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Aristophanes' *Clouds* in its ritual setting

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ABSTRACT: This article examines Aristophanes' *Clouds* within the framework of the ritual events of the Great Dionysia, drawing parallels between those events and various textual and performative aspects of the play. It is argued that scholarship to date has largely subordinated the play's ritual aspects, examination of which reveals that in fact Aristophanes has crafted a vigorous defense of *polis* religion against the 'new thinking' and 'new gods' represented by the play's foil, Socrates.

I. Introduction

This article will explore ways in which comedy can function as part of the ritual experience of festival participants in fifth-century Athens. I use the term 'ritual' here to refer to a set of actions performed at specified times and in particular manners for the purpose of bringing the performer into contact or communication with a supra-human being or power.[1] In order to focus the issue, I will examine possible relationships between *Clouds* and the Great Dionysia with respect to the ritual events of the latter, with the goal of understanding ways in which the play itself might function as a ritual element of the festival.

Among the comedies, *Clouds* has not often been considered from the point of view of its relationship to the events of the Great Dionysia. Rather, it is more often viewed as a critique or parody of new forms of philosophical and other speculative thought, where the character Socrates is not so much the historic individual as what Walter Burkert calls 'an unholy alliance of sophistry and natural philosophy, of Protagoras and Diogenes of Apollonia... presented under the mask of Socrates'.[2] At the same time, it seems clear from the *Apology* that Socrates' portrayal in the play affected the *polis*' view of him.[3] From my perspective, however, the play's depiction of Socrates and his 'new thinking' is relevant not so much as a seed for his later trial as for its critical response to such innovations in the context of fifth-century Athens' *polis* religion.

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[1] See Larson 2007a:15-16; Burkert 1985:7-8; Seaford 1995:xi.

[2] Burkert 1985:316. There is support for this view in the battle of the Stronger and Weaker Arguments. Compare, e.g. *Nu*. 114-15 (τούτοιν τὸν ἕτερον τοῖν λόγοιν, τὸν ἥττονα, νικᾶν λέγοντά φασι τἀδικώτερα) and 889-1104 (the Arguments) with Prot. *fr*. B6a (τὸ τὸν ἥττω δὲ λόγον κρείττω ποιεῖν) and with Pl., *Ap*. 19b5-c1 (Σωκράτης ἀδικεῖ... τὸν ἥττω λόγον κρείττω ποιῶν καὶ ἄλλους ταὐτὰ ταῦτα διδάσκων). There is also support for such an interpretation given the students' interest in τὰ μετέωρα πράγματα, as well as their interest in logic and grammar. See Σ *Nu*. 228 (περὶ τούτων γὰρ τοῖς φιλοσόφοις τὰ ζητήματα); Guthrie 1969:3:27-51, 205 and 221; Kerferd 1981; see also Hubbard 1991:95, noting the play's numerous variations on a theme of σοφία.

[3] Pl. *Ap* 19c1-4. For several possible relationships between the Socrates of the play and the historical figure, see Konstan 2011:75-88; Kanavou 2011:67-70; Gagné 2009:213; Price 1999:85-7; see also Méautis 1938:97; Rogers 1930:32.

I use the term '*polis* religion' to take into account the role of the *polis* in authorizing the introduction into the city of new gods, a function arising out of the absence in Greek religion of canon, priests or governing religious authorities.[4] Given a link between religious observances and the political structure, tensions could arise between the open nature of Greek polytheism, with its room for innovation, and *polis* prerogatives in establishing 'a system of cults, particular rituals and sanctuaries, and a sacred calendar'.[5] What I therefore also wish to examine is whether comedy, with its 'licensed' ability to parody and mock,[6] could serve as an agent of the *polis* in seeking to safeguard its established religious systems as well as its moral values from religious or philosophical innovations that might be seen to threaten them.

I suggest that *Clouds* has not been fully examined from this perspective. Thus while Simon Byl has focused attention on religious aspects of the play, the heart of his argument is that there is a virtual one-to-one correspondence between the language and imagery of the play and the Eleusinian Mysteries.[7] I see a number of problems with that analysis. In the first instance, revelation of any true secrets of the Mysteries was probably the one certain route to a prosecution for ἀσέβεια.[8] But no such prosecution occurred in this instance.[9] Second, some of the links seem strained, such as Byl's assertion that the burning of the Phrontisterion at the end of the play is an express allusion to Herodotus' tale that the reason the Persians, when routed at Plataea, died on unconsecrated ground outside of the sacred grove of Demeter was because the goddess barred their way as vengeance for having burned her shrine at Eleusis.[10] In addition to the difficulty of believing that a sufficient number of audience members would catch the Herodotean reference, by tying such a major plot component to a mythical, Mystery-related event Byl risks losing sight of other explanations for the destruction of the Phrontisterion.[11] Third, several scholars have found allusions to *non*-Eleusinian

[4] Parker 2011:57-61.

[5] Sourvinou-Inwood 2000a:19; see Bremmer 2010:33-4; Kindt 2009:13-19; Garland 1992:vii, 151.

[6] Goldhill 1991:207.

[7] See Byl 2007:22; Byl 1988:68; Byl 1980:10. Hence Bonnechere 1998:441 n.21 describes Byl as 'le grand défenseur de la parodie éleusinienne'.

[8] Isoc. *Or*. 16.6. Indeed, Aeschylus is said to have avoided prosecution on such grounds only by professing ignorance that disclosure was prohibited (Arist. *EN* 3.1, 1111a8-11). And although there is some question as to the reliability of the sources concerning Aeschylus' alleged transgression (Gagné 2009:220), there is little doubt that profanation of the Eleusinian Mysteries would have given rise to great outrage among the people (*ibid*. 217-18: 'It almost seems as if an accusation of impiety had to involve the [Eleusinian] Mysteries to be effective with the audience and in court'; Adkins 1970:15: portrayal of the Mysteries in the play 'would have been regarded not as amusing but as blasphemous'). Moreover, those who mocked the Mysteries were of course themselves subject to mockery or even banishment, as in the case of Diagoras of Melos, who was said to be Socrates' teacher (Ar. *Ran*. 320; *Nu*. 830; *Av*. 1073-4; Bremmer 2010:33).

[9] See Stone 1988:200, 232.

[10] Byl 2007:74; see Hdt. 9.65.

[11] For example, the burning of the Phrontisterion may be as much a dramatized form of judgment on its 'new ideas' and 'new gods' as anything else. This would be particularly true if one follows the suggestion of Grote 1851:554 n.2 that the then-recent burning of the Pythagoreans' meeting place at Kroton led Aristophanes so to portray the destruction of the Phrontisterion. Such an allusion would have strengthened any parallels between the 'anti-city' doctrines of the

rituals or thought in the same references relied upon by Byl to demonstrate an Eleusinian parody, including to Pythagorean practices,[12] a mystery cult involving the oracle of Trophonius,[13] Orphic ceremonies,[14] shamanistic rituals,[15] Dionysiac celebrations[16] and a cult of Sabazius.[17] The passages in question thus arguably reflect little more than generic references to numbers of mystery or cult ceremonies.

Christianne Sourvinou-Inwood, for her part, does address possible links between the dramatic contests and the pre-play events of the Great Dionysia as part of her more general effort to understand relationships between drama and cult, but she does so within a framework of rigid distinctions between the respective roles of tragedy and comedy. Thus she distinguishes comedy's mockery of the gods from tragedy's allegedly more serious attitude towards them, asserting that the different origins, character and forms of celebration of these two 'main elements of the City Dionysia' are such as to make the gods of tragedy 'representations, almost impersonations, of the real gods', while rendering the gods of comedy mere 'comic construct[s]'.[18] But she thereby underestimates the extent of the Greek religious imagination, whereby the gods can be presented in a mocking way that is nevertheless consistent with cultic reverence for the 'real gods' of *polis* religion.

Albert Henrichs has examined the role of the chorus as ritual performer, but he does so with respect to 'the rather rare instances' in tragedy where choruses 'comment self-referentially on their own performance as dancers' and thereby 'assume a ritual posture which functions as a link between the cultic reality of the [Great] Dionysia and the imaginary religious world of the tragedies'.[19] The tragic chorus, however, has only limited means of stepping outside of the mythic setting of its dramatic role in order to engage the 'here and now' events of the festival. In contrast, the comic chorus has a greater freedom to do so, including: (i) through the *parabasis*; (ii) by direct naming of contemporary Athenians; (iii) by direct reference to the festival's ritual events; and/or (iv) through self-referential comments of the sort identified by Henrichs on its own dancing and singing.[20]

Anton Bierl does go notably further, taking an interdisciplinary approach to the study of ritual and performative aspects of the chorus in Old Comedy. His analysis, however, while importantly focusing on the comic chorus, does so principally with respect to its members' roles as singers and dancers in a way he

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Pythagoreans (Detienne 1979:60), and the asceticism practiced by the students of the Phrontisterion.

[12] Bowie 1993:112-13.

[13] Bonnechere 2008.

[14] Marianetti 1993:13-14.

[15] Bowie 1993:116-24.

[16] Méautis 1938:93, comparing *Nu*. 140 to E. *Ba*. 474.

[17] Marianetti 1993:14-15. See also Cic. *de Leg*. 2.37 ('novos... deos... sic Aristophanes... vexat, ut apud eum Sabazius et quidam alii dei peregrini iudicati e civitate eiciantur').

[18] Sourvinou-Inwood 2003:69, 177.

[19] Henrichs 1995:59, 90.

[20] See Taplin 1996:191-4; Taplin 1986:173.

concludes is 'structurally similar to an initiatory experience'.[21] Like Henrichs, Bierl also stresses the comic chorus' self-referential verbal descriptions of its activities, finding them to be 'an inalienable part of the nature of a cultic and ritual action';[22] and he examines such self-references as they relate to the chorus' 'transgress[ion of] the boundaries of the plot in the direction of the actual *performance*'.[23] While he thus does view the chorus' performance as a form of ritual presentation, he does not principally focus on its relationship to the external world of the festival, let alone as a possible agent of *polis* religion.

Finally, from a less ritually-based perspective, Robert Parker has also studied the relationship between drama and what he calls 'public religion'. However he does so with more weight placed on the role of tragedy and only 'glancing attention' paid to comedy.[24] To the extent he does consider comedy, he recognizes a link between it and Dionysian rituals, but essentially limits the connection to comedy's use of phalli and verbal insults.[25] He thus rejects the view that dramatic choruses may themselves perform a ritual function within a given festival, arguing that at best their hymns serve to 'recall' external ritual.[26]

Taken as a whole, it thus remains open to explore in more detail what comedy has 'to do with Dionysos', including its possibly more direct relationship to the particular events of the Great Dionysia and its role within *polis* religion as conveyed through dramatic language and symbolism. My principal argument will be, contrary to Parker, that comedy can in fact be a 'voice speaking for Athens',[27] in this instance through a complex series of connections to festival rituals and *polis* concerns, including: (i) by the Cloud Chorus' procession into the play, whereby it links itself to a key opening ritual of the Great Dionysia; (ii) by the substance of the choral songs in praise of the Olympians and other gods, including affirmations of Zeus' priority and direct parallels to other ceremonies of the Great Dionysia; (iii) in general by the ritual 'register'[28] of the play's hymns, prayers, oaths and epithets; (iv) by the play's delineation of the Clouds as gods embracing contradictions in a manner that imports characteristics of the festival's god, Dionysos; and ultimately (v) by the play's affirmation of the justice of Zeus in the destruction of the Phrontisterion and thus the *polis*' rejection of the 'new gods' and 'new thinking' represented by Socrates.

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[21] Bierl 2009:253. The heart of Bierl's analysis is based on '[m]odern play theory in the context of cultural anthropology and child psychology', such that to the extent the chorus is engaged in a ritual performance, it is that of a '*rite de passage*' (*ibid*. 69, 80). See also Lada-Richards 1999 (focusing on Ar. *Thesm*. and *Ran*.).

[22] Bierl 2009:31.

[23] Bierl 2009:82 (emphasis in original).

[24] Parker 2005:136.

[25] Parker 2005:139. Parker stops short, however, of the extreme views of Scullion 2002, who across the board rejects Dionysian associations of drama, whether in tragedy or comedy.

[26] Parker 2005:138.

[27] Parker 2005:138.

[28] I adopt the definition of register in Willi 2003:8 as a distinctive mode of speaking used for a given situation, 'the linguistic code that is used in the creation of a text that belongs to a "genre".'

II. Gods and ritual in *Clouds*

While the particulars may have varied from city to city, and indeed from *deme* to *deme*, certain general elements are found in Greek cult worship practices.[29] These include an identifiable set of gods as the subject of worship; a location, or multiple locations, where a given god was said to dwell; names by which the god could be invoked; cult personnel; a range of ritual practices, including prayers, libations, hymns, and sacrificial and votive offerings; and a festal calendar providing occasions for honoring the gods in one or more of the foregoing ways on a regular basis.[30] I will therefore examine the particulars of the play against that general background.

A. Context: The Great Dionysia

Although it was not the only festival on the calendar honoring Dionysos, the Great Dionysia had a central importance to fifth-century Athens because its celebrations occurred distinctively in the presence of visitors from 'the whole Hellenic world'.[31] The festival was thus 'an effective advertisement of the wealth and power and public spirit of Athens, no less than of the artistic and literary leadership of her sons'.[32] As such, the events of the Great Dionysia included not only ritual but also civic ceremonies, all leading up to dramatic contests among several tragedies, satyr plays and comedies.

With respect to its rituals, the festival commenced with a symbolic reenactment of the mythical return of Dionysos to Athens, whose inhabitants he had smitten with a plague affecting their genitals in punishment for initially having rejected him.[33] Thus the god's statue was first removed from its regular place in the temple of Dionysos to the outskirts of the city. It was then transported back to the city in a torchlight procession accompanied by hymns and sacrifice—the εἰσαγωγὴ ἀπὸ τῆς ἐσχάρας—with the god's return to the city symbolized by placement of his statue either in the theater of Dionysos or back inside his nearby temple for the duration of the festival.[34] Other rites followed, including a second procession—the πομπή—leading to sacrifices in the temple precincts; and a night-time κῶμος, or revel.[35]

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[29] Parker 1996:3-7; see also Sourvinou-Inwood 2000a:19.

[30] Larson 2007a:18-19; Mikalson 1999:1-29; Price 1999:25-39; Burkert 1985:55-9, 75, 84, 88, 95-8, 102-3, 199-203, 225-27.

[31] Pickard-Cambridge 1968:58; Price 1999:44. This was not the case with other festivals, such as the Lenaia.

[32] Pickard-Cambridge 1968:58.

[33] See Σ Ar. *Ach*. 243. There is a technical debate, immaterial to this discussion, whether the festival commenced with this rite or whether the rite was preliminary to it. Pickard-Cambridge 1968:59-60.

[34] Pickard-Cambridge 1968:60 asserts that the statue was placed in the theater. Parker 2011:180-81 agrees; but Wilson 2007:50 more cautiously suggests that the statue was more likely returned to the temple, with the god's presence in the theater being representing by his priest, not his statue. See also Pickard-Cambridge 1968:268. In either case, however, the god was seen to 'return' to Athens and it is that festival advent that is most relevant here.

[35] Pickard-Cambridge 1968:61-3.

In addition to these ritual events concerning the god, his statue and his temple, there were a number of civic ceremonies that likely occurred in the theater itself immediately before the presentation of the several plays.[36] These included presentation of tribute from Athens' allies; honors given to citizens as well as foreigners who had benefited the city; and the public presentation of orphans of fallen soldiers to mark their own coming of age and entrance into military service for the city.[37]

Simon Goldhill has focused on these latter events as a use of 'the state festival to glorify the state', such that he views the Great Dionysia as 'in the full sense of the expression a civic occasion'.[38] Goldhill argues that while the civic pre-play ceremonies glorified the state, the ensuing tragedies and the comedies questioned the *polis*' 'self-image'[39] by exposing its internal 'conflicts and ambiguities'.[40] He finds the resulting 'interplay of norm and transgression' to be 'Dionysiac', using the term Dionysiac in an abstracted sense to refer to Dionysos' generalized character as 'the divinity associated with illusion and change, paradox and ambiguity, release and transgression'.[41] In that context, he is admittedly 'least' interested in the possible relationships between '[w]hat happened on the days immediately *before* the days on which plays were performed'—i.e. in the εἰσαγωγὴ ἀπὸ τῆς ἐσχάρας and related rituals—and the plays themselves.[42]

It is not obvious to me, however, that the comedies invariably operate as a challenge to the norms of the city; and I will suggest that if we focus on the relationship between *Clouds* and ritual as well as any civic pre-play ceremonies of the festival, it will become clear that this play, at least, is neither 'Dionysiac' in the sense used by Goldhill, nor simply a parody of Eleusinian Mysteries and/or sophistic thought and reason, but rather also serves to support the framework of the Great Dionysia as a *polis*-sanctioned festival..

B. The play's pantheon

If, as I have suggested, the play in fact supports the framework of the Great Dionysia as a *polis*-sanctioned festival, then it should ultimately affirm rather than subvert the gods whom the *polis* acknowledges. To test this thesis I will therefore first examine the constellation of gods found in the play, a mix of both traditional and 'new' gods, with the goal of identifying ways in which the pantheon thus created relates to the city's gods and in particular to the festival's god, Dionysos.

[36] The exact order of these events at the festival is not clear. Pickard-Cambridge 1968:63.
[37] Pickard-Cambridge 1968:59.
[38] Goldhill 1990:102, 114. By 'full sense' I take him to mean that drama's key role in the festival is as an element of Athens' political discourse.
[39] Goldhill 1990:102.
[40] Goldhill 1990:127.
[41] Goldhill 1990:127-9.
[42] Goldhill 1990:98 (emphasis added).

1. The Clouds

The dominant gods of *Clouds* are the Clouds themselves. That they form a chorus of deities is nearly unique in Greek drama.[43] Their divine status first appears when they are introduced by Socrates as αἱ ἡμέτεραι δαίμονες; and he twice refers to them as θεαί.[44] Socrates prays to them as daughters of the Titan Ocean; and so also do they refer to themselves.[45] As most relevant here, the Clouds' first appearance in the play directly calls up the image of the εἰσαγωγὴ ἀπὸ τῆς ἐσχάρας, the pre-play ritual whereby Dionysos' return to Athens is symbolically re-enacted by the removal of his statue from the city and its return in a torchlight procession accompanied by hymns and sacrifice.

Thus Socrates purports to see them descending from Mount Parnes[46] and then announces their appearance παρὰ τὴν εἴσοδον.[47] The Clouds' arrival from a distance thereby suggests a dramatic parallel to the arrival of the statue of Dionysos from the outskirts of town.[48] Indeed, because the god's statue was likely already placed in the theater,[49] the Clouds' own entrance would have functioned as a symbolic merger of the world of drama and the world of the festival. Further, the Clouds' entrance hymn, with its direct reference to the εὐκέλαδοι χοροί and the accompanying αὐλοί,[50] conveys a sense of the characters being self-aware of

[43] The Cloud chorus is one of a tiny number of choruses composed of divinities, at least in the extant plays. Thus there are the Furies in A. *Eu*.; the daughters of Ocean in A. *Pr*.; and a chorus of satyrs in E. *Cycl*. There may be choruses of semi-divinities in lost plays of course, such as a possible chorus of heroes in Ar. *frr*. 310-30 (attributed to the play *Heroes*). See Pickard-Cambridge 1968:237; see also Bierl 2009:76 n.202. But so far as the literature reveals, choruses of traditional deities do not otherwise appear.

[44] *Nu*. 252, 316, 329.

[45] *Nu*. 271, 276-8. Hes. *Theog*. 346-66 refers to there being in fact 3000 daughters of Ocean and perhaps the suggestion is that the nymphs of this play fall within that group, as did the nymphs in A. *Pr*. But the Clouds' parentage remains elusive throughout, perhaps in keeping with clouds' inherently changeable nature. Thus later in the play the Clouds refer to themselves as daughters of Aither, *not* Ocean (*Nu*. 569-70). Yet regardless whether the Clouds of the play are daughters of Ocean or Aither, they certainly resonate with a recognized class of minor nature gods associated with such phenomena as clouds and springs (see generally Burkert 1985:184-5). Byl 1987 nevertheless makes the curious argument that Aristophanes named the play as he did *not* as an allusion to any nature goddesses, but rather to the miraculous dust cloud from Eleusis that assured the Athenians' victory at Salamis in 480, citing Hdt. 8.65. One difficulty with his theory is that Herodotus described this dust cloud using the word κονιορτός, not νέφος. Another is that his suggestion is inconsistent with the general nature imagery of the play: see, e.g. *Nu*. 329, 341, 343-4.

[46] *Nu*. 323. This reference also functions a metatheatrical joke because the mountain would have been hidden from the audience by the Acropolis (Dover 1968:143).

[47] *Nu*. 326. This is also metatheatrical, as a reference to the physical structure of the theater. Although we can do no more than speculate on this point, it might also be that Socrates' use of the word εἴσοδος provided a verbal resonance with the word εἰσαγωγή, thus further linking the Clouds' procession in the play to the pre-play rituals involving Dionysos' statue.

[48] The distance is emphasized by the fact that their song is heard before they are seen entering the theater, as Socrates only sees them *after* the hymn ends (*Nu*. 323).

[49] Or, as noted above, in the god's nearby temple.

[50] *Nu*. 311-13.

their setting within the dramatic competitions of the Great Dionysia.[51] And again, the Clouds' singing of the πρόσοδοι μακάρων ἱερώταται[52] calls to mind not only the εἰσαγωγὴ ἀπὸ τῆς ἐσχάρας but also the ensuing πομπή. So also the opening song's reference to the εὐστέφανοι θεῶν θυσίαι[53] reminds the audience of the sacrifices that had not long before taken place in the temple precincts. Finally, the chorus' reference to Βρομία χάρις[54] is a link to the pre-play κῶμος rituals.

Second, the Clouds are characterized by a shape-shifting quality important to their role in the pantheon created within the play. Socrates sees them coming from afar off, but they initially appear to Strepsiades not at all;[55] then as 'mist and dew and smoke;'[56] then as somehow 'possessing/permeating everything',[57] yet still having the form of women.[58] And in a genuine confusion of images, Strepsiades quickly *denies* that they look like women, but rather like sheep fleeces, and yet fleeces with noses.[59] Socrates suggests that the Clouds shift forms of their own volition: γίγνονται πάνθ' ὅτι βούλονται.[60] Within the framework of the play, this may well foreshadow the Clouds' turning against Strepsiades at the end of the play, suggesting that he was foolish to have thought that the gods could be limited to a fixed position.

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[51] While it is true that the text we have is a revised version of the play and may well never have been performed as such at the festival (hyp. *Nu*. A6 Holwerda), there is no sound basis for doubting that it was published and circulated (Dover 1972:104). Moreover, while it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore in detail the debate over which portions of the play represent the original, performed version and which might be later revisions or additions (see, e.g. hyp. *Nu*. A7 Holwerda; Σ *Nu*. 549, 553 and 591), we are on reasonably safe ground in assuming that the choral songs reflect a good deal of the original (see generally Dover 1968:lxxx-xcviii). What would *not* be reasonable is to read the play as Riu 1999:269 does, simply as a vehicle for Aristophanes to identify himself with Socrates as one 'committ[ing] *hybris* and *adikia* against the gods', a view that cannot be squared with the respectful treatment both of the gods and festival rituals discussed in this paper.

[52] *Nu*. 307.

[53] *Nu*. 308.

[54] *Nu*. 311.

[55] *Nu*. 325.

[56] *Nu*. 329.

[57] *Nu*. 328.

[58] *Nu*. 341.

[59] *Nu*. 343-4.

[60] *Nu*. 348. Sfyroeras 1992:163 argues that Socrates' response in fact is the expounding of 'a mimetic... theory of comedy', in that the Clouds' changeability is meant to signify a dramatic performer's assumption of different roles, each represented by a mask. That is probably reading too much theory into Socrates' response, but it is nevertheless interesting to speculate on the variability of any mask(s) and/or costumes the Cloud choristers might have worn. Whatever the masks were, or however the players were costumed, the staging must have been quite creative: as noted, the Clouds had visible noses (*Nu*. 344); looked like 'mortal women' (341); didn't look like women (344); and/or looked like 'fleeces spread out' (343). My own guess is that the choristers were quite diversely costumed, consistent with the metaphor of the variability of clouds in nature. And despite the disclaimer in the *parabasis* of the playwright's use of stage gimmicks such as comic phalli (*Nu*. 538-89), it would not be surprising if at least some members of the Cloud chorus wore padded body suits with protuberant breasts and buttocks. These would have been comically apt for portraying cloud forms; and their use would also have provided a humorous context for Strepsiades' references to seeing the Clouds as women.

With respect to the more general question of how the gods are portrayed, however, the Clouds' variability links them almost metonymically to Dionysos, whose 'oscillating nature' and ability to 'encompass[] oppositions' is arguably his most notable characteristic.[61] As such, the 'playful inventions and meta-theatrical experiments' of the comedy may themselves be seen as ritual enacted for the god of the theater.[62] And the sense in which the Clouds are 'Dionysiac' is therefore less the politico-confrontational meaning given by Goldhill than a more ritual one related to the processional, hymnic and other rites leading up to the dramatic presentations.

Third, the Clouds share a notable characteristic of other gods in that they have no fixed abode. Socrates thus summons them from a number of possible cult locations in the form εἴτε... εἴτε... εἴτε.[63] These locations themselves reveal much about the Clouds' ties to the gods sanctioned by the *polis*. Thus they may be found seated ἐπ' Ὀλύμπου κορυφαῖς ἱεραῖς χιονοβλήτοισι, an appropriate dwelling place for gods and a means of linking them to the Olympians. But while they are associated with gods in airy places, they are also water-related and may be found variously Ὠκεανοῦ πατρὸς ἐν κήποις; or Νείλου προχοαῖς; or dwelling either at Μαιῶτιν λίμνην or σκόπελον νιφόεντα Μίμαντος.[64] As such they are globally in harmony with traditional *polis* gods.

Fourth, a number of the epithets used of the Clouds further link them to the gods of the *polis*, including again to Dionysos as the god the festival. Epithets are naming phrases used to describe one or more divine characteristics and are commonly found in Greek hymns and prayers. While there is disagreement whether the purpose of such epithets is to 'choose the right name' lest the god not respond, or is simply to provide the god with maximum honor,[65] care does go into choosing an appropriate name for the god in a given context.[66] Thus the Clouds are epithetically referred to as σεμναὶ θεαί,[67] βροντησικέραυνοι,[68] ἀέναοι Νεφέλαι,[69] πολυτίμητοι,[70] δέσποιναι,[71] οὐράνιαι[72] and παμβασίλειαι.[73] Many of the epithets thus chosen are commonly associated with a wide range of gods. For example, gods and goddesses referred to as σεμνός include Demeter,[74] the Magna

[61] Bierl 2010:1.
[62] Bierl 2010:1.
[63] *Nu*. 270-74. This is consistent with other examples of a cletic summons (e.g. Sappho *fr*. 1; see also Page 1955:16-17).
[64] The use of both air and water imagery is also consistent with the references to the Clouds' patrimony at times as derived from Ocean and at other times from Aither (*Nu*. 271, 276-8, 569-70).
[65] Willi 2003:18; Pulleyn 1997:106-7.
[66] See generally Devlin 1995:17; Anderson 1995.
[67] *Nu*. 265, 291.
[68] *Nu*. 265.
[69] *Nu*. 276. Cf. the opening line of the later *Hymn*. *Or*. 21: Ἀέριοι νεφέλαι….
[70] *Nu*. 269, 328.
[71] *Nu*. 357, 429.
[72] *Nu*. 316.
[73] *Nu*. 357.
[74] *h*. *Hym*. *Cer*. 1.

Mater,[75] Apollo,[76] Poseidon,[77] Athena[78] and the Furies.[79] Gods are frequently addressed as πολυτίμητοι in other comedies,[80] including for example Zeus[81] and Herakles.[82] The term δέσποιναι is associated with Hecate[83] and Artemis.[84] Gods who are οὐράνιαι include Demeter[85] and Hera.[86] In addition, as ἀέναοι the Clouds are associated with Zeus' 'ever-flowing' τιμή.[87]

As with their Olympian cult-locations noted above, such appellations connect the Clouds to principal gods acknowledged by the *polis*. Likewise the Clouds refer to themselves as παρθένοι ὀμβροφόροι,[88] again broadening the scope of their relationship to the water-gods of the pantheon, just as was the case noted above with respect to their cult locations by rivers, lakes and oceans. Moreover, while the epithetic references to the Clouds as thunder and lightning goddesses certainly call up the image of Zeus,[89] these are *also* terms that may reference Dionysos as thunderbolt-born Bromios,[90] thus tying the Clouds to the festal god.[91]

Finally, acting as a chorus of deities, the Clouds are assigned a number of attributes consistent with their divine status. Thus the Clouds employ servants to accomplish their will on earth;[92] accordingly they give instructions to Socrates to educate Strepsiades.[93] They likewise foresee the negative consequences of Strepsiades' goal of defrauding his creditors[94] and can therefore advise on the

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[75] Pi. *P*. 3.79.
[76] A. *Sept*. 800-01.
[77] S. *OC* 55.
[78] S. *OC* 1090.
[79] S. *Aj*. 837; A. *Eu*. 383.
[80] *LSJ s.v*. πολυτίμητος.
[81] Ar. *fr*. 319.
[82] Ar. *Ach*. 807.
[83] A. *fr*. 388.
[84] S. *El*. 626.
[85] *h*. *Hym*. *Cer*. 55
[86] Pi. *P*. 2.38-9. To the extent an allusion to this ode was perceived, it would have provided a particularly elegant link to the Clouds in that Pindar there compares the cloud that Ixion embraced in a dream to Hera as heavenly queen. The ties to Hera are further strengthened by the epithet παμβασίλειαι (*Nu*. 357).
[87] Pi. *O*. 14.12.
[88] *Nu*. 299.
[89] See also *Nu*. 580-4, where the Clouds assert their ability to cause thunder and lightning (Hubbard 1991:108: the Clouds' 'practice of sending omens through lightning and thunder is typical of the divine powers we usually associate with Zeus'). That is not to say that all such references are reverent; and Strepsiades thus responds to the Clouds' thundering approach with βούλομαι ἀνταποπαρδεῖν πρὸς τὰς βροντάς (*Nu*. 293)
[90] See E. *Ba*. 92-3 (λιποῦσ' αἰῶνα κεραυνίῳ πλαγᾶ); S. *Ant*. 1116 (Διὸς βαρυβρεμέτα γένος), 1139 (ματρὶ σὺν κεραυνίᾳ); see Sfyroeras 1992:161.
[91] In addition the Clouds are addressed as μεγάλαι θεαὶ ἀνδράσιν ἀργοῖς (*Nu*. 316). They are thus said to provide lazy men with intellect and verbal skills (317-18). These are the only examples of joking epithets applied to the Clouds and may reflect more on Socrates than the goddesses (331-4).
[92] *Nu*. 435.
[93] *Nu*. 476-7.
[94] *Nu*. 812-13, 1303-20.

future, as they remind the audience they have in fact done in the past.[95] They have special knowledge of the other gods.[96] They distinguish good from evil conduct;[97] and they are themselves dispensers of justice.[98]

Taken as a whole, then, the portrait of the Clouds is both elevated and highly complex. While they are invoked in part as impersonal forces of nature, they are also active players in the drama, possessed of intellect and speech. The latter capacity, of course, is of necessity for a chorus, but the point is that Aristophanes has crafted them with a good deal more in mind than providing changeable visual imagery or a group of singers and dancers.[99] Instead, the Clouds are aligned in character with the Olympians and other gods recognized by the city and, by virtue of their own shifting and variable forms, with Dionysos in particular.[100]

2. Other gods

The Clouds are of course not the only gods or demi-gods mentioned or described in the play. In fact there are some twenty others. With respect to the Olympians named in the play, they like the Clouds are portrayed in traditional and familiar terms, as indicated by the range of epithets by which they are addressed: *Apollo*, ἄναξ Δήλιε;[101] *Artemis*, ἡ Ἐφέσου μάκαιρα πάγχρυσον ἔχουσα οἶκον, ἐν ᾧ κόραι Λυδῶν μεγάλως σέβουσιν;[102] *Athena*, ἡ ἐπιχώριος ἡμετέρα θεὸς,[103] αἰγίδος ἡνίοχος,[104] πολιοῦχος,[105] Τριτογενείης;[106] *Hermes*, φίλ' Ἑρμῆ;[107] *Poseidon*, ὁ

[95] *Nu*. 581-94.
[96] *Nu*. 1458-61.
[97] *Nu*. 1444-5.
[98] *Nu*. 1458-61. A number of critics have found the ending of the play, where the tables appear to be turned on Strepsiades, to be puzzling or inconsistent in light of what they perceive as the Clouds' earlier support for his goal of acquiring the forensic skills needed to defraud his creditors. See, e.g. Guthrie 1969:3.370, who argues that the Clouds do an 'astonishing *volte-face* at the end of the play [which] can only be taken as another example of their sophistry'. But the Clouds did not ratify the morality of Strepsiades' goals; instead, they allowed him to obtain 'what [he] desired' (*Nu*. 435), with the just consequence that he was not in fact relieved of his debts. There is thus a broad consistency between the Clouds' position and Zeus' judgment on those who pursue crooked judgments. Compare *Nu*. 433-34 (ἐπιθυμῶ... στρεψοδικῆσαι) with Hes. *W&D* 238-9 (οἷς ὕβρις τε μέμηλε κακὴ καὶ σχέτλια ἔργα, τοῖς δὲ δίκην Κρονίδης τεκμαίρεται εὐρύοπα Ζεύς).
[99] Aristophanes' portrayal of the Clouds is thus consistent with long-standing personifications of natural phenomena in the literature, many of which were also the subject of cult worship. See Larson 2007b; cf. Stafford 2000, analyzing ancient Greek worship of personified abstractions such as Persuasion and Peace.
[100] Thus Flickinger 1918:127 was surely wrong in his view that the play reflects an 'irreverent, almost atheistic, tendency' entirely 'unassociated with religious worship'. Of course, Old Comedy is not free of ambiguity and irony. Thus while my principal goal is to analyze the play's under-appreciated consistencies with polis-approved rituals, I do not suggest that the Clouds are univocally described in a manner consistent with the city's values (see, e.g., *Nu*. 331-4).
[101] *Nu*. 595-6.
[102] *Nu*. 598-600.
[103] *Nu*. 601. Cf. the praise of Athens itself in Ar. *fr*. 110: ὦ πόλι φίλη Κέκροπος, αὐτοφυὲς Ἀττική, χαῖρε λιπαρὸν δάπεδον, οὖθαρ ἀγαθῆς χθονός.
[104] *Nu*. 602.
[105] *Nu*. 602
[106] *Nu*. 989.
[107] *Nu*. 1478.

ἵππιος,[108] ὁ μεγασθενής τριαίνης ταμίας,[109] γῆς τε καὶ ἁλμυρᾶς θαλάσσης ἄγριος μοχλευτής;[110] and *Zeus*, βασιλεύς,[111] ὑψιμέδων θεῶν,[112] τύραννος... μέγας,[113] Ὀλύμπιος,[114] ὁ μέγας.[115] Many of these are common descriptors for the gods in question[116] and together they suggest that the traditional gods are being treated with a good deal of respect.[117] While some of the references do seem generic, such as 'King Zeus', the choice of that and other rulership-related epithets has relevance to the play, where Zeus is said to have been dethroned[118] but in fact is vouchsafed by the Cloud Chorus as chief among the gods.[119] The reference to Poseidon as ὁ ἵππιος is comically apt in view of Phidippides' betting debts. But he is also relevantly invoked as sea-shaker to the extent the Clouds are seen as having their parentage from Ocean.

I also suggest that the reference to Athena as protector of the city has a particular significance given the close of the play, where the burning of the Phrontisterion might call to mind not only the then-recent burning of the Pythagoreans' meeting place at Kroton[120] but also the burning of Athena's olive tree by the Persians. As related mythically by Herodotus, the olive tree regenerated itself the next day, thus symbolizing the enduring nature of Athens under the protection of the *polis*' patron goddess.[121] Here, in contrast, the temple of the 'new gods' simply disappears, thus symbolically leaving *polis* religion intact. And along the same vein, the Cloud chorus' praise of Athena as 'our homeland goddess' stands in contrast to Socrates' invocation of the Clouds as 'our own gods'.

Focusing separately on Dionysos, he is invoked as Παρνασσίαν ὃς κατέχων πέτραν σὺν πεύκαις σελαγεῖ,[122] Βάκχαις Δελφίσιν ἐμπρέπων,[123] and as

[108] *Nu*. 83.
[109] *Nu*. 566.
[110] *Nu*. 567-8.
[111] *Nu*. 1, 153.
[112] *Nu*. 563.
[113] *Nu*. 564-5.
[114] *Nu*. 817.
[115] *Nu*. 1239.
[116] For discussion of the characteristics and origins of individual gods see, e.g. Parker 2011:65-70; Mikalson 1999:11-12; Burkert 1985:119-81.
[117] I am not suggesting that this is the invariant way the Olympians or other gods are portrayed in Old Comedy. See, e.g. the abusive and mocking treatment of Dionysos in *Ra*. 478-90; see Parker 2005:150-51. My point is that it would equally be a mistake to over-simplify the role(s) of the gods in comedy, as Dover 1972:30 does with the view that the 'gods are treated and portrayed not as the august beings worshipped in hymns and processions to temples, but as Pucks and Rumpelstiltskins drawn from the nursery-stories of an unusually sophisticated, confident and irreverent nursery'. See also the same error in Pascal 1911:5 ('gli dèi sono materia di riso per il poeta, non oggetto di venerazione').
[118] *Nu*. 828.
[119] *Nu*. 563-6.
[120] See n.11 above.
[121] Hdt. 8.55.
[122] *Nu*. 604.
[123] *Nu*. 605.

κωμαστής.[124] The reference to lighted torches provides yet another link to the torchlight procession, the εἰσαγωγὴ ἀπο τῆς ἐσχάρας, returning the god's statue to the city at the start of the Great Dionysia;[125] and torches will of course also become meaningful at the close of the play when Strepsiades has the Phrontisterion burned down.[126] Similarly, the choral references to Bacchic joy and to Dionysos as κωμαστής are clear links to the κῶμος that rounded out the festival's opening rituals.

The epithets chosen for other named gods are similarly relevant to the play or otherwise consistent with the gods' traditional portrayals. Thus we have: *Aither*, λαμπρός,[127] μεγαλώνυμος ἠμέτερος πατήρ,[128] σεμνότατος,[129] βιοθρέμμων πάντων;[130] *Air*, δέσποτ' ἄναξ, ἀμέτρητ' Ἀήρ;[131] and *Helios*, ὁ ἱπποπόμας,[132] ὃς ὑπερλάμπροις ἀκτῖσιν κατέχει γῆς πέδον,[133] μέγας ἐν θεοῖς ἐν θνητοῖσί τε δαίμων.[134] Each of these deities has to do with τὰ μετέωρα πράγματα[135] and most of the epithets chosen for them emphasize characteristics shared in part by the Clouds. Thus Aither, like the Clouds, is a life-nourisher. Air, of course, is where the Clouds may be found. And Helios covers the plains of the earth in a way analogous to the covering-nature of clouds.

While many of the foregoing divine or semi-divine figures are found commonly in the literature,[136] others invoked in the play—notably ὁ Δῖνος and ἡ Γλῶττα—are not. What is important here about these 'new gods' referred to by Socrates is the imprecision and variability both of their roles and their relative importance to other gods. Thus Socrates first enjoins Strepsiades to worship τὸ Χάος, αἱ Νεφέλαι and ἡ Γλῶττα, deictically emphasizing them, τρία ταυτί.[137] But Socrates elsewhere describes ὁ Δῖνος as chief in the Pantheon, having supplanted Zeus.[138] Yet it is not clear that ὁ Δῖνος rules either, as Socrates later swears *not* by Δῖνος but μὰ τὴν Ἀναπνοήν, μὰ τὸ Χάος, μὰ τὸν Ἀέρα.[139] Indeed, he thereby seems to drop αἱ Νεφέλαι and ἡ Γλῶττα entirely from his earlier-worshipped Trinity.

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[124] *Nu*. 606.
[125] See also S. *Ant*. 1226, 1143, where Dionysos and the maenads are said to run across the slopes of Parnassus carrying torches.
[126] *Nu*. 1490.
[127] *Nu*. 265.
[128] *Nu*. 569.
[129] *Nu*. 570.
[130] *Nu*. 570.
[131] *Nu*. 264.
[132] *Nu*. 571.
[133] *Nu*. 572-3.
[134] *Nu*. 573-4.
[135] *Nu*. 228.
[136] E.g. Helios in *h*. *Hom*. *Ap*. 410-13 or Aither in Hes. *Theog*. 124.
[137] *Nu*. 424.
[138] *Nu*. 380, 828, 1469. Kanavou 2011:77 suggests that the word is 'close enough to forms of the name Zeus (starting with Δι-) to sound as a comic variation', pointing out a pun on Δία that appears at *Nu*. 1471.
[139] *Nu*. 627.

From a positive viewpoint, Aristophanes may here be exercising the freedom inherent in Greek polytheism, which as an 'open system' allowed not only for inventiveness within existing cult worship but also tolerated the introduction of so-called 'foreign gods',[140] subject to *polis* consent. But viewed negatively, the portrayal of Socrates' casual invocation of first one set of gods and then another, often of gods newly-created in the play, may thus have confirmed in the minds of some that he taught youths to acknowledge not the gods of the *polis* but ἕτερα δαιμόνια καινά.[141] This may be particularly relevant with respect to ὁ Δῖνος, a 'god' who reflects a wide-ranging series of cosmogonic speculations by Empedocles, Anaxagoras and others concerning circular or 'whirling' forces in the primal and ongoing movements of the universe,[142] cosmogonies which might well have been seen to 'replace[] mythology by science and mathematics'[143] and thus to 'kick Zeus out'.[144] As such, it is relevant to my thesis that the Clouds themselves do *not* praise ὁ Δῖνος as pre-eminent, but rather acknowledge the allegedly dethroned Zeus as chief among them: ὑψιμέδοντα μὲν θεῶν Ζῆνα τύραννον εἰς χορὸν πρῶτα μέγαν κικλήσκω.[145]

Apart from the use of epithets, many of the gods in the play are addressed or referred to through oaths.[146] Oaths are exclamatory expressions, in drama often taking the form 'νὴ ____'. Although one critic expresses the view that these are 'almost glorified particles [used] to express tone more than substance',[147] I believe that misses the point. While such expressions arguably fall outside the

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[140] See generally Garland 1992. As told in Hdt. 2.53.2, Homer and Hesiod first provided the Greeks with the origins, names, forms and functions of the gods. But epic did not thereby create a fixed pantheon, even if gods found outside of epic are seen as 'foreign' (Parker 2011:98-102; Price 1999:12-15; Burkert 1985:176). Aristophanes exercised a similar inventiveness when he introduced a form of cult of the goddess Peace in his 421 BC play, in which the hero Trygaeus both prays and offers sacrifice to her (Ar. *Pax* 974-1017). Thus while Peace was already 'seen as a real power' during the fifth century through literary representations and otherwise, there is no reliable evidence that she was the subject of any *polis*-authorized worship until the fourth century (Stafford 2000:174-7, 184-8, 193).

[141] Pl. *Ap*. 26b5. Note for example the verbal links between this passage and the ἡμέτεραι δαίμονια of *Nu*. 252. I therefore disagree with Parker 1996:203, who too restrictively argues that the indictment in 399 BC 'must... allude to [Socrates'] "divine sign", *daimonion*'.

[142] Dover 1968:150 cites as possible sources for this 'deity' fragments of Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Diogenes and the 'Atomists' concerning δίνη as a form of cosmic spinning; but see Ferguson 1979:358, concluding that while the feminine form appears in some sources, there is no clear source for the masculine δῖνος, such that it may well have been Aristophanes' invention in order to permit a pun in line 1473, where δῖνος refers to a pot as well as to Whirl.

[143] Ferguson 1971:115.

[144] *Nu*. 828.

[145] *Nu*. 563-4. The Clouds likewise acknowledge the Eleusinian Mysteries outside a parodic context (*Nu*. 302-04). I therefore disagree with Craik 1987:32-3, who argues that Aristophanes' approach to *polis* religion is an 'iconoclastic' one, inducing the audience to 'laugh at the mysteries'.

[146] *Air* (627, 667); *Apollo* (372, 387, 732); *Athena* (966-7, 1265); *Breath* (626); *Chaos* (627); *Demeter* (121, 455); *Dionysos* (90, 108-09, 311, 519, 1000); *Earth* (364, 366); the generic '*gods*' (246-8, 480, 784, 1097, 1227, 1272); *Graces* (733); *Herakles* (184); *Hermes* (1276); *Mist* (814); *Poseidon* (83-5, 626, 665, 723); and *Zeus* (135; 153; 217; 251; 261; 314; 328; 329-30; 344; 347; 408; 483; 651; 694; 733; 1227; 1228; 1234; 1332; 1338; 1379; 1405).

[147] Dillon 1995:137. Willi 2003:13 refers to these as 'assertive idioms'.

category of a true religious 'oath',[148] they are not gratuitous. There is to be sure a relentless frequency of such oaths in the play; and some oaths are plainly used for comic effect, as when Strepsiades and Socrates both swear by a Zeus in whom they profess not to believe,[149] or when Strepsiades tells a creditor how laughable it is to the intelligentsia when ordinary people use such expressions.[150] But it would be too glib anachronistically to read back into the frequency of such oaths the casualness of modern swearing in our own society; and while it would be unduly speculative to divine their meanings at each point in the play, it would be fair to say that the oaths as well as the epithets add to the ritual overtones of the play.

C. Ritual elements of the play

With the play's pantheon thus established, I will discuss in this section its several explorations of forms of communication with and worship of the gods, i.e. the ritual structures of the play, with a view to seeing how these also may align with any festal events either in parodic or symbiotic relationship.

1. Teacher and priest

What Byl and others have referred to as the Eleusinian-like initiation rites in the opening scenes of the play may be better understood as newly-minted initiation ceremonies, or τελεταί, whereby Strepsiades is inducted both into the worship of the Phrontisterion's 'new gods' and the acquisition of its 'new knowledge'. As such, the Phrontisterion functions as a temple, or cult location, thus satisfying one of the general elements of Greek religion noted above. For purposes of my analysis, the Phrontisterion is thus a parodic counterpart to the physically nearby temple of Dionysos.[151]

And the play's temple also has its own specialized personnel. Just as the cult of Dionysos had a chief priest,[152] so here we have Socrates, who functions as a form of combined teacher and priest. Socrates is thus frequently referred to as διδάσκαλος, or teacher.[153] As such, he and his school are engaged in exploring a wide range of then-current and developing fields of inquiry, including measurements,[154] geometry,[155] geography,[156] enterology,[157] rhythm,[158]

[148] See Burkert 1985:250-54.
[149] *Nu*. 652, 694, 1228.
[150] *Nu*. 1240 (Ζεὺς γελοῖος ὀμνύμενος τοῖς εἰδόσιν).
[151] Unlike most temples, however, including the temple of Dionysos (Burkert 1985:60, 88), the Phrontisterion has no statue or other cult image. The absence of such an image might, however, be seen as a metaphorical indication that the gods of the *polis* have rejected the Phrontisterion, just as Dionysos had mythically withdrawn from Athens on first being rejected by its inhabitants.
[152] Pickard-Cambridge 1968:268.
[153] *Nu*. 98, 238, 871, 1147.
[154] *Nu*. 143-52, 203, 639-45.
[155] *Nu*. 202. Cf. Vernant 1982:126-9 on the relationship between the geometry of physical space and Athens' developing social structures.
[156] *Nu*. 206-7.
[157] *Nu*. 155-64.
[158] *Nu*. 646-51.

etymology,[159] grammar,[160] dialectic and argumentation,[161] the Earth's exterior,[162] the Earth's interior,[163] astronomy[164] and more generally τὰ μετέωρα πράγματα, a term that might include not only a study of things in the heavens but 'high' thoughts.[165] It is therefore perhaps no surprise that his students refer to him as αὐτός,[166] a term used of Pythagorean masters.[167]

Socrates is further addressed by the Clouds as ἱερεύς, albeit a priest of slick nonsense.[168] While there are no fixed elements in Greek cult as to what might be a priest's role and duties—'no *disciplina*, but only usage, *nomos*'[169]—when a priest did preside, his duties would commonly include the offering of prayers, libations and sacrifices.[170] So here also Socrates invokes the cult's 'own gods' and summons them to appear.[171] In addition, acting with the Cloud goddesses' delegated authority,[172] it is Socrates who makes the initial decision to admit Strepsiades.[173] He is thus a keeper of the integrity of the 'mysteries'[174] of the Phrontisterion. His depiction is consistent, if not conforming in any strict way, with the notion of a priest as one due honor because of his dedication to a god's service.[175]

Prayers were a central part of Greek cult activity and Socrates' prayer also conforms to the general elements found therein. Simon Pulleyn's simple definition is that to pray means 'asking the gods for something'.[176] From a structural point

[159] *Nu*. 392-4; see Willi 2003:97-98.
[160] *Nu*. 658-92; see Willi 2003:98-100.
[161] *Nu*. 740-83.
[162] *Nu*. 188.
[163] *Nu Nu*. 92. This portrayal may thus also have been a background for the charges in Pl. *Ap*. 19b5: Σωκράτης ἀδικεῖ καὶ περιεργάζεται ζητῶν τά τε ὑπὸ γῆς καὶ οὐράνια.
[164] *Nu*. 171-2, 194-5, 201; see also Σ Ar. *Pax* 92a: ἔφη δὲ ἐν ταῖς Νεφέλαις μετεωρολέσχας τοὺς φιλοσόφους, ὅτι τὰ οὐράνια περινοοῦσιν.
[165] *Nu*. 228. For a delightful example of nineteenth-century parodic reception of *Clouds*, see Mansel 1873:402, complete with a 'Chorus of Professors' parodying that era's own 'new thinking:' 'Theologians we, / Deep thinkers and free, / From the land of the new Divinity; / Where Critics hunt for the sense sublime, / Hidden in texts of the olden time…' etc.
[166] *Nu*. 218.
[167] Dover 1968:125; Marianetti 1992:122; Willi 2003:114.
[168] *Nu*. 359.
[169] Burkert 1985:95 ('Greek religion might almost be called a religion without priests… The god in principle admits anyone…'). Although Parker 2011:50 has a point in criticizing Burkert's statement as 'very bold' given the actual numbers of priests operating at the time, it was nevertheless true that prayers and sacrifices were often and appropriately offered by individuals (Sourvinou-Inwood 2000b:44-45). This is not the same thing, of course, as an individual choosing to establish his own *cult*, for 'cult activities which... appear to pertain to "personal" religion are in fact also part of *polis* religion' (*ibid*. 54).
[170] Burkert 1985:95.
[171] *Nu*. 263-74.
[172] *Nu*. 435-6.
[173] *Nu*. 250-62.
[174] *Nu*. 140.
[175] Burkert 1985:97-8; and cf. Pl. *Ap*. 36b3-9, where Socrates notes the privations he has suffered by following the dictates of his δαίμων.
[176] Pulleyn 1997:15.

of view, Greek prayers are generally begun with an invocation, often but not exclusively 'with ὦ preceding the name of the divinity'.[177] Εὔχομαι is the most commonly used term for all forms of prayers;[178] and the invocation may employ certain characteristic verbs that give a sense of summoning the god to hear or to appear, e.g. κλῦθι or ἐλθέ.[179] Further, prayers often include a divine epithet characterizing and/or localizing the divinity as part of the invocation.[180]

Socrates' prayer contains all such elements: the invocatory ὦ; a form of εὔχομαι;[181] a call for ritual silence;[182] divine epithets;[183] an imperative summons to come;[184] and a petition, ὑπακούσατε δεξάμεναι θυσίαν καὶ τοῖς ἱεροῖσι χαρεῖσαι.[185] The significance of the prayer for purposes of my analysis is that it is in form consistent with prayers that would have been offered during the festival's pre-play ritual events. And there is also comic irony involved, in that Socrates is summoning gods whom he thinks may be patrons of the Phrontisterion, whereas in fact they will serve as agents of *polis* religion in its destruction.

However Socrates' role is characterized, he is portrayed as having a more elevated position than others in the Phrontisterion—indeed, quite literally so in his first appearance, where he is found swinging in a basket above the stage—and he speaks in what Kenneth Dover labels a 'highly poetic', 'pretentious' and thus condescending way to the ἐφήμεροι[186] below him. His own self-conception also suggests that he sees himself as a bit transcendent: ἀεροβατῶ καὶ περιφρονῶ τὸν ἥλιον.[187] His demeanor as well as his priestly invocations of alternate deities not acknowledged by the *polis* thus evidence the *hubris* towards the gods for which the Phrontisterion is condemned.[188]

2. Initiation and initiands

While initiation rites are not a necessary element of all cult worship, τελεταί are emblematic of participation in 'mystery' rites.[189] Without conforming in a

[177] Willi 2003:16; Devlin 1995:17.
[178] Willi 2003:24.
[179] Pulleyn 1997:134-44; Porta 1999:174-5.
[180] Burkert 1985:74-5, 184; see also Willi 2003:19-21.
[181] Dover 1968:109 takes the view that Strepsiades' mere use of 'the word εὐξάμενος at *Nu*. 126 constitutes the prayer'; he describes it as 'performative utterance' in reliance on categories developed by John Austin (although Austin himself excluded drama from the scope of his analysis: Austin 1962:6, 21-2).
[182] *Nu*. 263; cf. Ar. *Av*. 959.
[183] *Nu*. 264-5, 269
[184] *Nu*. 270-4.
[185] *Nu*. 274. From a substantive point of view, the heart of a prayer for the Greeks would often have been the 'argumentation', what Willi calls 'negotiations with the gods'; this may take various forms evoking a sense of obligation on the part of the god, whether for past benefits rendered to him/her/it, or in the expectation of future reverence. Willi 2003:37-41; Porta 1999:157, 161-2, 180. Here there is no such argumentation; and any sense of reciprocal obligations may simply be implicit.
[186] *Nu*. 223; see Dover 1968:125-6 and references therein.
[187] *Nu*. 225; cf. the intertext in Pl. *Ap*. 19c3.
[188] *Nu*. 1506. Indeed, one might read his purported scrutiny of ὁ ἥλιος as disrespect for Ὁ Ἥλιος.
[189] *Nu*. 304; cf. Hdt. 2.171; Ar. *V*. 121; Ar. *Pax* 413, 419; E. *Ba*. 22, 73; Pl. *Euthd*. 277d.

strict, Bylian way to the elements of any particular rite, the *Clouds* does have aspects that convey a clear sense of one being introduced into a special or private realm, in this case the dramatic construct of the 'new gods' and the 'new thinking' of the Phrontisterion. There are two types of initiands we meet at the Phrontisterion, the students and Strepsiades. In analyzing ways in which the play deals with initiation rituals, it will therefore be useful to start by taking each separately.[190]

The students whom we meet early in the play are expressly stated to be those who have been 'initiated'[191] into the 'mysteries'[192] of the Phrontisterion. We are not told their ages, but it would not be a stretch to think of them as youths, as this is consistent with Greek initiatory rituals involving both boys and girls being consecrated to temple service[193] or more generally being inducted into the social and religious life of the community.[194] Nor are we told how these young students came to dwell in the Phrontisterion, but Greek initiation rituals typically involved three stages: first the separation of the youths from society; then a period of instruction; and finally a reintegration into the community.[195] While the play does not expressly cover all such three stages with respect to the students of the Phrontisterion, their status as persons set apart from the rest of society—including their pallor from being kept indoors and given little food—is certainly made clear.[196] Similarly, we are given a vivid picture of their instruction rigors, which involve not only physical privation but also the range of studies and inquiries described above. And arguably with the destruction of the Phrontisterion they will undergo a forced reintegration into the *polis*, having nowhere else to go.

With respect to Strepsiades, we are also given a series of linguistic and situational indicators that he is undergoing a form of initiation as he seeks to be 'taught' by the 'wise souls' of the Phrontisterion.[197] Concisely, he is told at the school's gate that it would be impious—οὐ θέμις—to reveal the school's teachings save to its pupils.[198] Accordingly, when Strepsiades meets Socrates and the latter agrees to take him on as a student, Strepsiades is put through a series of actions that generally relate to initiation rites performed in mystery or other cults: he is seated on a sacred stool,[199] given a wreath,[200] sprinkled with flour as a form of baptism,[201] and ushered inside the sacred precincts.[202]

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[190] Phidippides' 'initiation' into the Phrontisterion occurs offstage by exposure to the dialectic of the Stronger and Weaker Arguments and its possibly parodic nature is thus less clear. Marianetti 1993:27-9, however, sees Phidippides' entrance in the Prontisterion as 'an Aristophanic allusion' to the initiation of one child each year into the Eleusinian Mysteries.

[191] *Nu*. 258.

[192] *Nu*. 140.

[193] Burkert 1985:98.

[194] Parker 2011:201-05; Dowden 1999:224; Price 1999:90-7.

[195] Price 1999:90-7; Burkert 1985:260. For a range of current scholarship on initiation practices in Greek religion, see Dodd and Faraone 2003.

[196] E.g. *Nu*. 184-6.

[197] *Nu*. 94-8.

[198] *Nu*. 140, 258.

[199] *Nu*. 254; cf. Pl. *Euthd*. 277d5-8, concerning the enthronement ritual of the Corybantic τελεταί; see also Dover 1968:130-31.

Two notable things occur during these ceremonies. First, Strepsiades reacts to being given a wreath as though he is about to be offered as a sacrifice, begging Socrates not to do so: ὥσπερ με τὸν Ἀθάμανθ' ὅπως μὴ θύσετε.[203] His reference to Athamas may relate to Athamas' having been married to the goddess Nephele, and thus have been triggered by the preceding invocation of the Nephelai. Although the surviving versions of the myth are unclear as to the nature of Athamas' sacrifice,[204] it nevertheless appears that he may have been poised to offer himself up to save his children.[205] If so, then there is a nice parallel to Strepsiades offering himself to the rituals of the Phrontisterion in order to pay off his son's debts.

Second, as Socrates calls on Strepsiades to enter the Phrontisterion, the latter asks for honey cakes, on the grounds that he feels as though he is about to enter the cave of the hero Trophonius,[206] a shrine whose guardian snakes were mollified with honey cakes.[207] Again, the clear sense is of one entering sacred precincts. Pierre Bonnechere tries to make a 'point par point' argument that the forms of initiation and other rituals portrayed in *Clouds* parallel Trophonian mystery rites at least as closely as they do those of Eleusis, a resemblance he finds so close 'qu'elle ne pourrait être réduit à une simple coïncidence formelle'.[208] His purpose is more to examine how the reference to Trophonius may have been activated in the minds of fifth-century Athenians and thus, unlike Byl, he does not seek to make the references fully explanatory of the play. However, to the extent he over-stresses the relationship his approach, like Byl's, risks being a bit reflective of the Rorschach-like nature of the clouds, where one sees what one projects.[209]

The better analysis is that the various 'initiation' references in the play are part of Aristophanes' purposeful amalgam of sources crafted in parodic form for the purpose of his global critique of Socrates' and other new thinkers' forms of 'initiation' into their schools of thought and method. To the extent the play presents a parody of initiation rites it arguably does so by contrasting the exclusivity of the Phrontisterion's society with the broad access to Eleusis afforded to both the men and women of Greece.[210] Moreover, the parodic nature

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[200] *Nu*. 255; cf. E. *IA* 1567.
[201] *Nu*. 260-3.
[202] *Nu*. 505.
[203] *Nu*. 256.
[204] Σ *Nu*. 257 suggests a reference to Sophocles' now-lost *Athamas*, but S. *frr*. 4-5 tell us nothing helpful, nor do A. *frr*. 1-2, from Aeschylus' lost *Athamas*. A version in Hdt. 7.197 does refer to Athamas' possible sacrifice as a scapegoat. But it is by definition impossible to know what references might have come to a listener's mind. However, as noted above, sacrifice is an important element in Greek cult activities (see, e.g. Parker 2011:132-42; Mikalson 1999:26-7; Burkert 1985:55-7), and while there is no sacrifice as such in *Clouds*, there are certainly sacrificial overtones in the play, such as Strepsiades' offering himself to be flayed, dismembered and distributed as food (*Nu*. 442-56).
[205] Apoll. *Lib*. 1.9.1-2
[206] *Nu*. 506-07.
[207] Σ *Nu*. 506.
[208] Bonnechere 1998:474-75, 477.
[209] *Nu*. 340-55.
[210] Burkert 1985:285.

of the Phrontisterion's 'initiation rite' serves to highlight by way of contrast the gravity of the festival's civic ceremonies, such as the presentation of the war orphans as they became soldiers in a highly visible manner that ratified 'the duties of an individual to the *polis*'.[211]

3. Hymns

Hymns, like prayers, are a key feature in Greek ritual; and a working definition is that a hymn is a musical and sung form of addressing or referring to the gods.[212] *Clouds* contains two choral passages that in style and substance are best described as of a ritual nature.

The first such passage accompanies the Clouds' entrance in response to Socrates' summons.[213] Here the chorus begins with a self-invocation to 'rise up;'[214] and the members epithetically address themselves as 'everlasting'[215] and 'rain-bearing'[216] deities. The chorus then parallels the pre-play rituals noted above when it : (i) calls on itself to 'visit' Athens;[217] (ii) refers to the Springtime setting of the Great Dionysia;[218] and (iii) sings of 'the rivalry of melodious choruses' of the festival competition,[219] with their accompanying flute music.[220]

From a syntactical point of view, the use of predicating relative clauses is 'the most distinct syntactic feature of hymns' in comparison to prayers or other lyric forms.[221] There are several such occurrences in the first song's antode, where the descriptions both of certain mysteries and of the Great Dionysia are elaborated in cumulative phrases.[222] Omission of the article may also constitute a syntactically

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[211] Goldhill 1990:114.

[212] See Bremer 1981:193 ('[a] hymn is a sung prayer'). As Pulleyn 1997:43-55 notes, 'hymns were of their essence musical and prayers were not', thus distinguishing the speech-act of prayers from the modality of their performance in hymns. Hymns are characterized by their forms of invocation, their usage of epithets, certain speech-act verbs and the presence of certain syntactical forms (Willi 2003:16-17; 18-23; 23-27 and 35-7). It follows that not every choral passage occurring in drama is a hymn, as not all songs have a ritual register. See, e.g. Ar. *Av*. 227-62 (the song of the hoopoe), 1376-1400 (Cinesias' appeal for wings).

[213] *Nu*. 276-90, 299-313.

[214] *Nu*. 277.

[215] *Nu*. 276.

[216] *Nu*. 276, 299. The chorus further calls on itself, using the middle voice, to 'shake off' its rainy haze. *Nu*. 287. From a staging point of view, this could also refer to the mid-entrance shedding of some sort of gauze costuming.

[217] *Nu*. 300. Note that the chorus does so poetically with its descent from Mount Parnes (323). The chorus similarly instructs itself to 'survey' the land (289), which it does from its actual vantage point in the theater.

[218] *Nu*. 311.

[219] *Nu*. 312.

[220] *Nu*. 313 and Σ *ad loc*., suggesting that βαρύβρομος refers to the sound of the flute. Note also that at the close of the play the chorus self-referentially directs itself to commence an exiting dance (*Nu*. 1510-11). Dancing, as well as music, often accompanied the singing of hymns (Bremer 1981:197-8; Bowie 1993:147). And dancing is characteristic of choral performance generally (Pickard-Cambridge 1968:246-56).

[221] Willi 2003:37; see also Devlin 1995:17.

[222] *Nu*. 302-09, 312-13.

distinctive feature of hymns;[223] and there are in fact *no* articles at all in the first song.

The second choral song likewise exhibits relevant characteristics of a hymn. This song occurs in the *parabasis* and, as with the Clouds' entrance song, consists of an ode and antode.[224] The ode opens by invoking Zeus, who is invited to the 'dance' as chief in the Pantheon.[225] Here as well the members of the Cloud Chorus 'comment self-referentially on their own performance as dancers' and thereby 'assume a ritual posture which functions as a link between the cultic reality of the City Dionysia and the [play's] imaginary religious world'.[226]

The second song's ode praises four gods, Zeus, Poseidon, Aether and Helios, each accompanied by one or more divine epithets, in a 'number and... inventive range' highly characteristic of hymns.[227] While most of the gods in the *parabasis* song are Olympians, the Clouds also add Aither, who is certainly fitting in the context of their song inasmuch as the Clouds acknowledge him as πατήρ.

The second song's antode directly parallels the ode's structure, with four additional gods, Apollo, Artemis, Athena and Dionysos, praised with relevant and cumulating epithets.[228] The invocation of Dionysos is of course by definition appropriate to the festival. The reference to Dionysos as glowing in the light of πεύκαι, moreover, may even be seen as an intratextual reference to the later torching of the Phrontisterion. In addition, the Clouds' praise of Athena gives the Chorus the perspective not of the 'helpless [choral] witnesses' of tragedy[229] but of a protagonist acting with the goal of protecting the city and its gods.[230] What is most relevant is that in their praise, the Clouds ignore ὁ Δῖνος and ἡ Γλῶττα in favor of the Olympians.

In terms of the syntactical characteristics noted above, both the ode and the antode of the second song likewise show a high ratio of instances where the article is omitted to those where it is used.[231] In addition, the predicating relative clauses

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[223] Willi 2003:35.

[224] *Nu*. 563-74, 595-606.

[225] *Nu*. 563-5.

[226] Henrichs 1995:59. The Clouds may therefore also be seen to share some of Dionysos' own 'qualities' as a god of wine and ecstasy (Easterling 1997:45; Henrichs 1990:258). And their self-referential exhortations provide further evidence of the play's virtual integration as a ritual element within 'the here and now of the festive context in Athens' (Bierl 2009:276 n.25; see also Henrichs 1995:106 n.5).

[227] Willi 2003:18, 21-2; Furley and Bremer 2001:52-6.

[228] *Nu*. 595-606.

[229] Taplin 1996:194.

[230] Scodel 1987:334-5 argues that there is a 'clear distinction' between the choral personalities of the second song's ode and antode, the first praising the gods from the perspective of 'cosmic forces' and the second from the perspective of 'human worshippers'. She recognizes that such a split in choral personality would be 'unique'. I suggest that any shift in perspective may better be seen as consistent both with the Clouds' inherent variability and with other examples in the play, such as the choral entrance, where the chorus acts divinely in parallel with Athenian singers engaged in the festival's ritual events.

[231] See Willi 2003:36 (ratio of 5:1 within 12 lines of the ode; ratio of 7:1 within 12 lines of the antode).

used of Helios, Apollo, Artemis and Dionysos reflect hymnically characteristic cumulated praise.[232]

In sum, the style of both songs is one of considerable elaboration both of vocabulary and structure, signal characteristics of hymnic composition.[233] Similarly, as songs of a ritual nature, they are crafted to provide the gods—including of course the Clouds themselves—with delight. And this would have been particularly true in the Theater of Dionysos itself, where the Priest of Dionysos, having been granted a right of προεδρία *ex officio*, sat prominently in the middle of the front row as the god's representative.[234] As such, the choral songs must be seen not only to link the play to the songs and other rituals of the festival,[235] but also as themselves elements in the ritual celebrations.

III. Conclusions

Examination of *Clouds* from the point of view of its relationship to the pre-play events of the Great Dionysia bears out the thesis it is a comedy very much in harmony with, rather than in Goldhill's sense 'transgressive' of, those rituals, whether the same are described as cultic or civic. This much becomes clear as we focus on the nature and function of the Cloud goddesses themselves as a chorus, for it is as a chorus that they—not Strepsiades, Socrates, or the Arguments—both dominate and give meaning to the play.

First, as a chorus of deities, the Clouds tie the world of the drama to the here-and-now ritual events occurring prior to the dramatic contests of the Great Dionysia in such a way as to dissolve boundaries between the two and thus make the play a form of ritual itself in the sense that I am using the term. They do so principally by their own entrance to the theater in a manner paralleling the εἰσαγωγὴ ἀπὸ τῆς ἐσχάρας; by the linguistic form as well as the substance of their two hymns in praise of Athens and the gods the *polis* acknowledges; and by their self-referential links to the πομπή with its accompanying prayers, hymns and sacrifices to Dionysos and to the ensuing κῶμος revels.

Second, the Clouds themselves are presented epithetically as closely identified with the gods that the *polis* acknowledges. As a result, they stand in contrast to such 'new gods' of Socrates as ὁ Δῖνος and ἡ Γλῶττα, neither of whom were gods having cult authorized by the city and who may instead be seen respectively as metonymies for cosmologies that undermine the authority of Zeus as well as for sophistic techniques that might be used to undermine distinctions between stronger and weaker moral positions. And although the Clouds are themselves initially invoked by Socrates, they always remain distanced from him, such that their affirmation of the *polis* gods ultimately leaves Socrates much as the

[232] Willi 2003:36.
[233] Pulleyn 1997:49.
[234] Pickard-Cambridge 1968:268.
[235] See Easterling 1985:39; Henrichs 1995:59; Bierl 2009:53-4; cf. Goldhill 1991:197: '[T]he hymns to the gods that are regular elements in the structure of the *parabasis* draw the comic chorus close to the other choruses who sing in religious celebration at the festival.'

Apology presents him, that is, as one believed by many in the city to have rejected *polis* religion and to have taught others to do so.

Third, because they are goddesses of intellect as well as of nature the Clouds are hardly the bomologic 'comic constructs' of Sourvinou-Inwood. And they demonstrate that in this comedy, at least, Aristophanes has treated the gods in far from the 'atheistic' or 'iconoclastic' way alleged by Flickinger and Craik. It is not the gods, but rather the enemies of *polis* religion whom he attacks.

Fourth, the Cloud goddesses are presented as both complex and elusive and thus able to transcend the several antitheses of the play in a way that allows them to oversee a closing resolution that rejects speculative theories and fabricated deities not acknowledged by the *polis*.

Fifth, the parodic initiation scenes in the play harmonize with and support the festival's civic pre-play events by throwing into relief the gravity and importance of the latter.

Finally, through their express praise, the Clouds ratify the kingship of Zeus; and by their rejection of Strepsiades they acknowledge the justice of Zeus as carried out both in the failure of Strepsiades' debt-avoidance schemes and in the destruction of the Phrontisterion in the play's closing scene. As such, this comedy does not simply 'recall', as Parker would have it, the rituals of the Great Dionysia. Rather, the play itself functions both as an element of those celebrations and as an agent of *polis* religion in rejecting cult seen to threaten the city's established systems and values.

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