

## Characterization Via Oathmaking in Aristophanes' *Clouds*

In the *Clouds*, Aristophanes employs a significant quantity and variety of oaths sworn by characters and choruses regardless of class or species. Even members of the *phrontisteria*, despite their disavowal of deity, engage in invocations of parallel structure. Invocations as part of comedic monologue and dialogue are entirely removed from the practical stake of petitions or exclamations which are found within the genres of tragedy and epic poetry. While characters within Aristophanic comedy may appeal to deities or concepts in supplication or frustration, the mode of communicating these invocations is more often meant to be received as political satire or methods of characterization. This paper will argue that Aristophanes, as with most other aspects of his comedic dialogues, has carefully crafted the invocations of his characters to communicate not only their individual personas but also their personal developments throughout the play. The majority of this paper will be dedicated to the analysis of which specific deities Aristophanic characters choose to swear by in their assertions, denials, and promises. Omitting instances of exclamation, cursing, and simple vocative in dialogue, this paper will primarily analyze the differences between Strepsiades' seemingly innumerable oaths and those of other characters. These choices, in addition to their evolution, yield greater insights into class-centric religious association, social mobility, and the overflow of the *phrontisterion* into the realm of the religious. This paper stands to shed light on the Aristophanic view of the fickle nature of oaths and pious observance.

By compiling each invocation made by major characters within the play, a frequency analysis can be made to show consistency and change in each character's oathmaking throughout the progression of the play. When combining this quantitative aspect of oathmaking with the qualitative analysis of oaths as units of speech containing socio-political themes, it will be shown that Aristophanes uses oaths as one of the primary ways to observe character morality and alignment. This paper will investigate both genuine and unkept oaths for their insight into personal qualities of the oathmaker and ultimately, it can be shown that the developments of the oaths of

Strepsiades and Pheidippides are foils for the disintegration of their fidelity to each other as members of a familial unit and to their moral performance within Greek society. While oaths and invocations are often simply translated and contextualized on a surface level, this paper will give due attention to the way that oaths contain subtle yet deliberate political and moral stances. Understanding the choices which Aristophanes makes in the minutiae of this comedy sheds light not only on an unnoticed facet of the play's narrative but also on an underrepresented aspect of his authorial range.

### Works Cited

- Aristophanes. *Clouds. Wasps. Peace*. Edited and translated by Jeffrey Henderson. Loeb Classical Library 488. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- Dillon, Matthew. "By Gods, Tongues, and Dogs: The Use of Oaths in Aristophanic Comedy." *Greece and Rome* 42, no. 2 (1995): 135–51.
- Dover, Kenneth James. *Aristophanic comedy*. Vol. 77. Univ of California Press, 1972.
- Fletcher, Judith. *Performing oaths in classical Greek drama*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Lowe, J. C. B. "Some Questions of Attribution in Aristophanes." *Hermes* 95, no. 1 (1967): 53–71.
- Miller, Harold W. "Comic iteration in Aristophanes." *The American Journal of Philology* 66, no. 4 (1945): 398-408.
- Sommerstein, Alan H., and Judith Fletcher, eds. *Horkos: The Oath in Greek Society*. 1st ed. Liverpool University Press, 2007. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vjkqh>.
- Sommerstein, Alan H. and Torrance, Isabelle C.. *Oaths and Swearing in Ancient Greece*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2014.
- Sommerstein, Alan H. *Talking about laughter: and other studies in Greek comedy*. Oxford University Press (UK), 2009.
- Wright, F. Warren. "Oaths in the Greek Epistolographers." *The American Journal of Philology* 39, no. 1 (1918): 65-74.