

A Niece of Megakles: An Unnoticed Paratragic Subtext in Aristophanes' *Clouds*

This paper explores an unnoticed paratragic theme in Strepsiades' opening monologue (41-55, 60-74) about his ill-fated marriage to the aristocratic "niece of Megakles" (46) in the extant version of Aristophanes' *Clouds* (c. 420-417). As the origin of their extravagant, horse-obsessed son – the source of the crippling debt that drives the hero to seek the help of the unscrupulous Socratics – Strepsiades' consummation of his marriage is figured as a "beginning of evils" leading to his ruin and the jarring violence of the play's conclusion. This analysis adds to recent studies of *Clouds*' distinctive, unusually nuanced paratragic mode (e.g., 1452-1466) by Silk (2000: 351-356) and Revermann (2006: 226-235).

Strepsiades' peculiar characterization of his unnamed wife as a "niece of Megakles, son of Megakles" (46), and "thoroughly Koesyrized" (ἐγκεκοισυρωμένην: 48), has not been closely studied. Dover (1968: *ad loc.*), for example, understood these names to be fictional types meant to reflect this unnamed woman's aristocratic lineage and extravagant lifestyle rather than the real individuals who are confusingly described by Aristophanic scholiasts (see Σ *Nub.* 48; cf. Σ 800; Σ *Ach.* 614). However, the subsequent confirmation of several Alkmaeonids of the sixth and fifth-century of these names (Shear 1963; Davies 1971: 380-381; Raubitschek 1994; Futo Kennedy 2014) suggests that Aristophanes implicitly identifies Strepsiades' wife as a member of this particular aristocratic clan and one notoriously cursed by its handling of the seventh-century Kylonian conspiracy (Hdt. 5.71).

Contemporary evidence for the continued association of the Alkmaeonids with the curse (cf. Thuc. 1.126; Ar., *Eq.* 445-447) increases the likelihood that Aristophanes figures Strepsiades' wife as a vector of *miasma*. Given these associations, as well as the family's links with tyranny (Lavelle 1989), Aristophanes' humorous yet detailed description of Strepsiades'

consummation of his marriage – “...smelling of new wine, figs, fleeces, and abundance; and she of perfume, saffron, tongue kisses, extravagance, gluttony...” (50-52) – assumes something of a sinister character.

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