

# ARISTOPHANES CLOUDS

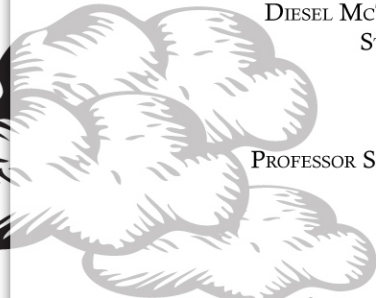


# ARISTOPHANES

# CLOUDS


## PLAYERS

*in order of appearance*



SHIFTY McTHRIFTY	MATTHEW LOAR
DIESEL McTHRIFTY	FOIVOS KARACHALIOS
STUDENTS	PAUL GOWDER (LEADER), MINH NGUYEN, JOSE ARMANDO PEREZ-GEA, AND VINCE TOMASSO
PROFESSOR SOCRATES	TOMER PERRY
CLOUDS	BIANCA CARPENETI, FEDERICA CARUGATI, MAXINE HOLLAND, AND ALANA WAKSMAN (LEADER)
STRAIGHT TALK	HANS WIETZKE
SUBVERSIVE SPEECH	MATT SIMONTON

## PRODUCTION



DIRECTOR	JAMES KIERSTEAD
PRODUCER, PROPS MISTRESS	CAROLYN MACDONALD
COSTUMER	LISA LOWE
CHOREOGRAPHER	NIKITA VASHI
MUSICAL/TECH. DIRECTOR	AL DUNCAN
MUSICIAN	C. J. JAMESON
SET DESIGNER	SHARON BELTRACCHI
SET TECHNICIAN	EILEEN MAZZOCHETTE
LIGHTING	DAN-EL PADILLA PERALTA

## TRANSLATION



TRANSLATORS	ZANA BASS, NICHOLAS BOTERF, AL DUNCAN, FOIVOS KARACHALIOS, JAMES KIERSTEAD, MATT SIMONTON, VINCE TOMASSO, AND HANS WIETZKE
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# DIRECTOR'S NOTE

JAMES KIERSTEAD



Aristophanes' *Clouds* was first performed in 423 B.C. at the festival of Dionysus in Athens, where it was awarded third prize (out of three). But the Greek text which has been transmitted to our own day (and which we used for our translation) cannot be the script of the original play, since (in a part of the play we were forced to cut), Aristophanes in his own voice complains in the past tense about his play finishing in last place. The text we have must therefore be a revised version of the play circulated later by its embarrassed author; there is no evidence that Aristophanes' *Clouds* was ever given a second chance onstage. A reference to the comic poet Eupolis' play *Marikas* in the same passage makes it likely that the revised version was composed sometime after 421, when Eupolis' play was produced. The revision was apparently incomplete, since our text contains a reference to the politician Cleon, who died in 422, apparently still alive and well.

Attic Old Comedy (the fifth-century Athenian genre of which Aristophanes is the only practitioner any of whose plays survive complete) had a number of conventions, most of which we have abandoned in our production, but some of which we have kept. One of these was that all the roles were written for no more than four actors (one more than in tragedy) not counting the chorus, which explains Socrates' comically under-motivated haste to get himself offstage before the contest between Straight Talk and Subversive Speech in front of Shifty and Diesel. Another is a certain looseness about location, so that when the play opens on Shifty and Diesel sleeping in front of the Mc-Thrifty family home, we are meant to imagine that they are in fact inside. At times, Aristophanes enjoyed parodying the tragic *ekkyklema* or trolley that was used to transport before the audience the gory results of violent events that had to take place offstage. Another tragic innovation Aristophanes famously exploited for his own comic purposes in the *Clouds* was the *mekhane* or crane used to bring gods onstage in a suitably grand manner. Although none of our actors wear the masks that were characteristic of all Athenian drama, nor the paunches that were characteristic of Old Comedy, we have retained the equally characteristic comic *phalloi*.

The original play follows a typical Aristophanic plot-structure, in which the resolution of the problem set up at the beginning of the play (here, whether Shifty is going to be able to persuade Diesel to go to Socrates' school and there get the education that will allow him to clear his father's debts) occurs not at the end of the piece but somewhere near the middle. After achieving his chief aims, the comic hero is then at leisure to mock his enemies - in the *Clouds*, Shifty's two creditors, in scenes we were forced to cut from the play because of its extraordinary length. The play is unusually long partly because it contains a double dose of another typical feature of Aristophanes' plays, the *agon* or contest between two sides of an argument (Straight Talk vs. Subversive Speech, and later Shifty vs. Diesel). The original play also contained two *parabases*, in which the comic playwright speaks to his audience *in propria persona* - but we have had to cut both of these.

To many, the *Clouds* is interesting chiefly because of its portrayal of the philosopher Socrates, a depiction which is at odds with that presented by both Plato and Xenophon, both in general (the Platonic Socrates never accepts money for his services) and in detail (the Socrates of the *Republic* knows little about the technicalities of metre, and that little at second hand). In the *Apology*, Plato's version of his teacher's defense speech at the trial that would lead to his condemnation to death, Socrates complains that because of 'the play by Aristophanes' he is portrayed as someone who 'inquires into things below the earth and in the sky and makes the weaker argument defeat the stronger'. But any attributions of responsibility to Aristophanes for the death of Socrates are thrown into doubt by the twenty-four year period that intervened between the comedy and the trial, years that included a brief reign of terror by an oligarchic junta that included a number of Socrates' former students.

The political perspectives of a poet as constantly facetious and restlessly parodic as Aristophanes are always hard to pin down, and rarely more so than in the *Clouds*. In the contest between Straight Talk and Subversive Speech, for example, it is hard to decide which is the more ridiculous, the former's moralistic encomium of a pedophilic past or the latter's irresponsible urging of an unscrupulous hedonism underwritten only by casuistry. At the same time, the general ethical direction of the plot, in which Shifty learns to rue the day he tried to cheat his way out of debt, may seem clear, and the *Clouds*, so often the arbiters of the play's moral contests, seem to have revealed themselves by the end of the play to be defenders of a traditional morality and the traditional gods. Such a clear moral position, though, seems to have been intolerable to our elusive playwright, and there is certainly little to sanction or admire in the pathologically violent action Shifty takes at the end of the play.



Last year, this director appeared on stage denouncing foreigners, railing against homosexuals, and attempting to purchase two underage sex-slaves dressed up as cats. Admittedly, this was all part of my role in SCIT's inaugural production of Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, but if the first concern of any director of Attic Old Comedy should be to offend everybody, I may be felt to be uniquely qualified for the job. Any offense caused by our modernizations of these products of the world's first ever democratic culture is far from senseless, however, but stems from a conviction that the most unrestrained and riotous freedom of speech is a pre-condition for a flourishing democratic society even in modern times. In a university which places laudable emphasis on mutual respect, we think it may be salutary to introduce a little mutual mockery, mockery in which no position, even one's own, is spared the exacting examination of the comic gaze. Because as Aristophanes and Socrates both knew, sometimes the first step on the journey to knowledge is to learn to laugh at oneself.





# TRANSLATORS' NOTE

AL DUNCAN & MATT SIMONTON



TEN YEARS AGO, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN IMPOSSIBLE to create the translation you are about to hear. Composed collaboratively by eight translators, writing over the past eight months from such sundry locations as South Africa, Tennessee, and California, the digital medium of 'cloud computing' was essential to our translation of one of the world's oldest comedies. Fifth-century Athens meets twenty-first century Silicon Valley. Aristophanes shakes hands with Google Docs.

From sitcoms to late-night talk shows to feature films, the majority of modern comedy is team-written. Collaborative composition suits comedy well. Comedy must cater to the majority: as spectators, then and now, we laugh with our fellow audience as much as we laugh at the comedy itself. Social composition is a natural extension of this principle. A writing-team and innovative cast blur the distinction between author and audience. Bad jokes are left on the (now digital) cutting room floor, and comedic timing is well honed long before opening night.

Aristophanes, however (the evidence suggests) composed his comedies alone. It boots little to ask whether his comedy would have improved from collaboration. Aristophanes' record of success and subsequent textual survival bear witness to the viability of his individual composition. Furthermore, from the translators' perspective, his unified text and the drama's narrative arc provide a much-needed structure for our otherwise piece-meal translation.

Thematically, the *Clouds* is the obvious Aristophanic comedy to perform in the modern academy. Featuring arguably Athens' most (in)famous character, Socrates, and skewering the excesses of intellectualism, the *Clouds* may make a modern academic audience feel oddly at home. Indeed, a number of its themes have returned to the fore of modern consciousness: a 'philosophical' academy is set against 'dogmatic' religion, a poor citizen is beset by calls from his creditors, and as a father and son fail to understand each other, their decisions lead to mutual ruin. Performing the *Clouds* in a university context, however, comes with no small irony. Aristophanes wrote for an Athenian audience that included intellectuals but was largely lay. The *Clouds* adopts an essentially external dramatic view of the academy--our glimpses within the walls raise more questions than they answer.

Aristophanes' characters are not as rigidly defined as the roles of *commedia dell'arte*, but their easily recognized traits help bridge the great yawn of time and space. The Greek protagonist Strepsiades, whose slippery disposition is captured in his name "Twister", is rendered in our translation as Shifty Mc-Thrifty from Modesto. A penny-wise farmer who marries rich, Shifty/Strepsiades' buffoonery is appealing to any society where rural collides with urban. Some types, however, have not fared so well. Strepsiades' son, Pheidippides (our Diesel), was a caricature of an aristocratic youth, dedicated to the exclusively expensive (and therefore, as so often, super cool) sport of chariot racing. Though a modern polo player who maintained his own stable might have provided a closer socio-zoological analog, the comedic type would have little humor. To our rescue comes the MTV 'reality' series *Jersey Shore*, with its meat heads Michael "The Situation" Sorrentino and Ronnie Ortiz-Magro who represent quasi-ethnic, yet somehow stereotypically American, youths dedicated to the unreflective pursuit of cool. Replacing horses with cars, we translated Pheidippides, "Frugal Horse", into the appropriately frugal (and macho) petroleum product, Diesel.

The contest between two speeches, or *dissoi logoi*, reflects in the original Greek version Aristophanes' awareness of the radical changes taking place in traditional Athenian education. The "sophists," those teachers of logic and rhetoric so thoroughly excoriated by Plato, had already for some time been wowing crowds and attracting private pupils (for a fee) by the time Aristophanes turned his comic and critical eye toward them in 423 BCE. Figures such as Gorgias, Protagoras, and Prodicus were teaching a new generation of Athenians to question old ethical shibboleths and manipulate the intricacies of language and argument for private interest. As tends to happen in the never-ending war between the generations, old-timers decried these developments and their attendant fads -- sumptuous clothes, bad haircuts, sexual laxity, "foreign" influences -- as a sad decline from the "good old days" when men were men, youngsters were well-mannered, and everyone cared for God and Country. The young, in turn, could view their elders as uncouth dinosaurs with no grasp of modern "sophistication" (derived ultimately from "sophist").

Aristophanes, however, was not such a crotchety traditionalist as to unduly glorify the halcyon days of the past. "Better Argument" (our "Straight Talk"), the representative of the old-guard, conservative form of education, has more than a whiff of "pervert" about him; despite his stuffy, proper exterior, he takes a keen interest in the goings-on of the boys' locker room. Ancient Athenian attitudes to pederasty were quite different from our own, but the effect then as now was to cast a skeptical light on the supposed purity of tradition. "Worse Argument" ("Subversive Speech"), on the other hand, translates more seamlessly as the flamboyant (and in our case, European) embodiment of all that is trendy, specious, affected, snobbish, and mercilessly avant-garde. We'll let you decide who wins the argument.

# T H E C O M P A N Y

## **Sharon Beltracchi** (Set Designer)

*Junior, Earth Systems*

Sharon once planned to major in Classics, and then, like all undergrads must do, she changed her mind. Apparently, that did not get her away from Greek Theater.

## **Bianca Carpeneti** (Cloud)

*Senior, Archaeology & Classics*

After getting a taste of SCIT last spring, Bianca declared her intention never to step on-stage again. So much for good intentions. She would like to thank James for peer-pressuring her into another round of singing and dancing, and the entire SCIT gang for making it fun...or at least getting her so drunk she couldn't tell the difference.

## **Federica Carugati** (Cloud)

*1st year PhD, Classics and Political Science*

Federica never thought she would ever dance and sing in public (in private as well) and came to Stanford from Italy only to be proved wrong. She has never experienced being a cloud but she strongly believes that smoky, puffy, ethereal atmospheres suit her.

## **Al Duncan** (Musical & Technical Director, Translator)

*4th year PhD, Classics and Humanities*

Al hails from the Detroit, rock city, and is happy to have the chance to share his musical stylings upon a captive audience amidst such talented singers, dancers, and clouds. Thanks to LVJ for understanding and braving the lions alone!

## **Paul Gowder** (Lead Student)

*4th year PhD, Political Science*

Paul "terror of the high seas" Gowder is a reprobate and n'er do well whose picture adorns the wall of every post office between here and Burkina Faso. His dream is to one day destroy all rivals and be more than merely one of the two favorite womanizers in his social circle. He tries to balance dissertation writing and wallowing in drugs and dangerous atavism. Small children flee his approach.

## **Maxine Holland** (Cloud)

*Junior, Economics and Classics*

This is Maxine's second year with SCIT. She doesn't know what made here come back...she doesn't even get to wear a phallus this year!

## **C.J. Jameson** (Trumpet and Percussion, Ferryman-of-Funk)

*Senior*

C.J. Jameson is a Senior, majoring in Classics (Greek & Latin) and minoring in the dismal science. Previous credits include pass/no credit, taking credit, and standardized imperial credits. He looks forward to being an excellently grumpy old man. Thanks to the fam for not flipping out when I told you this morning that I was in a play. RTFO, Modesquad.

## **Foivos Karachalios** (Diesel, Translator)

*3rd year PhD, Classics*

Foivos was born in Athens, Greece, and got cast as the guido-like character of Diesel (Pheidippides) due to the director's misled belief that Greeks and Italians are the same. Lacking the washboard abs that his part requires, he considers this to be one of the utmost challenges of his acting career.

**James Kierstead** (Director, Translator)

*3rd year PhD, Classics*

James acted in more than a dozen plays at high school and college, and since coming to the Bay Area has appeared in productions of Sophocles' and Euripides' *Electra* (Stanford Summer Theater) and in readings of Euripides' *Cyclops* (San Francisco Theater Pub) and Euripides' and Seneca's *Medea* (Cutting Ball Theater). After helping found SCIT a couple of years ago, he played Justin Cittee in their inaugural production of Aristophanes' *Acharnians*. Having now hung up his phallus, he feels fortunate to be making his directorial debut with a company of such utter lunatics.

**Matthew Loar** (Shifty McThrifty)

*1st year PhD, Classics*

Matthew cut his teeth in the suburban wilderness of Littleton, CO, earned his first degree in the Virginia hills, and finally heeded the call of Manifest Destiny and moved West to experience the trials and tribulations of California. Possessing a humor that is generally much more reserved and less scandalous, Matthew hopes the audience won't judge him too severely for the plenitude of penis jokes.

**Lisa Lowe** (Costume Mistress)

With soft spots for both Classics and small theatre groups on Stanford's campus, Lisa is delighted to costume for SCIT. A design professional, Lisa costumes for companies throughout the Bay Area, including the Stanford Savoyards, Lyric Theatre of San Jose, and PlayGround.

**Carolyn MacDonald** (Producer, Props Mistress)

*1st year PhD, Classics*

Carolyn arrived at Stanford this fall a wide-eyed Torontonion innocent, little imagining that by spring she would be emblazoning clipboards with CUMSHOT and fashioning tiny owl phalluses. She's had a blast, and would like to thank everyone involved in the show for making it such a raucous, raunchy, down-and-dirty delight.

**Eileen Mazzochette** (Set Technician)

*1st year Master's Student, Electrical Engineering*

Eileen is originally from everyone's favorite state, New Jersey, but is slowly becoming West Coastified here at Stanford as she pursues her Master's Degree in Electrical Engineering. She has worked in set construction in a few other shows including Wintertime and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead at Lehigh University where she did her undergrad. She's excited to get back into theater here at Stanford!

**Minh Nguyen** (Student)

*Junior, Political Science*

Minh hails from sunny So Cal where denizens of all shapes and sizes never get tired of hittin' the beach and whippin' up that tan. As he studies under the great So-crates at the Center for Universal Meta-Studies and Heuristic Omni-Technology he can't help but ponder this great enigma: which is goin' to melt him first, the man's burnin' intellect or the California sun?

**Dan-el Padilla Peralta** (Lighting)

*1st year PhD, Classics*

Dan-el (*civis Novi Eboraci*) loafes and invites his soul, leans on loafes at his ease among beams of light. He knows next to nothing about lighting arrangements but is pleased to render his services. Immediately at play's end you may find him drinking his treasured Natty + lemonade mix.



**Jose Armando Perez-Gea (Student)**

*BA Senior and MA Philosophy*

Jose Armando has had a remarkably stable career so far, he started as a student since before his third birthday, and while the role has taken him from Los Angeles to Mexico City to Crawley to San Antonio, he continues his role, now in Palo Alto. (his devotion is so strong, that even in the play he repeats such a role). He is confident that his one line will be the most exciting part of the play.

**Tomer Perry (Professor Socrates)**

*1st year PhD, Political Science*

His usual typecast being the dirty old geezer who chase young women and get punished, Tomer is excited for the change, playing a dirty old geezer who chases young boys and gets punished. As a philosophy student, of sorts, Tomer is humbled/terrified to play the father of philosophy and was lured by the grotesque silliness Socrates's depiction; other motives include friendly guilt, insatiable ambition and a basket of fruit.

**Matt Simonton (Subversive Speech)**

*4th year PhD, Classics*

Matt is excited for SCIT's second annual show, and for the opportunity once again to tap into his inner Frenchman. After extensive research into Bay Area bathhouse culture he feels prepared to inhabit the role of Subversive Speech. In his spare time he enjoys "investigating the things on high" in his new home of Berkeley and, as an aspiring academic, making the weaker argument the stronger.

**Vince Tomasso (Student)**

*6th year PhD, Classics*

Vince is glad to be graduating at last. His performance of the student is modeled on his emotional state during the second year of the Ph.D. program.

**Nikita Vashi (Choreographer)**

*Stanford Classics '09*

Nikita began her encounter with the classics department through a tattered copy of Herodotus, never thinking that it would one day lead her to teach postdocs how to body roll. But between JTim's sweet beats, Abba's melodious meanderings, and the timbrous tenor of Leonard Skynard, she's come to realize that the heart and soul of the classics department truly resides in its good-natured eagerness to embarrass itself in order to bring the past to life.

**Alana Waksman (Lead Cloud)**

Alana likes to do theater. She lives in Berkeley, grew up in Iowa, and graduated from Connecticut College with a BA in Theater and English in 2008, where she met Ben Fisher, who knows James, which is why she is in this play. Alana has studied at The National Theater Institute, Shakespeare & Company, Berkshire Theater Festival, and St. Petersburg State Academy in Russia. Also a director and a teacher, Alana currently teaches private acting classes and will be a teaching artist this summer at the San Francisco Shakespeare Festival's Shakespeare Camps. She was most recently seen in the Bay One-Act Festival as Arwin Archer in Ben Fisher's "Query."

**Hans Wietzke (Straight Talk)**

*1st year PhD, Classics*

Hans grew up along the muddy banks of the Mississippi in St. Paul, Minnesota, and has dabbled in theater since his undergraduate days. Of all the productions that he's been a part of, *The Clouds* is both the most professional and the most crass.

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*The cast and crew would like to extend their*  
**SPECIAL THANKS**  
*to the following groups and individuals for their diligence and care:*

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