# The Acharnians [and] the Clouds [and] Lysistrata Study Guide

## The Acharnians [and] the Clouds [and] Lysistrata by Aristophanes

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# Plot Summary

This collection of three plays by the Classical Greek playwright Aristophanes satirizes various aspects of the society and culture of Athens several centuries before the birth of Christ. The first and third ("The Acharnians" and "Lysistrata") focus on the city's need for, but resistance to, a lasting peace with its enemies. The second, "The Clouds," focuses on the new (at the time) style of learning and philosophy as taught by the renowned Socrates. Throughout all three plays, there are undercurrents of explicit sexuality as well as thematic explorations of the foolishness of holding too tightly to traditional ways, and how the disempowered find power.

The first play of the collection, "The Acharnians," begins with a long soliloquy by Athenian citizen Dikaiopolis, who expresses his frustration with the drawn out process of trying to build peace between Athens and its various enemies, a process that (as the narrative later reveals), is highly corrupt. The assistance of a so-called minor deity, Amphitheus, empowers Dikaiopolis with a personal peace, which he attempts to pass on to the war-like Acharnians, angry with Dikaiopolis for intervening in there ongoing confrontations with the confrontational Sparta. Dikiaopolis enlists the aid of renowned playwright Euripides and strives to convince the Acharnians that peace is in their best interest. As part of his argument, he demonstrates the potential for economic growth in peacetime by setting up a market and doing successful business with a pair of merchants. After concluding his transactions, Dikaiopolis celebrates his success with a self-cooked banquet, both angering and mocking his warrior neighbor, Lamachus. At the same time, however, Dikaiopolis refuses to share his secret for peace with others, eventually becoming drunk on peace but still being hailed by the now peaceful Acharnians as a hero.

In "The Clouds," the second play of the collection, the wily Strepsiades attempts to enlist his son Pheidippides in the ways of the so-called New Learning, as taught by the controversial but nevertheless respected Socrates, so that he (Strepsiades) can maneuver his way out from under his burdensome debts. Pheidippides refuses outright, so Strepsiades goes to Socrates himself, and is surprised to find that Socrates and his learning are both inspired not by the traditional gods, but by The Clouds, whose presence Socrates invokes and who come down to earth to teach Strepsiades. The generally stupid Strepsiades misunderstands and misapplies the teachings of both Socrates and The Clouds, but doesn't understand what has happened until Pheidippides, who has finally gone to study with Socrates, reveals to him the negative side of Socrates' techniques of philosophical argument. Driven to an extreme of anger by Pheidippides' attitude, Strepsiades sets fire to Socrates' home. The Clouds return to the sky, speaking of how their job is done.

The final play of the collection is "Lysistrata," in which the women of Greece unite behind the forceful leadership of an Athenian woman, Lysistrata, in a desperate effort to bring peace to their country. Specifically, they decide to withhold sex from their men until they refuse to go to war ever again. Many of the women are initially resistant to the idea, saying they love sex too much to give it up. Lysistrata convinces them, however, and

soon the men become angry and frustrated, not to mention painfully engorged, at the situation. Even though some of the women weaken, and even though the men prove both manipulative and clever, Lysistrata's plan eventually works. Delegations from Athens and Sparta, the principal players in Greece's ongoing wars, negotiate peace using the nude body of Lysistrata's ally, Reconciliation, to map out who is going to take control of which territory. The play ends with a song and dance in which the striking women and their horny husbands are happily reunited.

# The Acharnians, Part 1

## The Acharnians, Part 1 Summary

This collection of three plays by the Classical Greek playwright Aristophanes satirizes various aspects of the society and culture of Athens several centuries before the birth of Christ. The first and third ("The Acharnians" and "Lysistrata") focus on the city's need for, but resistance to, a lasting peace with its enemies. The second, "The Clouds," focuses on the new (at the time) style of learning and philosophy as taught by the renowned Socrates. Throughout all three plays, there are undercurrents of explicit sexuality as well as thematic explorations of the foolishness of holding too tightly to traditional ways, and how the disempowered find power.

(p. 13 -20) In the empty space in front of the regular meeting place of the Athenian Assemby, Dikaiopolis waits for peace negotiations to start, speaking in soliloquy about the last time he was there and the plays that were going on in the theatre at the time. He complains about how late and irresponsible the members of the Assembly are, reminisces about how good things were in his home village, and how "if any speaker dares say a word about anything except peace, I'll shout, I'll heckle, I'll abuse, I'll..."

Dikaiopolis is interrupted by the arrival of the Assemblymen and of Amphitheus, who introduces himself as a minor immortal sent by the gods to assist the peace process and who pleads for financial support (see "Quotes," p. 15). He is summarily dismissed by the Crier, who is running the Assembly and who calls in a series of Greek ambassadors. The first are the Ambassadors to Persia who complain about the ill treatment they received while on their mission - ill treatment that sounds, to both the bitter Dikaiopolis and the audience, as though they were actually treated royally. The second Ambassador is given the name The Great King's Eye, and according to stage directions wears a mask (see "Objects/Places" - Masks) with only one eye and speaks in gibberish. His presentation to the Assembly is translated by his fellow Ambassador as meaning that the Persians are going to give the Athenians gold, but translated by Dikaiopolis as saying the Athenians are "wide arsed idiots." After The Great King's Eye is dismissed, Amphitheus returns, and Dikaiopolis sends him on a mission to make peace with Sparta (see "Objects / Places"). Meanwhile, the Crier calls forth another Ambassador, who says that the Thracians have promised military support. As he introduces the Thracian soldiers, they rush forward and hungrily rob Dikaiopolis of his lunch. The Crier sends the Thracians away and closes the Assembly.

Dikaiopolis is again left alone, but not for long. Amphitheus returns, this time bringing news that a group of tough old warriors from Acharnae is advancing towards Athens, angry with the Athenians for attempting to make peace with "the men who cut our vines down" (i.e., Sparta). He tells Dikaiopolis of the three peace plans he (Amphitheus) proposed to the Acharnians, illustrating their content by offering him three different sorts of wine. Dikaiopolis rejects the five year contract as "loathsome" and the ten year contract as "much too acid," but accepts the third one as having "the scent of ambrosia

and nectar." He pours out a bit of the wine in a libation (respectful salute to the power of the gods) and unilaterally declares peace, leaving the Acharnians to do what they will. As Dikaiopolis goes inside to drink the rest of the wine, Amphitheus runs off to get away from the Acharnians.

## The Acharnians, Part 1 Analysis

As is the case with all three plays in this collection theme (the overall theme of both the collection and of the individual plays), action and style effectively intertwine to make an apparently intended point about society, and how human beings function within that society. Specifically, thematic intent (satirizing a current situation or individual - in this case, the failure of Athens' ruling classes to establish peace) combines with this play's specific story (Dikaiopolis' personal struggle to create lasting peace) and how that story is presented (with crude comic exaggeration) to point out that efforts to achieve peace are in general anchored in self interest. This takes place on two main levels, the first being apparent here in the visit of the self-satisfied, somewhat petulant Ambassadors who seem to think their essential purpose is to be treated well and with respect, rather than actually doing what their supposed to do. This evidence of self-interest triggers determined action in the play's protagonist, Dikaiopolis, which eventually reveals that he too is prone to self-interested action in the same way as those with whom he is so angry. This is the second level of the play's manifestation of its simultaneous narrative and thematic intent, becoming fully evident in Part 4 when Dikaiopolis refuses various requests for peace in the name of keeping it all for himself.

Another interesting element in this section of the play is the intervention of Amphitheus, who in spite of being a "minor" god has the same power as those of his more major fellows, in that he is able to intervene decisively in human affairs (as Greek spirituality contended all gods had not only the right but the desire to do). Another point about Amphitheus is that after his exit here, he never reappears. This might be considered a commentary on how, in mythology and in the theatre based on that mythology, the gods interpolate themselves into human events only long enough to either create trouble or resolve trouble and then disappear, leaving humanity to sort out the details themselves (in the way Amphitheus does here).

Finally, there is the vivid and clear symbolic relationship between the three sorts of wine the three sorts of peace sampled by Dikaiopolis, with his ultimate choice making it clear that he wishes (hopes?) for a peace that lasts a long, LONG time.

# The Acharnians, Part 2

## The Acharnians, Part 2 Summary

(p. 21 - 41) The Chorus of Acharnians (old but vital men) comes on, speaking in angry verse of their search for the traitor who negotiated peace with Sparta and who has escaped them. Their verse is interrupted by the arrival of Dikaiopolis and his family, who begin a religious rite celebrating peace. The ritual is in turn interrupted by the Acharnians, who confront Dikaiopolis about his peace declaration. He sends his family back into his house for safety, and then confronts the Chorus with his belief that the Spartans are not the only ones to blame for the conflict with the Acharnians. The Acharnians react angrily, but Dikaiopolis convinces them to let him plead the Spartan case.

Suddenly concerned about how his speech will be perceived (see "Quotes," p. 28 and "Characters - Cleon"), Dikaiopolis visits the home of renowned playwright Euripides, and asks to borrow the ragged costume of one of his better known characters. The self-satisfied Euripides eventually agrees, but becomes increasingly irritated when Dikaiopolis (referring to how the audience has to know who he is but the Chorus has to be completely fooled) asks for prop after prop to help his performance. After Euripides finally throws him out of the house, and as he dresses himself in the costume, Dikaiopolis convinces himself to actually go through with his plan (see "Quotes," p. 32). He then, in his disguise as a beggar, speaks at length to the Chorus of Acharnians that their quarrel is as much with the Megarians as it is with the Spartans. The Chorus splits in two, half wanting to attack Dikaiopolis for telling lies and the other half defending him for telling the truth. The first half calls out for Lamachus, a great warrior, whose arrival strikes terror into Dikaipolis. He pleads, flirts, and grovels, in an attempt to get Lamachus to show him mercy, but eventually becomes angry with Lamachus for collecting large sums of money for being a soldier while he (Dikaiopolis) and members of the Chorus have either been on "the front line" or have been forced to volunteer for war. Lamachus insists that he will never stop being paid to do, and goes out in a huff.

The Chorus reunites, and first speaks directly to the audience about how the playwright is right to say what he's saying about peace, even in the face of potential persecution from Cleon (see "Quotes," p. 39). The Chorus then speaks of how they, elderly warriors that they are, have been defamed and dishonored by the young who seek and control power.

## The Acharnians, Part 2 Analysis

There are several noteworthy elements in this section. The first is the evidence, presented in dialogue, many of the characters (including Dikaiopolis and the Chorus) actually know they're in a play. This is a fairly common device, employed in both contemporary and classical theatre, to simultaneously remind the audience that what

they're seeing isn't actually real but is nonetheless grounded in real feelings and circumstances. In other words, it serves to remind the audience to look into themselves as well as into the play for insight into the truths being acted out.

A related point is the way the narrative, in this section (and indeed throughout both the play and the others in this collection) incorporates real people of the time. In this case, the references are both verbal (as in the case of Cleon, who is spoken about but never seen) and actual (as in the instances of both Euripides and Lamachus, who appear in person). Again, the references serve to exploit the relationship between the audience's experience in the theatre and their experience in life. They serve to blur the lines between the two sorts of experience and remind audiences that as human beings they, like Dikaiopolis, are trapped in a situation over which they can, and perhaps should, be inspired to take more control. On another level, the presence of these real-life figures serves a satirical function - specifically, to point out how (eccentric? extreme? foolish?) they are. Again, the point is to suggest to the audience that they re-think the way they perceive and react to public figures. A contemporary example of this process and purpose is the recent portrayal by Tina Fey of 2008 Vice-Presidential candidate Sarah Palin.

A third key element here is the way in which the Chorus is portrayed - as actually participating in, and being changed by, the action as opposed to merely observing, and or commenting on, the action as choruses usually do in Greek theatre (see "Objects/Places - The Chorus in Greek Theatre"). In many ways, in fact, the Chorus is a co-protagonist with Dikaiopolis, in their own way being as transformed by the events of the play as he is.

# The Acharnians, Part 3

## The Acharnians, Part 3 Summary

(p. 41 - 52) Dikaiopolis returns and sets up a ring of stones defining what he calls his marketplace where anyone in Greece is welcome to come and trade. The first to arrive is a thin, evidently poverty stricken Megarian, who disguises his two young daughters as pigs and, through dialogue heavy with crude sexual double entendre (see "Quotes," p. 44), trades them to Dikaiopolis for salt and garlic. The conversation is interrupted briefly by an Informer, who tries to define the bargain as illegal and arrest the Megarian, but Dikaiopolis chases him (the Informer) away.

After a brief commentary by the Chorus on Dikaiopolis' courage in chasing the Informer, which they favorably compare to the lack of courage of several other (artists? warriors? public figures?), a second trader arrives. This one is from Thebes, and has a large inventory of edible plants and animals on offer. Dikaiopolis is particularly enthusiastic about the merchant's eels. When the question of payment comes up, the Theban rejects anything Dikaiopolis has to offer ... until he (Dikaiopolis) suggests that the Theban take an informer in payment. The Theban reacts enthusiastically, saying he can make money off the Informer's skills at sneakiness. At that moment, another Informer arrives, charging the Theban with trying to illegally sell the spoils of war and foolishly explaining his theories on how the Theban would sabotage Athens. The Theban and Dikaiopolis overpower him, and the Theban takes him away as the Chorus discusses with Dikaiopolis how useful he (the Informer) will be.

A Slave rushes in, eager to buy some food for Lamachus. Dikaiopolis refuses to sell him anything, proclaiming that everything he bought from the Theban is for him and chasing the Slave off. As Dikaiopolis goes into the house, the Chorus sings of how brave, courageous and blessed he is, praying to Reconciliation (see "Characters") that she bless them the way she has Dikaiopolis (see "Quotes," p. 52).

## The Acharnians, Part 3 Analysis

Again, there are several noteworthy elements in this section. The first is the accent-defined, mercenary, morally challenged portrayal of the Megarian - for further consideration of this aspect of the play see "Style - Language and Meaning." The second noteworthy point is the crudity of the Megarian's dialogue - specifically, the way his speech includes several double entendres (see "Objects/Places"), the first (and perhaps most vivid) examples of the pervasive, crudely expressed sexual undercurrent in all three comedies of this collection.

A third point is how the transformation of the Chorus from an entity of war and confrontation to an entity of peace continues, as evidenced in their hymn to Dikaiopolis. There is irony here, however. Specifically, the fact that the Chorus is praising a man

who is becoming increasingly self interested, and who will become even more so in the following section.

Finally, there is the intriguing appearance of the informers, who are treated with the disrespect and resentment that similar individuals have been, and often are, treated throughout history. There is the sense here that the Informers are, in fact, representatives of the status quo (the way things are) that Dikaiopolis is trying to change and that the playwright suggests, in all three plays, SHOULD be changed. In other words, they are advocates for rules, with the treatment they receive suggesting that at least part of the playwright's thematic perspective is that rules should be broken. For further consideration of this point, see "Objects/Places - Classical Greek Theatre."

# The Acharnians, Part 4

## The Acharnians, Part 4 Summary

(p. 52 - 62) As Dikaiopolis happily and busily prepares the food purchased from the Theban, he is visited first by a man named Dercetes and second by the slaves of a young married couple, all sent to ask Dikaiopolis to share with them a drop of peace (ie a drop of wine from the peace contract bottle). Dikaiopolis refuses all requests except by that of the bride's slave, who tells him that she wants a bit of peace in order to keep her man's "prick" at home. Dikaiopolis agrees to this, saying it isn't the women's fault their husbands go off to war. He gives instructions that when it looks as though the bride's husband is going to go and fight, she should rub a drop of the wine into his penis.

A Messenger arrives with fighting orders for Lamachus, who now apparently lives next door to Dikaiopolis. As Lamachus first complains about having his life disrupted and then makes his preparations to go to war, Dikaiopolis mocks him by making similar (but satirical) complaints about the dinner he's preparing. Lamachus becomes increasingly angry at being mocked, eventually leaving without having made Dikaiopolis stop. After he's gone, Dikaiopolis goes back into his house.

After the Chorus speaks brief commentary wishing both Dikaiopolis and Lamachus well (that also hints that Dikaiopolis will come out the better in their dispute - see "Quotes," p. 58), a Messenger rushes on with news that Lamachus has been wounded. Lamachus returns, crying out in agony about how fate has betrayed him. Dikaiopolis comes on, happy and drunk, "waving an empty pitcher." As Lamachus tells his attendants to be gentle with his wounded body, Dikaiopolis tells his female attendants to pleasure him (Dikaiopolis) sexually and calls out for more wine, which is brought to him. As Lamachus is carried off, still wailing about the pain he's in, the Chorus hails Dikaiopolis as a champion.

## The Acharnians, Part 4 Analysis

There are two main elements to consider in this section. The first is the relationship between Dikaiopolis and Lamachus - specifically, the celebration of peace evident in the former and the celebration of war and violence evident in the latter. Peace (i.e., wine, food and prosperity) evidently bring happiness, while war evidently brings pain and suffering, a truth that is perhaps self evident but which the playwright evidently feels ought to be pointed out more vividly. The irony, of course, is that both men are profoundly self-interested, an evocation of what seems to be the playwright's central thematic point here - that humanity, whether at war or at peace, is ultimately self interested.

The second point is related to the first. This is the question of why Dikaiopolis refuses to share peace. One answer might be that in having his central character behave in the same self-serving way as the characters he (Dikaiopolis) condemns, the playwright is making a pointed comment about human nature, a variation on the point about self-interest made above. Specifically, the playwright seems to be suggesting that in the same way as the politicians and warriors want to build and/or conserve their power by making war and controlling the peace process, individual citizens (like Dikaiopolis) want to build and/or conserve what power THEY manage to gain within this society by whatever means possible. But then if this is the reason for the playwright making the choice he does, why then does he have the Chorus hail Dakaiopolis as a champion? Perhaps the Chorus hails self-preservation, and the consolidation of self-power, because the playwright wants to suggest that ALL human beings are ultimately as self-interested as Dikaiopolis, and would like to be as self serving as he is.

On the other hand, there is a less cynical possibility. This is the idea that by having Dikaiopolis refuse to share peace in the way he does, the playwright is suggesting that each individual is responsible, or must be made responsible, for making and preserving peace in his own life. If THAT'S the case, why does Dikaiopolis allow the bride's slave to carry some peace back to her mistress? It may be that the playwright is a proponent, to use a late 20th Century phrase, of making love not war. In other words, he is perhaps making the suggestion that positive, pleasurable, unified relations between people (in this case, manifest as sexual) are a valid, and necessary, alternative to the more negative, wounding, confrontation relations of war. There is also Dikaiopolis' comment that women aren't responsible for war which, aside from clearly foreshadowing the circumstances and actions of "Lysistrata," seems to be making a very clear, and very pointed, comment about the male tendency towards violence.

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# The Clouds, Part 1

## The Clouds, Part 1 Summary

(p. 75 - 94) While his son Pheidippides lies asleep and dreaming beside him, Strepsiades sits wakeful and fretting, worrying in soliloquy about the debts his horse-crazy son is racking up, recalling the unhappy circumstances of his marriage (see "Quotes," p. 76), and musing on how his wife has spoiled their son. He comments that he's thought of a way to remedy the debt-full situation, wonders how he's going to convince his son of the merits of the idea, and then realizes the best way to do it is to get him to say yes before he's fully awake. This he does, but when Pheidippides learns that Strepsiades wants to send him to study with the "pale-faced bare-footed quacks" Socrates ... and learn the value of arguing for the wrong (see "Quotes," p. 79), he refuses and goes home.

Strepsiades then resolves to be taught himself, and knocks at the door of Socrates' home (see "Objects/Places - The Thinkery"). An arrogant Student answers, and at first refuses to allow Strepsiades in, saying Socrates is too busy dealing with important (but satirically described) subjects to see him. Eventually, however, the Student relents and shows Strepsiades into the classroom, where a large number of pale, unhealthy looking pupils are, according to the Student, engaged in various sorts of complicated contemplations (again, satirically described).

At that moment Socrates appears, in the manner in which the gods in more dramatic plays appears - high above the action, lowered into the scene by a machine and asking (with long words and complicated phrasing) what Strepsiades wants. Strepsiades explains how much debt he's in and adds that he wants to learn one of Socrates' arguments - "the one that always pays off and never pays up." When Strepsiades swears by the gods that he will pay fairly, Socrates tells him the gods "are no longer current" and adds that the only true gods are "the Clouds." He ritually prepares Strepsiades to meet the Clouds, and calls for them to come down to earth.

As the Clouds sing distantly, Strepsiades is at first fearful, but becomes enchanted by the female voices he hears (see "Quotes," p. 87). As the beautiful Clouds appear, they greet Socrates as their favorite (see "Quotes," p. 89). Strepsiades at first speaks crudely about their power, but then promises never to sacrifice to any other gods, adding that all he wants is to develop the skills to "twist and turn [his] way through the thickets of the law and give [his] creditors the slip." The Clouds agree to help, Strepsiades celebrates (in verse) his future success, and the Clouds assure him he's going to gain a wonderful reputation. After asking Strepsiades a few basic questions about his memory and his speaking skills (which Strepsiades answers in a way that makes him quite exasperated), Socrates takes Strepsiades into his house.

# The Clouds, Part 1 Analysis

Unlike "The Acharnians" and "Lysistrata," which are both concerned with peace, "The Clouds" is focused on another aspect central to contemporary Athenian life, not to mention socio-political debate. This is the influence of what was then known as New Learning, as practiced and taught by Socrates (see "Characters"). The satirical point made here is that this sort of learning and the individuals at its forefront are, firstly, held in too high an esteem. This point is made in this section by the way Socrates makes his first appearance - as "deus ex machine" (literally, "god in the machine"), the way that the immortals were traditionally presented to the Classical Greek audience. The point is not made to suggest that the playwright thinks of Socrates as a god, but to illustrate how the playwright makes his satirical point by suggesting that that is exactly how the obviously foolish and self interested Strepsiades (and by extension the people of Athens) think of Socrates. In other words, Socrates is just a man, but people treat him as a god - and, as the narrative eventually makes clear, the playwright thinks this is a BIG mistake.

There are several other interesting elements here. The first is the way the play's title and the identity of its chorus both have a clear and unavoidable resonance with the contemporary saying that someone has his or her head "in the clouds," meaning that he or she is a dreamer, unrealistic, and perhaps even a little foolishly self absorbed. The second is the irony associated with the fact that Socrates has apparently rejected the influence of the original gods (i.e., spirituality as it has been traditionally known) but nevertheless has embraced a different sort of spirituality, a different sort of faith - in the inspiration provided by the aforementioned dreamy clouds. Finally, there is the relationship between Strepsiades and Pheidippides, which may very well be familiar to those who have ever been a teenager and/or a parent in a teenager/parent relationship. For further consideration of this aspect of the play, see "Characters - Pheidippides."

# The Clouds, Part 2

## The Clouds, Part 2 Summary

(p. 94 - 105) The Chorus assures Strepsiades that his studies, although possibly disturbing, will result in good fortune. The Chorus Leader then speaks at length, apparently in the voice of the playwright, about all the work that goes into a play, how carefully crafted his play is, and how ultimately respectful he is of the authority figures (including Cleon) that he has satirized. The full Chorus then invites the powerful gods to celebrate and dance with them, while the Chorus Leader reminds the audience of all the good they (the Clouds) do (see "Quotes," p. 97), and instructs the audience on the good THEY can do (include persecute Cleon).

Socrates bursts out of his house, complaining about how stupid Strepsiades is. He calls for Strepsiades to come out and to bring his bed with him. As Strepsiades comes, complaining about how many bugs there are in his bed, Socrates tries to engage him in theoretical conversation - about geometry, and about language and gender. In both conversations, Strepsiades falls exasperatingly short, leading Socrates to instruct him in an obviously foolish (and wrong) way that Strepsiades completely accepts. Finally, Socrates orders Strepsiades to lie down on his bed and simply think one of his problems through.

After Socrates goes back in his house, Strepsiades tries to do as he's told, but complains to the Chorus about the bugs in his bed. Socrates comes back out and asks how he's getting along. When Strepsiades says he's not doing well, Socrates again asks him what he wants to learn, and Strepsiades again tells him he wants to learn how to avoid interest and getting into too much debt. Socrates, using what can be identified as the Socratic Method of questioning, helps Strepsiades to come up with what he (Socrates) hopes will be reasonable solutions, but which turn out to be completely idiotic. Socrates becomes increasingly frustrated and eventually gives up. Strepsiades begs the Chorus for help, and the Leader tells him to have his son taught. In spite of his certainty that Pheidippides will be useless, Strepsiades goes to fetch him. The Chorus tries to reassure Socrates that his work will not be in vain, but Socrates ignores them and goes into his house.

## The Clouds, Part 2 Analysis

The first point to note about this section of the play is that the action essentially stops while the Chorus gives voice to the playwright's personal difficulties with Cleon, his ethical difficulties with the way Cleon operates, and his call to action for the audience to intervene with Cleon on his behalf. It is perhaps the most overt, and simultaneously irrelevant interjection of reality into the drama to be found in all three plays - irrelevant, that is, to the narrative, not to the playwright's overall purpose in recounting the narrative. It may be that the playwright puts these words and attitudes into the mouth of

the Chorus in this particular play because in that context, the Clouds are ostensibly the messengers of truth. The reader might well be justified in wondering, however, if that was indeed his intention, why did he put such obviously personal and deeply held beliefs into the mouths and philosophies of entities that eventually prove to be ineffectual, and who are held up as gods by people whom he portrays as both stupid and foolish?

The so-called Socratic Method of philosophical debate involved the philosopher (originally Socrates) asking his student a series of questions designed to help the student arrive at an experience and/or understanding of truth simultaneously objective (based on universal principles) and subjective (based on personal experience and insight). The fact that in this section the method fails with Strepsiades, and in fact turns on him later in the play, suggests that part of the playwright's thematic intent in creating this situation is to suggest that the method is fundamentally flawed.

# The Clouds, Part 3

## The Clouds, Part 3 Summary

(p. 105 - 115) Strepsiades comes back, pushing the reluctant Pheidippides ahead of him and describing about all the wonderful things he says he's learned from Socrates, things which Pheidippides can immediately tell are foolish and wrong. Socrates comes out, and immediately offers the opinion that Pheidippides is going to be extremely difficult to teach. Strepsiades assures him that Pheidippides will learn quickly and well, and asks that he (Pheidippides) be taught the arguments for Right and Wrong ... or, at the very least, Wrong.

Socrates summons the representatives of the two arguments from the house. Right is "a distinguished looking old man", while Wrong is a "smirking ... young man of about Pheidippides' age but of a much less healthy appearance - except for his large phallus." After Right and Wrong argue about who is going to win their debate, calling each other names and mocking each other, the Chorus Leader jumps in and lays out the rules for the argument (see "Quotes," p. 109).

Right speaks first, speaking of the dignity, integrity and restraint with which the young people who studied under the Old Ways lived their lives. While Wrong mocks him, urging Pheidippides to do the same, Right comments that the legendary warriors of the age all studied under him, and they all prospered, physically emotionally, militarily and financially. Wrong argues persuasively that there are many more advantages to his perspective (see "Quotes," p. 114), leading Right to argue that following Wrong's arguments will end with Pheidippides having "the asshole of a faggot for the rest of his life". Wrong argues that people of influence, power and respect all have such assholes, and indeed that many in the audience watching are themselves "faggots." This leads Right to change his mind, throw off his cloak, reveal that he's dressed like a woman, and run out of the play, flirting with male members of the audience as he goes.

Wrong asks Strepsiades what he wants to do, and Strepsiades tells him to teach Pheidippides. "He should," Strepsiades says, "be able to handle small cases with one side of his mouth while using the other side for the bigger ones/" Pheidippides goes off reluctantly with Wrong and, as Strepsiades dances happily into his house, the Chorus warns him he'll regret his actions.

## The Clouds, Part 3 Analysis

This section contains the thematic and narrative core of the play - specifically, the debate between the self-righteous Right and the self-serving Wrong. The first thing to note is that there seems to be no middle ground, no room or place or possibility for compromise. While this is perhaps the play's satirically motivated point (the suggestion that the two philosophies are so entrenched in themselves that no compromise is

possible), it may be that if the play's intent was to awaken its audience, that intent might have been better served by incorporating at least the possibility of a third, middle way.

The second point to note about this section is the dialogue referring to "faggots," which contemporary readers might perceive as inappropriate, if not offensive. There are two points to remember here. The first is that the references are entirely in keeping with sexual references throughout the three plays, and indeed of Greek comedy in general. Consider, for example, the crudity of the Megarian's references to his children in "The Acharnians," the desperation of the men in "Lysistrata" to be "fucked" and the presence in all three plays of the exaggerated, erect phallus (see "Objects/Places").

The second point to remember is that while the Ancient Greeks are, perhaps stereotypically, perceived and/or recalled as being open minded about male homosexuality, this belief applied only to relations between an older and younger man, which was considered to be part of the latter's education. Homosexual behavior between two older men (as opposed to that) was viewed in much the same way as it has been for the last several centuries, and indeed as more conservative thinkers view it today - as a feminization of the male ideal, as a weakening and a submission. In a society as anchored in war and military (pre?) conceptions as the Greeks, such weakness was essentially an abomination, and a trigger for disgust. All of this means that by having Right both perceived as and acting like a "faggot," the playwright is suggesting that in the view of contemporary society ( which is in his thematic perspective embracing Wrong's philosophy as enthusiastically and as foolishly as both Strepsiades and Socrates), the old ways (as embodied by Right) are weakening society's strength and power. The irony of such perceptions is illuminated in the following section, in which the dangers associated by the New Ways (i.e., Wrong) are dramatically and vividly dramatized.

# The Clouds, Part 4

## The Clouds, Part 4 Summary

(p. 115 - 130) The Chorus of Clouds speaks to the judges of the theatre competition, promising to bless their fields and crops with rain if they award the play first prize.

Strepsiades comes out of his house, fearful of an approaching deadline for him to pay back several loans, excited to see how much Pheidippides has learned and looking forward to winning his debates with his creditors. When he learns from Socrates that Pheidippides has learned the argument he was supposed to, Strepsiades dances with joy. Pheidippides comes out of Socrates' house, and Strepsiades whoops with excitement (see "Quotes," p. 118) when he sees just how much of a clever thinker he (Pheidippides) has become. He sings a song of celebration, and takes Pheidippides into their home.

A moment later, a Fat Creditor appears, demanding that Strepsiades pay back a loan made for him (Strepsiades) to buy a horse. Strepsiades comes back out and refuses, using one of the faulty arguments taught to him by Socrates (see Part 3) as evidence. The Fat Creditor reacts with shock and outrage, promising as he leaves to have Strepsiades in court. A few moments later a Second Creditor appears, demanding that Strepsiades pay the interest on a loan. Strepsiades again uses arguments that seem to be inspired either by Socrates or Pheidippides, assaults the Second Creditor, chases him off, and goes back inside. After the Chorus comments that Strepsiades will soon be begging to be released from the torture he's brought on himself, Strepsiades runs out of the house in fear, having been beaten by Pheidippides.

When asked by the Chorus what happened, Strepsiades explains that an argument began after he asked Pheidippides to sing at dinner, and that the argument resulted in Pheidippides hitting him. Pheidippides uses the Socratic Method of questioning to prove that he had every right to hit his father, saying that since parents hit their children out of an expression of caring, children have the right to hit their parents for the same reason. He also argues that young people have the right to change laws in the same way that their parents once did, and proposes that he prove his point even further by beating his mother. This is too much for Strepsiades, who cries out in anger to Socrates and to the Clouds for betraying his faith in them.

As the Clouds protest that they only did what they asked, Strepsiades threatens to punish Socrates and prays to a statue of Hermes for advice on whether to sue. He imagines that he sees the statue saying no, which Strepsiades takes as an indication that he should punish Socrates in other ways. He calls for a slave to bring him a torch and sets fire to Socrates' roof, calling also for an ax and starting to chop its beams apart. At one of the house's windows, Chaerephon (Socrates' fellow philosopher) and Socrates both appear, begging Strepsiades to stop. Strepsiades (still up on the roof) quotes Socrates' own words back at him, used when Socrates first appeared (see Part

1), "I am walking upon air and attacking the mystery of the sun." Caerephon and Socrates fall over each other in their efforts to get away. Strepsiades and his slaves chase them off. After they've gone, the Leader of the Chorus turns to her fellow Clouds and says it's time to leave. "We've done," she comments, "I think I'd say / sufficient choral service for today."

## The Clouds, Part 4 Analysis

For insight into the Chorus' opening speech, see "Objects/Places - The Theatre Competition."

This section contains the play's climax, the point at which its narrative and thematic lines converge into a confrontation that suddenly changes the overall tone of the play from something essentially comic to something that feels, for a moment, too intensely real to be anything but tragic. There is the very strong sense that in its portray of Strepsiades' frustration and anger, the play is presenting a portrait of a man at the end of his tether that cuts too close to the emotional bone. In other words, it doesn't seem quite right to find rage of this intensity funny. The point must be made, however, that contemporary sensibilities might very well be quite different from those of the audiences who originally viewed the play. In other words, an audience in Ancient Greece may very well find this scene hysterically funny.

That said, the sense of suddenly increasing darkness in what has, to this point, been a pointed but ultimately harmless piece of satiric entertainment sense also emerges from the newly educated Pheidippides' argument with his father. The argument becomes even more chilling when it is remembered that his style of argument is an exactly duplicated version of the Socratic Method (see Part 2 above). The thematic point here is that logic, perhaps even the Old Thinking as well as the New, is as subject to manipulation and corruption as any other human belief system and / or philosophy.

The play's final irony can be found in the apparently casual ease with which the Chorus of Clouds dismisses what has just gone on. The point here is perhaps that the Clouds, not to mention the learning and wisdom they bring with them, are ultimately fickle and shallow. They blow away like clouds on a hot summer day in the face of a good, brisk wind - the powerful wind, to extend the metaphor, of human fear and human greed, both of which are evident in the self absorbed Strepsiades.

# Lysistrata, Part 1

## Lysistrata, Part 1 Summary

(p. 141 - 150) In the courtyard of Lysistrata's home, Lysistrata waits impatiently for the women of Greece to arrive for an important gathering. Her flighty neighbor Calonice assures her that all the women she's summoned will be there, but wonders what the meeting is for. After some crude banter (see "Quotes," p. 142), Lysistrata says she has realized the only way that all of Greece can achieve peace and unity is if the women take charge. Women, she says, have to make themselves so attractive but so frustratingly unattainable that men will never want to go to war ever again.

Shortly afterwards, other women (including Myrrhine) arrive for the meeting, followed by delegations from other Greek city/states, including the Spartan delegation led by tough talking, physically imposing Lampito, who demands why Lysistrata has called them together. Lysistrata tells the women to think about how unhappy they are about their men constantly being at war, and says that she's had an idea of how to end the situation - all women, she suggests will stop having sex with their men until the wars are all ended.

Most of the women protest, saying there's no way they can stop having sex. Lampito, however, agrees, leading Calonice to ask for more information about how the plan will work. Lysistrata describes what she has in mind (see "Quotes," p. 146 - 2). Although Calonice is still doubtful, Lampito says the plan will work on the Spartan men. She wonders, however, whether it will work with the Athenian men, particularly with their large store of funds kept in Athena's temple. Lysistrata says that part of her plan includes taking over some of Athens' most sacred buildings, including the temple, and adds that there is already a group of supporters waiting at the Acropolis (see "Objects/Places") waiting for her to give the signal. She then asks the women to take an oath to seal their bargain. At first, she intends to make the oath on a shield, but Myrrhine points out that it's strange to seal an oath of peace on a weapon of war. Calonice suggests making the oath by drinking wine from a common goblet, and after Lysistrata prays over both, Myrrhine reluctantly becomes the first person to swear, almost fainting when it comes to the point of actually saying she will refuse to have sex (see "Quotes," p. 149). Before the women can drink, there is the sound of distant fighting. Lysistrata says this means that the siege of Athena's temple has been successfully completed, and tells Lampito to return to Sparta and engage the rest of the women there in the bargain. As Lampito goes, Lysistrata leads the other women up to the Acropolis.

## Lysistrata, Part 1 Analysis

Perhaps the noteworthy element of this section, and indeed of this play, is its statement of female empowerment, a manifestation of one of the central themes of the collection (see "Themes - Empowering the Disempowered"). Another noteworthy element is the

scope of the play's satirical intent, in that it satirizes male and female alike - the superficial Calonice and the sexually intense Myrrhine are equally as satirical of female perspectives as the grumbling Magistrate and the frustrated, horny Cinesias are of male perspectives. There is also the metaphoric value of having much of the action relate to the Acropolis, and specifically the Temple of Athena. Athena was a famously virgin goddess, meaning that there is a clear connection between the reawakened "virginity" of Lysistrata and her allies and the power of the goddess. Meanwhile, for consideration of the metaphoric meaning of Lysistrata's assaults on the goddess' temple and on the Acropolis, see "Objects/Places."

Finally, there is the clear parallel between the wine almost drunk by Lysistrata and the other women and the wine drunk by Dikaiopolis in "The Acharnians" - wine being on one level the bringing of peace, on another level the trigger for the breaking of rules (such as the rules of behavior broken by the women here). The irony, of course, is that in "The Acharnians," Dikaiopolis drinks and peace, albeit self-indulgent, is established - in other words, the situation changes. Here in "Lysistrata," no one drinks, and by the end of the play there is the sense that while a small victory for peace has been won, the status quo has essentially been restored, and it won't be long before the men (and the women) end up right back where they started.

# Lysistrata, Part 2

## Lysistrata, Part 2 Summary

(p. 150 - 156) The setting shifts to the courtyard in front of the Acropolis. A Chorus of Aged Men appears. Each member carries a pot of fire and large branches of wood. They slowly and painfully advance into the playing area, speaking in angrily poetic phrases about the irresistible power of male Athenian warriors, the reckless behavior of the women and their determination to regain control of Athena's Temple. The Male Chorus Leader tells the other men to first attempt to break down the doors to the Temple, and if that doesn't work, set fire to the doors and smoke the women out.

As the Male Chorus tends the fire in their pots, Stratyllis leads on a Chorus of Women, each member carrying a pitcher of water. As the other women pray to Athena to help them with their righteous cause, Stratyllis engages the Male Chorus Leader in a bitter argument - they call each other names and comment nastily about each other's sexual abilities. The Male Chorus Leader tells the men to set the women on fire, but before they do Stratyllis tells the women to throw their water on the men. As the men complain bitterly about how cold the water is, the women joke that "We're watering you to make you grow."

## Lysistrata, Part 2 Analysis

Fire in the pots represents the fire/power of male desire, while the fact that the fires are difficult to maintain is a pointed commentary on the inability of elderly men to sustain both emotional and physical desire - that is, the inability to sustain an erection. There is also the sense here, and indeed throughout the play, that men's desire for war is essentially the same as their desire for sex - to conquer, to control, to express power. Meanwhile, the water in the women's pitchers represents something more specific to the play - Lystrata's plan to "douse," as it were, the male desire for war/sex/power.

It's interesting to note, meanwhile, that in many spiritual systems other than the Classical Greek, fire is held to be representative of male energy, while water is held to be representative of female energy. Consider, for example, the Chinese yin/yang philosophy, in which yin energy is considered to be female, cool, wet, and passive, while yang energy is considered to be male, hot, dry, and aggressive. The irony, of course, is that the women in Lysistrata are anything BUT passive. Finally, there is another double entendre in the women's use of the word "grow." On one level, the women are simply referring to watering plants to make them grow. On the sexual level, "grow" can refer to the "growth" of the flaccid male penis into a fully erect one. This means that the pouring of the cold water (a so-called "cold shower"?) carries through the metaphor of the women's actions in dousing the men's desire for both sex and war. In other words, the women are not helping the men (or, more specifically, their penises, and metaphorically their power) "grow" at all.

BOOKRAGS

# Lysistrata, Part 3

## Lysistrata, Part 3 Summary

(p. 156 - 169) A Magistrate comes, accompanied by four police officers and determined to end the situation. He talks about how men have always been inconveniently governed by the whims of their women (most of which, according to the apparently unwitting double entendres in the speech, involve sex - see "Quotes," p. 157). He also talks about how inconvenient the situation is and resolves to end it. Before he can take action, however, Lysistrata leads a group of angry old women from inside the temple, and subdues both the Magistrate and the police. She and the Magistrate then engage in a lengthy, pointed debate over whether women have any right at all to take any kind of political, social, or military control over the functioning of the city state. This leads Lysistrata first into a lengthy speech in which she tells the Magistrate of the repressive lives men have made women lead.

Then, in spite of the Magistrate's protestations and as he is both restrained and mockingly dressed to resemble a woman, Lysistrata tells him how women would run the government - in the same way as they clean and unravel a tangled skein of wool and prepare it to be woven into something useful. She concludes by speaking at length (again) of how men have taken advantage of women (see "Quotes," p. 164), and mocking how the Magistrate looks. After he angrily goes out to inform his colleagues in government just how badly the women are behaving, Lysistrata and the other women go back into the Acropolis.

In alternate poetic verses, the Chorus of Men and the Chorus of Women challenge each other to fight. Each time they speak, they each remove a layer of clothing, freeing themselves for battle. The confrontations between the Male Chorus Leader and Stratyllis are particularly sharp and personal. They are interrupted by the emergence of Lystrata from the Acropolis, clearly upset.

## Lysistrata, Part 3 Analysis

In the same way as the commentary about "faggots" in "The Clouds" exploited Athenian male fear of being feminized and therefore emasculated, Lysistrata's almost ritualized re-dressing of the Magistrate exploits the fear of the Athenian male power structure of being rendered powerless. This, in turn, carries with it clear echoes of the selfishness at the heart of the thematic explorations of peace in "The Acharnians." Males, like the Magistrate here and the members of the Assembly there (and also Dikaiopolis) are only interested in what can benefit them. Women, however (at least in the world of this particular play) are more interested in what can benefit not only them, but society as a whole.

In terms of the sexual subtext to the action of this piece, it seems quite clear that the removal of the chorus' clothes prior to war can be seen as an ironic echo of the removal of clothes prior to lovemaking. In other words, the metaphoric statement here is that lovemaking is, in its way, a struggle between the sexes, a battle between who has more power and who submits to that power. On another level, this scene could also be interpreted as foreshadowing of the reunion of male and female that comes (in the sexually charged context of these plays, pun intended) at the play's conclusion.

# Lysistrata, Part 4

## Lysistrata, Part 4 Summary

(p. 169 - 180) Lysistrata tells the Choruses that it's getting more difficult to sustain her plan - the women in the Acropolis are coming up with increasingly wild excuses to go home and have sex with their men. As she speaks, one woman after another attempts to get away, but she makes fun of their excuses and bullies them into going back inside, producing a copy of a prophecy that poetically suggests the women will win the fight if they remain strong. She then leads the convinced women back inside.

Still unclothed, the Male Chorus speaks poetically of a powerful male warrior who lived in the wilderness to avoid getting entangled with women. The Female Chorus responds by telling, also poetically, the story of an equally powerful male warrior who lived in the wilderness to avoid getting entangled with the ways of MEN ... although he "adored" women. After another confrontation between the Male Chorus Leader and Stratyllis, the choruses retreat to opposite sides of the stage, the Female Chorus taking with them the clothes of the Male Chorus.

Lysistrata appears, standing on the upper platform of a tower, calling the women to prepare a defense against the arrival of a man. When Myrrhine cries out that the man is her husband, Cinesias, Lysistrata urges her to remember what she swore to do, and Myrrhine says she will. Lysistrata then tells the Female Chorus to go into the Acropolis, and they all (including Myrrhine) do so. Lysistrata remains outside to confront Cinesias who appears wearing an oversized erect phallus (see "Objects/Places") and leading a servant holding a baby. He calls for her to let Myrrhine come out, protesting that he is in agony and eventually bribing Lysistrata with a purse of cash. Lysistrata goes in and sends out Myrrine, who gives in to Cinesias' manipulations that she come out and take care of her abandoned child.

As she cuddles her baby, Cinesias tries to get her to come home and take care of the rest of their life together, including their sex life. At first she refuses, but eventually seems to give in. As Cinesias sends the slave and the baby back home, Myrrhine prepares to make love with him, but then drives the increasingly impatient Cinesias into a rage of frustration when she makes demand after demand to be comfortable (see "Quotes," p. 178). Finally, she agrees to lie down with him, but after he settles himself, he realizes that Myrrhine has slipped back into the Acropolis, leaving him with his painful, throbbing phallus. The Male Chorus sympathizes with him, but the Female Chorus taunts him. At that moment, a Herald from Sparta appears.

## Lysistrata, Part 4 Analysis

It's interesting to note in this section how the playwright suggests that sexual desire is not limited to the male experience, simultaneously suggests (through the scene

between Myrrine and Cinesias) that women are more able to restrain their sexual desires than men. The play's irony is contained in the fact that male and female alike eventually give in to their desires for each other, with even the leaders of the two choruses (who to this point have been unrelentingly hostile) reuniting by the end of the play in recognition of their mutual need.

A related, and equally interesting, point is the fact that Cinesias' entrance marks this is the first appearance in this play of a phallus (see "Objects/Places") - specifically, his painfully, and frustratingly, erect phallus. Again, there is significant irony here in the fact that in the other plays in this collection, and in Ancient Greek spiritual symbolism in general, the phallus was a positive symbol - of sexual power and freedom, specifically of the male sort. In "Lysistrata," however, the phallus is a symbol of frustration, or perhaps more accurately, of the frailty of that power.

# Lysistrata, Part 5

## Lysistrata, Part 5 Summary

(p. 180 - 193) The Herald's cloak barely conceals a bulge in the crotch that seems to be triggering the same sort of pain in him as Cinesias' phallus is causing. When Cinesias first confronts him about it, he (the Herald) denies the truth, but eventually reveals that he and the rest of the Spartan men are all in the same condition - they've been barred from having sex with their women. Cinesias realizes that all the Greek women are in on the plan, and tells the Herald to bring the Spartan leadership to Athens so they can enter (pun intended) negotiations for peace. As the Herald goes, Cinesias also goes - to fetch the Athenian leadership.

Speaking in alternating verses, the Male and Female Choruses reconcile, led by Stratyllis who tenderly takes a bug from the eye of the Male Chorus Leader and kisses him (see "Objects/Places - The Male Chorus Leader's Bug"). The final lines of their poetic compromise, however, suggest that things are not quite as harmonious as they seem (see "Quotes," p. 184).

The Spartan and Athenian delegates, all with apparently painful bulges in their groins, appear and greet each other. After sympathizing with each other on their painful condition, they call out Lysistrata, who appears accompanied by a beautiful young naked woman called Reconciliation. As the men become even more painfully aroused by Reconciliation's presence, Lysistrata speaks poetically about how they need to work together for peace. The delegations initially resist, but are eventually won over by the tantalizing presence of Reconciliation. Using her body as a map, and speaking in language heavy with double entendres (see "Quotes," p. 187"), the Athenians and Spartans work out who is going to control what part of the country. All agree to work for peace with other Greek communities, and Lysistrata orders them to go home with their wives and treat them well. The Athenians and Spartans agree to be led into the Acropolis by Lysistrata and Reconciliation, leaving the Choruses behind. The Choruses sing an ironically comic song suggesting that peace isn't really peace, but war and confrontation in disguise.

After the song is finished, the drunken Athenians come out, talking about how in future all their peace negotiations with Sparta will be conducted while they're drunk - it all went well, and everyone had a good time. The Spartan delegation comes out and leads a musical celebration of how things between the two cities are going to be different. Lysistrata then leads the Athenian and Spartan women out of the Acropolis, telling the husbands and wives to rejoin each other and be nice to one another. The Athenians, Spartans and Choruses all pair off, husbands with wives, and join in a general song and dance celebrating the wisdom of Athena and the joys of married life.

# Lysistrata, Part 5 Analysis

Sexual and narrative tension reaches its peak in this section, as Lysistrata successfully manipulates the general situation, and the men in particular, into creating the peace she has so cleverly sought. In their chorus of reconciliation, however, there is the suggestion that the male and female choruses are each luring each other into a false sense of security in order to, once again, take advantage over the other. In other words, there is the sense at the play's conclusion that neither the battle for peace nor the so-called "battle of the sexes" are conflicts that are ever going to be won permanently ... but the combatants are nevertheless going to have a good time during the war both fighting and making up.

Meanwhile, it's possible to see the play's concluding reconciliation between Athens and Sparta as a further metaphoric representation of its reconciliation between male and female (also exemplified in the reconciliation between the male and female choruses). Specifically, it could be argued that while both cities are undoubtedly militaristic in perspective, there is a certain femaleness about what might be described as the Athenian energy, or perspective - a wisdom, a thirst for other intellectual and philosophical perspectives that some might see as being particularly feminine, especially when placed against the power-oriented, control-oriented, highly physical Spartan mentality.

# Characters

## The Chorus in Greek Theatre

The traditional Greek Chorus, in both comic and tragic theatre, was a group of individual actors/performers speaking with the identity, and from the perspective, of a single character. Generally, the Chorus observed the action and commented on it, often in language more poetic than that of the central characters. In that context, the Chorus often presented and discussed the play's themes - while the central characters played those themes dramatically, the Chorus told the audience what they (the themes) were.

The Chorus in tragic theatre was, in general, more reactive than the Chorus in comedy. This is not to suggest that the Chorus in tragedy was unemotional, and did not relate to/with the central characters. On the contrary, in tragedies like "The Oresteia" and "The Bacchae," the Chorus led and inspired the characters through great intensities of emotion and experience. It could be argued, in fact, that the Chorus was the catalyst for catharsis, the release of an audience's emotion through the experience of seeing it played out and/or manifest in the lives and experiences of the characters onstage. In comedy, however, the Chorus tended to play a more active role, as it does in both "The Acharnians" and "Lysistrata" in this collection. The Chorus in "The Clouds," in character and function, can be perceived as being much more akin to the Chorus in a tragedy - essentially passive and observing, rather than playing a significant role in the action.

For individual consideration of the nature of the choruses in the three plays in this collection, see the individual commentaries relating to them below.

## Cleon

Cleon was a powerful Athenian politician, active both publicly and behind the scenes, at the time the plays were written and produced. Scholarship records that he was repeatedly, and increasingly, angered at the way he as an individual and government in general was portrayed in plays by Aristophanes, and attempted at various times and in various ways to lessen the playwright's influence both in society and in the theater. In short, he and Aristophanes were cultural and political rivals, a personal and political tension on display in each of the plays here, in which the playwright puts very pointed comments about Cleon and his judgmental power into the mouths of his characters. In other words, the plays become a means through which the playwright stages his resentful attack on someone whom he (the playwright) believes to be both a personal and cultural danger to independent thought.

## The Acharnians - Dikaiopolis

Dikaiopolis is the central character of "The Acharnians." He, of all the principal characters in all the plays in this collection, is perhaps the most obvious, and most

overt, representative of the playwright's voice and opinions. This applies to both the playwright's narrative themes and his personal experience. In terms of the former, the play's satirical, thematic message about the desires of Athens' citizens for peace, and their resentful disgust with the self-indulgent, self-serving actions of the city state's politicians, are all made manifest in Dikaiopolis' words and actions. In other words, theme and character are united to considerable dramatic, and satirical, effect (see "Themes - Political and Social Satire")

On the other hand, Dikaiopolis could easily be perceived as an independent creation, a created character that just happens to have similar social/political views to the playwright, were it not for the fact that he (Dikaiopolis) shares many of the personal experiences of the playwright. Both men have had confrontations with the powerful politician Cleon (see below), and with the public. These confrontations, it seems, are based in the fact that both Dikaiopolis and Aristophanes not only make pointed comments about peace and the process (?) of obtaining it, but make their comments without any apparent inhibitions about identifying and blaming who they think is responsible for the LACK of peace.

It's important to note, however, that in the final third of the play there is the strong sense that the characters and/or personalities of Dikaiopolis and Aristophanes diverge, specifically at the point at which Dikaiopolis withholds peace from the various individuals who ask him to share it with them. This is in many ways the most surprising and intriguing narrative element in all the plays in this collection - if Dikaiopolis believes in peace so much, why does he not share it more readily and more widely? For further consideration of this point, see "The Acharnians - Part 4 Analysis."

## Amphitheus

In the Classical Greek spiritual system, there were major gods (Zeus, Hera, Athena, Poseidon, etc., generally referred to as the Olympian Gods) and minor gods (children of the greater gods, or entities associated with smaller manifestations of nature such as streams, forests, etc.). Amphitheus, as he describes himself, is a so-called "minor" deity, the great-great-great grandson of the Earth Mother goddess Demeter. He has no apparent designation - that is to say, he does not appear to be the god of anything. He does, however, apparently have the divine ability to travel quickly and somehow negotiate peace. His essential haplessness can perhaps be seen as the playwright making a satirical point about how the gods, far from being omnipotent and universally good, tend to be as vulnerable to emotional failings and foibles, not to mention subject to the whims of those with greater power as any human being.

## The Chorus of Acharnians

As discussed above (see "The Chorus in Greek Theatre"), the Chorus of Acharnians is a group of individuals speaking with the attitudes and perspectives of a single character. In other words, each of the members of the Chorus is the same person - an

anonymous, non-individualized, angry, bitter, assertive old man. This particular Chorus, however, is noteworthy (and perhaps almost unique in Greek Theatre) in that it undergoes a process of transformation in the same way as an individual character would. Specifically, the Chorus at the beginning of the play is warlike and angry, resentful of both the idea of peace and of having actual peace imposed upon them. By the end of the play, however, they are celebrating peace and, in fact, are honoring Dikaiopolis for having the courage to value, bring, and maintain it. In other words, the Chorus not only reveals and comments on the play's core theme, but like the individual characters of this and other plays, is both a manifestation and embodiment of it.

## Euripides, Lamachus

These two individuals, like Cleon (see above) are representations of actual human beings alive and active in the community at the time in which "The Acharnians" was written and produced. Euripides was a famous and well respected tragic playwright with a reputation for serious, intense, poetry and insight into humanity, while Lamachus, was a warrior, simultaneously respected for his prowess and reviled for accepting money to exercise that prowess on behalf of whichever army was willing to pay for it. Both are drawn in exaggerated ways that make their presence satirical, manifestations of attitudes that Aristophanes wanted his audience to see as shallow, self-important, and ultimately damaging to society.

## The Megarian and the Theban

These two characters appear as merchants, attempting to take advantage of the peace created by Dikaiopolis in order to make profit. The Megarian (in his willingness to disguise and sell his daughters) and the Theban (in his willingness to sell just about anything) are both satires of the highly opportunistic sort of businessman who will use any circumstance in order to gain profit. The fact that peace-bringer Dikaiopolis literally buys into their practices is perhaps a reiteration of a point discussed earlier - that even people regarded as heroic peace bringers are as humanly flawed and open to exploitation as anyone. Scholarship in other fields may be able to determine whether the individual characteristics of the two merchants are satirical of their individual communities (Megara and Thebes).

## Dercetes, the Slaves

These briefly appearing characters are essentially catalytic, serving as vehicles by which the playwright can simultaneously suggest two things. The first is that seekers of peace might, on some level, be entirely selfish, while the second is that pleasurable human relations (such as those sought by the bride through her slave - that is, those inspired by male relations with women) are a preferable and viable alternative than confrontational human relations in war.

# The Clouds - Strepsiades

Strepsiades is the protagonist of "The Clouds", functioning on both levels on which the term "protagonist" manifests. First, he is the central character whose desires and intentions drive the action. Specifically, it is his desire to acquire knowledge, initially on his son's behalf and later on his own, that leads him to do what he does. When the knowledge he and his son acquire proves to be destructive and not at all what he hoped, his disappointment drives him to take the extreme acts of revenge that close the play. In terms of the second aspect of the meaning of "protagonist", his emotional transformation and/or journey is quite significant, moving from a place of an idealized, perhaps naïve, definitely selfish idea of what learning can bring into his life to a bitter, angry, fearful realization of the destructive energy the wrong kind of learning HAS brought into his life.

It's important to note here that the cause-and-effect relationship between these two sorts of protagonist is clearer here than it is in the other plays in this collection and perhaps in many other plays in general. In other words, Strepsiades' emotional journey is what it is because of his objectives and the way he pursues them, and vice versa. He does what he does because he wants what he wants so intensely ... his actions become more and more extreme because his desires become more and more intense ... and his actions at the end of the play are as intense and violent as they are because his disappointment and fear are as intense and violent as THEY are. Feeling A triggers Action A, which triggers Feeling B, which triggers Action B, and so on and so on.

The other noteworthy thing about Strepsiades is that he is not only foolish and selfish, but ignorant and actually rather stupid. This is a direct contrast to the central characters in the other plays in this collection, Dikaiopolis (in "The Acharnians") and Lysistrata (in "Lysistrata"), both of whom are highly intelligent, if occasionally naïve. It may be that in making Strepsiades as stupid as he is, the playwright is making the thematic point that both searching for knowledge as intensely as Strepsiades does and misusing it as determinedly as he does is foolish, to say the least. This idea is reiterated in the satirical actions and character of Socrates, discussed below.

# Pheidippides

Pheidippides is Strepsiades' son, and is a character type that might well be familiar to audiences in every period, and perhaps even every culture, since the play premiered more than two millennia ago. The type in question is that of "the rebellious son", the young man who thinks he knows more than his father, and is resentfully bored with living according to his father's ways and wishes. What's interesting about this particular version of this character (archetype?) is that he turns the tables on his father, eventually doing exactly what his father wants but turning out to be even more of what his father DOESN'T want in a son. On another level, however, there is also the sense that Pheidippides is a manifestation of the play's central thematic point relating to the dangers of innovation in thinking, and perhaps most importantly of blind adoption of

such innovations. In other words, Strepsiades wants Pheidippides to study with Socrates simply because the latter is the new thing in wisdom and philosophy, but he has that same "new thing" turn on him in a way that is destructive both personally and, in the thematically satiric scheme of things, societally as well.

## The Student

The Student satirizes the arrogance and self-absorption of the so-called "new learning" described above, with his large eyes and pale skin comically commenting on how the transformation of the mind can (does?) have a negative effect on the body. The student's appearance also foreshadows Phedippides' physical and intellectual transformation into something similar at the end of the play.

## Socrates

The character of Socrates here, like the characters of Euripides, Cleon and Lamachus in "The Acharnians," is based on an historical individual. In this case, the individual in question is the then-and-now famous philosopher known for his unkempt appearance, his method of philosophical argument (the so-called "Socratic Method" - see "Objects/Places"), and the manner of his death (execution by suicide for the apparent crime of corrupting the youth). The principal aspects of his personality, work and life are satirized in "The Clouds," an aspect of the play that in turn suggests that in his own quest for knowledge, insight and truth for its own sake Socrates is, in his way, as foolish and naïve as Strepsiades.

## The Chorus of Clouds

Unlike the Choruses in "The Acharnians" and in "Lysistrata," the Chorus of Clouds plays a relatively minor role in the action. Ideals of beauty, power, and intellectual inspiration, they are catalysts for the action (i.e., the intellectual and emotional transformation of Strepsiades and Pheidippides) rather than either undergoing a transformation of their own (as the Chorus does in "Acharnians") or actively participating in the transformation of a culture (as they do in "Lysistrata").

## Right and Wrong

These two characters are the embodiments of the play's central thematic premise, the exploration of the tension between the conservative, traditional, socially oriented ways of thinking and the newer, more liberal, and more individualistic ways of thinking represented by Socrates. It's interesting to note that neither Right nor Wrong is portrayed as being an ideal - both, in fact, are portrayed as being essentially unhealthy ways for a society, and individuals within that society, to think, feel, and believe.

## Lysistrata - Lysistrata

There are several points to note about Lysistrata (the character, rather than the play) when taken into consideration with the central characters of the other two plays in the collection. Like Dikaiopolis in "The Acharnians," she is clever and resourceful, but Lysistrata is far more active when it comes to pursuing her goals and intentions. She makes things happen on her own initiative and utilizing her own ideas. Dikaiopolis is reactive - to the foolishness of the assemply, to the return of Amphitheus with the wine, to the Acharnians, to Lamachus. In "The Clouds," Strepsiades is active but stupid and foolish. Lysistrata is clearly the smartest character in the play, meaning that she backs up her actions with logical arguments and awareness of true situations. In other words, she is far more aware, far more wise than Strepsiades, and far more of a individual with her own mind and perspective than Dikaiopolis.

It's interesting to note, however, that nowhere in the play is there any significant reference, either in dialogue or action or presence, of Lysistrata's husband. He is referred to, but he never actually appears. A reader might reasonably wonder whether the play would have unfolded as it did if he had been there, either to support his wife's cause or to fight with her in order to ensure its rejection. The point is not made to suggest that such a character should or should not be included, but rather to note the absence of a character who, in a play about relationships between men and women, would have likely added an interesting immediacy and personal stake to the mostly idealized leadership of Lysistrata.

## The Chorus

Unlike the Choruses in the other two plays, each of which is anchored by a single central identity, the Chorus in "Lysistrata" is split, with male and female halves positioned on either side of the play's central question. (At one point in "The Acharnians" the Chorus splits, but is still of the same essential character as its members argue and eventually re-merges into its single character). Also, like the Chorus in "The Acharnians" the Choruses in "Lysistrata" are transformed, each moving from a place of anger and confrontation to a place of reconciliation and relative harmony, at least temporarily. In other words, the Choruses here are more active than reactive, involved in the action rather than simply commenting on it.

## Calonice,Myrrhine

These two characters, friends and allies of Lysistrata, share similar perspectives - both are initially resistant to Lysistrata's ideas, both embrace them reluctantly, and both share what some might say is a misogynistic, negative, shallow, and stereotypical view of their own gender, a view that others might say is typical of the male members of Athenian society at the time. Unlike Calonice, however, Myrrhine actually has a chance to both put Lysistrata's ideas into action and transform herself into a woman who actually uses the stereotype to her advantage, and becomes something more. It might not be going

too far, in fact, to suggest that Myrrhine is in fact an embodiment of one of the play's secondary themes, advocating the empowerment of, and a new respect for, the insight and wisdom of women.

## Lampito

The characterization of the physically imposing Lampito functions on two levels. First, she brings a welcome bluntness and earthiness into the world of the more intellectual (typically Athenian?) Lysistrata, and the airy giddiness of Calonice and Myrrhine. Second, and perhaps more tellingly, as a representative of Sparta (the less intellectual, more physical rival of Athens in Ancient Greece's culture wars) Lampito satirizes the roughness and sensuality that so many Athenians believed was rampant in her home city. In this context, it's interesting to note that different translations and/or adaptations of the play each give Lampito different accents - in the original Greek, Lampito's differences are portrayed not only in appearance and attitude, but in dialect. The translation under consideration here makes Lampito Scottish, while another translation (for example) places her as originating in the Southern United States. For further consideration of this aspect of the translation, question, see "Style - Language and Meaning."

## Magistrate, Cinesias

These two characters, extreme and comic as they are, satirize two key aspects of (stereotypical? archetypal?) male sexuality - rampant desire and utter helplessness when that desire isn't appeased. A reader can't help but wonder just how comfortable males in the audience of the original production (or perhaps of any production) would be at seeing themselves as being so completely enslaved by the will of their penises.

## Reconciliation

The character of Reconciliation appears twice in this collection, spoken of in "The Acharnians" and appearing physically in "Lysistrata." Of the two appearances, the latter is far more interesting, partly because she appears nude and partly because she is a much more vividly present manifestation of the desire for peace and union. In other words, in "The Acharnians" Reconciliation is an ideal, whereas in "Lysistrata" she is a reality, albeit spoken of in highly objectifying terms that, to some degree, undermine the validity of the peace she brings into being.

# Objects/Places

## Classical Greek Theatre

Contemporary dramatic storytelling (movies and television, as well as theatre) has its roots in the theatre of the Ancient Greeks, written performed as much as five centuries before the birth of Christ. Tragedies focused on moral-oriented retellings of ancient myths, while comedies tended to focus on social and political satire, with large doses of sexual humor. All such classical theatre, but the comedies in particular, themselves had their roots in religious rituals celebrating and honoring Dionysus, the god of wine and revelry - and, by implication, of loosened inhibitions. In other words, theatre had its beginnings in an exploration of how human beings were and what they did when they broke and/or transcended traditional rules of behavior. For further consideration of this aspect of the plays' background, see "Topics for Discussion - In what ways do the principal characters ..."

## The Theatre Competition

The plays presented during the celebrations of Dionysus were, in fact, presented in a competitive format. The producers and playwrights of the chorus were all judged and awarded prizes based on their work, with a jury awarding first prize to the play that they thought was produced and written best. There was intense rivalry between producers, and between playwrights, with those who weren't awarded prizes that they felt they deserve sometimes perceiving that there was inappropriate influence going on between socio-political leadership and the presumably objective judges. This is at least part of the reason for there being so many references to Cleon, both oblique and overt, throughout these plays. The playwright believed firmly that Cleon had exercised his political influence to ensure that he (the playwright) did not win the theatre competitions.

## Athens

Athens was the intellectual, cultural, and democratic center of cultural life in Ancient Greece - at least, it is viewed as such from the perspective of history, and certainly from its own, self-satisfied perspective (satirized in the plays in this collection) at the time. The setting for all three of the plays here, Athens was also a substantial military power, at the center of many of the wars that lasted for decades, sometimes centuries, between the various independent city states that eventually unified into Greece.

## Sparta

Sparta was Athens' chief rival for power, both cultural and military. Traditionally viewed as more physically than intellectually robust, more athletic than cultural, more military than cerebral, Sparta was viewed by the majority of the Athenian population as inferior

and confrontational. The portrayal of Lampito in "Lysistrata," as rough-around-the-edges, less-educated and articulate, is representative of the overall attitude Athenians held towards Spartans.

## Double Entendre

A double entendre is a word or phrase with two layers of meaning. It is a form of irony, but of a specific sort - the second meaning of the word or phrase is essentially sexual. The dialogue in Classical Greek comedy is filled with such words and phrases - for examples see "Quotes," pp. 44, 52, 142, 157, 187, 188" and also "Lysistrata - Part 2

## Phalluses

"Phallus" is a synonym for "penis." In the rituals described above (see "Classical Greek Theatre"), the often sexually charged celebrations of Dionysus included the use of ornamental erect phalluses as symbols and/or manifestations of the spirit of the god, and specifically of his relationship to and/or manifestation of uninhibited sexual energy. The use of phalluses continued as those initial rituals evolved into what we could now call theatre, but only in comedy - phalluses never appear in tragedy. They are used to particularly effect in "Lysistrata", where they serve as powerful evocations of the men's sexual frustration.

## Masks

Actors in Classical Greek theatre, both comedy and tragedy, always wore masks as part of the definition of their characters. All were individualized and characterized. Like phalluses, their use grew out of their use as part of Dionysian ritual. The particular mask worn by The Eye of God in "The Acharnians" is an example of how a mask was and/or can be individualized depending on the nature of the character being portrayed.

## Wine

Wine, in both life and theatre in Ancient Greece, was often utilized as a means for swearing oaths and sealing promises. The irony here is that Dionysus, the god of revelry, was also the god of wine. In other words, oaths sworn over wine may have been initially meant, but were likely to end up broken simply because wine, in Dionysian terms, essentially served to lessen an individual's predisposition to live by the rules of society, such as those associated with the keeping of oaths and promises.

## The Acharnians - The Three

The three peace contracts, each symbolized / embodied by a different sort of wine (see "Wine" above), represent different sorts of peace agreements. Their being used as

such, and the consequences of that usage, is an example of the irony, described above, associated with swearing an oath on wine. In other words, Dikaiopolis becoming increasingly drunk on "peace" and eventually, ultimately, coming into conflict with Lamachus, illustrates the foolishness of using a beverage associated with a god of rule breaking with an act of rule MAKING.

## Dikaiopolis' Costume

Dikaipolis' costume, cobbled together from bits and pieces of costumes worn by actors/characters in plays by Euripides, can be seen as functioning on a couple of metaphoric levels. The playwright seems to be poking satirical fun not only at the high regard in which Euripides, his plays and his characters are held by contemporary Athenian society. He is also satirizing the way he (the playwright), and perhaps Athenian society as a whole, picks and chooses how to apply lessons and/or truths illuminated in plays in general and plays by philosopher/writers like Euripides in particular.

## The Clouds - The Thinkery

"Thinkery" is the satirical name given to the school run by Socrates out of his home. In the same way as a hatchery breeds chickens, the Thinkery breeds intellectuals.

## Strepsiades' Bed

The bug-filled, unhealthy and uncomfortable bed metaphorically represents Strepsiades' belief about his old life - that it was unhealthy, uncomfortable, and unprofitable. When he finds he can't sleep on it, it represents the way he feels he can no longer rest within his old, debt-ridden life, meaning that when he leaves his bed and appeals to Socrates to teach him, he is metaphorically attempting to leave his old, non-intellectual life behind.

## Lysistrata - The Acropolis

The Acropolis is a mountain in the center of Athens, and is the site of the Parthenon, the great Temple of Athena which exists to this day. The mountain and temple were the physical and spiritual heart of the city and its power (military, political, and social), meaning that when Lysistrata takes possession of it, she is metaphorically taking control of all the aspects of life in the city.

## The Male Chorus Leader's Bug

The painful intrusion into the Chorus Leader's ability to see represents his unwillingness and/or inability to see the suffering their taste for war has brought into the lives of the women. Stratyllis' removal of the bug can be seen as a metaphoric representation of

how the actions of all the women in the play have essentially enabled the men to "see" the damage they've been doing, to their women and to the life of the city, by being so warlike.

# Themes

## Political and Social Satire

Satire is a form of humor in which the characteristics of an individual, a group of individuals, or even a society are exaggerated, to comic effect, in order that audiences can perceive how foolish they are. In a way, satire can be seen as proof of the old saying that you catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar - audiences (in theatrical satire) or readers (in literary satire) will more willingly accept painful truths if they're laughing while they're doing it. To look at it in another way, satire is perhaps the equivalent of the once-popular practice of applying so-called "laughing gas" to patients during dental procedures - they don't notice the pain if they're otherwise having a good time. Very often, the ultimate purpose of satire is two-fold - to awaken those who watch and/or read it to those painful truths, and to hint that they, like the characters in these three plays, have a social responsibility to do something to change those truths.

All three plays in this collection are anchored in this central thematic intent, which can be more specifically defined in this context as commentary on, and perhaps even a rejection of, Athenian attitudes both traditional (in the case of "The Acharnians" and "Lysistrata") and contemporary (in "The Clouds). In "The Acharnians," the target is hypocritical political leaders who say they want peace but in fact act out of self-interest, in "The Clouds," the target is self-important intellectuals, and in "Lysistrata" the objects of the satire are men in general, and male military leaders in particular.

For further consideration of the concept of satire and its application in contemporary society, see "Topics for Discussion - Throughout history, satire ..."

## The Tension between Tradition and Change

In all three plays, traditional ways of thinking, believing and functioning, both as individuals and as members of society, are challenged and, to varying degrees of benefit, defeated. In both "The Acharnians" and "Lysistratra", these beliefs relate to the futility of pursuing peace, and in both the individuals presenting the challenge win their battle, but with one significant difference. In "The Acharnians," both Dikaiopolis' challenge and his victory are ultimately anchored in self interest. In "Lysistrata," there is a degree of self interest in Lysistrata's ideals and actions, but her perspective is ultimately broader in that she is able to see and experience the benefit to all society of her goals. Ultimately, there is the sense in both plays that the challenges of both characters amount to nothing - Dikaiopolis is reluctant to share his divinely inspired sense of peace, while the peace in Lysistrata will, it seems, last only as long as the relief experienced by the men at once again being allowed to have sex. In other words, both plays seem to make the thematic statement that no matter how change takes place, it won't last - that there will always be tension between what has always been and what perhaps should be.

This tension is played out more overtly in "The Clouds," where the beliefs challenged relate to the nature of philosophy, the relationship between philosophy and personal integrity, and the necessity of evolution from one way of thought to another. Here the prospect of a new way of thinking and/or being is satirized with equally penetrating objectivity as the old ways of thinking were in the other two plays. Specifically, the new perspectives sought by Strepsiades, promoted by Socrates, and wholeheartedly embraced (to devastating effect) by Pheidippides seemingly destroy the spiritual well being of all three, making the thematic suggestion that sake for the sake of change is ultimately dangerous. The juxtaposition of this thematic point with those of "The Acharnians" (any process of change involves self-interest) and "Lysistrata" (even the best intentioned change is temporary) suggests that when it comes to humanity's awareness of its own socio/political/intellectual evolution, individuals and society as a whole have a way to go before a genuine sense of perspective can develop.

## Empowering the Disempowered

At the core of the struggles of the central characters in each of the three plays in this collection is a struggle for power. Dikaiopolis, Strepsiades and Lysistrata are all (each?) determined to manifest a sense of independent, individual strength, a sense of control in a world and society where they feel as though they have none. There are significant differences between the three in why they want that power and in how they go about achieving it - Dikaiopolis' initially selfless desire devolves into what appears to be something greedier and more self-indulgent, which is where Strepsiades' desire begins and stays ... at least, until he realizes that his selfishness may very well result in his own destruction. Only Lysistrata's desire for power is informed by her consistent desire to change the circumstances in which that power is exercised - witness her bringing other people on board to her plan, a direct contrast to Dikaiopolis' repeated rejection of others who want to share and spread his experience of peace.

There is some question, however, at the conclusion of "Lysistrata" whether Lysistrata has any insight into just how temporary both her personal power and the peace that she has brought into being will actually last. The point is not made to suggest that her struggle is invalid. On the contrary - the play's ending suggests that in a world where societal peace seems shallow and temporary, the role and responsibility of the individual to strive to renew that peace is even more important.

# Style

## Point of View

The main point of view of all three plays in this collection is essentially the same - to satirize various aspects of humanity in general, and of Athenian culture in particular (for further discussion of satire, see "Objects/Places" and "Topics for Discussion - Throughout history, satire has been ..."). The playwright clearly sees, and experiences, the world in which he lives and works as having flaws, and uses his plays to both point out those flaws and make fun of individuals living within that society for a) not seeing them before, and b) not doing anything about them.

A second important aspect of the three plays' point of view is the playwright's apparent grudge against a powerful politician named Cleon, who is specifically named in all three plays as someone with whom the playwright has issues. It seems that the playwright feels picked on or persecuted, perhaps because the satirical commentary referred to above cuts a little too close to the bone for Cleon's self-conscious political sensibilities. The plays, in both their direct and indirect references to the conflict between the two men, are dramatized from the playwright's point of view of fighting back - specifically, his attempts to get the play-going public (which, at the time, was almost the entire male population of the city, which not coincidentally was also the entire voting public) on his side.

A third noteworthy aspect of the plays' point of view has to do with the religious/spiritual context in which they were written and produced. In the life of Ancient Greece, and indeed in much of the ancient world, humanity's relationship with the gods, in all their manifestations and failings, was an integral part of day to day life. Good things and bad things alike happened as the result of direct godly intervention, with divine blessings and guidance sought in almost every conceivable circumstance and individuals often interpreting events and circumstances more according to the will of the gods rather than the actions of humanity.

## Setting

In broad terms, the setting of all three plays is the same - the intellectually powerful, militarily significant, culturally enlightened city of Athens. An important element to note here is that the city's positive aspects are portrayed in all three plays as being both taken for granted and anchored in a degree of self-congratulation. In other words, the play's setting is as much a target of the playwright's satire as the lives and actions and perspectives of the characters who live within its physical and socio-political walls.

In narrative terms, the action of the plays is, for the most part, set in a public context - open forums, courtyards, gathering spaces, etc. A private confrontation between two people has an intimacy, a sense of being self-contained, the feeling that the conflict

being played out has more personal than public repercussions. A confrontation played out in public, however, carries with it a sense that people are watching, listening, remembering, and judging, giving more dramatic weight and impact both to what is being said and the way it's expressed. In the specific circumstance of all three of these plays, which all (to varying degrees and in varying ways) involve issues of public concern, placing so many of the confrontations between individuals in a public setting gives them the air of socio-political debate.

Finally, in theatrical terms, there are several occasions when characters are aware that they're in a play. This is particularly true of the Choruses, who frequently make appeals to the audience to hear them, understand them, and turn their thinking around to that being expressed in the play. This technique, referred to in contemporary theatrical terms as "direct address" or "audience address," brings the audience more intimately into the action, places a responsibility on the audience to engage fully in the play's ideas, and as is the case in these three plays, attempts to incite them to particular action. Those actions, again in all three plays, include advocating for peace, siding with the playwright against Cleon, and not taking intellectual and/or cultural pretension too seriously.

## Language and Meaning

The first point to note about this collection is that it is a translation, meaning that there is at least one level of discrepancy between interpretation and original intent (as there is with any translation). An introduction suggests that the translator has made considerable effort to capture both the style and the meaning of the original material, and there is the clear sense that to a certain degree this effort has succeeded. There is a certain crudity of language and image that, the reader is told, was present in the original that, the reader is also told, has not been sanitized. Thus, the dialogue here includes words like "fuck", "shit" and "crap" that would never appear in translations that might be described as more polite, genteel and/or poetic.

That said, there is evidence of cultural influence in this translation - specifically, of British sensibilities, apparent in dialect choice and phrasing. This is especially evident in "Lysistrata," where Lampito is given a Scottish accent, and in "The Acharnians," where the Megarian is also apparently from Scotland. This is an example of how techniques of translation can be, and are, used to illuminate the meaning and function of an original text through the interpolation of a more local, accessible context. The question, of course, is how the specific choices of accent reflect the original playwright's intent in defining her uniquely Spartan perspective and attitudes. There may, in fact, a faint whiff of national and/or cultural snobbery in the choices to make the obviously rough-around-the-edges Lampito and the equally obviously moral-free Megarian Scottish. There is little or no doubt that such snobbery was present (or at the very least satirized) in the original - see "Objects/Places - Athens" and "Sparta". Meanwhile, it's interesting to note that such apparent but subtle snobbery can be perceived in translations grounded in other sensibilities. For example, in an American translation/adaptation of "Lysistrata," Lampito is given a Southern accent.

# Structure

In general, Classical Greek Theatre was structured around what has come to be called the Three Unities - unity of time, meaning that the action was continuous ... unity of place, meaning that the action all took place at one location ... and unity of action, meaning that the action followed one narrative line from beginning to end (in other words, no sub-plots). These unities were adhered to much more strictly in tragedy than in comedy, perhaps a manifestation of the more Dionysian (read: rule breaking) context in which comedy as a genre developed (see "Objects/Places - Classical Greek Theatre"). The comedies in this collection all display a breaking of the rules of two of the Three Unities - all three plays change locations at one point or another, and all three plays evidently take place over extended periods of time with evident (and at times considerable) lapses of time between scenes, even though the action is presented continuously. The only unity honored in all three is the unity of action. Each play narrates the development of a single plot from beginning to end, following the traditional (and time tested) narrative structure of beginning, middle, climax, end.

It could be argued that certain scenes within the plays (such as the confrontation between Myrrhine and Cinesias in Lysistrata) are in fact sub-plots. The fact remains, however, that while they may involve characters other than the central ones (in this particular example, Lysistrata doesn't participate in the scene at all), these scenes is essentially a manifestation and/or development of the central line of action.

Finally, there is also a narrative tradition in Classical Greek theatre that scenes involving characters alternate with scenes involving the Chorus, in which the themes of the play and the meaning of the character scenes are discussed for the enlightenment and understanding of the audience. For the most part, this structure is followed throughout the narratives of all three plays.

# Quotes

"Amphitheus: ... the gods have commissioned me to make peace with the Spartans ... but though I am immortal gentlemen, I have been given no expenses. The executive won't let me have them!" The Acharnians, p. 15

"Dikaiopolis: I've personal experience now, after what Cleon did to me on account of last year's play. He dragged me into the Council Chamber, made all sorts of trumped up charges, spewed out a torrent of sewage - I very nearly perished in the flood of filth." Ibid, p. 28

"Dikaiopolis: Forward, my soul; you see the starting line! What's wrong? Go on, move - you're full of Euripides, after all!" Ibid, p. 32.

"Dikaiopolis: Even comedy knows something about truth and justice; and what I'm going to say may be unpalatable, but it's the truth." Ibid, p. 33

"Chorus: Both justice and right / are my allies, you see / and I'll never be known / (as [Cleon] is, far and near / as a cowardly fag / who's promiscuously queer!" Ibid, p. 39

"Megarian" ... when they thicken up and grow a bit o'hair, a porker makes the perfect sacrifice to Aphrodite ... if ye skewer them on a spit, their flesh is delicious." Ibid, p. 44

"Chorus: With [Reconciliation] I could still manage three close encounters / vines, fig trees, more vines, I would plant in your soil / and all round your field olive trees in a circle / to anoint you and me, each new moon, with their oil" Ibid, p. 52

"Chorus: And just guess which ends up with a bimbo / massaging his whatsit in bed!" Ibid, p. 58

"Strepsiades: "On our wedding night, I went to bed smelling of new wine, drying racks, fleeces and affluence - and she of perfume, saffron, French kisses, spending, over-eating, and erotic rituals" The Clouds, p. 76

"Strepsiades: They say [Socrates and Chaerephon] 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." Ibid, p. 79

"Socrates: 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" Ibid, p. 87

"Strepsiades: ... 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 bit and bring arguments to undermine his! If there's any way to do it, I do so want to see them face to face!" Ibid, p. 87

"The Clouds: ...we favor you greatly, because of the way / you swagger and glance with disdain / endure much derision, go barefoot all day / and on our account act really vain" Ibid, p. 89.

"Chorus Leader: If you send troops out on a foolish mission / our rain or thunder stops the expedition" Ibid, p. 97

"Chorus Leader: [Right], you explain the way you taught the boys in the olden days, and [Wrong], you explain the New Education, and then [Pheidippides] can hear both of you, make up his mind, and choose which will be his teacher." Ibid, p. 109

"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?" Ibid, p. 112

"Wrong: ... 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?" Ibid, p. 114

"Strepsiades: You've got 'not guilty' and 'on the contrary' and that famous [Athenian] 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." Ibid, p. 118

"Calonice: ...what is this thing that you've called us women together to talk about? Is it a big thing? Lysistrata: A very big thing. Calonice: Big and meaty, you mean? Lysistrata: Very big and very meaty." Lysistrata, p. 142

"Lysistrata: I didn't realize that we women were such a total lot of nymphos. The tragic poets are right about us after all: [fuck], calve and dispose of, that's the way we live." Ibid, p. 146.

"Lysistrata: ... just imagine. We're at home, beautifully made up, and we walk around the house wearing sheer lawn shifts and nothing else; the men are all horny and can't wait to leap on us; and we keep our distance and refuse to come to them - then they'll make peace soon enough, you'll see." Ibid, p. 146.

"Lysistrata: I will not allow either lover or husband ... to approach me in a state of erection ... and I will live at home in unsullied chastity ... wearing my saffron gown and my sexiest makeup ... to inflame my husband's ardor ... I will never willingly yield myself to him ... and should he [take] me by force against my will ... I will submit passively and will not thrust back ... I will not raise my slippers towards the ceiling ... I will not adopt the lioness-on-a-cheesegrater position ..." Ibid, p. 149.

"Magistrate: Goldsmith, that necklace you mended for my wife - she was dancing last night and the pin slipped out of the hole ... if you've got time, could you go over to my place tonight and fit a pin in her hole, please?" Ibid, p. 157.

"Lysistrata: A man comes home - he may be old and grey - but he can get himself a young wife in no time. But a woman's not in bloom for long, and if she isn't taken quickly she won't be taken at all, and before long she's left sitting at home hoping to see some omen foretelling a happier future." Ibid, p. 164

"Myrrhine: But look now, you haven't got a blanket! Cinesias: By Zeus, I don't NEED one! All I need is a FUCK!" Ibid, p. 178

"Chorus: Walk in - no questions - as if you were in your own place. / Oh, I should have said, THE DOOR WILL BE SHUT IN YOUR FACE" Ibid, p. 184

"Lysistrata (to Reconciliation): Don't be rough or brusque; handle them very gently, not in the brutal way our menfolk used to do, but in the friendly intimate way that a woman does. If he won't give you his hand, take him by the tool." Ibid, p. 186.

"Spartan: '... give us back this round hill ... we've set our hearts on it and been probing around it for years.' ... Athenian: 'Very well ... give us these Prickly Bushes here, and the Malian Gulf behind them, and the Long Legs - I mean the Long Walls of Megara ...'" Ibid, p. 187-188

"Lysistrata: Now will you please maintain purity, so that we women can entertain you ... with the food and drink we brought in our picnic boxes." Ibid, p.188

# Topics for Discussion

In what ways do the principal characters (Dikaiopolis, Strepsiades, Lysistrata) of the three plays in this collection embody the premise (suggested in "Objects/Places - Classical Greek Theatre") that dramatic narrative has its origins in spiritual celebrations of the breakdown of inhibition? In other words, in what ways do these and other characters break the rules that modify and govern traditional behavior?

Throughout history, satire has been employed and/or appreciated as a way of exposing human foibles and failings, particularly those of individuals in power. Where is satire evident in recent contemporary society? socio-political commentary? What do you think is the result of contemporary satire - do people listen? Does society change? Do individual perceptions change?

Consider the double entendres quoted from the three plays (see "Quotes," pp. 44, 52, 142, 157, 187, 188" and also "Lysistrata - Part 2 Analysis"). What is the sexual metaphor implied by each one?

Discuss the parallels and contrasts between the apparent sexual content of these plays and sexuality in contemporary culture and/or entertainment.

In "The Acharnians," in what ways is Dikaiopolis portrayed as a hero? In what ways is that portrayal similar and/or different to that of Lysistrata?

Debate for yourselves the argument between Right and Wrong in "The Clouds."

How does the debate between Right and Wrong in "The Clouds" continue in contemporary society?

Why do you think the leader of the Female Chorus in Lysistrata is given a name, while the leader of the Male Chorus is not?

What do you think would happen if women in contemporary society pursued the same tactic for ending war as the women in "Lysistrata?"