

STREPSIADES' WIFE:
ARISTOPHANES, *CLOUDS* 41 FF.

In the prologue of Aristophanes' *Clouds* we see Strepsiades consumed by worry over his debts and unable to sleep. The immediate cause of his difficulties, his son Pheidippides, shares the stage and, with his equine dreams, serves as a pointed reminder of his father's predicament. In lines 41 ff. Strepsiades turns his thoughts to the ultimate cause of his troubles, a natural progression from son to mother (1):

- εἴθ' ὄφελ' ἢ προμνήστρι' ἀπολέσθαι κακῶς
ἦ τις με γῆμ' ἐπῆρε τὴν σὴν μητέρα.
ἐμοὶ γὰρ ἦν ἄγροικος ἡδιστος βίος,
εὐρωτιῶν, ἀκόρητος, εἰκῆ κείμενος,
45 βρῶν μελίτταις καὶ προβάτοις καὶ στεμφύλοις.
ἔπειτ' ἔγημα Μεγακλέους τοῦ Μεγακλέους
ἀδελφιδῆν ἄγροικος ὦν ἐξ ἄστεως,
σεμνήν, τρυφῶσαν, ἐγκεκοισυρωμένην.
ταύτην ὅτ' ἐγάμουν, συγκατεκλινόμην ἐγὼ
50 ὄζων τρυγός, τρασιᾶς, ἐρίων, περιουσίας,
ἢ δ' αὖ μύρου, κρόκου, καταγλωττισμάτων,
δαπάνης, λαφυγμοῦ, Κωλιάδος, Γενετυλλίδος.
οὐ μὴν ἐρῶ γ' ὡς ἀργός ἦν, ἀλλ' ἐσπάθα,
ἐγὼ δ' ἂν αὐτῇ θοιμάτιον δεικνὺς τοδὶ
55 πρόφασιν ἔφασκον· ὦ γυναῖ, λίαν σπαθῆς.

It is clear that behind these lines stands the familiar contrast of rustic and urban values (this is particularly clear in the effective juxtaposition ἄγροικος ὦν ἐξ ἄστεως, 47). Although we never learn the name of Strepsiades' wife, Aristophanes has carefully placed her in a specific social context: that she is the niece of Megacles son of Megacles suggests that she is an Alcmeonid (2). However strange the marriage may appear to modern

(1) The text of *Clouds* is cited from K. J. Dover's edition, Oxford 1968.

(2) See Dover and Sommerstein *ad loc.*; J. K. Davies, *Athenian Propertied Families, 600-300 B.C.*, Oxford 1971, 368 ff. (useful bibliography on 368 f.). This identification may be supported by the description of her as ἐγκεκοισυρωμένην (v. 48), if Koisyra was indeed the name of a member of the Alcmeonid family: see T. L. Shear, "Phoenix" 19, 1963, 99-112 (with refinements in Davies 380). In a detailed study, D. Ambrosino, "MCr" 21/22, 1986/87, 95-127, has used this identification to develop an allegorical understanding of the marriage. On her view, in this play Aristophanes "rappresenta il rap-

readers, it seems to attest, at least superficially, to the περιουσία (v. 50) that Strepsiadēs formerly enjoyed. Of his *status* Dover writes (p. xxvii), "A distinguished aristocratic family sought him out (41 f.) as a husband for one of its daughters, and since this (to us) surprising marriage is taken for granted by Ar., without explanation or further comment, we should be justified in supposing that it did not surprise Ar.'s audience".

There is, however, something surprising in the portrait painted of Strepsiadēs' wife in these lines, and that is the emphasis placed on her sexuality. This is especially true of the 'smells' listed in 51-52 (3). Although δαπάνη and λαφυγμός seem to serve only to reflect her class (4), the other details can be interpreted as reflecting an interest in sex. The most obvious are καταγλωττίσματα, a word which seems to mean "kisses with the tongue" (5). μύρον is a regular concomitant of sexual union (6): As commentators note, κρόκος probably refers to a garment dyed with saffron; from *Lys.* 219 ff. it seems that clothes of this colour could be worn to arouse men (7). Both Κωλιάς and Γενετυλλίς suggest the cult of Aphrodite on the promontory Colias, which was known for women's rites (8).

porto tra *demos e kalokagathoi* nella *polis*, come un 'matrimonio' tra persone di diversa classe sociale, da cui è nato un figlio inevitabilmente destinato a far penare il padre" (p. 106). Pheidippides, she argues, represents Alcibiades. Although in certain respects this is an ingenious reading, it is unconvincing. Aristophanes does not present the union in terms that suggest political allegory; and although references are made to Alcibiades as early as the *Daitales* (fr. 205 PCG) of 427 B.C., it is difficult without the aid of hindsight to see such an extended, subtle treatment in *Clouds*, the first version of which was composed in 423. For a survey of dramatic allusions to Alcibiades, see M. Vickers, "Historia" 38, 1989, 41-65.

(3) Dover, citing *Eccl.* 617 and *Xen. Mem.* 1.2.24, suggests that there may be some implication of "one kind of sex-appeal" in σεμνήν (v. 48), but the primary reference of the word seems to be social: see Ussher on *Eccl.*, *loc. cit.* (to the passages there cited, add Ar. fr. 729 PCG and Pl. *Phaedr.* 257b).

(4) Sex and gluttony, however, were commonly associated: see D. E. Gerber, "HSCP" 82, 1978, 161-165. Accordingly, λαφυγμός is appropriate to the description of Strepsiadēs' wife.

(5) The word is defined in this sense by Pollux 2.109 (= *Com. Adesp.* 882 Kock).

(6) See in particular the exchange between Cinesias and Myrrhine at *Lys.* 938 ff., and Henderson's note on *Lys.* 47.

(7) The κρόκος seems to possess an erotic force in Greek poetry: see Bühler on Mosch. 2.68; cf. also E. Irwin in D. E. Gerber (ed.), *Greek Poetry and Philosophy. Studies in Honour of Leonard Woodbury*, Chico 1984, 158. It may be relevant to note that, according to Donatus (1.29-30 Wessner), the *meretrix* in comedy was recognized by a yellow mantle.

(8) See L. R. Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States*, Oxford 1896-1909, II 733, for the ancient *testimonia*.

The presence of the goddess of sexuality is clearly evoked by these epithets, and this may be reinforced by a possible pun on κωλή (9). The final lines of Strepsiades' speech may simply allude to his wife's extravagance; but it has been argued that σπαθάω is here used with a sexual reference and that the lines refer to her excessive (λίαν) interest in intercourse (53 ff.) (10).

Owing to uncertainty concerning the implications of some details, the precise extent to which the speech emphasizes the sexuality of Strepsiades' wife is open to debate; but it is clear nonetheless that it is a salient feature. The wife's sexual proclivity has usually been seen as part of the contrast between rustic and urban values. Dover, for example, argues (on 51) that these details "carry the implication that sex was more important to an idle, rich woman than to a hard-working farmer's wife". Yet this view is not satisfactory. The description seems to characterize both Strepsiades and his wife at the time of their union (ὄτ' ἐγάμου, συγκατεκλινόμενη... 49) (11), and it is astonishing that the daughter of a noble house should come to the marriage-bed 'smelling' of καταγλωττίσματα. It was the general practice for Greek girls to be raised apart from the society of males (12). The reason (or at least rationalization) for this was the belief that women could exercise less control over passion than men: once aroused the sexual desires of women were thought to be insatiable and uncontrollable (13). Accordingly, women required strict control; for the honour of a family was intimately bound up with the reputation of its daughters. If that reputation were in some way compromised, the consequences could be serious.

(9) See J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse*, New Haven and London 1975, 73 (and 129, for κωλή as a term for the penis).

(10) See Henderson (p. 73) and R. K. Fisher, *Aristophanes, Clouds: Purpose and Technique*, Amsterdam 1984, 54 f., who see a sexual reference in the use of σπαθάω. Dover and Sommerstein (*ad loc.*), however, reject an obscene understanding of these lines, preferring to see them as a joke on her extravagance: cf. Diph. fr. 42.26-27 *PCG* μειράκιον ἐρῶν πάλιν / τὰ πατρῶα βρύκει καὶ σπαθῶ. It should be noted that the presence of the direct object and βρύκει makes the significance of the word in the Diphilus passage clearer than it is in the case of the occurrence in *Clouds*.

(11) συγκατεκλινόμενη has been understood as referring to both the marriage-feast and the marriage-bed; as Dover notes, the latter is more likely.

(12) For evidence and discussion see K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality*, Oxford 1974, 209-213, and *Greek Homosexuality*, Cambridge Mass. 1978, 149 f.; S. B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, and Slaves*, New York 1975, 79 ff.; J. Gould, "JHS" 100, 1980, 48; R. Padel in A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt (edd.), *Images of Women in Antiquity*, London 1983, 8-12; D. Cohen, "G&R" 36, 1989, 3-15.

(13) See the passages collected in "CQ" 34, 1984, 39 n. 18 (to which add Pl. Com. fr. 105 *PCG*, where it is said that a woman unrestrained becomes an ὑβριστον χρῆμα κάκόλαστον).

Anyone who slandered a girl would be subject to vengeance undertaken by male kin; if the girl were in fact culpable, she could be killed or sold into slavery (14).

In light of these social considerations, the strangeness of Strepsiades' bride becomes all the more striking. The niece of Megacles simply should not possess such sexual sophistication on her wedding night. The ideal was a girl like the wife of Ischomachus (Xen. *Oec.* 7.4-6), who came to her husband ready for training, knowing little except the basic skills of a woman and from her mother σωφροσύνη (15). Accordingly, I suggest that Aristophanes is implying that Strepsiades married the daughter of a noble house whose virtue had been compromised, and who was thus unsuitable for marriage within her own class. It seems unlikely that a family would choose in every case to kill a delinquent daughter or sell her into slavery. These penalties clearly represent extremes. More often, I suspect, less drastic expedients would be chosen. It would indeed be convenient, if someone such as Strepsiades – wealthy but belonging to a lower class, perhaps dazzled by the prestige of the family – could be found as a husband for the girl in question. This match would effectively remove both the girl and her disgrace to the periphery of the society inhabited by the family. It can be argued, moreover, that this solution avoids what might be judged by some to be an even greater source of shame (or at least public scrutiny), viz. execution or slavery (16).

There is no firm evidence to prove the existence of this practice for the classical period; but it seems *prima facie* not unlikely, and there may be some indirect support. In New Comedy we find a number of instances where a girl is raped and impregnated by a conscientious assailant, who later approaches the family and asks for the girl's hand (17). This match seems to be an acceptable resolution. If the rapist had not been so conscientious, the consequences for the girl would have been dire. New Comedy presents a world of happy endings; in reality such situations were seldom settled in so tidy a fashion.

Another partial parallel may be found in Euripides' *Electra*, in which Ae-

(14) Aesch. 1.182; Apld. 1.8.4; Plut. *Sol.* 23.2. For discussion (especially of vengeance in the face of sexual insult) see B. M. Lavelle, "AJP" 107, 1986, 318-331; cf. also my remarks in "CQ" 34, 1984, 41 f.

(15) For the latter, cf. *ibid.* 7.14 ἐμὸν δ' ἔφησεν ἡ μήτηρ ἔργον εἶναι σωφρονεῖν.

(16) Pomeroy (above n. 12, 86) writes of the right of a family to sell a disgraced girl into slavery, "I do not know of any case where this sale actually occurred, whether because the severity of the penalty was a deterrent, or because the father was reluctant to make the scandal in the family public".

(17) Menander's *Samia* (cf. 38 ff.) is perhaps the best example: see E. Fantham, "Phoenix" 29, 1975, 53 f.

gisthus has contrived to neutralize the threat posed by Electra by marrying her off below her station (18). There is, of course, no suggestion that her virginity was in any way impugned, but the parallel lies in the method of dealing with a troublesome daughter. It may be relevant to note that in Sophocles' very different play Electra's appearances in public were a source of embarrassment to the family (*El.* 516-518).

The understanding here proposed for Strepsiades' marriage will allow us to account for the opening lines of the speech. If Strepsiades had managed to win the hand of his wife through an active suit, it would be understandable; his success in that case could be attributed to his affluence. Yet it is clear in Strepsiades' speech that the family sought him out: in fact the *προμνήστρια* urged (*ἐπήρε*) him to marry. This detail makes much more sense, if the family was using the match as a means of avoiding potential embarrassment. Strepsiades may have seemed the perfect husband for a miscreant daughter, wealthy enough to support her comfortably but far enough removed from the social world of the noble houses to conceal her shame. He also seems to have been naïve enough to be unaware of the true nature of the marriage; in his speech there is nothing to suggest that he is conscious that his bride differed from the ideal prescribed for aristocratic women. And this is surely deliberate on the poet's part, another indication of Strepsiades' inability to understand fully the world in which he lives (19).

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(18) The social issue is well set out by Denniston in his note on line 253.

(19) K. J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy*, London 1972, 101, characterizes Strepsiades as both "gullible" and "muddle-headed". For discussion of Strepsiades' attitudes and understanding, see also P. Green, "GRBS" 20, 1979, 15-25; L. Woodbury, "Phoenix" 34, 1980, 108-127.

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