

Some more Reflections on *The Hemlock Cup* of Bettany Hughes

Bettany Hughes devotes the 31st Chapter of her book to Aristophanes' caricature of Socrates. As a motto, she opens the chapter with the quotation from Aristophanes' *Clouds* 445-51:

A bold rascal, a fine speaker, impudent, shameless, a braggart, and adept at stringing lies and an old stager at quibbles, a complete table of laws, a thorough rattle, a face to slip through any hole, supple as a leather strap, slippery as an eel, an artful fellow, a blusterer, a villain, a knave with one hundred faces, cunning, intolerable, a gluttonous dog. (Hughes, p. 211)

The motto animates the whole chapter, and in its function as a motto it is most powerful if it stands at the head of the chapter without any comment. She returns to it a few pages later, re-quoting it in full:

‘Aristophanes has written all about the gobby philosopher and his peculiar ways. The title of his thinly veiled slander is *Clouds*. In his summation of Socrates, the author certainly did not pull his punches. *A bold rascal, a fine speaker ... cunning, intolerable, a gluttonous dog* [the shortening is mine, J.T.]. (Aristophanes' *Clouds* 445-51) Clearly, to spark such intemperate smears, Socrates was already known in Athens: a big character in the city. And a big name too.’ (Hughes, p. 215)

One wonders why the comedy fell flat, for every word in this ‘summation of Socrates’ is full of comic potential. Hughes notes that ‘Aristophanes himself viewed *Clouds* as his best play’ (p. 421, n. 15 on Ch. 31), but on this point she differs from him and sides with the audience: ‘*Clouds* is not stellar – and it wasn’t judged so. Aristophanes won third (last) prize when the show was first presented.’ (p. 217) Did Aristophanes’ Socrates fail to play it out? If so, why did Aristophanes refuse to accept the judgment of the public, boldly attacking it as unfair and shamefully wrong in his next comedy? For in the *Wasps*, staged in 422, a year after the *Clouds*, Aristophanes proudly declares the *Clouds* his best comedy – chastising the audience for betraying him, for their misjudgement of his ‘last year’s comedy’, for their inability immediately to recognize and properly appreciate the novelty of his thoughts – proclaiming that ‘nobody has ever heard better comic lines’, and claiming that his defeat did not diminish his stature in the eyes of the wise (*Wasps* 1044-48).

Aristophanes’ Socrates could not play it out, for the passage Hughes quotes is anything but a ‘summation of Socrates’. To get some clarity into this matter, let us see it in its proper setting. The words are spoken by Strepsiades, characterized by Hughes as ‘the middle-aged, bumbling bumpkin’ (p. 216). Strepsiades, once a rich farmer, married a lady from the circles of impoverished aristocracy; their son, Phidippides, acquired an aristocratic taste for keeping fine, expensive horses. As a consequence, Strepsiades run up debts. The day of repayment is approaching; unable to sleep, he gets an idea. If his son goes to the ‘Thinkery of wise souls’ (*Clouds* 94), he will learn how to win any cause in a court of law, just or unjust (*Cl.* 99). Strepsiades does not even know the names of the wise men to whom he wants to send his son. At this stage Phidippides refuses to obey, and Strepsiades himself decides to become a student in Socrates’ Thinkery. He duly promises not to recognize any other deity than the

Clouds – the deity of Socrates and of all men of leisure (*Cl.* 316), of all the sophists and of all poets, of all men inspired by the Clouds (*Cl.* 331-4) – and he asks from the Clouds just one favour: he wants to become able to ‘twist the right (*strepsodikêsai*, his name Strepsiades signifies a ‘Twister’) and give his creditors the slip’ (*Cl.* 431-4). He avows to be ready to suffer anything at the hands of his teachers to make his wish come true, ‘to be beaten, to be left hungry, thirsty, freezing, to be flayed’ (*Cl.* 441-2). If he escapes his creditors, he is ready to face any opprobrium, let people think of him whatever they wish, let them call him ‘a *bold rascal, a fine speaker ... cunning, intolerable, a gluttonous dog*’ (*Cl.* 445-51), all this he is ready to suffer, if only his ardent wish comes true. – Hughes ‘summation of Socrates’ is in fact Aristophanes’ characterization of the twisted mind of Strepsiades, the ‘Twister’.

Would it perhaps have been better if Hughes had omitted Aristophanes entirely from the sources on which she draws in depicting Socrates? According to Dover Aristophanes’ picture of Socrates cannot be reconciled with the Socrates of Plato and Xenophon. He argues that Aristophanes’ ‘Socrates teaches for payment (*Cl.* 98, 245f., 114ff.), and he teaches forensic rhetoric, by means of which a man in the wrong can persuade his hearers that he is in the right’. (Aristophanes, *Clouds*, edited with Introduction and Commentary by K. J. Dover, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1968, n. on l. 1508, p. xxxiii-iv). But let me examine the lines on the basis of which Dover constructs his case.

In the lines 98-9, to which Dover refers in the first place, Strepsiades says that in the ‘Thinkery’ live men ‘who, if you pay them well, can teach you how to win your case – whether you’re in the right or not’. But immediately after Strepsiades has pronounced these lines, Aristophanes makes it clear that Strepsiades at this stage knows very little about Socrates; he does not even know his name (*Cl.* 100). He only knows that these men are known to be *kaloi te k’agathoi, truly noble thinkers* (*Cl.* 101). As soon as Strepsiades characterizes men in the Thinkery by this noble attribute, expressing the well-known Socratic ideal of moral and intellectual integrity, his son immediately knows of whom he speaks: Socrates and Chaerephon. The humour of the comedy lies in seeing Socrates, of whom every one knows that he did not take money, and that he did not teach forensic rhetoric, refracted through the preconceptions and false expectations of Strepsiades, the Twister. What the public thought of those, who taught the art of ‘winning your case – whether you’re in the right or not’ can be best seen in the words which Hughes mistook for Aristophanes’ summation of Socrates: *A bold rascal, a fine speaker, impudent, shameless, a braggart, and adept at stringing lies and an old stager at quibbles, a complete table of laws, a thorough rattle, a face to slip through any hole, supple as a leather strap, slippery as an eel, an artful fellow, a blusterer, a villain, a knave with one hundred faces, cunning, intolerable, a gluttonous dog.*

Dover’s next reference is to lines 245f. Strepsiades asks Socrates: ‘Please teach me your alternative system of argument – how not to pay debts. I shall pay you whatever you ask – I swear by the gods.’ Socrates responds: ‘Which gods do you swear by? First, we do not consider gods to be money (*theoi hêmin nomism’ ouk esti*, l. 248) Here a double meaning is at play, *nomisma* means money just as well as custom and belief. Socrates can be understood as saying ‘We do not recognize gods’. Both meanings are here in play, but it is the first meaning

to which Strepsiades responds: ‘By what do you then make your oaths? By iron currency like in Byzantium?’ (*Cl.* 248-9) Iron currency was proverbial: money has no value for Socrates and his circle. A scholiast (ancient commentator) quotes Plato, the comic writer, in his remark on line 249: ‘We would find it difficult to live in Byzantium where iron currency is used.’ (*Scholia Graeca in Aristophanem*, edited by F. Dübner, Paris 1842) – This is the last we hear about money in connection with Socrates. To twist Socrates into a man taking money for teaching forensic rhetoric was beyond the powers even of the Twister.

Lastly, Dover refers to line 1146. Having been thrown out of the Thinkery as unteachable, Strepsiades persuades his son to become Socrates’ disciple, and now he comes to take his son home. He has brought Socrates as a present a bag of barley-groats, and in line 1146 addresses Socrates with the words: ‘Take this one first’ – the scholiast explains ‘this one’ as a bag of barley-groats on the basis of line 669 where Strepsiades told Socrates: ‘I will fill up your kneading trough with barley’ – ‘it’s proper to give the teacher due admiration.’ Socrates does not reject ‘this one’ at 1146ff. and so he appears to have accepted it. Paradoxically, Dover can be referred to for explanation, for in his ‘Introduction’ he points out that Aristippus, a disciple of Socrates, ‘alleged that Socrates received food and wine from wealthy friends (fr. 7): an allegation which could well be true – how Socrates made a living is one of the mysterious things about him – but its edge is blunted by the addition of the detail that Socrates took only a small portion of what he was given. So far from alleging that Socrates took money, Aristippus implied that he did not.’ (Dover, xlvi.) Dover observes that ‘we are clearly meant to imagine that when Strepsiades comes to collect Pheidippides he has not seen him for some time’ (Dover, xxxiii). Strepsiades’ bringing Socrates a bag of barley-groats – not a heavy one, for he does not need a servant to carry it – was barely a return for what his son consumed in Socrates’ company. Socrates’ tacit acceptance of ‘this one’ in the *Clouds* is thus in perfect harmony with the account given by Aristippus.

Dover alleges that Socrates and his students in the *Clouds* ‘rely for a living on stealing other people’s clothes’ (*Cl.* 179, 497, 856ff.). (Dover, p. xxxiv.) So let me follow his references. At 175 a disciple of Socrates tells Strepsiades a story about his teacher: ‘Last evening we had no food for supper.’ Strepsiades: ‘What did Socrates devise for the barley meal (176)?’ Disciple: ‘On the table he lightly sprinkled ashes: then he bent a skewer, used it as a compass and snatched **the** mantel (*to himation*) from **the** wrestling school (*ek tês palaistras*) (176-9).’ There is a problem concerning the definite articles ‘**the** wrestling school’ and ‘**the** himation’. Dover admits that the problem would not arise if Aristophanes had in mind the Socrates who discussed philosophy in the *palaistra*, for ‘the Platonic Socrates frequented wrestling-schools’, but this he cannot accept, for those wrestling-schools ‘belong to a way of life alien to that of Aristophanic Socrates’. He offers instead: ‘Possibly “he stole the *himation* (the mantle) from the wrestling-school” was a colloquial expression meaning “He’s not to be trusted” or “he hasn’t a penny to his name”, and the joke lies in the incorporation of such an expression in an actual narrative.’ (Dover, note on 179, pp. 118-119) As can be seen, the logic of Dover’s own thought in his note *ad loc.* compels him to negate his claim that Socrates and his students in the *Clouds* ‘rely for a living on stealing other people’s clothes’, which figures so prominently in his ‘Introduction’.

Plato's *Theaetetus* sheds light on Aristophanes' anecdote. In the dialogue, a teacher of geometry, Theodorus, wants to avoid being questioned by Socrates and implores him to address his questions to Theaetetus. Socrates rebukes him: 'And if you went to the wrestling-schools (*pros tas palaistras*) in Sparta, would you think it proper to watch other people stripped, some of them with rather inferior physiques, and not take your clothes off and show your figure?' (162a-b) A little later, compelled to undergo Socrates' questioning, Theodorus complains: 'It isn't easy to avoid saying something when one's sitting with you, Socrates. I was talking nonsense just now, when I claimed that you'd let me keep my clothes on and not make me take them off ... acting like an Antaeus [a famous mythical robber] you don't let go anyone who comes up to you until you've forced him to take his clothes off and wrestle with you in an argument.' (169a-b) It is noteworthy that in the *Theaetetus* Plato chooses a famous teacher of geometry for Socrates to strip naked. In the *Clouds* it is by taking recourse to geometry that Socrates 'snatches the coat from the *palaistra*'.

Strepsiades exclaimed in response to the disciple's story: 'Why do we then admire that Thales!' Thales was a famous mathematician, Socrates with his expertise in geometry eclipsed him – in the eyes of Strepsiades. Undoubtedly, by putting this exaggerated praise into the mouth of Strepsiades, Aristophanes turned it into a joke. But it does not deprive the anecdote of its relevance as far as the historical Socrates is concerned. In Plato's *Meno* Socrates chose geometry to make Meno's slave aware of his own ignorance; on that basis he brings him to recollection and true insight (82b-86b). In the *Phaedo* we learn that Socrates often said that learning is in fact recollection, that he proved it by his questioning, and that this could be best demonstrated if one focussed his questioning on geometric figures (72e-73a).

Let me go to Dover's next reference concerning his allegation that Socrates and his students in the *Clouds* 'rely for a living on stealing other people's clothes'. Strepsiades is about to enter Socrates' school. Socrates orders: 'Come now, take off your mantle ... It is the custom for novices to enter naked (*gumnous*)' (*Cl.* 497-498). Plato's dialogues shed plenty of light on this point. In the *Charmides* Chaerephon extols Charmides' beauty: 'if he would consent to strip ... he has such perfect beauty of form.' Socrates: 'What an irresistible person you make him to be ... if in his soul he is well developed ... let us strip that part of him and view it (154d1-e2).' In the *Alcibiades I* Socrates warns Alcibiades against his infatuation with the Athenian *demos*: 'you need to see it stripped naked' (132a6). In the *Cratylus* Socrates emphasizes that the souls go naked to Hades (403b5), for being a philosopher, Hades does not want to be with people in their bodies, he wants to be in company of souls that are purified of all the evils and desires associated with the body (403e-404a). In the *Protagoras* Socrates exhorts Protagoras to 'uncover his mind' as a patient 'uncovers his chest and back' to a doctor (352a). In the *Gorgias* Zeus decrees that the souls must enter their afterlife naked, stripped of their bodies, judged by naked souls of the divine judges, for only thus they can be judged fairly (523e). In book 2 of the *Republic* Glaucon asks Socrates to strip the just man naked (*gumnôteos*) of all the rewards that he might reap because of his being just (361c). In book 5 Socrates ordains that women should strip when doing their exercises, and put on virtue instead of mantles (*anti himatiôn*, 457a6-7). In book 9 Socrates requires that the tyrant

should be seen naked (*gumnos*), stripped of ‘the pompous aspect which the tyrannical nature assumes to the beholder’ (577a, tr. Jowett). In book 10, in order to prepare his audience for his negative verdict on poetry, Socrates wants to see poetry ‘stripped naked’ of its poetic colours (601b).

The motive of the mantle recurs in the *Clouds*. In the opening scene Strepsiades shows his worn mantle as proof of his impoverishment, his aristocratic wife’s indulgence and her neglect of him (*Cl.* 54-5). Socrates’ disciple tells the story of Socrates’ snatching the mantle from the wrestling school as proof of Socrates’ greatness (175-180). Strepsiades must take off his mantle on entering the Thinkery (497-498). Unteachable, Strepsiades leaves the school and tells his son: ‘I straightway forgot everything that was taught to me.’ Pheidippides asks: ‘Then, that’s the reason you’ve lost your mantle?’ Strepsiades ‘I’ve not lost it, but I’ve thought it down’ (855-857). ‘I’ve thought it down’, or ‘discarded it through thought’ – *katapephrontika* – renders Socrates’ stripping of his interlocutors by questioning. Eager to persuade his son to become a student of Socrates, Strepsiades is fully reconciled to his having been stripped, he even admits that it was his own thinking that was involved in the process. Bringing his son into the Thinkery, Strepsiades wants him to learn the two famous types of rhetorical argument, Right and Wrong, but especially the Wrong, which wins the case even if his cause is unjust (882-5). Socrates tells him that his son himself must learn from Wrong and Right: ‘I shall be absent’ (887). Then we can witness a contest between Right and Wrong, the Right defending the old discipline and morality, the Wrong offering the young man to indulge all his vices and predilections, be it heterosexual, or homosexual. Right is appalled, but Wrong in the end succeeds in unmasking his morality as false pretence. With his homosexual tendencies unmasked, Right joins the inmates of the Thinker: ‘By gods, receive my mantle (*to himation*), I am joining you’ (1104). At the end of the comedy Strepsiades lets it transpire that the stripping was what hurt him most; he sets the Thinkery on fire as the one ‘whose mantle you took away’. (1498)

Dover’s arguments dissolve under scrutiny, and Hughes was right in referring to Aristophanes as one of her most important sources. I applaud her drawing on Aristophanes, but deplore her way of doing so. She writes:

‘Strepsiades watches (for our amusement) as Socrates is shat on by lizards while gawping at the heavens, measuring with great solemnity the distance a flea can jump and then “peering at the arse of the moon”.’ (Hughes, p. 217)

Not so, for Strepsiades does not ‘watch’ anything of this kind, he listens to anecdotes that Socrates’ disciple tells him about his master. Moreover, Hughes distorts each of these anecdotes. Let me begin with Hughes’ Strepsiades watching ‘as Socrates is shat on by lizards while gawping at the heavens “peering at the arse of the moon”’. The story told by the disciple is as follows.

Disciple: ‘Yesterday he was deprived of a great thought by a lizard.’ Strepsiades: In which way? Tell me.’ Disciple: ‘He was investigating the paths (*hodous*) of the moon and the revolutions of the sky (*periphoras*), then (*eita*), as he gaped up (*anô*

kechênotos), a lizard shat down on him (*katechesen*) in the night (*nuktôr*), from the ceiling (*apo tês orophês*).’ (*Cl.* 169-173)

Hughes’ “*peering at the arse of the moon*” is not a distortion as such, if it is placed where it belongs. For this is what Strepsiades says – in her rendering – at the close of the play to justify his burning down Socrates Thinkery: ‘Why did you inspect the seat (*tên hedran*) of the moon’ (*Cl.* 1507). I render Strepsiades’ *tên hedran* as ‘the seat’; Hughes’ ‘the arse’ is more evocative, and within the framework of comedy would be more appropriate, if she did not omit to indicate that here is a *double entendre* in play. For *hedra* can mean both the ‘seat’ of the body and the ‘station’ of a heavenly body. Strepsiades at the close of the play uses *tên hedran* in the obscene sense, but he does so against the background of a much more elevated meaning of the term, which was much more frequently used, for *hedra* signified the seat of the gods, sanctuary, temple; and thus the ‘station’ of a heavenly body.

Aristophanes’ design in emphasizing Strepsiades’ twisted mind in this way comes to light if we take into account the complaint of the moon, reported to the audience by the Clouds, that the Athenian calendar was out of kilter with the heavenly calendar. By their having distorted the proper order of days, the Athenians deprived the gods of proper religious offerings and feasts on days appointed by the gods (*Cl.* 607-625). The Clouds insist that the Athenians must properly order the days of life (*tou biou tas hêmeras*), that is according to the moon (*kata selênên*, 626). Aristophanes thus ingeniously put the need for proper astronomic observations, proper observation of the paths of the moon and of the heavenly revolutions at the very heart of religious requirements. When Strepsiades at the end of the play burns Socrates’ Thinkery in the name of the moon, he does so for his twisted pseudo-religious reasons, against the true interests of religion, of the heavenly moon, of the gods, and of men, whose days of life the moon regulates as she moves along her paths on the revolving sky.

When Hughes says that Socrates was ‘shat on by lizards while gawping at the heavens’, she has Dover and other interpreters on her side. Dover notes on *orophês*: ““Ceiling” in *Wasps* 1215, where the scene imagined is indoors; but Socrates must go outside to look at the moon, and in Thucydides iv. 48. 2 ... the *orophê* seems to be that side of the covering of the house which is exposed to the sky.’ In other words, Dover and others take *apo tês orophês* to mean ‘from the roof’. I have great difficulty in understanding it like that. Firstly, the disciple says that a lizard (not ‘lizards’) ‘shat down’ (*katechesen*) on Socrates. If outside, Socrates peered at the moon standing under the roof, which is strange to say the least. Secondly, the disciple clearly distinguishes two successive stages in his story: 1. Socrates investigated the paths of the moon and its heavenly revolutions, and then (*eita*), 2. he gaped up (*anô kechênotos*) and the lizard ... He gaped up *after* having investigated the moon’s paths and heavenly revolutions. Thirdly, the disciple emphasizes that this happened *nuktôr*, ‘in the night’, which would be pointless if Socrates peered at the moon outside the house. It makes sense if the discussion took place inside the house; in the light of the torches the students could see Socrates turning his face up, affecting gaping, but Socrates could not see the lizard on the ceiling just above him, relieving itself. Fourthly, had Socrates observed the moon outside the house, he could have inspected its *hedra*, that is its ‘station’, not its paths and its revolutions.

Plato's *Republic* elucidates this passage. In *Republic* 529a-b Socrates promotes astronomy as one of the sciences that elevate the intellect (*pros to anô schein*, 527b10). In order to clear the way for doing so, he argues against those who view gazing at the stars as an activity that elevates the soul, 'as if the man gazing at the paintings on the ceiling (*en orophêi*, 529b1), with his face turned up, watched them with his intellect and not with his eyes'. The only science that 'make the soul look upwards' (*anô*) is the science which is of *being* and the *unseen*. If a man perceives objects with his senses, whether he is gaping up (*anô kechênôs*) or blinking down, what he does does not deserve to be called learning; it has nothing to do with science (529b3-c1). In the light of this passage, Socrates in his Thinkery, in the night, discussed with his students the paths of the Moon and the revolutions of heavens, which cannot be seen however long one might gape at the moon; then (*eita*), that is after doing so, he emphasized that such gaping was ridiculous by turning his head upwards with a gesture of gaping, but the lizard gave Socrates' intended joke a new twist. Dover's explanation of the paths of the Moon and the revolutions of heavens is apposite: 'The *periphorai* ['revolutions'] of the moon are the ways in which it is apparently carried round, according to an ascertainable but complicated scheme, by the revolving sky; its *hodoi* ['paths] are its own paths from horizon to horizon, which it follows within the limits of those *periphorai*.' (Dover p. 117, note on 172) – It is only when we thus take full account of the anecdote concerning Socrates' investigation of the *paths* and *revolutions* of the moon that Strepsiades' twisted use of *hedra* comes fully to light.

In Hughes' account, apart from watching Socrates "*peering at the arse of the moon*" Strepsiades is 'watching as Socrates is measuring with great solemnity the distance a flea can jump'. In fact, according to the disciple Socrates did the questioning, not the actual measuring. For Socrates asked *Chaerephon* how long was the jump of the flea that bit *Chaerephon's* eyebrow and then jumped on Socrates' head. *Aristophanes's* Socrates is primarily a questioner, as is *Plato's* and *Xenophon's* Socrates. Socrates' subsequent treatment of Strepsiades is in harmony with the opening anecdote. At *Clouds* 385 Socrates tells Strepsiades: 'I shall teach you on the basis of your own experience (*apo sautou*)'; at 695 he urges him 'think through some of your own affairs (*ti tôn seautou pragmatôn*)'; at 740 he prompts him: 'open up your thought and step by step encompass in your thought your affairs, analysing and investigating them correctly'.

In reporting the story about the measuring of the flea's jump Hughes missed an important aspect of it. For Socrates asked *Chaerephon* how long was the flea's jump *measured in terms of flea's own feet*. This idea should be seen in the light of *Plato's Theaetetus*, in which Socrates criticises *Protagoras's* dictum that 'a man is the measure of all things' (152a), which suggests a radical perceptual relativity. Socrates argues that *Protagoras* could have equally well opened his treatise on *Truth* by declaring a pig, a baboon, or a tadpole as a measure of things (161c).

Bettany Hughes devoted some thought to the closing scene of the *Clouds*:

'In about 454 BC a group of Pythagoreans had gathered together as per usual in their meeting house in Croton, one of the Greek cities in Magna Graecia, southern Italy ...

As the radical group of thinkers settled down to business, the door was barred – from the outside – and a torch put to the tinder. All the Pythagoreans within were burned alive ... Aristophanes imagines a similar, awful fate for Socrates and the others in his ‘Thinkery’.

Socrates [coughing in the smoke]: Help, I’m going to suffocate!

Chaerephon [still inside]: Help, I’m being prematurely cremated!

*Strepsiades [descending the ladder followed by his slave XANTHIAS]: No more than you deserved; people who cock snooks at the gods and argue about the arse of the moon must pay for it. [Kicks SOCRATES in the bum.]: Get them! Stone them! Revenge! Revenge for the injured gods! Remember what they did! Revenge. (Aristophanes, *Clouds*, Trans. A. H. Sommerstein)*

This time, Socrates and his companions escape. But the scene, even if it had a happy ending, was ugly.’ (Bettany Hughes, p. 217)

In Aristophanes’ original comedy, Strepsiades does not kick Socrates in the bum in the closing scene, or anywhere else in the play. Socrates bewails his miserable fate ‘*Oh, wretched me, I’m going to suffocate*’ (Cl. 1504), then Chaerephon wails ‘*I am going to be burnt alive*’ (Cl. 1505). Did these two escape their being burnt alive, as Hughes supposes? Strepsiades’ response to Socrates’ and Chaerephon’s cries – ‘Why did you insult gods and look into the *hedra* of the moon?’ – is followed with the words ‘chase them, stone them, hit them, for many reasons, but most of all because you know that they insulted the Gods’. The codices put these words into the mouth of the god Hermes, and so does F. W. Hall’s and W. M. Geldart’s Oxford edition of the text, whereas Kock, Dover and others put them into the mouth of Strepsiades. These words are generally taken as an indication that Socrates and Chaerephon escaped from the burning house. Nevertheless, at the beginning of this closing scene Strepsiades’ doings were first observed and bewailed by three unnamed disciples of Socrates, who were presumably at the forecourt of the Thinkery, as at the beginning of the play. These three had a much better chance of escaping. The idea of Strepsiades, ‘the middle-aged, bumbling bumpkin’, chasing Socrates out of the theatre goes against everything the public knew about Socrates and his heroic deeds at Potidaea and at Delion, and it goes against Aristophanes’ picture of Socrates. It is a very different thing to have Socrates bewail ‘*Oh, wretched me, I’m going to suffocate*’ when he is going to suffocate, than having him scramble out of the burning house and be chased by Strepsiades and his servant out of the theatre. Hughes’ view of the closing scene is in discord with her own observation: ‘One aspect that Aristophanes never mocks is Socrates’ courage.’ (Hughes, p. 219) The tragic ending of Socrates in the *Clouds*, at the hands of Strepsiades, the Twister, worked as an antidote and protected Socrates against prosecution for almost a quarter of a century.