19, 20). Cf. also Sophocles' poetic association of κένταυρος, νεφέλη (here = "net, trap"), and κέντρα in *Trach.* 831–33, 839–40. Later, Euripides will make Pentheus "stab the air" at *Bacch.* 629–32 as he attacks the false image of Bacchus. (There are sexual overtones, here as elsewhere.)

⁹ Cf. the companion-poem, *Pythian* 3, where Coronis ἤρατο τῶν ἀπεόντων (20), as many do "who hunt windswept aims, whose hopes are unfulfilled"; she fell into great disaster (29), yet her child Asclepius was preserved and given to the good centaur Chiron to rear.

¹⁰ John H. Finley, Jr., *Pindar and Aeschylus* (Cambridge, MA 1955) 92–98. For a somewhat different reading, cf. R. E. Grimm, "Pindar and the Beast," *CP* 57 (1962) 1–9.

favor of Bacchylides?) Yet the lesson remains general. We are all called to show gratitude and accept mortal limits (the two go together). Success requires restraint, requires acceptance of reality. All genuine achievement, from statecraft to chariot-racing to poetry, must depend on the gods' gifts and the sense and skill with which we embrace those gifts. Anything else is folly.

I return to Strepsiades, who in true comic fashion refuses to accept life's ordinary restraints and limits, such as the payment of debts incurred through his son's horse- and chariot-racing. His first scheme failing, he ventures himself into the Phrontisterion, beholds its wonders, and is initiated shortly by Socrates into the mysterious and delusive realm of celestial matters (τὰ μετέωρα), scientific ideas, and novel deities such as the Clouds (250–59):

- ΣΩ. βούλει τὰ θεῖα πράγματ' εἰδέναι σαφῶς
 ἅττ' ἐστὶν ὀρθῶς;
 ΣΤ. Νῆ Δί', εἶπερ ἔστι γε.
 ΣΩ. Καὶ ξυγγενέσθαι ταῖς Νεφέλαισιν εἰς λόγους,
 ταῖς ἡμετέραισι δαίμοσιν;
 ΣΤ. Μάλιστά γε.
 ΣΩ. Κάθιζε τοίνυν ἐπὶ τὸν ἱερὸν σκίμποδα.
 ΣΤ. Ἴδου κάθημαι.
 ΣΩ. Τουτονὶ τοίνυν λαβὲ
 τὸν στέφανον.
 ΣΤ. Ἐπὶ τί στέφανον; Οἴμοι, Σώκρατες,
 ὥσπερ με τὸν Ἀθάμανθ' ὅπως μὴ θύσετε.
 ΣΩ. Οὐκ, ἀλλὰ ταῦτα πάντα τοὺς τελουμένους
 ἡμεῖς ποοῦμεν.
 ΣΤ. Εἶτα δὴ τί κερδανῶ;
 ΣΩ. Λέγειν γενήσει τρῖμμα, κρόταλον, παιπάλη.

Socrates' *double entendre* at 252 was unintentional. Being much concerned with sex, as with food, Strepsiades joyfully accepts the invitation to "have intercourse" with the Clouds—which may have prompted Socrates to add the qualifying εἰς λόγους ("verbal intercourse, I mean") after a pause.¹¹ The audience will enjoy his naive, sensual reaction. Soon afterwards, they will be amused by his literal-minded fear of being sacrificed "like Athamas." The allusion, as Dover observes, is on target, for Phryxus and Helle were Athamas' children by his consort Nephele, or Cloud.¹² Strepsiades has his moments. His characteristically associative thinking here lights, most appropriately, on that hero who slept with Cloud and got himself and his family into all kinds of trouble.

After summoning the Clouds, Socrates explains to the puzzled Strepsiades why they look like women (345–55):

¹¹ Translators usually miss the joke; William Arrowsmith is a happy exception.

¹² *Aristophanes. Clouds*, ed. K. J. Dover (Oxford 1968) 132, 257.

- ΣΩ. Ἀπόκριναί νυν ἄττ' ἄν ἔρωμαι.
 ΣΤ. Λέγε νυν ταχέως ὅ τι βούλει.
 ΣΩ. Ἦδη ποτ' ἀναβλέψας εἶδες νεφέλην κενταύρω ὁμοίαν,
 ἢ παρδάλει ἢ λύκῳ ἢ ταύρῳ;
 ΣΤ. Νῆ Δί' ἔγωγ'. Εἶτα τί τοῦτο;
 ΣΩ. Γίνονται πάνθ' ὅ τι βούλονται· κᾶτ' ἦν μὲν ἰδῶσι κομήτην
 ἄγριόν τινα τῶν λασίων τούτων, οἶόνπερ τὸν Ξενοφάντου,
 σκάπτουσαι τὴν μανίαν αὐτοῦ κενταύροις ἦκασαν αὐτάς.
 ΣΤ. Τί γάρ, ἦν ἄρπαγα τῶν δημοσίων κατίδωσι Σίμωνα, τί
 δρῶσιν;
 ΣΩ. Ἀποφαίνουσαι τὴν φύσιν αὐτοῦ λύκοι ἐξαίφνης ἐγένοντο.
 ΣΤ. Ταῦτ' ἄρα ταῦτα Κλεώνυμον αὐταὶ τὸν ῥίψασπιν χθὲς
 ἰδοῦσαι,
 ὅτι δειλότατον τοῦτον ἔωρων, ἔλαφοι διὰ τοῦτ' ἐγένοντο.
 ΣΩ. Καὶ νῦν γ' ὅτι Κλεισθένη εἶδον, ὄρας, διὰ τοῦτ' ἐγένοντο
 γυναῖκες.

The passage works on several levels. First, as a metatheatrical joke, for the representation of comic choruses requires theatrical convenience even more than symbolic appropriateness. It is difficult for choreutai to represent clouds "floating in the blue." It is easier to represent clouds who, for their own purposes, present themselves as seductive women—with, most likely, touches of "cloud" about their drapery and headdresses. (Strepsiades' protest earlier that "these have noses," whereas real clouds resemble "spread-out wool," plays on slang terms for the penis and for sexual intercourse, hence reminds us that the real-life choreutai were male. The joke focuses our minds, if not Strepsiades', on disguise and the multiple interpretation of disguise.)¹³

Second, Aristophanes scores extra points by indulging in some old-fashioned εἰκασμός, a primitive form of satire. Its riddling guise invites the audience to play along. Why do the Clouds appear as centaurs? To ridicule some pederast, like Xenophantus' son.¹⁴ Why as wolves (we would say, sharks)? Some embezzler of public funds: Simon, maybe. Why deer? Some coward: Cleonymus, of course. And now Strepsiades, catching on, completes the argument himself (he is quick enough when it comes to personal insults): So why women? The Clouds must have noticed—Cleisthenes.

¹³ The argument of C. Brown, "Noses at Aristophanes' *Clouds* 344?" *QUCC* 14 (1983) 87–90, is not really refuted by G. Mastromarco, "Il Naso Delle Nuvole (Aristofane, *Nuvole* 344)," *QUCC* 23 (1986) 121–23; for although the Clouds present themselves basically as human (Mastromarco), Aristophanes cannot resist confusing levels of make-believe further by alluding to the masculinity of the actual choreutai (Brown). On noses and penises, cf. also M. Davies, "The Tickle and Sneeze of Love," *AJA* 86 (1982) 117 and nn. 15, 16.

¹⁴ Dover cites a scholion to Aeschines 1. 52 but fails to follow up the joke, whose point lies in an obscene pun: The compulsive pederast is a κέντροπος, or "butt-fucker": cf. Von der Mühl (above, note 8) 228, with refs., including *Nub.* 350.

And third: Socrates' account suggests an aspect of the Clouds' ever-shifting nature that goes well beyond Socrates' own limited and limiting comprehension.¹⁵ For as they assume various shapes in order to expose, through satiric "likenings," the personality traits and obsessions of particular men, the Clouds resemble nothing so much as—the poets, actors, and choruses of Old Comedy. Like Aristophanes himself, they are experts at indecent exposure. Through taking on disguises, they reveal the shameful truth beneath ordinary appearances. But they are also (again, like the comic poet and his troupe) free agents, mischievous self-willed players. If they assume the likeness of seductive women, they may do so, not just because of the effeminate Cleisthenes, but because of the would-be cheater Strepsiades, whom they visit, in time-honored fashion, with delusion—or for that matter, because of that other cheater, Socrates, who also wrongly believes that he can control the Clouds' comic mimicry, fun, and delusiveness in the service of his own inferior and limited purposes.

Many years ago, venturing a descriptive account of "Aristophanes' Ever-Flowing Clouds," I said that they were (among other things) natural symbols of confusion and deception.¹⁶ Instances of the latter included Hera's seduction of Zeus in *Iliad* 14, where their divine lovemaking is concealed, together with Hera's purposes, in a golden cloud, and Ixion's infatuate intercourse, in *Pythian* 2, with the cloud-image in Hera's shape. Strepsiades misbehaved, or was mistreated, "like a comic Ixion." But his disaster was more a comic ἀπάτη than a tragic ἄτη—more like the comic deception of Zeus than like the tragic infatuation of Pindar's Ixion.

The Strepsiades-Ixion comparison is mentioned in Dover's commentary (we came to it independently), and it is developed by Köhnken in his careful 1980 article on the *Clouds*.¹⁷ Dover uses Ixion and the phantom Helen (especially in Euripides' *Helen*) to illustrate the mythic and poetic linkage of clouds with deception; and Köhnken argues at length for Aristophanes' conscious evocation of *Pythian* 2: The collocation of clouds, women and centaurs, mockery and madness, is strikingly similar. I am not altogether convinced that Aristophanes is alluding to Pindar's version, which we have, rather than to the lost Ixion-tragedies or to the legend generally. I shall, however, argue that the case for Strepsiades as a comic Ixion can be strengthened, by the "intercourse with clouds" joke that I discussed earlier,

¹⁵ On the function and meaning of the cloud chorus, see H.-J. Newiger, *Metapher und Allegorie* (Munich 1957) 50–74; P. Pucci, "Saggio Sulle Nuvole," *Maia* 12 (1960) 31–42; P. Händel, *Formen und Darstellungsweisen in der aristophanischen Komödie* (Heidelberg 1963) 234–38; K. J. Reckford, "Aristophanes' Ever-Flowing Clouds," *Emory Univ. Quarterly* 22 (1967) 222–35; C. P. Segal, "Aristophanes' Cloud-Chorus," *Arethusa* 2 (1969) 143–61; A. Köhnken, "Der Wolken-Chor des Aristophanes," *Hermes* 108 (1980) 154–69; D. Ambrosino, "Nuages et sens. Autour des Nuées d'Aristophane," *Quaderni di Storia* 18 (1983) 3–60.

¹⁶ Reckford (previous note) 231–34.

¹⁷ Dover (above, note 12) lxxviii; Köhnken (above, note 15) 162–63 and, on the likelihood of a conscious Pindaric reminiscence, n. 27.

and also by a concatenation of words and images that are especially prominent in the latter part of the *Clouds*: twisting and turning (στρέφειν and related terms), chariot and wheels, the horse-goad (κέντρον), sexual passion (ἐρῶν, ἐραστής), and lifting someone "up in the air," literally or figuratively (ἐπαίρειν). The combination is striking. It evokes Ixion's punishment, while reminding us, again, that Strepsiades is not Ixion.

In Hellenistic and Roman times, Ixion's wheel became one of the great *Sehenswürdigkeiten* of the underworld, along with Tantalus' feast (or impending rock), Sisyphus' boulder, and Tityus' vulture. Earlier, though, Ixion was depicted as revolving in mid-air.¹⁸ Euripides' Heracles laments that, for his sins, he will be banished from earth and sea, and "will imitate the wheel-driven Ixion in his bonds" (*HF* 1295–98). On a fourth-century Campanian neck-amphora, two winged figures set Ixion's wheel in motion. Are they Aurai, or perhaps Nephelai? In everyday Greek life, the bodies of slaves or criminals undergoing torture were attached to wheel rims (ἐπὶ τροχοῦ στρεβλοῦσθαι), lashed with whips or prodded with goads (κέντρα). Aristophanes often mentions these tortures.¹⁹ But the juxtaposition on the vase of lovely female figures and the mid-air wheel brings us back more particularly to Strepsiades, the "son of Twist."

His name, as many have observed, suits his nature.²⁰ It also suits the near-Euripidean reversal plot on which he revolves. At the play's beginning we find him twisting and turning in bed, anxious about his debts. His goal is to twist out of debts and lawsuits somehow, like a successful wrestler, or like Odysseus πολύτροπος, the "man of many turns." Socrates and the *Clouds* encourage his day-dreams of becoming a super-successful lawyer and scoundrel—a κέντρον and στρόφις, among other things.²¹ He fails, of course. He cannot, any more than others, harness the intellectual and cultural revolution (Δίνοϋς) to his private purposes. The reversal plot makes him a victim, whether of bedbugs on the "mystic cot" (twisting and turning again beneath the bedclothes, in comic counterpoint to the gracefully

¹⁸ Berlin F 3023, listed in A. D. Trendall, *The Red-Figured Vases of Lucania, Campania and Sicily* (Oxford 1967) 338, no. 787. On this point, and for the following references to Ixion in myth and art, see Boyce (above, note 5) 33–40, 92–99 and notes.

¹⁹ Cf. *Pax* 452, *Lys.* 845–46 (and J. Henderson's commentary [Oxford 1987] *ad loc.*), *Ra.* 620, *Pl.* 875.

²⁰ Cf., among others, B. Marzullo, "Strepsiade," *Maia* 6 (1953) 99–124; Pucci (above, note 15) 15–18. Although the name Strepsiades is not introduced until line 134, I take Aristophanes' uses of στρέφω and related terms at 36, 434, 776, 792 and 1455 as strongly thematic, together, probably, with forms of τρέπω (40, 88, 813, 1263) and τρέφω (927, 1158, 1206, 1208).

²¹ Although we might expect an active meaning for κέντρον here (= κεντροτύπος, "one that strikes with the goad"; cf. the scholia), κέντρον normally denotes a low, vicious person: "one that bears the marks of the κέντρον, a rogue that has been put to the torture" (LSJ). The term στρόφις, "a slippery fellow, or twister," is more clearly suited to Strepsiades. Its fuller implications are wonderfully suggested by the French *roué* which Ambrosino (above, note 15) 12 uses of Strepsiades in another connection, at line 260.

dancing chorus), or of his all too sophistically educated, father-beating son. He is more twisted about than twisting. And yet (this is a chief difference to tragedy), Strepsiades retains the clown's basic resiliency, the ability to bounce back from defeat. "I may have fallen [been thrown], but I won't just lie there."

I give, for language, imagery, and tone, the end of the second creditor scene and the beginning of the chorus's little teasing song that precedes the catastrophe (1296–1306):

- ΣΤ. Οὐκ ἀποδιώξει σαυτὸν ἀπὸ τῆς οἰκίας;
Φέρε μοι τὸ κέντρον.
- ΔΑ. Ταῦτ' ἐγὼ μαρτύρομαι.
- ΣΤ. Ὕπαγε. Τί μέλλεις; Οὐκ ἔλας, ὧ σαμφόρα;
- ΔΑ. Ταῦτ' οὐχ ὕβρις δῆτ' ἐστίν;
- ΣΤ. Ἄξεις; Ἐφιαλῶ
κεντῶν ὑπὸ τὸν πρωκτὸν σε τὸν σειραφόρον.
Φεύγεις; Ἐμελλὸν σ' ἄρα κινήσειν ἐγὼ
αὐτοῖς τροχοῖς τοῖς σοῖσι καὶ ξυνωρίσιν.
- ΧΟ. Οἷον τὸ πραγμάτων ἐρᾶν φλαύρων· ὁ γὰρ
γέρων ὄδ' ἐρασθεῖς
ἀποστερησάι βούλεται
τὰ χρήμαθ' ἀδανείσατο.

The association of goad (κέντρον), wheels, and passionate love is telling. Strepsiades got into trouble, of course, through Pheidippides' horse- and chariot-racing. He owed twelve mnae to Pasiās for a horse, three to Ameinias for a little chariot and wheels (τροχοῖν 31). Now the second creditor has come, a natural enemy and oppressor, masquerading pathetically as a figure out of Euripidean tragedy, smashed up in a racing accident. Strepsiades sees through the act and the false pathos (much as Dicaeopolis rejected the "desolated" farmer in *Acharnians* 1018–36) and, with splendid appropriateness, he converts his creditor into a racehorse to be driven—away. The comic business with the κέντρον is sexual aggression too, the dramatic equivalent of a simple "Fuck you!"²² It also links up with the κένταυρος motif earlier and with the chorus' teasing remarks about this "great lover," which are more than a warning, in colloquial terms, not to "like trouble." Strepsiades is a lover at heart, a *senex amator*. Infatuation comes naturally to him, as to Pindar's Ixion, or to Ixion's sister Coronis, who "was in love with the impossible" (ἦρατο τῶν ἀπεόντων, *Pyth.* 3. 20). Should a comic hero desire anything less?

The turning of Strepsiades' wheel of fortune is marked most emphatically at 1452–64:

²² For κέντρον = phallus, cf. J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse* (New Haven 1975) 122; for the phallic "sting" of the wasp-chorus, K. J. Reckford, "Catharsis and Dream-Interpretation in Aristophanes' *Wasps*," *TAPA* 107 (1977) 305–07 and n. 22.

- ΣΤ. Ταυτὶ δι' ὑμᾶς, ὦ Νεφέλαι, πέπονθ' ἐγώ,
 ὑμῖν ἀναθείς ἅπαντα τὰμὰ πράγματα.
- ΧΟ. Αὐτὸς μὲν οὖν σαυτῷ σὺ τούτων αἴτιος,
 στρέψας σεαυτὸν εἰς πονηρὰ πράγματα.
- ΣΤ. Τί δήτα ταῦτ' οὐ μοι τότε ἠγορεύετε,
 ἀλλ' ἄνδρ' ἄγροικον καὶ γέροντ' ἐπήρετε;
- ΧΟ. Ἡμεῖς ποοῦμεν ταῦθ' ἐκάστοθ', ὅταν τινὰ
 γνῶμεν πονηρῶν ὄντ' ἐραστήν πραγμάτων,
 ἕως ἂν αὐτὸν ἐμβάλωμεν εἰς κακόν,
 ὅπως ἂν εἰδῆ τοὺς θεοὺς δεδοικέναι.
- ΣΤ. Ὡμοι πονηρὰ γ', ὦ Νεφέλαι, δίκαια δέ·
 οὐ γάρ μ' ἐχρῆν τὰ χρήμαθ' ἀδανεισάμην
 ἀποστειρεῖν.

It was, the Clouds insist, Strepsiades' own silly fault. He "twisted" himself into bad trouble. The collocation of words, στρέψας-ἐπήρετε-ἐραστής, balancing the Clouds' earlier warning, once more might recall Ixion as the lustful man caught up in delusion and punished on the airborne wheel. For Strepsiades' "airborne" adventures in the realm of ideas, clouds, and τὰ μετέωρα have belied his passionate hopes, bringing him to reversal, recognition, and punishment, as on the wheel of time. He comes perilously near to becoming an Ixion, a tragic hero, perhaps a Euripidean one. Perilously near: But there are differences, and they are crucial.

For Strepsiades, though humiliated, is not finally hurt. His repentance is comic repentance, in the manner of Verdi's Falstaff: He may speak ruefully, may admit (as beasts often do in Aesop's fables) that "it served me right"; but that is quite enough, and he will move quickly to new resolution and new action: the burning of the Phrontisterion. As for the Clouds' judgment on him, Strepsiades (by now) recognizes teasing, recognizes comic moralizing when he hears it. He insists, quite rightly, that the Clouds' alleged justice was as "naughty" in its way as his own attempt to evade paying his debts. Not only, that is, are the Clouds not representatives of the old morality and religion: They are irresponsible spirits, independent comic agents in their own right, who serve only their own wilful sense of play. (I have compared them elsewhere to Shakespeare's fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.)²³ Although their trickery towards Strepsiades was evoked in part by their observation and comic mimesis of Strepsiades' own tricky nature, and in part by their patronage of Socrates and related intellectual frauds (who may, however, become victims in their turn), still this little ἀπάτη is only one manifestation of their immortal, illusionary, ever-changing playfulness.

Strepsiades, then, is like Ixion—and unlike. The cumulative similarities of word and act, the clouds, centaurs, and turning wheels, lead us finally to appreciate the comic hero's strength in not being, precisely, a

²³ Reckford (above, note 15) 222.

tragic hero. The *Clouds* has painful moments. It flirts with tragedy, even as it parodies it (the second creditor). There are paratragic laments, very close to Euripides. The reversal plot itself is very Euripidean, very close to *Hecuba* and *Andromache*. The audience may have felt the closeness, may have been disturbed by it—and by other serious implications of the *Clouds*. And yet, it is not a tragedy, as Strepsiades is not Ixion. He survives humiliation. He refuses to accept defeat. He is resilient, as clowns and Athenians should be. In the end, he may claim rightful (or wrongful) descent from Odysseus, “man of many turns,” and from Pindar’s victors in the chariot race and the wrestling match. Is it a coincidence, after all, that the champion of *Isthmian 7* (the pankration) is named Strepsiades?²⁴

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²⁴ This essay is submitted in grateful memory of Friedrich Solmsen, who read Pindar with me in 1978–79 and provided much scholarly counsel over the years. He approved the present thesis *in embruo*, referring me to Von der Mühl, and led me on with sherry, cookies, and encouragement. But I must admit, despite Aristophanic temptations to the contrary, that the responsibility for any subsequent faults is my own.