



ARISTOPHANES

11 Plays!
Frogs, Clouds, ...

ARISTOPHANES

11 Plays! Birds, Clouds, Frogs, Knights, Peace, ...

Sapientia



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Birds, Clouds, Frogs, Knights, Lysistrata, Peace
ARISTOPHANES

*Based on the *publicly available translations by [Ian Johnston](#)¹ and by [G. Theodoridis](#)^{2*}*

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¹<http://records.viu.ca/~Johnstoi/>

²<https://bacchicstage.wordpress.com>

³<http://diz.link/alizeus>

About ARISTOPHANES

Aristophanes (/æriˈstɒfəniːz/ or /ɛriˈstɒfəniːz/; Greek: Ἀριστοφάνης, pronounced [aristopʰáneːs]; c. 446 – c. 386 BC), son of Philippus, of the deme Cydathenaeum, was a comic playwright of ancient Athens. Eleven of his thirty plays survive virtually complete. These, together with fragments of some of his other plays, provide the only real examples of a genre of comic drama known as Old Comedy, and they are used to define the genre. Also known as *the Father of Comedy* and *the Prince of Ancient Comedy*, Aristophanes has been said to recreate the life of ancient Athens more convincingly than any other author. His powers of ridicule were feared and acknowledged by influential contemporaries; Plato singled out Aristophanes' play *The Clouds* as slander that contributed to the trial and subsequent condemning to death of Socrates although other satirical playwrights had also caricatured the philosopher.

...more at [wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristophanes)⁴

⁴<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aristophanes>

On Satire in Aristophanes's Clouds

This section is based on the [publicly available](#)⁵ lecture by Ian Johnston

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*[The following is the text of a lecture by Ian Johnston, delivered in part in the main lecture for Liberal Studies 111 at Malaspina College (now Vancouver Island University) in November 1998. References to the text are to the Arrowsmith translation in *Four Plays* by Aristophanes, Penguin, 1962. This document is in the public domain, released November 1998, and may be used by anyone, in whole or in part, for any purpose, provided the source is acknowledged]*

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Introduction

Today I want to begin by considering a curious topic: What is laughter and why do we like to experience laughter, both in ourselves and others? This will, I hope, serve as something of an entry point into a consideration of the social importance and uses of laughter in cultural experience. And this point, in turn, will assist in an introduction to the importance of humour and laughter in an important form of literature, namely, satire. All of this, I trust, will help to illuminate what is going on in the Aristophanic comedy we are studying this week, *The Clouds*.

To cover all these points is a tall order, and as usual I'm going to be skating on thin ice at times, but unless we have some sense of the social importance of humour and group laughter, then we may fail fully to understand just what Aristophanic satire is and what it sets out to do.

⁵<http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/introser/clouds.htm>

Laughter as a Shared Social Experience

Why do people laugh? And what is laughter? I don't propose to answer this very complex psychological problem, but I would like to make some observations about laughter and humour which may help to clarify the issues usefully.

When you think about it, laughter is a curious phenomenon. People momentarily lose their poise, screw their faces up into funny expressions, often rock their bodies back and forth, and emit strange animal like noises which in almost any other circumstance would be considered socially quite unacceptable—snorting, wheezing, and so on. This odd behaviour is usually accompanied by feelings of emotional satisfaction so strong that the first impulse after a good laugh is to see if one can experience it again.

Also, the best laughter appears to be a group phenomenon. That is, we laugh best when we are with others and when they are engaging in the same sort of behaviour. That which occasions laughter, the joke, is above all a social phenomenon. It requires a teller and an audience. We don't tell jokes to ourselves, or if we do, they may prompt a modest chuckle. But when we get to the pub, we tell the same joke to a group and laugh uproariously along with all the others. When we hear a good joke, we normally don't immediately want to run away and ponder it alone in the woods; we think about what fun we're going to have telling it to a group of people who don't know it and thus repeat the experience we have just been through. For it's a curious fact that, even if we know the joke, we can derive considerable pleasure and laughter from hearing it or telling it again in the right context. In other words, the group response is, I would suggest, one key to understanding why laughter matters.

That's why a laugh track is an important part of TV comedy. After all, watching television is not really a group experience, so if we are to enjoy the laughter a group has to be manufactured for us, so that we have the impression of participating in a group experience. In a tense TV drama, we don't have a "gasp" track or anything that might put us in imaginary touch with a group undergoing the same experience. That's not necessary, because in such situations we are very alone in some ways. But anything that we are supposed to laugh at is just not as funny if we are very conscious that there's no one else participating with us. As the old saying has it, "Laugh and the world laughs with you; cry and you cry alone."

Now, this on the face of it is odd. Human beings seem to derive great pleasure in sitting around listening to stories or seeing behaviour which then reduces them to

a state in which they momentarily lose control of themselves and revert to strange animal-like behaviour, totally unbecoming to anyone who has any concern for self-control or a normal reasonably dignified appearance.

And this I think offers an important insight into the nature of laughter. When we laugh we are acknowledging that a good deal of what we do in life is rather silly, that human life is full of aspirations to be something better than we really are. A joke, and our shared response to a joke, deflates the dignity and self-control and self-imposed value that human beings place on themselves. When we laugh we are, in a sense, acknowledging that by our temporary loss of self-control and dignity.

For example, to take the simplest and commonest form of a joke. We spend a lot of time trying to walk upright in a graceful and well coordinated manner, and an important part of our self-identity is that we, well, are worth looking at: cool, dignified, and coordinated. Yet, nothing is funnier to us than to see someone take a well-staged pratfall, to slip on the banana peel, to lose the equilibrium we try so hard to maintain, which is such an important part of our individual dignity. Similarly, when someone is trying to reach up to the stars and his pants fall down (often as a reaction to the effort of reaching upward), we see that as funny, because it's a sudden and unexpected reminder of the ambivalence of being a human being, a creature who aspires to great things in search of nobility but who has to cover his rather silly looking backside. The temporary and unexpected loss of control over ourselves registers as a shared agreeable experience.

A Sense of Humour

We talk about people having a sense of humour. What we mean, I think, by this phrase is the ability to perceive a certain discrepancy between the normal behaviour and the unexpected deflation of it. When a joke presents itself in language, responding to it with a sense of humour depends upon being able to see the ways in which language may be manipulated in unexpected ways to produce a curious effect, contrary to what we might have expected.

The most obvious example of this is the pun, which depends upon the audience's ability to recognize the way in which a particular word can be unexpectedly manipulated to produce an effect contrary to our expectations. Some people have great difficulty appreciating puns—they don't see the humour of treating language that way, either because they don't see the multi-layered meanings of words or

because they see them but they don't think it's very funny to treat language that way or because they find the pun just too common and obvious a form of comic surprise.

Possessing a sense of humour is a complex business. It's not just a matter of rational understanding. We all know how lame it is to have a joke explained. The source of the humour may be exposed, but the joke is not funny any more. In other words, if the punch line doesn't have a punch, a sudden and instantaneous effect, then the joke doesn't do its work properly.

Another point here, of course, is that a sense of humour is something often unique to a particular cultural group. That's clear enough, given that humour has to draw upon the shared experiences of the group in order to contradict them or surprise them. Listening to Bill Cosby's story about Noah makes little sense to anyone who is quite unfamiliar with the story, who has never wondered exactly what a "cubit" is, or who has no knowledge of what modern suburban living really is. That's one reason perhaps why one can learn the language of a country very well and yet still find much of its humour incomprehensible or unfunny (e.g., American Jewish humour, Chicano humour, and so on).

The Joke: Some Thoughts About Structure

The things that make us laugh, I would suggest, are often of this nature. They are out of the blue reminders that, for all our pretensions to greatness, nobility, value and what not, we are curious animals, whose body parts and behaviour can often reveal that we are quite ridiculous, no matter how hard we try to avoid that truth. When we laugh together, we are sharing an insight into our common human nature.

Hence, the common observation that the most basic joke is one that contradicts our expectations (this is a standard Aristophanic device). In telling a joke, we set up certain expectations, which are then violated or altered in some unexpected way. The humour comes from a shared recognition that we've been had, that our human natures are somehow rather different from what we had imagined. Telling a joke well thus often requires two things: the ability to set up the expectation and then the ability to deliver the punch line which contradicts or deflates that expectation in an unexpected manner.

We all know people who are very poor joke tellers. They have no sense of structure or they blow the punch line too early. And few things are more frustrating

to listen to than someone who tells jokes badly. Presenting a joke requires a certain sophistication, either in physical presentation or in the verbal telling, and if it's not done right, then the shared group experience doesn't take place. Setting up the joke is probably the more difficult part of the exercise, a fact which may be the reason why in a comedy twosome, like Abbott and Costello, the straight man, the set up artist, usually gets more pay than the deliverer of the punch line.

The ability to tell jokes well, however, is an enormous social asset, primarily because it's the quickest way to get the group's attention, to consolidate the feeling of a group as a group, and to transform any disunity or irritation into a pleasant, non-threatening, shared social experience. Many people, like myself, learn early in life that telling jokes or transforming potentially threatening situations into jokes is an enormously powerful survival tactic. If you can make someone who is threatening you laugh with you, then you have transformed the situation from one of danger to yourself into one of a shared moment of understanding of your common humanity.

The Greeks themselves had a favorite story about this phenomenon. It featured their most popular folk hero, Hercules. On one of his adventures he captured two nasty brothers, the Cercopes, and was carrying them off to do away with them. As they lay hanging down Hercules's back they started making jokes about his hairy, ugly rump. They were so funny that they got Hercules laughing so that he couldn't stop, and he had to let them go. After all, it's difficult to feel hostile towards someone who is constantly making you laugh together.

The Two-Edged Nature of the Joke

I have tried to stress the social basis for the humour which arises from sharing a joke in order to bring out the first key point of this lecture, that laughter and the presentations of jokes which bring it about, is above all else a social experience which has to be shared in order to be effective. Someone who is incapable of participating in a joke, for whom there is no laughter of the sort I have been describing, is in some important ways cut off from full participation in many of the most important ways in which groups consolidate their identity and learn together.

It's important to stress that not all jokes work in the same ways. There are, for example, at least two common effects of jokes—those which reinforce a group's identity by excluding others and those which educate the group into a new awareness of itself. For instance, a good deal of the most common colloquial humour is what we

might call “locker room” laughter, the shared experience which comes from making fun of someone whom the group wishes to exclude. For it’s clear that one of the most powerful ways in which a group of people can repel any outsiders or deal with the threat of unwelcome intrusions by outsiders is to make fun of such outsiders, to, in effect, dehumanize them, so that what we are sharing in our laughter is the shared awareness that we are better than such people.

Such “exclusionary” humour is the basis for a good deal of humour which these days we consider unacceptable—racist jokes, sexist jokes, ethnic jokes (The Andrew Dice Clay school of comic performance). While we disapprove of such humour often for the very Platonic reason that it corrupts our understanding of others not immediately like ourselves, we have to recognize that it is amazingly popular, no where more so than on the Internet. If we need any evidence of the importance many people place on using jokes and shared laughter as a means of maintaining a sense of exclusionary solidarity in the face of constant threats of intrusion, we have only to dial up an appropriate “hate” address on the Internet.

But humour can also be educational, that is, it can transform our understanding of the group, and by doing that in a way that we all share it can effect a pleasant, yet very effective transformation of the situation. To listen to Bill Cosby, for example, is to be reminded through laughter, that the life of a black child or parent is, for all our particular racial stereotyping, a shared human experience. In laughing at what we share together, we are unconsciously transforming our understanding of our mutual relationship in a common group. That why, in a sense, one of the surest ways to educate a group into a new awareness of something is through comedy.

And that’s the reason perhaps why often we find stand up comedians in the forefront of those who are pushing hardest at our understanding of ourselves, frequently in very painful ways. When Lenny Bruce used to stand up and chant the word “Nigger” at his audience or make jokes about dope addicts and prostitutes he was, in effect, pushing at the envelope of what that group accepted as normal. For many people, his jokes were offensive, that is, the shock or the punch line was too unexpected to overcome the built-in habits of the group. But for those who found themselves laughing at the humour, the experience was, in a small but important way, a means of reminding them of the limits of their understanding and thus, to a certain extent, an expansion of their knowledge of what the group was and what it might include. When we laugh at Bill Cosby’s humour, for example, we are ignoring or forgetting the fact that he is an Afro-American different from white folks and are

acknowledging our common human identity.

Satire: A General Definition

The mention of the name Lenny Bruce brings me to the main point of the first part of this lecture, the particular form of humour which we call satire. We are all more or less familiar with what satire is, since we are exposed to it a good deal, but its precise literary sense may not be quite so clear.

Formally defined, satire is “A composition in verse or prose holding up vice or folly to ridicule or lampooning individuals. . . . The use of ridicule, irony, sarcasm, etc., in speech or writing for the ostensible purpose of exposing and discourage vice or folly.”

In other words, satire is a particular use of humour for overtly moral purposes. It seeks to use laughter, not just to remind us of our common often ridiculous humanity, but rather to expose those moral excesses, those corrigible sorts of behaviour which transgress what the writer sees as the limits of acceptable moral behaviour.

Let me put this another way. If we see someone or some group acting in a way we think is morally unacceptable and we wish to correct such behaviour, we have a number of options. We can try to force them to change their ways (through threats of punishment); we can deliver stern moral lectures, seeking to persuade them to change their ways; we can try the Socratic approach of engaging them in a conversation which probes the roots of their beliefs; or, alternatively, we can encourage everyone to see them as ridiculous, to laugh at them, to render them objects of scorn for the group. In doing so we will probably have at least two purposes in mind: first, to effect some changes in the behaviour of the target (so that he or she reforms) and, second, to encourage others not to behave in such a manner.

In that sense, what sets satire apart from normal comedy (and the two often shade into each other in ways which make an exact border line difficult to draw), is that in satire there is usually a clear and overt didactic intention, a clear moral lesson is the unifying power of the work. Whereas in normal comedy, we are being asked to laugh at ourselves and our common human foibles, in satire the basis of the humour is generally some corrigible unwelcome conduct in a few people or in a particular typical form of human behaviour. Normal comedy, if you will, reminds us of our incorrigible human limitations; satire focus rather on those things which we can correct in order to be better than we are (or, if not better, at least not as bad).

This is no doubt a somewhat muddled distinction at this point, but it should become clearer as we proceed.

At the basis of every good traditional satire is a sense of moral outrage or indignation: This conduct is wrong and needs to be exposed. Hence, to adopt a satiric stance requires a sense of what is right, since the target of the satire can only be measured as deficient if one has a sense of what is necessary for a person to be truly moral. And if this satire is to have any effect, if it is to be funny, then that sense of shared moral meaning must exist in the audience as well. Satire, if you like, depends upon a shared sense of community standards, so that what is identified as contrary to it can become the butt of the jokes.

This moral basis for satire helps to explain why a satire, even a very strong one which does nothing more than attack unremittingly some target, can offer a firm vision of what is right. By attacking what is wrong and exposing it to ridicule the satirist is acquainting the reader with a shared positive moral doctrine, whether the satire actually goes into that doctrine in detail or not. Aristophanes in the *Clouds* may be taking a harshly critical view of Socrates (and others, as we shall see), but there may well be an important positive moral purpose behind that.

[I should note here that it is possible to write satire in the absence of any shared sense of moral standards, but the result is a curious form of “black” satire. This genre is particularly common today. Modern satire typically makes everything look equally ridiculous. In such a satiric vision, there is no underlying vision of what right conduct is and the total effect, if one tries to think about it, is very bleak indeed—a sense that we might as well laugh at the ridiculousness of everything because nothing has any meaning. Whether we call this *Monty Python* or *Saturday Night Live* or *This Hour Has Twenty-two Minutes* or whatever, it seems to add up to an attitude that since there’s no significant meaning to anything, we might as well laugh at everything. That will enable us to retreat with style from the chaos. Such an attitude is very much at odds with traditional satire, which tends to work in the service of a moral vision which is being abused by particular people or particular conduct]

Satire: Some Comments on the Range

Given that central to what we call traditional satire is some underlying moral vision, so that the “negative” portrayal of the target works in the service of a “positive” vision, it is clear that satire can take on a wide range of tones. That is, the moral

indignation at the heart of the satirist can lead him to something really vicious and savage, an unrelenting and unforgiving attack on what he sees as extreme moral corruption in what he is ridiculing, or, alternatively, the indignation of the satirist may temper itself with some affection for the target, so that the satire is much more good natured, less abusive and aggressive, even to the point where we are not sure just how much the comic portrait is really satiric or simply comic (as in, say, a celebrity “roast,” where a group of people attack one of their friends, but do so in an affectionate way, so that the target really has nothing to complain about, even if some of the jokes hit a tender nerve at times).

Satire thus can come in many forms, from savage to gentle, but it remains satire so long as we feel that the writer's main purpose is making us laugh at conduct which he believes ought to be corrected. Whether we see Aristophanes's portrayal of Socrates as aggressively vicious or as much more affectionately funny, the satiric purpose remains clear so long as we sense that Aristophanes intends us to see the Thinkery as something we should not place our faith in, as something ridiculous. To the extent that Socrates and the Thinkery become attractive to us (say, because of the energy and humour of the place), the satiric purpose is diminished. More of this later.

Satire: Some Basic Techniques

How does a satirist set about ridiculing the vice and folly she wants the audience to recognize as unacceptable? Remember that the challenge to the satirist is to get the moral point across with humour, so that the audience or the reader laughs in the appropriate manner. Put another way, the challenge is to put across serious matters in humorous ways.

Let me restate this point because it is crucial. The central message of satire is often very simple and can be stated quickly. Satire is, for reasons we shall consider in a moment, not a genre which encourages complex explorations of deep psychological issues in the characters. It's much more like a repetitive insistence on the foolishness of certain kinds of behaviour. So the problem for the satirist is to make his treatment funny, that is, to keep the jokes coming quickly and with sufficient variety so that the audience stays interested in what is going on. Nothing is staler in art than a satire which runs out of steam or which starts to repeat itself in predictable ways. That's why the staple form for modern satire is the short skit—set up, punch line, fade out.

In a longer satire, like an Aristophanic play or Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* the problem is to keep the reader interested through one's technique.

Well, there are a number of basic strategies. I list them here in no particular order.

1) First, the satirist sets up a target—either a person like Socrates or Strepsiades or Pisthetairos or a group like the Thinkery—which will symbolize the conduct he wishes to attack. Satire, in other words, has a clear target. Setting up the target in a way that can generate humour in a variety of ways is an important talent. The Thinkery, for instance, is not just a one-line joke about the nature of Socratic inquiry; in the play it becomes the source for a number of other jokes, verbal and visual, e.g., Socrates hanging in a basket, the pot bellied stove (always emitting strange smoke), the students gazing at the ground with their bums in the air, all sorts of strange quasi-philosophical mumbo jumbo, and so on. On the stage, the Thinkery is a fertile source for humorous variety; the initial message may be simple and repetitive, so to keep the audience interested the theatrical presentation has to be varied and funny. Nothing is duller than a humorless satire.

But in *The Clouds* the target is not just Socrates. Another target is clearly the middle-aged Athenian male, Strepsiades, full of energy and crudity, desperate to sort out the difficulties of his personal life (the problems of belonging to a litigious, imperialistic society from which traditional systems of order have disappeared). And this Groucho Marx like character is put into hopelessly exaggerated situations, where he has to deal with the Thinkery. His reasons for wanting to have anything to do with Socrates and his manner of dealing with his trouble (in all its variety) is the source of most of the satire and identifies for us Aristophanes's main target—the average Athenian citizen. Clearly, most Athenians are not exactly like Strepsiades, but there's enough connection between him and the average citizen to make the satiric point clear enough.

2) Second, the satirist will typically exaggerate and distort the target in certain ways in order to emphasize the characteristics he wishes to attack and, most importantly, to provide recurring sources of humour. Such exaggeration and distortion are key elements in the humour. The target must be close enough to the real thing for us to recognize what is going on, but sufficiently distorted to be funny, an exaggeration, often a grotesque departure from normality. The *Clouds* still can provide an amusing and provocative evening's entertainment for someone who has never heard of Socrates, but obviously the person who does have some familiarity with that figure is going to derive a great deal more from the play.

The example of a political cartoon is instructive here. When we laugh at the cartoon of, say, Clinton, we are responding to two things: a recognition of the original and of what the satirist has done to distort the original so as to make it ridiculous for a particular purpose. The cartoon may still be very funny for someone who doesn't know Clinton, but some of the immediate edge will clearly be lost.

In that sense, all satire is, of course, unfair, if by that we mean that the depiction of the target is not life-like, not a true copy, not naturalistic. Of course, it's not. There would be no cartoon if all we had was a photograph of Clinton. Making the targets ridiculous means bending them out of shape (as in a distorting mirror), not beyond recognition but certainly far from their normal appearance. The point of the satire often lies in the nature of the distortion. Much of the best satire depends, in other words, on a skillful caricature or cartoon, rather than on any attempt at a life-like rendition of the subject.

So to complain that Socrates in *The Clouds* is nothing like the real Socrates is to miss the point. Aristophanes is setting up his Socrates to symbolize in a ridiculously distorted manner certain ways of behaving which he wishes his audience to recognize as absurd. At the same time, the portrait has to have some recognizable connection to Socrates if the play is to make a connection with the audience. But it's important, too, to recognize that the main satire may not be directed so much at Socrates, ridiculous as he is, but at Strepsiades for his desire to believe in Socrates for his own self-interested purposes.

Such distortion obviously involves setting up a certain distance between the target and the audience. That is, we are not in a satire invited to consider the inner feelings of the targets or to speculate on any complex psychological motives for why they behave the way they do. The satirist focuses his ridicule on external behaviour, not on speculating about possible complex psychological motivation for that behaviour. To do the latter is to bring the audience into the inner workings of the target's heart and mind, and once one has done that, it is difficult to respond to the target satirically. As the old French saying has it, "Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner" ["To understand everything is to forgive everything"]. For that reason it's difficult to satirize anyone whose inner psychological troubles are well known. Richard Nixon was easy to satirize until he broke down on national television and bared his truly desperate feelings to the world.

3) Once the target is delineated in an appropriately distorted way, the satire proceeds by an unrelenting attack. Here the satirist has a variety of weapons,

ranging from rude direct insults and a lot of robust physical humour (pratfalls, misunderstandings, mock fights, farting, waving the phallus in the air) to more complex assaults parodying various forms of language and belief. *The Clouds* is justly famous as a very robust satire featuring a wide variety of satiric techniques, some very corny, some rude, some very physical, some sophisticated parody (in language), some pointed personal references to members of the audience, a direct address to the audience, some lyrical interludes, lots of dancing and singing and music, and a wealth of technical detail in the stage design and costumes, and so on, a whole arsenal of techniques designed above all else to keep the attack varied and funny (with no concessions to political correctness). The audience doesn't have time to pause, because something new and unexpected is about to happen at almost every moment.

This emphasis on the variety of an unrelenting attack may help to explain the structure of Aristophanic comedy, which at first glance seems to suffer from the lack of any complex plot. In a sense it is a very linear form of drama in which one incident follows hard upon the heels of another, more like a series of skits held together by a common central character, than a carefully crafted story in which a lot of the interest comes from curious twists and turns in the plot.

This form of play, the Aristophanic comedy, is technically called Old Comedy, and it is, as I have observed, marked by a continuing variety in what goes on, more like an old style pantomime than the sorts of situation comedies we are used to (which derive from what we call New Comedy). The story, such as it is, focuses on one person's attempts to cope with the complexities of Athenian life in the face of very odd circumstances marked by all sorts of interruptions. As a vehicle for dramatic variety it is unsurpassed, but it certainly won't answer the needs of those who demand the consistent depiction of a naturalistic slice of life drama with an intricate plot.

A good many of these attacks are going to draw upon the shared cultural milieu of the playwright and the audience (names of particular people and events, excerpts from particularly well known speeches or plays, references to current affairs, and so on). The aim of the satirist is to deliver an unrelenting attack on the target which the audience can laugh at, so that the audience's shared response, its laughter, can effectively deal with the behaviour which the satirist wishes to correct.

In this connection, the notion and use of satiric irony is important. This is a technique which, as its name suggests, confronts the audience with the discrepancy

between what characters say and do and what we fully understand by their actions. To appreciate satire, that is, we have to have a sense of where the satirist is coming from, so that we recognize the distortion and the ridiculous behaviour for what it is. If we fail to see the satiric irony at work, then our response may defeat the purposes of the satirist, because we will be tempted to say one of two things: (a) well, life's not like that so I don't see the point (e.g., there is such place as the Thinkery and that portrait of Socrates is just stupid, because he's not like that in real life) or (b) hey, I think that action by the target is just great; maybe we should all be more like that (e.g., Hey that's a great idea. I think I'll enroll my son at the Thinkery).

If we fail to see the function of the satiric irony, in other words, we may dismiss the fiction as mere stupidity, or we may embrace it as something admirable. So the challenge of the satirist is to make the satiric intention clear but not overly obvious, so that the audience derives a certain pleasure from participating in the in-joke, in seeing what the writer is getting at through the humour.

That quality of satire makes it, for all its frequent crudity and knock-about farce, a much more "intellectual" genre than many others. To appreciate satire one has to be able to recognize the continuing existence of different levels of meaning (that is, of irony), and the more sophisticated the satire the more delicate the ironies. Or, put another way, satire requires a certain level of education and sophistication in the audience. People can still respond to the fun of Aristophanes, to the dramatic action and the crude fun, but with no sense for satiric irony, the point of the piece will get rather lost.

4) In assaulting the target in this way, the satirist is going to be pushing hard at the edge of what the audience is prepared to accept. If the satirist wants really to connect with the audience, then the writer is going often to be pushing language at the audience in new ways, taking risks with what they are prepared to accept. After all, if the purpose is to wake people up to the moral realities of their daily situation, then often some fairly strong language and surprising imagery is going to be in order. That, of course, presents the risk of offending the audience's taste. If an audience turns away from the work in disgust, then they are not going to attend to whatever important moral lesson the satirist is striving to call attention to. Hence the more aggressive the satirist, the more delicately the writer has to walk along the line of what is acceptable and what is not. It's no accident that expanding the envelope of what is acceptable on the stage or in prose is often the work of our satirists.

This point is worth stressing, because if a satirist is really touching a nerve in

the audience, then a common response is to find ways to neutralize the satire. I have sketched out four of the common methods one can use to do that: (a) take the satire literally and dismiss it as absurd or embrace it as a good idea (the satiric irony is thus lost and the point of the satire evaporates), (b) reject the satire because it is too rude or crude (it offends my taste); (c) reject the satire because it is “unfair” or not sufficiently true to life (this is very similar to point a above); (d) reject the satire by failing to respond to the ironies.

Is Satire Ever Effective?

How effective is satire at realizing its objective, that is, the moral reformation of the audience? I suppose the short answer is not very often, especially nowadays, when being laughed at is often a sign of celebrity rather than something one is automatically ashamed of. I suspect that in closely knit groups, where one's status and dignity are important, becoming a laughing stock is something one worries about. Under these circumstances, the satirist may indeed really connect with the target. That, however, may prompt extreme hostility to the writer rather than a reformation of the target's character.

Swift observed that satire is like a mirror in which people see everyone's face except their own. That, I suspect, is a very accurate observation, and to that extent the satirist is probably engaging in something of a vain endeavour: to get people to recognize their own ridiculousness and to avoid it in the future. Still, there may be some other, more useful point. For satire is not just a matter of attacking the target; it's also a matter of attacking or at least challenging those who believe in the target, who do not see, that is, the moral imperfections at the basis of a particular social or political stance.

So it may be the case that satire works most effectively at educating an audience to see through the pretensions and folly of people whom it takes much more seriously than they ought to be taken. If it does that, then it has used laughter in a very constructive way, as mentioned above: it has helped to show us that too often our sense of what we are, as individuals and as groups, is too limited by delusions of grandeur. Too often we become enamored of false idols. Satire is one means of educating us against the practice.

The Clouds

If we acknowledge, then, that *The Clouds* is a satire, what does Aristophanes wish us to learn from witnessing the play? I take it that many of his satiric techniques are obvious enough from the text, although one needs to affirm that we are most unlikely to realize the full satiric potential of this wonderful play without witnessing a first-class production of it. There are few dramas that proffer such an invitation to use the full resources of the stage to keep the audience constantly involved in the action: all sorts of amazing stage devices, pyrotechnics, amusing costumes (including phalluses), repeated physical conflict, and so on. We gather only a small and insufficient sense of the dramatic potential of the work by reading it.

Still, we do get some sense of how this play might appear, so we are in a position to explore what Aristophanes wants us to think about. I would maintain that the satire here goes through at least three distinct stages and that, in going through these stages, the tone of the satire changes from something very amusing and distant from us to something much closer to us, more potentially disturbing, and perhaps apocalyptic. By the end of the play we may well have moved beyond satire; we are, in any case, a long way from the opening scenes of the play.

In the opening scenes of the play, the butt of the satire is clearly Socrates. This may be (indeed, is) an unfair portrait of the Socrates we know from the *Gorgias* and the *Apology* (for one thing in those works Socrates is not concerned with physical science and expressly repudiates the notion that he wants to make the weaker argument the stronger). But the satire is very vigorous and funny. As an audience we can laugh good humouredly at a familiar face and place a considerable distance between us and what seems to be the major target of the satire.

One point to stress here is that in the opening of the play, the satire is (for an audience) quite comfortable. The laughter is (if we discuss it in terms of a distinction I introduced earlier) exclusionary. The variously silly things about the Thinkery and Socrates invite that audience to laugh at him as a charlatan and humbug. This is comfortable for an audience, because the satire is apparently directed at a single person, not at them, and since they are not Socrates, they are clearly not implicated in Aristophanes's ridicule.

However, Socrates does not remain the sole (or even the most important target of Aristophanes's satire), for the main aim of the satire changes somewhat when Strepsiades decides to enroll in the Thinkery himself. Strepsiades, after all, is a

representative Athenian, and it is made clear to us that for him the attraction of Socrates's school (which he has told us is humbug) is naked self-interest. He wants to defraud his fellow citizens out of the money he owes them. He wants, as he makes clear to us, to learn the art of breaking his promises at the expense of his fellow citizens.

At this point, Aristophanes is casting his satiric net more widely: this is no longer an attempt merely to expose Socrates to ridicule but to include the self-serving greed of Athenians, including, of course, some of those in the audience. In some respects, at this point Strepsiades becomes a more serious and uncomfortable target than Socrates—and the moral tone becomes potentially somewhat more serious. After all, Socrates is in some sense better than Strepsiades. He may be silly, but at least he believes in what he is doing and devotes all his energies to doing that. Strepsiades, by contrast, is not at all interested in learning anything about what Socrates is up to; he simply wants to be equipped to escape his obligations. The satire here is just as funny, especially Strepsiades's stupidity. But his willingness to corrupt language to serve his own interests is something more serious than Socrates's wild speculations.

And this is reinforced by the sense that Strepsiades is not just a single particular Athenian known to the audience (like Socrates). Strepsiades is also a social type: a man who married above his station and has a son whose spending he cannot control. He is, in a sense, representative of a certain kind of citizen, many of whom may well be sitting in the audience. Thus, holding his self-interested greed up to ridicule is clearly implicating, not just one local weirdo, but a certain social type or social attitude. In other words, increasingly numbers of the audience who were laughing so comfortably at Socrates only a few minutes before are now being forced to laugh at themselves or their neighbours.

A similar shift occurs soon afterwards. Once we come to the debate between the Old and the New Philosophy, the satire changes its emphasis (or, rather, enlarges its concerns). This debate makes it clear that what is at stake here is not just a silly thinker or a greedy social type. What Aristophanes is after is an indictment of an entire way of life, especially of the modern trends which are eroding traditional values. The debate (especially if we see it on stage with the magnificent costumes and the ritualized combat) is very funny, but the moral concerns are coming much closer to home. The willingness to dispense with proven values in education and conduct brings with it the loss of something which the playwright clearly sees as something valuable.

It may be the case that Aristophanes is a staunch defender of the old values. But that need not be so. After all, the old philosophy comes in for some satiric jibes, especially for his prurience and rather simple indignation, which might well be presented as a sort of naive stuffiness. But there can be no doubt, I think, of the seriousness of the issues at stake here, the erosion of old values enshrined in a shared tradition and a communal respect for that tradition.

In this connection, the decision of the narrator to label the disputants Philosophy and Sophistry may be somewhat misleading. Traditionally, these debaters have been called the Just (or Major or Better) Logic and the Unjust (or Minor or Weaker) Logic (as Arrowsmith's long endnote on p. 153 indicates). Arrowsmith is right, I think, when he claims (in the same note) that "Aristophanes is talking, not about systems of formal logic, but about whole system of Reason, discursive and nondiscursive alike)," which he characterizes later (on p. 154) as an argument between "the rational guidance of Custom . . . , the corrective rightness of traditional experience as against the restless innovations and risky isolation from experience and history of the pure intellect."

To frame the dispute that way may be fair enough, but the labels Philosophy (for traditional values) and Sophistry (for innovation) may mislead, especially if we come to this play (as many readers to) fresh from dealing with Socrates's definition of his endeavour as philosophy (rather than as oratory), for it would appear to load the scales somewhat on behalf of what Arrowsmith calls Philosophy, when, in fact, the point of the satire may well be that both disputants are, for different reasons, equally foolish. The comic dispute, in other words, may be a funny dramatic symbol for a serious social problem which lies at the heart of this satire: the traditional ways of valuing have broken down, not because they have been "defeated" by some newer and more sophisticated form of valuing, but rather because the old traditions have become stuffy, pretentious, ungrounded, and silly. Aristophanes, in other words, may not be celebrating traditional values, so much as satirizing the vain glory of those values, now without power in a transformed world, forced to defend itself with indignant comparative spluttering about the penis length.

It's clear, too, just what is eroding that tradition: the ability to manipulate language. The New Philosophy (Sophistry) wins the day because the form of linguistic analysis it uses can, the face of the weakness of traditional beliefs, undermine the value of anything. We are seeing here (in satiric comic form) something of the same thing that Herodotus is doing to traditional stories, subjecting them to rational

analysis. Here, of course, the exercise is a parody of such analysis, but the effect is the same: calling the old story (and the values which it expresses) into question. The mistake of the Old Philosophy (or the fatal weakness) is a simple uncritical trust in a shared system of meaning in words and of the importance of certain old stores as enshrining permanent values. Having nothing intelligent to counter the New Philosophy's demolition of that shared meaning, the Old Philosophy can only acknowledge the loss.

What has contributed to developments of this method which lead to the loss of traditional value? The end of the debate between the two Philosophies makes that very clear. The responsibility lies with the audience of Athenian citizens, the "buggers," who are indicted by the Old Philosophy as he concedes defeat. By this point the easy satire of the opening of the play, where the audience member could feel a comfortable distance between himself and the ridiculous figure of Socrates, has altered significantly. Now, Socrates and his Thinkery are no longer the issue. The central concern is the neglect by the Athenians themselves of their old traditions and their love of novelty in the service of self-interest. The theatrical action is still very funny (the style has not changed), but the target is now all-encompassing.

The dramatic point is worth stressing. The play begins by inviting the audience to laugh at the ridiculousness of one particular person for his outright humbuggery. As mentioned above, such satire poses no threat to members of the audience and draws them into the story with reassuring ease and much fun. But in the course of the play, the members of the audience are pressured to extend their understanding of humbuggery so that it now includes themselves. It's as if Aristophanes is asking very pointedly: All right, you found certain conduct in Socrates hilarious. How about that same conduct in yourselves? What's the difference?

The consequences of this attitude emerge in the quarrel between Strepsiades and his son. Again, there's a lot of humour in the exchange and the physicality of the staging, but the seriousness of the issue is made explicit. If we abandon traditions to serve only our individual self-interest, then we are left with a situation in which the only basis for human relationships is power. In such a world, why should a son not beat up his father and his mother? There is no particular reason not to. Since laws are only human conventions invented by the stronger party, they can be changed once power shifts, and people can now do more or less as they want. Pheidippides makes the case that human beings are just like animals, and in the animal world, the barnyard, power is the basis of all relationships.

It may be all very well for Strepsiades to yell at his son that if we wants to live as a barnyard animal he can go and shit on a perch. But Pheidippides's case has, in fact, been endorsed by Strepsiades earlier in the play when he puts his own self-interest ahead of anything else. After all, if, in the interests of one's personal advancement, one wants to cheat one's neighbours of what one owes (and has promised), then what defense does one have against the son who wants to beat his parents? The principles that one might want to invoke to prevent the latter are the same as those which should prevent the former. As Pheidippides demonstrates, once an old tradition grows too feeble and one sets about undermining tradition with the new linguistic analysis, anything is possible.

Here, of course, Aristophanes is touching a really sore point in Athenian social life (and in ours). How do we keep the good will of our children on whom we are going to depend? What is it that keeps children from exerting their superior physical power to abuse their parents when they don't get their way? In Athenian times, and even today, this is a significant concern, especially since the continuing health and peaceful life of the elderly requires the benevolent co-operation of the children (much more so then than now). Once that goes, then something very basic to the fabric of our immediate family life breaks down. The members of Aristophanes's audience would have no trouble seeing in that issue something of direct importance in their lives (no more than members of a modern audience).

At this point in the play, I am suggesting, the satire, while still very robust and funny, is a lot more uncomfortable. The action is pushing us to the recognition that the real issue here is not Socrates (silly as he may be), but rather a self-interested greed which will rebound on us. Strepsiades's initial motivation is to serve his self-interest in any way possible; without realizing it, he initiates a course of action which leads inevitably to his physical abuse. The responsibility for this lies, not with Socrates, nor even with Strepsiades, but with the members of the audience, the "buggers." And this issue is now something with which all members of the audience will be fully involved, since they have parents and children and they certainly have a fear of family abuse. Aristophanes is pointing out that the very behaviour which makes Socrates so funny earlier in the play and which they, like Strepsiades, engage in out of self-interest, may well unleash behaviour of which they are all afraid (or ought to be).

The Chorus

That such a concern about the Athenian population generally is the major satiric thrust of the play is made more explicit by the single most important dramatic presence in the play: the Chorus of Clouds, in many ways the most ambiguous element in the play.

The Chorus is made up of seductive female singers and dancers (just how seductive the staging will determine), divine presences bringing with them the promise of rain and fertility. But it's quickly made clear that they are primarily the divine personalities who answer to the desires of those who wish to create something in words, "goddesses of men of leisure and philosophers. To them we owe our repertoire of verbal talents; our eloquence, intellect, fustian, casuistry, force, wit, prodigious vocabulary, circumlocutory skill. . . ." Hence, they are defined as the patrons of all those who manipulate others with words. And this function is mirrored in their characteristic of having no definite shape, but taking on the form in accordance with what the perceiver wishes to see.

That may be the reason they come through in this play as having no consistent point of view, no easily assignable meaning. Socrates can hail them as his patron, and so can the figure of Aristophanes. They can celebrate Strepsiades's decision to enroll in the Thinkery and berate the Athenian audience for its silliness about the lunar calendar—all the time dominating the stage with their singing and dancing. The "meaning" of the Chorus of Clouds (if that is the right word) is as protean as their shape: like the language the Athenians use for various purposes they have no firmness, no determinate form. To the extent this play has a cosmic divine presence, that's brought to us by the Clouds themselves.

That comic business about the Clouds controlling everything for which the traditional gods are given credit, all that stuff about the cosmic convection principle, thunder as farting, and so on, may be funny, but the issue lies at the heart of the play's moral indignation at what is happening in Athens, where the possibilities for a significant life are being systematically corrupted by the seductive power of words, of language itself, which is now being shaped to human beings' desires, rather than directing those desires. The fact that the Clouds spend so much time singing and dancing (and this, one would hope, would be done beautifully on stage) enacts the very point the play is making about the issues they represent.

This point about the corruption of language applies to everyone in the play. For

it's not the case, I think, that Aristophanes is privileging the older ways. That figure of Philosophy (or the Just Argument) is as self-serving and silly in his language as is Sophistry (or the Unjust Argument). Indeed, the similarity between the two in this respect makes them both servants of the *Clouds* and conveys a potentially disturbing irony to all the comic business.

The Ending of *The Clouds*

That irony I refer to helps to make the ending of this play potentially so ominous. Of course, a great deal is going to depend upon how the play is staged. But it's no accident that Aristophanes ends this comedy with a wanton act of destruction, the burning down of the Thinkery. Why does Strepsiades do this? Well, one immediate cause appears to be the frustration he now finds himself in, when he realizes that he has been trapped by his own silliness and corruption. Instead of resolving the comedy in a peaceful way, with, for example, an acknowledgment of his errors and some form of reconciliation with his son, Aristophanes has him lash out with an action that indicates his loss of restraint, his decision to abandon thought, and to channel his confused feelings into violence.

There's an interesting difference here between this work and the *Odyssey*. You will recall that the final act of Odysseus in that work is restraint. The destructiveness of the civil war is averted when the gods persuade Odysseus to hold back, to restrain his desire for revenge on the suitors. And the re-establishment of civic harmony in Ithaca requires that. This is a common end of a comic plot, where the sources of social disruption have been punished, killed, expelled, or forgiven, and there is a general sense of a restored social harmony. Similarly, the end of *Oedipus* is marked by restraint. Oedipus inflicts a horrific punishment on himself and is about to set out into self-imposed exile. But the community is still intact, still trying to absorb the significance of what has happened. And Thebes has been saved and will endure.

The ending of *Clouds* is not like this. The final vision we have in this play is of destruction. The script does not move us beyond that act. And if we see, as we might, that this destruction has involved some real human suffering and perhaps even death, then we have clearly moved into a world beyond the easy, distant comedy of the opening of the play. In a sense, we might say that we have moved well beyond satire in the closing moments, because we are no longer laughing. What we are seeing might be interpreted as an ominous warning: "What I have shown you is something

silly and ridiculous, but the consequences of that are far from amusing." This ending will be all the more powerful if we see in Socrates, as we might, an attractive energy and tolerable weirdness, so that his defeat registers as something of a loss.

I stress that this interpretation of the ending is one of many possibilities. It would be easy enough through the staging to take much of the sting out of it and to make the destruction of the Thinkery something relatively trivial and funny, perhaps even therapeutic. Much would depend upon the presentation of the destruction and the response of the people involved. But the fact that there is no prolonged choral closure after the burning, no final comic celebration of a reinstatement of a communal solidarity does raise the possibility that this ending is something more ironically serious than much of the rest of the comedy might suggest. It is a vision of mob violence.

And the role of the Chorus at this point in the play is significant. The Leader of the Chorus incites Strepsiades and Pheidippides on, urging them to give Socrates and his followers a good thrashing. This, of course, is the man whose labours they encouraged at the start of the play, a man who regarded them as his patron saint. There's a strong sense here that the *Clouds* themselves are applauding and enjoying the destruction we are witnessing, and they justify their encouragement with appeals to the "gods of heaven," an appeal which has revealed itself as empty during the course of the play, because no one manifests any sense of what a belief in such gods might mean.

In this matter of the tone at the ending of the play, there's an important ambiguity over Pheidippides' last exit. Does he go back into his house or return to the Thinkery? He has not achieved any reconciliation with his father, so the latter is a distinct possibility that he goes into the school (a suggestion made by Martha Nussbaum and passed on, with strong reservations, in Alan Sommerstein's notes to the play). If a particular production chooses the latter possibility and includes Pheidippides among the victims of Strepsiades' homicidal rage, then obviously the comedy at the end has become much more ironically bitter. More than that, too, because Pheidippides' return to the school is a direct insult to his father, and thus one might well see it as the key event which triggers Strepsiades' final outburst. I'm not insisting on this view of the ending, but the possibility is certainly there.

If you see that this powerfully ominous ending as a persuasive possibility, then you can recognize how Aristophanes has significantly shifted his tone throughout the play and perhaps get a sense of why he does this. In a sense, he traps the

audience. First, we get us engaged in the work by inviting us to laugh at a ridiculous stranger with whom we share nothing in common: the satire is funny but safe, because we are not like Socrates. But then, by bringing the satire closer and closer to us, Aristophanes, through our own laughter, brings us face to face with the recognition that what we are really laughing at is not Socrates but our own conduct, our own foolishness arising out of self-interest. And then the work takes us into the consequences of that foolishness, both in the present and, more ominously, into the future. By the end of the play, we are no longer dealing with Sophists and greedy debt-ridden farmers; we are dealing with ourselves and a vision of what we may well become if we don't recognize what's at stake in the promises we make and the words we use.

This all comes about with great theatrical panache and lots of humour; but those features should not obscure the fact that Aristophanes is in deadly earnest in getting across his moral concerns about Athens. There may well be a sense here of tragic inevitability. The satire has gone beyond any sense of ridiculing behaviour which we can correct into an exploration of the inevitable destructiveness of the Athenian character: we were laughing at the particular foolishness of human beings; now we are invited to see that as an inherently self-destructive impulse which threatens the survival of the community. The Chorus of *Clouds* may promise life-giving rain, but what they represent is the process of destroying the city (and we are not permitted to forget here that Athens is at war).

We don't have to know much history to see that, if the ending here is an ominous warning, then it turned out to be prophetic. The Athenians did turn against Socrates and they did lose their traditional virtues in the course of the war. Along with those, of course, they also forfeited what they were most proud of: their political independence. In burning down the Thinkery, Strepsiades is pointing forward to much of the self-destructiveness which brought the Athenians, and countless other cultures proud of their values but increasingly consumed with self-interest, to grief.

Short Postscript on *The Birds*

Given what has been said above about satire, how are we to make sense of *The Birds*? Part of the satiric intention is clear enough, but in some ways there are complexities in this play which might lead us to wonder about the full satiric intentions.

The play sets up a typical middle-aged Athenian as its main target. Pisthetairos

and Euelpides have left the city ostensibly to find a better place, one free of the legal, economic, and political troubles of Athens. They are fed up with life in the city, and the birds, they think, will help them locate a more peaceful haven.

By the end of the play, of course, all this original intention has been subverted. Pisthetairos and Euelpides have become rulers of the birds and are, it seems, about to supplant the gods themselves. In the process they have persuaded the birds to surrender their freedom in the name of increasing their power and riches, and so what started out as a quest for a peacefully independent life for two Athenians ends up with an extension of their empire, a triumph which is to be celebrated by eating a couple of birds, the very creatures to whom they came at the start for advice about how to live.

On a fairly basic level the satiric intention here is clear enough: Aristophanes wants to hold up to ridicule the Athenian habit of aggressive interference, their innate imperialistic tendencies which make it impossible for them to live life without seeking domination. It is something bred into them, no matter how much they may want to escape its consequences. Arrowsmith makes this point in the long note on p. 317:

For if Aristophanes shows us in Pisthetairos here an Athenian exhausted by years of national restlessness and in search of *apragmosune* [a life of relaxed leisure] among the Birds, it is precisely his point that no Athenian can escape his origin. And once arrived among the Birds, Pisthetairos promptly exhibits the national quality from which he is trying to escape. He is daring, acquisitive, ruthlessly energetic, inventive, and a thorough-paced imperialist. And finally, in the apotheosis that closes the play, he arrives at his logical destination—divinity. For *polupragmosune* [the combination of these Athenian qualities], as Aristophanes ironically observed, is moved by nothing less than man's divine discontent with his condition, and the hunger of Athenians to be supreme, and therefore god. Â

The way in which Aristophanes presents this transformation suggests that it comes almost by instinct. Pisthetairos is, it seems, genuine in his desire to escape from the corrupting world of Athens, but he is incapable of repressing his urge to take charge, to urge the Birds to use whatever tactics are in their power to increase their dominion. He never expresses a particular reason for doing this, other than the

idea that somehow power is good for its own sake—if one has an opportunity one should seize it. It is in one's self-interest to do so.

So in the play we see Pisthetairos expend a lot of energy to keep conventional civilization away from Cloudcuckooland—for his success is attracting settlers. But at the same time his very nature drives him to seek imperial control, which will, of course, threaten the very thing he originally sought to attain.

He succeeds in his imperial urges, and this is particularly significant, because of his linguistic skill, because of his ability to persuade, to use language to shape people to his own ends:

But my words are wings. . . . How else do you think mankind won its wings if not from words?

Through dialectic the mind of man takes wing and soars; he is morally and spiritually uplifted. And so I hoped with words of good advice to wing you on your way toward some honest trade. (290-291)

But the play invites us to contemplate, through a very exaggerated scenario, the ironic consequences of this view. How spiritually uplifted is Pisthetairos at the end? Through the most brutal tactics, which again and again remind the audience of what Athens is doing to others during the Peloponnesian War, Pisthetairos succeeds in elevating himself to god-like status, deceiving even the traditional deities and heroes.

FROGS

This edition is based on the [publicly available](#)⁶ translation by Ian Johnston

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HISTORICAL NOTE

Aristophanes (c. 456 BC to c. 386 BC) was the foremost writer of comic drama in classical Athens. His surviving plays are the only complete examples we have of Old Comedy. *Frogs* was first produced in Athens in 405 BC. By this time Athens had been at war with Sparta for over twenty-five years.

...

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

XANTHIAS: a slave

DIONYSUS: the god, appearing in human form as a middle-aged man

HERCULES: the legendary hero

CORPSE: a dead man being carried off to Hades

CHARON: the ferry man transporting the dead to Hades

CHORUS OF FROGS

CHORUS OF INITIATES: worshippers of the gods of the underworld

AEACUS: a gatekeeper in Hades

SERVANT

FIRST HOSTESS (PANDOCHEUTRIA)

SECOND HOSTESS (PLATANE)

SERVANT OF PLUTO

EURIPIDES: the playwright

AESCHYLUS: the playwright

PLUTO: king of Hades

VARIOUS ATTENDANTS

[The play opens on a street leading to Hades, with a door in the centre of the backstage area. Enter Dionysus, appearing as a middle-aged man with a noticeable paunch, wearing a yellow tunic and over that a lion skin. He's carrying a huge club, one commonly associated with Hercules. On his feet he wears soft leather lace-up

⁶<http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/aristophanes/frogs.htm>

boots. Behind him comes his slave Xanthias riding on a donkey and carrying a huge amount of luggage. Xanthias notices the audience]

XANTHIAS

Look, master, an audience! Shouldn't I say something?
Tell them one of those jokes they always fall for?

DIONYSUS

O, all right—say what you like. Only no jokes
about how you're dying to piss. I can't stand those—
they're all so stale.

XANTHIAS

What about my other jokes?

DIONYSUS

Go ahead—just nothing about your bladder,
about how it's going to burst.

XANTHIAS

What? You mean I can't tell
that really funny one . . .

DIONYSUS

I suppose so—
but don't say anything about the bit.

XANTHIAS

What bit?

DIONYSUS

The bit about how you need to shift your load
to take a piss.

XANTHIAS

Not even this one—
“Here I am transporting such a load
if I get no relief I may explode.”

DIONYSUS

Please, please, don't say that one—
not unless I'm sick and need to throw up.

XANTHIAS

Then what's the point of my being here like this?
Why do I get to carry all the heavy baggage

if I can't tell the usual porter jokes—you know,
the ones Ameipsias and Phrynichus
and Lycias, too, in all their comedies
provide the slave who carries all the bags.⁷

DIONYSUS

Just don't. Those jokes are all so feeble—
when I have to watch a play and hear them
by the time I leave I've aged at least a year.

XANTHIAS [striking a heroic tragic pose]
Alas, for my neck beneath this triply damned yoke.
I suffer all this pressure and can't tell my joke.

DIONYSUS

It's an outrage, sheer insolence, that I,
Dionysus, son of Winejar, have to walk like this,
sweating along so he can ride at ease
without a care and carrying no load.

XANTHIAS

What!?

Aren't I carrying the load?

DIONYSUS

How can you be?
You're riding on your ass.

XANTHIAS

I'm loaded down.

All this stuff . . .

DIONYSUS

What do you mean by that?

XANTHIAS

What I just said carries lots of weight.

DIONYSUS

Isn't the donkey carrying our load?

XANTHIAS

No, no way. Not the load I'm holding.

DIONYSUS

⁷(line 21) Phrynichus, Ameipsias, Lycias: comic poets, rivals of Aristophanes.

How come?

How can you be carrying anything at all
when someone else is carrying you?

XANTHIAS

I've no idea.

But my shoulder's falling off.

DIONYSUS

All right, then.

Since you claim the donkey's useless to you,
why not take your turn and carry it?

XANTHIAS

What a wretched life!

I should have gone away to fight at sea—
then I'd be free and I'd have told you straight
what you could do with that ass of yours.⁸

DIONYSUS

Get down, you useless idiot! We're there—
by the door I'm aiming for, my first stop.

[Dionysus knocks very aggressively on the door and calls out in a very imperious tone]

Hey, in there! Doorman! I'm summoning you.

[The door opens and Hercules steps out, wearing a lion's skin and carrying a club. He's amazed that someone is dressed up to resemble him]

HERCULES

Who's banging on this door—smashing at it
like some wild centaur. My god, what's this?

[Hercules inspects Dionysus' outfit and starts to laugh uproariously]

DIONYSUS

Hey, my boy . . .

XANTHIAS

What?

DIONYSUS

Didn't you see?

⁸(line 44) the fight at sea refers to the naval victory of Arginusae. Athenian slaves who had fought were freed (this is the first of a number of references to this action).

XANTHIAS

See what? 50

DIONYSUS

How scared he was of me?

XANTHIAS

Yes, by god, he was,
scared you're nuts.

HERCULES [doubling up with laughter]

By holy Demeter,

I can't stop laughing. I'll try biting my lip.

No, no use. I can't stop laughing at him.

DIONYSUS

Come here, my good man. I need something from you.

HERCULES [still laughing out of control]

I can't help myself—he's so ridiculous.

Seeing that lion skin above that yellow dress.

What's going on? Do people with large clubs

now walk around in leather booties?

Where on earth do you think you're going?

DIONYSUS

I've done naval service under Cleisthenes.⁹

HERCULES

At that sea battle?

DIONYSUS

Yes—and sunk enemy ships,
twelve or thirteen of them.

HERCULES

Just the two of you?

DIONYSUS

Yes, by Apollo, we did.

XANTHIAS

Then I woke up.

DIONYSUS

I was on board with Euripides' Andromeda,

⁹(line 61) Cleisthenes: a well-known homosexual in Athens, a favourite target of Aristophanes.

reading to myself aloud, when suddenly
a huge urge seized my heart. You've no idea how strong.

HERCULES

An urge? How big was it?

DIONYSUS

The size of Molon—tiny.¹⁰

HERCULES

For a woman?

DIONYSUS

No, no.

HERCULES

A young lad, then?

DIONYSUS

Certainly not.

HERCULES

Well, then, a man?

DIONYSUS

Ugh!

HERCULES

Did you grab hold of your Cleisthenes?

DIONYSUS

Don't mock me, brother.¹¹ I'm not doing so well,
tormented by such hot desires.

HERCULES

Tell me,
my little brother, what's it like?

DIONYSUS

I can't explain.

But I'll try to show you by analogy.

Have you ever had a craving for some stew?¹²

HERCULES

For stew? In my life maybe ten thousand times.

¹⁰(line 68) Molon: a man remarkable for his size—either very large or very small. The joke would seem to demand something very small. Given the sexual innuendo, it may be the case that Molon was a very big man with (reputedly) a very small penis.

¹¹(line 72) brother: Hercules and Dionysus are both sons of Zeus, hence brothers.

¹²(line 76) stew: Hercules was famous for his enormous appetite.

DIONYSUS

Is that explanation clear enough to you?
Or shall I try some other way?

HERCULES

Not about stew!
That I understand completely.

DIONYSUS

Well then,
that's how much I'm eaten up with my desire
for Euripides.

HERCULES

Even when he's dead?¹³

DIONYSUS

So no one's going to talk me out of it—
I have to find him.

HERCULES

Right down in Hell?

DIONYSUS

Or even lower,
by god, if there's such a place.

HERCULES

What's the point of that?

DIONYSUS

I need a clever poet. There's none around.
The ones we've got are all so lousy.

HERCULES

What? Isn't Iophon still up there?¹⁴

DIONYSUS

He's the only good one left—if he's any good. I'm not really sure if that's the case.

HERCULES

If you've got to take a playwright back,
why not Sophocles? He's better than Euripides.

DIONYSUS

¹³(line 82) dead: Euripides had died in Macedonia the year before the first production of *The Frogs*.

¹⁴(line 88) Iophon: son of Sophocles and a writer of tragedies.

Not 'til I get Iophon all by himself,
without his father, Sophocles, so I can test
the metal of his poetry. Besides, Euripides
is such a rascal he may try to flee Hades
and come with me. But Sophocles was nice—
easygoing while on earth and down here, too.

HERCULES

What about Agathon? Where's he?

DIONYSUS

He's left us—

a fine poet lamented by his friends.

HERCULES

Where's he gone?

DIONYSUS

Off to feast with saints.¹⁵

HERCULES

And Xenocles?¹⁶

DIONYSUS

O by god, may he drop dead!

HERCULES

Well then, Pythangelos?

XANTHIAS

What about ME?

In pain all this time—my shoulder's sore as hell.

HERCULES

Surely you've other artsy-fartsy types—
thousands of tragic poets—all of them
way more wordy than Euripides?

DIONYSUS

No, no—

all chatterboxes, twittering swallows in a music hall,
mere foliage—disgraces to the artist's craft.
Once they get a chance to stage their plays,

¹⁵(line 101) Agathon: an important and successful Athenian tragic playwright. He'd recently left Athens and was living in Macedonia.

¹⁶(line 102) Xenocles and Pythangelos: minor Athenian tragic playwrights.

to crap all over tragedy, they disappear.
If you looked you'd never find one playwright,
someone creative who could well declaim
a worthy sentiment.

HERCULES

That word "creative"—
what's it mean?

DIONYSUS

Someone poetical enough
to give utterance to something grand,
something like

[Dionysus strikes a tragic pose]

"the sky, Zeus' pied-a-terre,"
"the foot of time," or this—"a mind that will not swear
on sacred offerings but a perjured tongue
that's false with no sense of its perfidy."

HERCULES

You like that stuff?

DIONYSUS

Like it? I'm crazy about it.

HERCULES

I swear it's all bullshit—and you know it.

DIONYSUS

Now, now, don't try to tell me what to think,
not with tragedy. You're no expert there.

HERCULES

I still say it sounds like total rubbish.

DIONYSUS

Why not teach me how to stuff my guts?

XANTHIAS

WHAT ABOUT ME??!!!!!!

DIONYSUS

That's the reason I've come here
and dressed like you—so you can fill me in,
in case I need to know, about this place—

who welcomed you down here, who'd you meet
that time you went down after Cerberus.¹⁷

Tell me about the harbours, resting places,
bakeries and brothels, water fountains,
the cities, highways, all the detours,
the local customs and the fine hotels,
the ones with fewest bugs.

XANTHIAS

Still no word of me.

HERCULES

O you valiant heart! Are you man enough
to venture down below?

DIONYSUS

Forget my courage.
Show me the highway, the shortest one there is,
that takes me directly down to Hades.
Don't prattle on about the temperature—
and say it's way too hot or cold for me.

HERCULES

Let's see . . . what should I mention first of all?
Which one? Hmmm. You could try a stool and rope—
you could just hang yourself.

DIONYSUS

Stop it right there.
That way gives me a choking feeling.

HERCULES

There's a straight short cut, well traveled, too—
with pestle and mortar . . .

DIONYSUS

You mean hemlock.¹⁸

HERCULES

That's it!

¹⁷(line 131) Cerberus: in one of Hercules' most famous exploits, he went down into Hell and returned with the Cerberus, the watch dog of Hades.

¹⁸(line 148) hemlock: a lethal poison which begins by numbing the lower limbs.

DIONYSUS

Too cold—too much like winter. Right away
the shins get frozen solid.

HERCULES

All right, then.

You want me to tell you how to get there fast.

DIONYSUS

Yes, by god. I'm not one to take a hike.

HERCULES

How about a stroll to Kerameikos¹⁹ . . .

DIONYSUS

Okay, what then?

HERCULES

Climb up the tower there—
right to the very top . . .

DIONYSUS

And then what?

HERCULES

Take a look at the torch race starting up—
when the spectators all yell out “They’re off!”
then off you go as well.

DIONYSUS

Off? Where to?

HERCULES

Down.

DIONYSUS

No, I can't take that road. I'd pulverize
both rissole wrappers of my brain.

HERCULES

What's left?

DIONYSUS

The road you used.

HERCULES

O, an enormous journey.

¹⁹(line 153) Kerameikos: a district in Athens.

At the very start you come to a vast lake—
immense and bottomless.

DIONYSUS

How do I get across?

HERCULES

In a tiny boat—miniscule—like this [indicating the size].
An ancient sailor takes you for a fee—
two obols.

DIONYSUS

Two obols? It's amazing
what two obols can buy anywhere.²⁰
How come it's here in Hades, too?

HERCULES

That was Theseus.²¹
He started it. Once past the lake you'll find snakes.
You'll see thousands of them, horrific monsters.

DIONYSUS

Don't keep trying to scare me. That won't work.
There's no way you'll get me to turn back.

HERCULES

Then a huge sewer, always full of liquid turds—
and lying in it anyone who harmed a guest
or screwed a lad and then took back the cash,
or smacked his mother, punched his father's jaw,
or swore false oaths, or else had copied out
a speech of Morsimus.²²

DIONYSUS

By god, with them in the shit
should lie whoever learned a war dance by Cinesias.²³

HERCULES

Next the breath of flutes will sound around you.

²⁰(line 167) two obols: the standard amount for welfare payments or daily pay for soldiers and sailors.

²¹(line 168) Theseus: the legendary founder of Athens, who made his own journey to Hades and back, and hence (according to this comment) introduced Athenian customs into Hades.

²²(line 178) Morsimus: an inferior tragic playwright.

²³(line 179) Cinesias: an Athenian poet.

You'll see the finest light, just like in Athens,
and myrtle groves, with happy men and women
gathered there to celebrate and clap their hands.

DIONYSUS

So who are they?

HERCULES

Those are the initiates,
the ones who celebrate the mysteries.²⁴

XANTHIAS

Then, by god, in these mysteries I play the ass.
I'll not stand for this a moment longer.

[Xanthias dismounts and starts to unload the baggage he has been carrying]

HERCULES

Those ones will tell you all you need to know.
These initiates live closest to the road
which takes you to the doors of Pluto's place.²⁵
And so, my brother, I bid you fond farewell.

DIONYSUS

Good bye—god keep you healthy, too.

[Hercules exits back through the door. Dionysus turns to Xanthias, who has just
about finished putting down all the luggage he has been carrying]

You there—take up the baggage once again!

XANTHIAS

Before I've put it down?

DIONYSUS

Yes, and hurry up.

[Enter a solemn funeral cortege parrying a dead man towards Hades]

XANTHIAS

Come on, I'm begging you. Hire one of them—
someone carrying the corpse. That's why they're here.

DIONYSUS

And if I don't find anyone?

²⁴(line 185) the mysteries: secret cult religious rituals for special groups of initiates.

²⁵(line 190) Pluto: god of Hades.

XANTHIAS

I'll do it.

DIONYSUS

Fair enough. All right, they're bringing out a corpse
You there . . . you stiff . . . I'm talking to you . . . Hallo!

[The corpse suddenly sits up straight]

You want to take a little luggage down to hell?

CORPSE

How much?

DIONYSUS

This stuff here.

CORPSE

Will you pay two drachmas?

DIONYSUS

My god, no. Less than that.

CORPSE

Then go away.

DIONYSUS

Hang on, my dear fellow. Can't we haggle?

CORPSE

If you don't pay two drachmas, forget it.

DIONYSUS

How about nine obols?

CORPSE

No bloody way!

I'd rather you shoved me back to life again.

[Corpse lies down and the funeral procession moves away]

DIONYSUS

What a pompous boor!

XANTHIAS

To hell with him—

I'll take the stuff myself.

[Xanthias starts loading himself with the baggage once again]

DIONYSUS

That's my good man—

a loyal and worthy slave. Let's get that boat . . .

[Enter Charon rowing his small boat across the stage]

CHARON

Ahoy there! Coming alongside.

XANTHIAS

What's this?

DIONYSUS

This?

By god, it's the lake Hercules talked about.

And I see the boat . . .

XANTHIAS

You're right. Thanks to Poseidon.

This must be Charon.

DIONYSUS

Ahoy there, Charon . . .

Greetings, Charon . . . Charon, halloooo!

CHARON

Who's seeks a rest from work and trouble?

Who's heading for Fields of Forgetfulness,

Never-never land, the Cerberians,

the Ravens²⁶ and Tartarus.

DIONYSUS

That's me.

CHARON

Then jump aboard.

DIONYSUS

Where do you put in?

The Ravens? Is that a stop?

CHARON

Yes, by god—

a special stop just for you. Get in.

DIONYSUS [to Xanthias]

All right, my lad, hop in.

²⁶(line 218) Ravens: a reference to a curse invoking the ravens to pick someone's bones. Charon lists various regions of Hell like so many stop on a bus route.

CHARON

I won't take the slave—
not unless he fought at sea to save his skin.

XANTHIAS

Not me, by god, no way. My eyes were bad.

CHARON

Then you must make a detour round the lake.

XANTHIAS

Where do I wait for you?

CHARON

At Wuthering Rock²⁷ —
right by the rest stop.

DIONYSUS

You got that?

XANTHIAS

I got that.

[picking up the bags]

Why am I so unlucky? When we began
I must've really pissed somebody off.

CHARON [to Dionysus]

Sit down there—at that oar.

[Dionysus sits on one of the oars]

Anyone else?

Hurry up—all aboard! What are you doing?

DIONYSUS

What am I doing? I'm sitting on this oar.

That's what you ordered me to do.

CHARON

Come on, fatso—park your butt right here.

DIONYSUS [moving off the oar]

There!

CHARON

Can you pick up the oar? Stretch your arms.

²⁷(line 226) Wuthering Rock: a part of the landscape of hell (possibly invented here by Aristophanes).

DIONYSUS

Like this?

CHARON

Don't be such a fool. Set your foot there.

Now pull the oar with all your force.

DIONYSUS

How can I?

I've had no practice. I'm no sailor.

And besides, I'm not from Salamis.²⁸

How'm I supposed to row a boat?

CHARON

It's not hard. You'll hear lovely melodies
once you make the effort.

DIONYSUS

Songs? Whose songs?

CHARON

The amazing music of the swan frogs.

DIONYSUS

All right, then. Get the tempo going.

CHARON

Yo ho, heave ho. Yo ho heave ho.

[As the small boat begins to move, the Chorus of Frogs is heard from off stage]²⁹

CHORUS OF FROGS

Brekekekex koax koax

Brekekekex koax koax.

Children of the marsh and lake
harmonious song now sweetly make,
our own enchanting melodies
koax koax.

The songs we sang for Nysa's lord,
for Dionysus, son of Zeus,
in Limnai at the Feast of Jars³⁰

²⁸(line 239) Salamis: an island close to Athens, famous for its sailors.

²⁹(line 245) Chorus of Frogs: it's not clear whether this chorus remains off stage or not.

³⁰(line 254) feast of Jars: a reference to an annual Athenian festival (the Anthesteria) held early in the year in the precinct of Dionysus "in the marsh" (Limnai). The festival involved a lot of drinking.

as people in their drunken glee
thronged into our sanctuary.

Brekekekex koax koax.

DIOYSUS [still rowing]

I'm starting to get a pain in the ass
from all your koax koax.

CHORUS OF FROGS

Brekekekex koax koax.

DIONYSUS

Not that you give a damn about it.

CHORUS OF FROGS

Brekekekex koax koax.

DIONYSUS

Piss off—and take that koax koax with you.

Nothing but koax koax.

CHORUS OF FROGS

Yes, and for us that's fine
you meddling fool—so asinine.
Music-loving Muses love us too
as does goat-footed Pan
playing music on melodious pipes.
Apollo as he strums his lyre
loves us and what we sing,
for in the marshy waters here
we grow the reeds that bridge his string.
Brekekekex koax koax.

DIONYSUS [still rowing]

Well, I'm getting blisters and a sweaty bum.

Next time I bend down it's going to speak . . .

[As Dionysus leans forward for the next stroke he lifts his rear end up in the air
to fart at the Frog Chorus, but their next line drowns out the sound]

CHORUS OF FROGS

Brekekekex koax koax.

DIONYSUS

Stop it, you music-loving tribe!

CHORUS OF FROGS

No, no. We'll sing on all the more—
if we've ever hopped on shore
on sunny days through weeds and rushes
rejoicing in our lovely songs
as we dive and dive once more,
or as from Zeus' rain we flee
to sing our varied harmonies
at the bottom of the marsh,
our bubble-splashing melodies.

DIONYSUS

Brekekekex koax koax—
from you I'm catching your disease!

CHORUS OF FROGS

If that's the case, you'll never please.
That's hard on us.

DIONYSUS

But worse for me—
I may blow up here as I row.

CHORUS OF FROGS

Brekekekex koax koax

DIONYSUS

Go on. Keep croaking. I don't care.

CHORUS OF FROGS

We'll croak on 'til our throats wear out.
We'll croak all day.

DIONYSUS

Brekekekex koax koax
You never beat me in this play!

CHORUS OF FROGS

And you've no chance to win your way,
not matched with us.

DIONYSUS

And you've no hope outdoing me.
No, no. If I must I'll yell all day,

koaxing you to get my way—

Brekekekex koax koax

[Dionysus listens for a response from the Chorus, but there is none]

You see. Sooner or later I was going to win—
and make you stop your harsh koaxing din.

CHARON

Stop it. Ship that oar alongside here.

Get out . . . and pay your fare.

DIONYSUS

Two obols? Here.

[Dionysus pays Charon, who rows his way off stage. Dionysus starts looking around for Xanthias]

Xanthias! Hey, Xanthias!

XANTHIAS [offstage]

Over here!

DIONYSUS [still calling]

Come here!

[Xanthias appears with the baggage but without the donkey]

XANTHIAS

Greetings, master.

DIONYSUS

All right, what have we got?

XANTHIAS

Nothing but filthy muck—mud and darkness.

DIONYSUS

Did you see the men who beat their fathers—
or perjurers—the ones he mentioned?

XANTHIAS

You mean you don't?

DIONYSUS [looking at the audience] By Poseidon, yes I do!

Now I see them. So what do we do next?

XANTHIAS

We'd better get away from here.

Hercules mentioned to us it's the place
where wild beast prowls.

DIONYSUS

To Hell with him!

He was talking big to make me scared.

He saw I was a fighter, and he's jealous.

No one's more full of it than Hercules.

But I'm keen now for some adventure,
some exploit worthy of this expedition.

XANTHIAS

Of course you are. What's that? I hear a noise.

DIONYSUS

What? Where is it?

XANTHIAS

Behind us.

DIONYSUS [pushing Xanthias]

Get behind me.

XANTHIAS

No, it's up ahead.

DIONYSUS [pushing Xanthias again]

You get in front.

XANTHIAS

My god!

Now I see it. Ooooh, a monstrous beast!

DIONYSUS [cowering behind Xanthias]

What's it like?

XANTHIAS

It's weird—all sorts of shapes. Now it's an ox—no, no, a jackass—
now it's a woman—what a gorgeous babe!

DIONYSUS

Where is she?

I'll go say hello.

XANTHIAS

Hold on a minute!

She's not a woman any more. Now she's a bitch!

DIONYSUS [terrified]

It's Empusa!!³¹

XANTHIAS

Her whole face is on fire!

DIONYSUS

Her legs—does she have one made of bronze?

XANTHIAS

Yes!

By Poseidon, yes! The other's made of cow shit.

And that's no lie.

DIONYSUS

Where can I run?

XANTHIAS [imitating Dionysus]

Where can I run?

DIONYSUS [appealing the audience]

O holy man, save me—so we can drink together.³²

XANTHIAS

We're screwed! Oh, lord Hercules!

DIONYSUS

Don't call me that!

I'm begging you, my man—don't say that name!

XANTHIAS

Then Dionysus . . .

DIONYSUS

That's worse than Hercules.

XANTHIAS [to the imaginary monster]

Beat it! Shoo! Come on, master.

DIONYSUS

What's going on?

XANTHIAS

Cheer up—we've come through everything just fine.

Now like Hegelochus we can recite

³¹(line 332) Empousa: a celebrated Athenian ghost-monster who could change her shape.

³²(line 336) so we can drink together: Dionysus here appeals to the audience, specifically to the Priest of Dionysus who traditionally sat in the front row.

“After the storm I see the seals are calm.”³³

Empousa’s left.

DIONYSUS

You swear?

XANTHIAS

Cross my heart.

DIONYSUS

Swear again.

XANTHIAS

Yes, by Zeus.

DIONYSUS

Swear it one more time.

XANTHIAS

By Zeus, I swear.

DIONYSUS

That was a close shave—
looking at her almost made me puke.

XANTHIAS

You were so terrified you stained your pants.

DIONYSUS [in a tragic tone]

Woe, woe, why do such ills afflict me so?

Which god shall I accuse of thus destroying me?

XANTHIAS

How ’bout Zeus’ airy pied-a-terre or the foot of time?

[The sound of music being played on the pipes comes from inside the house]

XANTHIAS

Listen!

DIONYSUS

What is it?

XANTHIAS

You don’t hear that?

DIONYSUS

What?

³³(line 343) Hegelochos . . . seals are calm: Hegelochos was an actor in Euripides’ plays who garbled a word and made the lines ridiculous (like changing “sea” to “seal”).

XANTHIAS

A tune played on the flute.

DIONYSUS [continuing his tragic rant]

Ah yes, and now
the scent of torches just came wafting o'er me,
torches of mystery . . .

XANTHIAS [interrupting]

Shhhh. Let's squat down here—
keep quiet and pay attention.

[The Chorus of Initiates is heard offstage]

CHORUS OF INITIATES

Iacchus, O Iacchus,

Iacchus, O Iacchus.

XANTHUS

Master, this is it—the initiates
doing their chant, the ones he talked about—
Diagoras' hymn to Iacchus.³⁴

DIONYSUS

It sounds like that to me. We'd best shut up,
so we find out for sure.

CHORUS OF INITIATES

Iacchus, living here
in your highly honoured shrines—
Iacchus, O Iacchus
in this meadow come to dance
with partners in your mystery.
Shake the garland round your head,
the fruit-filled myrtle, come and tread
our playful rite's unbridled steps
where the Graces join in, too—
our pure and sacred dance and song,
the chant of your initiate throng.

XANTHIAS

³⁴(line 361) Iacchos was a minor divine presence associated with Dionysian celebrations. Diagoras may refer to a notorious Athenian atheist.

O holy noble daughter of Demeter,³⁵
 I just smelt roast pork—how sweet a smell that is.

DIONYSUS

If you keep quiet, you may just get a slice.
 [Enter the Chorus of Initiates carrying torches]

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Awake the blazing torches in your hands!

CHORUS OF INITIATES

O Iacchus, Iacchus—with us you stand
 light-bearing star in our nocturnal rite.

For now the meadow blazes light,
 old men's knees will move again
 as they dance off their ancient pain,
 the lengthy cycle of their aged plight
 in this your ceremonial night..

As your radiant torches blaze
 bring to this flowery marshy place,
 the forward march of all the young
 that constitute your choral throng,
 O sacred one.

CHORUS LEADER

Let all those stand in silence here
 and keep their distance from our dance—
 all those who have no sure command
 of ritual words and purposes,
 who have not purified their hearts,
 the ones who've never seen or danced
 the noble Muses' ritual songs,
 or played their part in Bacchic rites
 of bull-devouring Cratinus,³⁶
 or like words fit for foolish clowns
 when such words are not suitable—
 or anyone who just can't turn away

³⁵(line 375) daughter of Demeter: a reference to Persephone, wife of Pluto, king of Hades.

³⁶(line 399) Cratinus: a well-known and successful comic poet before Aristophanes.

from fights and hateful party strife,
 who cannot be a genial citizen,
 easygoing with his countrymen,
 but lights and fans the flames of war,
 ambitious to advance himself,
 whoever guides our state through storms
 and is corrupted by some bribe,
 betrays our watch posts and our ships
 or from Aegina smuggles goods,
 like that wretch Thorycion,
 our customs agent who shipped off
 illicit stuff to Epidaurus³⁷ —
 oar pads and cloth for sails and pitch,
 or who persuades some other man
 to send supplies to hostile ships,
 or anyone opposing Hecate
 in dithyrambic choruses,
 or any politician setting out
 to pare back pay our poets get
 because they mock him in these rites,
 ancient rites of Dionysus.

I say to all such people, and I say again—
 and for a third time I state once more—
 stand back from our choral mysteries.
 But those now here begin the songs,
 the dances lasting all night long,
 as fits our ceremonial throng.

CHORUS OF INITIATES

Now each one boldly marches on
 into the meadow's flowery lap,
 and each one stamps the ground—
 we joke, make fun, we mock,
 our bellies crammed with breakfast food.

³⁷(line 414) Aegina . . . Thoracion . . . Epidaurus: Aegina was an island centre for illegal trade during the war. Thoracion was (one assumes) well known as a corrupt official. Epidaurus was a naval centre close to Athens.

CHORUS LEADER

Move on, now—but see you praise
the saving goddess in a noble way,
as you sing out our melodies.
She says she acts to save our land
from season unto season,
against the wishes of Thorycion.

Come now, cry aloud another chant
for goddess Demeter, our harvest queen,
a celebration made in sacred song.

CHORUS OF INITIATES

O Demeter, queen of our sacred rites, stand with us here
preserve us now, your chorus. Let me play in safety,
let me dance all day, tell lots of really funny jokes,
and offer many serious reflections, too.
Then, as befits your ceremonial rites, let me,
with my ridicule and fun, take off first prize,
let me wear the wreath, garland of victory.

CHORUS LEADER

Come now, with your singing summon here
that lovely god, our partner in this dance.

CHORUS

Widely honoured Iacchus,
creator of the sweetest joyful song,
come here with us to Demeter,
show us how you move along
this lengthy way with so much ease.
Iacchus, lover of the dance,
escort me forward as I prance.
In your playful penny-pinching mood
you've torn my tiny dancing shoes,
you've ripped my dress to shreds—
Iacchus, you've found a way
for all of us to dance and play
what more, we never have to pay.

O Iacchus, lover of the dance
 escort me forward as I prance.
 What's more, as I just glanced aside
 around me here, I saw a girl,
 a lovely partner in the dance—
 her scanty dress was ripped in two,
 I saw a nipple peeking through.
 Iacchus, lover of the dance,
 escort me forward as I prance.

DIONYSUS

Hey, I'm always keen to enjoy myself.
 I'd like to dance with her.

XANTHIAS

Me, too.

CHORUS OF INITIATES

Would you like to join us now in making fun
 of Archedemos, who at seven years old
 was toothless, no genuine Athenian teeth.³⁸

And now he plays big shot in politics
 among the dead above—the best there is
 at double dealing and corruption.

And Cleisthenes, I hear, still picks his ass
 and rips his cheeks apart among the tombstones,
 blubbering over his dead lover Sabinos.

And Callias, they say, son of the man
 who used to bugger his own horses,
 has fights at sea, naval entanglements,
 his arse hole covered by a lion skin. '.

DIONYSUS [approaching the Leader of the Chorus]

Could you please inform the two of us
 where Pluto lives when he's at home down here?
 We're strangers in these parts. We've just arrived.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

³⁸(line 479) Archedemos . . . teeth: a complex joke about a prominent Athenian politician, alleging that he is not a genuine citizen (something that was determined at seven years of age).

No need to travel very far from here—
so don't ask me again. You should know
you're there—right at this very door.

DIONYSUS [to Xanthias]

All right, lad, pick up the bags again.

XANTHIAS [grumbling as he picks up the luggage]

What's this all mean—the same old storyline,
with Corinth, son of Zeus . . . all this baggage.³⁹

CHORUS OF INITIATES

Keep up the dance
along the round path sacred to our goddess,
to the flower-bearing grove—let's play
with those who join this festival,
the one our goddess so adores.

I'll join the women and the girls
who dance to the goddess all night long,
the ones who bear the sacred light.

Let's move on into flowery meadows, [450]
the rose-filled fields, and worship there
the way we always do, with song and dance,
where blessed Fates assemble, too.

[The Chorus exits]

DIONYSUS

Let's see—what style do I use at this point
to knock upon the door? Which one to use?
What's the local style of knocking here?

XANTHIAS

Stop wasting time. Try chewing on the door—
act like Hercules. You've got his height and might.

DIONYSUS [knocking]

You in there! Doorkeeper!

AEACUS [from inside]

Who is it?

³⁹(line 498) Corinth, son of Zeus: an expression meaning (in effect) "always the same old stuff." People from Corinth were (by reputation) never tired of boasting about the divine origin of the founder of their city.

DIONYSUS

It's great Hercules!

[Aeacus bursts through the door and grabs Dionysus very roughly]

AEACUS

O you abominable, you shameless reckless wretch—

villain, villain, damned smiling villain—

the man who made off with Cerberus my dog!

You grabbed him by the throat and throttled him,

then took off on the run, while I stood guard.

Now you're caught—black-hearted Stygian rocks,

and blood-dripping peaks of Acheron

will hold you down. Roaming hounds of Cocytus

will gnaw your guts to bits—Echnida, too,

and she's a hundred heads. The Tartesian eel

will chew your lungs, your kidneys bleed

from entrails Tithrasian Gorgons rip apart.

I'll set out hot foot in their direction.

[Aeacus lets go of Dionysus, who drops to the ground in terror. Exit Aeacus back into the house. Dionysus lifts his tunic and inspects his underpants]

XANTHIAS

What have you done?

DIONYSUS

I've made an offering. Call the god.

XANTHIAS

You're being ridiculous. Get up. Move it,

before some stranger spots you.

DIONYSUS

I'm going to faint.

Bring the sponge here—set it on my heart.

[Xanthias rummages through the bags and finds a large sponge]

XANTHIAS

I've found the sponge! Here—you can do it.

[Dionysus takes the sponge and begins to clean up his crotch with it]

XANTHIAS

Where are you putting that sponge? O golden gods,

you keep your heart in there?

DIONYSUS

It was scared—

it ran off to my lower bowel.

XANTHIAS

Of all gods and men

no one's more cowardly than you.

DIONYSUS

Me?

How can I be when I asked you for the sponge?

Another man would not have asked, as I did.

XANTHIAS

What would he have done?

DIONYSUS

Well, a coward

would have lain there and stunk up the place.

But I stood up—what's more, I wiped myself.

XANTHIAS

By Poseidon, a valiant act.

DIONYSUS

By Zeus. I think it was.

Weren't you scared shitless by his angry words,

by all those threats?

XANTHIAS

By Zeus, I never thought of them.

DIONYSUS

All right then, since you're so brave, so valiant,

you can be me. Take this club and lion skin.

If you're got the guts, I'll trade places with you.

I'll carry all the baggage.

XANTHIAS

All right.

I've got no choice. Quick, give me that.

[Xanthias takes the club and puts on the lion skin]

XANTHIAS [in the grand style]

Now gaze upon the Xanthian Hercules—
see if I turn coward and act like you.

DIONYSUS

No, by god, you'll well deserve a whipping.
Come on, then, I'll pick up the bags.

[Dionysus starts to pick up a few of the smaller pieces. A Servant enters through the door]

SERVANT

Have you come back, my dearest Hercules?
Come on in. Once the goddess heard you'd come
she had us baking bread loaves right away,
boiling up pea soup—two or three cauldrons full,
roasting an entire ox, baking honey cakes
and cookies. So do come in.

XANTHIAS

That's really nice,
but I'm afraid . . .

SERVANT

I won't let you get away—
by Apollo, no. She's stewing bird meat,
toasting fresh desserts, mixing sweetest wines.
Please come in.

XANTHIAS

I appreciate it, but . . .

SERVANT

You can't be serious. I won't let you leave.
There's a lovely flute girl in there, just for you—
two or three dancing girls, as well.

XANTHIAS

What's that?

Did you say dancing girls?

SERVANT

Young and in full bloom—
all freshly plucked. So come on in. Right now
the cook's all ready to produce the fish.

The table's being brought in.

XANTHIAS

You go on back.

First, tell those dancing girls inside I'm coming.

[to Dionysus]

You, slave, follow me. And bring the baggage.

DIONYSUS

Hey, hold on a minute. All this pretence,
you can't be taking it so seriously.

The fact I dressed you up as Hercules—
that was just fun. Don't play the fool with me.

Pick up these bags again and bring them in.

XANTHIAS

What? You're not intending to take back from me
what you gave in person?

DIONYSUS

You bet I am.

Take off that lion skin.

XANTHIAS

I want witnesses—

I entrust my law suit to the gods.

DIONYSUS

What gods?

To think that you, a slave and mortal, too,
could play Hercules, Alcmena's son—
so arrogant and stupid.

XANTHIAS

All right, all right.

Have it your way, then. Take the costume.

Perhaps some day the gods'll make you need me.

[Xanthias hands the club and lion skin to Dionysus]

CHORUS

There's a man with brains,
with keen intelligence—
someone who's sailed about a bit

and always rolls himself around
 to the right side of the ship.
 He's not one to stand transfixed
 like some image made in paint
 or frozen solid like a stone.
 To move away from where one stands
 to places much more comfortable—
 that indicates a clever man,
 a born Theramenes.⁴⁰

DIONYSUS

Now that would be extremely funny
 to see Xanthias, my slave, lying at ease
 enjoying bed linen from Milesia,
 as he smooches with some dancing girl.
 He asks me for a pot to piss in—
 but I, looking at him straight, grab him hard
 right by his cucumber.

[Dionysus laughs at the thought, but then reconsiders]

But then he'd see me
 and, being a rascal, sock me on the jaw.
 He'd knock my front teeth out for sure.

[Pandokeutria, a landlady, enters through the door, looks at Dionysus, and calls back
 through the doorway]

PANDOEUTRIA

Plathane, Plathane, come out here.
 That fellow's back who came to our hotel
 and ate up all our bread, all sixteen loaves.

[Enter Plathane, another landlady]

PLATHANE

My god, that's the one.

XANTHIAS

Oh, oh. Someone's in trouble.

PANDODEUTRIA

And twenty boiled hams afterwards as well—

⁴⁰(line 600) Theramenes: An Athenian politician famous for his political survival skills.

at half an obol each.

XANTHIAS

Now he's in for it.

PANDOEUTRIA

And lots of garlic, too.

DIONYSUS

My good women, you jest.

You don't know what you're saying.

PANDOEUTRIA

O yes, we do.

You thought I wouldn't know you any more

because you've got those little booties on.

What else was there? I haven't said a word
about the pickled fish.

PLATHANE

You left out

all the fresh cheese, by god, the scoundrel ate.

He gobbled up the baskets, too.

PANDOEUTRIA

To top it all,

when I tallied up his bill, he just looked at me

and yelled, a massive roar right in my face.

XANTHIAS

That's just like him. He does that everywhere.

PANDOEUTRIA

Then he pulled out his sword—he looked insane.

PLATHANE

My god, you poor dear!

PANDOEUTRIA

We were both terrified.

Somehow we ran up fast onto the shelf,

and he took off, grabbing up the mats.

XANTHIAS

Well, that's exactly how he operates.

PANDOEUTRIA

We've got to deal with him somehow. I know—
go call my patron Cleon.⁴¹

PLATHANE

If you meet him,
get Hyperbolos, as well. We'll fix this fellow.

PANDOKeutria

You wretched greedy swine—I'd be so happy
to smash your molars with a rock, those teeth
which gobbled down my stuff.

DIONYSUS

That's really nice—
and I'd like to dump you in a deep ravine.

PLATHANE

I could take a sickle and slice that gullet
which wolfed down all my tripe. Instead of that,
I'll get Cleon to draw up a charge,
so we can fish food out of him right here.

[Exit Plathane and Pandokeutria]

DIONYSUS

Now, may I die the nastiest of deaths,
my little Xanthias, if I'm not fond of you . . .

XANTHIAS

I know what you're thinking. Just stop right there.
Don't say a word. I'm Hercules again—
but I won't do it.

DIONYSUS

Dear little Xanthias,
don't say such things.

XANTHIAS

How could I be Hercules—
remember I'm a slave and mortal, too.

DIONYSUS

I know you're angry—you've a right to be.
But even if you hit me, I won't criticize.

⁴¹(line 633) Cleon . . . Hyperbolos: Athenian politicians with a special interest in leading the common people.

And if in future I take anything from you,
may I be chopped down root and branch.
Let me die in the worst way possible—
me, my wife, and kids—and Archedemus, too—
the man with clammy eyes.

XANTHIAS

On those conditions I accept your oath.
[Xanthias and Dionysus exchange the lion skin and club once again]

CHORUS:

Since you've taken up the skin,
the one you had before,
your task is now to start again,
to reinvigorate yourself—
once more put on that dreadful stare,
recall the god you imitate.
If you get caught in foolish talk
or squeak out squeals of fear,
you'll be compelled a second time
to carry all the bags.

XANTHIAS

Men, the advice you give me is not bad.
I was thinking the same thing myself.
What's more, if all this turns out a success,
he'll try to take this back from me again.
I know that for a fact. But I'll make myself
a manly man—with a gaze like mustard.
I need to do that—for just as I thought
I hear the sound of scraping by the door.
[Enter Aeacus with servants]

AEACUS

Tie up this dog thief. Get a move on, too—
so we can punish him. Be quick about it.

DIONYSUS

Oh, oh. Someone's in trouble now.

XANTHIAS

What the hell!

You stay away from me!

AEACUS

O ho, you're fighting back!

[calling inside the house]

Ditylas, Sceblias, Pandocus—outside!—

come here and punch this fellow out.

[Servants appear and begin to fight Xanthias]

DIONYSUS

It's shameful, a complete disgrace—

the way he hits them back—and more than that—
he steals.

AEACUS

That's shocking.

DIONYSUS

It's even worse.

It's scandalous and dreadful.

XANTHIAS

Now, by god,

I'm prepared to die if I was ever here

before today, or stole a thing from you

that's worth a hair. What's more, I'll make an offer,

like a true gentleman—take this slave of mine

and torture him. If you find out from him

I've done wrong, then take me out and kill me.

AEACUS

How should I torture him?

XANTHIAS

All the ways there are.

Tie him to a ladder, hang him up,

whip him with nails, twist him on the rack,

strip off skin, fill his nose with vinegar,

load bricks on him—do everything you can.

Just don't flog him with fresh onions or a leek.

AEACUS

That offer's fair. So if I beat the slave
and cripple him, I'll pay for damages.

XANTHIAS

Not to me. Just take him off for torture.

AEACUS

No. I'll torture him right here, so he'll confess
before your very eyes.

[To Dionysus]

Put down that load.

And hurry up. Don't give me any lies.

DIONYSUS

I here proclaim no one should torture me.
I'm an immortal god. If you do so,
you'll have yourself to blame.

AEACUS

What are you saying?

DIONYSUS

I'm saying I'm Dionysus, an immortal,
a son of Zeus—this man here's a slave.

AEACUS

You hear that?

XANTHIAS

I hear what he claims to be—
all the more good reason for flogging him.
If he's a god, he won't feel a thing.

DIONYSUS

You're right.

And since you also claim that you're a god,
why don't you take as many blows as me?

XANTHIAS

Fair enough. Then whichever of the two
you see bursting into tears or flinching
as he's whipped—you'll know he's not the god.

AEACUS

You're a fine gentleman—that's obvious. [640] You stand for justice. All right—the

two of you,
take off your clothes.

[Xanthias and Dionysus remove their clothes and get down on all fours in preparation for the whipping. Aeacus produces a massive whip]

XANTHIAS

How will you judge this?
How will you keep it fair?

AEACUS

That's easy.
I'll alternate the blows.

XANTHIAS

A fine suggestion.
AEACUS [striking Xanthias]

There!

XANTHIAS

Watch closely if I flinch or not.

AEACUS

But I just hit you.

XANTHIAS

By god, I didn't feel a thing.

AEACUS

All right. Now I'll lay into this one here.

[Aeacus strikes Dionysus]

DIONYSUS

When are you going to start my whipping?

AEACUS

I just did.

DIONYSUS

Why didn't I sneeze?

AEACUS

I haven't a clue.

Back to this one again.

XANTHIAS

Get on with it!

[Aeacus strikes Xanthias much harder than the first time]

XANTHIAS [feeling the pain]

Ahhhh!!

AEACUS

What's that sound about? Did that blow hurt?

XANTHIAS

No, by god. I was just remembering
the feast for Hercules at Diomeia.

AEACUS

The man's a saint. All right, now this one's turn.

[Aeacus strikes Dionysus, again much harder than before]

DIONYSUS

Oooowww! Ahhh!!

AEACUS

What was that cry?

DIONYSUS

I see men on horseback.

AEACUS

Why are your eyes full of tears?

DIONYSUS

I smell onions.

AEACUS

You didn't feel a thing?

DIONYSUS

No, nothing—

nothing that bothered me.

AEACUS

All right, then,

back to this one here.

[Aeacus hits Xanthias really hard]

XANTHIAS

Aiiiiieee!!

AEACUS

What was that?

XANTHIAS [pretending he has a thorn in his hand]

A little prickle. Pull it out.

AEACUS

What's going on?

Now it's this one's turn.

[Aeacus strikes Dionysus very hard]

DIONYSUS

Aaaiiii!! O Apollo,

who presides at Delphi and at Delos . . .

XANTHIAS

You hear that—the man's in pain.

DIONYSUS

No, I'm not.

I was remembering some poetry,

a verse from Hipponax.

XANTHIAS

You're getting nowhere.

Hit him on the ribs.

AEACUS

A good idea, by god.

Stick out that pot of yours.

[Aeacus hits Dionysus savagely on the ribs and stomach]

DIONYSUS

Aaaiiii! O Poseidon . . .

XANTHIAS

Someone's feeling pain.

DIONYSUS [continuing to recite poetry]

. . . you who command

Aegean headlands and the green-grey sea . . .

AEACUS

Holy Demeter, I can't sort this out.

Which one's the god? You'd best come inside.

My master Pluto will know who you are,

so will Persephone, his wife—they're gods.

DIONYSUS

Now you talking. I'd have liked it better

if you'd thought of that before these whippings.

[Dionysus and Xanthias and Aeacus go into the house leaving the Chorus on stage]
CHORUS

You Muses, enter now our sacred dance.
Enjoy our songs and gaze upon
the massive crowds of people here,
thousands of clever thinkers in their seats,
in love with honour more than Cleophon,
on whose snarling lips a Thracian swallow sits,
making an awful din—on that foreign leaf
she squawks her nightingale's lament,
for he'll soon be sentenced, sent to die
although the jury's votes create a tie.⁴²

CHORUS LEADER

It's just and proper in this city
our sacred chorus give advice and teach.
So first it seems appropriate to us
to free the citizens from inequalities—
to ease their fears. So if a man slips up
thanks to the wrestling tricks of Phrynicus,⁴³
I say we should allow the ones who fall
to state their case, reform their evil ways.
Besides that's no dishonour to our city.
It would bring benefits. It's scandalous
that those who fought a battle once at sea
should instantly become Plataeans,
masters instead of slaves.⁴⁴ I don't deny
this worked out well—in fact, I praise it.
It's the only well-intentioned thing you did.
But as well as this it stands to reason
we should forget the single blow of fortune
of those who fought so much at sea beside you,

⁴²(line 762) Cleophon . . . votes are equal: Cleophon was an Athenian politician in favour of the war. The gibe here suggests he's not a true Athenian. Aristophanes' prediction that Cleophon would soon be sentenced to death came true a year later.

⁴³(line 768) Phrynicus: Athenian politician who led the revolution in 411 BC.

⁴⁴(line 775) Plataeans . . . masters instead of slaves: after the naval battle of Arginusae, the Athenians freed the slaves who had fought and gave them rights of citizenship equivalent to the rights of the Plataeans, important allies of Athens.

just like their fathers, your ethnic kinsmen—
that's what they keep requesting. But you here,
whom nature made the wisest of all people,
should drop your anger and make everyone
who fights alongside us at sea a kinsman,
a citizen. For if we are too proud,
too puffed up with self-worth, especially now,
when we're encircled by the sea's embrace,
in future time we'll look like total fools.
If I've a keen sense of the life and style
of someone who will someday cry in woe,
this tiny irritating ape Cleigenes,
the most corrupt of all our laundry types,
those noble men who cut the soap with ash,
dilute the mix, and use Cimolian earth,
won't be with us long. He knows it, too—
that's why he's not a man promoting peace.
He knows that someday in a drunken fit
he may well lose his staff of office,
and, more than that, be stripped of all his clothes.⁴⁵
This city, it often seems to me
treats our best and worthiest citizens
the way it does our old silver coins,
our new gold ones, as well.⁴⁶ This money
was never counterfeit—no, these coins
appeared to be the finest coins of all,
the only ones which bore the proper stamp.
Everywhere among barbarians and Greeks
they stood the test. But these we do not use.
Instead we have our debased coins of bronze,
poorly struck some days ago or yesterday.
That's how we treat our finest citizens,

⁴⁵(line 800) Cleigenes . . . clothes: Aristophanes here attacks the keeper of a public bath and laundry for cheating his customers, predicting that soon he will lose his political office.

⁴⁶(line 804) our new gold ones, as well: a famous comparison between the political leaders and the debased coinage (one of the effects of the war).

the nobly born, our righteous men,
our best and brightest, the ones well trained
in music and the dance at the palaestra.⁴⁷
Instead we use foreign bronze for everything—
useless men from useless fathers, red heads,⁴⁸
men who've come here very recently—
the sort the city at its most negligent
would never use in earlier days,
not even as a scapegoat.⁴⁹ But now,
you silly fools, it's time to change your ways.
Use worthy people once again. You'll see—
if you're successful, then you'll merit praise.
And if you fail, well, you'll be a fine match
for the tree you're hanging from. At any rate,
should you slip up, that's what the wise will say.
[Enter Xanthias with a servant from the house]

SERVANT

By Zeus who saves us, that master of yours
is a very cultured gentleman.

XANTHIAS

Of course, he is.

The only things he knows are how to drink
and dip his dink.

SERVANT

But not to beat you on the spot
when they proved that you're the slave—and one
who claimed you were the master.

XANTHIAS

If he had,
he'd have had regrets—and that's a fact.

SERVANT

What you just did is worthy of a slave,

⁴⁷(line 815) palaestra: the traditional school in Athens, emphasizing physical fitness and the arts.

⁴⁸(line 817) red heads: a reference to foreigners or slaves, not true Athenians.

⁴⁹(line 821) scapegoat: once a year in Athens two condemned criminals were beaten out of the city and executed in a purification ritual to cleanse the city of its collective guilt.

something I love to do.

XANTHIAS

Forgive my asking,
but what is it you love to do?

SERVANT

It's more than love—
almost ecstasy—when I can curse my master
out of ear shot.

XANTHIAS

What about really bitching,
whenever you've received a total thrashing
and run outside?

SERVANT

Yes, I do like that, too.

XANTHIAS

What about sticking your nose in everything?

SERVANT

By god, there's nothing finer—that's for sure.

XANTHIAS

By Zeus, divine protector of our race,
what about listening to our masters' chat
when they spread gossip . . .

SERVANT

I'm even crazier for that!

XANTHIAS

. . . then passing on the gossip all around,
to everyone outside the house?

SERVANT

You mean me?

Every time I do that, I piss myself.

XANTHIAS

By Phoebus Apollo, give me your hand,
let me kiss you, and you kiss me.

[Notices a noise from inside the house]

Tell me,

by Zeus, patron of all flogged slaves like us,
what's going on inside the house, that noise,
all that yelling and abuse?

SERVANT

Oh that—
that's Euripides and Aeschylus.

XANTHIAS

Ah ha!

SERVANT

Big, big trouble's in the works down here
among the dead—a massive civil war.

XANTHIAS

What about?

SERVANT

There's a custom in these parts
that in the arts—the great and worthy ones—
the best man in his special area
gets all his meals for free at City Hall
in the chair of honour next to Pluto . . .

XANTHIAS

I get it.

SERVANT

. . . until someone else arrives
who has more skill than he does. At that point,
he has to yield his place.

XANTHIAS

But why would this
get Aeschylus upset?

SERVANT

Well, he had his chair,
the one for tragedy, as the finest
in that form of art.

XANTHIAS

Who's got it now?

SERVANT

When Euripides came down to Hades
he started showing off his rhetoric
to thieves, bag snatchers, parricides,
to all the ones who steal—and here in Hades
that’s most of us. Well, they listened to him,
heard his counter-arguments, his twists and turns,
and went nuts for him. So they then proposed
he was the wisest of all men. With that,
Euripides got so worked up he claimed
that chair where Aeschylus sits down.

XANTHIAS

Didn’t people throw stuff at him?

SERVANT

My god, no.

Quite the opposite. They all cried out
to have a trial set up which could find out
which of the two men was the wiser poet.

XANTHIAS

The crowd of scoundrels?

SERVANT

Yes, that bunch—
they made a din, by god—right up to heaven.

XANTHIAS

Didn’t Aeschylus get some support?

SLAVE

It’s like this audience—too few good men.

XANTHIAS

So what’s Pluto planning to set up?

SLAVE

A contest— there’s going to be a trial right here,
a test of skill.

XANTHIAS

What about Sophocles—
how come he didn’t claim the poet’s chair?

SLAVE

My god, he wouldn't. When he first arrived
he kissed Aeschylus, shook him by the hand,
and kept his distance from the chair of honour.
And now, according to Cleidemides,
he means to sit by as a substitute.
If Aeschylus wins out, he'll keep his place.
If not, in this contest of poetic skill
he says he'll fight on to the bitter end
against Euripides.

XANTHIAS

So this affair is on.

SLAVE

Yes, in a minute. In this very spot
some fairly weird things will be going on—
they're testing poetry with balance scales!

XANTHIAS

What?! They'll weigh tragedy in milligrams?

SERVANT

And they're bringing out some measuring sticks,
rulers for words, framed rectangles . . .

XANTHIAS

Will they be constructing bricks?

SERVANT

. . . bevels, too,
and wedges—all because Euripides
says he'll test their tragedies, every word.

XANTHIAS

Well, my guess is that Aeschylus
isn't liking this at all.

SLAVE

He just glared,
lowering his head as if he were a bull.

XANTHIAS

Who's going to judge this trial?

SLAVE

That's difficult.

Wise men are hard to find—in short supply.

And Aeschylus didn't really hit it off
with the Athenians . . .

XANTHIAS

Perhaps because
he thought that most of them were criminals.

SERVANT

. . . and he considered other people
worthless as judges of true poetry.

So at last they turned toward your master,
since he's got some knowledge of that art.

But let's go in. There's always trouble for us,
every time our master's in a rush.

[Xanthias and the Servant go into the house]

CHORUS [in a parody of the tragic style] Now the loud-roaring hero feels in full his
fury—

that valiant vehemence which surges up within,

when he confronts his rival in poetic craft
sharpening smooth-talking tusks, just like a boar.

His frenzied passion's going to make those eyeballs roll.

The battle's here at hand—helmet-glancing war,
horse-crested words, while splintered axles break apart,
as the subtle chisel-worker tries to push and parry
steed-prancing phrases from the man who builds our minds.

The bristling crest erect there on his shaggy neck,
his natural hair, a fearful scowl upon his brow,
and bellowing, he'll launch his language fixed with bolts,
like planking for a ship, he'll rip the words apart,
blasting with his giant's lungs. The other man,
the one who works his mouth, who tortures every word,
unrolling his smooth tongue and shaking envy's rein,
will dissect and parse those words, and, splitting hairs,
refute all that large labour of the former's lungs.

[Enter Aeschylus, Euripides, Dionysus, and Pluto, with attendants]

EURIPIDES

I'll not give up the chair—no more advice.
I say I'm better in poetic skill.

DIONYSUS

Why are you silent, Aeschylus? You hear
the claim he's made.

EURIPIDES

His high-and-mighty pose—
he does that at the start of every play,
some hocus-pocus for his tragedies.

DIONYSUS

My dear fellow, that's too much big talk.

EURIPIDES

I know the man—and for a long time now
I've studied him. He makes crude characters
with stubborn tongues. As for his own mouth,
it's unrestrained and uncontrolled, unlocked,
no proper discourse, bombastiloquent.

AESCHYLUS

Is that so, you garden-goddess child?
You say that of me, you gossip-monger,
a beggar's poet who picks and stitches rags?
You'll regret those words.

DIONYSUS

Hey, Aeschylus,
hold on. Don't fire up your heart so angrily,
with such ill will.

AESCHYLUS

No, no, I won't hold back,
'til I've exposed the man and clearly proved
this cripples' poet is a boastful fool . . .

DIONYSUS [to the attendants]

Hey, boys, bring out a sheep—a black one, too.
It looks as if a storm's about to break.⁵⁰

⁵⁰(line 962) about to break: Dionysus pretends he needs to offer a sacrifice to placate the god of storms.

AESCHYLUS:

. . . collecting all those monodies from Crete,
importing impure marriage into art . . . ⁵¹

DIONYSUS

Whoa, hold on there, much-honoured Aeschylus.
And you, my poor Euripides, back off
beyond this breaking storm—that would be wise,
in case his anger cracks your skull in two,
some heady phrase makes all your brain leak out
your hero Telephos. And you there, Aeschylus,
don't get so angry. Test him, but calmly—
and then be tested, too. It's just not right
for poets to engage in such abuse,
like two women selling bread. You bellow
as if you were a tree on fire.

EURIPIDES

I'm ready.
I don't mind biting or being bitten first,
whatever he prefers, about my diction,
or the songs and sinews of my tragic plays—
and by god, about Peleus, too,
my Meleager or my Aeolos,
or, even more about my Telephos. ⁵²

DIONYSUS

What do you want to do? Tell us, Aeschylus.

AESCHYLUS

I have no wish to enter battle here.
The war we fight is not on equal terms.

DIONYSUS

Why's that?

AESCHYLUS

My poetry did not die with me,
but his did once he died. So it's down here—

⁵¹(line 850) monodies . . . marriage into art: an attack on Euripides' innovations and on the alleged immorality in his plays. Monodies are long lyrical solos for main characters.

⁵²(line 981) Telephos: a beggar hero of one of Euripides' plays.

he'll have it with him when he wants to speak.
But nonetheless since it's what you want,
we must go through with this.

DIONYSUS [to the assembled group]

Come now,
someone bring an offering here, and fire as well,
so I can pray before this contest starts,
our battle of the brains, and judge the fight
with maximum aesthetic expertise.

[addressing the Chorus]

Now for the Muses you should sing a song.

CHORUS

O you nine sacred Muses
mighty Zeus' virgin daughters,
gazing down on subtle minds,
you see intelligence at work
in men who write our maxims.
When such as these go out to fight,
with counterarguments and tricks,
with fiercely studied wrestling moves,
with crooked throws, come to us here,
observe the power of these mouths,
their awesome skill in making words,
sawing phrases up like sawdust.

Now our great contest in this art stands ready, let the business start.

DIONYSUS

Before we have you two recite your lines,
you ought to offer up your prayers.

AESCHYLUS

O Demeter,
who nourishes my mind, make me worthy
to be there in your mysteries.

DIONYSUS [to Euripides]

It's your turn—
take some incense. Make an offering.

EURIPIDES

All right—

but I pray to different gods.

DIONYSUS

Personal ones?

Your very own? Freshly minted?

EURIPIDES

That's right.

DIONYSUS

Then pray away to those private gods of yours.

EURIPIDES

O air, my food, O pivot of my tongue,
O native wit, O nose that smells so fine,
whatever words I seize upon, let me
refute them—let the victory be mine.

CHORUS

Now we're filled with great desire
to hear from poets with such skill,
the pathway in this war of words
they'll walk along. Their tongues are wild,
no lack of boldness in their mood,
nor are their intellects asleep.

It looks as though we're going to see
one man say something quite urbane
and finely trimmed. The other one
will seize him and his arguments,
the roots and all, and then attack
and scatter words around the place
like wrestle-rolling on a mat.

DIONYSUS [To Aeschylus and Euripides]

You must speak at full speed. But see you talk
this way—with elegance, no metaphors,
and nothing someone else might say.

EURIPIDES

All right.

As for myself—the kind of poet I am—
I'll say that in my final words. For first,
I'll demonstrate this fellow's fraudulent,
a cheat. I'll show just how he took them in,
and fooled those idiots reared on Phrynichos.⁵³
First, he'd wrap a person up and sit him down
with his face hidden away—some character
like Niobe or his Achilles—
mere window dressing for the tragedy.
They didn't speak or even mutter.

DIONYSUS

That's right. They didn't.

EURIPIDES

And then his Chorus thumped their lyrics out—
strings of them, four in a row without a break,
the character just sat on stage in silence.

DIONYSUS

Well, I liked that they kept quiet. It pleased me.
It wasn't any worse than those today
who babble on and on.

EURIPIDES

You were a fool—
no doubt of that.

DIONYSUS

I think so, too. But why so?
Why did our friend here do that?

EURIPIDES

It was a trick
designed to keep spectators in their seats,
waiting for when Niobe might start to speak.
So the play continued on and on and on . . .

DIONYSUS

What a rascal! How he had me fooled!
[to Aeschylus] Why are you fretting there and fidgeting?

⁵³(line 1041) Phrynichos: the most important writer of tragedy before Aeschylus.

EURIPIDES

Because I've caught him out. When he'd played this trick
and half the play was done, someone would speak up,
a dozen ox-like words—with eyebrows, crests,
some fear-faced things full of the bogey man,
which no one in the audience understood.

AESCHYLUS

How miserable I feel . . .

DIONYSUS

Stay quiet please.

EURIPIDES

Nothing he said was ever clear.

DIONYSUS [to Aeschylus]

Don't grind your teeth.

EURIPIDES

He talked on about Scamanders, trenches,
shields with bronze enamelled griffon-eagles,
in horse-cliffed phrases hard to comprehend.

DIONYSUS

Yes, by god, one long night I got no sleep
from worrying what kind of bird was called
the tawny clear-voiced horse cock.

AESCHYLUS

You idiot!

It was a symbol painted on the ships.

DIONYSUS

I thought it was Eryxis, Philoxenos' son.

EURIPIDES

Did you have to work a rooster in
just for the tragedy?⁵⁴

AESCHYLUS

You god-forsaken wretch,
what sorts of plays did you create?

EURIPIDES

⁵⁴(line 1076) rooster . . . just for the tragedy: Aeschylus refers to a rooster in Agamemnon.

None like you—
 no horse-cock monsters or goat-stags, by god,
 the sort they paint on Persian tapestries.
 When I first took this art of plays from you,
 crammed with bombast to the gills, fustian stuff,
 at first I made it slim, reduced its weight,
 with vesicles, and walks, and laxatives.
 I gave a potion drawn from bookish chat,
 and took care nursing it with monodies.

DIONYSUS

And you mixed in Cephisophon, as well.⁵⁵

EURIPIDES

I wasn't fool enough to put in there
 whatever stuff I chanced upon, or add
 just anything I found. The character
 who came out first would right away explain
 on my behalf the background of the play.

DIONYSUS

Which was better than your own, by god.

EURIPIDES

After those opening words I never set
 anything superfluous in the play. No.
 For me the woman spoke—so did the slave,
 the master, maiden, the old woman, too.

AESCHYLUS

Well, shouldn't you be killed for daring this?

EURIPIDES

By Apollo, no. I was doing my work
 the democratic way.

DIONYSUS [to Euripides]

My dear chap,
 I'd forget that—from your point of view

⁵⁵(line 1086) Cephisophon: an Athenian who lived in Euripides' house and was rumoured have assisted Euripides with his plays and had an affair with his wife.

that's not the best line you could take.⁵⁶

EURIPIDES [indicating the audience]

I taught these people here to speak their minds . . .

AESCHYLUS

I say so too—and before doing that

I wish you'd split apart—right down the middle.

EURIPIDES

. . . introducing subtle rules for words,
for verses nicely trimmed. I taught them to think,
to see, to understand, to love new twists
and double dealing, to suspect the worst,
to be too smart in everything . . .

AESCHYLUS

I agree.

EURIPIDES

. . . and I brought in domestic issues, too—
useful matters of things we understand,
things people here could challenge me about.
They know their stuff—so they could test my art.
I didn't boast or lose my common sense.
Nor did I scare them all with characters
like Cycnus and Memnon, who walk around
with bells attached.⁵⁷ Look at our disciples,
his and mine—you know them all quite well.
Meganeitos and rough Phormisios
are his—great long-beard-lance-and-trumpet men,
flesh-rippers with the pine—whereas, for me
there's neat Theramenes and Cleitophon.⁵⁸

DIONYSUS

Theramenes? Now, he's a clever man,
expert in everything. When he meets trouble,

⁵⁶(line 1101) line you could take: Euripides' sympathies in his life appeared to be with the oligarchs, not with the democrats in Athens.

⁵⁷(line 1117) with bells attached: Cycnus and Memnon were characters in plays by Aeschylus. Warriors had bells attached to their shields or to their horses' harnesses.

⁵⁸(line 1122) Cleitophon: an Athenian member of the group around Socrates.

when it hits him in the face, he gets away,
 no problem, by changing who he is—
 if being a Chian doesn't work for him,
 he claims that he's Achaean.⁵⁹
 EURIPIDES [rushing his concluding speech]

I taught these people here
 to think about such things.
 I brought logic into art.
 I made them questioners.
 Now they see everything
 and understand it all.
 Their minds are more profound—
 they organize their homes
 much better than before.
 So now they ask "Where's this?"
 "How's it going?" "Who took that?"

DIONYSUS [imitating Euripides speaking style here]
 Yes, by god, that's what they do.
 Now each Athenian man
 goes home and starts to yell—
 to scream at his own servants,
 "Where's my pot? My sardine—
 who's bitten off its head?
 My bowl from bygone years,
 is it, too, dead and gone?
 And where's my garlic clove?
 I had it yesterday.
 Who's munching on my olives?"
 Before this, they'd just sit
 and gape there stupidly,
 like little mummy's boys
 and silly sweet-toothed fools.

⁵⁹(line 1128) Achaean: this joke is hard to render accurately. The Greek says (literally) "not a Chian [i.e., from Chios] but a Kian" or (more freely) "not a Chian with a ch but a Kian with a k," indicating the man's slippery character, able to change nationality by altering the spelling of the word. The change to "Achaean" may make the joke somewhat more compressed and workable, especially when the speech is spoken rather than read.

CHORUS [to Aeschylus]

You see this, radiant Achilles,⁶⁰

Come now, what can you say to him?

Don't let your anger take control

and carry you beyond the track.

He's charged you with some dreadful things.

But now, you noble gentleman,

respond to him, but not with wrath

Haul in your sails—except the tips—

then bit by bit bring in your ship.

Keep watching for an easy wind.

You just may get a gentle breeze.

DIONYSUS

Now you who were first among the Greeks

to raise the solemn towers of spoken words

adorning them with tragic gibberish,

be strong and spout forth eloquence.

AESCHYLUS

This trial enrages me—it pains my spleen

to have to answer such a man. But still,

to stop your claim that I'm incompetent

you answer this for me: Why should anyone

admire the man who is a poet?

EURIPIDES

For cleverness

and good advice—and since we help improve

the men who live within our cities.

AESCHYLUS

So if that's something you didn't do,

instead transforming fine and decent men

to make them scoundrels, what would you say

you'd then deserve by way of punishment?

DIONYSUS

⁶⁰(line 1155) Achilles: calling Aeschylus "Achilles" is a reminder both of his traditionally noble character and of his mood. Like Achilles he sits there silent and enraged.

Death—but don't ask him.

AESCHYLUS

Consider first

the nature of the men he got from me—
were they not nobly born and six feet tall?

There were no runaways, no layabouts,
no scoundrels like today, no ne'er-do-wells.

No. Those men breathed spears and javelins,
white-crested helmets, coronets, and greaves,
with passions wrapped in seven oxhide folds.

EURIPIDES

This is getting bad.

DIONYSUS

His helmet-making
wears me down.

EURIPIDES

What exactly did you do
to make these men so noble?

DIONYSUS

Aeschylus,
speak up. Forget your pride and stubbornness.

AESCHYLUS

I wrote a play brim full of war god Ares.

DIONYSUS

Which one was that?

AESCHYLUS

My Seven Against Thebes.

Every man who saw it fell in love with war.

DIONYSUS

But you did something bad there with the Thebans—
you made them more courageous in the war.

For that you should be spanked.

AESCHYLUS [to the audience]

You too,

you could have trained yourselves for war as well,

but you weren't so inclined. Then after that,
by putting on my Persians I instructed them
so they were always keen to beat their foes—
thus honouring our finest act.⁶¹

DIONYSUS

I was pleased
when you cried out in sorrowful lament,
“O child of Darius, who is dead,” and then,
the chorus clapped its hands and all yelled out
“Booo hooo.”

AESCHYLUS

Poets need to work on things like this.
Look back—they've been useful from the start,
the noble race of poets. There's Orpheus—
he taught us rituals and not to kill,
Musaeus showed us cures for sicknesses
and oracles as well, and Hesiod
taught farming, harvest times, and how to plough.
As for divine Homer, where's his renown,
his special fame, if not in what he taught,
those useful facts about courageous deeds,
and battle ranks and how men arm themselves.

DIONYSUS

Well, that may be, but Homer didn't teach
a thing to Pantacles, that clumsy oaf.
The other day while marching on parade,
he clipped his helmet on, and then he tried
to tie the crest on top.

AESCHYLUS

And brave men, too—
Homer gave us lots—with them the hero
Lamachos. I took Homeric warriors,
and let my brain write many noble deeds

⁶¹(line 1203) finest act: a reference to the defeat of the Persians at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC, for most Athenians the high point of their city's history.

about great lion-hearted fighting men
like Patroclus and Teucer—in this way
I urged our citizens to match themselves
with them, when they heard the trumpet sound.
But by god I never made a single whore
like Phaedra or that Sthenoboia.⁶²
No one's ever known me as a man
who writes about the way a woman loves.

EURIPIDES

No, by god. Whatever you possess,
there's nothing there of Aphrodite.

AESCHLYUS

Let her stay away! But she took her seat
when she sat down hard on you and yours.
She really squashed you flat.

DIONYSUS

She sure did, by god.
What you wrote about the wives of other men
you had to suffer with your own.

EURIPIDES

You wretched man,
How has my Stheneboia harmed our state?

AESCHYLUS

Because you helped persuade the noble wives
of well-born men to drink down hemlock,
ashamed of those like your Bellerophon.

EURIPIDES

My Phaedra story—did I make that up?

AESCHYLUS

No—it was there. But it's a poet's task
to conceal disgrace—not put it on parade
front and centre and instruct men in it.
Small children have a teacher helping them,
for young men there's the poets—we've got

⁶²(line 1231) Phaedra and Sthenoboia: an attack on heroines in plays by Euripides.

a solemn duty to say useful things.

EURIPIDES

When you spout on of Lycabettus
and subjects like magnificent Parnassus,
does this involve your teaching useful things?

We need to use the language people use.

AESCHYLUS

You pestering demon, don't you see
that noble thoughts and fine ideas perforce
produce a language of commensurate size?
Besides, it's fitting for the demi-gods
to speak in loftier terms—just as they wear
much finer robes than ours. But you besmirched
what I displayed with such nobility.

EURIPIDES

What did I do?

AESCHYLUS

First, you dressed your kings in rags,
to make them pitiful to all who watched.

EURIPIDES

If I did that, what damage did it do?

AESCHYLUS

It's your fault no rich man any more
is keen to pay out money for a ship.
Instead he wraps himself in rags and weeps
and whines about how poor he is.

DIONYSUS

Yes, by Demeter, that's true. But underneath
he wears a tunic of pure wool. And then,
if he deceives them with a speech like that,
he pops up in the market by the fish.⁶³

AESCHYLUS

And then you taught them how to babble on
with stupid gossip—so the wrestling schools

⁶³(line 1273) by the fish: a reference to the fact that fish was an expensive food in Athens at the time.

stood empty and the buttocks of our young,
who chattered all the time, were quite worn out.
You then convinced the Paralos' crew⁶⁴
to argue with their officers. In my day
they were ignorant of this—all they knew
was how to yell for food and cry “Yo ho.”

DIONYSUS

By Apollo, that's right—and how to fart
straight in the faces of the rowers there, or shit
on sailors down below, their mess mates.
On shore they'd rob someone. Now they talk back—
they never row—just sail out here and there.
AESCHYLUS [rapidly summing up his opening argument]
What crimes is he not guilty of?

Did he not put up on display
pimps and women giving birth
in holy shrines and having sex
with their own brothers, and then claim
that living is no life? So now,
because of him our city here
is crammed with bureaucratic types
and stupid democratic apes
who always cheat our people.
Nobody carries on the torch—
no one's trained in that these days.

DIONYSUS

No, by god, they're not. That's why
while at the Panathenic games
I laughed myself quite pissless—
a slow, pallid, porky runner
went on by—head drooping down—
far behind the rest. In that race
he wasn't very good. Well then,
the folks at Keremeios gate

⁶⁴(line 1277) Paralos' crew: the Paralos was the flag ship of the Athenian navy.

began to whack him in the gut,
to hit his ribs and sides and butt.
While their hands were slapping him,
he let rip a tremendous fart
which killed the torch. Then on he ran.

CHORUS

The event is huge, the strife intense—
the mighty war goes on. It's hard to choose.
When one man presses hard, the other one
wheels round and launches the attack once more.
[addressing Aeschylus and Euripides]
You two, don't you stay inactive where you sit.
For wit knows many varied ways to strike.
And so, no matter what you're fighting for,
speak out, set to, bring up your works—
the old and new. Put your daring to the test—
say something that's intelligent and deft.
Don't be afraid the people watching here
are just too ignorant and will not see
the subtle points in what you two may say.
Don't worry on that score, for it's not true.
They've served in wars—and each man owns a book.
He understands the witty parts. You see,
it's in their nature to possess strong minds,
but now the whetstone's really sharpened them.
So have no fears—examine everything—
at least for the spectators' benefit
since they've become so wise.

EURIPIDES

All right, I'll turn to the prologues you composed,
so I can start off with a test to check
the first part of a clever poet's tragedy.
In setting down just how events occurred
this man was never clear

DIONYSUS

Which one will you test?

EURIPIDES

Quite a few. [to Aeschylus] But first, will you recite for me an opening from your *Oresteia*.

DIONYSUS

Let everyone keep quiet. Achilles, speak.

AESCHYLUS [quoting from the *Choephoroi*]

“O Hermes underground, who oversees
my father’s power, be my rescuer,
my ally, answering the prayers I make.
I’ve come back and returned unto this land.”

DIONYSUS

You see some flaws in this?

EURIPIDES

More than a dozen.

DIONYSUS

But the whole thing’s only four lines long!

EURIPIDES

And each of them has twenty errors.

DIONYSUS

I warn you, Aeschylus, keep quiet. If not,
you’ll forfeit these four lines and owe some more.

AESCHYLUS

Am I to remain silent just for him?

DIONYSUS

I think that’s best.

EURIPIDES

Right at the very start
he’s made a huge mistake—as high as heaven.

AESCHYLUS

You do see you’re talking rubbish.

EURIPIDES

If so,

it doesn’t bother me.

AESCHYLUS

You claim I'm wrong—
well, where are my mistakes?

EURIPIDES

Recite the start again.

AESCHYLUS

“O Hermes underground, who oversees
my father's power . . .”

EURIPIDES

Orestes says this
at the tomb of his dead father, does he not?

AESCHYLUS

I won't deny it.

EURIPIDES

Since his father died
a brutal death at the hands of his own wife
and by a secret trick, how can he claim
that Hermes watches over anything?

AESCHYLUS

That's not my sense—when he speaks, he means
Hermes, god of luck, who watches all the dead.
And his words clearly show that this Hermes
obtained that office from his father Zeus.

EURIPIDES

So you've made an even bigger blunder
than I thought—if this subterranean job
comes from his dad . . .

DIONYSUS

If that's the case,
he's a grave robber on his father's side.

AESCHYLUS

That's cheap wine you're drinking, Dionysus,
it lacks bouquet.

DIONYSUS

Recite another line for him.

[to Euripides]

And you, take care about the damage you inflict.

AESCHYLUS [quoting again]

“ . . . my father’s power, be my rescuer,
my ally, answering the prayers I make.
I’ve come back and returned unto this land.”

EURIPIDES

The skilful Aeschylus has just revealed
the same thing twice.

DIONYSUS

How so?

EURIPIDES

Look at the verse.

All right, I’ll tell you—“I’ve come back”
is followed by the word “returned”—coming back
and returning—they mean the same.

DIONYSUS

Yes, by god—
exactly like a man who says to someone,
“Hey, lend me a baking dish or, if you like,
a dish for baking.”

AESCHYLUS

You blithering idiot,
it’s not the same at all. That line of verse
has beautifully chosen words.

EURIPIDES

It does?

Then show me what you mean.

AESCHYLUS

To come unto a land
refers to someone with a native home—
he’s come back—there’s nothing else implied.
But when a man arrives who’s been an exile,
he comes back and returns.⁶⁵

⁶⁵(line 1391) and returns: Aeschylus’ hair-splitting point is that “come back” and “return” mean different things, because the latter is appropriate for those whose political status is uncertain.

DIONYSUS

By Apollo, that's good!

What do you say to that, Euripides?

EURIPIDES

I say Orestes didn't "return" home.

He came in secret, without permission
from those in charge.

DIONYSUS

By Hermes, that's good.

But I don't get what you mean.

EURIPIDES

Come on then,
try another line.

DIONYSUS

Yes, let's have some more.

Get a move on, Aeschylus. And you,
keep looking out for something bad.

AESCHYLUS [reciting more lines]

"On this heaped-up burial mound I pray
my father hears and listens . . ."

EURIPIDES

It's there again—

he's saying the same thing twice—
to hear, to listen—obviously the same.

DIONYSUS

Well, you fool, he is speaking to the dead.
And we don't reach them even with a triple prayer.

AESCHYLUS

All right, how do you compose your prologues?

EURIPIDES

I'll tell you. And if I say the same thing twice
or you see extra padding there, some verse
that doesn't suit the plot, then spit on me.

DIONYSUS

Come on, speak up. I need to clearly hear

the language in your prologues working well.

EURIPIDES [reciting from one of his plays]

“Oedipus to start with was a lucky man . . .”

AESCHYLUS

By god, no he wasn’t—his nature
gave him a dreadful fate. Before his birth
Apollo said he’d murder his own father—
he wasn’t even born! How could he be
a lucky man right at the very start?

EURIPIDES [continuing to recite]

“Then he became most wretched of all men.”

AESCHYLUS

No, no, by god. He always was like that.
And why? Because as soon as he was born,
he was exposed out in the cold, in a pot,
so he wouldn’t grow into a murderer
and kill his father. He dragged himself away
to Polybus on mutilated feet.
And after that he married an old woman,
though he was young, and, as things turned out,
she was his mother. So he poked out his eyes.

DIONYSUS

Then he’d have ended happy after all,
if, like Erastinides, he’d been a general.⁶⁶

EURIPIDES

You’re being stupid. I make my prologues well.

AESCHYLUS

Is that so? Well, by god, I won’t scratch
each phrase word for word, but with help from the gods
I’ll kill your prologues with a little oil jug.

EURIPIDES

My prologues? With an oil jug?

AESCHYLUS

Yes, just one.

⁶⁶(line 1429) Erastinides: Athenian general condemned to death after the battle of Arginusae.

The way you write, well, everything fits in—
a little fleece, a little oil jug,
a little bag—they all mesh nicely in
with your iambics. Let me demonstrate.⁶⁷

EURIPIDES

What this? You'll demonstrate?

AESCHYLUS

That's what I'm saying.

DIONYSU

All right, Euripides, you've got to speak.

EURIPIDES [reciting some more of his own lines]

"Aegyptos, so many people say,
with fifty children in a rowing boat,
landing in Argos . . ."

AESCHYLUS

. . . lost his little oil jug.

EURIPIDES

What's this stuff about an oil jug?

You'll regret this.

DIONYSUS

Recite another prologue
so I can see the point again.

EURIPIDES [continuing to recite]

"Dionysus clothed in fawn skins leaps
among the torches on Parnassus,
on that mount he waved his thysrus—
there he danced and . . ."

AESCHYLUS

. . . lost his little oil jug.

DIONYSUS

O dear,

we've been stricken with an oil jug once again.

EURIPIDES

⁶⁷(line 1438) demonstrate: in the section which follows Aeschylus repeatedly uses the phrase "lost his little oil jug" to bring out the triviality of Euripides' verse, especially its rhythms and its imagery.

It's no big deal. In this next prologue
he can't tie in his little oil jug.

"Among all men there's not one living
who's blessed in everything—if nobly born
he lacks sufficient livelihood, or else,
if basely born, . . ."

AESCHYLUS

. . . he's lost his little oil jug.

DIONYSUS

Euripides . . .

EURIPIDES

What?

DIONYSUS

It seems to me
you should haul in your sails. This little oil jug—
it's going to introduce a mighty storm.

EURIPIDES

By Demeter, I won't even think of it.
Here's one will knock that oil jug from his hand.

DIONYSUS

All right, recite another one—take care—
keep your distance from that little oil jug.

EURIPIDES

"Abandoning Sidon city, Cadmus,
Agenor's son . . ."

AESCHYLUS

. . . lost his little oil jug.

DIONYSUS

My dear fellow, buy the oil jug from him,
so he can't shatter all our prologues.

EURIPIDES

What?

I should purchase it from him?

DIONYSUS

I think you should.

EURIPIDES

No way. I've got lots of prologues to recite—
ones where he can't stick in his little oil jug.
“Pelops, son of Tantalus, arrived at Pisa,
and riding his swift horses . . .”

AESCHYLUS

. . . lost his little oil jug.

DIONYSUS

You see—he stuck in that little oil jug
once again. Look, my good man, pay his price—
use all your means. You'll get it for an obol.
And it's really nice—a good one.

EURIPIDES

Not yet—
I've still got plenty left: “Oeneus once
from his own land . . .”

AESCHYLUS

. . . lost his little oil jug.

EURIPIDES

Let me at least recite the whole line first—
“Oeneus once from his own land received
a bounteous harvest—then while offering
first fruits for sacrifice . . .”

AESCHYLUS

. . . lost his little oil jug.

DIONYSUS

In the middle of the service? Who stole it?

EURIPIDES

Back off, my dear man—let him speak to this:
“Zeus, as truth reports . . .”

DIONYSUS

You'll be destroyed—
For he'll just say “lost his little oil jug.”
These oil jugs pop up in your prologues
the way warts grow on eyes. For god's sake,

change the subject. What about his lyrics?

EURIPIDES

All right. I'll show how bad he is at them.

His songs are awful—they all sound just the same.

CHORUS

What's going to happen now?

I've got an idea how

he'll criticize and mar

the one whose lyrics are

our finest songs so far.

How will his censure ring

to a Dionysian king,

for me a fearful thing?

EURIPIDES

His songs are truly quite astonishing.

I'll give quick proof, for I'll condense them all

into a single song.

DIONYSUS

All right, you do that. I'll gather up some pebbles and keep score.

[Someone begins the accompaniment on a flute]

EURIPIDES [beginning his parody of Aeschylus]

Phthian Achilles, O, you hear the crash—

the loud man-slaughtering BASH, why don't you come,

come here to help us? As the primordial race,

we honour Hermes by the lake—BASH.

Why come you not to our assistance?

DIONYSUS

That's two bashes for you, Aeschylus.

EURIPIDES [continuing the parody]

Most glorious of Achaean men, O Atreus,

who rules far and wide, learn of me—BISH BASH—

why come you not to our assistance?

DIONYSUS

There's a third bash for you, Aeschylus.

EURIPIDES [continuing the parody]

Be still! Attendants on the bee priestess
are nigh to open up Artemis' shrine—BASH.

Why come you not to our assistance?

I have authority to utter out in full,
to speak those fatal orders ruling us
and this our expedition—BISH BASH.

Why come you not to our assistance?

DIONYSUS

By ruling Zeus, what a pile of bashes!
The toilet's where I want to be right now—
this bashing's swollen both my kidneys.

EURIPIDES

Don't go, not before you listen to
another group of songs, compressed medlies
of this man's lyric melodies.

DIONYSUS

All right then, go on.

But you can leave out all the bash and crash.

EURIPIDES

[continuing his parody of Aeschylus]

How the Achaeans' twin-throned power, youth of Greece—

Tophlatto-thratto-phlilatto-thrat—

sent by the Sphinx, presiding she dog of unlucky days—

Tophlatto-thratto-phlilatto-thrat—

swooping bird with spear and with avenging hand—

Tophlatto-thratto-phlilatto-thrat—

granting eager sky-diving dogs to light upon—

Tophlatto-thratto-phlilatto-thrat—

the allied force assembled to assault great Ajax—

Tophlatto-thratto-phlilatto-thrat.

DIONYSUS

What's this phlatto-thrat? Is it from Marathon?

Where did you pick up your rope-twisting songs?

AESCHYLUS

I brought them to a noble place from somewhere fine,

lest I be seen to gather up my crop
from that same sacred meadow of the Muse
as Phrynichos. But this fellow over here
gets his songs anywhere—from prostitutes,
Meletus' drinking songs, flute tunes from Caria,
from lamentations or dance melodies,
as in a moment I will demonstrate.

Let someone bring a lyre here—and yet
who needs a lyre for this man? Where is she,
that girl who beats time with her castanets?
Come hither, you Muse of this Euripides—
for your style fits the songs we're going to sing.

[Enter a very old and ugly woman who accompanies Aeschylus' parody by clicking
her castanets and dancing very badly]

DIONYSUS [reacting to the old woman's appearance]

This Muse is hardly the most gorgeous babe we've ever seen from Lesbos, that's for
sure.

AESCHYLUS [parodying Euripides]

You chattering kingfishers in the sea
in the ever-flowing waves
who wet wing-tops with water drops
like so much dripping dew,
and spiders underneath the roof,
your fingers wi-i-i-i-i-i-i-inding
threads for stretching on the loom,
work of tuneful weaving rods,
where dolphins, those flute-loving fish,
leap at the blue-peaked prows,
at oracles and stadiums.

I joy in early budding vines,
the spiral cluster, killing pain.

O my child, hurl your arms about me . . .

You see this foot?

DIONYSUS

I see it.

AESCHYLUS

And the other one?

DIONYSUS

I see that too.⁶⁸

AESCHYLUS [to Euripides]

You write this sort of bilge and then you dare
to criticize my songs—you, who wrote your tunes
to twelve-stringed music of Cyrene?⁶⁹ Bah!
So much for his songs. I still want to check
his solo melodies, their lyric style.

[parodying Euripides once more]

O Night, O darkly shining Night,
what are you sending me,
what dreams of woe,
from Hades' halls—
what souls without a soul,
the children of black night,
so horrible they raise my hair
in black corpse-clothes—
murder, murder—
such huge fingernails.

Now, servants, light my lamp for me,
haul river water in your pails
and warm it up, so I
may rinse away my dream,
O spirit of the sea.

That's it—oh all you
who share this house with me,
gaze here upon these portents.
My Glyce's fled away—
she stole my cock and ran.
You nymphs born on the mountain peaks,
and you, O Mania, aid me now.

⁶⁸(line 1570) that too: Aeschylus is calling attention to the rhythmic feet in Euripides' verse. Dionysus, of course, misunderstands and starts inspecting Aeschylus' feet.

⁶⁹(line 1573) Cyrene: a notorious prostitute.

There I was, poor wretched me,
at work with all my daily tasks,
my spindle full of thread,
my fingers wi-i-i-i-i-inding,
as I wove skeins of yarn
to carry off to market
for sale in early morning.

But now my bird has flown,
flown off into the atmosphere
its wing-tips oh so nimble.
It's left me woes, woes,
and in my eyes tears, tears—
they trickle, trickle down,
O miserable me.

O you Cretans, Ida's children,
seize your bows and rescue me.
Swiftly move your limbs,
make full circle round this house.
And child Diktynna, Artemis,
so beautiful, by all means bring
your baby bitches to my home.
And you, oh Hecate, Zeus' child,
with blazing fire-brands in both your hands,
light my way to Glyke's place,
so I can then reveal her theft
and catch her in the act.

DIONYSUS

Stop the songs.

AESCHYLUS

All right. I've said enough.
Now I want to bring him to the balance scale,
the very thing to test our poetry—
to check how much our phrases weigh.

DIONYSUS

Come here, then, if I have to do this—

treating poets just like cheese for sale.

CHORUS:

Clever men like these take pains,

for here's a marvel once again.

Devices new and strange they bring.

Who else would think up such a thing?

I'd not believe it—even though

I met someone who told me so.

DIONYSUS

Come on. Stand beside the balance scales.

AESCHYLUS and EURIPIDES [together]

All right.

DIONYSUS

Now, each of you grab hold and don't let go

until I yell at you—I'll say "Cuckoo!"

AESCHYLUS and EURIPIDES: [each one holding a scale pan]

We're holding on.

DIONYSUS

Speak your line into the scale.

EURIPIDES [reciting]

"I wish that Argive ship had never flown . . ."

AESCHYLUS [reciting]

"O river Spercheios, where cattle graze . . ."

DIONYSUS

Cuckoo!!! Let go . . .

[Dionysus inspects the scale pans and sees that Aeschylus' side has sunk more]

The pan on this man's side

has gone much further down.

EURIPIDES

And why is that?

DIONYSUS

Why? Because he put a river in it.

He wet his words the way wool-sellers do—

whereas you put in a word with wings.

EURIPIDES

All right, let him speak again and match me.

DIONYSUS

Grab hold again.

AESCHYLUS and EURIPIDES

We're ready.

DIONYSUS

So speak down.

EURIPIDES [reciting]

"Persuasion has no temple except speech."

AESCHYLUS [reciting] "The only god who loves no gifts is Death."

DIONYSUS

Let go. Let go. This one's going down again.

He put death in—the heaviest of harms.

EURIPIDES

But I put in persuasion—and my line
was beautifully expressed.

DIONYSUS

Persuasion's light—

she's got no brains at all. Say something else,
a heavy line, immense and ponderous, to make you sink.

EURIPIDES

A heavy line like that,
where can I find such lines in all my verse?

DIONYSUS

I'll tell you. "Achilles threw the dice—
two snake's eyes and a four." You'd better speak—
it's the last time the two of you get weighed.

EURIPIDES [reciting]

"His right hand grasped the heavy iron club . . ."

AESCHYLUS [reciting]

"Chariot piled on chariot, corpse on corpse . . ."

DIONYSUS

This time he got you once again.

EURIPIDES

How so?

DIONYSUS

He put in two chariots and two stiffs.
A hundred Egyptians couldn't shift that load.⁷⁰

AESCHYLUS

No more contest with me word for word—
put him in the scale pan with his wife and kids,
throw on Cephisophon. Let him step in,
sit down—he can bring all his books. For me—
I'll only speak two verses of my own.

DIONYSUS

These men are friends of mine, so I won't judge
the two of them. I don't want to be at war
with either man. One of them, I think,
is really clever. The other I enjoy.

PLUTO

Won't you fail to get the thing you came for?

DIONYSUS

What if I chose the other man?

PLUTO

Take one—
whichever one you wish, so you don't leave
and make your trip in vain.

DIONYSUS

May gods bless you.
Look, how 'bout this—I came here for a poet.

EURIPIDES

What for?

DIONYSUS

So I might save our city
and let it keep its choruses. Therefore,
whichever one of you will give our state
the best advice, well, that's the man I'll take.
So first, a question for each one of you—

⁷⁰(line 1666) raise that load: Egyptians had a reputation for great strength.

What's your view of Alcibiades?⁷¹

This issue plagues our city.

EURIPIDES

The people there—

what do they think of him?

DIONYSUS

What do they think?

The city yearns for him, but hates him, too,
yet wants him back. But you two, tell me this—
what's your sense of him?

.EURIPIDES

I hate a citizen

who helps his native land by seeming slow,
but then will quickly inflict injuries
which profit him but give our city nothing.

DIONYSUS

By Poseidon, that's well said. Now, Aeschylus,
what's your view on this?

AESCHYLUS

The wisest thing is not to rear a lion cub inside the city,
but if that's what the citizens have done,
we'd must adjust ourselves to fit its ways.

DIONYSUS

By Zeus the saviour, this decision's hard.
One spoke with skill, the other was so clear.
All right, each one of you speak up again.
Tell me of our state—how can we save her?

EURIPIDES

Use Cinesias as Cleocritus' wings—
then winds would lift them over the flat sea.⁷²

DIONYSUS

A really funny sight. But what's the point?

⁷¹(line 1686) Alcibiades: a brilliant and charismatic, but erratic and controversial Athenian politician and general in the closing years of the Peloponnesian War.

⁷²(line 1705) flat sea: Cinesias was very tall and skinny, and Cleocritus was reported to look like an ostrich.

EURIPIDES

In a sea fight, they'd take some vinegar,
and dump the bottles in opponents' eyes.
But I know the answer—let me speak.

DIONYSUS

All right, say on.

EURIPIDES

When those among us
who have no faith act faithfully, and things
bereft of trust are trusted . . .

DIONYSUS

What's that?

I don't get what you're saying. Speak out
more clearly—more matter with less art.

EURIPIDES

If we removed our trust from politicians
on whom we now rely, and used the ones
we don't use now, we could be saved. It's clear
we're not doing well with what we're doing now,
if we reversed our course, we might be saved.

DIONYSUS

Well put, O Palamedes,⁷³ you clever man.
Did you come up with this idea yourself,
or is it from Cephisophon?

EURIPIDES

It's mine alone.
that bit about those jars of vinegar—
Cephisophon's idea.

DIONYSUS [to Aeschylus]

Now you. What do you say?

AESCHYLUS

About our state—acquaint me first of all
with those in her employ. Surely they're good men?

DIONYSUS

⁷³(line 1720) Palamedes: a hero in the Trojan war.

Of course they're not. She hates those worst of all.

AESCHLYUS

She loves the ne'er-do-wells?

DIONYSUS

Not really—

but she's got no choice. She has to use them.

AESCHYLUS

How can one save a city like this one,
which has no taste for woolen city coats
or country cloaks of goat skin?

DIONYSUS

By Zeus,

to get upstairs, you'd best come up with something.

AESCHYLUS

Up there I'd talk, but I don't want to here.

DIONYSUS

Don't be that way. Send something good from here.

AESCHYLUS

When they consider their foe's land their own
and think of their land as the enemy's,
and when they look upon their ships as riches
and see their wealth as wretchedness . . .⁷⁴

DIONYSUS

Yes, but jury members wolf down all the cash.

PLUTO

You should decide.

DIONYSUS

I'll make my choice between them.

I'll choose the one who's pleasing to my soul.

EURIPIDES

Do not forget those gods by whom you swore
to take me home. You have to choose your friends . . .

DIONYSUS

⁷⁴(line 1739) wretchedness: Aeschylus is here apparently defending the early Athenian policy of putting all their faith in the navy to prosecute the war, leaving the land open for enemy occupation.

My tongue made that oath, but I choose Aeschylus.

EURIPIDES

What have you done, you foulest of all men?

DIONYSUS

Me? I've picked Aeschylus to win. Why not?

EURIPIDES

Do you dare to look me in the face
after you've done the dirtiest of deeds?

DIONYSUS

What's dirty if this audience approves?

EURIPIDES

You're heartless. Will you never think of me
now that I'm dead?

DIONYSUS

What if living isn't really dying,
or breathing dining, or sleep a pillow slip?⁷⁵

PLUTO

Come inside now, Dionysus.

DIONYSUS

What for?

PLUTO

So I can entertain you here, before you go.

DIONYSUS

An excellent idea, by god. I won't say no.

CHORUS

Blest is the man with keen intelligence—
we learn this truth in many ways
Once he's shown his own good sense
he goes back home again.
He brings our citizens good things
as well as family and friends,
with his perceptive mind.
So to be truly civilized,
don't sit by Socrates and chat

⁷⁵(line 1753) pillow slip: Dionysus is here mocking Euripides with echoes of the latter's own verses.

or cast the Muses' work aside,
 forgetting the most vital skills
 of writing tragedies.
 Wasting time with pompous words,
 while idly scratching verbal bits—
 that suits a man who's lost his wits

PLUTO

So now, farewell, Aeschylus—go,
 save our city with your noble thoughts,
 and educate our fools—we have so many.
 Take this sword, hand it to Cleophon.
 Present this rope to tax collector
 Myrmex and his colleague Nicomachos—
 this hemlock give to Archenomos.
 Tell them to come here fast without delay.
 If they don't come soon, then, by Apollo,
 I'll brand and cripple them, then ship them down
 at full speed underground with Adeimantos,
 Leucolophos's son.⁷⁶

AESCHYLUS

That I'll do. As for my chair of honour,
 give it to Sophocles to keep safe for me
 in case I ever come back here. He's the one
 whose talent I would put in second place.
 Bear in mind—the rogue right there, this clown,
 this liar, will never occupy my chair,
 not even by mistake.

PLUTO [to the Chorus]

Let your torches shine,
 your sacred torches light the way for him,
 escort him on his way—and praise his fame
 with his own songs and dances.

CHORUS

First, all you spirits underneath the ground,

⁷⁶(line 1783) Adeimantos: a general in Athens, later accused of treachery.

let's bid our poet here a fond farewell,
as he goes upward to the light. To the city
grant worthy thoughts of every excellence.
Then we could put an end to our great pain,
the harmful clash of arms Let Cleophon—
and all those keen to fight—war on their enemy
in their ancestral fields, on their own property.⁷⁷

⁷⁷(line 1801) properties: Cleophon was a leader of the pro-war party. The point here is that many of those advocating war were not putting their own property in danger, unlike many Athenian farmers and landowners whose lands were occupied by the enemy forces.

BIRDS

This edition is based on the [publicly available](#)⁷⁸ translation by Ian Johnston

...

HISTORICAL NOTE

The Birds was first produced at the drama festival in 414 BC, where it won second prize. At this period, during the Peloponnesian War, Athens was very powerful and confident, having just launched the expedition to Sicily, fully expecting to triumph in that venture and in the larger war.

...

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

PISTHETAIROS: a middle-aged Athenian
EUELPIDES: a middle-aged Athenian
SERVANT-BIRD: a slave serving Tereus, once a man
TEREUS: a hoopoe bird, once a man
FLAMINGO
PEACOCK
A SECOND HOOPOE
GLUTTON-BIRD: a fictitious species
CHORUS LEADER
CHORUS: of birds
XANTHIAS: slave serving Pisthetairos
MANODOROS: slave serving Euelpides, also called MANES.
PROCNE: a nightingale with a woman's body, consort of Tereus.
PRIEST
POET
ORACLE MONGER: a collector and interpreter of oracles
METON: a land surveyor
COMMISSIONER OF COLONIES: an Athenian official
STATUTE SELLER: man who sells laws
FIRST MESSENGER: a construction-worker bird

⁷⁸<http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/aristophanes/birds.htm>

SECOND MESSENGER: a soldier bird

IRIS: messenger goddess, daughter of Zeus

FIRST HERALD: a bird

YOUNG MAN: young Athenian who wants to beat up his father

CINESIAS: a very bad dithyrambic poet and singer

SYCOPHANT: a common informer

PROMETHEUS: the Titan

POSEIDON: god of the sea, brother of Zeus

HERCULES: the legendary hero, now divine

TRIBALLIAN GOD: an uncouth barbarian god

PRINCESS: a divine young lady

SECOND HERALD

Scene: A rugged, treed wilderness area up in the rocky hills. Enter Pisthetairos and Euelpides, both very tired. They are clambering down from the rocky heights towards the level stage. Pisthetairos has a crow perched on his arm or shoulder, and Euelpides has a jackdaw. Both Pisthetairos and Euelpides are carrying packs on their back. They are followed by two slaves carrying more bags. The slaves stay well out of the way until they get involved in the action later on.

EUELPIDES [speaking to the bird he is carrying]

Are you telling us to keep going straight ahead? Over there by that tree?

PISTHETAIROS

Blast this bird—

it's croaking for us to head back, go home.

EUELPIDES

Why are we wandering up and down like this? You're such a fool—this endless weaving round

will kill us both.

PISTHETAIROS

I must be an idiot

to keep hiking on along these pathways,
a hundred miles at least, and just because
that's what this crow keeps telling me to do.

EUELPIDES

What about me? My poor toe nails are thrashed.

I've worn them out because I'm following

what this jackdaw says.

PISTHETAIROS [looking around]

I have no idea

where on earth we are.

EUELPIDES

You mean from here

you couldn't make it back to your place?

PISTHETAIROS:

No way—not even Execestides

could manage that.⁷⁹

EUELPIDES

We're in a real mess.

PISTHETAIROS

Well, you could try going along that pathway.

[The two men start exploring different paths down to opposite sides of the stage]

EUELPIDES

We two were conned by that Philokrates,

the crazy vendor in the marketplace

who sells his birds on trays. He claimed these two

would take us straight to Tereus the hoopoe,

a man who years ago became a bird.

That's why we paid an obol for this one,

this jackdaw, son of Tharraleides,* and three more for the crow. And then what? The two know nothing, except how to bite.

[The jackdaw with Euelpides begins to get excited about something. Euelpides talks to the bird]

What's got your attention now? In those rocks?

You want to take us there? There's no way through.

PISTHETAIROS [calling across the stage to Euelpides]

By god, the same thing over here, no road.

EUELPIDES

What's your crow saying about the pathway?

⁷⁹*Execestides*: An Athenian descended from Carian slaves and therefore not entitled to be a citizen. The point here is that he must have been extremely skilful to get to Athens, given where he started, and even he couldn't navigate his way back to Athens in this terrain.

PISTHETAIROS

By god, it's not cawing what it did before.

EUELPIDES [shouting]

But what's it saying about the road?

PISTHETAIROS

Nothing—

it's saying nothing, just keeps on croaking—
something about biting my fingers off.

EUELPIDES [addressing the audience]

Don't you think it's really odd the two of us,
ready and eager to head off for the birds,⁸⁰
just can't find the way. You see, we're not well.

All you men sitting there to hear our words,
we're ill with a disease, not like the one
which Sacas suffers,⁸¹ no—the opposite.

He's no true citizen, yet nonetheless
he's pushing his way in by force, but we,
both honoured members of our tribe and clan,⁸²

both citizens among you citizens,
with no one trying to drive us from the city,
have winged our way out of our native land
on our two feet. We don't hate the city
because we think it's not by nature great
and truly prosperous—open to all,
so they can spend their money paying fines.

Cicadas chirp up in the trees a while,
a month or two, but our Athenians
keep chirping over lawsuits all their lives.
That's why right now we've set off on this trip,
with all this stuff—basket, pot, and myrtle boughs.⁸³

⁸⁰*Tereus*: the name of a mythological king of Thrace who married Procne and raped her sister Philomela. The sisters killed his son and fed Tereus the flesh for dinner. All three were changed into birds: Tereus into a hoopoe, Procne into a nightingale, and Philomela into a swallow.

⁸¹*Tharraleides*: the reference here seems to be to a well-known member of the audience, perhaps celebrated for his small size and loud voice.

⁸²*birds*: the Greek expression is “to the Ravens,” meaning “go to hell.”

⁸³*Sacas*: a name for Acestor, a foreign-born tragic dramatist.

We're looking for a nice relaxing spot,
where we can settle down, live out our lives.
We're heading for Tereus, that hoopoe bird—
we'd like to know if in his flying around
he's seen a city like the one we want.

PISTHETAIROS

Hey!

EUELPIDES

What?

PISTHETAIROS

My crow keeps cawing upwards—
up there.

EUELPIDES

My jackdaw's looking up there, too,
as if it wants to show me something.
There must be birds around these rocks. I know—
let's make noise and then we'll see for sure.

PISTHETAIROS

You know what you should do? Kick that outcrop.

EUELPIDES

Why not use your head? There'd be twice the noise.

[Pisthetairos and Euelpides start climbing back up the rocky outcrops towards a
door in the middle of the rocks]

PISTHETAIROS

Pick up a stone and then knock on the door.

EUELPIDES

All right. Here I go.

[Euelpides knocks very loudly on the door and calls out]

Hey, boy . . . boy!

PISTHETAIROS

What are you saying? Why call the hoopoe "boy"?

Don't say that—you should call out

[giving a bird call]

"hoopoe-ho."

EUELPIDES [knocking on the door and calling again]

Hoopoe-ho! . . . Should I knock again? . . . Hoopoe-ho!

SERVANT-BIRD [inside]

Who is it? Who's shouting for my master?

[The door opens and an actor-bird emerges. He has a huge beak which terrifies Euelpides and Pisthetairos. They fall back in fear, and the birds they have been carrying disappear]

EUELPIDES

My lord Apollo, save us! That gaping beak—

SERVANT-BIRD [also frightened]

Oh, oh, now we're in for it. You two men,
you're bird-catchers!

EUELPIDES

Don't act so weird!

Can't you say something nice?

SERVANT-BIRD [trying to scare them off]

You two men will die!

EUELPIDES

But we're not men.

SERVANT-BIRD

What? What are you, then?

EUELPIDES

Well . . . I'm a chicken-shitter . . . a Libyan bird . . .

SERVANT-BIRD

That's rubbish.

EUELPIDES

No, it's not—I've just dropped my load—
down both my legs. Take a look.

SERVANT-BIRD

And this one here? What kind of bird is he?

[to Pisthetairos]

Can you speak?

PISTHETAIROS

Me? . . . a crapper-fowl . . . from Phasis.

EUELPIDES

God knows what kind of animal you are!

SERVANT-BIRD

I'm a servant bird.

EUELPIDES

Beaten by some rooster
in a cock fight?

SERVANT-BIRD

No. It was my master—
when he became a hoopoe, well, I prayed
that I could turn into a bird. That way
he'd still have me to serve and wait on him.

EUELPIDES

Does a bird need his own butler bird?

SERVANT-BIRD

He does—I think it's got something to do
with the fact that earlier he was a man.
So if he wants to taste some fish from Phalerum,
I grab a plate and run off for sardines.
If he wants soup, we need pot and ladle,
so I dash off for the spoon.

EUELPIDES

A runner bird—
that's what you are. Well, my little runner,
do you know what we'd like to have you do?
Go call your master for us.

SERVANT-BIRD

But he's asleep—
for heaven's sake, his after-dinner snooze—
he's just had gnats and myrtle berries.

EUELPIDES

Wake him up anyway.

SERVANT-BIRD

I know for sure
he'll be annoyed, but I'll do it, just for you.

[Exit Servant-Bird back through the doors]

PISTHETAIROS

Damn that bird—he scared me half to death.

EUELPIDES

Bloody hell—he frightened off my bird!

PISTHETAIROS

You're such a coward—the worst there is.

Were you so scared you let that jackdaw go?

EUELPIDES

What about you? Didn't you collapse
and let your crow escape?

PISTHETAIROS

Not me, by god.

EUELPIDES

Where is it then?

PISTHETAIROS

It flew off on its own.

EUELPIDES

You didn't let go? What a valiant man!

TEREUS: [from inside, speaking in a grand style]

Throw open this wood, so I may issue forth.

[The doors open. Enter Tereus, a hoopoe bird, with feathers on his head and wings but none on his body. He struts and speaks with a ridiculously affected confidence. Euelpides and Pisthetairos are greatly amused at his appearance]

EUELPIDES

O Hercules, what kind of beast is this? What's that plumage? What sort of triple crest?

TEREUS

Who are the persons here who seek me out?

EUELPIDES

The twelve gods, it seems, have worked you over.⁸⁴

TEREUS

Does seeing my feathers make you scoff at me? Strangers, I was once upon a time a man.

EUELPIDES

It's not you we're laughing at.

⁸⁴*tribe and clan*: the political units of Athenian civic life.

TEREUS

Then what is it?

EUELPIDES

It's your beak—to us it looks quite funny.

TEREUS

It's how Sophocles distorts Tereus—
that's me—in his tragedies.

EUELPIDES

You're Tereus? Are you a peacock or a bird?⁸⁵

TEREUS

I am a bird.

EUELPIDES

Then where are all your feathers?

TEREUS

They've fallen off.

EUELPIDES

Have you got some disease?

TEREUS

No, it's not that.

In winter time all birds shed their feathers,
then new ones grow again. But tell me this—
who are the two of you?

EUELPIDES

Us? We're human beings.

TEREUS

From what race were you born?

EUELPIDES

Our origin? In Athens—which makes the finest warships.

TEREUS

Ah, so you're jury-men, are you?

EUELPIDES

No, no.

We're different—we keep away from juries.

⁸⁵ *basket, pot, and myrtle boughs*: these materials were necessary to conduct the sacrifices at the founding of a new city.

TEREUS

Does that seedling flourish in those parts?

EUELPIDES

If you go searching in the countryside,
you'll find a few.

TEREUS

So why have you come here? What do you need?

EUELPIDES

To talk to you.

TEREUS

What for?

EUELPIDES

Well, you were once a man, as we are now.

You owed people money, as we do now.

You loved to skip the debt, as we do now.

Then you changed your nature, became a bird.

You fly in circles over land and sea.

You've learned whatever's known to birds and men.

That's why we've come as suppliants to you,

to ask if you can tell us of some town,

where life is sheepskin soft, where we can sleep.

TEREUS

Are you looking for a mighty city,

more powerful than what Cranaus built?⁸⁶

EUELPIDES

Not one more powerful, no. What we want

is one which better suits the two of us.

TEREUS

You clearly want an aristocracy.

EUELPIDES

Me? No, not at all. The son of Scellias

is someone I detest.⁸⁷

TEREUS

⁸⁶*twelve gods*: the major Olympian deities, headed by Zeus.

⁸⁷Most Athenians knew very little about peacocks.

All right, then,
What kind of city would you like to live in?

EUELPIDES

I'd like a city where my biggest problem
would be something like this—in the morning
a friend comes to my door and says to me,
“In the name of Olympian Zeus, take a bath,
an early one, you and your children,
then come to my place for the wedding feast
I'm putting on. Don't disappoint me now.
If you do, then don't come looking for me
when my affairs get difficult for me.”⁸⁸

TEREUS

By heaven, you poor man, you do love trouble.
What about you?

PISTHETAIROS

I'd like the same.

TEREUS

Like what?

PISTHETAIROS

To have the father of some handsome lad
come up to me, as if I'd done him wrong,
and tell me off with some complaint like this—
“A fine thing there between you and my son,
you old spark. You met him coming back
from the gymnasium, after his bath—
you didn't kiss or greet him with a hug,
or even try tickling his testicles—
yet you're a friend of mine, his father.”

TEREUS

How you yearn for problems, you unhappy man.
There is a happy city by the sea,
the Red Sea, just like the one you mention.⁸⁹

⁸⁸*Cranaus*: reference to a mythological king who founded Athens or a word derived from *kranaos*, meaning rugged, a word often applied to Athens.

⁸⁹*son of Scellias*: the reference is to a man called Aristocrates, an important politician-soldier in Athens.

EUELPIDES

No, no. Not by the sea! That's not for us,
not where that ship Salamia can show up
with some man on board to serve a summons
early in the morning. What about Greece?
Can you tell us of some city there?⁹⁰

TEREUS

Why not go and settle down in Elis—
in Lepreus?

EUELPIDES

In Leprous? By the gods,
I hate the place—although I've never seen it—
it's all Melanthius' fault.⁹¹

TEREUS

You could go
to the Opuntians—they're in Locris—
you might settle there.

EUELPIDES

Be Opuntius—
no way, not for a talent's weight in gold.⁹²
But what's it like here, living with the birds? You must know it well.

TEREUS

It's not unpleasant.
First of all, you have to live without a purse.

EUELPIDES

So you're rid of one great source of fraud in life.

TEREUS

In the gardens we enjoy white sesame,
the myrtles, mint, and poppies.

EUELPIDES

So you live

⁹⁰*difficult for me*: this is a utopian fantasy because the neighbour is suggesting that, as a punishment, his friend Euelpides would not have to help him if he gets in financial trouble, even though he's invited him to an important family celebration.

⁹¹*Red Sea*: a general term for any sea by the southern coasts of Asia.

⁹²*summons*: Athenian citizens could be legally summoned home for trial. Salamia was an official ship often used for such voyages.

just like newly-weds.

PISTHETAIROS

That's it! I've got it!

I see a great plan for this race of birds—
and power, too, if you'll trust what I say.

TEREUS

What do you want to get us all to do?

PISTHETAIROS

What should you be convinced to do? Well, first,
don't just fly about in all directions,
your beaks wide open—that makes you despised.
With us, you see, if you spoke of men
who always flit about and if you asked,
> “Who's that Teleas” someone would respond,
> The man's a bird—he's unreliable,
flighty, vague, never stays in one place long.”⁹³

TEREUS

By Dionysus, that's a valid point—
the criticism's fair. What should we do?

PISTHETAIROS

Settle down together in one city.

TEREUS

What sort of city could we birds set up?

PISTHETAIROS

Why ask that? What a stupid thing to say!
Look down.

TEREUS

All right.

PISTHETAIROS

Now look up.

TEREUS

I'm looking up.

PISTHETAIROS

⁹³*Melanthius' fault*: the reference is to an Athenian tragic dramatist who had a very bad skin condition (making him look as if he had leprosy).

Turn your head round to the side.

TEREUS

By Zeus,
this'll do me good, if I twist off my neck.

PISTHETAIROS

What do you see?

TEREUS

Clouds and sky.

PISTHETAIROS

Well, then,
isn't this a staging area for birds?

TEREUS

A staging area? How come it's that?

PISTHETAIROS

You might say it's a location for them—
there's lots of business here, but everything
keeps moving through this zone, so it's now called
a staging place. But if you settled here,
fortified it, and fenced it off with walls,
this staging area could become your state.
Then you'd rule all men as if they're locusts
and annihilate the gods with famine,
just like in Melos.⁹⁴

TEREUS

How'd we manage that?

PISTHETAIROS

Look, between earth and heaven there's the air.
Now, with us, when we want to go to Delphi,
we have to ask permission to pass through
from the Boeotians. You should do the same.
When men sacrifice, make gods pay you cash.
If not, you don't grant them rights of passage.
You'll stop the smell of roasting thigh bones
moving through an empty space and city

⁹⁴*Opuntius*: a widely disliked Athenian informer. A talent's weight is just under 30 kilograms.

which don't belong to them.

TEREUS

Wow!!! Yippee!!

By earth, snares, traps, nets, what a marvellous scheme!

I've never heard a neater plan! So now,
with your help, I'm going to found a city,
if other birds agree.

PISTHETAIROS

The other birds? Who's going to lay this business out to them?

TEREUS

You can do it. I've taught them how to speak.
Before I came, they could only twitter,
but I've been with them here a long, long time.

PISTHETAIROS

How do you call to bring them all together?

TEREUS

Easy. I'll step inside my thicket here,
and wake my nightingale. Then we'll both call.
Once they hear our voices they'll come running.

PISTHETAIROS

O, you darling bird, now don't just stand there—
not when I'm begging you to go right now,
get in your thicket, wake your nightingale.

[Tereus goes back through the doors]⁹⁵

TEREUS [singing]

Come my queen, don't sleep so long,
pour forth the sound of sacred song—
lament once more through lips divine
for Itys, your dead child and mine,
the one we've cried for all this time.⁹⁶

Sing out your music's liquid trill
in that vibrato voice—the thrill
which echoes in those purest tones

⁹⁵*Teles*: Athenian politician with a reputation for being unpredictable.

⁹⁶*Melos*: the Athenians committed a horrible atrocity during the Peloponnesian War, starving the population of Melos and then executing all male citizens.

through leafy haunts of yew trees roams
and rises up to Zeus' throne.

Apollo with the golden hair
sits listening to your music there—
and in response he plucks his string—
his lyre of ivory then brings
the gods themselves to dance and sing.

Then from gods' mouths in harmony
come sounds of sacred melody.

[A flute starts playing within, in imitation of the nightingale's song. The melody
continues for a few moments]

EUELPIDES

By lord Zeus, that little birdie's got a voice!
She pours her honey all through that thicket!

PISTHETAIROS

Hey!

EUELPIDES

What?

PISTHETAIROS

Shut up.

EUELPIDES

Why?

PISTHETAIROS

That hoopoe bird—270

he's all set to sing another song.

TEREUS [issuing a bird call to all the birds. His song or chant is accompanied by
the flute indicating the nightingale's song]

Epo-popo-popo-popo-popoi,

Io, io, ito, ito, ito, ito.

Come here to me,
all you with feathers just like mine,
all you who live in country fields
fresh-ploughed, still full of seed,
and all you thousand tribes
who munch on barley corn

who gather up the grain,
and fly at such a speed
and utter your sweet cries,
all you who in the furrows there
twitter on the turned-up earth,
and sweetly sing
tio tio tio tio tio tio tio—

 All those of you
who like to scavenge food
from garden ivy shoots,
all you in the hills up there
who eat from olive and arbutus trees.
come here as quickly as you can,
fly here in answer to this call—
trio-to trio-to toto-brix!

 And every one of you
in low-lying marshy ground
who snap sharp-biting gnats,
by regions of well-watered land,
and lovely fields of Marathon,
all you variously coloured birds,
godwits and francolins—
I'm calling you.

 You flocks who fly across the seas
across the waves with halcyons
come here to learn the news.
We're all assembling here,
all tribes of long-neck birds.
A shrewd old man's arrived—
he's here with a new plan,
a man of enterprise,
all set to improvise.
So gather all of you
to hear his words.

[The final words gradually change from coherent speech into a bird call]

Come here, come here,
come here, come here.

Toro-toro toro-toro-tix

Kik-kabau, kik-kabau.

Toro-toro toro-toro li-li-lix

[Euelpides and Pisthetairos start looking up into the sky for birds]

PISTHETAIROS

Seen any birds lately?

EUELPIDES

No, by Apollo, I haven't—
even though I'm staring up into the sky,
not even blinking.

PISTHETAIROS

It seems to me
that hoopoe bird was just wasting time
hiding, like a curlew, in that thicket,
and screaming out his bird calls—
[imitating Tereus] po-poi po-poi

[There is an instant response to Pisthetairos' call from off stage, a loud bird call
which really scares Pisthetairos and Euelpides]

BIRD [offstage]

Toro-tix, toro-tix.

PISTHETAIROS

Hey, my good man, here comes a bird.

[Enter a flamingo, very tall and flaming red-something Pisthetairos and Euelpi-
des have never seen]

EUELPIDES

By Zeus,
that's a bird? What kind would you call that? It couldn't be a peacock, could it?

[Tereus re-enters from the thicket]

PISTHETAIROS

Tereus here will tell us. Hey, my friend,
what's that bird there?

TEREUS

Not your everyday fowl—

the kind you always see. She's a marsh bird.

EUELPIDES

My goodness, she's gorgeous—flaming red!

TEREUS

Naturally, that's why she's called Flamingo.

[A second bird enters, a Peacock]

EUELPIDES [to Pisthetairos]

Hey . . .

PISTHETAIROS

What is it?

EUELPIDES

Another bird's arrived.

PISTHETAIROS

You're right. By god, this one looks really odd.

[To Tereus] Who's this bizarre bird-prophet of the Muse,
this strutter from the hills?

TEREUS

He's called the Mede.

PISTHETAIROS

He's a Mede? By lord Hercules, how come
a Mede flew here without his camel?

EUELPIDES

Here's another one . . .

[The next bird enters, another Hoopoe]

. . . what a crest of feathers!

PISTHETAIROS [To Tereus]

What's this marvel? You're not the only hoopoe?

This here's another one?

TEREUS

He's my grandson—

son of Philocles the Hoopoe—it's like
those names you pass along, when you call
Hipponicus the son of Callias,

and Callias son of Hipponicus.⁹⁷

PISTHETAIROS

So this bird is Callias. His feathers—
he seems to have lost quite a few.

TEREUS

Yes, that's true—
being a well-off bird he's plucked by parasites,
and female creatures flock around him, too,
to yank his plumage out.

[Enter the Glutton-bird, an invented species, very fat and brightly coloured]

PISTHETAIROS

By Poseidon,
here's another bright young bird. What's it called?

TEREUS

This one's the Glutton-bird.

PISTHETAIROS

Another glutton? Cleonymus is not the only one?⁹⁸

EUELPIDES

If this bird were like our Cleonymus,
wouldn't he have thrown away his crest?

PISTHETAIROS

Why do all the birds display such head crests? Are they going to run a race in armour?

TEREUS

No, my dear fellow, they live up on the crests,
because it's safer, like the Carians.⁹⁹

PISTHETAIROS [looking offstage]

Holy Poseidon, do you see those birds!

What a fowl bunch of them—all flocking here!

EUELPIDES [looking in the same direction]

Lord Apollo, there's a huge bird cloud! Wow!

⁹⁷In some productions of *The Birds* the set design permits the audience to see inside Tereus' quarters, so that the singer of the songs which follow remains visible to the audience. Alternatively, Tereus could move out onto a rocky balcony to deliver his song. It seems dramatically very weak to have him deliver these lyrics out of sight of the audience.

⁹⁸*Ity*: son of Tereus and Procne, killed by his mother, who served him up as dinner, in revenge for Tereus' rape and mutilation of her sister.

⁹⁹*Hipponicus*: this passages refers to the Greek custom of naming children after their grandfathers. Philocles was a tragic dramatist. Callias, his son, was a notorious spendthrift who squandered his family inheritance on a debauched lifestyle.

So many feathered wings in there I can't see
a way through all those feathers to the wings.

[Enter the Chorus of Birds in a dense mass. Pisthetairos and Euelpides clamber
up the rock to get a better look at them]

PISTHETAIROS

Hey, look at that—
it's a partridge, and that one over there,
by Zeus, a francolin—there's a widgeon—
and that's a halcyon!

EUELPIDES

What's the one behind her?

PISTHETAIROS

What is it? It's a spotted shaver.

EUELPIDES

Shaver?

You mean there's a bird that cuts our hair?

PISTHETAIROS

Why not? After all, there's that barber in the city—
the one we all call Sparrow Sporgilos.¹⁰⁰

Here comes an owl.

EUELPIDES

Well, what about that? Who brings owls to Athens?¹⁰¹

PISTHETAIROS [identifying birds in the crowd]

. . . a turtle dove,

a jay, lark, sedge bird . . .

EUELPIDES

. . . finch, pigeon . . .

PISTHETAIROS

. . . falcon,

hawk, ring dove . . .

EUELPIDES

. . . cuckoo, red shank . . .

¹⁰⁰*Cleonymus*: an Athenian politician well known for his eating habits and his size. He also reputedly once threw his shield away in battle and ran off.

¹⁰¹*safer*: Pisthetairos refers to a race in which the runners wore helmets with plumes (crests), but Tereus misunderstands and talks about mountain crests where the birds live. Caria is in Asia Minor.

PISTHETAIROS

. . . fire-crest . . .

EUELPIDES

. . . porphyryon, kestrel, dabchick, bunting,
vulture, and that one's there's a . . . [he's stumped]

PISTHETAIROS

. . . woodpecker!!

EUELPIDES

What a crowd of birds! A major flock of fowls!

All that twitter as they prance around,

those rival cries! . . . Oh, oh, what's going on? Are they a threat? They're looking
straight at us—

their beaks are open!

PISTHETAIROS

It looks that way to me.

CHORUS LEADER [starting with a bird call]

To-toto-to to-toto-to to-to.

Who's been calling me? Where's he keep his nest?

TEREUS

I'm the one. I've been waiting here a while.

I've not left my bird friends in the lurch.

CHORUS LEADER

Ti-tit-ti ti-tit-ti ti-ti-ti-ti

tell me as a friend what you have to say.

TEREUS

I have news for all of us—something safe,
judicious, sweet, and profitable.

Two men have just come here to visit me,
two subtle thinkers . . .

CHORUS LEADER [interrupting]

What? What are you saying?

TEREUS

I'm telling you two old men have arrived—

they've come from lands where human beings live
and bring the stalk of a stupendous plan.

CHORUS LEADER

You fool! This is the most disastrous thing
since I was hatched. What are you telling us?

TEREUS

Don't be afraid of what I have to say.

CHORUS LEADER

What have you done to us?

TEREUS

I've welcomed here
two men in love with our society.

CHORUS LEADER

You dared to do that?

TEREUS

Yes, indeed, I did.
And I'm very pleased I did so.

CHORUS LEADER

These two men of yours,
are they among us now?

TEREUS

Yes, as surely as I am.

CHORUS [breaking into a song of indignation]

Aiiii, aiiii

He's cheated us,
he's done us wrong.
That friend of ours,
who all along
has fed with us
in fields we share,
now breaks old laws
and doesn't care.

We swore a pact
of all the birds.
He's now trapped us
with deceitful words—
so power goes

to all our foes,
that wicked race
which since its birth
was raised for war
with us on earth.

CHORUS LEADER

We'll have some words with that one later.
These two old men should get their punishment—
I think we should give it now. Let's do it—
rip 'em to pieces, bit by bit.

PISTHETAIROS

We're done for.

EUELPIDES

It's all your fault—getting us into this mess.
Why'd you bring me here?

PISTHETAIROS

I wanted you to come.

EUELPIDES

What? So I could weep myself to death?

PISTHETAIROS

Now, you're really talking nonsense—
how do you intend to weep, once these birds
poke out your eyes?

CHORUS [advancing towards Pisthetairos and Euelpides

On, on . . .

let's move in to attack,
and launch a bloody rush,
come in from front and back,
and break 'em in the crush—
with wings on every side
they'll have no place to hide.

These two will start to howl,
when my beak starts to eat
and makes 'em food for fowl.
There's no well-shaded peak,

no cloud or salt-grey sea
where they can flee from me.

CHORUS LEADER

Now let's bite and tear these two apart!
Where's the brigadier? Bring up the right wing!

[The birds start to close in on Pisthetairos and Euelpides, cowering up on the rocks]

EUELPIDES

This is it! I'm done for. Where can I run?

PISTHETAIROS

Why aren't you staying put?

EUELPIDES

Here with you? I don't want 'em to rip me into pieces.

PISTHETAIROS

How do you intend to get away from them?

EUELPIDES

I haven't a clue.

PISTHETAIROS

Then I'll tell you how—
we have to stay right here and fight it out.
So put that cauldron down.

[Pisthetairos takes the cauldron from Euelpides and sets it down on the ground in front of them]

EUELPIDES

What good's a cauldron?

PISTHETAIROS

It'll keep the owls away from us.

EUELPIDES

What about the birds with claws?

PISTHETAIROS [rummaging in the pack]

Grab this spit—
stick it in the ground in front of you.

EUELPIDES

How do we protect our eyes?

PISTHETAIROS [producing a couple of tin bowls]

An upturned bowl.
Set this on your head.

EUELPIDES: [putting the tin bowl upside down on his head and holding up the pot, with the spit stuck in the ground]

That's brilliant!

What a grand stroke of warlike strategy!

In military matters you're the best—
already smarter than that Nikias¹⁰²

[Pisthetairos and Euelpides, with tin bowls on their heads, await the birds' charge—with Pisthetairos hiding behind Euelpides, who is holding up the big pot. Their two slaves cower behind them]

CHORUS LEADER

El-el-el-eu . . . Charge!

Keep those beaks level—no holding back now!

Pull 'em, scratch 'em, hit 'em, rip their skins off!

Go smash that big pot first of all.

[As the Chorus is about to start its charge, Tereus rushes in between the two men and the Chorus and tries to stop the Chorus Leader]

TEREUS

Hold on, you wickedest of animals!

Tell me this: Why do you want to kill these men,
to tear them both to bits? They've done no wrong.
Besides, they're my wife's relatives, her clansmen.

CHORUS LEADER

Why should we be more merciful to them
than we are to wolves? What other animals
are greater enemies of ours than them? Have we got better targets for revenge?

TEREUS

Yes, by nature enemies—but what if
they've got good intentions? What if they've come
to teach you something really valuable?

CHORUS LEADER

How could they ever teach us anything,

¹⁰²*shaver*: the Greek bird *kerulos* was a mythological species. The passage here plays on the similarity of the verb *keirein* meaning to cut hair.

or tell us something useful—they're enemies,
our feathered forefathers' fierce foes.

TEREUS

But folks with fine minds find from foemen
they can learn a lot. Caution saves us all.
We don't learn that from friends. But enemies
can force that truth upon us right away.
That's why cities learn, not from their allies,
but from enemies, how to build high walls,
assemble fleets of warships—in that way,
their knowledge saves their children, homes, and goods. 490

CHORUS LEADER

Well, here's what seems best to me—first of all,
let's hear what they have come to say. It's true—
our enemies can teach us something wise.

PISTHETAIROS [to Euelpides] I think their anger's easing off. Let's retreat.

[Pisthetairos and Euelpides inch their way toward the doors, still bunched
together, with Euelpides holding up the pot]

TEREUS [to the Chorus Leader]

It's only fair—and you do owe me a favour,
out of gratitude.

CHORUS LEADER

In other things,
before today, we've never stood against you.

PISTHETAIROS

They're acting now more peacefully to us—
so put that pot and bowl down on the ground.
But we'd better hang onto the spit, our spear.
We'll use it on patrol inside our camp
right by this cauldron here. Keep your eyes peeled—
don't even think of flight.

[Euelpides puts down the cauldron, removes his tin-plate helmet, and marches
with the spear back and forth by the cauldron, on guard]

EUELPIDES

What happens if we're killed? Where on earth

will we be buried?

PISTHETAIROS

In Kerameikos—

where the potters live—they'll bury both of us.

We'll get it done and have the public pay—

I'll tell the generals we died in battle,

fighting with the troops at Orneai.¹⁰³

CHORUS LEADER

Fall back into the ranks you held before. 510

Bend over, and like well-armed soldier boys,

put your spirit and your anger down.

We'll look into who these two men may be,

where they come from, what their intentions are.

[The Chorus of Birds breaks up and retreats]

Hey, Hoopoe bird, I'm calling you!

TEREUS

You called? What would you like to hear?

CHORUS LEADER

These two men—

where do they come from and who are they?

TEREUS

These strangers are from Greece, font of wisdom.

CHORUS LEADER

What accident or words

now brings them to the birds?

TEREUS

The two men love your life,

adore the way you live—

they want to share with you

in all there is to give.

CHORUS LEADER

What's that you just said? What plan is in their head?

TEREUS

Things you'd never think about—

¹⁰³ *Athens*: to bring owls to Athens is an expression for something totally unnecessary (like bringing coals to Newcastle).

you'll be amazed—just hear him out.

CHORUS LEADER

He thinks it's good that he
should stay and live with me?

Is he trusting in some plan
to help his fellow man
or thump his enemy?

TEREUS

He talks of happiness
too great for thought or words
He claims this emptiness—
all space—is for the birds—
here, there, and everywhere.
You'll be convinced, I swear.

CHORUS LEADER

Is he crazy in the head?

TEREUS

He is shrewder than I said.

CHORUS LEADER

A brilliant thinking box?

TEREUS

The subtlest, sharpest fox—
he's been around a lot
knows every scheme and plot.

CHORUS LEADER

Ask him to speak to us, to tell us all.
As I listen now to what you're telling me,
it makes me feel like flying—taking off!

TEREUS [to the two slaves]

Take their suits of armour in the house—
hang the stuff up in the kitchen there,
beside the cooking stool—may it bring good luck!
[turning to Pisthetairos]

Now you. Lay out your plans—explain to them
the reason why I called them all together.

[Pisthetairos is struggling with the servants, refusing to give up his armour]

PISTHETAIROS

No. By Apollo, I won't do it—
not unless they swear a pact with me
just like one that monkey Panaitios,
who makes our knives, had his wife swear to him—
not to bite or pull my balls or poke me.

CHORUS LEADER

You mean up your . . .

PISTHETAIROS

No, not there. I mean the eyes.

CHORUS LEADER

Oh, I'll agree to that.

PISTHETAIROS

Then swear an oath on it.

CHORUS LEADER

I swear on this condition—that I get
all the judges' and spectators' votes and win.¹⁰⁴

PISTHETAIROS

Oh, you'll win!

CHORUS LEADER

And if I break the oath
then let me win by just a single vote.
Listen all of you! The armed infantry
can now pick up their weapons and go home.
Keep an eye out for any bulletins
we put up on our notice boards.

CHORUS [singing]

Man's by nature's born to lie.
But state your case. Give it a try.
There's a chance you have observed
some useful things inside this bird,
some greater power I possess,
which my dull brain has never guessed.

¹⁰⁴*Nikias*: Athenian general famous for his tactical skill.

So tell all here just what you see.
 If there's a benefit to me,
 we'll share in it communally.

CHORUS LEADER

Tell us the business that's brings you here.
 Persuade us of your views. So speak right up.
 No need to be afraid—we've made a pact—
 we won't be the ones who break it first.

PISTHETAIROS [aside to Euelpides]

By god, I'm full of words, bursting to speak.
 I've worked my speech like well-mixed flour—
 like kneading dough. There's nothing stopping me.

[giving instructions to the two slaves]

You, lad, fetch me a speaker's wreath—and, you,
 bring water here, so I can wash my hands.

[The two slaves go into the house and return with a wreath and some water]

EUELPIDES [whispering to Pisthetairos]

You mean it's time for dinner? What's going on?

PISTHETAIROS

For a long time now I've been keen, by god,
 to give them a stupendous speech—overstuffed—
 something to shake their tiny birdy souls.

[Pisthetairos, with the wreath on his head, now turns to the birds and begins his formal oration]

I'm so sorry for you all, who once were kings . . .

CHORUS LEADER

Kings? Us? What of?

PISTHETAIROS

You were kings indeed,
 you ruled over everything there is—
 over him and me, first of all, and then
 over Zeus himself. You see, your ancestry
 goes back before old Kronos and the Titans,
 way back before even Earth herself!¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵*Orneai*: a siege in which some Athenians took part. There were no casualties.

CHORUS LEADER

Before the Earth?

PISTHETAIROS

Yes, by Apollo.

CHORUS LEADER

Well, that's something I never knew before!

PISTHETAIROS

That's because you're naturally uninformed—
you lack resourcefulness. You've not read Aesop.

His story tells us that the lark was born
before the other birds, before the Earth.

Her father then grew sick and died. For five days
he lay there unburied—there was no Earth.

Not knowing what to do, at last the lark,
at her wits' end, set him in her own head.

EUELPIDES

So now, the father of the lark lies dead
in a headland plot.

PISTHETAIROS

So if they were born
before the Earth, before the gods, well then,
as the eldest, don't they get the right to rule?

EUELPIDES

By Apollo, yes they do.

[addressing the audience]

So you out there,
look ahead and sprout yourselves a beak—
in good time Zeus will hand his sceptre back
to the birds who peck his sacred oaks.

PISTHETAIROS

Way back then it wasn't gods who ruled.
They didn't govern men. No. It was the birds.
There's lots of proof for this. I'll mention here
example number one—the fighting cock—
first lord and king of all those Persians,

well before the time of human kings—
 those Dariuses and Megabazuses.
 Because he was their king, the cock's still called
 the Persian Bird.

EUELPIDES

That's why to this very day
 the cock's the only bird to strut about
 like some great Persian king, and on his head
 he wears his crown erect.

PISTHETAIROS

He was so great,
 so mighty and so strong, that even now,
 thanks to his power then, when he sings out
 his early morning song, all men leap up
 to head for work—blacksmiths, potters, tanners,
 men who deal in corn or supervise the baths,
 or make our shields or fabricate our lyres—
 they all lace on their shoes and set off in the dark.

EUELPIDES

I can vouch for that! I had some bad luck,
 thanks to that cock—I lost my cloak to thieves,
 a soft and warm one, too, of Phrygian wool.
 I'd been invited to a festive do,
 where some child was going to get his name,
 right here in the city. I'd had some drinks—
 and those drinks, well, they made me fall asleep.
 Before the other guests began to eat,
 that bird lets rip his cock-a-doodle-doo!
 I thought it was the early morning call.
 So I run off for Halimus¹⁰⁶—but then,
 just outside the city walls, I get mugged,
 some coat thief hits me square across the back—
 he used a cudgel! When I fall down there,
 about to cry for help, he steals my cloak!

¹⁰⁶*win*: a reference to the fact that *The Birds* is competing in a drama festival.

PISTHETAIROS

To resume—way back then the Kite was king.
He ruled the Greeks.

CHORUS LEADER

King of the Greeks!!

PISTHETAIROS

That's right.

As king he was the first to show us how
to grovel on the ground before a kite.

EUELPIDES

By Dionysus, I once saw a kite
and rolled along the ground, then, on my back,
my mouth wide open, gulped an obol down.
I had to trudge home with an empty sack.¹⁰⁷

PISTHETAIROS

Take Egypt and Phoenicia—they were ruled
by Cuckoo kings. And when they cried “Cuckooooo!!”
all those Phoenicians harvested their crop—
the wheat and barley in their fields.

EUELPIDES

That's why
if someone's cock is ploughing your wife's field,
we call you “Cuckoo!”—you're being fooled!¹⁰⁸

PISTHETAIROS

The kingship of the birds was then so strong
that in the cities of the Greeks a king—
an Agamemnon, say, or Menelaus—
had a bird perched on his regal sceptre.
And it got its own share of all the gifts
the king received.

EUELPIDES

Now, that I didn't know.
I always get amazed in tragedies

¹⁰⁷*Earth*: Kronos was the father of Zeus; the Titans were the sons of Kronos. Earth was the original mother goddess.

¹⁰⁸*Halimus*: a community on the coast near Athens.

when some king Priam comes on with a bird.
 I guess it stands on guard there, keeping watch
 to see what presents Lysicrates gets.¹⁰⁹

PISTHETAIROS

Here's the weirdest proof of all—lord Zeus
 who now commands the sky, because he's king,
 carries an eagle on his head. There's more—
 his daughter has an owl, and Apollo,
 like a servant, has a hawk.

EUELPIDES

That's right,
 by Demeter! What's the reason for those birds?

PISTHETAIROS

So when someone makes a sacrifice
 and then, in accordance with tradition,
 puts the guts into god's hands, the birds
 can seize those entrails well before Zeus can.
 Back then no man would swear upon the gods—
 they swore their oaths on birds. And even now,
 our Lampon seals his promises "By Goose,"
 when he intends to cheat.¹¹⁰ In days gone by,
 all men considered you like that—as great
 and sacred beings. Now they all think of you
 as slaves and fools and useless layabouts.
 They throw stones at you, as if you're mad.
 And every hunter in the temples there
 sets up his traps—all those nooses, gins,
 limed sticks and snares, fine mesh and hunting nets,
 and cages, too. Then once they've got you trapped,
 they sell you by the bunch. Those who come to buy
 poke and prod your flesh. If you seem good to eat,
 they don't simply roast you by yourself—no!

¹⁰⁹*kite*: an old Greek custom of saluting the kite as the bird announcing the arrival of spring by rolling on the ground. This speech refers to the habit of carrying small coins in the mouth. Having eaten his money, he can't buy the food he set out to purchase.

¹¹⁰These lines are an attempt to deal with an totally obscure sexual pun in the Greek.

They grate on cheese, mix oil and silphium
with vinegar—and then whip up a sauce,
oily and sweet, which they pour on you hot,
as if you were a chunk of carrion meat.

CHORUS

This human speaks
of our great pain
our fathers' sins
we mourn again—
born into rule,
they threw away
what they received,
their fathers' sway.

But now you've come—
fine stroke of fate—
to save our cause.
Here let me state
I'll trust myself
and all my chicks
to help promote
your politics.

CHORUS LEADER

You need to stick around to tell us all
what we should do. Our lives won't be worth living
unless by using every scheme there is
we get back what's ours—our sovereignty.

PISTHETAIROS

Then the first point I'd advise you of is this:
there should be one single city of the birds.
Next, you should encircle the entire air,
all this space between the earth and heaven,
with a huge wall of baked brick—like Babylon.

EUELPIDES

O Kebriones and Porphyryon!

What a mighty place! How well fortified!¹¹¹

PISTHETAIROS

When you've completed that, demand from Zeus
he give you back your rule. If he says no,
he doesn't want to and won't sign on at once,
you then declare a holy war on him.

Tell those gods they can't come through your space
with cocks erect, the way they used to do,
rushing down to screw another woman—
like Alkmene, Semele, or Alope.¹¹²

For if you ever catch them coming down
you'll stamp your seal right on their swollen pricks—
they won't be fucking women any more.

And I'd advise you send another bird
as herald down to human beings to say
that since the birds from now on will be kings,
they have to offer sacrifice to them.

The offerings to the gods take second place.
Then each of the gods must be closely matched
with an appropriate bird. So if a man
is offering Athena holy sacrifice,
he must first give the Coot some barley corn.
If sacrificing sheep to god Poseidon,
let him bring toasted wheat grains to the Duck.

And anyone who's going to sacrifice
to Hercules must give the Cormorant
some honey cakes. A ram for Zeus the king? Then first, because the Wren is king of
birds,
ahead of Zeus himself, his sacrifice
requires the worshipper to execute
an uncastrated gnat.

EUELPIDES

I like that bit about

¹¹¹*Lysicrates gets*: a reference to a corrupt Athenian politician.

¹¹²*Lampon*: a well known soothsayer in Athens. "By Goose" is a euphemistic way of swearing "By Zeus."

the slaughtered gnat. Now thunder on, great Zan.¹¹³

CHORUS LEADER

But how will humans think of us as gods
and not just jackdaws flying around on wings?

PISTHETAIROS

A foolish question. Hermes is a god,
and he has wings and flies—so do others,
all sorts of them. There's Victory, for one,
with wings of gold. And Eros is the same.
Then there's Iris—just like a timorous dove,
that's what Homer says.

EUELPIDES

But what if Zeus
lets his thunder peal, then fires down on us
his lightning bolt—that's got wings as well.

PISTHETAIROS [ignoring Euelpides]

Now, if men in their stupidity
think nothing of you and keep worshipping
Olympian gods, then a large cloud of birds,
of rooks and sparrows, must attack their farms,
devouring all the seed. And as they starve,
let Demeter then dole out grain to them.

EUELPIDES

She won't be willing to do that, by Zeus.
She'll make excuses—as you'll see.

PISTHETAIROS

Then as a test,
the ravens can peck out their livestock's eyes,
the ones that pull the ploughs to work the land,
and other creatures, too. Let Apollo
make them better—he's the god of healing.
That's why he gets paid.

EUELPIDES

But you can't do this

¹¹³*Kebriones* and *Porphyryon* were two Giants who fought against the Olympian gods.

'til I've sold my two little oxen first.

PISTHETAIROS

But if they think of you as god, as life,
as Earth, as Kronos and Poseidon, too,
then all good things will come to them.

CHORUS LEADER

Tell me
what these good things are.

PISTHETAIROS

Well, for starters,
locusts won't eat the blossoms on their vines.
The owls and kestrels in just one platoon
will rid them of those pests. Mites and gall wasps 790
won't devour the figs. One troop of thrushes
will eradicate them one and all.

CHORUS LEADER

But how will we make people wealthy? That's what they mostly want.

PISTHETAIROS

When people come
petitioning your shrines, the birds can show
the mining sites that pay. They'll tell the priest
the profitable routes for trade. That way
no captain of a ship will be wiped out.

CHORUS LEADER

Why won't those captains come to grief?

PISTHETAIROS

They'll always ask the birds about the trip.
Their seer will say, "A storm is on the way.
Don't sail just yet" or "Now's the time to sail—
you'll turn a tidy profit."

EUELPIDES

Hey, that's for me—
I'll buy a merchant ship and take command.
I won't be staying with you.

PISTHETAIROS

Birds can show men
the silver treasures of their ancestors,
buried in the ground so long ago.
For birds know where these are. Men always say,
> “No one knows where my treasure lies, no one,
> except perhaps some bird.”

EUELPIDES

I’ll sell my boat.
I’ll buy a spade and dig up tons of gold.

CHORUS LEADER

How will we provide for human health? Such things dwell with the gods.

PISTHETAIROS

If they’re doing well,
is that not giving them good health?

EUELPIDES

You’re right.
A man whose business isn’t very sound
is never medically well.

CHORUS LEADER

All right,
but how will they get old? That’s something, too,
Olympian gods bestow. Must they die young?

PISTHETAIROS

No, no, by god. The birds will add on years,
three hundred more.

CHORUS LEADER

And where will those come from?

PISTHETAIROS

From the birds’ supply. You know the saying,
“Five human lifetimes lives the cawing crow.”¹¹⁴

EUELPIDES

My word, these birds are much more qualified
to govern us than Zeus.

¹¹⁴These women all had sexual encounters with gods. Alkmene and Zeus produced Hercules; Semele and Zeus produced Dionysus; and Alope and Poseidon produced Hippothoon.

PISTHETAIROS

Far better qualified!

First, we don't have to build them holy shrines,
made out of stone, or put up golden doors
to decorate their sanctuaries. They live
beneath the bushes and young growing trees.

As for the prouder birds, an olive grove
will be their temple. When we sacrifice,
no need to go to Ammon or to Delphi—
we'll just stand among arbutus trees
or oleasters with an offering—
barley grains or wheat—uttering our prayers,
our arms outstretched, so from them we receive
our share of benefits. And these we'll gain
by throwing them a few handfuls of grain.

CHORUS LEADER

Old man, how much you've been transformed for me—
From my worst enemy into my friend,
my dearest friend. These strategies of yours—
I'll not abandon them, not willingly.

CHORUS

The words you've said make us rejoice—
and so we'll swear with just one voice
an oath that if you stand with me—
our thoughts and aims in unity—
honest, pious, just, sincere,
to go against the gods up there,
if we're both singing the same song
the gods won't have my sceptre long.

CHORUS LEADER

Whatever can be done with force alone
we're ready to take on—what requires brains
or thinking through, all that stuff's up to you.

PISTHETAIROS

That's right, by Zeus. No time for dozing now,

or entertaining doubts, like Nikias.¹¹⁵

No—let's get up and at it fast.

TEREUS

But first, you must come in this nest of mine,
these sticks and twigs assembled here. So now,
both of you, tell us your names.

PISTHETAIROS

That's easy.

My name's Pisthetairos.

TEREUS

And this man here?

EUELPIDES

I'm Euelpides, from Crioa.

TEREUS

Welcome both of you!

PISTHETAIROS and EUELPIDES

Thanks very much.

TEREUS

Won't you come in?

PISTHETAIROS

Let's go. But you go first—
show us the way.

TEREUS

Come on, then.

[Tereus enters his house]

PISTHETAIROS [holding back, calling into the house]

But . . . it's strange . . .

Come back a minute.

[Tereus reappears at the door]

Look, tell us both

how me and him can share the place with you
when you can fly but we're not able to.

TEREUS

I don't see any problem there.

¹¹⁵*Zan*: an archaic and contemptuous name for Zeus.

PISTHETAIROS

Maybe,
but in Aesop's fables there's a story told
about some fox who hung around an eagle,
with unfortunate results.

TEREUS

Don't be afraid.
We have a little root you nibble on—
and then you'll grow some wings.

PISTHETAIROS

All right then,
let's go. [To the slaves] Manodorus, Xanthias,
bring in our mattresses.

CHORUS LEADER [to Tereus]

Hold on a second—
I'm calling you.

TEREUS

Why are you calling me?

CHORUS LEADER

Take those two men in—give 'em a good meal.
But bring your tuneful nightingale out here,
who with the Muses sings such charming songs—
leave her with us so we can play together.

PISTHETAIROS

Yes, by god—agree to their request.
Bring out your little birdie in the reeds.

EUELPIDES

For gods' sake, bring her out, so we can see
this lovely nightingale of yours.

TEREUS

If that's what you both want, it must be done.
[calling inside]
Come here, Procne. Our guests are calling you.

[Enter Procne from the house. She has a nightingale's head and wings but the
body of a young woman. She is wearing gold jewellery]

PISTHETAIROS

Holy Zeus, that's one gorgeous little bird!
What a tender chick!

EUELPIDES

How I'd love to help that birdie
spread her legs, if you catch my drift.

PISTHETAIROS

Look at that—
all the gold she's wearing—just like a girl.

EUELPIDES

What I'd like to do right now is kiss her.

PISTHETAIROS

You idiot—look at that beak she's got,
a pair of skewers.

EUELPIDES

All right, by god,
we'll treat her like an egg—peel off the shell,
take it clean off her head, and then we'll kiss her.

TEREUS

Let's get inside.

PISTHETAIROS

You lead us in—good luck to all!

[Pisthetairos, Euelpides, Tereus, Xanthias, and Manodorus enter the house]

CHORUS [singing to Procne]

Ah, my tawny throated love,
of all the birds that fly above
you're dearest to my heart
your sweet melodious voice
in my song plays its part—
my lovely Nightingale,
you've come,
you've come.
And now you're here with me.
Pour forth your melody.
Pipe out the lovely sounds of spring,

a prelude to my rhythmic speech
in every melody you sing.

[Procne plays on the flute for a few moments as the Chorus Leader prepares to address the audience directly. He steps forward getting close to the spectators]

CHORUS LEADER

Come now, you men out there, who live such dark, sad lives—
you're frail, just like a race of leaves—you're shaped from clay,
you tribes of insubstantial shadows without wings,
you creatures of a day, unhappy mortal men,
you figures from a dream, now turn your minds to us,
the eternal, deathless, air-borne, ageless birds,
whose wisdom never dies, so you may hear from us
the truth about celestial things, about the birds—
how they sprang into being, how the gods arose,
how rivers, Chaos, and dark Erebus were formed¹¹⁶
— about all this you'll learn the truth. And so from me
tell Prodicus in future to depart.¹¹⁷ At the start,
there was Chaos, and Night, and pitch-black Erebus,
and spacious Tartarus. There was no earth, no heaven,
no atmosphere. Then in the wide womb of Erebus,
that boundless space, black-winged Night, first creature born,
made pregnant by the wind, once laid an egg. It hatched,
when seasons came around, and out of it sprang Love—
the source of all desire, on his back the glitter
of his golden wings, just like the swirling whirlwind.
In broad Tartarus, Love had sex with murky Chaos.
From them our race was born—our first glimpse of the light.
Before that there was no immortal race at all,
not before Love mixed all things up. But once they'd bred
and blended in with one another, Heaven was born,
Ocean and Earth—and all that clan of deathless gods.
Thus, we're by far the oldest of all blessed ones,
for we are born from Love. There's lots of proof for this.

¹¹⁶crow: in legend and folk lore the life span of the crow was enormous.

¹¹⁷Nikias: Athenian general, famous for his hesitation about tactics.

We fly around the place, assisting those in love—
 the handsome lads who swear they'll never bend for sex,
 but who, as their young charms come to an end, agree
 to let male lovers bugger them, thanks to the birds,
 our power as gifts—one man gives a porphyryon,
 another man a quail, a third one gives a goose,
 and yet another offers up a Persian Fowl.¹¹⁸
 All mortals' greatest benefits come from us birds.
 The first is this: we make the season known—springtime,
 winter, autumn—it's time to sow, as soon as Crane
 migrates to Lybia with all that noise. He tells
 the master mariner to hang his rudder up
 and go to sleep awhile. He tells Orestes, too,
 to weave himself a winter cloak, so he won't freeze
 when he sets out again to rip off people's clothes.¹¹⁹
 Then after that the Kite appears, to let you know
 another season's here—it's time to shear the sheep.
 Then Swallow comes. Now you should sell your winter cloak
 and get yourself a light one. So we're your Ammon,
 Delphi and Dodona—we're your Apollo, too.¹²⁰
 See how, in all your business, you first look to birds—
 when you trade, buy goods, or when a man gets married.
 Whatever you think matters in a prophecy,
 you label that a bird—to you, Rumour's a bird;
 you say a sneeze or a chance meeting is a bird,
 a sound's a bird, a servant's a bird—and so's an ass.
 It's clear you look on us as your Apollo.

CHORUS

So you ought to make gods of your birds,
 your muses prophetic, whose words
 all year round you've got,
 unless it's too hot.

¹¹⁸*Erebus*: the primeval darkness.

¹¹⁹*Prodicus*: a reference to a well known philosopher who offered a materialistic explanation for the origin of the gods.

¹²⁰These lines refer to the custom of giving one's lover a bird as a present.

Your questions will always be heard.

And we won't run away to a cloud
and sit there like Zeus, who's so proud—
we're ready to give,
hang out where you live,
and be there for you in the crowd.

CHORUS LEADER

Yes, to you, your children, and their children, too,
we'll grant wealth and health, good life, and happiness,
peace, youth, laughter, dances, festivals of song—
and birds' milk, too—so much, you'll find yourself worn out
with our fine gifts—yes, that's how rich you'll be.

CHORUS

O woodland Muse
Tio-tio-tio-tiotinx
my muse of varied artful song
on trees and from high mountain peaks
tio-tio-tio-tiotinx
to your notes I sing along
in my leafy ash tree seat.
tio-tio-tio-tiontinx
From my tawny throat I fling
my sacred melodies to Pan.
In holy dance I chant and sing
our mother from the mountain land.
Toto-toto-toto-toto-toto-totinx
Here Phrynichus would always sip
ambrosial nectar from our tone
to make sweet music of his own.
tio-tio-tio-tiotinx.

CHORUS LEADER

If there's someone out there in the audience
who'd like to spend his future life among the birds
enjoying himself, he should come to us. Here, you see,
whatever is considered shameful by your laws,

is all just fine among us birds. Consider this—
if your tradition says one shouldn't beat one's dad,
up here with us it's all right if some young bird
goes at his father, hits him, cries, "You wanna fight? Then put up your spur!" If out
there among you all
there is, by chance, a tattooed slave who's run away,
we'll call him a spotted francolin. Or else,
if someone happens to be Phrygian, as pure
as Spintharos, he'll be a Philemon-bred finch.
If he's like Execestides, a Carian slave,
let him act the Cuckoo—steal his kin from us—
some group of citizens will claim him soon enough.
And if the son of Peisias still has in mind
betraying our city gates to worthless men,
let him become his father's little partridge cock—
for us there's nothing wrong with crafty partridge stock.

CHORUS

Tio-tio-tio-tio-tinx- That's how the swans
massed in a crowd
with rustling wings
once raised aloud
Apollo's hymn.

Tio-tio-tio-tio-tinx
They sat in rows
on river banks
where Hebros flows.

Tio-tio-tio-tio-tinx
Their song then rose
through cloud and air—
it cast its spell
on mottled tribes
of wild beasts there—
the silent sky
calmed down the sea.
Toto-toto-toto-toto-totinx.

Olympus rang—
amazement seized
its lords and kings.
Then Muses there
and Graces, too,
voiced their response—
Olympus sang.
Tio-tio-tio-tio-tiotinx.

CHORUS LEADER

There's nothing sweeter or better than growing wings.
If any of you members of the audience
had wings, well, if you were feeling bored or hungry
with these tragic choruses, you could fly away,
go home for dinner, and then, once you'd had enough,
fly back to us again. Or if, by any chance,
a Patrocleides sits out there among you all,
dying to shit, he wouldn't have to risk a fart
in his own pants—he could fly off and let 'er rip,
take a deep breath, and fly back down again.
If it should be the case that one of you out there
is having an affair, and you observe her husband
sitting here, in seats reserved for Council men,
well, once again, you could fly off and fuck the wife,
then fly back from her place and take your seat once more.
Don't you see how having wings to fly beats everything? Just look at Diitrephes—the
only wings he had
were handles on his flasks of wine, but nonetheless,
they chose him to lead a squad of cavalry,
then for a full command, so now, from being nobody,
he carries out our great affairs—he's now become
a tawny civic horse-cock.¹²¹

[Enter Pisthetairos and Euelpides from Tereus' house. They now have wings on
and feathers on their heads instead of hair]

PISTHETAIROS

¹²¹*Orestes*: the reference is to a well-known thief of other people's clothing.

Well, that's that. By Zeus,
I've never seen a more ridiculous sight!

EUELPIDES

What are you laughing at?

PISTHETAIROS

At your feathers.

Have you any idea what you look like—

what you most resemble with those feathers on? A goose painted by some cheap
artiste!

EUELPIDES

And you look like a blackbird—one whose hair
has just been cut using a barber's bowl.

PISTHETAIROS

People will use us as metaphors—

as Aeschlyus would say, "We're shot by feathers
not from someone else but of our very own."

CHORUS LEADER

All right, then. What do we now need to do?

PISTHETAIROS

First, we have to name our city, something
fine and grand. Then after that we sacrifice
an offering to the gods.

EUELPIDES

That's my view, too.

CHORUS LEADER

So what name shall we give our city?

PISTHETAIROS

Well, do you want to use that mighty name
from Lacedaimon—shall we call it Sparta?

EUELPIDES

By Hercules, would I use that name Sparta
for my city? No. I wouldn't even try
esparto grass to make my bed, not if

I could use cords of linen.¹²²

PISTHETAIROS

All right then, what name
shall we provide?

CHORUS LEADER

Some name from around here—
to do with clouds, with high places full of air,
something really extra grand.

PISTHETAIROS

Well, then,
how do you like this: Cloudcuckooland?

CHORUS LEADER

Yes! That's good! You've come up with a name 1090
that's really wonderful—it's great!

EUELPIDES

Hang on,
is this Cloudcuckooland the very spot
where Theogenes keeps lots of money,
and Aeschines hides all his assets?¹²³

PISTHETAIROS

It's even more than that—it's Phlegra Plain,
the place where gods beat up on all the giants
in a bragging match.¹²⁴

EUELPIDES

This fine metropolis!

O what a glittering thing this city is!

Now who should be the city's guardian god? Who gets to wear the sacred robes we
weave?

PISTHETAIROS

Why not let Athena do the guarding?

¹²²In other words, we're all the oracles you need. Ammon, Delphi, and Dodona are shrines famous for prophecy. Apollo is the god of prophecy.

¹²³*Diitrephes*: prominent Athenian politician and general. A horse-cock is a mythological animal with the front of a horse and the rear of a cock.

¹²⁴poor people used esparto grass to make rope chords to hold up the mattress. Rich folks used linen. The pun here is obviously on Sparta-esparto. Euelpides won't have anything to do with Sparta or anything that sounds like it.

EUELPIDES

But how can we have a finely ordered state
where a female goddess stands there fully armed,
while Cleisthenes still fondles weaving shuttles.¹²⁵

PISTHETAIROS

Well, who will hold our city's strong Storkade?

CHORUS LEADER

A bird among us of a Persian breed—
it's said to be the fiercest anywhere
of all the war god's chicks.

EUELPIDES

Some princely cocks? They're just the gods to live among the rocks!

PISTHETAIROS [to Euelpides]

Come now, you must move up into the air,
and help the ones who're building up the wall—
hoist rubble for 'em, strip and mix the mortar,
haul up the hod, and then fall off the ladder.
Put guards in place, and keep all fires concealed.
Make your inspection rounds holding the bell.¹²⁶
Go to sleep up there. Then send out heralds—
one to gods above, one down to men below.
And then come back from there to me.

EUELPIDES

And you? You'll stay here? Well, to hell with you . . .

PISTHETAIROS

Hey, my friend,
you should go where I send you—without you
none of that work I mentioned will get done.
We need a sacrifice to these new gods.
I'll call a priest to organize the show.

[Euelpides exits. Pisthetairos calls to the slaves through the doors of Tereus' house]

¹²⁵*Theogenes and Aeschines*: two Athenian business men who constantly boasted they were richer than they were.

¹²⁶the *giants* were the monstrous children of Uranus; the gods are the Olympians, headed by Zeus. The point here is that Cloud cuckoo land is so great, it's a place for divine boasting, not just the sort of thing rich Athenians might brag about.

You, boy, pick up the basket, and you,
my lad, grab up the holy water.

[Pisthetairos enters the house. As the Chorus sings, the slaves emerge and prepare for the sacrifice. The Chorus is accompanied by a raven playing the pipes]

CHORUS

I think it's good and I agree,
your notions here are fine with me,
a great big march with dancing throngs
and to the gods send holy songs,
and then their benefits to keep
we'll sacrifice a baby sheep—
let go our cry, the Pythian shout,
while Chaeris plays our chorus out.

[The Raven plays erratically on the pipe. Pisthetairos comes out of the house. He brings a priest with him, who is leading a small scrawny goat for the sacrifice]

PISTHETAIROS [to the Raven]

Stop blowing all that noise! By Hercules,
what's this? I've seen some strange things, heaven knows,
but never this—a raven with a pipe
shoved up his nose. Come on, priest, work your spell,
and sacrifice to these new gods as well.

PRIEST

I'll do it. But where's the basket-bearing boy?

[The slave appears with the basket]

Let us now pray to Hestia of the birds,¹²⁷
and to the Kite that watches o'er the hearth,
to all Olympian birds and birdesses . . .

PISTHETAIROS [to himself]

O Hawk of Sunium, all hail to you,
Lord of the Sea . . .

PRIEST

And to the Pythian Swan of Delos—
let's pray to Leto, mother of the quail
to Artemis the Goldfinch . . .

¹²⁷ *Cleisthenes*: a well-known homosexual in Athens, often satirized by Aristophanes.

PISTHETAIROS

Ha! No more goddess
of Colaenis now, but goldfinch Artemis . . .

PRIEST

. . . to Sabazdios, Phrygian frigate bird,
to the great ostrich mother of the gods
and of all men . . .

PISTHETAIROS

. . . to Cybele, our ostrich queen,
mother of Cleocritos¹²⁸ . . .

PRIEST

. . . may they give
to all Cloudcuckooites security,
good health, as well—and to the Chians, too.¹²⁹

PISTHETAIROS

I do like that—the way those Chians
always get tacked on everywhere—

PRIEST

. . . to Hero birds, and to their chicks,
to Porphyryons and Pelicans,
both white and grey, to Raptor-birds and Pheasants,
Peacocks and Warblers . . .

[The Priest starts to get carried away]

. . . Ospreys and Teals

Hérons and Gannets, Terns, small Tits, big Tits, and . . .

PISTHETAIROS [interrupting]

Hold on, dammit—stop calling all these birds.

You idiot! In what sort of sacrifice

does one call for ospreys and for vultures? Don't you see—one kite could snatch this
goat,

then carry it away? Get out of here,

you and your garlands, too. I'll do it myself—

I'll offer up this beast all on my own.

¹²⁸The officer inspecting the sentries regularly rang a small bell to indicate that all was well.

¹²⁹*Hestia*: traditional goddess of the hearth.

[Pisthetairos pushes the Priest away. Exit Priest]

CHORUS

Now once again I have to sing
a song to purify you all,
a holy sacred melody.
The Blessed Ones I have to call—
but if you're in a mood to eat
we just need one and not a score
for here our sacrificial meat
is horns and hair, and nothing more.

PISTHETAIROS

Let us pray while we make sacrifice
to our feathery gods . . . [raises his eyes to sky and shuts his eyes]
[A poet suddenly bursts on the scene reciting his verses as he enters]

POET [reciting]

O Muse, in your songs sing the renown
of Cloudcuckooland—this happy town . . .

PISTHETAIROS

Where'd this thing come from? Tell me—who are you?

POET

Me? I'm a sweet tongued warbler of the words—
a nimble servant of the Muse, as Homer says.

PISTHETAIROS

You're a slave and wear your hair that long?

POET

No, but all poets of dramatic songs
are nimble servants of the Muse, as Homer says.

PISTHETAIROS

No doubt that's why your nimble cloak's so thin.
But, oh poet, why has thou come hither?

POET

I've been making up all sorts of splendid songs
to celebrate your fine Cloudcuckoolands—
dithyrambs and virgin songs and other tunes

after the style of that Simonides.¹³⁰

PISTHETAIROS

When did you compose these tunes? Some time ago?

POET

O long long ago—yes, I’ve been singing
the glory of this town for years.

PISTHETAIROS

Look here—

I’ve just been making sacrifice today—
the day our city gets its name. What’s more,
it’s only now, as with a new-born child,
I’ve given it that name.

POET

Ah yes, but Muses’ words are swift indeed—
like twinkling hooves on rapid steeds.
So thou, oh father, first of Aetna’s kings,
whose name means lots of holy things,
present me something from thy grace
whate’er you wish, just nod your face.¹³¹

PISTHETAIROS

This fellow here is going to give us trouble—
unless we can escape by giving something.

[Calling one of the slaves]

You there with the tunic and the jerkin on.
Strip off the leather jerkin. Give it up
to this master poet. Take this jerkin.
You look as if you’re really freezing cold.

POET

The darling Muse accepts the gift
and not unwillingly—
But now your wit should get a lift
from Pindar’s words which . . .

PISTHETAIROS

¹³⁰*Cleocritus*: a very ugly Athenian who was often compared to an ostrich.

¹³¹The *Chians* were staunch allies of Athens in the Peloponnesian War.

This fellow's never going to go away!

POET [making up a quotation]

"Out there amid nomadic Scythians,
he wanders from the host in all his shame,
he who has no woven garment shuttle-made—
a jerkin on, but no tunic to his name."

I speak so you can understand.

PISTHETAIROS

Yes, I get it—you want the tunic, too.

[To the slave] Take it off. We must assist our poets.

Take it and get out.

POET

I'm on my way—

But as I go I'll still make songs like these
in honour of your city—

"O thou sitting on a golden throne,
sing to celebrate that shivering, quivering land.
I walked its snow-swept fruitful plains . . ."

[At this point Pisthetairos has had enough. He grabs the poet and throws him
into the wings]

POET [as he exits]

Aaaaiiii!

PISTHETAIROS [calling after him]

Well, by Zeus, at least you've now put behind
the cold, since you've got that little tunic on!
God knows, that's a problem I'd not thought about—
he learned about our city here so fast.

[resuming the sacrifice] Come, boy, pick up the holy water
and walk around again. Let everyone
observe a sacred holy silence now . . .

[Enter an Oracle Monger, quickly interrupting the ceremony. He is carrying a
scroll]

ORACLE MONGER

Don't sacrifice that goat!

PISTHETAIROS

What? Who are you?

ORACLE MONGER

Who am I? I'm an oracular interpreter.

PISTHETAIROS

To hell with you!

ORACLE MONGER

Now, now, my dear good man,
don't disparage things divine. You should know
there's an oracle of Bacis which speaks
of your Cloudcuckooland—it's pertinent.

PISTHETAIROS

Then how come you didn't talk to me
about this prophecy some time before
I set my city here?

ORACLE MONGER

I could not do that—
powers divine held me in check.

PISTHETAIROS

Well, I guess
there's nothing wrong in listening to it now.

ORACLE MONGER [unrolling the scroll and reading from it]

"Once grey crows and wolves shall live together
in that space between Corinth and Sicyon . . ."

PISTHETAIROS

What my connection to Corinthians?

ORACLE MONGER

Its Bacis' cryptic way of saying "air."
"First sacrifice to Pandora a white-fleeced ram.
Whoever first comes to prophesy my words,
let him receive a brand new cloak and sandals."

PISTHETAIROS

Are sandals in there, too?

ORACLE MONGER [showing the scroll]

Consult the book.

"Give him the bowl, fill his hands full with offal . . ."

PISTHETAIROS

The entrails? Does it say that in there?

ORACLE MONGER

Consult the book. “Inspired youth,
if thou dost complete what here I do command,
thou shalt become an eagle in the clouds—if not,
if thou will not give them me, you’ll ne’er become
an eagle, or a turtle dove, or woodpecker.”

PISTHETAIROS

That’s all in there, as well?

ORACLE MONGER

Consult the book.

PISTHETAIROS [pulling out a sheet of paper from under his tunic]

Your oracle is not at all like this one—

Apollo’s very words. I then wrote down.

“When an impostor comes without an invitation—
a cheating rogue—and pesters men at sacrifice,
so keen is he to taste the inner parts, well then,
he must be beaten hard between the ribs . . .”

ORACLE MONGER

I don’t think you’re reading that.

PISTHETAIROS

Consult the book.

“Do not spare him, even if he’s way up there,
an eagle in the clouds, or if he’s Lampon
or great Diopeithes in the flesh.”¹³²

ORACLE MONGER

That’s not in there, is it?

PISTHETAIROS

Consult the book.

Now, get out! To hell with you . . .

[Pisthetairos beats the Oracle Monger off stage, hitting him with the scroll]

ORACLE MONGER

Ooooh . . . poor me! [Exit]

¹³²*Simonides*: well-known lyric poet of the previous generation.

PISTHETAIROS

Run off and do your soothsaying somewhere else!

[Enter Meton, carrying various surveying instruments, and wearing soft leather buskin boots]¹³³

METON

I have come here among you all . . .

PISTHETAIROS

Here's more trouble.

And what have you come here to do? Your scheme—
what's it look like? What do you have in mind? Why hike up here in buskin?

METON

I intend
to measure out the air for you—dividing it
in surveyed lots.

PISTHETAIROS

For heaven's sake,
who are you?

METON [shocked]

Who am I? I'm Meton—
famous throughout Greece and Colonus.¹³⁴

PISTHETAIROS

What are these things you've got?

METON

Rods to measure air.
You see, the air is, in its totality,
shaped like a domed pot cover . . . Thus . . . and so,
from up above I'll lay my ruler . . . it bends . . . thus . . .
set my compass inside there . . . You see?

PISTHETAIROS

I don't get it.

METON

With this straight ruler here
I measure this, so that your circle here

¹³³These lines are a jumble of allusions to well known poems. The founder of Aetna is Heiron, ruler of Syracuse, whose name is the same as the word for "of holy things." In Homer a nod of the head signifies divine assent.

¹³⁴*Lampon and Diopieithes* were well-known soothsayers in Athens.

becomes a square—and right in the middle there
we have a market place, with straight highways
proceeding to the centre, like a star,
which, although circular, shines forth straight beams
in all directions . . . Thus . . .

PISTHETAIROS

This man's a Thales¹³⁵

Now, Meton . . .

METON

What?

PISTHETAIROS

You know I love you—
so do as I say and head out of town.

METON

Am I in peril?

PISTHETAIROS

It's like in Sparta—
they're kicking strangers out—lots of trouble—
plenty of beatings on the way through town.

METON

You mean a revolution?

PISTHETAIROS

God no, not that.

METON

Then what?

PISTHETAIROS

They've reached a firm decision—
it was unanimous—to punch out every quack.

METON

I think I'd best be off.

PISTHETAIROS

You should, by god,
although you may not be in time—the blows
are coming thick and fast . . .

¹³⁵*Meton* was a famous astronomer and engineer.

[Pisthetairos starts hitting Meton]

METON [running off]

O dear me . . . I'm in a pickle.

[Exit Meton. Pisthetairos yells after him]

PISTHETAIROS

Didn't I say that some time ago? Go somewhere else and do your measuring!

[Enter an Athenian Commissioner. He is carrying voting urns. He is dressed in an extravagantly official costume]¹³⁶

COMMISSIONER

Where are your honorary governors?

PISTHETAIROS

Who is this man—a Sardanapallos?¹³⁷

COMMISSIONER

I have come here to Cloudcuckooland
as your Commissioner—I was picked by lot.

PISTHETAIROS

As Commissioner? Who sent you here?

COMMISSIONER

Some dreadful paper from that Teleas.¹³⁸

PISTHETAIROS

How'd you like to receive your salary
and leave, without doing anything?

COMMISSIONER

By god,
that would be nice. I should be staying at home
for the assembly. I've been doing some work
on Pharnakes' behalf.¹³⁹

PISTHETAIROS

Then take your fee
and go. Here's what you get . . . [strikes him]

COMMISSIONER

What was that?

¹³⁶*Colonus*: a district of Athens.

¹³⁷*Thales*: very famous astronomer and thinker from distant past. Thales is often considered the founder of philosophy.

¹³⁸*Commissioner*: an official who was sent out to supervise and report on a new colony.

¹³⁹*Sardanapallos* was the last king of Assyria, famous in legend for his extravagant lifestyle and appearance.

PISTHETAIROS

A motion on behalf of Pharnakes.

[Pisthetairos strikes him again]

COMMISSIONER

I call on witnesses—he's hitting me—

He can't do that—I'm a Commissioner!

[Exit the Commissioner, on the run. Pisthetairos chases him]

PISTHETAIROS

Piss off! And take your voting urns with you!

Don't you find it weird? Already they've sent out

Commissioners to oversee the city,

before we've made the gods a sacrifice.

[Enter a Statute-Seller reading from a long scroll]

STATUTE SELLER

"If a resident of Cloudcuckooland

should wrong a citizen of Athens . . ."

PISTHETAIROS

Here come scrolls again—what's the trouble now?

STATUE SELLER

I'm a statute seller—and I've come here

to sell you brand-new laws.

PISTHETAIROS

What laws?

STATUTE SELLER

Like this—

"Residents of Cloudcuckooland must use

the same weights and measures and currency

as those in Olophyxia."¹⁴⁰

PISTHETAIROS [kicking him in the bum]

Soon enough

you'll use them on your ass, you Fix-your-Holean!!

STATUTE SELLER

What's up with you?

PISTHETAIROS

¹⁴⁰*Teles*, an Athenian politician, would have proposed sending the Commissioner out.

Take your laws and shove off!

Today I'll give you laws you really feel!

[Statute Seller runs off. The Commissioner enters from the other side, behind Pisthetairos]

COMMISSIONER [reading from a paper]

"I summon Pisthetairos to appear in court
in April on a charge of official outrage . . ."

PISTHETAIROS [turning]

Really? You again! Why are you still here?

[Pisthetairos chases the Commissioner off again. The Statute Seller then re-appears on the other side, also reading from a paper]

STATUTE SELLER

"If anyone chases off court officers
and won't receive them as the law decrees . . ."

PISTHETAIROS [turning]

This is getting really bad—you still here?

[Pisthetairos chases off the Statute Seller. The Commissioner re-appears on the other side of the stage]

COMMISSIONER

I'll ruin you! I'll take you to court—
ten thousand drachmas you'll . . .

PISTHETAIROS: [turning and chasing the Commissioner off stage]

And I'll throw out those voting urns of yours!

STATUTE SELLER [reappearing]

Have you any memory of those evenings
when you used to shit on public pillars
where our laws are carved?

[The Statute Seller turns his back on Pisthetairos, lifts up his tunic, and farts at him]

PISTHETAIROS [reacting to the smell]

Oh god! Someone grab him.

[The slaves try to catch the Statute Seller but he runs off. Pisthetairos calls after him]

Not going to stick around? [to slaves] Let's get out of here—and fast. Go inside.
We'll sacrifice the goat to the gods in there.

[Pisthetairos and the slaves to inside the house]

CHORUS

All mortal men commencing on this day
at every shrine will sacrifice to me,
from now on offering me the prayers they say,
for I control them all and everything I see.
I watch the entire world, and I protect
the growing crops, for I have power to kill
the progeny of all the world's insects,
whose all-devouring jaws would eat their fill
of what bursts out from seeds on ground below,
or fruit above for those who lodge in trees.
I kill the ones who, as the greatest foe,
in sweet-smelling gardens cause great injuries
All living beasts that bite and crawl
are killed—my wings destroy them all.

CHORUS LEADER

This public notice has been proclaimed today:
the man who kills Diagoras the Melian
will receive one talent—and if one of you
assassinates some tyrant long since dead and gone,
he, too, will get one talent. So now, the birds, as well,
wish to make the same announcement here. Anyone
who kills Philocrates the Sparrowman will get
one talent—and if he brings him in alive,
he'll get four.¹⁴¹ That man strings finches up together,
then sells 'em—a single obol gets you seven.
He injures thrushes by inflating them with air
then puts them on display. And he stuff feathers
up the blackbird's nose. He captures pigeons, too,
keeps them locked up, and forces them to work for him,
tied up as decoy birds, underneath his nets.
We wish to make this known to you. If anyone
is keeping birds in cages in your courtyards,

¹⁴¹*Pharnakes* was an important Persian official. Dealing with him would be considered treasonous in some quarters.

we tell you, “Let them go.” If you don’t obey,
you, in your turn, will be arrested by the birds,
tied up and forced to work as decoys where we live.

CHORUS

O happy tribes
of feathered birds—
we never need
a winter cloak.
In summer days
the sun’s far rays
don’t injure us.
I live at ease
among the leaves
in flowery fields.
In love with sun
cicadas sing
through noonday heat
their sharp-toned song
divinely sweet.
In winter caves
and hollow spots
I play all day
with mountain nymphs.
In spring we eat
white myrtle buds,
our virgin treat,
in garden places
of the Graces.

CHORUS LEADER

We want to speak to all the judges here
about our victory—the splendid things
we’ll give them if their verdict goes our way—
how they’ll get much lovelier gifts than those
which Alexander got.¹⁴² And first of all,

¹⁴²A small town in the remote north east of Greece (by Mount Athos).

what every judge is really keen to have,
 some owls of Laureium who'll never leave.¹⁴³
 They'll nest inside your homes, hatch in your purse,
 and always breed small silver change. And then,
 as well as this, you'll live in temple-homes.
 The birds will make your roof tops eagle-style,
 with pediments.¹⁴⁴ If you hold some office,
 a minor post, and wish to get rich quick,
 we'll set a sharp-beaked falcon in your hands.
 And if you need to eat, then we'll dispatch
 a bird's crop, where it keep its stored-up food.
 If you don't vote for us, you should prepare
 some little metal plates to guard your head.
 You'll need to wear them, just like statues do.
 For those of you without that head plate on,
 when you dress up in fine white brand-new clothes,
 the birds will crap on as a punishment.

[Enter Pisthetairos from the house]

PISTHETAIROS

You birds, we've made a splendid sacrifice.
 But why is there still no messenger
 arriving from the walls to bring us news
 of what's going on up there? Ah, here comes one,
 panting as if he'd run across that stream
 at Elis where Olympian athletes race.

[Enter First Messenger, out of breath]

FIRST MESSENGER [he doubles up and can hardly speak]

Where is . . . Where is he . . . where . . . where is . . .
 where . . . where . . . where . . . our governor Pisthetairos?

PISTHETAIROS

I'm here.

FIRST MESSENGER

The building of your wall . . . it's done.

¹⁴³At the drama festival formal public announcements like this were part of the script. Diagoras was a notorious atheist who had fled Athens. The reward for killing old tyrants was part of a ritual pronouncement to protect democracy.

¹⁴⁴*Alexander*: another name for Paris of Troy.

PISTHETAIROS

That's great news.

FIRST MESSENGER

The result—the best there is . . .
the most magnificent . . . so wide across . . .
that Proxenides of Braggadocio
and Theogenes could drive two chariots
in opposite directions past each other
along the top, with giant horses yoked,
bigger than that wooden horse at Troy.

PISTHETAIROS [genuinely surprised]

By Hercules!

FIRST MESSENGER

I measured it myself— 1450
its height—around six hundred feet.

PISTHETAIROS

Wow!

By Poseidon, that's some height! Who built the wall
as high as that?

FIRST MESSENGER

The birds—nobody else.
No Egyptian bore the bricks—no mason,
no carpenter was there. They worked by hand—
I was amazed. Thirty thousand cranes flew in
from Lybia—they brought foundation stones
they'd swallowed down. The corn crakes chipped away
to form the proper shapes. Ten thousand storks
brought bricks. Lapwings and other river birds
fetched water up into the air from down below.

PISTHETAIROS

Who hauled the mortar up there for them?

FIRST MESSENGER

Hérons—
they carried hods.

PISTHETAIROS

How'd they load those hods?

FIRST MESSENGER

My dear man, that was the cleverest thing of all.
Geese shoved their feet into the muck and slid them,
just like shovels, then flicked it in the hods.

PISTHETAIROS

Is there anything we can't do with our feet?

FIRST MESSENGER: Then, by god, the ducks, with slings attached
around their waists, set up the bricks. Behind them
flew the swallows, like young apprentice boys, 1470
with trowels—they carried mortar in their mouths.

PISTHETAIROS

Why should we hire wage labour any more? Go on—who finished off the woodwork
on the wall?

FIRST MESSENGER

The most skilled craftsmen-birds of all of 'em—
woodpeckers. They pecked away to make the gates—
the noise those peckers made—an arsenal!
Now the whole thing has gates. They're bolted shut
and guarded on all sides. Sentries make rounds,
patrolling with their bells, and everywhere
troops are in position, with signal fires
on every tower. But I must go now—
I need to wash. You'll have to do the rest.

[Exit First Messenger]

CHORUS LEADER

What's up with you? Aren't you astonished
to hear the wall's been finished up so fast?

PISTHETAIROS

Yes, by gods, I am. It is amazing!
To me it sounds just like some made-up lie.
But here comes a guard from there—he'll bring news
to us down here of what's going on up top.
He face looks like a dancing warrior's.

[Enter the Second Messenger in a great panic and out of breath]

SECOND MESSENGER

Hey . . . hey . . . Help . . . hey you . . . help! 1490

PISTHETAIROS

What's going on?

SECOND MESSENGER

We suffered something really bad . . .
one of the gods from Zeus has just got through,
flown past the gates into the air, slipping by
the jackdaw sentinels on daytime watch.

PISTHETAIROS

That's bad! A bold and dangerous action.
Which god was it?

SECOND MESSENGER

We're not sure. He had wings—
we do know that.

PISTHETAIROS

You should have sent patrols
of frontier guards out after him without delay.

SECOND MESSENGER

We did dispatch the mounted archers—
thirty thousand falcons, all moving out 1500
with talons curved and ready—kestrels, buzzards,
vultures, eagles, owls—the air vibrating
with the beat and rustle of their wings,
as they search out that god. He's not far off—
in fact, he's here somewhere already.

[Exit Second Messenger]

PISTHETAIROS

We'll have to get our sling-shots out—and bows.
All you orderlies come here! Fire away!
Strike out! Someone fetch a sling for me!

[Xanthias and Manodorus enter with slings and bows. The group huddles
together with weapons ready]

CHORUS [in grand epic style]

And now the combat starts, a strife beyond all words,

me and the gods at war. Let everyone beware, 1510
 protect the cloud-enclosing air, which Erebus
 gave birth to long ago. Make sure no god slips through
 without our catching sight of him. Maintain your watch
 on every side—already I can hear close by
 the sound of beating wings from some god in the sky.

[Enter Iris, in long billowing dress and with a pair of wings. She descends from
 above, suspended by a cable and hovering in mid-air flapping her wings]

PISTHETAIROS

Hey, you—just where do you think you’re flying? Keep still. Stay where you are.
 Don’t move. Stop running.

Who are you? Where you from? You’ve got to tell me.

Where’d you come from?

IRIS

I’m from the Olympian gods.

PISTHETAIROS

You got a name? You look like a ship up there—
 the Salaminia or the Paralos.¹⁴⁵

IRIS

I’m fast Iris.

PISTHETAIROS

Fast as in a boat or fast as in a bitch?

IRIS

What is all this?

PISTHETAIROS

Is there a buzzard here
 who’ll fly up there to arrest this woman?

IRIS

Arrest me? Why are you saying such rubbish?

PISTHETAIROS [making an attempt to hit Iris by swinging his sling]

You’re going to be very sorry about this.

IRIS

This whole affair is most unusual.

PISTHETAIROS

¹⁴⁵The owls of Laureium are coins. The owl was stamped on Athenian coins, and Laureium was the site of the silver mines.

Listen, you silly old fool, what gates
did you pass through to get by the wall?

IRIS

What gates? By god, I don't have the least idea. 1530

PISTHETAIROS

Listen to her—how she feigns ignorance!

Did you go past the jackdaw generals? You won't answer that? Well then, where's
your pass,
the one the storks give out?

IRIS

What's wrong with you?

PISTHETAIROS

You don't have one, do you?

IRIS

Have you lost your wits?

PISTHETAIROS

Didn't some captain of the birds up there
stick a pass on you?

IRIS

By god no, no one up there
made a pass or shoved his stick at me, you wretch.

PISTHETAIROS

So you just fly in here, without a word,
going through empty space and through a city
which don't belong to you?

IRIS

What other route
are gods supposed to fly?

PISTHETAIROS

I've no idea.

But, by god, not this way. It's not legal.
Right now you're in breach of law. Do you know,
of all the Irises there are around,
if you got what you most deserve, you'd be
the one most justly seized and sent to die.

IRIS

But I'm immortal.

PISTHETAIROS

In spite of that,

you would have died. For it's obvious to me
that we'd be suffering the greatest injury,
if, while we rule all other things, you gods
do just what you like and won't recognize
how you must, in your turn, attend upon
those more powerful than you. So tell me,
where are you sailing on those wings of yours?

IRIS

Me? I'm flying to men from father Zeus,
instructing them to sacrifice some sheep
to the Olympian gods on sacred hearths—
and fill their streets with smells of offerings.

PISTHETAIROS

Who are you talking about? Which gods?

IRIS

Which gods? Why us of course—the gods in heaven.

PISTHETAIROS

And you're the gods?

IRIS

Are there any other deities?

PISTHETAIROS

The birds are now men's gods—and to the birds
men must now sacrifice and not, by god, to Zeus.

IRIS [in the grand tragic style]

Thou fool, thou fool, stir not the awesome minds of gods,
lest Justice with the mighty mattock of great Zeus
destroy your race completely—and smoke-filled flames
from Licymnian lightning bolts burn into ash
your body and your home . . .

PISTHETAIROS [interrupting]

Listen, woman—stop your spluttering.

Just keep still. Do you think you're scaring off
some Lydian or Phrygian with such threats? You should know this—if Zeus keeps on
annoying me,

I'll burn his home and halls of Amphion,
reduce them all to ash with fire eagles.

I'll send more than six hundred birds—porphyryons
all dressed in leopard skins, up there to heaven,
to war on him. Once a single porphyryon
caused him distress enough.¹⁴⁶ And as for you,
if you keep trying to piss me off, well then,
I'll deal with Zeus' servant Iris first—

I'll fuck your knickers off—you'd be surprised
how hard an old man's prick like mine can be—
it's strong enough to ram your hull three times.

IRIS

Blast you, you wretch, and your obscenities!

PISTHETAIROS

Go way! Get a move on! Shoo!

[Iris begins to move up and away]

IRIS

My father

won't stand for insolence like this—he'll stop you!

PISTHETAIROS

Just go away, you silly fool! Fly off
and burn someone to ashes somewhere else.

[Exit Iris]

CHORUS

On Zeus' family of gods we've shut our door—
they'll not be passing through my city any more.
Nor will men down below in future time invoke
the gods by sending them their sacrificial smoke.

PISTHETAIROS

Something's wrong. That messenger we sent,
the one that went to human beings, what if

¹⁴⁶Greek temples commonly had triangular pediments known as "eagles."

he never gets back here again?

[Enter First Herald, a bird, carrying a golden crown]

FIRST HERALD

O Pisthetairos, you blessed one,

wisest and most celebrated of all men . . .

the cleverest and happiest . . . trebly blest . . .

[He's run out of adjectives] . . . Speak something to me . . .

PISTHETAIROS

What are you saying?

FIRST HERALD [offering Pisthetairos the golden crown]

All people, in honour of your wisdom,

crown you with this golden diadem.

PISTHETAIROS [putting on the crown]

I accept.

But why do people honour me so much?

FIRST HERALD

O you founder of this most famous town,

this city in the sky, do you not know

how much respect you have among all men,

how many men there are who love this place? Before you built your city in the air,

all men were mad for Sparta—with long hair,

they went around half starved and never washed,

like Socrates—and carrying knobbed sticks.

But now they've all completely changed—these days

they're crazy for the birds. For sheer delight

they imitate the birds in everything.

Early in the day when they've just got up,

like us, they all flock to feed together,

but on their laws, browsing legal leaflets,

nibbling their fill of all decrees. So mad

have they become for birds that many men

have had the names of birds assigned to them.

One lame tradesman now is called the Partridge.

And Melanippus' name is changed to Swallow,¹⁴⁷
 Opuntius the Raven with One Eye.
 Philocles becomes the Lark, and Sheldrake
 is now Teagenes' name. Lycurgus
 has become the Ibis, Chaerephon the Bat,
 Syracosius the Jay, and Meidias
 is now named the Quail—he looks like one
 right after the quail flicker's tapped its head.¹⁴⁸
 They're so in love with birds they all sing songs
 with lines about a swallow or a duck,
 or goose, some kind of pigeon, or just wings,
 even about some tiny bits of feather.
 That what's going on down there. I tell you,
 more than ten thousand men are coming here,
 demanding wings and talons in their lives.
 You've got to find a way to get some wings
 for your new colonists and settlers.

[Exit First Herald]

PISTHETAIROS

All right, by god, this is no time for us
 to just stand around. [To a slave] You, get inside there—
 fill all the crates and baskets up with feathers.¹⁶⁴⁰
 Get on with it as fast as possible.
 Let Manes haul the wings out here to me.¹⁴⁹
 I'll welcome those who come from down below.

[Xanthias and Manodoros go inside the house and start bringing out baskets of feathers]

CHORUS

Our city soon will have a reputation
 for a large and swelling population.

PISTHETAIROS

Just let our luck hold out!

¹⁴⁷Pisthetairus compares Iris to a ship because her dressing is billowing like a sail. The two names he gives are the two main flag ships of the Athenian fleet.

¹⁴⁸*Porphyron* was the name of one of the giants who went to war against Zeus.

¹⁴⁹The lines following refer to a number of political figures in Athens.

CHORUS

Our city here inspires so much love . . .

PISTHETAIROS [to Manodoros, who is bringing out a basket]
I'm telling you you've got to bring it fast!

CHORUS

For what do we not have here up above
which any men require in their places?
Desire, Wisdom, and eternal Graces—
we've got them all and what is still the best—
the happy face of gentle peaceful Rest.

PISTHETAIROS [to Manes who is taking his time bringing out more baskets]
God, you're a lazy slave—move it! Faster!

CHORUS

Let him bring the wings in baskets on the go—
then once more run at him—give him a blow.
The lad is like a donkey—he's that slow.

PISTHETAIROS [frantically sorting feathers]
Yes, that Manes is a useless slave.

CHORUS

Now first of all you need to sort
these wings all out for each cohort—
musical wings and wings of seers,
wings for the sea. You must be clear—
you need to look at all such things
when you give every man his wings.

[Manes comes out with a basket, again moving very slowly]

PISTHETAIROS [going at Manes and grabbing him]
By the kestrels, I can't stop grabbing you—
when I see how miserably slow you are.

[Manes twists loose and runs back into the house. A young man enters singing]

YOUNG MAN [singing]

Oh, I wish I could an eagle be
soaring high above the barren sea,
the grey-blue ocean swell so free.

PISTHETAIROS

It looks like our messenger told us the truth—
here comes someone singing that eagle-song.

YOUNG MAN

Damn it—there's nothing in the world as sweet
as flying . . .

<PISTHETAIROS

You've come to get some wings from us, I guess.¹⁵⁰ >

YOUNG MAN

Yes, I'm in love with all your birdy ways—
I want to live with you and fly. Besides,
I think your laws are really keen.

PISTHETAIROS

What laws? The birds have many laws.

YOUNG MAN

All of them—but I really like that one
which says it's all right for a younger bird
to beat up his old man and strangle him.

PISTHETAIROS

Yes, by god, we think it very manly
when a bird, while still a chick, beats up his dad.

YOUNG MAN

That's why I want to re-locate up here—
I'd love to choke my father, get all his stuff.

PISTHETAIROS

But there's an ancient law among the birds—
inscribed in stone on tablets of the storks,
“When father stork has raised up all his young,
when they are set to fly out of the nest,
then young storks must, in their turn, care for him.”

YOUNG MAN

So coming here has been no use, by god,
if I've now got to feed my father, too.

PISTHETAIROS

¹⁵⁰This reference is to a very popular betting game in which a quail was placed inside a circle and tapped on the head to see if it would back off or stand its ground.

No, no. My dear young man, since you came here
in all good faith, I'll fix you up with wings
just like an orphan bird.¹⁵¹ And I'll give you
some fresh advice—something I learned myself
when I was just a lad. Don't thump your dad.

[Pisthetairos starts dressing the boy as a bird as he says the following lines]

Take this wing here, and in your other hand
hold this spur tight. Think of this crest on top
as from a fighting cock. Then stand your guard,
go on a march, live on a soldier's pay—
and let your father live. You like to fight,
so fly away to territories in Thrace,
and do your fighting there.

YOUNG MAN

By Dionysus,
I think the advice you give is good.
I'll do just what you say.

PISTHETAIROS

And now, by Zeus,
you're talking sense.

[Exit Young Man. Enter Cinesias, singing and dancing very badly]¹⁵²

CINESIAS [singing]

To Olympus on high
with my wings I will fly—
On this song's path I'll soar
and then sing a few more . . .

PISTHETAIROS

This creature needs a whole pile of wings!

CINESIAS [singing]

For my body and mind
know not fear, so I'll find . . .

PISTHETAIROS

Cinesias, welcome. Let me now greet

¹⁵¹Manes is probably another name for Manodoros, since there are only two slaves in the play.

¹⁵²I follow Sommerstein's useful suggestion and add this line here to make sense of the lines which follow.

a man as thin as bark on linden trees!
Why have you come whirling here on such lame feet?

CINESIAS

A bird—that's what I long to be,
a clear-voice nightingale—that's me.

PISTHETAIROS

Stop singing—just tell me what you want to say.

CINESIAS

I want you to give me wings then float up,
flying high into the clouds where I can pluck
wind-whirling preludes swept with snow.

PISTHETAIROS

You want to get your preludes from the clouds?

CINESIAS

But all our skill depends upon the clouds.
Our brilliant dithyrambs are made of air—
of mist and gleaming murk and wispy wings.
You'll soon see that—once you've heard a few.

PISTHETAIROS

No, no—I won't.

CINESIAS

Yes, by Hercules, you will.
For you I'll run through all the airs . . . [starts singing]

O you images of birds,
who extend your wings,
who tread upon the air,
you long-necked birds . . .

PISTHETAIROS [trying to interrupt]

All right. Enough!

CINESIAS [ignoring Pisthetairos, continuing to sing another song]
Soaring upward as I roam.

I wander floating on the breeze . . .

PISTHETAIROS [looking in one of the baskets of wings]

By heaven, I'll stop these blasting winds of yours!

[Pisthetairos takes a pair of wings and starts poking Cinesias around the stage]

with them, tickling him]

CINESIAS [dodging away from Pisthetairos, giggling, and continuing to sing]
First I head along the highway going down south,
but then my body turns towards the windy north,
as I slice airy furrows where no harbour lies . . . 1740

[Cinesias has to stop singing because Pisthetairos is tickling him too much with the wings. He stops running off and singing. He's somewhat out of breath]

Old man, that's a clever trick—pleasant, too—
but really clever.

PISTHETAIROS

You mean you don't enjoy
being whisked with wings?

CINESIAS

Is that the way you treat
the man who trains the cyclic choruses—
the one whom tribes of men still fight to have?¹⁵³

PISTHETAIROS

Would you like to stick around this place
to train a chorus here for Leotrophides,¹⁵⁴
made up of flying birds—the swallow tribe?

CINESIAS

You're making fun of me—that's obvious.
But I won't stop here until I get some wings
and I can run through all the airs.

[Exit Cinesias. Enter a Sycophant, singing to himself]

SYCOPHANT [singing]

Who are these birds with mottled wing?
They don't appear to own a thing—
O dappled swallow with extended wing . . .

PISTHETAIROS

This is no minor problem we've stirred up—
here comes one more person singing to himself.

¹⁵³At the festival for tragic drama, the war orphans were paraded around in special armour given to them by the state.

¹⁵⁴*Cinesias* was a well-known and frequently satirized poet in Athens. He was extremely thin and evidently suffered very badly from diarrhea.

SYCOPHANT [singing]

O long and dappled wings, I call once more . . .

PISTHETAIROS

It seems to me his song's about his cloak—
he needs a lot of swallows to bring in the spring.¹⁵⁵

SYCOPHANT

Where's the man who's handing out the wings
to all who travel here?

PISTHETAIROS

He's standing here.
But you should tell me what you need.

SYCOPHANT

Wings, wings.
I need wings. Don't ask me that again.

PISTHETAIROS

Do you intend to fly off right away,
heading for Pellene?

SYCOPHANT

No, not at all.
I'm a summons server for the islands—
an informer, too . . .

PISTHETAIROS

You're a lucky man
to have such a fine profession.

SYCOPHANT

. . . and I hunt around
to dig up law suits. That's why I need wings,
to roam around delivering summonses
in allied states.

PISTHETAIROS

If you're equipped with wings,
will that make you more skilled in serving men?

SYCOPHANT

¹⁵⁵The tribes were the political divisions in Athenian life. The dithyrambic competitions were organized by tribes, each one wanting the services of the best poets.

No. But I'd escape being hurt by pirates.
 And then I could return home with the cranes,
 once I've swallowed many law suits down
 to serve as ballast.¹⁵⁶

PISTHETAIROS

Is that what you do for work?
 Tell me this—you're a strong young lad and yet
 don't you slander strangers for a living?

SYCOPHANT

What can I do? I never learned to dig.

PISTHETAIROS

But, by god, there are other decent jobs,
 where a young man like you can earn his way,
 more honest trades than launching still more law suits.

SYCOPHANT

My good man, don't keep lecturing me like this.
 Give me some wings.

PISTHETAIROS

I'm giving you some wings—
 I'm doing it as I talk to you right now.

SYCOPHANT

How can you put wings on men with words?

PISTHETAIROS

With words all men can give themselves their wings.

SYCOPHANT

All men?

PISTHETAIROS

Have you never heard in barber shops
 how fathers always talk of their young sons—
 "It's dreadful the way that Diitrephes' speech
 has given my young lad ambitious wings,
 so now he wants to race his chariot."
 Another says "That boy of mine has wings
 and flutters over tragedies."

¹⁵⁶*Leotrophides* was another Athenian famous for being extremely thin (like Cinesias).

SYCOPHANT

So with words
they're really given wings?

PISTHETAIROS

That what I said.

With words our minds are raised—a man can soar.
That's how I want to give you wings—with words,
with useful words, so you can change your life
and get a lawful occupation.

SYCOPHANT

But I don't want to.

PISTHETAIROS

What will you do?

SYCOPHANT

I'll not disgrace my folks.

Informing—that's my family's profession.
So give me now some light, fast falcon's wings—
or kestrel's—then I can serve my papers
on those foreigners, lay the charges here,
and fly back there again.

PISTHETAIROS

Ah, I get it—
what you're saying is that the case is judged
before the stranger gets here.

SYCOPHANT

That's right.

You understand exactly what I do.

PISTHETAIROS

And then, while he's travelling here by ship,
you fly out there to seize his property.

SYCOPHANT

You've said it all. I've got to whip around
just like a whirling top.

PISTHETAIROS

I understand—

a whirling top. Well, here, by god, I've got
the finest wings. They're from Corcyra . . . here!

[Pisthetairos produces a whip from the basket and begins hitting the Sycophant,
who dodges around to evade the blows]

SYCOPHANT

Ouch! That's a whip you've got!

PISTHETAIROS

No—a pair of wings.

With them I'll make you spin around all day!

SYCOPHANT

Ow! Help! That hurts!

PISTHETAIROS

Wing your way from here!

Get lost—I want rid of you, you rascal!

I'll show you legal tricks and twists—sharp ones, too!

[Pisthetairos beats the Sycophant off stage. Enter Xanthias and Manodorus from
the house]

Let's gather up these wings and go inside.

[Pisthetairos and the two slaves carry the baskets of wings back into the house]

CHORUS:

When we fly
we often spy
strange amazing spots—
in those flights
peculiar sights.

There's a tree grows far from us
simply called Cleonymos,
a useless tree, without a heart—
immense, and vile in every part.
It always blooms in early spring,
bursting forth with everything
that launches legal quarrelling.
and then in winter time it yields
a shedding foliage of shields.

There's a land

ringed by the dark,
a gloomy wilderness,
where Heroes meet
and with men eat.

Men live with heroes in that place,
except at dusk—then it's not safe
for the two of them to meet.
Men who in the night time greet
the great Orestes are stripped bare
he strikes at them and leaves them there.
And so without their clothes they bide—
paralysed on their right side.¹⁵⁷

[Enter Prometheus, muffling his face in a long scarf and holding an unopened umbrella]

PROMETHEUS

Oh, dear, dear, dear. I pray Zeus doesn't see me.
Where's Pisthetairos?

[Pisthetairos enters from the house carrying a chamber pot. He is surprised to see the new arrival]

PISTHETAIROS

Who's this? Why so muffled?

PROMETHEUS

Do you see any god who's trailed me here?

PISTHETAIROS

No, by Zeus, I don't. But who are you?

PROMETHEUS

What time of day is it?

PISTHETAIROS

What time of day? A little after noon. But who are you?

PROMETHEUS

Quitting time or later?

PISTHETAIROS

You're pissing me off . . .

¹⁵⁷The point here seems to be that the Sycophant's cloak is so thin and worn that he's singing for warm weather, when he won't need it.

PROMETHEUS

What's Zeus up to? What about the clouds—
is he scattering 'em—or bringing 'em together?

PISTHETAIROS

You're a total fool!

PROMETHEUS

All right—then I'll unwrap.

[Prometheus takes off the muffler concealing his face]

PISTHETAIROS

Prometheus, my friend!

PROMETHEUS

Hey, quiet. Don't shout.

PISTHETAIROS

What's the matter?

PROMETHEUS

Shhh . . . don't shout my name.

I'm done for if Zeus can see I'm here.

But I'll tell you what's going on up there,
if you take this umbrella. Hold it up,
above our heads—that way no god can see.

PISTHETAIROS

Ah ha! Now that's a smart precaution—
that's forethought, just like Prometheus!
Come under here—make it fast—all right, now,
you can talk without a worry.

[Pisthetairos and Prometheus huddle together under the umbrella]

PROMETHEUS

Then listen.

PISTHETAIROS

I'm listening—speak up.

PROMETHEUS

Zeus is done for.

PISTHETAIROS

And when was he done in?

PROMETHEUS

It happened
 once you colonized the air. From that point on,
 no human being has made a sacrifice
 to any god, not once—and since that time
 no savoury smells from roasting thigh bones
 have risen up to us from down below.
 So now, without our offerings, we must fast,
 as if it's time for Thesmophoria.¹⁵⁸
 The barbarian gods are starving—so now
 they scream out like Illyrians and say
 their armies will march down attacking Zeus,
 unless he moves to get the ports re-opened,
 to make sliced entrails once again available.

PISTHETAIROS

You mean other gods, barbarian ones,
 are there above you?

PROMETHEUS

Barbarian deities? Of course.
 That's where Execestides derives
 all his ancestral family gods.

PISTHETAIROS

What's the name of these barbarian gods?

PROMETHEUS

The name? They're called Triballians.¹⁵⁹

PISTHETAIROS

I see—that must be where we get our phrase
 they've got me “by the balls.”

PROMETHEUS

You got that right.
 Now let me tell you something to the point—
 ambassadors are coming here to settle this,
 from Zeus and those Triballians up there.

¹⁵⁸Cranes reputedly swallowed stones to serve as ballast on their flights.

¹⁵⁹These lines refer to the notion that meeting up with ghosts of heroes is all right during the day but harmful at night. There is also another reference here to the thief Orestes (mentioned earlier by the Chorus Leader) who beats people and steals their clothes.

But don't agree to peace unless great Zeus
gives back his sceptre to the birds again,
and gives the Princess to you as your wife.

PISTHETAIROS

Whose this Princess?

PROMETHEUS

The loveliest of girls—
she's the one in charge of Zeus' thunderbolt
and all his assets—wise advice, good laws,
sound common sense, dockyards, slanderous talk—
his paymistress who hands three obols out
to jury men . . .

PISTHETAIROS

So in Zeus' name,
she's the one in charge of everything?

PROMETHEUS

That's right.
If you get her from Zeus, you've got it all.
That's why I came here to tell you this.
I've always been a friend of human beings.

PISTHETAIROS

Yes, of all the gods it's thanks to you
that we can fry up fish.¹⁶⁰

PROMETHEUS

I hate all gods—
but you know that.

PISTHETAIROS

You've always hated them.
Heaven knows—it's something natural to you.

PROMETHEUS

I'm Timon through and through.¹⁶¹ Time to get back.
So let me have the parasol. That way,

¹⁶⁰*Thesmophoria*: an important religious festival in Greece, during which there was a period of fasting.

¹⁶¹*Triballians*: the name of a barbarian tribe in Thrace, north of Greece. The Tiballian god who enters with Poseidon and Hercules a few lines later on cannot speak Greek, so his lines are incomprehensible gibberish.

if Zeus does catch sight of me from there,
he'll think I'm following some basket girl.

PISTHETAIROS

Take the piss pot, too—then you can act
as if you're the one who's carrying the stool.

[Prometheus leaves with the umbrella and the pot. Pisthetairos goes back into the house]

CHORUS

By that tribe of men with such huge feet
they use them for a shade retreat,
there's stands a lake where Socrates,
deceives men's souls, that unwashed tease.
Peisander went there to find out
the spirit his life had been without.
A big young camel he did slay,
then, like Odysseus, snuck away.
By camel's blood to that place drawn,
up pops a Bat—it's Chaerephon!¹⁶²

[Enter Poseidon, Hercules, and the Triballian god]

POSEIDON

Here it is—Cloudcuckooland—in plain view,
city we've come to as ambassadors.

[Poseidon inspects the clothing on the Triballian god]

What are you doing? Why drape your cloak that way,
from right to left? It's got to be re-slung
the other way—like this.

[The Triballian tries to reshape his cloak but gets in a mess]

You fumbling idiot—

a born Laespodias, that's what you are!¹⁶³

O democracy! Where are you taking us,
when gods vote in a clumsy oaf like this?

[Poseidon continues to fuss over the Triballian's appearance]

Keep your hands still! Oh, to hell with you!

¹⁶²*Prometheus* stole fire from heaven and gave it to human beings.

¹⁶³*Timon* was a legendary Athenian who hated his fellow citizens.

You're the most uncivilized of all the gods
I've ever seen. All right, Hercules,
what do we do?

HERCULES

You've heard what I propose.
I'd like to wring his neck—whoever he is
who set up this blockade against the gods.

POSEIDON

But you forget, my friend, that we've been sent
as envoys to negotiate down here.

HERCULES

That just makes me want to throttle him
twice as much as I wanted to before.

[The wall of the house now moves off to reveal Pisthetairos and the slaves getting
dinner ready. They are preparing birds to cook in the oven]

PISTHETAIROS

The grater for the cheese—can someone get it? And bring the silphium. Hand me the
cheese.

Now, fire up the coals.

POSEIDON

Greetings, mortal.

We three are gods, and we salute you!

PISTHETAIROS

But I'm grating silphium right now.

HERCULES

What kind of meat is this?

PISTHETAIROS

The meat's from birds—
they've been tried and sentenced for rebellion,
rising up against the fowl democracy.

HERCULES

Is that why you're shredding silphium
all over them before doing something else?

PISTHETAIROS [looking up and recognizing Hercules]

Well, hello there, Hercules. What's up?

POSEIDON

We've come as envoys sent down from the gods
to negotiate the terms for peace.

PISTHETAIROS [to one of the slaves] There's no oil left in the jug.

HERCULES

And bird meat
should be glistening with lots of oil.

POSEIDON

We gods get no advantage from this war.
If you and yours were friendly to the gods,
you'd have water from the rain in all your ponds—
halcyon days would be here all the time.
We've come with total powers in such things.

PISTHETAIROS

From the start we didn't launch a war on you—
and we're ready to talk peace, if that's your wish,
provided you're prepared to do what's right.
And here's what's right: Zeus gives his sceptre back
to us—I mean the birds—once more. And then,
if we can settle this on these conditions,
I'll invite the envoys to have lunch with me.

HERCULES [salivating over the prepared bird]

That's just fine with me! I vote we say . . .

POSEIDON [interrupting]

What's that you fool! Idiotic glutton!
You want give away your father's power?

PISTHETAIROS

Is that what you think? Look, if birds here
rule everything down there, won't you gods above
be even stronger? Now underneath the clouds
men can bend down and swear false oaths to you.
But once the birds and you become allies,
if any man should swear by Raven and by Zeus
and then perjure himself, Raven would come by,
swoop down upon the man before he sees him,

peck at his eye and pluck it out.

POSEIDON

By Poseidon,

what you're saying makes good sense!

HERCULES

Sounds good to me.

PISTHETAIROS [to the Triballian god]

What do you say?

TRIBALLIAN [speaking foreign gibberish]

Nab aist roo.

PISTHETAIROS

You hear what he said? He agrees with you.

Now listen up—here's yet another benefit

you'll get from us. If any man once vows

to one of the gods he'll sacrifice a beast,

then tries to talk his way out of doing it

by splitting hairs and, acting on his greed,

holds back his vow, saying "Gods are patient,"

we'll make him pay for that as well.

POSEIDON

How? Tell us how you'd do that.

PISTHETAIROS

Well, at some point,

when that man is counting up his wealth

or sitting in his bath, some kite will fly down,

while he's not paying attention, grab his cash,

the value of two sheep, and carry that

up to the god.

HERCULES

He gets my vote again—

I say we give the sceptre back to them.

POSEIDON

All right—ask the Triballian.

HERCULES [threateningly]

Hey, you—

Triballian—want me to smack you round?

TRIBALLIAN [afraid]

Oo smacka skeen dat steak?

HERCULES

He says it's fine—

he agrees with me.

POSEIDON

Well, if it's what you want,

then it's all right with me.

HERCULES [to Pisthetairos]

Hey, we're ready to agree to terms
about the sceptre.

PISTHETAIROS

By god, there's one more thing—

I've just remembered. I'll let Zeus keep Hera,

but he must give me that young girl Princess.

She's to be my wife.

POSEIDON

Then you don't want

a real negotiation. Come on, let's go back home.

PISTHETAIROS

That's up to you. Hey, cook, watch that gravy.

Make sure you make it sweet!

HERCULES

Hey, Poseidon,

my dear fellow, where you going? Come on,

are we going to war about a woman?

POSEIDON

What should we do?

HERCULES

Do? Settle this matter.

POSEIDON

What? You fool! Don't you see what he's doing,

how all this time he's been deceiving you? You're ruining yourself, you know. If Zeus
dies,

after giving all his sovereignty to birds,
you'll have nothing. Right now you're his heir—
you get whatever's left when Zeus departs.

PISTHETAIROS [to Hercules]

Oh dear, dear—how he's trying to play with you.
Come on over here—let me tell you something.

[Pisthetairos and Hercules talk apart from the others]

You uncles's putting one over on you,
you poor fool—because, according to the law,
you don't get the smallest piece of property
from your father's goods. You're illegitimate—
you're a bastard.

HERCULES

A bastard? What do you mean?

PISTHETAIROS

I mean just what I say. Now, your mother—
she was an alien woman. And Athena—
do you think a daughter could inherit
if she's got legal brothers?

HERCULES [very puzzled]

But once he dies,
couldn't my dad leave me all his property
as a bastard's share?

PISTHETAIROS

The law won't let him.
The first one to claim your father's property
will be Poseidon here, who's raised your hopes.
He'll claim he's your father's legal brother.
I'll read you what Solon's laws dictate—

[Pisthetairos pulls a piece of paper out and reads]

1 "If there are lawful children, then a bastard

has no rights as a close blood relative.
If there are no lawful children, the goods
go to the nearest next of kin."

HERCULES

What!

I don't get anything from daddy's stuff?

PISTHETAIROS

Not a thing, by god. So tell me this—

has your father introduced you to his kin group yet?¹⁶⁴

HERCULES

No, not me. As a matter of fact,

I've been wondering about that for some time.

PISTHETAIROS

Well, don't just stare up there, mouth wide open,

planning an assault. Join up with us instead.

I'll make you a king and give you bird's milk.

HERCULES

I've always thought you're right in what you say
about the girl. I'd hand her over to you.

PISTHETAIROS [to Poseidon]

What do you say?

POSEIDON

I vote no.

PISTHETAIROS

So now,

it's up to the Triballian here. What you say?

TRIBALLIAN

De geerl geeve over greet souvrin bridies.

HERCULES

There! He says to hand her over.

POSEIDON

No by god!

he never said to give her up—no way.

He's just babbling like a swallow.

HERCULES

So he said hand her over to the swallows!

¹⁶⁴*Peisander*: an Athenian with a reputation for corruption and cowardice. Chaerephon was well known as an associate of Socrates.

POSEIDON

You two work it out—agree on peace terms.
Since you're both for it, I'll say nothing more.

HERCULES

We ready now to give you all you ask.
So come along with us in person—
up to heaven—there you can get your Princess,
and all those other things as well.

PISTHETAIROS [pointing to the cooking he's been preparing]
So these birds were slaughtered in good time
before the wedding feast.

HERCULES

If you want to,
I could stay here and roast the meat. You go.

POSEIDON

Roast the meat? You mean you'd wolf it down,
you glutton. Come on with us. Let's go.

HERCULES [reluctantly leaving]

I'd have enjoyed eating that.

PISTHETAIROS [calling to his slaves]

Hey, you—
one of you bring me out some wedding clothes!

CHORUS

In lands of Litigation there's a place—
it's right beside the water clock—
where that villainous and thieving race
of tongue-and-belly men all flock.
They use their tongues to sow and reap,
to harvest grapes and figs en masse.
A crude barbarian tribe, a heap
of Philipsses and Gorgias.
From these horse-loving sycophants,
who use their tongues to cram their gut,
through all of Attica's expanse

in sacrifice the tongue's first cut.¹⁶⁵

[Enter Second Herald]

SECOND HERALD

You here who've done fine things, more wonderful
than I can say, you thrice-blessed race with wings,
you birds, welcome now your king on his return,
as he comes back among these wealthy halls.

Here he approaches—you'll never see a star
so bright in any gleaming home of gold.

No—not even the far-reaching rays of sun
have ever shone as splendidly as he,
the man who brings with him his lovely wife,
too beautiful for words, and brandishing
the winged thunderbolt from Zeus. Sweet smells
are rising up, high into heaven's vault,
a glorious spectacle, and wisps of smoke
from burning incense are blown far and wide.

Here he is in person. Let the sacred Muse
open her lips in a triumphal holy song.

[Enter Pisthetairos and his bride Princess]

CHORUS

Back off, break up, make room—
And wing your way around the man
so blessed with blissful fortune.
Oh, oh—such beauty and such youth!
What a blessing for this city of the birds
is this fine marriage you have made.

A great good fortune now attends us,
the race of birds—such mighty bliss,
thanks to this man. So welcome back
with nuptial chants and wedding songs
our man himself and his Princess.

Olympian Hera and great Zeus
who rules the gods on lofty thrones

¹⁶⁵*Laespodias*: Athenian politician who dressed oddly to conceal his misshapen legs.

the Fates once joined with wedding songs.

O Hymen, Hymenaeus¹⁶⁶

And rich young Eros in his golden wings
held tight the reins as charioteer
at Zeus' wedding to the happy Hera.

O Hymen, Hymenaeus,
O Hymen, Hymenaeus.

PISTHETAIROS

Your chants fill me with great delight,
as do you songs. And I just love your words.

CHORUS

Come now, celebrate in song
earth-shattering thunder, Zeus' lightning fire—
which now belong to him—
that dreaded bolt white lightning, too.
Oh, that great golden blaze of lightning,
that immortal fiery spear of Zeus,
and groaning thunders bringing rain—
with you this man now rattles Earth.
And everything that Zeus once had,
he's got it all—and that includes
our Princess, who once sat by Zeus' throne.
O Hymen, Hymenaeus!

PISTHETAIROS

Now all you feathered tribes of friends,
come follow me on this my wedding flight.
Let's wing our way up there to Zeus' house
and to our wedding bed. Reach out your hand,
my blissful love, and take hold of my wing—
then dance with me. I'll lift and carry you.

[Pisthetairos and Princess lead the procession off the stage]

CHORUS

Alalalalai—
Raise triumphal cries of joy,

¹⁶⁶A kin group (*phrateres*) was a group of citizens who shared a common ancestor.

sing out the noble victor's song—
the mightiest and highest of all gods!

*[The procession exits singing and dancing, accompanying Pisthetairos and his
bride up to Heaven]*

CLOUDS

This edition is based on the [publicly available](#)¹⁶⁷ translation by Ian Johnston

...

HISTORICAL NOTE

Clouds was first produced in the drama festival in Athens—the City Dionysia—in 423 BC, where it placed third. Subsequently the play was revised, but the revisions were never completed. The text which survives is the revised version, which was apparently not performed in Aristophanes' time but which circulated in manuscript form. This revised version does contain some anomalies which have not been fully sorted out (e.g., the treatment of Cleon, who died between the original text and the revisions). At the time of the first production, the Athenians had been at war with the Spartans, off and on, for a number of years.

...

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

STREPSIADES: a middle-aged Athenian

PHEIDIPPIDES: a young Athenian, son of Strepsiades

XANTHIAS: a slave serving Strepsiades

STUDENT: one of Socrates' pupils in the Thinkery

SOCRATES: chief teacher in the Thinkery

CHORUS OF CLOUDS

THE BETTER ARGUMENT: an older man

THE WORSE ARGUMENT: a young man

PASIAS: one of Strepsiades' creditors

WITNESS: a friend of Pasias

AMYNIAS: one of Strepsiades' creditors

STUDENTS OF SOCRATES

[Scene: In the centre of the stage area is a house with a door to Socrates' educational establishment, the Thinkery.¹⁶⁸ On one side of the stage is Strepsiades' house, in front of which are two beds. Outside the Thinkery there is a small clay

¹⁶⁷<http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/aristophanes/clouds.htm>

¹⁶⁸*Thinkery*: The Greek word *phrontisterion* (meaning school or academy) is translated here as Thinkery, a term borrowed from William Arrowsmith's translation of *The Clouds*.

statue of a round goblet, and outside Strepsiades' house there is a small clay statue of Hermes. It is just before dawn. Strepsiades and Pheidippides are lying asleep in the two beds. Strepsiades tosses and turns restlessly. Pheidippides lets a very loud fart in his sleep. Strepsiades sits up wide awake]

STREPSIADES Damn! Lord Zeus, how this night drags on and on!
It's endless. Won't daylight ever come?

I heard a cock crowing a while ago,
but my slaves kept snoring. In the old days,
they wouldn't have dared. Oh, damn and blast this war—
so many problems. Now I'm not allowed
to punish my own slaves.¹⁶⁹ And then there's him—
this fine young man, who never once wakes up,
but farts the night away, all snug in bed,
wrapped up in five wool coverlets. Ah well,
I guess I should snuggle down and snore away.

[Strepsiades lies down again and tries to sleep. Pheidippides farts again. Strepsiades finally gives up trying to sleep]

STREPSIADES

I can't sleep. I'm just too miserable,
what with being eaten up by all this debt—
thanks to this son of mine, his expenses,
his racing stables. He keeps his hair long
and rides his horses—he's obsessed with it—
his chariot and pair. He dreams of horses.¹⁷⁰ And I'm dead when I see the month go
by—
with the moon's cycle now at twenty days,
as interest payments keep on piling up.¹⁷¹

[Calling to a slave]

Hey, boy! Light the lamp. Bring me my accounts.

[Enter the slave Xanthias with light and tablets]

Let me take these and check my creditors.

How many are there? And then the interest—

¹⁶⁹During the war it was easy for slaves to run away into enemy territory, so their owners had to treat them with much more care.

¹⁷⁰Wearing one's hair long and keeping race horses were characteristics of the sons of very rich families.

¹⁷¹The interest on Strepsiades' loans would increase once the lunar month came to an end.

I'll have to work that out. Let me see now . . .

What do I owe? "Twelve minai to Pasias?"

Twelve minai to Pasias! What's that for?

O yes, I know—that's when I bought that horse,
the pedigree nag. What a fool I am!

I'd sooner have a stone knock out my eye.¹⁷²

PHEIDIPPIDES [talking in his sleep]

Philon, that's unfair! Drive your chariot straight.

STREPSIADES That there's my problem—that's what's killing me.
Even fast asleep he dreams of horses!

PHEIDIPPIDES [in his sleep] In this war-chariot race how many times
do we drive round the track?

STREPSIADES

You're driving me,
your father, too far round the bend. Let's see,
after Pasias, what's the next debt I owe?

"Three minai to Arynias." For what?

A small chariot board and pair of wheels?

PHEIDIPPIDES [in his sleep] Let the horse have a roll. Then take him home.

STREPSIADES

You, my lad, have been rolling in my cash.
Now I've lost in court, and other creditors
are going to take out liens on all my stuff
to get their interest.

PHEIDIPPIDES [waking up]

What's the matter, dad?

You've been grumbling and tossing around there
all night long.

STREPSIADES

I keep getting bitten—
some bum bailiff in the bedding.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Ease off, dad.

¹⁷²twelve minai is 100 drachmas, a considerable sum. The Greek reads "the horse branded with a koppa mark." That brand was a guarantee of its breeding.

Let me get some sleep.

STREPSIADES

All right, keep sleeping.

Just bear in mind that one fine day these debts
will all be your concern.

[Pheidippides rolls over and goes back to sleep]

Damn it, anyway.

I wish that matchmaker had died in pain—

the one who hooked me and your mother up.

I'd had a lovely time up to that point,

a crude, uncomplicated, country life,

lying around just as I pleased, with honey bees,

and sheep and olives, too. Then I married—

the niece of Megacles—who was the son

of Megacles. I was a country man,

and she came from the town—a real snob,

extravagant, just like Coesyra.¹⁷³ When I married her and we both went to bed,

I stunk of fresh wine, drying figs, sheep's wool—

an abundance of good things. As for her,

she smelled of perfume, saffron, long kisses,

greed, extravagance, lots and lots of sex.¹⁷⁴ Now, I'm not saying she was a lazy bones.

She used to weave, but used up too much wool.

To make a point I'd show this cloak to her

and say, "Woman, your weaving's far too thick."¹⁷⁵

[The lamp goes out]

XANTHIAS

We've got no oil left in the lamp.

STREPSIADES

Damn it!

Why'd you light such a thirsty lamp? Come here.

¹⁷³Megacles was a common name in a very prominent aristocratic family in Athens. Coesyra was the mother of a Megacles from this family, a woman well known for her wasteful expenditures and pride.

¹⁷⁴The Greek has "of Colias and Genetyllis" names associated with festivals celebrating women's sexual and procreative powers.

¹⁷⁵Packing the wool tight in weaving uses up more wool and therefore costs more. Strepsiades holds up his cloak which is by now full of holes.

I need to thump you.

XANTHIAS

Why should you hit me?

STREPSIADES

Because you stuck too thick a wick inside.

[The slave ignores Strepsiades and walks off into the house]

After that, when this son was born to us—

I'm talking about me and my good wife—

we argued over what his name should be.

She was keen to add -hippos to his name,

like Xanthippos, Callipedes, or Chaerippos.¹⁷⁶ Me, I wanted the name Pheidonides,

his grandpa's name. Well, we fought about it,

and then, after a while, at last agreed.

And so we called the boy Pheidippides.

She used to cradle the young lad and say,

"When you're grown up, you'll drive your chariot

to the Acropolis, like Megacles,

in a full-length robe . . ." I'd say, "No—

you'll drive your goat herd back from Phelleus,

like your father, dressed in leather hides . . ."

He never listened to a thing I said.

And now he's making my finances sick—

a racing fever. But I've spent all night

thinking of a way to deal with this whole mess,

and I've found one route, something really good—

it could work wonders. If I could succeed,

if I could convince him, I'd be all right.

Well, first I'd better wake him up. But how?

What would be the gentlest way to do it?

[Strepsiades leans over and gently nudges Pheidippides]

Pheidippides . . . my little Pheidippides . . .

PHEIDIPPIDES [very sleepily] What is it, father?

STREPSIADES

¹⁷⁶-hippos means "horse." The mother presumably wanted her son to have the marks of the aristocratic classes. Xanthippos was the name of Pericles' father and his son. The other names are less obviously aristocratic or uncommon.

Give me a kiss—

then give me your right hand.

[Pheidippides sits up, leans over, and does what his father has asked]

PHEIDIPPIDES

All right. There.

What's going on?

STREPSIADES

Tell me this—do you love me?

PHEIDIPPIDES

Yes, I do, by Poseidon, lord of horses.

STREPSIADES

Don't give me that lord of horses stuff—

he's the god who's causing all my troubles.

But now, my son, if you really love me,
with your whole heart, then follow what I say.

PHEIDIPPIDES

What do you want to tell me I should do?

STREPSIADES

Change your life style as quickly as you can,
then go and learn the stuff I recommend.

PHEIDIPPIDES

So tell me—what are you asking me?

STREPSIADES: You'll do just what I say?

PHEIDIPPIDES

Yes, I'll do it— 110

I swear by Dionysus.

STREPSIADES

All right then.

Look over there—you see that little door,
there on that little house?

PHEIDIPPIDES

Yes, I see it.

What are you really on about, father?

STREPSIADES

That's the Thinkery—for clever minds.

In there live men who argue and persuade.
They say that heaven's an oven damper—
it's all around us—we're the charcoal.
If someone gives them cash, they'll teach him
how to win an argument on any cause,
just or unjust.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Who are these men?

STREPSIADES

I'm not sure
just what they call themselves, but they're good men,
fine, deep-thinking intellectual types.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Nonsense! They're a worthless bunch. I know them—
you're talking about pale-faced charlatans,
who haven't any shoes, like those rascals
Socrates and Chaerephon.¹⁷⁷

STREPSIADES

Shush, be quiet.
Don't prattle on such childish rubbish.
If you care about your father's daily food,
give up racing horses and, for my sake,
join their company.

PHEIDIPPIDES

By Dionysus, no!
Not even if you give me as a gift
pheasants raised by Leogoras.¹⁷⁸

STREPSIADES

Come on, son—
you're the dearest person in the world to me.
I'm begging you. Go there and learn something.

PHEIDIPPIDES

What is it you want me to learn?

¹⁷⁷Chaerephon: a well-known associate of Socrates.

¹⁷⁸pheasants were a rich rarity in Athens. Leogoras was a very wealthy Athenian.

STREPSIADES

They say
 that those men have two kinds of arguments—
 the Better, whatever that may mean,
 and the Worse. Now, of these two arguments,
 the Worse can make an unjust case and win.
 So if, for me, you'll learn to speak like this,
 to make an unjust argument, well then,
 all those debts I now owe because of you
 I wouldn't have to pay—no need to give
 an obol's worth to anyone.¹⁷⁹

PHEIDIPPIDES

No way.
 I can't do that. With no colour in my cheeks
 I wouldn't dare to face those rich young Knights.¹⁸⁰

STREPSIADES

Then, by Demeter, you won't be eating
 any of my food—not you, not your yoke horse,
 nor your branded thoroughbred. To hell with you—
 I'll toss you right out of this house.¹⁸¹

PHEIDIPPIDES

All right—
 but Uncle Megacles won't let me live
 without my horses. I'm going in the house.
 I don't really care what you're going to do.
 [Pheidippides stands up and goes inside the house. Strepsiades gets out of bed]

STREPSIADES

Well, I'll not take this set back lying down.
 I'll pray to the gods and then go there myself—
 I'll get myself taught in that Thinkery.
 Still, I'm old and slow—my memory's shot.
 How'm I going to learn hair-splitting arguments,

¹⁷⁹an obol was a relatively small amount, about a third of a day's pay for a jury member.

¹⁸⁰Knights is a term used to describe the affluent young men who made up the cavalry. Pheidippides has been mixing with people far beyond his father's means.

¹⁸¹A yoke horse was part of the four-horse team which was harnessed to a yoke on the inside.

all that fancy stuff? But I have to go.
Why do I keep hanging back like this?
I should be knocking on the door.

[Strepsiades marches up to the door of the Thinkery and knocks]

Hey, boy . . . little boy.

STUDENT [from inside] Go to Hell!

[The door opens and the student appears]

Who's been knocking on the door?

STREPSIADES

I'm Strepsiades, the son of Pheidon,
from Cicynna.

STUDENT

By god, what a stupid man,
to kick the door so hard. You just don't think.
You made a newly found idea miscarry!

STREPSIADES

I'm sorry. But I live in the country,
far away from here. Tell me what's happened.
What's miscarried?

STUDENT

It's not right to mention it, 170
except to students.

STREPSIADES

You needn't be concerned—
you can tell me. I've come here as a student,
to study at the Thinkery.

STUDENT

I'll tell you, then.
But you have to think of these as secrets,
our holy mysteries. A while ago,
a flea bit Chaerephon right on the eye brow,
and then jumped onto Socrates' head.
So Socrates then questioned Chaerephon
about how many lengths of its own feet
a flea could jump.

STREPSIADES

How'd he measure that?

STUDENT

Most ingeniously. He melted down some wax,
then took the flea and dipped two feet in it.
Once that cooled, the flea had Persian slippers.
He took those off and measured out the space.

STREPSIADES

By Lord Zeus, what intellectual brilliance!

STUDENT

Would you like to hear more of Socrates,
another one of his ideas? What do you say?

STREPSIADES

Which one? Tell me . . .

[The student pretends to be reluctant]

I'm begging you.

STUDENT

All right.

Chaerephon of Sphettus once asked Socrates
whether, in his opinion, a gnat buzzed
through its mouth or through its anal sphincter.

STREPSIADES

What did Socrates say about the gnat?

STUDENT

He said that the gnat's intestinal tract
was narrow—therefore air passing through it,
because of the constriction, was pushed with force
towards the rear. So then that orifice,
being a hollow space beside a narrow tube,
transmits the noise caused by the force of air.

STREPSIADES

So a gnat's arse hole is a giant trumpet!
O triply blessed man who could do this,
anatomize the anus of a gnat!
A man who knows a gnat's guts inside out

would have no trouble winning law suits.

STUDENT

Just recently he lost a great idea—
a lizard stole it!

STREPSIADES

How'd that happen? Tell me.

STUDENT

He was studying movements of the moon—
its trajectory and revolutions.

One night, as he was gazing up, open mouthed,
staring skyward, a lizard on the roof
relieved itself on him.

STREPSIADES

A lizard crapped on Socrates!
That's good!

STUDENT

Then, last night we had no dinner.

STREPSIADES

Well, well. What did Socrates come up with,
to get you all some food to eat?

STUDENT

He spread some ashes thinly on the table,
then seized a spit, went to the wrestling school,
picked up a queer, and robbed him of his cloak,
then sold the cloak to purchase dinner.¹⁸²

STREPSIADES

And we still admire Thales after that?¹⁸³

Come on, now, open up the Thinkery—
let me see Socrates without delay.

I'm dying to learn. So open up the door.

[The doors of the Thinkery slide open to reveal Socrates' students studying on a porch (not inside a room). They are in variously absurd positions and are all very

¹⁸²I adopt Sommerstein's useful reading of this very elliptical passage, which interprets the Greek word *diabetes* as meaning a passive homosexual (rather than its usual meaning, "a pair of compasses"—both senses deriving from the idea of spreading legs apart). The line about selling the cloak is added to clarify the sense.

¹⁸³Thales was a very famous thinker from the sixth century BC.

thin and pale]

By Hercules, who are all these creatures!
What country are they from?

STUDENT

You look surprised.

What do they look like to you?

STREPSIADES

Like prisoners—

those Spartan ones from Pylos.¹⁸⁴ But tell me—

Why do these ones keep staring at the earth?

STUDENT

They're searching out what lies beneath the ground.

STREPSIADES

Ah, they're looking for some bulbs. Well now,
you don't need to worry any longer,
not about that. I know where bulbs are found, 230
lovely big ones, too. What about them?

What are they doing like that, all doubled up?

STUDENT

They're sounding out the depths of Tartarus.

STREPSIADES

Why are their arse holes gazing up to heaven?

STUDENT

Directed studies in astronomy.

[The Student addresses the other students in the room]

Go inside. We don't want Socrates
to find you all in here.

STREPSIADES

Not yet, not yet.

Let them stay like this, so I can tell them
what my little problem is.

STUDENT

It's not allowed.

¹⁸⁴The Athenians had captured a number of Spartans at Pylos in 425 and brought them to Athens where they remained in captivity.

They can't spend too much time outside,
not in the open air.

[The students get up from their studying positions and disappear into the interior of the Thinkery. Strepsiades starts inspecting the equipment on the walls and on the tables]

STREPSIADES

My goodness,
what is this thing? Explain it to me.

STUDENT

That there's astronomy.

STREPSIADES

And what's this?

STUDENT

That's geometry.

STREPSIADES

What use is that?

STUDENT

It's used to measure land.

STREPSIADES

You mean those lands
handed out by lottery.¹⁸⁵

STUDENT

Not just that—
it's for land in general.

STREPSIADES

A fine idea—
useful . . . democratic, too.

STUDENT

Look over here—
here's a map of the entire world. See?
Right there, that's Athens.

STREPSIADES

What do you mean?
I don't believe you. There are no jury men—

¹⁸⁵ Athenians sometimes apportioned land by lot outside the state which they had appropriated from other people.

I don't see them sitting on their benches.

STUDENT

No, no—this space is really Attica.¹⁸⁶

STREPSIADES

Where are the citizens of Cicynna,
the people in my deme?¹⁸⁷

STUDENT

They're right here.

This is Euboea, as you can see,
beside us, really stretched a long way out.

STREPSIADES

I know—we pulled it apart, with Pericles.¹⁸⁸ Whereabouts is Sparta?

STUDENT

Where is it? Here.

STREPSIADES

It's close to us. You must rethink the place—
shift it—put it far away from us.

STUDENT

Can't do that.

STREPSIADES [threatening] Do it, by god, or I'll make you cry!

[Strepsiades notices Socrates descending from above in a basket suspended from
a rope]

Hey, who's the man in the basket—up there?

STUDENT

The man himself.

STREPSIADES

Who's that?

STUDENT

Socrates.

STREPSIADES

Socrates! Hey, call out to him for me—
make it loud.

¹⁸⁶Attica is the territory surrounded by and belonging to Athens.

¹⁸⁷A deme was a political unit in Athens. Membership in a particular deme was a matter of inheritance from one's father.

¹⁸⁸In 446 BC the Athenians under Pericles put down a revolt in Euboea, a large island just off the coast of Attica.

STUDENT

You'll have to call to him yourself.

I'm too busy now.

[The Student exits into the interior of the house]

STREPSIADES

O Socrates . . .

my dear little Socrates . . . hello . . .

SOCRATES

Why call on me, you creature of a day?

STREPSIADES

Well, first of all, tell me what you're doing.

SOCRATES

I tread the air, as I contemplate the sun.

STREPSIADES

You're looking down upon the gods up there,
in that basket? Why not do it from the ground,
if that's what you're doing?

SOCRATES

Impossible!

I'd never come up with a single thing
about celestial phenomena,
if I did not suspend my mind up high,
to mix my subtle thoughts with what's like them—
the air. If I turned my mind to lofty things,
but stayed there on the ground, I'd never make
the least discovery. For the earth, you see,
draws moist thoughts down by force into itself—
the same process takes place with water cress.

STREPSIADES

What are you talking about? Does the mind
draw moisture into water cress? Come down,
my dear little Socrates, down here to me,
so you can teach me what I've come to learn.

[Socrates' basket slowly descends]

SOCRATES

Why have you come?

STREPSIADES

I want to learn to argue.

I'm being pillaged—ruined by interest
and by creditors I can't pay off—
they're slapping liens on all my property.

SOCRATES

How come you got in such a pile of debt
without your knowledge?

STREPSIADES

I've been ravaged
by disease—I'm horse sick. It's draining me
in the most dreadful way. But please teach me
one of your two styles of arguing, the one
which never has to discharge any debt.
Whatever payment you want me to make,
I promise you I'll pay—by all the gods.

SOCRATES

What gods do you intend to swear by?
To start with, the gods hold no currency with us.

STREPSIADES

Then, what currency do you use to swear?
Is it iron coin, like in Byzantium?

SOCRATES

Do you want to know the truth of things divine,
the way they really are?

STREPSIADES

Yes, by god, I do,
if that's possible.

SOCRATES

And to commune and talk
with our own deities the Clouds?

STREPSIADES

Yes, I do.

SOCRATES

Then sit down on the sacred couch.

STREPSIADES

All right.

I'm sitting down.

SOCRATES

Take this wreath.

STREPSIADES

Why a wreath?

Oh dear, Socrates, don't offer me up
in sacrifice, like Athamas.¹⁸⁹

SOCRATES

No, no.

We go through all this for everyone—
it's their initiation.

STREPSIADES

What do I get?

SOCRATES

You'll learn to be a clever talker,
to rattle off a speech, to strain your words
like flour. Just keep still.

[Socrates sprinkles flour all over Strepsiades]

STREPSIADES

By god, that's no lie!

I'll turn into flour if you keep sprinkling me.

SOCRATES

Old man, be quiet. Listen to the prayer.

[Socrates shuts his eyes to recite his prayer]

O Sovereign Lord, O Boundless Air,
who keeps the earth suspended here in space,
O Bright Sky, O Sacred Goddesses—
the Thunder-bearing Clouds—arise,
you holy ladies, issue forth on high,
before the man who holds you in his mind.

STREPSIADES [lifting his cloak to cover his head]

¹⁸⁹ Athamas, a character in one of Sophocles' lost plays who was prepared for sacrifice. He was rescued by Hercules.

Not yet, not yet. Not 'til I wrap this cloak
like this so I don't get soaked. What bad luck,
to leave my home without a cap on.

SOCRATES [ignoring Strepsiades]

Come now, you highly honoured Clouds, come—
manifest yourselves to this man here—
whether you now sit atop Olympus, 330
on those sacred snow-bound mountain peaks,
or form the holy choruses with nymphs
in gardens of their father Ocean,
or gather up the waters of the Nile
in golden flagons at the river's mouths,
or dwell beside the marsh of Maeotis
or snowy rocks of Mimas—hear my call,
accept my sacrifice, and then rejoice
in this holy offering I make.

CHORUS [heard offstage]

Everlasting Clouds—
let us arise, let us reveal
our moist and natural radiance—
moving from the roaring deep
of father Ocean to the tops
of tree-lined mountain peaks,
where we see from far away
the lofty heights, the sacred earth,
whose fruits we feed with water,
the murmuring of sacred rivers,
the roaring of the deep-resounding sea.
For the unwearied eye of heaven
blazes forth its glittering beams.
Shake off this misty shapelessness
from our immortal form and gaze upon
the earth with our far-reaching eyes.

SOCRATES

O you magnificent and holy Clouds,

you've clearly heard my call.

[To Strepsiades]

Did you hear that voice
intermingled with the awesome growl of thunder?

STREPSIADES

O you most honoured sacred goddesses,
in answer to your thunder call I'd like to fart—
it's made me so afraid—if that's all right . . .

[Strepsiades pull down his pants and farts loudly in the direction of the offstage
Chorus]

Oh, oh, whether right nor not, I need to shit.

SOCRATES

Stop being so idiotic, acting like
a stupid damn comedian. Keep quiet.
A great host of deities is coming here—
they're going to sing.

CHORUS [still offstage]

O you maidens bringing rain—
let's move on to that brilliant place,
to gaze upon the land of Pallas,
where such noble men inhabit
Cecrops' lovely native home,¹⁹⁰ where they hold those sacred rites
no one may speak about,
where the temple of the mysteries
is opened up in holy festivals,¹⁹¹ with gifts for deities in heaven,
what lofty temples, holy statues,
most sacred supplication to the gods,
with garlands for each holy sacrifice,
and festivals of every kind 380
in every season of the year,
including, when the spring arrives,
that joyful Dionysian time,

¹⁹⁰Cecrops: a legendary king of Athens. Pallas is Pallas Athena, patron goddess of Athens.

¹⁹¹holy festivals: the Eleusinian mysteries, a traditionally secret and sacred festival for those initiated into the band of cult worshippers.

with rousing choruses of song,
resounding music of the pipes.

STREPSIADES

By god, Socrates, tell me, I beg you,
who these women are who sing so solemnly.
Are they some special kind of heroines?

SOCRATES

No—they're heavenly Clouds, great goddesses
for lazy men—from them we get our thoughts,
our powers of speech, our comprehension,
our gift for fantasy and endless talk,
our power to strike responsive chords in speech
and then rebut opponents' arguments.

STREPSIADES

Ah, that must be why, as I heard their voice,
my soul took wing, and now I'm really keen
to babble on of trivialities,
to argue smoke and mirrors, to deflate
opinions with a small opinion of my own,
to answer someone's reasoned argument
with my own counter-argument. So now,
I'd love to see them here in front of me,
if that's possible.

SOCRATES

Just look over there—
towards Mount Parnes. I see them coming,
slowly moving over here.¹⁹²

STREPSIADES

Where? Point them out.

SOCRATES

They're coming down here through the valleys—
a whole crowd of them—there in the thickets,
right beside you.

STREPSIADES

¹⁹²Mount Parnes: a mountain range to the north of Athens.

This is weird. I don't see them.

SOCRATES [pointing into the wings of the theatre]

There—in the entrance way.

STREPSIADES

Ah, now I see—

but I can barely make them out.

[The Clouds enter from the wings]

SOCRATES

There—

surely you can see them now, unless your eyes
are swollen up like pumpkins.

STREPSIADES

I see them.

My god, what worthy noble presences!

They're taking over the entire space.

SOCRATES

You weren't aware that they are goddesses?

You had no faith in them?

STREPSIADES

I'd no idea.

I thought clouds were mist and dew and vapour.

SOCRATES

You didn't realize these goddesses
support a multitude of charlatans—
prophetic seers from Thurium, quacks
who specialize in books on medicine,
lazy long-haired types with onyx signet rings,
poets who produce the twisted choral music
for dithyrambic songs, those with airy minds—
all such men so active doing nothing
the Clouds support, since in their poetry
these people celebrate the Clouds.

STREPSIADES

Ah ha, so that's why they poeticize
"the whirling radiance of watery clouds

as they advance so ominously,”
 ”waving hairs of hundred-headed Typho,”¹⁹³ with “roaring tempests,” and then
 “liquid breeze,”
 or ”crook-taloned, sky-floating birds of prey,”
 ”showers of rain from dewy clouds”—and then,
 as a reward for this, they stuff themselves
 on slices carved from some huge tasty fish
 or from a thrush.¹⁹⁴

SOCRATES

Yes, thanks to these Clouds.
 Is that not truly just?

STREPSIADES

All right, tell me this—
 if they’re really clouds, what’s happened to them?
 They look just like mortal human women.
 The clouds up there are not the least like that.

SOCRATES

What are they like?

STREPSIADES

I don’t know exactly.
 They look like wool once it’s been pulled apart—
 not like women, by god, not in the least.
 These ones here have noses.

SOCRATES

Let me ask you something.
 Will you answer me?

STREPSIADES

Ask me what you want.
 Fire away.

SOCRATES

Have you ever gazed up there
 and seen a cloud shaped like a centaur,
 or a leopard, wolf, or bull?

¹⁹³Typho: a monster with a hundred heads, father of the storm winds (hence, our word typhoon).

¹⁹⁴thrush: meat from a thrush was considered a delicacy, something that might be given to the winner of a public competition. These lines are mocking the dithyrambic poets (perhaps in comparison with the writers of comic drama).

STREPSIADES

Yes, I have.

So what?

SOCRATES

They become anything they want.

So if they see some hairy savage type,
one of those really wild and wooly men,
like Xenophantes' son, they mock his moods,
transforming their appearance into centaurs.¹⁹⁵

STREPSIADES

What if they glimpse a thief of public funds,
like Simon? What do they do then?¹⁹⁶

SOCRATES

They expose
just what he's truly like—they change at once,
transform themselves to wolves.

STREPSIADES

Ah ha, I see.
So that's why yesterday they changed to deer.
They must have caught sight of Cleonymos—
the man who threw away his battle shield—
they knew he was fearful coward.¹⁹⁷

SOCRATES

And now it's clear they've seen Cleisthenes—
that's why, as you can see, they've changed to women.¹⁹⁸

STREPSIADES [to the Chorus of Clouds]

All hail to you, lady goddesses.
And now, if you have ever spoken out
to other men, let me hear your voice,
you queenly powers.

CHORUS LEADER

¹⁹⁵Xenophantes' son: a reference to Hieronymos, a dithyrambic and tragic poet. A centaur was known for its savage temper and wild appearance.

¹⁹⁶Simon: an allegedly corrupt Athenian public official.

¹⁹⁷Cleonymos: an Athenian accused of dropping his shield and running away from a battle.

¹⁹⁸Cleisthenes: a notorious homosexual whom Aristophanes never tires of holding up to ridicule.

Greetings to you, old man born long ago,
hunter in love with arts of argument—
you, too, high priest of subtlest nonsense,
tell us what you want. Of all the experts
in celestial matters at the present time,
we take note of no one else but you—
and Prodicus¹⁹⁹—because he's sharp and wise,
while you go swaggering along the street,
in bare feet, shifting both eyes back and forth.
You keep moving on through many troubles,
looking proud of your relationship with us.

STREPSIADES

By the Earth, what voices these Clouds have—
so holy, reverent, and marvelous!

SOCRATES

Well, they're the only deities we have—
the rest are just so much hocus pocus.

STREPSIADES

Hang on—by the Earth, isn't Zeus a god,
the one up there on Mount Olympus?

SOCRATES

What sort of god is Zeus? Why spout such rubbish?
There's no such being as Zeus.

STREPSIADES

What do you mean?

Then who brings on the rain? First answer that.

SOCRATES

Why, these women do. I'll prove that to you
with persuasive evidence. Just tell me— 490
where have you ever seen the rain come down
without the Clouds being there? If Zeus brings rain,
then he should do so when the sky is clear,
when there are no Clouds in view.

¹⁹⁹Prodicus: a well-known Athenian intellectual, who wrote on a wide variety of subjects. Linking Socrates and Prodicus as intellectual equals would strike many Athenians as quite absurd.

STREPSIADES

By Apollo, you've made a good point there—
it helps your argument. I used to think
rain was really Zeus pissing through a sieve.
Tell me who causes thunder? That scares me.

SOCRATES

These Clouds do, as they roll around.

STREPSIADES

But how?

Explain that, you who dares to know it all.

SOCRATES

When they are filled with water to the brim
and then, suspended there with all that rain,
are forced to move, they bump into each other.
They're so big, they burst with a great boom.

STREPSIADES

But what's forcing them to move at all?
Doesn't Zeus do that?

SOCRATES

No—that's the aerial Vortex.²⁰⁰

STREPSIADES

Vortex? Well, that's something I didn't know.
So Zeus is now no more, and Vortex rules
instead of him. But you still have not explained
a thing about those claps of thunder.

SOCRATES

Weren't you listening to me? I tell you,
when the Clouds are full of water and collide,
they're so thickly packed they make a noise.

STREPSIADES

Come on now—who'd ever believe that stuff?

SOCRATES

I'll explain, using you as a test case.
Have you ever gorged yourself on stew

²⁰⁰Vortex: the Greek word is *dinos* meaning a whirl or eddy. I adopt Sommerstein's suggestion for this word here.

at the Panathenaea and later
had an upset stomach—then suddenly
some violent movement made it rumble?²⁰¹

STREPSIADES

Yes, by Apollo! It does weird things—
I feel unsettled. That small bit of stew
rumbles around and makes strange noises,
just like thunder. At first it's quite quiet—
"pappax pappax"—then it starts getting louder—
"papapappax"—and when I take a shit,
it really thunders "papapappax"—
just like these Clouds.

SOCRATES

So think about it—
if your small gut can make a fart like that,
why can't the air, which goes on for ever,
produce tremendous thunder. Then there's this—
consider how alike these phrases sound,
"thunder clap" and "fart and crap."

STREPSIADES

All right, but then explain this to me—
Where does lightning come from, that fiery blaze,
which, when it hits, sometimes burns us up,
sometimes just singes us and lets us live?
Clearly Zeus is hurling that at perjurers.

SOCRATES

You stupid driveling idiot, you stink
of olden times, the age of Cronos!²⁰² If Zeus
is really striking at the perjurers,
how come he's not burned Simon down to ash,
or else Cleonymos or Theorus?
They perjure themselves more than anyone.
No. Instead he strikes at his own temple

²⁰¹Panathenaea: a major annual festival in Athens.

²⁰²Cronos: the divine father of Zeus, the age of Cronos is part of the mythic past.

at Sunium, our Athenian headland,
and at his massive oak trees there. Why?
What's his plan? Oak trees can't be perjured.

STREPSIADES

I don't know. But that argument of yours
seems good. All right, then, what's a lightning bolt?

SOCRATES

When a dry wind blows up into the Clouds
and gets caught in there, it makes them inflate,
like the inside of a bladder. And then
it has to burst them all apart and vent,
rushing out with violence brought on
by dense compression—its force and friction
cause it to consume itself in fire.

STREPSIADES

By god, I went through that very thing myself—
at the feast for Zeus. I was cooking food,
a pig's belly, for my family. I forgot
to slit it open. It began to swell— 560
then suddenly blew up, splattering blood
in both my eyes and burning my whole face.

CHORUS LEADER

O you who seeks from us great wisdom,
how happy you will be among Athenians,
among the Greeks, if you have memory,
if you can think, if in that soul of yours
you've got the power to persevere,
and don't get tired standing still or walking,
nor suffer too much from the freezing cold,
with no desire for breakfast, if you abstain
from wine, from exercise, and other foolishness,
if you believe, as all clever people should,
the highest good is victory in action,
in deliberation and in verbal wars.

STREPSIADES

Well, as for a stubborn soul and a mind
thinking in a restless bed, while my stomach,
lean and mean, feeds on bitter herbs, don't worry.
I'm confident about all that—I'm ready
to be hammered on your anvil into shape.

SOCRATES

So now you won't acknowledge any gods
except the ones we do—Chaos, the Clouds,
the Tongue—just these three?

STREPSIADES

Absolutely—
I'd refuse to talk to any other gods,
if I ran into them—and I decline
to sacrifice or pour libations to them.
I'll not provide them any incense.

CHORUS LEADER

Tell us then what we can do for you.
Be brave—for if you treat us with respect,
if you admire us, and if you're keen
to be a clever man, you won't go wrong.

STREPSIADES

O you sovereign queens,
from you I ask one really tiny favour—
to be the finest speaker in all Greece,
within a hundred miles.

CHORUS LEADER

You'll get that from us.
From now on, in time to come, no one will win
more votes among the populace than you.

STREPSIADES

No speaking on important votes for me!
That's not what I'm after. No, no. I want
to twist all legal verdicts in my favour,
to evade my creditors.

CHORUS LEADER

You'll get that,
just what you desire. For what you want
is nothing special. So be confident—
give yourself over to our agents here.

STREPSIADES

I'll do that—I'll place my trust in you.
Necessity is weighing me down—the horses,
those thoroughbreds, my marriage—all that
has worn me out. So now, this body of mine
I'll give to them, with no strings attached,
to do with as they like—to suffer blows,
go without food and drink, live like a pig,
to freeze or have my skin flayed for a pouch—
if I can just get out of all my debt
and make men think of me as bold and glib,
as fearless, impudent, detestable,
one who cobbles lies together, makes up words,
a practised legal rogue, a statute book,
a chattering fox, sly and needle sharp,
a slippery fraud, a sticky rascal,
foul whipping boy or twisted villain,
troublemaker, or idly prattling fool.
If they can make those who run into me
call me these names, they can do what they want—
no questions asked. If, by Demeter, they're keen,
they can convert me into sausages
and serve me up to men who think deep thoughts.

CHORUS

Here's a man whose mind's now smart,
no holding back—prepared to start
When you have learned all this from me
you know your glory will arise among all men to heaven's skies.

STREPSIADES

What must I undergo?

CHORUS

For all time, you'll live with me
a life most people truly envy.

STREPSIADES

You mean I'll really see that one day?

CHORUS

Hordes will sit outside your door
wanting your advice and more—
to talk, to place their trust in you
for their affairs and lawsuits, too,
things which merit your great mind.
They'll leave you lots of cash behind.

CHORUS LEADER [to Socrates]

So get started with this old man's lessons,
what you intend to teach him first of all—
rouse his mind, test his intellectual powers.

SOCRATES

Come on then, tell me the sort of man you are—
once I know that, I can bring to bear on you
my latest batteries with full effect.

STREPSIADES

What's that? By god, are you assaulting me?

SOCRATES

No—I want to learn some things from you.
What about your memory?

STREPSIADES

To tell the truth
it works two ways. If someone owes me something,
I remember really well. But if it's poor me
that owes the money, I forget a lot.

SOCRATES

Do you have any natural gift for speech?

STREPSIADES

Not for speaking—only for evading debt.

SOCRATES

So how will you be capable of learning?

STREPSIADES

Easily—that shouldn't be your worry.

SOCRATES

All right. When I throw out something wise
about celestial matters, you make sure
you snatch it right away.

STREPSIADES

What's that about?

Am I to eat up wisdom like a dog?

SOCRATES [aside] This man's an ignorant barbarian!
Old man, I fear you may need a beating.

[to Strepsiades]

Now, what do you do if someone hits you?

STREPSIADES

If I get hit, I wait around a while,
then find witnesses, hang around some more,
then go to court.

SOCRATES

All right, take off your cloak.

STREPSIADES

Have I done something wrong?

SOCRATES

No. It's our custom
to go inside without a cloak.

STREPSIADES

But I don't want
to search your house for stolen stuff.²⁰³

SOCRATES

What are you going on about? Take it off.

STREPSIADES [removing his cloak and his shoes]

So tell me this—if I pay attention
and put some effort into learning,
which of your students will I look like?

²⁰³Legally an Athenian who believed someone had stolen his property could enter the suspect's house to search. But he first had to remove any garments in which he might conceal something which he might plant in the house.

SOCRATES

In appearance there'll be no difference
between yourself and Chaerephon.

STREPSIADES

Oh, that's bad.

You mean I'll be only half alive?

SOCRATES

Don't talk such rubbish! Get a move on
and follow me inside. Hurry up!

STREPSIADES

First, put a honey cake here in my hands.
I'm scared of going down in there. It's like
going in Trophonios' cave.²⁰⁴

SOCRATES

Go inside.

Why keep hanging round this doorway?

[Socrates picks up Strepsiades' cloak and shoes. Then Strepsiades and Socrates
exit into the interior of the Thinkery]

CHORUS LEADER

Go. And may you enjoy good fortune,
a fit reward for all your bravery.

CHORUS

We hope this man
thrives in his plan.

For at his stage
of great old age
he'll take a dip
in new affairs
to act the sage.

CHORUS LEADER [stepping forward to address the audience directly]

You spectators, I'll talk frankly to you now,
and speak the truth, in the name of Dionysus,
who has cared for me ever since I was a child.

²⁰⁴Trophonios' cave was a place people went to get prophecies. A suppliant carried a honey cake as an offering to the snakes in the cave.

So may I win and be considered a wise man.²⁰⁵
 For I thought you were a discerning audience
 and this comedy the most intelligent
 of all my plays. Thus, I believed it worth my while
 to produce it first for you, a work which cost me
 a great deal of effort. But I left defeated,
 beaten out by vulgar men—which I did not deserve.
 I place the blame for this on you intellectuals,
 on whose behalf I went to all that trouble.
 But still I won't ever willingly abandon
 the discriminating ones among you all,
 not since that time when my play about two men—
 one was virtuous, the other one depraved—
 was really well received by certain people here,
 whom it pleases me to mention now. As for me,
 I was still unmarried, not yet fully qualified
 to produce that child. But I exposed my offspring,
 and another woman carried it away.
 In your generosity you raised and trained it.²⁰⁶ Since then I've had sworn testimony
 from you
 that you have faith in me. So now, like old Electra,
 this comedy has come, hoping she can find,
 somewhere in here, spectators as intelligent.
 If she sees her brother's hair, she'll recognize it.²⁰⁷
 Consider how my play shows natural restraint.
 First, she doesn't have stitched leather dangling down,
 with a thick red knob, to make the children giggle.²⁰⁸ She hasn't mocked bald men

²⁰⁵win: this is a reference to the fact that the play is part of a competition. The speech obviously is part of the revisions made after the play failed to win first prize in its initial production. The speaker may have been Aristophanes himself or the Chorus Leader speaking on his behalf.

²⁰⁶trained it: This passage is a reference to Aristophanes' first play, *The Banqueters*, and to those who helped him get the work produced. The child mentioned is a metaphorical reference to that work or to his artistic talent generally. The other woman is a metaphorical reference to Callistratos, who produced *The Banqueters*.

²⁰⁷Electra was the sister of Orestes and spent a long time waiting to be reunited with him. That hope kept her going. When she saw her brother's lock of hair on their father's tomb, she was overjoyed that he had come back. The adjective "old" refers to the story, which was very well known to the audience.

²⁰⁸These lines may indicate that in *The Clouds* the male characters did not wear the traditional phalluses or that the phalluses they did wear were not of a particular kind.

or danced some drunken reel.

There's no old man who talks and beats those present
with a stick to hide bad jokes. She doesn't rush on stage
with torches or raise the cry "Alas!" or "Woe is me!"

No—she's come trusting in herself and in the script.

And I'm a poet like that. I don't preen myself.

I don't seek to cheat you by re-presenting here
the same material two or three times over.

Instead I base my art on framing new ideas,
all different from the rest, and each one very deft.

When Cleon was all-powerful, I went for him.

I hit him in the gut. But once he was destroyed,

I didn't have the heart to kick at him again.

Yet once Hyperbolos let others seize on him,
they've not ceased stomping on the miserable man—

and on his mother, too.²⁰⁹ The first was Eupolis—

he dredged up his Maricas, a wretched rehash

of my play *The Knights*—he's such a worthless poet—

adding an aging female drunk in that stupid dance,

a woman Phrynichos invented years ago,

the one that ocean monster tried to gobble up.²¹⁰ Then Hermippos wrote again about
Hyperbolos,

Now all the rest are savaging the man once more,

copying my images of eels. If anyone

laughs at those plays, I hope mine don't amuse him.

But if you enjoy me and my inventiveness,

then future ages will commend your worthy taste.

CHORUS

For my dance I first here call

on Zeus, high-ruling king of all

among the gods—and on Poseidon,

so great and powerful—the one

who with his trident wildly heaves

²⁰⁹Cleon was a very powerful Athenian politician after Pericles. Aristophanes savagely attacked him in *Knights*. Cleon was killed in battle (in 422). Hyperbolos became a very influential politician after Cleon's death.

²¹⁰Eupolis, Phrynichos, and Hermippos were comic playwrights, rivals of Aristophanes.

the earth and all the brine-filled seas,
and on our famous father Sky,
the most revered, who can supply
all things with life. And I invite
the Charioteer whose dazzling light
fills this wide world so mightily
for every man and deity.

CHORUS LEADER

The wisest in this audience should here take note—
you've done us wrong, and we confront you with the blame.
We confer more benefits than any other god
upon your city, yet we're the only ones
to whom you do not sacrifice or pour libations,
though we're the gods who keep protecting you.
If there's some senseless army expedition,
then we respond by thundering or bringing rain.
And when you were selecting as your general
that Paphlagonian tanner hated by the gods,²¹¹ we frowned and then complained
aloud—our thunder pealed
among the lightning bursts, the moon moved off her course,
the sun at once pulled his wick back inside himself,
and said if Cleon was to be your general
then he'd give you no light. Nonetheless, you chose him.
They say this city likes to make disastrous choices,
but that the gods, no matter what mistakes you make,
convert them into something better. If you want
your recent choice to turn into a benefit,
I can tell you how—it's easy. Condemn the man—
that seagull Cleon—for bribery and theft.²¹² Set him in the stocks, a wooden yoke
around his neck.
Then, even if you've made a really big mistake,
for you things will be as they were before your vote,

²¹¹Paphlagonian tanner is a reference to Cleon, who earned his money from tanneries. Paphlagonia is an area in Asia Minor. The word here implies that Cleon was not a true Athenian.

²¹²seagull was a bird symbolic of thievery and greed. The contradiction in these speeches in the attitude to Cleon (who died the year following the original production) may be accounted for by the incomplete revision of the script.

and for the city this affair will turn out well.

CHORUS

Phoebus Apollo, stay close by,
lord of Delos, who sits on high,
by lofty Cynthos mountain sides;
and holy lady, who resides
in Ephesus, in your gold shrine,
where Lydian girls pray all the time;
Athena, too, who guards our home,
her aegis raised above her own,
and he who holds Parnassus peaks
and shakes his torches as he leaps,
lord Dionysus, whose shouts call
amid the Delphic bacchanal.²¹³

CHORUS LEADER

When we were getting ready to move over here,
Moon met us and told us, first of all, to greet,
on her behalf, the Athenians and their allies.
Then she said she was upset—the way you treat her
is disgraceful, though she brings you all benefits—
not just in words but in her deeds. To start with,
she saves you at least one drachma every month
for torchlight— in the evening, when you go outside,
you all can say, “No need to buy a torch, my boy,
Moon’s light will do just fine.” She claims she helps you all
in other ways, as well, but you don’t calculate
your calendar the way you should—no, instead
you make it all confused, and that’s why, she says,
the gods are always making threats against her,
when they are cheated of a meal and go back home
because their celebration has not taken place

²¹³holy lady is a reference to the goddess Artemis. The aegis is a divine cloak which has invincible powers to strike fear into the god’s enemies. Here it is invoked as a protection for Athens, Athena’s city. Dionysus lived in Delphi when Apollo was absent from the shrine during the winter.

according to a proper count of all the days.²¹⁴ And then, when you should be making sacrifice,
 you're torturing someone or have a man on trial.
 And many times, when we gods undertake a fast,
 because we're mourning Memnon or Sarpedon,²¹⁵
 you're pouring out libations, having a good laugh.
 That's the reason, after his choice by lot this year
 to sit on the religious council, Hyperbolos
 had his wreath of office snatched off by the gods.
 That should make him better understand the need
 to count the days of life according to the moon.²¹⁶

[Enter Socrates from the interior of the Thinkery]

SOCRATES

By Respiration, Chaos, and the Air,
 I've never seen a man so crude, stupid,
 clumsy, and forgetful. He tries to learn
 the tiny trifles, but then he forgets 830
 before he's even learned them. Nonetheless,
 I'll call him outside here into the light.

[Socrates calls back into the interior of the Thinkery]

Strepsiades, where are you? Come on out—
 and bring your bed.

STREPSIADES [from inside]

I can't carry it out—
 the bugs won't let me.

SOCRATES

Get a move on. Now!

[Strepsiades enters carrying his bedding]

SOCRATES

Put it there. And pay attention.

²¹⁴Athenians followed a lunar calendar, but there were important discrepancies due to a very careless control over inserting extra days.

²¹⁵Memnon or Sarpedon: Memnon, the son of Dawn, was killed at Troy, as was Sarpedon, a son of Zeus, and leader of the Lycian allies of the Trojans.

²¹⁶religious council: the Amphictyonic Council, which controlled some important religious shrines, was made up of delegates from different city states. In Athens the delegate was chosen by lot. It's not clear how the gods could have removed the wreath in question.

STREPSIADES [putting the bed down]

There!

SOCRATES

Come now, of all the things you never learned
what to you want to study first? Tell me.

[Strepsiades is very puzzled by the question]

SOCRATES

Poetic measures? Diction? Rhythmic verse?

STREPSIADES

I'll take measures. Just the other day
the man who deals in barley cheated me—
about two quarts.

SOCRATES

That's not what I mean.

Which music measure is most beautiful—
the triple measure or quadruple measure?

STREPSIADES

As a measure nothing beats a gallon.

SOCRATES

My dear man, you're just talking nonsense.

STREPSIADES

Then make me a bet—I say a gallon
is made up of quadruple measures.

SOCRATES O damn you—you're such a country bumpkin—
so slow! Maybe you can learn more quickly
if we deal with rhythm.

STREPSIADES

Will these rhythms
help to get me food?

SOCRATES

Well, to begin with,
they'll make you elegant in company—
and you'll recognize the different rhythms,
the enoplian and the dactylic,

which is like a digit.²¹⁷

STREPSIADES

Like a digit!

By god, that's something I do know!

SOCRATES

Then tell me.

STREPSIADES

When I was a lad a digit meant this!

[Strepsiades sticks his middle finger straight up under Socrates' nose]

SOCRATES

You're just a crude buffoon!

STREPSIADES

No, you're a fool—

I don't want to learn any of that stuff.

SOCRATES

Well then, what?

STREPSIADES

You know, that other thing—

how to argue the most unjust cause.

SOCRATES

But you need to learn these other matters

before all that. Now, of the quadrupeds

which one can we correctly label male?

STREPSIADES

Well, I know the males, if I'm not witless—

the ram, billy goat, bull, dog, and fowl.

SOCRATES

And the females?

STREPSIADES

The ewe, nanny goat,

cow, bitch and fowl.²¹⁸

²¹⁷the dactyl is named from the Greek word for finger because it consists of one long stress followed by two short stresses, like the structure of bones in a finger. The phrase "which is like a digit" has been added to make the point clearer.

²¹⁸I adopt Sommerstein's suggested insertion of this line and a half in order to clarify what now follows in the conversation, which hinges on the gender of words (masculine, feminine, or neuter) and the proper ascription of a specific gender to words which describe male and female objects. The word "fowl" applies to both male and females and therefore is not, strictly speaking masculine. This whole section is a satire on the "nitpicking" attention to language attributed to the sophists.

SOCRATES

You see what you're doing?
You're using that word "fowl" for both of them,
Calling males what people use for females.

STREPSIADES

What's that? I don't get it.

SOCRATES

What's not to get?
"Fowl" and "Fowl" . . .

STREPSIADES

By Poseidon, I see your point.
All right, what should I call them?

SOCRATES

Call the male a "fowl"—
and call the other one "fowlette."

STREPSIADES

"Fowlette?"
By the Air, that's good! Just for teaching that
I'll fill your kneading basin up with flour,
right to the brim.²¹⁹

SOCRATES

Once again, another error!
You called it basin—a masculine word—
when it's feminine.

STREPSIADES

How so? Do I call
the basin masculine?

SOCRATES

Indeed you do.
It's just like Cleonymos.²²⁰

STREPSIADES

How's that?
Tell me.

²¹⁹kneading basin: a trough for making bread.

²²⁰Cleonymos was an Athenian politician who allegedly ran away from the battle field, leaving his shield behind.

SOCRATES

You treated the word basin
just as you would treat Cleonymos.

STREPSIADES [totally bewildered by the conversation]

But my dear man, he didn't have a basin—
not Cleonymos—not for kneading flour.
His round mortar was his prick—the wanker—
he kneaded that to masturbate.²²¹ But what should I call a basin from now on?

SOCRATES

Call it a basinette, just as you'd say
the word Sostratette.

STREPSIADES

Basinette—it's feminine?

SOCRATES

It is indeed.

STREPSIADES

All right, then, I should say
Cleonymette and basinette.²²²

SOCRATES

You've still got to learn about people's names—
which ones are male and which are female.

STREPSIADES

I know which ones are feminine.

SOCRATES

Go on.

STREPSIADES

Lysilla, Philinna, Cleitagora,
Demetria . . .

SOCRATES

Which names are masculine?

STREPSIADES

There are thousands of them—Philoxenos,

²²¹to masturbate: the Greek here says literally "Cleonymos didn't have a kneading basin but kneaded himself with a round mortar [i.e., masturbated]."

²²²The point of this very laboured joke seems to be making Cleonymos feminine, presumably because of his cowardice (running away in battle).

Melesias, Amynias . . .

SOCRATES

You fool,

those names are not all masculine.²²³

STREPSIADES

What?

You don't think of them as men?

SOCRATES

Indeed I don't.

If you met Amynias, how would you greet him?

STREPSIADES How? Like this, "Here, Amynia, come here."²²⁴

SOCRATES

You see? You said "Amynia," a woman's name.

STREPSIADES

And that's fair enough, since she's unwilling

to do army service. But what's the point?

Why do I need to learn what we all know?

SOCRATES

That's irrelevant, by god. Now lie down—

[indicating the bed]

right here.

STREPSIADES

And do what?

SOCRATES

You should contemplate—

think one of your own problems through.

STREPSIADES

Not here,

I beg you—no. If I have to do it,

let me do my contemplating on the ground.

²²³The three names mentioned belong to well known Athenians, who may have all been famous for their dissolute life style. Socrates is taking issue with the spelling of the last two names which (in some forms) look like feminine names. StrepsiaDES, of course, thinks Socrates is talking about the sexuality of the people.

²²⁴Amynia: in Greek (as in Latin) the name changes when it is used as a direct form of address—in this case the last letter is dropped, leaving a name ending in -a, normally a feminine ending.

SOCRATES

No—you've got no choice.

STREPSIADES [crawling very reluctantly into the bedding]

Now I'm done for—

these bugs are going to punish me today.

[Socrates exits back into the Thinkery]

CHORUS

Now ponder and think,

focus this way and that.

Your mind turn and toss.

And if you're at a loss,

then quickly go find

a new thought in your mind.

From your eyes you must keep

all soul-soothing sleep.

STREPSIADES

O god . . . ahhhhh . . .

CHORUS

What's wrong with you? Why so distressed?

STREPSIADES

I'm dying a miserable death in here!

These Corinthian crawlers keep biting me.²²⁵

gnawing on my ribs,

slurping up my blood,

yanking off my balls,

tunneling up my arse hole—

they're killing me!

CHORUS

Don't complain so much.

STREPSIADES

Why not? When I've lost my goods,

lost the colour in my cheeks, lost my blood,

lost my shoes, and, on top of all these troubles,

I'm here like some night watchman singing out—

²²⁵Corinthian is obviously a reference to bed bugs, but the link with Corinth is unclear (perhaps it was a slang expression).

it won't be long before I'm done for.

{Enter Socrates from inside the Thinkery]

SOCRATES

What are you doing? Aren't you thinking something?

STREPSIADES

Me? Yes I am, by Poseidon.

SOCRATES

What about?

STREPSIADES

Whether there's going to be any of me left
once these bugs have finished.

SOCRATES

You imbecile,

why don't you drop dead!

[Socrates exits back into the Thinkery]

STREPSIADES

But my dear man,

I'm dying right now.

CHORUS LEADER

Don't get soft. Cover up—

get your whole body underneath the blanket.

You need to find a good idea for fraud,
a sexy way to cheat.

STREPSIADES

Damn it all—

instead of these lambskins here, why won't someone
throw over me a lovely larcenous scheme?

[Strepsiades covers his head with the wool blankets. Enter Socrates from the
Thinkery and looks around thinking what to do]

SOCRATES

First, I'd better check on what he's doing.

You in there, are you asleep?

STREPSIADES [uncovering his head]

No, I'm not.

SOCRATES

Have you grasped anything?

STREPSIADES

No, by god, I haven't.

SOCRATES

Nothing at all?

STREPSIADES

I haven't grasped a thing—

except my right hand's wrapped around my cock.

SOCRATES

Then cover your head and think up something—
get a move on!

STREPSIADES

What should I think about?

Tell me that, Socrates.

SOCRATES

First you must formulate
what it is you want. Then tell me.

STREPSIADES

You've heard

what I want a thousand times—I want to know
about interest, so I'll not have to pay
a single creditor.

SOCRATES

Come along now,
cover up.

[Strepsiades covers his head again, and Socrates speaks to him through the
blanket]

Now, carve your slender thinking
into tiny bits, and think the matter through,
with proper probing and analysis.

STREPSIADES Ahhh . . . bloody hell!

SOCRATES

Don't shift around.

If one of your ideas is going nowhere,
let it go, leave it alone. Later on,

start it again and weigh it one more time.

STREPSIADES

My dear little Socrates . . .

SOCRATES

Yes, old man,
what is it?

STREPSIADES

I've got a lovely scheme
to avoid paying interest.

SOCRATES

Lay it out.

STREPSIADES

All right. Tell me now . . .

SOCRATES

What is it?

STREPSIADES

What if I purchased a Thessalian witch
and in the night had her haul down the moon—
then shut it up in a circular box,
just like a mirror, and kept watch on it.

SOCRATES

How would that provide you any help?

STREPSIADES

Well, if no moon ever rose up anywhere,
I'd pay no interest.

SOCRATES

And why is that?

STREPSIADES

Because they lend out money by the month.

SOCRATES

That's good. I'll give you another problem—
it's tricky. If in court someone sued you
to pay five talents, what would you do
to get the case discharged.

STREPSIADES

How? I don't know.

I'll have to think.

SOCRATES

These ideas of yours—

don't keep them wound up all the time inside you.

Let your thinking loose—out into the air—

with thread around its foot, just like a bug.²²⁶

STREPSIADES

Hey, I've devised a really clever way

to make that lawsuit disappear—it's so good,

you'll agree with me.

SOCRATES

What's your way?

STREPSIADES

At the drug seller's shop have you seen

that beautiful stone you can see right through,

the one they use to start a fire?

SOCRATES

You mean glass?

STREPSIADES

Yes.

SOCRATES

So what?

STREPSIADES

What if I took that glass,

and when the scribe was writing out the charge,

I stood between him and the sun—like this—

some distance off, and made his writing melt,

just the part about my case?²²⁷

SOCRATES

By the Graces,

that's a smart idea!

STREPSIADES

²²⁶bug: children sometimes tied a thread around the foot of a large flying bug and played with it.

²²⁷The scribe would be writing on a wax tablet which the heat would melt.

Hey, I'm happy—

I've erased my law suit for five talents.

SOCRATES

So hurry up and tackle this next problem.

STREPSIADES

What is it?

SOCRATES

How would you evade a charge

and launch a counter-suit in a hearing

you're about to lose without a witness?

STREPSIADES

No problem there—it's easy.

SOCRATES: So tell me.

STREPSIADES: I will. If there was a case still pending,

another one before my case was called,

I'd run off and hang myself.

SOCRATES

That's nonsense.

STREPSIADES

No, by the gods, it's not. If I were dead,

no one could bring a suit against me.

SOCRATES

That's rubbish. Just get away from here.

I'll not instruct you any more.

STREPSIADES

Why not?

Come on, Socrates, in god's name.

SOCRATES

There's no point—

as soon as you learn anything, it's gone,

you forget it right away. Look, just now,

what was the very first thing you were taught?

STREPSIADES

Well, let's see . . . The first thing—what was it?

What was that thing we knead the flour in?

Damn it all, what was it?

SOCRATES

To hell with you!

You're the most forgetful, stupidest old man . . .

Get lost!

STREPSIADES

Oh dear! Now I'm in for it.

What going to happen to me? I'm done for,

if I don't learn to twist my words around.

Come on, Clouds, give me some good advice.

CHORUS LEADER

Old man, here's our advice: if you've a son
and he's full grown, send him in there to learn—
he'll take your place.

STREPSIADES

Well, I do have a son—

a really good and fine one, too—trouble is
he doesn't want to learn. What should I do?

CHORUS LEADER

You just let him do that?

STREPSIADES

He's a big lad—

and strong and proud—his mother's family
are all high-flying women like Coesyra.

But I'll take him in hand. If he says no,
then I'll evict him from my house for sure.

[to Socrates]

Go inside and wait for me a while.

[Strepsiades moves back across the stage to his own house]

CHORUS [to Socrates]

Don't you see you'll quickly get
from us all sorts of lovely things
since we're your only god?

This man here is now all set
to follow you in anything,

you simply have to prod.

You know the man is in a daze.
He's clearly keen his son should learn.
So lap it up—make haste—
get everything that you can raise.
Such chances tend to change and turn
into a different case.

[Socrates exits into the Thinkery. Strepsiades and Pheidippides come out of their house. Strepsiades is pushing his son in front of him]

STREPSIADES

By the foggy air, you can't stay here—
not one moment longer! Off with you—
go eat Megacles out of house and home!

PHEIDIPPIDES

Hey, father—you poor man, what's wrong with you?
By Olympian Zeus, you're not thinking straight.

STREPSIADES

See that—"Olympian Zeus"! Ridiculous—
to believe in Zeus—and at your age!

PHEIDIPPIDES

Why laugh at that?

STREPSIADES

To think you're such a child—
and your views so out of date. Still, come here,
so you can learn a bit. I'll tell you things.
When you understand all this, you'll be a man.
But you mustn't mention this to anyone.

PHEIDIPPIDES

All right, what is it?

STREPSIADES

You just swore by Zeus.

PHEIDIPPIDES

That's right. I did.

STREPSIADES

You see how useful learning is?

Pheidippides, there's no such thing as Zeus.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Then what is there?

STREPSIADES

Vortex now is king—
he's pushed out Zeus.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Bah, that's nonsense!

STREPSIADES

You should know that's how things are right now.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Who says that?

STREPSIADES

Socrates of Melos²²⁸

and Chaerephon—they know about fleas' footprints.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Have you become so crazy you believe
these fellows? They're disgusting!

STREPSIADES

Watch your tongue.

Don't say nasty things about such clever men—
men with brains, who like to save their money.

That's why not one of them has ever shaved,
or oiled his skin, or visited the baths
to wash himself. You, on the other hand,
keep on bathing in my livelihood,
as if I'd died.²²⁹ So now get over there,
as quickly as you can. Take my place and learn.

PHEIDIPPIDES

But what could anyone learn from those men
that's any use at all?

STREPSIADES

You have to ask?

²²⁸Melos: Strepsiades presumably is confusing Socrates with Diagoras, a well known materialistic atheist, who came from Melos (whereas Socrates did not).

²²⁹died: part of the funeral rituals in a family required each member to bathe thoroughly.

Why, wise things—the full extent of human thought.
You'll see how thick you are, how stupid.
Just wait a moment here for me.

[Strepsiades goes into his house]

PHEIDIPPIDES

O dear,
What will I do? My father's lost his wits.
Do I haul him off to get committed,
on the ground that he's a lunatic,
or tell the coffin-makers he's gone nuts.

[Strepsiades returns with two birds, one in each hand. He holds out one of them]

STREPSIADES

Come on now, what do you call this? Tell me.

PHEIDIPPIDES

It's a fowl.

STREPSIADES

That's good. What's this?

PHEIDIPPIDES

That's a fowl.

STREPSIADES

They're both the same? You're being ridiculous.
From now on, don't do that. Call this one "fowl,"
and this one here "fowlette."

PHEIDIPPIDES

"Fowlette"? That's it?

That's the sort of clever stuff you learned in there,
by going in with these Sons of Earth?²³⁰

STREPSIADES

Yes, it is—
and lots more, too. But everything I learned,
I right away forgot, because I'm old.

PHEIDIPPIDES

That why you lost your cloak?

²³⁰Sons of Earth: a phrase usually referring to the Titans who warred against the Olympian gods. Here it also evokes a sense of the materialism of Socrates' doctrine in the play and, of course, ironically ridicules the Thinkery.

STREPSIADES

I didn't lose it—

I gave it to knowledge—a donation.

PHEIDIPPIDES

And your sandals—what you do with them,
you deluded man?

STREPSIADES

Just like Pericles,

I lost them as a “necessary expense.”²³¹ But come on, let's go. Move it. If your dad
asks you to do wrong, you must obey him.

I know I did just what you wanted long ago,
when you were six years old and had a lisp—
with the first obol I got for jury work,
at the feast of Zeus I got you a toy cart.

PHEIDIPPIDES

You're going to regret this one fine day.

STREPSIADES

Good—you're doing what I ask.

[Strepsiades calls inside the Thinkery]

Socrates,

come out here . . .

[Enter Socrates from inside the Thinkery]

Here—I've brought my son to you.

He wasn't keen, but I persuaded him.

SOCRATES

He's still a child—he doesn't know the ropes.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Go hang yourself up on some rope,
and get beaten like a worn-out cloak.

STREPSIADES

Damn you! Why insult your teacher?

SOCRATES

Look how he says “hang yourself”—it sounds

²³¹“necessary expense”: refers to the well-known story of Pericles who in 445 BC used this phrase in official state accounts to refer to an expensive but secret bribe he paid to a Spartan general to withdraw his armies from Athenian territories around Athens. No one asked any embarrassing questions about the entry.

like baby talk. No crispness in his speech.²³² With such a feeble tone how will he learn

to answer to a charge or summons
or speak persuasively? And yet it's true
Hyperbolos could learn to master that—
it cost him one talent.²³³

STREPSIADES

Don't be concerned.
Teach him. He's naturally intelligent.
When he was a little boy—just that tall—
even then at home he built small houses,
carved out ships, made chariots from leather,
and fashioned frogs from pomegranate peel.
You can't imagine! Get him to learn
those two forms of argument—the Better,
whatever that may be, and the Worse.
If not both, then at least the unjust one—
every trick you've got.

SOCRATES

He'll learn on his own
from the two styles of reasoning. I'll be gone.

STREPSIADES

But remember this—he must be able
to speak against all just arguments.

[Enter the Better Argument from inside the Thinkery, talking to the Worse Argument who is still inside]

BETTER ARGUMENT

Come on. Show yourself to the people here—
I guess you're bold enough for that.

[The Worse Argument emerges from the Thinkery]

WORSE ARGUMENT

Go where you please.

²³²speech: the Greek says “with his lips sagging [or loosely apart].” Socrates is criticizing Pheidippides' untrained voice.

²³³talent: an enormous fee to pay for lessons in rhetoric. Socrates is, of course, getting Strepsiades ready to pay a lot for his son's education.

The odds are greater I can wipe you out
with lots of people there to watch us argue.

BETTER ARGUMENT

You'll wipe me out? Who'd you think you are?

WORSE ARGUMENT

An argument.

BETTER ARGUMENT

Yes, but second rate.

WORSE ARGUMENT

You claim that you're more powerful than me,
but I'll still conquer you.

BETTER ARGUMENT

What clever tricks
do you intend to use?

WORSE ARGUMENT

I'll formulate
new principles.

BETTER ARGUMENT [indicating the audience]

Yes, that's in fashion now,
thanks to these idiots.

WORSE ARGUMENT

No, no. They're smart.

BETTER ARGUMENT

I'll destroy you utterly.

WORSE ARGUMENT

And how?

Tell me that.

BETTER ARGUMENT

By arguing what's just.

WORSE ARGUMENT

That I can overturn in my response,
by arguing there's no such thing as Justice.

BETTER ARGUMENT

It doesn't exist? That's what you maintain?

WORSE ARGUMENT

Well, if it does, where is it?

BETTER ARGUMENT

With the gods.

WORSE ARGUMENT

Well, if Justice does exist, how come Zeus
hasn't been destroyed for chaining up his dad.²³⁴

BETTER ARGUMENT

This is going from bad to worse. I feel sick.

Fetch me a basin.

WORSE ARGUMENT

You silly old man—

you're so ridiculous.

BETTER ARGUMENT

And you're quite shameless,
you bum fucker.

WORSE ARGUMENT

Those words you speak—like roses!

BETTER ARGUMENT

Buffoon!

WORSE ARGUMENT

You adorn my head with lilies.

BETTER ARGUMENT

You destroyed your father!

WORSE ARGUMENT

You don't mean to,
but you're showering me with gold.

BETTER ARGUMENT

No, not gold—
before this age, those names were lead.

WORSE ARGUMENT

But now,
your insults are a credit to me.

BETTER ARGUMENT

You're too obstreperous.

²³⁴Zeus overthrew his father, Cronos, and the Titans and imprisoned them deep inside the earth.

WORSE ARGUMENT

You're archaic.

BETTER ARGUMENT

It's thanks to you that none of our young men
is keen to go to school. The day will come
when the Athenians will all realize
how you teach these silly fools.

WORSE ARGUMENT

You're dirty—
it's disgusting.

BETTER ARGUMENT

But you're doing very well—
although in earlier days you were a beggar,
claiming to be Telephos from Mysia,
eating off some views of Pandeletos,
which you kept in your wallet.²³⁵

WORSE ARGUMENT

That was brilliant—
you just reminded me . . .

BETTER ARGUMENT

It was lunacy!
Your own craziness—the city's, too.
It fosters you while you corrupt the young.

WORSE ARGUMENT

You can't teach this boy—you're old as Cronos.

BETTER ARGUMENT

Yes, I must—if he's going to be redeemed
and not just prattle empty verbiage.

WORSE ARGUMENT [to Pheidippides]

Come over here—leave him to his foolishness.

BETTER ARGUMENT

You'll regret it, if you lay a hand on him.

²³⁵Telephos from Mysia was a hero in a play by Euripides in which a king was portrayed as a beggar. Pandeletos was an Athenian politician. The imputation here is that the Worse Argument once did very badly, barely surviving on his wits and borrowed ideas.

CHORUS LEADER

Stop this fighting, all these abusive words.

[addressing first the Better Argument and then the Worse Argument]

Instead, explain the things you used to teach
to young men long ago—then you lay out
what's new in training now. He can listen
as you present opposing arguments
and then decide which school he should attend.

BETTER ARGUMENT

I'm willing to do that.

WORSE ARGUMENT

All right with me.

CHORUS LEADER

Come on then, which one of you goes first?

WORSE ARGUMENT

I'll grant him that right. Once he's said his piece,
I'll shoot it down with brand-new expressions
and some fresh ideas. By the time I'm done,
if he so much as mutters, he'll get stung
by my opinions on his face and eyes—
like so many hornets—he'll be destroyed.

CHORUS

Trusting their skill in argument,
their phrase-making propensity,
these two men here are now intent
to show which one will prove to be
the better man in oratory.
For wisdom now is being hard pressed—
my friends, this is the crucial test.

CHORUS LEADER [addressing the Better Argument]

First, you who crowned our men in days gone by
with so much virtue in their characters,
let's hear that voice which brings you such delight—
explain to us what makes you what you are.

BETTER ARGUMENT

All right, I'll set out how we organized
our education in the olden days,
when I talked about what's just and prospered,
when people wished to practise self-restraint.
First, there was a rule—children made no noise,
no muttering. Then, when they went outside,
walking the streets to the music master's house,
groups of youngsters from the same part of town
went in straight lines and never wore a cloak,
not even when the snow fell thick as flour.
There he taught them to sing with thighs apart.²³⁶ They had memorize their songs—
such as,
"Dreadful Pallas Who Destroys Whole Cities,"
and "A Cry From Far Away." These they sang
in the same style their fathers had passed down.
If any young lad fooled around or tried
to innovate with some new flourishes,
like the contorted sounds we have today
from those who carry on the Phrynis style,²³⁷
he was beaten, soundly thrashed, his punishment
for tarnishing the Muse. At the trainer's house,
when the boys sat down, they had to keep
their thighs stretched out, so they would not expose
a thing which might excite erotic torments
in those looking on. And when they stood up,
they smoothed the sand, being careful not to leave
imprints of their manhood there for lovers.
Using oil, no young lad rubbed his body
underneath his navel—thus on his sexual parts
there was a dewy fuzz, like on a peach.
He didn't make his voice all soft and sweet
to talk to lovers as he walked along,
or with his glances coyly act the pimp.

²³⁶thighs apart: keeping the thighs together was supposed to enable boys to stimulate themselves sexually.

²³⁷Phrynis style: Phrynis was a musician who introduced certain innovations in music around 450 BC.

When he was eating, he would not just grab
 a radish head, or take from older men
 some dill or parsley, or eat dainty food.
 He wasn't allowed to giggle, or sit there
 with his legs crossed.

WORSE ARGUMENT

Antiquated rubbish!
 Filled with festivals for Zeus Polieus,
 cicadas, slaughtered bulls, and Cedeides.²³⁸

BETTER ARGUMENT

But the point is this—these very features
 in my education brought up those men
 who fought at Marathon. But look at you—
 you teach these young men now right from the start
 to wrap themselves in cloaks. It enrages me
 when the time comes for them to do their dance
 at the Panathenaea festival
 and one of them holds his shield low down,
 over his balls, insulting Tritogeneia.²³⁹ And so, young man, that's why you should
 choose me,
 the Better Argument. Be resolute.
 You'll find out how to hate the market place,
 to shun the public baths, to feel ashamed
 of shameful things, to fire up your heart
 when someone mocks you, to give up your chair
 when older men come near, not to insult
 your parents, nor act in any other way
 which brings disgrace or which could mutilate
 your image as an honourable man.
 You'll learn not to run off to dancing girls,
 in case, while gaping at them, you get hit
 with an apple thrown by some little slut,

²³⁸Cedeides: a dithyrambic poet well known for his old-fashioned style. The other references are all too ancient customs and rituals (like the old tradition of wearing a cicada brooch or the ritual killing of oxen).

²³⁹Marathon: a battle in 490 BC in which a small band of Greeks, mainly Athenians, defeated the Persian armies which had landed near Athens. The Panathenaea was a major religious festival in Athens. Tritogeneia was one of Athena's titles.

and your fine reputation's done for,
 and not to contradict your father,
 or remind him of his age by calling him
 Iapetus—not when he spent his years
 in raising you from infancy.²⁴⁰

WORSE ARGUMENT

My boy, if you're persuaded by this man,
 then by Dionysus, you'll finish up
 just like Hippocrates' sons—and then
 they'll all call you a sucker of the tit.²⁴¹

BETTER ARGUMENT

You'll spend your time in the gymnasium—
 your body will be sleek, in fine condition.
 You won't be hanging round the market place,
 chattering filth, as boys do nowadays.
 You won't keep on being hauled away to court
 over some damned sticky fierce dispute
 about some triviality. No, no.
 Instead you'll go to the Academy,²⁴² to race under the sacred olive trees,
 with a decent friend the same age as you,
 wearing a white reed garland, with no cares.
 You'll smell yew trees, quivering poplar leaves,
 as plane trees whisper softly to the elms,
 rejoicing in the spring. I tell you this—
 if you carry out these things I mention,
 if you concentrate your mind on them,
 you'll always have a gleaming chest, bright skin,
 broad shoulders, tiny tongue, strong buttocks,
 and a little prick. But if you take up
 what's in fashion nowadays, you'll have,
 for starters, feeble shoulders, a pale skin,
 a narrow chest, huge tongue, a tiny bum,

²⁴⁰Iapetus was a Titan, a brother of Cronos, and hence very ancient.

²⁴¹Hippocrates was an Athenian, a relative of Pericles. He had three sons who had a reputation for childishness.

²⁴²Academy: this word refers, not to Plato's school (which was not in existence yet) but to a public park and gymnasium in Athens.

and a large skill in framing long decrees.²⁴³
 And that man there will have you believing
 what's bad is good and what's good is bad.
 Then he'll give you Antimachos' disease—
 you'll be infected with his buggery.²⁴⁴

CHORUS

O you whose wisdom stands so tall,
 the most illustrious of all.
 The odour of your words is sweet,
 the flowering bloom of modest ways—
 happy who lived in olden days!
 [to the Worse Argument]
 Your rival's made his case extremely well,
 so you who have such nice artistic skill.
 must in reply give some new frill.

CHORUS LEADER

If you want to overcome this man
 it looks as if you'll need to bring at him
 some clever stratagems —unless you want
 to look ridiculous.

WORSE ARGUMENT

It's about time!
 My guts have long been churning with desire
 to rip in fragments all those things he said,
 with counter-arguments. That's why I'm called
 Worse Argument among all thinking men,
 because I was the very first of them
 to think of coming up with reasoning
 against our normal ways and just decrees.
 And it's worth lots of money—more, in fact,
 than drachmas in six figures²⁴⁵—to select

²⁴³long decrees: The Greek says “and a long decree,” which makes little sense in English. The point of the joke is to set the audience up to expect “and a long prick” (which was considered a characteristic of barbarians).

²⁴⁴Antimachos was satirized in comedy as a particularly effeminate man.

²⁴⁵drachmas: the Greek has “more than ten thousandstaters.” A stater was a general term for non-Athenian coins, usually of high value. The idea, of course, is equivalent to “a ton of money.”

the weaker argument and yet still win.
 Now just see how I'll pull his system down,
 that style of education which he trusts.
 First, he says he won't let you have hot water
 when you take a bath. What's the idea here?
 Why object to having a warm bath?

BETTER ARGUMENT

The effect they have is very harmful—
 they turn men into cowards.

WORSE ARGUMENT

Wait a minute!
 The first thing you say I've caught you out.
 I've got you round the waist. You can't escape.
 Tell me this—of all of Zeus' children
 which man, in your view, had the greatest heart
 and carried out the hardest tasks? Tell me.

BETTER ARGUMENT

In my view, no one was a better man
 than Hercules.

WORSE ARGUMENT

And where'd you ever see
 cold water in a bath of Hercules? But who
 was a more manly man than him?²⁴⁶

BETTER ARGUMENT

That's it, the very things which our young men
 are always babbling on about these days—
 crowding in the bath house, leaving empty
 all the wrestling schools.

WORSE ARGUMENT

Next, you're not happy
 when they hang around the market place—
 but I think that's good. If it were shameful,
 Homer would not have labelled Nestor—

²⁴⁶bath of Hercules was a term commonly applied to thermal hot springs.

and all his clever men—great public speakers.²⁴⁷
 Now, I'll move on to their tongues, which this man
 says the young lads should not train. I say they should.
 He also claims they should be self-restrained.
 These two things injure them in major ways.
 Where have you ever witnessed self-restraint
 bring any benefit to anyone?
 Tell me. Speak up. Refute my reasoning.

BETTER ARGUMENT

There are lots of people. For example,
 Peleus won a sword for his restraint.²⁴⁸

WORSE ARGUMENT

A sword! What a magnificent reward
 the poor wretch received! While Hyperbolos,
 who sells lamps in the market, is corrupt
 and brings in lots of money, but, god knows,
 he's never won a sword.

BETTER ARGUMENT

But his virtue
 enabled Peleus to marry Thetis.²⁴⁹

WORSE ARGUMENT

Then she ran off, abandoning the man,
 because he didn't want to spend all night
 having hard sweet sex between the sheets—
 that rough-and-tumble love that women like.
 You're just a crude old-fashioned Cronos.
 Now, my boy, just think off all those things
 that self-restraint requires—you'll go without
 all sorts of pleasures—boys and women,

²⁴⁷This part of the argument is impossible to render quickly in English. Homer's word is *agoretēs*, meaning "speaking in the assembly." The Worse Argument is implying that, since the word *agora* means market place, Homer is commending these men for "talking in the market place."

²⁴⁸Peleus once refused the sexual advances of the wife of his host. She accused him of immoral activity, and her husband set Peleus unarmed on a mountain. The gods admired Peleus' chastity and provided him a sword so he could defend himself against the wild animals.

²⁴⁹Peleus, a mortal king, married Thetis, a sea goddess, with the blessing of the gods. Their child was the hero Achilles. She later left him to return to her father (but not for the reason given in the lines following).

drunken games and tasty delicacies,
 drink and riotous laughter. What's life worth
 if you're deprived of these? So much for that.
 I'll now move on to physical desires.
 You've strayed and fallen in love—had an affair
 with someone else's wife. And then you're caught.
 You're dead, because you don't know how to speak.
 But if you hang around with those like me,
 you can follow what your nature urges.
 You can leap and laugh and never think
 of anything as shameful. If, by chance,
 you're discovered screwing a man's wife,
 just tell the husband you've done nothing wrong.
 Blame Zeus—alleging even he's someone
 who can't resist his urge for sex and women.
 And how can you be stronger than a god?
 You're just a mortal man.

BETTER ARGUMENT

All right—but suppose
 he trusts in your advice and gets a radish
 rammed right up his arse, and his pubic hairs
 are burned with red-hot cinders. Will he have
 some reasoned argument to demonstrate
 he's not a loose-arsed bugger?²⁵⁰

WORSE ARGUMENT

So his asshole's large—
 why should that in any way upset him?

BETTER ARGUMENT

Can one suffer any greater harm
 than having a loose asshole?

WORSE ARGUMENT

²⁵⁰asshole: Someone caught in the act of adultery was punished by having a radish shoved up his anus and his pubic hair singed with hot ash. The various insults here ("loose-arsed bugger," "gigantic asshole," and so on) stand for the Greek perjorative phrase "wide arsed," which, in addition to meaning "lewd" or "disgusting," also carries the connotation of passive homosexuality, something considered ridiculous in mature men. Terms like "bum fucker" are too active to capture this sense of the insult.

What will you say
if I defeat you on this point?

BETTER ARGUMENT

I'll shut up.

What more could a man say?

WORSE ARGUMENT

Come on, then—

Tell me about our legal advocates.

Where are they from?

BETTER ARGUMENT

They come from loose-arsed buggers.

WORSE ARGUMENT

I grant you that. What's next? Our tragic poets,
where they from?

BETTER ARGUMENT

They come from major assholes.

WORSE ARGUMENT

That's right. What about our politicians—
where do they come from?

BETTER ARGUMENT

From gigantic assholes!

WORSE ARGUMENT

All right then—surely you can recognize
how you've been spouting rubbish? Look out there—
at this audience—what sort of people
are most of them?

BETTER ARGUMENT

All right, I'm looking at them.

WORSE ARGUMENT

Well, what do you see?

BETTER ARGUMENT

By all the gods,

almost all of them are men who spread their cheeks.

It's true of that one there, I know for sure . . .

and that one . . . and the one there with long hair.

WORSE ARGUMENT

So what do you say now?

BETTER ARGUMENT

We've been defeated.

O you fuckers, for gods' sake take my cloak—

I'm defecting to your ranks.

[The Better Argument takes off his cloak and exits into the Thinkery]

WORSE ARGUMENT [to Strepsiades]

What now?

Do you want to take your son away?

Or, to help you out, am I to teach him

how to argue?

STREPSIADES

Teach him—whip him into shape.

Don't forget to sharpen him for me,

one side ready to tackle legal quibbles. On the other side, give his jaw an edge
for more important matters.

WORSE ARGUMENT

Don't worry.

You'll get back a person skilled in sophistry.

PHEIDIPPIDES Someone miserably pale, I figure.

CHORUS LEADER

All right. Go in.

I think you may regret this later on.

[Worse Argument and Pheidippides go into the Thinkery, while Strepsiades
returns into his own house]

CHORUS LEADER

We'd like to tell the judges here the benefits
they'll get, if they help this chorus, as by right they should.

First, if you want to plough your lands in season,
we'll rain first on you and on the others later.

Then we'll protect your fruit, your growing vines,
so neither drought nor too much rain will damage them.

But any mortal who dishonours us as gods
should bear in mind the evils we will bring him.

From his land he'll get no wine or other harvest.
 When his olive trees and fresh young vines are budding,
 we'll let fire with our sling shots, to smash and break them.
 If we see him making bricks, we'll send down rain,
 we'll shatter roofing tiles with our round hailstones.
 If ever there's a wedding for his relatives,
 or friends, or for himself, we'll rain all through the night,
 so he'd rather live in Egypt than judge this wrong.

[Strepsiades comes out of his house, with a small sack in his hand]

STREPSIADES

Five more days, then four, three, two—and then
 the day comes I dread more than all the rest.
 It makes me shake with fear—the day that stands
 between the Old Moon and the New—the day
 when any man I happen to owe money to
 swears on oath he'll put down his deposit,
 take me to court.²⁵¹ He says he'll finish me,
 do me in. When I make a modest plea
 for something fair, "My dear man, don't demand
 this payment now, postpone this one for me,
 discharge that one," they say the way things are
 they'll never be repaid—then they go at me,
 abuse me as unfair and say they'll sue.
 Well, let them go to court. I just don't care,
 not if Pheidippides has learned to argue.
 I'll find out soon enough. Let's knock here,
 at the thinking school.

[Strepsiades knocks on the door of the Thinkery]

Boy . . . Hey, boy . . . boy!

[Socrates comes to the door]

SOCRATES

Hello there, Strepsiades.

STREPSIADES

Hello to you.

²⁵¹The person making the charge in court had to make a cash deposit which was forfeit if he lost the case.

First of all, you must accept this present.

[Strepsiades hands Socrates the small sack]

It's proper for a man show respect
to his son's teacher in some way. Tell me—
has the boy learned that style of argument
you brought out here just now?

SOCRATES

Yes, he has.

STREPSIADES

In the name of Fraud, queen of everything,
that's splendid news!

SOCRATES

You can defend yourself
in any suit you like—and win.

STREPSIADES

I can?

Even if there were witnesses around
when I took out the loan?

SOCRATES

The more the better—
even if they number in the thousands.

STREPSIADES [in a parody of tragic style]

Then I will roar aloud a mighty shout—
Ah ha, weep now you petty money men,
wail for yourselves, wail for your principal,
wail for your compound interest. No more
will you afflict me with your evil ways.
On my behalf there's growing in these halls
a son who's got a gleaming two-edged tongue—
he's my protector, saviour of my home,
a menace to my foes. He will remove
the mighty tribulations of his sire.
Run off inside and summon him to me.

[Socrates goes back into the Thinkery]

My son, my boy, now issue from the house—

and hearken to your father's words.

[Socrates and Pheidippides come out of the Thinkery. Pheidippides has been transformed in appearance, so that he now looks, moves, and talks like the other students in the Thinkery]

SOCRATES Here's your young man.

STREPSIADES

Ah, my dear, dear boy.

SOCRATES

Take him and go away.

[Socrates exits back into the Thinkery]

STREPSIADES

Ah ha, my lad—

what joy. What sheer delight for me to gaze,
first, upon your colourless complexion,
to see how right away you're well prepared
to deny and contradict—with that look
which indicates our national character
so clearly planted on your countenance—
the look which says, "What do you mean?"—the look
which makes you seem a victim, even though
you're the one at fault, the criminal.

I know that Attic stare stamped on your face.

Now you must rescue me—since you're the one
who's done me in.

PHEIDIPPIDES

What are you scared about?

STREPSIADES

The day of the Old Moon and the New.

PHEIDIPPIDES

You mean there's a day that's old and new?

STREPSIADES

The day they say they'll make deposits
to charge me in the courts!

PHEIDIPPIDES

Then those who do that

will lose their cash. There's simply no way
one day can be two days.

STREPSIADES

It can't?

PHEIDIPPIDES: How?

Unless it's possible a single woman
can at the same time be both old and young.

STREPSIADES

Yet that seems to be what our laws dictate.

PHEIDIPPIDES

In my view they just don't know the law—
not what it really means.

STREPSIADES

What does it mean?

PHEIDIPPIDES

Old Solon by his nature loved the people.²⁵²

STREPSIADES

But that's got no bearing on the Old Day—
or the New.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Well, Solon set up two days
for summonses—the Old Day and the New,
so deposits could be made with the New Moon.²⁵³

STREPSIADES

Then why did he include Old Day as well?

PHEIDIPPIDES

So the defendants, my dear fellow,
could show up one day early, to settle
by mutual agreement, and, if not,
they should be very worried the next day
was the start of a New Moon.

²⁵²Solon: was a very famous Athenian law maker. In the early sixth century he laid down the basis for Athenian laws.

²⁵³Pheidippides' hair-splitting argument which follows supposedly establishes that the law suits against Strepsiadēs are illegal and should be tossed out because (in brief) the court had taken the deposit, which the creditor had to make to launch the suit, on the wrong day (the last day of the month instead of the first day of the new month). The case rests on a misinterpretation of the meaning of the term Old and New Day—which was single day between the old and the new moon. The passage is, of course, a satire on sophistic reasoning and legal quibbling for self-interest.

STREPSIADES

In that case,
why do judges not accept deposits
once the New Moon comes but only on the day
between the Old and New?

PHEIDIPPIDES

It seems to me
they have to act like those who check the food—
they want to grab as fast as possible
at those deposits, so they can nibble them
a day ahead of time.

STREPSIADES

That's wonderful!

[to the audience]

You helpless fools! Why do you sit there—
so idiotically, for us wise types
to take advantage of? Are you just stones,
ciphers, merely sheep or stacked-up pots?
This calls for a song to me and my son here,
to celebrate good luck and victory.

[He sings]

O Strepsiades is truly blessed
for cleverness the very best,
what a brainy son he's raised.
So friends and townsfolk sing his praise.
Each time you win they'll envy me— 1540
you'll plead my case to victory.
So let's go in—I want to treat,
and first give you something to eat.

[Strepsiades and Pheidippides go together into their house. Enter one of Strepsiades' creditors, Pasias, with a friend as his witness]

PASIAS

Should a man throw away his money?
Never! But it would have been much better,
back then at the start, to forget the loan

and the embarrassment than go through this—
to drag you as a witness here today
in this matter of my money. I'll make
this man from my own deme my enemy.²⁵⁴ 1550 But I'll not let my country down—
never—

not as long as I'm alive. And so . . .

[raising his voice]

I'm summoning Strepsiades . . .

[Enter Strepsiades]

STREPSIADES

Who is it?

PASIAS

. . . on this Old Day and the New.

STREPSIADES

I ask you here

to witness that he's called me for two days.

What's the matter?

PASIAS

The loan you got, twelve minai,
when you bought that horse—the dapple grey.

STREPSIADES

A horse? Don't listen to him. You all know
how I hate horses.

PASIAS

What's more, by Zeus,
you swore on all the gods you'd pay me back.

STREPSIADES

Yes, by god, but Pheidippides back then
did not yet know the iron-clad argument
on my behalf.

PASIAS

So now, because of that,
you're intending to deny the debt?

STREPSIADES

²⁵⁴my own deme: the deme was the basic political unit in Athens. Membership in it passed down from one's father.

If I don't, what advantage do I gain
from everything he's learned?

PASIAS

Are you prepared
to swear you owe me nothing—by the gods—
in any place I tell you?

STREPSIADES

Which gods?

PASIAS

By Zeus, by Hermes, by Poseidon.

STREPSIADES

Yes, indeed, by Zeus—and to take that oath
I'd even pay three extra obols.²⁵⁵

PASIAS

You're shameless—may that ruin you some day!

STREPSIADES [patting Pasias on the belly]

This wine skin here would much better off
if you rubbed it down with salt.²⁵⁶

PASIAS

Damn you—

you're ridiculing me!

STREPSIADES [still patting Pasias' paunch]

About four gallons,
that's what it should hold.

PASIAS

By mighty Zeus,

by all the gods, you'll not make fun of me
and get away with it!

STREPSIADES

Ah, you and your gods—
that's so incredibly funny. And Zeus—
to swear on him is quite ridiculous
to those who understand.

²⁵⁵three extra obols: Strepsiades means here that swearing the oath will be such fun he's prepared to pay for the pleasure—an obvious insult to Pasias.

²⁵⁶salt: leather was rubbed down as part of the tanning process. The phrase "wine skin" has been added to clarify the sense.

PASIAS

Some day, I swear, you're going to have to pay for all of this.

Will you or will you not pay me my money?

Give me an answer, and I'll leave.

STREPSIADES

Calm down—

I'll give you a clear answer right away.

[Strepsiades goes into his house, leaving Pasion and the Witness by themselves]

PASIAS

Well, what do you think he's going to do?

Does it strike you he's going to pay?

[Enter Strepsiades carrying a kneading basin]

STREPSIADES

Where's the man who's asking me for money?

Tell me—what's this?

PASIAS

What's that? A kneading basin.

STREPSIADES

You're demanding money when you're such a fool?

I wouldn't pay an obol back to anyone

who called a basinette a basin.

PASIAS

So you won't repay me?

STREPSIADES

As far as I know,

I won't. So why don't you just hurry up

and quickly scuttle from my door.

PASIAS

I'm off.

Let me tell you—I'll be making my deposit.

If not, may I not live another day!

[Pasion exits with the Witness]

STREPSIADES [calling after them]

That'll be more money thrown away—

on top of the twelve minai. I don't want

you going thorough that just because you're foolish
and talk about a kneading basin.

[Enter Amynias, another creditor, limping He has obviously been hurt in some way]

AMYNIAS Oh, it's bad. Poor me!

STREPSIADES

Hold on. Who's this
who's chanting a lament? Is that the cry
of some god perhaps—one from Carcinus?²⁵⁷

AMYNIAS

What's that? You wish to know who I am?
I'm a man with a miserable fate!

STREPSIADES Then go off on your own.

AMYNIAS [in a grand tragic manner]

"O cruel god,
O fortune fracturing my chariot wheels,
O Pallas, how you've annihilated me!"²⁵⁸

STREPSIADES

How's Tlepolemos done nasty things to you?²⁵⁹

AMYNIAS

Don't laugh at me, my man—but tell your son
to pay me back the money he received,
especially when I'm going through all this pain.

STREPSIADES

What money are you talking about?

AMYNIAS

The loan he got from me.

STREPSIADES

It seems to me
you're having a bad time.

AMYNIAS

By god, that's true—

²⁵⁷Carcinus: an Athenian writer of tragic drama.

²⁵⁸Amynias is here quoting from a tragedy written by Carcinus' son Xenocles.

²⁵⁹Tlepolemos is a character in the tragedy mentioned in the previous note.

I was driving in my chariot and fell out.

STREPSIADES

Why then babble on such utter nonsense,
as if you'd just fallen off a donkey?

AMYNIAS

If I want him to pay my money back
am I talking nonsense?

STREPSIADES

I think it's clear
your mind's not thinking straight.

AMYNIAS

Why's that?

STREPSIADES

From your behaviour here, it looks to me
as if your brain's been shaken up.

AMYNIAS

Well, as for you,
by Hermes, I'll be suing you in court,
if you don't pay the money.

STREPSIADES

Tell me this—
do you think Zeus always sends fresh water
each time the rain comes down, or does the sun
suck the same water up from down below
for when it rains again?

AMYNIAS

I don't know which—
and I don't care.

STREPSIADES

Then how can it be just
for you to get your money reimbursed,
when you know nothing of celestial things?

AMYNIAS

Look, if you haven't got the money now,
at least repay the interest.

STREPSIADES

This “interest”—

What sort of creature is it?

AMYNIAS

Don’t you know?

It’s nothing but the way that money grows,
always getting larger day by day
month by month, as time goes by.

STREPSIADES

That’s right.

What about the sea? In your opinion, 1640
is it more full of water than before?

AMYNIAS

No, by Zeus— it’s still the same. If it grew,
that would violate all natural order.

STREPSIADES

In that case then, you miserable rascal,
if the sea shows no increase in volume
with so many rivers flowing into it,
why are you so keen to have your money grow?
Now, why not chase yourself away from here?

[calling inside the house]

Bring me the cattle prod!

AMYNIAS

I have witnesses!

[The slave comes out of the house and gives Strepsiades a cattle prod. Strepsiades
starts poking Amynias with it]

STREPSIADES

Come on! What you waiting for? Move it,
you pedigree nag!

AMYNIAS

This is outrageous!

STREPSIADES [continuing to poke Amynias away]

Get a move on—or I’ll shove this prod
all the way up your horse-racing rectum!

[Amynias runs off stage]

You running off? That's what I meant to do,
get the wheels on that chariot of yours
really moving fast.

[Strepsiades goes back into his house]

CHORUS

Oh, it's so nice
to worship vice.
This old man here
adores it so
he will not clear
the debts he owes.
But there's no way
he will not fall
some time today,
done in by all
his trickeries,
he'll quickly fear
depravities
he's started here.

It seems to me
he'll soon will see
his clever son
put on the show
he wanted done
so long ago—
present a case
against what's true
and beat all those
he runs into
with sophistry.
He'll want his son
(it may well be)
to be struck dumb.

[Enter Strepsiades running out of his house with Pheidippides close behind him]

hitting him over the head]

STREPSIADES

Help! Help! You neighbours, relatives,
fellow citizens, help me—I'm begging you!
I'm being beaten up! Owwww, I'm in such pain—
my head . . . my jaw.

[To Pheidippides]

You good for nothing,
are you hitting your own father?

PHEIDIPPIDES

Yes, dad, I am.

STREPSIADES

See that! He admits he's beating me.

PHEIDIPPIDES

I do indeed.

STREPSIADES

You scoundrel, criminal—
a man who abuses his own father!

PHEIDIPPIDES

Go on—keep calling me those very names—
the same ones many times. Don't you realize
I just love hearing streams of such abuse?

STREPSIADES

You perverted asshole!

PHEIDIPPIDES

Ah, some roses!

Keep pelting me with roses!!

STREPSIADES

You'd hit your father?

PHEIDIPPIDES

Yes, and by the gods I'll now demonstrate
how I was right to hit you.

STREPSIADES

You total wretch,
how can it be right to strike one's father?

PHEIDIPPIDES

I'll prove that to you—and win the argument.

STREPSIADES

You'll beat me on this point?

PHEIDIPPIDES

Indeed, I will.

It's easy. So of the two arguments
choose which one you want.

STREPSIADES

What two arguments?

PHEIDIPPIDES

The Better or the Worse.

STREPSIADES

By god, my lad,
I really did have you taught to argue
against what's just, if you succeed in this—
and make the case it's fine and justified
for a father to be beaten by his son.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Well, I think I'll manage to convince you,
so that once you've heard my arguments,
you won't say a word.

STREPSIADES

Well, to tell the truth,
I do want to hear what you have to say.

CHORUS

You've some work to do, old man.
Think how to get the upper hand.
He's got something he thinks will work,
or he'd not act like such a jerk.
There's something makes him confident—
his arrogance is evident.

CHORUS LEADER [addressing Strepsiades]

But first you need to tell the Chorus here
how your fight originally started.

That's something you should do in any case.

STREPSIADES

Yes, I'll tell you how our quarrel first began.

As you know, we were having a fine meal.

I first asked him to take up his lyre

and sing a lyric by Simonides²⁶⁰—

the one about the ram being shorn.

But he immediately refused—saying

that playing the lyre while we were drinking

was out of date, like some woman singing

while grinding barley.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Well, at that point,

you should have been ground up and trampled on—

asking for a song, as if you were feasting

with cicadas.

STREPSIADES

The way he's talking now—

that's just how he was talking there before.

He said Simonides was a bad poet.

I could hardly stand it, but at first I did.

Then I asked him to pick up a myrtle branch

and at least recite some Aeschylus for me.²⁶¹ He replied at once, "In my opinion,

Aeschylus is first among the poets

for lots of noise, unevenness, and bombast—

he piles up words like mountains." Do you know

how hard my heart was pounding after that?

But I clenched my teeth and kept my rage inside,

and said, "Then recite me something recent,

from the newer poets, some witty verse."

So he then right off started to declaim

some passage from Euripides in which,

spare me this, a brother was enjoying sex

²⁶⁰Simonides: was a well-known lyric poet of the previous century.

²⁶¹myrtle branch: traditionally a person singing at a drinking party held a myrtle branch unless he was playing a musical instrument.

with his own sister— from a common mother.
I couldn't keep my temper any more—
so on the spot I verbally attacked
with all sorts of nasty, shameful language.
Then, as one might predict, we went at it—
hurling insults at each other back and forth.
But then he jumped up, pushed me, thumped me,
choked me, and started killing me.

PHEIDIPIDES

Surely I was entitled to do that
to a man who will not praise Euripides,
the cleverest of all.

STREPSIADES

Him? The cleverest? Ha!
What do I call you? No, I won't say—
I'd just get beaten one more time.

PHEIDIPIDES

Yes, by Zeus,
you would—and with justice, too.

STREPSIADES

How would that be just? You shameless man,
I brought you up. When you lisped your words,
I listened 'til I recognized each one.
If you said "waa," I understood the word
and brought a drink; if you asked for "foo foo,"
I'd bring you bread. And if you said "poo poo"
I'd pick you up and carry you outside,
and hold you up. But when you strangled me
just now, I screamed and yelled I had to shit—
but you didn't dare to carry me outside,
you nasty brute, you kept on throttling me,
until I crapped myself right where I was.

CHORUS

I think the hearts of younger spry
are pounding now for his reply—

for if he acts in just this way
and yet his logic wins the day
I'll not value at a pin
any older person's skin.

CHORUS LEADER

Now down to work, you spinner of words,
you explorer of brand new expressions.
Seek some way to persuade us, so it will appear
that what you've been saying is right.

PHEIDIPPIDES

How sweet it is to be conversant with
things which are new and clever, capable
of treating with contempt established ways.
When I was only focused on my horses,
I couldn't say three words without going wrong.
But now this man has made me stop all that,
I'm well acquainted with the subtlest views,
and arguments and frames of mind. And so,
I do believe I'll show how just it is
to punish one's own father.

STREPSIADES

By the gods,
keep on with your horses then—for me
caring for a four-horse team is better
than being beaten to a pulp.

PHEIDIPPIDES

I'll go back
to where I was in my argument,
when you interrupted me. First, tell me this—
Did you hit me when I was a child?

STREPSIADES

Yes.

But I was doing it out of care for you.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Then tell me this: Is it not right for me

to care for you in the same way—to beat you—
since that's what caring means—a beating?
Why must your body be except from blows,
while mine is not? I was born a free man, too.
"The children howl—you think the father
should not howl as well?" You're going to claim
the laws permit this practice on our children.
To that I would reply that older men
are in their second childhood. More than that—
it makes sense that older men should howl
before the young, because there's far less chance
their natures lead them into errors.

STREPSIADES

There's no law that fathers have to suffer this.

PHEIDIPPIDES

But surely some man first brought in the law,
someone like you and me? And way back then
people found his arguments convincing.
Why should I have less right to make new laws
for future sons, so they can take their turn
and beat their fathers? All the blows we got
before the law was brought in we'll erase,
and we'll demand no payback for our beatings.
Consider cocks and other animals—
they avenge themselves against their fathers.
And yet how are we different from them,
except they don't propose decrees?

STREPSIADES

Well then,
since you want to be like cocks in all you do,
why not sleep on a perch and feed on shit?

PHEIDIPPIDES

My dear man, that's not the same at all—
not according to what Socrates would think.

STREPSIADES

Even so, don't beat me. For if you do,
you'll have yourself to blame.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Why's that?

STREPSIADES

Because I have the right to chastise you,
if you have a son, you'll have that right with him.

PHEIDIPPIDES

If I don't have one, I'll have cried for nothing,
and you'll be laughing in your grave.

STREPSIADES [addressing the audience]

All you men out there my age, it seems to me
he's arguing what's right. And in my view,
we should concede to these young sons what's fair.
It's only right that we should cry in pain
when we do something wrong.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Consider now another point.

STREPSIADES

No, no.

It'll finish me!

PHEIDIPPIDES

But then again
perhaps you won't feel so miserable
at going through what you've suffered.

STREPSIADES

What's that?

Explain to me how I benefit from this.

PHEIDIPPIDES

I'll thump my mother, just as I hit you.

STREPSIADES

What's did you just say? What are you claiming?
This second point is even more disgraceful.

PHEIDIPPIDES

But what if, using the Worse Argument,

I beat you arguing this proposition—
that it's only right to hit one's mother?

STREPSIADES

What else but this—if you do a thing like that,
then why stop there? Why not throw yourself
and Socrates and the Worse Argument
into the execution pit?

[Strepsiades turns towards the Chorus]

It's your fault,
you Clouds, that I have to endure all this.
I entrusted my affairs to you.

CHORUS LEADER

No.
You're the one responsible for this.
You turned yourself toward these felonies.

STREPSIADES

Why didn't you inform me at the time,
instead of luring on an old country man?

CHORUS

That's what we do each time we see someone
who falls in love with evil strategies,
until we hurl him into misery,
so he may learn to fear the gods.

STREPSIADES O dear. That's harsh, you Clouds, but fair enough.
I shouldn't have kept trying not to pay
that cash I borrowed. Now, my dearest lad,
come with me—let's exterminate those men,
the scoundrel Chaerephon and Socrates,
the ones who played their tricks on you and me.

PHEIDIPPIDES

But I couldn't harm the ones who taught me.

STREPSIADES

Yes, you must. Revere Paternal Zeus.²⁶²

²⁶²Paternal Zeus: This seems to be an appeal to Zeus as the guardian of the father's rights and thus a way of urging Pheidippides to go along with what his father wants. The line may be a quote from a lost tragedy.

PHEIDIPPIDES

Just listen to that—Paternal Zeus.
How out of date you are! Does Zeus exist?

STREPSIADES

He does.

PHEIDIPPIDES

No, no, he doesn't—there's no way,
for Vortex has now done away with Zeus
and rules in everything.

STREPSIADES

He hasn't killed him.

[He points to a small statue of a round goblet which stands outside Thinkery]
I thought he had because that statue there,
the cup, is called a vortex.²⁶³ What a fool
to think this piece of clay could be a god!

PHEIDIPPIDES

Stay here and babble nonsense to yourself.

[Pheidippides exits]²⁶⁴

STREPSIADES

My god, what lunacy. I was insane
to cast aside the gods for Socrates.

[Strepsiades goes up and talks to the small statue of Hermes outside his house]
But, dear Hermes, don't vent your rage on me,
don't grind me down. Be merciful to me.
Their empty babbling made me lose my mind.
Give me your advice. Shall I lay a charge,
go after them in court. What seems right to you?

[He looks for a moment at the statue]

You counsel well. I won't launch a law suit.
I'll burn their house as quickly as I can,
these babbling fools.

²⁶³Vortex: the Greek word *dinos*, meaning “whirl,” “eddy,” or “vortex,” also means a round goblet. The statue of such a goblet outside the Thinkery represents the presiding deity of the house.

²⁶⁴It's not clear whether Pheidippides goes back into his house or back into the school. If he does the latter, then the comic violence at the end of the play takes on a much darker tone, since Strepsiades' murderous anger includes his son. In fact, the loss of his son might be the key event which triggers the intensity of the final destruction.

[Strepsiades calls into his house]

Xanthias, come here.

Come outside—bring a ladder—a mattock, too.
then climb up on top of that Thinkery
and, if you love your master, smash the roof,
until the house collapses in on them.

[Xanthias comes out with ladder and mattock, climbs up onto the Thinkery and starts demolishing the roof]

Someone fetch me a flaming torch out here.

They may brag all they like, but here today
I'll make somebody pay the penalty
for what they did to me.

[Another slave comes out and hands Strepsiades a torch. He joins Xanthias on the roof and tries to burn down the inside of the Thinkery]

STUDENT [from inside the Thinkery]

Help! Help!

STREPSIADES

Come on, Torch, put your flames to work.

[Strepsiades sets fire to the roof of the Thinkery. A student rushes outside and looks at Strepsiades and Xanthias on the roof]

STUDENT

You there, what are you doing?

STREPSIADES

What am I doing?

What else but picking a good argument
with the roof beams of your house?

[A second student appears at a window as smoke starts coming out of the house]

STUDENT

Help! Who's setting fire to the house?

STREPSIADES

It's the man

whose cloak you stole.

STUDENT

We'll die. You'll kill us all!

STREPSIADES

That's what I want—unless this mattock
disappoints my hopes or I fall through somehow
and break my neck.

[Socrates comes out of the house in a cloud of smoke. He is coughing badly]

SOCRATES

What are you doing up on the roof?

STREPSIADES

I walk on air and contemplate the sun.

SOCRATES [coughing] This is bad—I'm going to suffocate.

STUDENT [still at the window] What about poor me? I'll be burned up.

[Strepsiades and Xanthias come down from the roof]

STREPSIADES [to Socrates] Why were you so insolent with gods
in what you studied and when you explored
the moon's abode? Chase them off, hit them,
throw things at them—for all sorts of reasons,
but most of all for their impiety.

[Strepsiades and Xanthias chase Socrates and the students off the stage and exit
after them]

CHORUS LEADER

Lead us on out of here. Away!

We've had enough of song and dance today.

[The Chorus exits]

Women in Parliament (Ecclesiazousae)

This edition is based on the [publicly available](#)²⁶⁵ translation by G.Theodoridis

ARISTOPHANES' "WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT" Ἐκκλησιάζουσαι (also known as "The Assembly Women") Ἐκκλησιάζουσαι
Written 390BCE

...

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

PRAXAGORA (An Athenian woman)

FIRST WOMAN (A neighbour of Praxagora)

SECOND WOMAN (Another neighbour)

BLEPYRUS (Praxagora's husband)

NEIGHBOUR (Neighbour and friend of Blepyrus)

CHREMES (A citizen of Athens)

MAN (Another citizen of Athens)

FEMALE HERALD

FIRST OLD WOMAN (An old prostitute)

GIRL (A young Prostitute)

EPIGENES (A young man)

SECOND OLD WOMAN (Second old prostitute, uglier than the first)

THIRD OLD WOMAN (Third old prostitute, ugliest of all)

MAID (Of Praxagora)

CHORUS OF ATHENIAN WOMEN:

CLEINARETI

MELISTICHI

SOSTRATI

ARIPHRADES

MRS LUSH

MRS GENEROUS

²⁶⁵<https://bacchicstage.wordpress.com/aristophanes/women-in-parliament-2/>

MRS HAPPY

TWO GIRLS (Silent)

SICON & PARMENON (Neighbour's slaves -silent)

Night. A street in Athens where three houses form the background of the stage. In the centre there is a small stone platform which will also be used as a seat. Enter PRAXAGORA dressed in men's clothes (complete with phallus). She is walking, bent over a walking stick and looking through the dim light of a lamp she's carrying. She waves her lamp searching up and down the street and while doing so she addresses her lamp, in the manner of a poet satirising another, in this case, Eurypides: Full of airs and pomposity.

Praxagora:

O light of my lamp!

Bright light in this lamp,

This well crafted lamp,

This lamp built on a wheel by inventors with good aim.

Let me tell of your birth and of your charms:

The potter's wheel spun you and gave you

A face

And thus your function is placed within

Your nostrils

A function as bright as the sun's

Rays!

So then,

O, light of my lamp,

Let your light give out the signal we women have

Arranged.

She waves the lamp towards the windows of the other two houses again

To you, alone, o light of my lamp, we'll reveal all

And we're right to do so for you,

Alone

Stand near us in our bedroom

When our body tangles with another in Aphrodite's

Knots of prurient passion.

You alone,

O light of my lamp,

Can stand by and
Watch our bodies bend into taut bows
And no one will send you away.
You alone,
O, light of my lamp
Can look so closely into those nooks and crannies
Between our thighs where no one else can look
And singe the curls that blossom therein!
And
You, alone, stand by when to our
Pantries we run to steal the flour
And
Bacchus' wine. You see us then and help us
But
You don't show and tell our neighbour!
That's why you, alone will learn what decisions
We, women made at Demeter's festival the Scira.

To the audience

Here we are! Minutes only before Parliament starts and not a woman in sight! It's damned near daylight!

Walks up and down anxiously.

Not a single one of them!

Chuckles. She just remembered a malapropism uttered by a certain Phyromachus.

He he! Remember Phyromachus? He once called us, "whore's bums!" Hehehehe!

Whore's Bums!

She shrugs her shoulders.

Pause

Well, we should get in there, in Parliament, quietly and quietly plonk our whore's bums on our seats nice and early. Make no noticeable fuss at all.

Pause

What on earth is keeping them? Haven't they sown together the false beards that I've told them to get? Maybe it was hard for them to pinch their husband's clothes. She suddenly sees something in the distance (Stage Left) I wonder what that light is. It's coming this way. I better hide somewhere in case it's a man.
She moves back and hides the lamp behind her. A woman, dressed in man's clothes

and carrying a dimly-lit lamp and a bundle appears. She waves her lamp to the others behind her and they follow her onto the stage.

First Woman:

We've got to hurry, girls! The cock crowed twice already!

Praxagora:Relaxes and moves forward towards them.

I was up here all night, waiting for you, girls!

Hang on. Let's get my neighbour out without her getting caught by hubby. Let's scratch softly at her door.

She does so. A minute later the SECOND WOMAN comes out to join them. She's dressed in men's clothes

Second Woman:

I had just put on my sandals when I heard your scratching. I couldn't sleep all night either. My hubby is an islander, you know. From Salamis. Just loves his little oar. He had me sailing round and round in that bed all night, non-stop! I've only just managed to steal his cloak!

Praxagora:Looks in the direction of Stage Left.

Ah! Here they are! Cleinareti, Sostrati... and Philaneti! Come on then, move it girls!

Enter the three women.

Glyki said the last one to get here will be paying a fine. Three jugs of wine and a sack of chickpeas.

Second Woman:

Laughs at the sight of Melistichi in the distance.

Ahahaha! Here's Melistichi, Smicythion's wife! Look at her run in her husband's boots! And there I was thinking that, what with her queer husband, she'd be the first one to be able to get away!

First Woman:

And... here's the innkeeper's wife, Mrs Lush herself, complete with her torch.

Praxagora:

And there's Mrs Generous and Mrs Happy and, behind them, a whole lot of women... The absolute cream of Athenian women!

Enter THIRD WOMAN puffing.

Third Woman:

What a nightmare it was to get away from my husband, girls! Up all night, coughing and spluttering, coughing and spluttering! All night! No wonder though, he gorged himself on my short'n curlies for his supper!

Laughter and nods all round.

Praxagora:

Now, ladies! Now that you're all here, sit down and let me ask you a question!

They all sit around her.

Right. Have you all done what we said we would, back at Scira? At Demeter's festival?

First Woman:

She raises her arm that shows a huge tuft of hair under her armpit.

Sure did. I've let the hair of my armpits grow so long that a lion could get lost in it, just like you've told us! Then, whenever my husband went off to the market, I'd get the oil out, splash it all over me and stand out in the sun all day to get my body all black.

Second Woman:

Me, too, Praxagora. The first thing I did was to throw the razor out of our house, so that my hair would grow so much, I won't look at all like the attractive woman that I really am.

She gets up to show her hairy legs, ears, nostrils, etc Laughter and applause all round.

Praxagora:

And have you all got the beards?

First Woman:

Pulls one out of her bundle.

Here! Look at this one! By Hekate, isn't it great?

Second Woman:

And look at mine, too, Praxagora! Isn't it great? Better even than that mop which shields Epicrates' face!

Praxagora: *To the rest of the women*

You too? All of you?

First Woman:

Yeap. Nods all round. They've got them, all right!

Praxagora: She walks around them, looking pleased.

Good. Looks like you've done everything as we said.

Points at the items she mentions.

Spartan boots...walking sticks...men's cloaks... Right! You've got everything, I see.

First Woman: Brings out a huge, thick truncheon out of her bag.

And I even knocked off my husband's truncheon, when he was asleep. Poor Lamius!

Second Woman:

That must be the truncheon he swings when he needs to fart!

Praxagora:

By Zeus the Saviour! With a stick like that, plus Argus' leather jacket, and his thousand eyes, and your old Lamius would be a great shepherd to gather us for our city's executioner!

All right! Now while there are still stars in the sky, let's get to the next thing.

Parliament is opening at Dawn and we're prepared for Parliament. Right, sisters?

First Woman:

Absolutely, by Zeus! And we've got to get in there early and sit ourselves directly in front of the Chairman's stone platform.

Second Woman: *She takes out of her bag some knitting*

Absolutely, by Zeus! That's why I've brought along my knitting. Get some done before the place fills up.

Praxagora:

While the place fills up, you idiot? Knitting?

Second Woman:

Absolutely, by Artemis! Why not? Don't you think I can knit and listen at the same time? My kids are totally naked!

Praxagora:

Listen to you, woman! Here we are trying to hide our body and you're talking about knitting!

We've got to get in there early, girls! We'd deserve what we'd get if, suddenly, when all the people are there, one of us has to climb over them to get herself a seat but her cloak gets stuck somewhere and off she goes, showing her pubes to everyone!

Remembers something and chuckles.

Phornisius' beard, ey? What a stack of curlies that beard is! Hehehe!

Catches herself

Right! Now, if we get there first and take our seats before all the others, hold our man's clothes tightly wrapped around our body and have our beards with us and let them roll out in front of our face, no man will suspect a thing.

Beards, ey? Even a woman-looking man, like Agyrius looks like a man-looking woman, now that he's wearing Pronomous' beard!

Agyrius, ey? Remember him! That crooked, filthy rich politician! Agyrius! Rules the whole city, the wanker! It's because of him that we should try and accomplish this

daring deed today, girls!

Applause

And! And we should do it before Dawn arrives.

Loudly, intently.

Let's hope to take the power in our hands, sisters! Let's save our city!

Applause

Pause. Relaxes her tone.

Because for a long time now, our city has been going nowhere at a fast oar!

Third Woman:

But Praxagora, how could we, a group of women, with women's brains make convincing speeches?

Praxagora:

We can make excellent speeches exactly because we are women! Better than any man can. They say that buggered youths make splendid orators, don't they? Now, do we women know about fucking or don't we? We're naturals, right?

Applause and calls of "right, too right, Praxagora, we know a thing or two about that!"

First Woman:

Oh, I don't know, really. Lack of experience is a dreadful thing, you know. I mean about speeches.

Praxagora:

But that's precisely why we're here, darling; to get ourselves all prepared with what we're going to say in there. Now, put your beards on quickly and, those of you who are ready to speak go ahead and speak!

First Woman:

Ha! We're all ready Praxagora! Who among us is not an absolute specialist in the art of talking, ey? Fucking and talking! We're brilliant!

Praxagora:

Put your beards on then and act like you're a man. I'll put mine on and then I'll wear these garlands if I want to make a speech.

The women put their beards on and fool around pretending to be acting like men; swinging their phalluses about, yelling "hohoho" raising their hands to show their muscles... etc.

Second Woman: After putting her beard on, takes a mirror out of her bag and looks into it. She is shocked.

Ooooooh! No! Sweetheart, Praxagora, look! Come and see just how ridiculous we look! This is awful!

Praxagora: Approaches and takes a look.

But why, darling? What's so ridiculous about it?

Second Woman:

But... with these black beards on our fair faces we look like someone stuck a squid on our heads grilled on charcoal!

Praxagora: Ignoring her, calls out as if she is the clerk of the Parliament:

Purifier! Let the Purifier sanctify this place with the sacrificial cat!

Whispers among the women such as "Shouldn't it be a piglet? Is that Persephone's cat? Poor thing!" A "Purifier" walks around with a cat, then takes it behind the curtains a moment after which we hear the cat being slaughtered.

Praxagora:

Right! All of you, girls now gather around.

(Indicating someone among them).

Ariphrades, stop that chatter! Move closer please and take your seat. Now! Who wishes to address Parliament?

First Woman:

Me!

Praxagora:

Good. Put the garland on and good luck!

First Woman:Puts it on.

Done.

Praxagora:

Go on, then!

First Woman:

What, make a speech on a dry throat?

Praxagora:

What do you mean? You want a drink? Now?

First Woman:

Of course! Isn't that why men put on the garland? I'd like some wine, please!

Praxagora:

Get out of there! Is that what you'd be doing in the real Parliament?

First Woman:

Whaaaat? Don't they drink in the real Parliament?

Praxagora:

Don't be silly, girl!

First Woman:

Of course they do, by Artemis! Absolutely! And it's the totally unadulterated strong stuff! Who else but drunks would come up with laws like those they do? Not only that but they also go on with libations, mimicking "By Zeus this and by Zeus that!" one libation after another with looong prayers and looong gulps of wine and then go on yelling at each other like drunks and then the archers come along and remove the drunkest of them! Sure they drink! All the time!

Praxagora:

Come on, enough. Off you go! Go and sit down. You are worthless to our cause!

First Woman: *Coughs*

By Zeus! I reckon I'd be far better off without this beard. I'm dying of thirst!

Praxagora:

Anyone else wishing to address the Parliament?

Second Woman:

Me!

Praxagora:

Go on then, put the garland on! Sarcastically Oh, we're doing just fine so far. Now, speak loudly, just like a man. Lean your body well over your stick.

The Second Woman makes play with the phallus before correcting herself and leans over the walking stick.

Second Woman: Speaking to the Parliament

Ahem! Now, my thinking is that I'd rather a better orator came up to speak on our behalf and defend our drinking rights, letting me stay sitting down and resting but, never mind! Now! Ahem! My view is that we shall not let a drop of water pollute our bars. Not a drop! Get rid of all the water kegs in bars! Dreadful policy, by Demeter and Persephone, dreadful, whoever invented it!

Praxagora:Interrupts her and corrects her.

Stop, you idiot! By Demeter and Persephone? The two goddesses? Two GOD-DESSESS? What were you thinking?

Second Woman:

What's up, Praxagora? I didn't ask for a drink, did I?

Praxagora:

No, of course you didn't ask for a drink but you swore by the two Goddesses. You're

supposed to be a man, not a woman. The rest of the speech though, was sheer eloquence!

Second Woman:

Oh! You're so right, by Apollo!

Praxagora:Interrupts her again and takes the garland off her head.

No, stop!

She addresses the rest of the women.

Look, girls! I'm not making the slightest move from here until I know we have perfected everything. We are simply not going into Parliament like this!

Second Woman:

Let me have the garland. I want to speak again. I believe I've got it perfect now.

Praxagora hands her the garland

Second Woman:

Ahem! My belief dear, seated ladies is –

Praxagora: *Interrupts her*

No, no, no! Look at us, you blockhead! What are we again? We are MEN! We are NOT ladies!

Second Woman:Points at the audience.

It's that fairy, Epigonus, out there. My eyes fell on him and for a minute I thought I was addressing women!

Praxagora:Guides the woman away angrily.

Come on, off you go, you twit. Sit down with the others. I've got a hunch that I had better take the garland myself and speak on behalf of all of us.

Puts the garland on.

Now! Ahem! I beg the gods that they fulfil all our wishes.

Men, I am as much a part of this country as all of you and I am truly anxious, truly sad about the dreadful state of our city's affairs.

You're always electing awful leaders! Awful! And if one of them gets something right for one day and he's useful, he gets all sneaky and dodgy and completely stuffs up everything for the following ten days! Then you get another leader and he's even worse than the last one! I know it's damned hard to put brains into a thick skull but you're always sending away those who love you and approach those who hate you. You're always afraid of the wrong lot of people!

There was a time when Parliament hardly ever met but we did know what a bastard Agyrrios was. Now though, when Parliaments meets, what happens is that you get

abundant praise from the man who draws a leader's salary but if he who draws none dares to tell you that all those who attend Parliament do so just so they can get paid, you condemned him to death!

Applause all round interrupts her speech.

Second Woman:

By Aphrodite, how well you spoke, Praxagora!

Praxagora:

Charming! Superb! Once again, you twit, you swore by Aphrodite! How would we look if you did that in the House?

Second Woman:

I wouldn't be doing that in there.

Praxagora:

Stop doing it here, then!

Continues

Right! And then there's this... this treaty, this "Coalition of the Willing" treaty we've just signed against the Spartans. When we were all debating it here, every one of us was shouting that if we didn't sign up the city would be ruined; then when we did, every one of us had changed his mind –but the man who put the proposal up in the first place, shot through! Disappeared on us!

Then, if we get another proposal, say to launch a fleet of ships, what happens? Well, the wealthy will vote "yes" but the poor and the farmers will vote "no." One minute you get vicious against the Corinthians, to which, of course, they reply in kind and the next they're "great," so your "great" is back again!

Those from Argos are uneducated fools, yet General Hieronymus is an absolute genius!

We get a slight chance at peace but then, our General Thrasyboulos, goes off screaming that he wasn't consulted!

Applause all round again

First Woman: *Indicating Praxagora*

Hey, this guy is smart!

Praxagora:

Now THAT is the correct way to praise me!

Back to her speech

And you, fellow citizens of Athens, yes, you alone are the cause of all this mess. You come here, draw your funds and use them for your own personal purposes while the

city rolls downhill, like our poor Aesimus.

Yet, there's still hope! There's still hope if you listen to my proposal which is this: I propose that we hand the city over to the women. Who better to run the city than they who run our households? They are the managers and treasurers of our house.

Applause again

All women together:

Yeaeaeaeae!

First Woman:

Indeed, kind sir! Please go on!

Praxagora: *Continues with the speech*

And let me prove to you just how much better they are equipped up here (indicating the brain) than us. Number one, they dye their wool in hot water. Each and every one of them! They've never strayed from that ancient custom. If a system works, they'll stick with it; not like this Parliament where we're always fiddling with everything, trying to change it this way and that, looking for some new way to do the same thing. Totally different to the women who:

Do the frying seated, just as they always did.

Carry things on their head, just as they always did.

Carry out the festival of Thesmophoria, just as they always did.

Bake their sweets, just as they always did.

Fuck with their husbands, just as they always did.

Have their secret lovers, just like they always did.

Do that little extra bit of shopping for themselves, just as they always did.

Love their wine straight off the bottle, just like they always did.

Love their fucking, just like they always did.

Takes a deep breath

For all these reasons, gentlemen, I say, let the women govern the city! Don't start analysing and debating it all, trying to be convinced by the argument. Just hand it over to them. We need only to consider the following:

Being the mothers of our soldiers, they'd want to protect them as best they can; and... and think how much bigger the rations would be and how much faster they'd reach our soldiers when they're fighting!

Then, so far as the treasury is concerned, women know all about money. They've learnt the game a long time ago. A woman will never be diddled by anyone if she's the leader –women are the absolute masters at diddling!

I'll stop here now. If I have convinced you you'll have wonderful lives.

Second Woman:

What a sweet woman you are, my Praxagora! Where did you learn all this, darling?

Praxagora:

My husband and I lived near the Pnyx, where Parliament met, when we were all thrown out of Athens. I've learnt by listening to the speeches of the other speakers.

First Woman:

Ah! That's why you're so awesome, so brilliant! Well, then. If you pull this off and we get the leadership of the city, we shall elect you General! But then what if Cephalus, our famous orator and potter gets up and insults you? How will you tackle him?

Praxagora:

I'll simply say he's out of his kiln!

First Woman:

Nothing new in that, Praxagora. You need to say something else.

Praxagora:

In that case, I'll say, he's a phlegmatic, black-livered madman!

First Woman:

Nahhh, nothing new in that either, Praxagora.

Praxagora:

Well then, I'll just say his pottery stinks and so will his work on the city!

First Woman:

And what if crusty-eyed Neocleidis starts insulting you as well?

Praxagora:

What I'll say to him is, "Neocleidis, go and shove your crusty eyes up a dog's bum!"

First Woman:

But what if they try to fuck you?

Praxagora:

Darling! I'm very well versed in fucking. I'll fuck them back!

First Woman:

Ah! Something else we haven't thought of: The archers! What if the cops do the drag on you? One from the front and one from the back?

Praxagora:

I'll just stick my elbows out, like this. They won't be able to grab me by my waist.

Chorus:

And if they do lift you up in the air, we'll scream at them to let you go.

First Woman:

Right. We've got all that under control... all, that is, except the fact that we mustn't forget to raise our hands when we vote, like the men do. We women are used to raising our legs, instead!

Praxagora:

Hm, that's a toughie, that one. Nevertheless, we've got to vote, so remember: Raise your right hand. Pull the cloak down and raise it bare.

All right. Now, just lift up your skirts and put on those Spartan boots... and hurry! That's right, just as you see your husbands wearing them when they go off to Parliament or whatever. Now tie on your beards, all of you. Properly! Done? Good. Now put on your husband's cloak and be careful how you do that also. Good! Now, let me see you leaning on those walking sticks. That's right. Good, and, as you're heading off start singing some song that the old men sing. Sing it like the peasants do.

Chorus:

Quite right. Well said!

Praxagora:

Let's go then. I think there are women going to Parliament from the farms, as well, so let's get there before they do. We've got to hurry because you know what it's like with payment in Parliament: either you're in by Dawn or you're given bugger all!

Exit Praxagora and the two women.

Cleinareti:

Well, men, time for us to trot off. And remember, the word is "men." That's the word we've got to use all the time from now on. Don't forget that because our life will be in great peril if we get caught dressed up like this and for such a secretive venture.

Melistichi:

So come on, men! Let's be off to the Parliament.

Sostrati:

The Chairman has issued the warning:

Be there at the crack of Dawn,

Be there covered in dust,

Be there happy to have garlic for lunch

Be there with eyes rubbed black

Ariphrades:

Or else not a penny you'll get

For your trouble.

Mrs Generous:

Pointing at some “men” who immediately stand “erect.” Hey, there Tom and Dick and Harry,

Look sharp and get moving!

You’ve got a role to carry,

Play it well, don’t falter!

Mrs Happy:

When we get our tickets

At the Parliament’s entrance,

Be sure we sit together

And together we vote as we ladies please.

Oh, no! I said “ladies” the fool.

I meant to say, “men” of course!

Mrs Lush:

It’s time now, let’s go.

The men from the bush are going to be there too, so we’ll need to push in.

Cleinareti:

Damn them! When the pay was an obol a day they’d run off to the garland shop instead, and there they’d sit on their bums and gossip all day rather than attend to the city’s affairs.

Melistichi:

Now that the pay is a bit more they come and they jostle and shove for a seat! Ah, bring back the days of our generous General Myronides!

Sostrati:

When he ruled no one dared ask for a handful of silver to serve our city. People would come with their own lunch sack, a crust of bread, a drink, a pair of onions and three olives!

Ariphrades:

Now they act like common bricklayers, asking for three obols a day while doing their civic duty.

From Praxagora’s door enter Blepyrus. He is wearing a long fine, lacy, white, diaphanous ladies’ shawl over his shoulders and women’s shoes with long straps, dragging loosely around his feet.

He has just got out of bed.

His face is twisted with pain and he has a tight, anxious grip of his bum with one hand, hoping to control his bowel.

Blepyrus:

What on earth is going on around here? Where has my wife run off to now?

Looks around him.

It's damned near Dawn and I still can't find her.

There I was, wide awake half the bloody night, desperate for a shit, desperately struggling to find my shoes and cloak in the dark, searching everywhere – but everywhere!- and nothing! I couldn't find a thing. In the meantime, there's Mr Bum-opener, banging at my rear entrance. What could I do? I grabbed my wife's cute little shawl and her cute little Persian slippers and rushed out here looking for a place to shit! I'm busting for one!

He looks around anxiously. Runs off Stage Left, farts and immediately runs back on stage again. Still anxiously, he squats mid-stage to shit.

At night, anywhere is all right, really, isn't it, because no one can really see you.

But then he peers into the audience, feels uncomfortable, farts, gets up and rushes out Stage Right. More farting before he rushes back on stage again, anxiously holding his bum.

What an idiot I was, getting married at my old age! I deserve a few good bruises for that one... as a memento of the occasion. Looks around for his wife. Wherever this wife of mine is, it's not going to be healthy for our relationship, I can tell you that for sure... Anyway, a man's got to do what a man's got to do, hasn't he?

He rushes back to Stage Right. Again we hear more farting, some groaning and the loud herald of some evacuation.

Pause.

He enters the stage, still feeling "pressed" however. He obviously did not manage to ease himself totally. He holds his stomach tightly and alternates between that and checking his hands, shawl and slippers.

From the opposite house we hear the creaking of the window shutters opening. Slowly we see the NEIGHBOUR. He is holding a lamp which he waves about trying to see into the street.

Neighbour:

Who is it? Who's there?

Waves the lamp and peers into the darkness

I don't suppose it's my neighbour Blepyrus, is it? Surely not!

Peers some more.

Blepyrus is trying to escape but he's unsuccessful. He is still gripping his stomach.
By Zeus, it IS the very man! Blepyrus!

Peers some more.

Hey... what's that yellow patch all over your back? Ha! I see you must have met our famous poet Kinesias. He's sprayed your bum with some of his shitty verses! Hahahahaha!

Blepyrus: *Gives up any attempt to escape. Farts.*

Nononono! I've come out here wearing my wife's yellow shawl. She loves wearing this little thing.

Neighbour:

Where's your cloak?

Blepyrus:

I wish I could tell you. I've looked for it among the sheets and blankets but just couldn't find it.

Neighbour:

Why didn't you ask your wife to tell you where it is?

Blepyrus: Mightily uncomfortable. Every sentence an obvious indication of defeat and despondency.

No, by Zeus, I couldn't ask her. She sneaked out on me. I'm afraid I'm about to cop some new worry from her.

Neighbour: Also begins to confess awkwardly.

Eh... Same damned thing happened to me, by Zeus! Same thing exactly! My woman took off with my vest. I love that vest! Not only that but she's taken my boots as well! Couldn't find them anywhere!

Blepyrus:

Me too! My Spartan boots have also gone. Nowhere to be found, nowhere to be seen! But I just had to have a bog, so I've just slipped into these little high heels and rushed out here. I couldn't very well shit in our blanket, I've just had it washed.

Neighbour:

I wonder what's going on? Perhaps some friend of hers invited them for breakfast.

Blepyrus:

A, ha! That's most probably what it is! So far as I know my woman is no slut.

Neighbour:

Oh, well. I can see the length of a ship's cable of shit on your back... I... I've got to go

to Parliament now. That is, if I can find my cloak! It's the only bloody cloak I possess!

Blepyrus: *Holding his stomach tightly and anxiously and with excruciating pain*
Me, too. As soon as I... finish my... as soon as I get rid of....

By Zeus! I need a shit badly! My bloody bum hole is totally blocked by some wild choke pear or something. Nothing can get out of there.

Neighbour:

The sort of blocking our Thrasyboulos did to the Spartans?

Blepyrus:

Yes, by Dionysius!

Show of agony

It sure got me in a tight spot.

Neighbour, chuckles, waves good bye and goes back inside his house.

To the audience

What the hell am I going to do now? And not only now but what will happen when I eat something?

Anxiously

Where will all the shit flow?

Indicating his bum.

This mister Wild Pear has locked and thoroughly bolted the rear exit...

Anxiously peering into the crowd

Is there a doctor in the house? Can someone go and get me one? Who though? Who's a good bum purger, I wonder... Anyone know Amynos? No? Anyhow he'll probably say no.

Spins around anxiously, urgently and in sheer agony.

Somebody please call Antisthenes, hurry! Do whatever it takes. He's the one! When it comes to groaning, moaning and whining he knows a bum hole that needs licking!

Not a great doctor but what a politician, ey?

He falls to his knees in agony then raises his hands in prayer

Oh, Ilithia! Goddess of the pregnant womb! I beg you! Don't ignore my pain!

Here I sit, trying to shit but the gate's shut and bolted!

They'll turn me into a potty for some comic stage!

Blepyrus squats and looks around him. He tightens his face as he tries variously to evacuate. Occasionally he'll check to see whether he's done anything. Time passes as the light on the stage increases gently. Suddenly he realises he's about to be freed of his burden. He picks up the lengthy shawl and runs behind the curtain on Stage

Right.

Enter Chremes Stage Left, carrying a shopping bag. He looks across and sees Blepyrus.

Chremes:

Oi! What do you think you're doing down there!

Suddenly shocked by the realization.

You're NOT dropping a bog here, are you?

We hear the loud noise of the long anticipated evacuation.
Then, with a look of relief on his face, he enters the stage.

Blepyrus:

Who, me? O, nonononono!

Looks back to where he was.

At least not any more. Here I am, finally standing up straight!

Chremes:

Still suspicious. Looks around and there's a short game of "hide the sin." Why are you wearing your wife's shawl?

Blepyrus:

This little ol' thing? Just grabbed it in the dark by mistake.

Changing the subject.

Tell me, where are you coming from?

Chremes:

From Parliament.

Blepyrus:

Is it out already?

Chremes:

Been out since the break of day, by Zeus!

Laughs.

You should have seen the late-comers! They were marked for being late with so much ochre, there was ochre flying about everywhere! What a laugh!

Blepyrus:

So, you did get your three obols, I presume.

Chremes:

I wish! No, I was too late for that! Shame! Shame! I've got to explain to my purse now why it's empty!

Blepyrus:

So... you got absolutely nothing then?

Chremes:

Absolutely nothing... except my shopping bag.

Blepyrus:

But why were you late?

Chremes:

A huge crowd of men turned up. Like never before. They just all turned up at the Parliament. Just like that, the whole throng of them together, and at the same time. I took one look at them and thought they must have all been cobblers. You know, pale. As if the sun never saw their faces. The whole place was pale... so neither I nor a whole lot of others near me got any money.

Blepyrus:

So, I won't get anything either if I go, ey?

Chremes:

Where from? You'd never get anything after the cock's second crow!

Blepyrus:

Oh no! Bugger me dead!

He falls to his knees and prays, mocking Aeschylus the tragedian

"Oh Antiochus, do not lament the loss of the three obols

but do lament the living man! Me, Blepyrus, for all I had is no more!"

Gets up again.

But what the hell was it that brought out such a huge throng, so early?

Chremes:

What else but the fact that the Chairman has placed in the agenda the question about how to save the city. There he was, the first of them all, Mister Crusty Eyes Neocleidis, jumps up out of his seat, gropes his way to the speaker's chair and gets ready to speak. The crowd though, begins to yell, "get off!" And "How dreadful it is that this person dares to lecture us on the ways of saving our city when he can't even save his own little eyeballs?" To which old Neocleidis looks all round him and yells, "what the hell can I do about it?"

Blepyrus:

I'd have told him, "grind a bit of garlic with the milk of the fig tree, add some sow-thistle and apply it on your eyelids every night." That's if I was there... but I wasn't!

Chremes:

Then, out comes our real genius, Eveon, wearing absolutely nothing, though he tried

to convince the people that he was, indeed, wearing a cloak. His words were very... democratic! He said, "As you can see, folks, I'm also in need of salvation. Just a mere silver drachma would do it, really. Anyhow, I'm still going to tell you how you can save the city and its people. The moment the sun turns his back on us and is replaced by winter, the manufacturers of clothes should give cloaks free to anyone who asks for them. That way, no one among us will catch pleurisy. As well, those who don't own a bed or a blanket, should go to the tanners – after they've had a wash – and if a tanner dares slam his doors to him, well, we should fine him three furs."

Blepyrus:

By Dionysus! What helpful ideas! And he should have added that our great grain mogul, Nausicydis, and other grain dealers should also give away to the poor, three kilos of grain for their supper or else these dealers would end up crying for a long time. Now that suggestion would get Eveon unanimous agreement!

Chremes:

Then, after Eveon a pale, handsome young man who looked just like our General Nikias, jumped to his feet and spoke to everyone. He... he argued that we should hand over the running of Athens to the women! Well! Everyone thundered with cries of "well said!" They were all those cobblers I was telling you about. But then the farmers began whispering and whining.

Blepyrus:

Because, by Zeus, they've got brains!

Chremes:

But they were fewer in number so the speaker told them to shut up. He said a whole lot of good things about the women but he said some nasty things about you!

Blepyrus:

About me? Like what?

Chremes:

First, that you're a right old bastard!

Blepyrus:

What about you? What did he call you?

Chremes:

I'll tell you in a minute. Then he called you a thief.

Blepyrus:

Me? Only me?

Chremes:

That's right, only you. And, by Zeus, he called you an informer as well.

Blepyrus:

Just me?

Chremes:

That's right, Blepyrus. You and (Indicating the audience) most of these people here, too! Thieves and informers. Dobbers. Squealers. Right old bastards the bloody lot of them.

Blepyrus:

Stares at the audience for a minute. Indicating them.

Well, that's true. That's undeniable, by Hermes.

Chremes:

And he also said that whilst we, men, all cheat each other and don't return borrowed things, the women, help each other, lend each other anything from dresses to jewellery, money, cups and saucers and they do it alone and without the presence of witnesses and wankers; and they return everything on time.

Blepyrus:

Yes, by Poseidon! We cheat even with witnesses present!

Chremes:

And he went on and on about all this, praising them. Gave a whole eulogy on them! They don't snitch, don't sue, don't destroy our democracy... lots of other great virtues.

Blepyrus:

And what did he propose?

Chremes:

That the city be turned over to the women. It was thought that this was the only thing the city hasn't ever tried.

Blepyrus:

And this proposal passed?

Chremes:

My words exactly. Absolutely!

Blepyrus:

And these women are now in charge of everything that we were in charge of?

Chremes:

Yep. Exactly right. They're in charge.

Blepyrus:

So... instead of me going to court, from now on it'll be my wife?

Chremes:

Nor will you be raising your children any more. Your missus will be in charge of that.

Blepyrus:

So... I won't need to moan and groan every morning, worrying about our daily bread?

Chremes:

By Zeus, no! Oh, no, mate! From now on, it's the wife who'll be doing all the worrying. No need to moan, to groan or to worry about a thing. Just stay home and...

Blepyrus farts.

...fart all day!

Blepyrus:

Hmmm. I... I fear for us, you know? I fear that for men of our age, when these women take over they'll force us... they'll force us to... well, you know, to...

Chremes:

To do what, Blepyrus?

Blepyrus:

What else? To have sex with them, man! And if we won't be able to do it then we won't even get breakfast!

Chremes:

Stupid man! You can do this, can't you? Indicates cunnilingus. Do it and you'll get both, breakfast and sex!

Blepyrus:

But it sure is awful when you're forced to do it!

Chremes:

But if it's the will of the city then everyone must obey.

Blepyrus:

Yes, I suppose. There is an old wife's tale that says, no matter how stupid or moronic our city's advice is, things will still turn out for the best!

Chremes: Raises his hands in prayer.

Well, Goddess Athena and all the rest of you gods, I sure hope that things do turn out for the best. I've got to go. Cheers, mate!

Exit Chremes Stage Right. Blepyrus goes back into his home.

A second after Chremes disappears, we hear him yell in anger because he had stepped upon Blepyrus' shit.

Enter the women, dressed in men's clothes.

Mrs Lush:

Move it, girls!

Are there any men following us? Take a good look all around.

There are lots of sleazy bastards around, checking out the shape of our bums. Watch out for them, you never know one of them might be right up you. And stamp your feet loudly as you go along and keep your cloaks tightly wrapped around your body. Show no flesh!

Mrs Generous:

Stay close and look about you carefully. That's right, look both left and right!

If this thing gets out and our husbands find out, both, shame and catastrophe will fall upon us and upon our scheme.

Mrs Happy:

Here we are, girls. This is where we've started off on our journey to Parliament.

Kick the dust high!

Shouts of jubilation.

There's our good General's house.

Indicates Praxagora's house.

She came up with the plan that the citizens of Athens have enacted.

More shouts of jubilation

Mrs Lush:

Right. Now there's no need to have these beards hanging off our faces any more, so take them off. Someone might see us in the full light of the sun, so let's go there by the wall's shade.

Sostrati:

Keep your eyes peeled girls. Change your clothes again, change them back to as you were before.

Mrs Lush:

Hurry up! I can see our General coming this way now. She's back from Parliament.

Melistichi:

Hurry everyone. Get rid of all that facial hair. Ghastly stuff we had to put up with all this time.

Women take off the beards and are in various states of clothes-changing when Praxagora enters.

Praxagora:

Wonderful, girls! Success! Luck was on our side and things have turned out exactly as we wanted. That's right, hurry now and get these cloaks off before anyone sees you. Your shoes, too. You, Sostrati, undo those Spartan horse reins!

(Indicating the laces on the Spartan Boots.) All of you, throw away the walking sticks and you, Mrs Lush, get all this stuff together. (Indicating the shoes, clothes, sticks etc.) I think I better sneak back into the house before hubby sees me. I better put his cloak and all this other stuff back where I took it from.

Mrs Lush and other women gather all the clothes.

Mrs Happy:

All done, o, great one! We got rid of everything just as you said. Now please guide our next move, Praxagora and tell us how to do well whatever you ask of us; because never in my life have I met a woman as awesome as you! That's for sure!

Praxagora:

Then wait for me here and I'll make you all my counsellors for the office they've elected me. You were absolutely manly back there, with all that clamour and hassle that was going on, too!

Enter Blepyrus from his house, sees his wife and yells with anger.

Blepyrus:

You! It's you! Where have you been, Praxagora?

Praxagora:

Since when is that your business, Blepyrus?

Blepyrus:

Oh, that's charming! That's very charming indeed! My business! And what innocence I see in your face!

Praxagora:

Oh, no! You're going to start yapping on about me being at my lover's house, now, right?

Blepyrus:

One lover? ONE lover? More like a fleet of them!

Praxagora:

Don't aggravate yourself; it's easy to check me out.

Blepyrus:

What do you mean? Check you out, how?

Praxagora:

Come and smell my hair. See if there's any perfume in it.

Blepyrus:

What do you mean, perfume? Since when do you women need perfume in your hair to get a fuck?

Praxagora:

Well, I do... unfortunately.

Blepyrus:

So why did you run out of the house with my clothes so early and so quietly?

Praxagora:

A woman, a close friend of mine was overcome by great pain in the middle of the night and I had to go and see her.

Blepyrus:

So why didn't you say something before you ran off like that?

Praxagora:

Surely you understand I had to think about the condition the poor pregnant woman was in, darling.

Blepyrus:

Still, you could have told me first! There's something awful about all this!

Praxagora:

I swear by the two goddesses. The woman who came for me told me to get there as quickly as possible, so I went just as I was.

Blepyrus:

Well then why not wear your own cloak? But, oh, no! You had to run off with my cloak and throw your shawl over me, leaving me looking like a corpse ready for the hearse! A wreath and an urn and I'd be ready for the grave!

Praxagora:

It was freezing outside, darling and I'm thin and feeble of health. That's why I needed this to keep warm, but you! I left you in your blankets, all warm and snug.

Thinks a little

Blepyrus:

But with you ran off the stick and the Spartan boots. Why is that?

Praxagora:

So I can save your cloak from thieves. I took the stick, wore the Spartan boots and stomped my feet on the cobble stones, making as much noise as I could, so that the thieves would think I was you.

Blepyrus:

Have you any idea how much wheat I could have got us with the three obols I'd be given if I'd managed to get to Parliament today? A whole bucket of it! Nearly twenty litres of it!

Praxagora:

Ah, don't worry, Blepyrus, she had a boy!

Blepyrus:

Who had a boy, Parliament?

Praxagora:

No, silly! The woman I went to. She had a boy, so I'll be getting a gift worth much more than the miserable three obols... So Parliament sat?

Blepyrus:

By Zeus, yes! Don't you remember? I told you yesterday!

Praxagora:

Ah, yes! Now I remember.

Blepyrus:

Well, have you heard what was decided?

Praxagora:

Not me. How could I?

Blepyrus:

Well, my darling wife, sit yourself down and enjoy your cuttlefish. They've voted to hand the city over to you women.

Praxagora:

To do what with it? Is there some weaving to be done?

She seats at the platform

Blepyrus:

God no. They want you to govern!

Praxagora:

Govern? Govern who?

Blepyrus:

Every bit of the city's business.

Praxagora:

By Aphrodite! What a blessed future this city will have!

Blepyrus:

Blessed? How is that going to happen?

Praxagora:

In many ways. From now on no one will dare behave shamefully in this city. And there'll be no more perjurers or sycophants –

Blepyrus: *Interrupts her*

Good gods! Please! Don't do that. How will we make a living?

Neighbour's door opens and neighbour enters

Neighbour:

Come on, mate, let your missus talk!

Praxagora:

Right! There'll be no more purse snatchers, no more envy, no more nudity, no more poverty, no more disputes, no more repossessing...

Neighbour:

By Poseidon! That would be fantastic – if she's not lying, that is!

Praxagora:

I'll show you whether I'm lying or not. You be my witness and when this becomes true, hubby here will shut up with his constant criticism!

Mrs Lush:

Now is the time when you need to use your mind, Praxagora!

A powerful mind, packed to the brim with wisdom and prudence, to defend our sisters.

Your lips never cease to utter the wise words that benefit our people in a myriad of ways.

Mrs Generous:

Now is the time, Praxagora, to show us just what your mind can do.

Mrs Happy:

Our city needs some wise person's solution.

Mrs Lush:

Tell us all about it.

Mrs Generous:

Make sure that nothing is said or done before.

Mrs Happy:

Pointing to the audience

The folk out there hate to see repeats.

Mrs Lush:

All right then, don't waste any time. Begin immediately.

Mrs Generous:

Put your ideas into practice straight away.

Mrs Happy:

Spectators love quick action more than anything else.

Praxagora:

Mrs Lush, Mrs Generous and you, too, Mrs Happy, I'm certain that my ideas are useful but I'm not sure if the spectators out there would like all this new action. That's what worries me about that lot. Peers into the audience. I think they'd much prefer to watch the same old, ancient action, over and over again.

Neighbour:

Ohhhh, no, don't worry Praxagora. So far as that goes, have no fear. Our way is to always abandon the old and well tested ideas and embrace the new ones.

Praxagora:

In that case, I don't want anyone to argue with me or to interrupt me until she has listened to the whole speech and has a full understanding of my whole plan.

Pause as she waits for a response

Good. Now, I suggest that all things be owned by everyone in common and everyone should be able to draw a pay and have an equal standard of living. They should all draw pay from the same funds. Let's have no more of this rich man-poor man stuff. None of this, one man farming huge paddocks and the other owning less land than what he needs for his grave. None of this one man owning a crowd of slaves and another not even a single servant. My law says, one law for everyone, one standard for all.

Blepyrus:

How can you make one law for everyone?

Praxagora:

Easy. Remember this motto: The only thing you'll eat before me is shit! The rest is equal time, equal serve.

Blepyrus:

You're making shit-eating a common practice too, are you?

Praxagora:

No, Blepyrus, but you've interrupted me. I was about to explain that very thing. The first thing I'll do is to place all the land into common ownership. The same with the money and with every other thing which is, at the moment, owned by individuals. And it is this common wealth that we women will harvest with prudent saving and a caring intelligence.

Neighbour:

What about those of us who possess no land but who have loads of silver and gold coins, like the Persian Darics for example?

Praxagora:

Well, they'll just have to deposit it to the central fund.

Blepyrus:

And if they don't deposit it, they'll have to lie and commit perjury... which is the way they've got it in the first place! Hahaha!

Praxagora:

In any case, what use will it be to them? None!

Blepyrus:

Why not?

Praxagora:

Because there will be no one forced to work through poverty! None of us will be lacking in anything. We'll have bread, salt, fish fillets, cloaks to wear, wine to drink, garlands, chick peas, the lot. So what's the point in not depositing their coins? Let me know if you can't see that.

Blepyrus:

But those men who have all this stuff do so because they're the biggest thieves around!

Praxagora:

That's right, darling! That's all due to the laws we have now -under this current system- but when this new system of ours is established and everything has deposited his stuff into a common fund, everyone would be living from it, so how would it possibly profit anyone by not depositing his stuff into that common fund?

Blepyrus:

But then... if a man sees a lovely girl and he would just love to buy her for a night of... of games, he'll have to first appear to the "common fund," draw out the price she's after and then go off and screw her.

Praxagora:

No, there'll be no need to draw any funds. He'll be able to sleep with her for free. No charge, no price. These girls will also become part of the common property law. Men will be able to sleep with them whenever they want and, if they want, make babies with them.

Blepyrus:

Well! In that case, every man will be running to the prettiest girl for his fuck.

Praxagora:

No, all the ugly ones and the ones with the twisted noses will stand next to the cute ones; and if the man wants the cute one he'll have to fuck the ugly ones first.

Blepyrus:

By Zeus, Praxagora! What about us, oldies? If we've got to go with the ugly ones first, by the time we get back to the cuties, our cocks would be useless. There'll be nothing left in them.

Praxagora:

Hahaha! Don't worry, sweetheart, they won't be fighting over you. Don't ever be afraid of that.

Blepyrus:

Fight? What do you mean fight?

Praxagora:

I mean, the cute ones. They won't be fighting to fuck with you. Anyhow, this problem about a useless cock... it's there already with you, isn't it?

Blepyrus:

How wise you are about your own, womanish affairs. You've got it worked out so that no woman's hole is left empty but what about the men? What are you doing about us, because, as I see it, the cute women will go right past us ugly ones and go fuck with the handsome ones.

Praxagora:

The ugly men like you should follow the cute bums when the dinner party is over and watch where they take their public walks because my laws will prohibit the tall and beautiful women to sleep with those young men unless they first serve the wishes of you, the ugly and the short.

Blepyrus:

Hahaha! So now ugly-nosed Lysicrates will be lifting his nose up in pride along with all those perfectly-nosed handsome youths! Oh my!

Neighbour:

By Apollo, that's right! What a great idea and how Democratic! What a laugh it would be when a bright young stallion, wearing his golden rings is told by someone wearing crude clogs, "hey buddy, hold on a while, wait till I'm finished and then I'll let you have the leftovers!"

Blepyrus: *Thinks a bit*

But then this sort of life won't allow us to recognise our own kids.

Praxagora:

And why should we? This sort of life will make them consider all men past a certain age as their fathers.

Blepyrus:

Oh nononono, Praxagora! That's too worrying a thought for me. The kids already want to strangle their fathers, the ones they know for certain are their fathers. With your rules these kids will not only want to strangle them but shit on them as well!

Praxagora:

No, silly! The bystanders will step in and save them. Before my laws, no one would give a damn about who's beating whose father. Now though, if they hear that some man is being beaten, they'll be worried that the old man was their own father and they'd run to the old man's side.

Blepyrus:

Sure, Praxagora. Nothing wrong with what you're saying but... the thought of Mr Fatso and Mr Baldy coming up to me and calling me "daddy" puts the wind up me.

Neighbour:

Ha! I can think of something even more frightful!

Blepyrus:

Like what?

Neighbour:

If Mr Turdlover comes to you, calls you "pappy" and gives you a big smooch! Hahaha!

Blepyrus:

Just let him try! Boy will he regret it!

Neighbour:

And you, my friend would smell of heavenly mint!

Praxagora:

Nothing to worry about. Turdlover was born before our decree so he can't give you that kiss.

Blepyrus:

Decree or no decree, he'd still be sorry if he kissed me... but... who'll be doing the farming, Praxagora?

Praxagora:

The farming will be done by the slaves. Your only concern will be to get all dressed up and oiled up around ten in the evening and go off to your dinner party.

Blepyrus:

Ah! Another valid question, I think, concerns clothing. What of them? Where do we get them from?

Praxagora:

Make use of what you've got for now. Later we'll weave you new ones.

Blepyrus:

And then there's the question about fines. Suppose someone gets sued and the judges give him a fine. Where will he get the money, surely you don't think it's fair for him to extract it from the common funds!

Praxagora:

But there won't be any hearings, Blepyrus!

Blepyrus: *To the Neighbour*

Those words, my dear friend, will be your undoing!

Neighbour:

I think so too!

Praxagora:

But, darling what will anyone sue anyone for?

Blepyrus:

Ha! By Apollo! I can mention lots of things! First of all there's the situation where someone won't pay his debt.

Praxagora:

Where did the lender get the money from in the first place, if all the money belongs to everyone? Obviously, he's a thief!

Neighbour:

Quite right, by Demeter! You're quite right!

Blepyrus:

All right, answer this question for me then: There's a dinner party and afterwards it gets all nasty, drunks fighting each other and so on. They'll end up getting to court and told to pay fines for assault. How will they do that? This will get you thinking!

Praxagora:

Whoever is fined will have his bread rations reduced. That reduction will hit him hard, in his belly! Next time he wants to assault anyone, he'll have to think twice about it!

Blepyrus:

So you think no one will be a thief?

Praxagora:

Why would he? He'd be stealing from something he's a shareholder in.

Blepyrus:

No more... being robbed in the middle of the night?

Neighbour:

Nope, not if you sleep at home!

Praxagora:

Not even like in the old days when you used to go out at night. No one will bother you because everyone will have everything they'll need for a happy life and if someone wants to strip you of your cloak well, then you just simply give it to him. What's the point of fighting about it when you can run off and pick a better one from the common lot?

Blepyrus:

What about gambling? Won't folk gamble with dice?

Praxagora:

What would be the point in that? To win what exactly?

Blepyrus:

And what sort of life-style will you create for the citizens?

Praxagora:

The same life-style for everyone. I'll turn the whole city into one huge, happy household by smashing down all the walls which now separate them and turn them into one building so that everyone can walk through everyone else's place.

Blepyrus:

That's silly. Where will we have our dinner?

Praxagora:

Dinner? I'll turn all the court rooms and all the covered footpaths into eating places.

Blepyrus: *Constantly trying to think of new objections*

What about Parliament and the speaker's platform?

Praxagora:

That's where I'll store all our cutlery, crockery, water jugs and suchlike. The children will be able to get up there and recite poems about heroes as well as about cowards with whom they'd be ashamed to share a meal.

Blepyrus:

By Apollo, that's a great idea! It sure makes me happy. Now, what about all those ballot boxes?

Praxagora:

The ballot boxes will be placed in the centre of the market place, by Harmodius' statue and I'll have an official who'll tell everyone which dining hall they should go. They'll draw a letter out of that box and the official will tell them to which hall that letter corresponds. The letter "B" for example will take you to the "Basilium" Dining hall. The letter "Theta" will take you to the neighbouring one and the letter "Kapa" will go to the hall where they sell the flour.

Blepyrus:

"Kapa" for capes?

Praxagora:

What do you mean, capes? They go there to eat!

Blepyrus:

What about those who won't manage to draw a letter? Will they be ejected out of the dining hall by all the others?

Praxagora:

That won't be happening with us, women. We'll be supplying every man with all his needs. Imagine this: Every man will be able to leave his dinner party drunk, still wearing his garland and carrying a torch to find his way home. And while he's walking, a woman will approach him and talk to him sweetly like this, "Come with us, sweetie, come to our place. There's a stunning looking girl in here." And from the second-storey window, another woman will call out, "Over here, darling. There's a beautiful young girl here, pale white skin... of course you'd have to screw me before you screw her." As well, the ugly men will run after the young, handsome studs and yell at them, "Ey! You there, young man, where are you going in such a hurry? In any case, you'll get no action in there even if you did go. These pretty ones in there will have to fuck the ugly folk, like me first, the ones with the flat noses. You... you can grab your two-fig branch and wank, there, in the doorway, if you're in too much of a hurry!" So, tell me, men, did you like all this?

Both Men:

Totally!

Praxagora:

Well, then I'll go and find a girl with a loud voice to use as my crier and then go off to the marketplace to accept all the goods as they arrive. Being elected the leader, I need to do these things. Then I'll have to organise the dinner for you all so that you can all have your first orgy tonight.

Blepyrus:

We are starting the orgies tonight?

Praxagora:

My words, exactly. Then I'll want to stop all the prostitutes from trading.

Blepyrus:

Whaaaaat?

But whyyyyy?

Neighbour:

Why? Isn't that obvious?

Indicating the chorus

She wants to put the whores out of business so that these ugly crows can get their young pricks! According to the new laws!

Praxagora:

As well, the slave girls won't be allowed to adorn themselves in any way so as to steal the fervour of the young, free men. They'd only be allowed to fuck with other slaves and have their little pinkies trimmed in the manner of a woollen underskirt. Very rough!

She turns to leave. Blepyrus follows closely behind.

Blepyrus:

Praxagora, darling, I'd like to follow you around, so that everyone can see me beside you and say, "Well, look at that! That's the Commander's husband!"

Both, Blepyrus and Praxagora exit into their house.

Neighbour:

I better go too. If I've got to take all my possessions to the marketplace, I'd better get them all together and check out what I've got.

Exit Neighbour into his house.

From the Neighbour's house, we hear noises pertaining to the shifting of furniture, collecting household items, breaking things, etc. Eventually, Neighbour and his two slaves, Sicon and Parmenon enter, carrying the household items and one by one, line them up on the street. Neighbour talks fondly and emotionally to each of the articles. It is the separation of close friends.

While this is going on, Man enters, stands at a corner and watches the activity with some emotional involvement, yet with quite some state of perplexity.

Neighbour:

Come, my darling sieve, pretty little thing, so white from all those bags of flour

you've sieved. Come outside, my sweet and stand here, in front of the parade, the first of all my belongings. Now who's going to be my number two in the parade? Ah! The casserole! Come out here, sweetheart! By Zeus! You're all black! Did Lysicrates use you to boil that black poison of his, to make his hair dye? Come, stand here, next to the sieve. You, too, my little toiletry box, my scissors and eyebrow pluckers and my make-up, come! Come my water jug.

To Sicon who's carrying the jug.

Jug Bearer, bring that cute jug over here... that's right, right here!

Parmenon comes out holding a hand mill in the shape of a lyre.

Ah, my darling lyre mill! You, too, come out here and we'll make you the musician of our parade! The number of times you've woken me up for Parliament, with your delightful song. Early, so early in the morning, it was still night!

Now, who's got the tub?

Sicon indicates he does.

Well, come on then, out here, with you!

To Parmenon.

You, bring out the honeycombs and place them next to the olive branches. And the two tripods and the oil flasks. Bring them all down here.

All things are eventually brought out and arranged on the stage

All, here? Good. Now let all the little potlets follow from behind.

Pause

Man: Snaps out of the involvement. To the audience

Ha! Me? No way! I'd never deposit my possession to the common coffers. I'd be an idiot to do so and a bit screwed in the head, I think! By Poseidon, never! Not before I scrutinise the situation over and over again and think about it for a very long time. I'm not going to throw away the fruit of my labour and all those careful savings, just like that, thoughtlessly. I'd need to be convinced first about how the whole thing will turn out.

To the Neighbour

Hey, there! What's with all these household goods? Are you moving house or are you using them as collateral for a loan?

Neighbour:

Neither!

Man:

So why have you got them all lined up like that? Are you marching them off to

Hieron's auction house?

Neighbour:

By Zeus, no! We're off to the marketplace. They'll be deposited to the city's coffers according to the new law.

Man:

You're giving them to the city?

Neighbour:

But of course!

Man:

What an idiot! By Zeus the saviour, what an idiot you are!

Neighbour:

What do you mean?

Man:

What do you mean, "what do I mean?" Look at you!

Neighbour:

What do you mean, "look at me?" Aren't I supposed to obey the laws of the city?

Man:

What do you mean "the laws of the city," stupid?

Neighbour:

What do you mean, "what laws?" The laws that have just been enacted!

Man:

What do you mean, "enacted?" How can you be so stupid?

Neighbour:

What do you mean, "stupid?"

Man:

What do you mean, "what do I mean by stupid?" I mean "stupid!" I mean you're the stupidest man of all!

Neighbour:

You mean... because I'm obeying orders?

Man:

I mean...Do smart men obey orders?

Neighbour:

But of course they do! Always!

Man:

No, that's not what the smart man does. That's the act of an idiot.

Neighbour:

So, you're thinking of not presenting your stuff?

Man:

I'm thinking of being very careful with this law. I'll see what the rest of the people do first.

Neighbour:

They're all getting their stuff ready to deposit them in the city's coffers, that's what they're all doing.

Man:

Sure, sure. I'll be convinced of that when I see it with my own two eyes.

Neighbour:

But the whole town is talking about it.

Man:

That's right, they're "talking" about it! Doesn't mean they'll be doing it.

Neighbour:

That's what they're promising to do. They're promising to take them in.

Man:

Of course, they are, of course they are!

Neighbour:

Man, you're stressing me out with all this doubt of yours!

Man:

Doubt? But of course, there's doubt!

Neighbour:

Zeus fuck you man!

Man:

Fuck? Sure they'll get fucked. Do you think that those with a brain will turn in all their possessions? Oh no! It's not part of our ethnic ethic.

Neighbour:

So you think we all should just... take from the city and give nothing back?

Man:

By Zeus, yes! Of course! Same with the gods. Check it out yourself. Every time we go there to pray to them, what do they do? There they are, hands stretched out, palms up, obviously not so that they may give but that they may be given something.

Neighbour:

Enough, you thieving wanker! Let me get on with it. I need to tie all this stuff

together... Now where did I put my rope?

Man:

So, you're really taking them to the marketplace?

Neighbour: Finds the rope, picks up the two tripods and ties them together.

What do you think I'm doing with these tripods?

Man:

You're being totally stupid. What a moron you are, not waiting to see what the rest of the people do about this. At least then and only then –

Neighbour: *Interrupts*

And then do what, then!

Man:

Then, you wait even a little longer, and then a little longer, and then a little longer and then you forget it!

Neighbour:

For what reason?

Man:

We've got earthquakes happening all the time, fires, bad luck, black cat dashing across your path. Who knows what! Stuff which will put an end to all these handouts, you great ox!

Neighbour: *Gets back to his work*

What a fine ox I'd be if I got to the depository and there was no more room for me to deposit these things!

Man:

Ha! Are you worried you might miss your turn? Don't worry, mate. They'll manage to get them off your hands sooner or later.

Neighbour:

Now what do you mean?

Man:

What I mean is that I know these people in our Parliament really well. They rush to vote for something one day and the next they reject it.

Neighbour:

Don't worry, they'll all be there with their chattels.

Man:

And if they don't?

Neighbour:

Don't you worry, they will!

Man:

And if they don't?

Neighbour: *Annoyed*

Well then, we'll fight the bastards.

Man:

What if they're more than you?

Neighbour:

If there are more of them then I'll just leave it all to them. I'll just walk away!

Man:

What if they go and sell all your stuff?

Neighbour:

Shove off, will you?

Man:

What if I shove off?

Neighbour:

If you shove off you'll be doing us all a great service.

Man:

So... you really want to hand over all your stuff?

Neighbour:

Of course I do and I can see all my own neighbours doing so, as well.

Indicates the third house.

Man:

Ha! Antisthenes? Sure, sure! He'd rather have a thirty-day long shit than hand over his purse. Antisthenes! Hahahaha!

Neighbour: *Charges towards him*

Damn you! Piss off!

Man:

And what about Callimachus, the dance teacher. Is he going to deposit anything?

Neighbour:

He's going to deposit more than Calias, that's for sure! The damned squanderer!

Man:

To the audience, anxiously.

This man is going to toss away his whole estate!

Neighbour:

You're exaggerating a bit, aren't you?

Man:

What do you mean, "exaggerating?" I see laws like this one enacted all the time... Remember the one on salt?

Neighbour:

Sure I do.

Man:

And what about when we all voted to bring in those stupid, useless copper coins. Remember that, too? In one day out the next! Remember?

Neighbour:

Damn it, do I! I've lost so much money with that rubbish! I had just gathered all my grapes, sold them, got paid in those coppers and then went off to the market to buy barley. No sooner I open my bag to pay for it and the herald shouts, "no more coppers! No more coppers! We're only using silver now!" Bastard of a vote that one!

Man:

And then it wasn't that long ago that we all voted Euripides' laws for the two and a half percent tax hike which was to raise five hundred talents for the city! Five hundred talents! Wow, we all thought, what a golden boy this Euripides is. But then, a few days later, we checked it out thoroughly and what did we see? Bedbugs in Zeus' blankets! Bullshit! So, our so called "golden Euripides" ended up being our "bastard Euripides!"

Neighbour:

Not the same at all, mate! Just not the same. See, the place was run by us, the men those days. Now it's led by women! Very different!

Man:

Oh, women, or not, don't worry! I'll be very careful, by Poseidon! I don't want them pissing all over me!

Neighbour:

Pissing all over you? Pissing all over you? Mate, I really have no idea what you're crapping on about!

Enter a female Herald

Female Herald:

Hear me, hear me, hear me, all you citizens of Athens! All citizens are henceforth included in this proclamation.

All of you quickly go over to our Lady Commander's place so that Luck can declare

where each of you will dine tonight. All the tables are now fully ready and fully laden with every delicious morsel. The couches, too, are dressed with covers and cushions. The wine is being served and the girls who sell the scents are waiting for you. The fish fillets are being barbecued, the hares are on the spit, the bread rolls are in the oven, the garlands are being plaited, crunchies are being roasted, the young girls are cooking chick pea soup and Smoeus the cunt lover is there with them, in his riding suit, licking clean the women's bowls. Geron is there, also. He's thrown away his cheap old boots and worn our cloak and he's now wearing a brand new suit and new boots, and he's chatting up a young stud.

Come all you citizens of Athens, for all this is waiting for you. Your bread is waiting for you – all you need to do is... open wide! *Indicating the mouth*

Exit female Herald

Man:

Wonderful! I'll be off then. Why hang around here when all this great service is so generously offered by our kind city?

Neighbour:

Oi! Where do you think you're off to? You haven't deposited your stuff!

Man:

I'm off to dinner! Why?

Neighbour:

No way! They won't feed you before you deposit your household goods. Not if they have any sense, they won't!

Man:

Don't worry, friend. Sarcastically I will deposit them. Believe me, I will!

Neighbour:

When?

Man:

Don't worry, mate. I won't be holding anyone up.

Neighbour:

What do you mean, "I won't be holding anyone up?"

Man:

What do you mean, "what I mean?" I mean that there will still be others who will be depositing even after me. That's what I mean, what I mean!

Neighbour:

But still, you're going to dinner before you deliver!

Man:

Of course I will. What choice do I have? Right-minded people must obey the call of their city and run to help as best they can.

Neighbour:

What if they stop you?

Man:

I'll lower my head and walk through.

Neighbour:

They'll whip you.

Man:

If they dare do that, I'll sue them.

Neighbour:

Ha! They'll laugh at you.

Man:

Well, if they do that, I'll just stand in the doorway and...

Neighbour:

And what? Tell me what you would do?

Man:

I'd stand there, wait for the food to arrive and pinch it as it goes into the dining hall.

Neighbour:

You better walk after me then!

Turning his back on him

Sicon, Parmenon, pick up my goods!

Man:

Hang on! Let me help you with all that.

Neighbour:

Oh, nononono! It's all right. I can see it now. I'll be taking MY stuff in and you'll be pretending that my stuff is YOUR'S! No thanks! Come on boys!

Exit Neighbour and slaves

Man:

By Zeus! I need to think up some mechanism by which I can keep my property but still share in the free food the state is giving out to everyone. It needs to be brilliant, though. I just have to go and eat without delay.

Exit Man

The window of a house opens and a young girl appears. Then the door of the house

next door opens and an old woman (FIRST OLD WOMAN) enters the stage. She walks up and down the stage, swinging her bag and bum, singing softly to herself but all the while searching the streets anxiously. The young woman from the window is also looking up and down the street.

First Old Woman:

I wonder why the men aren't here yet? They should have been here a long time ago! I've painted my face up with this beautiful white make up, I've put on my see-through, fuck-me please dress and... and? Well, all I'm doing is standing here, murmuring to myself a song and hoping to snap up a young passer by.

Pause

Come on, you Muses! Come into my mouth and find me one of those lovely, horny Ionian tunes.

Begins to sing "sweetly" a bawdy song.

Young Woman:

You putrid old trash! You're out before me today. You thought you'd check out the vineyard while no one is watching, and, while no one was watching, you thought you'd be able to pinch a bunch with your singing! But you do this, and I'll fight you: song for song! And I don't care if the audience out there finds the routine boring –it'll still be cute and comic!

First Old Woman: Indicates her wide behind.

Ha! Talk to this, woman and piss off!

To a piper, who could be among the chorus of women or behind the stage.

Come, you darling piper! Pick up your lovely little pipes and blow a tune worthy of you and me.

She begins to sing

The man who wants a good time
Should only sleep with me
Because the wise fuck comes not
With the young girl but with
Experienced grown up women.

Young Woman:

Don't turn away from the young ones
Their fluffy thighs are the home of tenderness
...a tenderness which turns to flower in their wondrous tits.
And you, old tart, though you've plucked away your moustache and

you've plastered your face with white paint
Only Death awaits your caresses,
Only Death is your next bed mate.

First Old Woman:

Ooooh, I hope your cunt falls off, you bitch
And when lust sends you to your bed
With the promise of a fuck
You can't find your bumhole
From the hole you'd love to rub.
Or when you're in bed and hope to hold a man
tight and close, may a snake, appear instead of him,
hissing into your armpits.

Young Woman:

To the audience this time
Now what will I do?
My man is not here yet
And I'm left here all alone
My mother's gone off somewhere
And I'll reveal no more
Back to the Old Woman
Well, old nanny, I beg you!
Please call Doctor Wanker
So you can get at least some joy,
Please nanny do it,
Ask him to let you play with his toy!
Please, ask the little boy!

First Old Woman: *To the audience*

I can see the poor love
Dying to do it the Ionian way
A dildo will send her desire away.

Back to the Young Woman:

Oh, I can see you dying to bend to your knees
And do it the Lesbian way.
A mouth, a head, a blow job
Will satisfy you desire and gob.

Young Woman:

But never will you take my toys away
And never will you kill my youth or
Steal my share of the fucks from me,
Not ever!

First Old Woman:

Well, bend your head like a skunk all you like and sing all the songs you want but
no one will sleep with you before they sleep with me.

Young Woman:

Over my dead body! Skunk? “Bend your head like a skunk?” That’s a new one for
you, isn’t it, old cheese?

First Old Woman:

Nope. Not new at all!

Young Woman:

No, of course not! Who can tell an old woman anything new?

First Old Woman:

Old woman? Girl, it isn’t my age that you should worry about!

Young Woman:

What then? Your face plaster and your powder?

First Old Woman:

Listen! Why do you keep talking to me?

Young Woman:

What about you? Why are you still searching the street?

First Old Woman:

Me? I’m just singing a little song for my beloved... my young Epigenes.

Young Woman:

If you’ve got a boyfriend then his name must be Gero!

First Old Woman:

He’ll show you, girl! He’ll be visiting me before he’ll be fucking you!

Enter Epigenes, wearing a garland and holding a torch. He is drunk. He has yet
to see the women.

First Old Woman:

Here’s my sweetheart!

Young Woman:

Ha! He’s not here for your sake, you droopy flaps!

First Old Woman:

By Zeus, no way! No way you skinny little runt!

Young Woman:

Well, let us see. He'll tell us himself who he's after. I'm going inside.

Young Woman goes inside

First Old Woman:

I'll go inside, too. Just to show you how I know better than you.

First Old Woman goes inside

Epigenes:

How blissful it would be if I could go fuck a young woman straightaway instead of having to do it first with an ugly nose or an old hag! How can this be right for a free man?

He goes back and forth from one door to the other, torn between duty and desire. Finally he is about to knock on the Young Woman's door.

Enter First Old Woman again

First Old Woman: *With a thunderous voice*

By Zeus! You knock on that door and you might as well say goodbye to your cock! These aren't the days of the great whore Charixede when we knew nothing about Democracy! Nowadays, we've got to do things according to democratic and just laws, by Zeus, by Zeus!

To the audience

But I'll go back inside and see how he resolves this.

First Old Woman goes back inside.

Epigenes: *Almost in tears*

Oh, gods! Let me get this little beauty on her own. I've drunk and drunk and I'm now drunk because of her! Ohhhh the desire! Ohhhh the desire!

Epigenes walks back to the Young Woman's door. He is confused.

The Young Woman appears at her window again.

Young Woman:

I've tricked the cursed old woman. He he! She's gone back inside, the silly old woman. She thought I'd stay inside, too. Ahhhh! But there's the very object of my love. Here's my boy!

She begins to sing to him

Come, sweet lover, come to me!

Come share my bed, embrace me through the night

Those curly tresses bring Eros to my heart
Bring a crazy desire to my loins.
I pray to you Eros let me free and let
My boy come to me, and lie deep inside me.

Epigenes: *He knocks at the Young Woman's door*

Come, sweet lover, come to me!
You too, sweet lover, come to me!
Run down the steps and open this door
Or else I'll faint in front of it.
I'd rather faint between your legs
My love and crash between your bum's little mounds.
Oh Aphrodite, why spin my mind for this girl?
I pray to you Eros let me free and let
My girl come to me, and lie deep inside me.
He knocks at the Young Woman's door.
My words are far too weak to tell of the strength of my longing
You, though my sweetheart,
Open up for me and give welcome to my love
I beg you, sooth my pain.
He knocks at the Girls door
Aphrodite's bud! The golden work of a brilliant jeweller!
Muses' bee, Graces' baby,
Visor of the most tender
Open up for me and give welcome to my love
I beg you, placate my pain.
He knocks at the Young Woman's door.

Enter First Old Woman again

First Old Woman:

Hey, you! What's all this knocking? Are you looking for me?

Epigenes: *Shocked*

Hell! Wwwwwhy wwwwould I be looking for you?

First Old Woman:

But you were banging on my door.

Epigenes:

I...I... I'd rather die!

First Old Woman:

Well then? What are you looking for, torch and all.

Epigenes:

I... I'm looking for someone from Wank City!

First Old Woman:

Who exactly?

Epigenes:

Who exactly? Well I'm not exactly looking for Mr Carpet Eater. You're probably the one who's expecting him!

First Old Woman: *Grabbing him by the arm*

By Aphrodite! Whether you like it or not, you're mine! Mine!

Epigenes: Shakes himself free.

Wait, woman, wait! We're not getting into the post-sixty-year-olds right now. We've postponed those for a while. Right now we're checking out the under twenty-year olds.

First Old Woman:

Under the previous Government, yes but under this one, sweetheart, you've got to enter us first!

Epigenes:

He who wants to play must play by the rules of the game.

First Old Woman:

But... you don't even eat your dinner by the rules of the game!

Epigenes: *Looks puzzled*

I... I'm sure you just said something but I just can't work it out. Now let me please knock on this door.

First Old Woman:

Not until you knock on mine first!

Epigenes:

But I told you, I don't need a knocker right now!

First Old Woman:

I know you love me darling! You're just shocked you've found me outside the house. Come, bring your lips closer to mine!

Epigenes:

Ehhh, No! Nonononono! I'm terrified your lover might appear any moment!

First Old Woman:

My lover? Which lover?

Epigenes:

The famous artist. Best artist in existence.

First Old Woman:

Oh yeah? And who might that be?

Epigenes:

You know, the one who paints all those funereal urns. Mr Death, himself and in person. You better run off or he might see you at your door.

First Old Woman:

I know, sweetheart, I know! I know exactly what you need to make you happy!

Epigenes:

By Zeus, and I know exactly what YOU need!

First Old Woman:

By Aphrodite! By the wonderful Aphrodite, who drew my name out of the lottery box. I'm not letting you go!

Epigenes:

You're off your head, old woman!

First Old Woman: Tries to grab him by the phallus but after a bit of a tussle he escapes.

Blah, blah, blah! You're coming to my bed, darling. Right now! Follow me!

Epigenes:

By Zeus! Look at her! No need to buy a bucket grip. Look at these teeth! Just send an old hag like this down the well and use her to grab all those buckets!

First Old Woman:

Once again she reaches for his phallus. Again he escapes.

Enough playing hard-to-get, silly child! Come with me now! Here's a good boy!

Epigenes:

I don't have to, old girl. At least not unless you've deposited in the State Coffers, one fiftieth of my possessions.

First Old Woman:

Oh yes you do! By Aphrodite, you certainly do have to come with me! You young folk are my greatest desire! I just love fucking with you!

Epigenes:

No way. I shall never agree to fuck with you. I just hate doing it with old and ugly women. It won't work.

First Old Woman: Brings a scroll out from under her skirt, an act that mortifies Epigenes.

You might not like it but this little decree will make you.

Epigenes:

Hell! Wwwwwhat is that?

First Old Woman:

Hehehehehe! This, my darling boy, is a decree that says you've got to follow me!

Epigenes:

Hell! Rrrrread out wwwwwhat it says!

First Old Woman:

All right, I'll read it for you.

Begins reading

"The women have hereby decreed that if a man desires to fuck a young woman, he may do so only after he fucks an old one. Further, should this young man refuse to obey by this statute, the older woman shall be authorised to drag the aforesaid young man by his cock, without any legal ramifications to her person or property!"

Epigenes:

Oh no! Oh nononono! Zeus help me! They're turning me into a victim of Procrustes. Too long for the bed and they chop it off. Too short for it and they stretch it! By Zeus, nooooooooooooo!

First Old Woman:

Our laws, young darling, must be obeyed!

Epigenes: *Thinks hurriedly and anxiously*

What if a mate or a neighbour comes along and gets me out of this mess with a financial arrangement?

First Old Woman:

But, darling, there is yet another law which says, men can only sign contracts below the value of one medimnus.

Epigenes: *Despondent*

Is there no reprieve?

First Old Woman:

Nope, no wiggling your bum out of this one, sweetie. It's your legal duty!

Epigenes:

Ha! I'll say I'm a businessman. You can never catch or prosecute businessmen!

First Old Woman:

Do that, honey and you'll be sorry!

Epigenes: *Deflated*

What can I do then?

First Old Woman:

Only one thing you can do, sweetheart: Follow me to my humble abode!

Epigenes: *Pleading*

Is this absolutely necessary?

First Old Woman:

Ohhhh, absolutely, necessary! More necessary than you can imagine! It's vitally necessary!

Epigenes:

Oh well! Get my death bed ready! Let flow the oregano all over it, break four vine branches to lay beneath me, spread the ribbons upon it, the funereal urns beside it and water jug by your entrance.

First Old Woman:

And don't forget the garland you'll be buying for me!

She grabs him by his phallus and pulls him behind her

Epigenes:

Quite right, quite right! One of those waxen ones that go with funerals because, once we get in there you'll become a carcass.

Enter Girl

Young Woman:

Hey, Where are you dragging him?

Epigenes' phallus responds to the Girl's appearance

First Old Woman:

He's mine and I'm taking him inside!

Young Woman:

Now, that wouldn't be a wise thing you'd be doing there.

He's a baby and you're more like his mother than his bed mate! If you women go on establishing laws like this one, the whole world will be cluttered with little Oedipuses!

First Old Woman: *Outraged*

Oh! Oh! You... you... you little slut! You jealous little slut. You've just thought this excuse up out of sheer jealousy! Right! I'll leave him to you then but you'll pay for this! You'll get your punishment for this. That's for sure!

Drops his phallus violently and goes inside.

Epigenes:

By Zeus the Saviour, sweetheart! You've done me a huge favour by getting this old woman off my back. And just for that wonderful deed, this evening I'll reward you with a huge and thick gift.

Young Woman becomes excited and pulls Epigenes by the phallus

Enter Second Old Woman, uglier than the first.

Second Old Woman: *Thunderously, behind Epigenes*

Heyyyy! Where are you taking this man, girl? You're violating laws, here! The law is written in plain writing: This boy has to fuck me first!

Epigenes:

Jumps with horror. Girl drops the phallus.

Hell! Wwwwwhere did you spring out of? You... you... you evil looking bit of mmmmmisery!

To the Young Woman

This... this... this filthy piece of ugliness is more frightening than the last.

Second Old Woman: *Takes his phallus and pulls him in the opposite direction.*

Come over here, please!

Epigenes: *Trembling with fear. To the Young Woman.*

Ohhhh, Ohhhh, please don't let her drag me away, darling, please! I beg you!

Young Woman starts crying and runs away back into the house.

Second Old Woman:

Silly boy! It's not me who's doing the dragging, it's the law!

Epigenes:

No, it's not the law at all. It's some sort of Empousa. Some weird beast... some big blister full of blood and ugly gore!

Second Old Woman: *Tugs sharply at his phallus*

Come on, you little wanker Come with me and stop whining!

Epigenes:

Hang on a minute, please! I... I need to go to the toilet first. It'll give me a bit of confidence. Otherwise, I'll have to do something right here and you'll see me go all red and brown with fear!

Second Old Woman:

Come on, courage, darling. Keep going, you'll be able to do your shitting in the house.

Epigenes:

I'm afraid, once you get me inside, I'll be doing more than what I need to be doing!

Indicating his testicles.

Look, I'll even leave you a couple of bits of excellent collateral!

Second Old Woman: *Takes a look at them then frowns*

Don't bother with the collaterals.

Enter Third Old Woman, even uglier than the previous two.

Third Old Woman: *Thunderously from behind them*

Oi! Oi! Hey you! Where in Hades's name are you going with her?

Epigenes: *Before he sees her*

I'm the one who's been dragged away, darling and may you gain many blessing for not just standing there and watching my torture, whoever you are!

He turns and sees the Third Old Woman who has now approached them.

By by by by by Hhhhherakles! By by by by Pa pa pa pan! By by by by the Corybantes!

By by by by the Dioscuri! Woeeeeee! Here's another horror to beat the other two most horrible of all horrors! What an awful sight! But what on earth is this... what on earth is this... thing? Somebody please tell me, I beg you! Is it some monkey splattered with make-up or some old carcass come up from the underworld?

Third Old Woman:

Enough with the comedy routine with you and come with me, now!

Second Old Woman:

No way! He's coming this way! This way boy!

Third Old Woman: *She grabs another part of his phallus*

I'll never ever let you go!

Second Old Woman:

Nor will I!

Epigenes:

Stop! You'll break me in two, you evil Harpes!

Second Old Woman:

According to the law you've got to follow me!

Third Old Woman:

Wrong! The law says that if the next woman is uglier, she gets him.

Epigenes:

But... but if I lose my lot with you two stacks of misery, what will I have left for that gorgeous girl in there?

Third Old Woman:

That's for you to work out. Right now you've got this to attend to!

Lewdly indicating her vagina

Epigenes:

All right then... Which of you do I fuck first, tell me, so I can escape all this?

Third Old Woman:

Can't you see? Walk this way.

Epigenes:

Then tell her to let go!

Second Old Woman:

You're coming with me, big boy!

Epigenes:

Only if she lets me go.

Third Old Woman:

Certainly not, by Zeus!

Second Old Woman:

Nor me!

Epigenes:

Things would be bloody rough if you two were captains of a ferryboat.

Second Old Woman:

Why is that?

Epigenes:

You'd be making your passengers very sick with all this pulling and tugging.

Third Old Woman:

Shut your face and come this way!

Second Old Woman:

Nope! You're walking this way boy!

Epigenes:

This is Cannonus' law for sure. Which is to say that I've got to fuck my accusers... but... how could I possibly work two boats with a single oar?

Second Old Woman:

No problem. Straight after a potful of bulbs, you'll be right!

Epigenes has been dragged to the front door of the Second Old Woman

Epigenes:

Oh, poor me! Here I am! Dragged all the way to the front door! Oh me, oh of cock!

Third Old Woman: *Yells at the Second Old Woman*

You think this is going to get you the goods? Forget it, woman! I'm charging into the

house right behind you! I'm coming in as well!

Epigenes:

Oh no! By the gods, oh no! Damn it, if I'm going to lose this battle let me at least suffer under one of you uglies, not both!

Third Old Woman:

Absolutely no choice in the matter, by Hekate!

Epigenes: *To the audience*

What a poor, wretched bastard I am, ey? Here I am, having to fuck a rotting hag all day and night, then, I'll have to jump off her and onto this old toad and start all over again! And this old toad is so old that I can see the funeral urn already standing by her cheeks. So aren't I damned? By Zeus the Saviour not only am I damned but I'm a heavily damned man and a poor suck at that, being forced to fuck these two beasts! Now, if I come up against some disaster while I'm on board these two rabid toads, bury me right at the mouth of the channel.

Indicating the Third Old Woman.

As for her, bury her alive in tar, put her feet in molten lead all the way up to her ankles and, instead of an urn stick her up on my grave.

The two old women drag Epigenes into the house and shut the door behind them. Enter Praxagora's MAID, swinging a wine bottle. She is clearly drunk. She addresses the chorus and the audience.

Maid:

Blessed, blessed, people! God's best country of them all! And of all, most blessed is my mistress herself, as well as all you women standing by your doors, neighbours, neighbours of the same neighbourhood, and me, too! I too, am most highly blessed, me, a maid with her hair washed in enchanting perfumes. O, glorious Zeus!

Takes a sip

Ha! Most enchanting though –more enchanting than all these enchanting aromas—are these enchanting little bottles of Thasian wine! Zeus bless it, it stays in your head for such a delightfully long time, they're still in there when all the other wines have long lost their all their enchanting bouquet and flown well off!

So! These Thasian wines are absolutely the best! Oh, yes! They are certainly the best! By the gods! If you drink these wines neat –no messing about with dirty water—they'll keep you chirpy and happy all the enchanting night long, that is, if you pick the one with the most enchanting bouquet!

Takes another sip

So!

Can one of you tell me where my master's got to? I mean, my mistress' master? I mean, my mistress' mister, master?

Cleinareti:

Hang around and I'm sure he'll be here soon...

Enter Blepyrus with a girl in each arm. All are garlanded and well inebriated.

Melistichi:

Here he is now. Looks like he's on his way to dinner.

Maid:

O, master! How enchanting! You are so lucky! So enchanting lucky! Twice, nay thrice enchanting lucky!

Blepyrus:

Me? I'm lucky?

Maid:

You, of course, you! More than any other man in the world, by Zeus, by enchanting Zeus!

She looks around her

Who could be luckier than you, master?

There are thirty thousand citizens out there and they all had a most enchanting dinner. You are the only one left!

Sostrati:

How lucky can you be!

Maid:

So... So... So!

Where are you off to now, then?

Blepyrus:

I'm off to dinner now.

Maid:

Ha! By Aphrodite! Yes, you're absolutely the very last one of them all. Yes, and your wife told me to pack you up and take you over there... You can take these little sweeties with you. You'll find some wine from Chios still there and some other lovely morsels. So don't be late.

To the chorus and the audience

And you, too, folks! All of you who love us and you, too, judges of the play –those of you who are NOT looking elsewhere!- come, follow me. It's all on the house.

Blepyrus: *To the maid*

Well, come on, girl, be generous! Invite them all, for goodness' sake! Feel free to invite the old man, the young man, the baby! There's dinner for everyone, made to their palette... If they rush home! Hahahahaha!

Me?

Fondles the girls lasciviously

I'm running off to have my dinner now and...

Indicating his phallus

Well, just as well I've got this little torch to show me the way home, ey?

Ariphrades:

So why hang around here folks? Off you go! Run! And while you're on your way down there, I'll sing an enchanting little table song...

Mrs Lush:

But first, let me make a tiny suggestion to our judges, and it is this:

Judges!

Mrs Generous:

The wise among you, please think wisely and judge me as the winner!

Mrs Hapy:

The friends of good humour, think humourously and judge me the winner!

Cleinareti:

So, yes, it's almost the lot of you I'm addressing this suggestion and ask you to vote for me! Make me the winner!

Melistichi:

Oh! And don't let the fact that the draw of the lot has brought me here, on the stage first, don't let that hinder your decision. Make me the winner!

Sostrati:

Oh! And don't break your oath as judges. You must judge us fairly, not like sluttish whores who can only remember their last fuck. Make me the winner!

Pause

Mrs Lush:

Hoorah, hoorah, hey, hey!

Mrs Happy:

Come on, darlings, move to the rhythm of this en-chanting tune and let's get ourselves to that dinner!

Mrs Generous:

If dinner is what we want!

Cleinareti:

Hoorah, hoorah, hey, hey!

Sostrati:

Kick your feet like the men from Crete

Dance to their own en-charming tune!

Feet are kicked high.

Blepyrus:

That's what I'm doing!

Hahahahaha!

Ariphrades:

And you, too, girls! So lithe, so supple, so... en-charming! Join us and move your bum!

Kick high to our rhythm, for soon, you'll see food like you've never seen before.

Mrs Lush:

Morsels like, greasy and salted saltfish and shark fish and catfish...

Mrs Happy:

And stinky skull fish and deadfish and braised beetles...

Mrs Generous:

And sparrows in oil and honey dripping from their beaks...

Cleinareti:

And ring-doves and chook-cocks and baked swallows...

Melistichi:

And marrow from rabbits in wine cooked very fine...

Sostrati:

And covered in cheese and in vinegar and silphium... And...

Mrs Lush:

Well, now that you've heard what's there, run, run raise the dust while you run and...

Mrs Generous:

Bring a plate with you and... just in case, put some beans on it!

Blepyrus:

Oh ho! How happy our gullets and tongues will be!

Mrs Happy:

We won, we won, we won!

Cleinareti:

As one, one, one!

Melistichi:
Kick your legs Girls
Sostrati:
Kick them high
Mrs Lush:
Let's go to dinner
Mrs Happy:
Let's say, hoorray!
All together:
Hoorrahhhhh!
Exit all

LYSISTRATA (Ian Johnston's Translation)

This edition is based on the [publicly available](http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/aristophanes/lysistrata.htm)²⁶⁶ translation by Ian Johnston

...

It's clear that in this play the male characters all wear the comic phallus, which is an integral part of the action throughout. Note, too, that in several places in *Lysistrata* there is some confusion and debate over which speeches are assigned to which people. These moments occur, for the most part, in short conversational exchanges. Hence, there may be some differences between the speakers in this text and those in other translations.

...

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

LYSISTRATA: a young Athenian wife
CALONICE: a mature married woman
MYRRHINE: a very attractive teenage wife.
LAMPITO: a strong young country wife from Sparta.
ISMENIA: a women from Thebes
SCYTHIAN GIRL: one of Lysistrata's slaves
MAGISTRATE: an elderly Athenian with white hair
CINESIAS: husband of Myrrhine
CHILD: infant son of Myrrhine and Cinesias
MANES: servant nurse of the Child
HERALD: A Spartan envoy
CHORUS OF OLD MEN
CHORUS OF OLD WOMEN
ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR
SPARTAN AMBASSADOR
WOMAN A: one of the wives following Lysistrata
WOMAN B: one of the wives following Lysistrata

²⁶⁶<http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/aristophanes/lysistrata.htm>

WOMAN C: one of the wives following Lysistrata

ARMED GUARDS: four police officials attending on the Magistrate

WOMEN: followers of Lysistrata

RECONCILIATION: a goddess of harmony

ATHENIAN DELEGATES

SPARTAN DELEGATES

SLAVES AND ATTENDANTS

[The action of the play takes place in a street in Athens, with the citadel on the Acropolis in the back, its doors facing the audience]

LYSISTRATA

If they'd called a Bacchic celebration
or some festival for Pan or Colias
or for Genetyllis, you'd not be able
to move around through all the kettle drums.
But as it is, there are no women here.

[Calonice enters, coming to meet Lysistrata]

Ah, here's my neighbour—at least she's come.²⁶⁷

Hello, Calonice.

CALONICE

Hello, Lysistrata.

What's bothering you, child? Don't look so annoyed.

It doesn't suit you. Your eyes get wrinkled.

LYSISTRATA

My heart's on fire, Calonice—I'm so angry
at married women, at us, because,
although men say we're devious characters . . .

CALONICE *[interrupting]*

Because by god we are!

LYSISTRATA *[continuing]*

. . . when I call them all
to meet here to discuss some serious business,
they just stay in bed and don't show up.

CALONICE

²⁶⁷ . . . at least she's come: Lysistrata is complaining that if the city had called a major festival all the women would be in the streets enjoying themselves. But none of them, it seems, has answered her invitation to a meeting (as we find out a few lines further on).

Ah, my dear, they'll come. It's not so easy
for wives to get away. We've got to fuss
about our husbands, wake up the servants,
calm and wash the babies, then give them food.

LYSISTRATA

But there are other things they need to do—
more important issues.

CALONICE

My dear Lysistrata,
why have you asked the women to meet here?
What's going on? Is it something big?

LYSISTRATA

It's huge.

CALONICE

And hard as well?

LYSISTRATA

Yes, by god, really hard.

CALONICE

Then why aren't we all here?

LYSISTRATA

I don't mean that!

If that were it, they'd all be charging here so fast.
No. It's something I've been playing with—
wrestling with for many sleepless nights.

CALONICE

If you've been working it like that, by now
it must have shrivelled up.

LYSISTRATA

Yes, so shrivelled up
that the salvation of the whole of Greece
is now in women's hands.

CALONICE

In women's hands?

Then it won't be long before we done for.

LYSISTRATA

It's up to us to run the state's affairs—
the Spartans would no longer be around.

CALONICE

If they weren't there, by god, not any more,
that would be good news.

LYSISTRATA

And then if all Boeotians
were totally destroyed!

CALONICE

Not all of them—
you'd have to save the eels.²⁶⁸

LYSISTRATA

As for Athens,
I won't say anything as bad as that.
You can imagine what I'd say. But now,
if only all the women would come here
from Sparta and Boeotia, join up with us,
if we worked together, we'd save Greece.

CALONICE

But what sensible or splendid act
could women do? We sit around playing
with our cosmetics, wearing golden clothes,
posing in Cimmerian silks and slippers.

LYSISTRATA

Those are the very things which I assume
will save us—short dresses, perfumes, slippers,
make up, and clothing men can see through.

CALONICE

How's that going to work?

LYSISTRATA

No man living
will lift his spear against another man . . .

CALONICE [interrupting]

²⁶⁸ . . . save the eels: At the time Lysistrata was first produced, the Athenians and Spartans had been fighting for many years. The Boeotians were allies of the Spartans. Boeotia was famous for its eels, considered a luxury item in Athens.

By the two goddesses, I must take my dress and dye it yellow.²⁶⁹

LYSISTRATA [continuing]

. . . or pick up a shield . . .

CALONICE [interrupting again]

I'll have to wear my very best silk dress.

LYSISTRATA [continuing]

. . . or pull out his sword.

CALONICE

I need to get some shoes.

LYSISTRATA

O these women, they should be here by now!

CALONICE

Yes, by god! They should have sprouted wings and come here hours ago.

LYSISTRATA

They're true Athenians,
you'll see—everything they should be doing
they postpone till later. But no one's come
from Salamis or those towns on the coast.

CALONICE [with an obscene gesture]

I know those women—they were up early
on their boats riding the mizzen mast.

LYSISTRATA

I'd have bet
those women from Acharnia would come
and get here first. But they've not shown up.

CALONICE

Well, Theogenes' wife will be here.

I saw her hoisting sail to come.²⁷⁰ Hey, look!

Here's a group of women coming for you.

And there's another one, as well. Hello!

Hello there! Where they from?

[Various women start arriving from all directions]

²⁶⁹ . . . dye it yellow: The two goddesses are Demeter and her daughter Persephone. The Athenian women frequently invoke them.

²⁷⁰ Theogenes: a well-known merchant and ship owner.

LYSISTRATA

Those? From Anagyrus.

CALONICE

My god, it seem we're kicking up a stink.²⁷¹

[Enter Myrrhine]

MYRRHINE Hey, Lysistrata, did we get here late?

What's the matter? Why are you so quiet?

LYSISTRATA

I'm not pleased with you, Myrrhine. You're late.

And this is serious business.

MYRRHINE

It was dark.

I had trouble tracking down my waist band.

If it's such a big deal, tell these women.

LYSISTRATA

No, let's wait a while until the women
from Boeotia and from Sparta get here.

MYRRHINE

All right. That sounds like the best idea.

Hey, here comes Lampito.

[Lampito enters with some other Spartan women and with Ismenia, a woman
from Thebes]

LYSISTRATA

Hello Lampito,

my dear friend from Sparta. How beautiful
you look, so sweet, such a fine complexion.

And your body looks so fit, strong enough
to choke a bull.

²⁷¹ . . . a stink: Calonice is making an obscure joke on the name Anagyrus, a political district named after a bad-smelling plant.

LAMPITO²⁷²

Yes, by the two gods,
I could pull that off.²⁷³ I do exercise
and work out to keep my bum well toned.

CALONICE [fondling Lampito's bosom]
What an amazing pair of breasts you've got!

LAMPITO

O, you stroke me like I'm a sacrifice.

LYSISTRATA [looking at Ismenia]
And this young woman—where's she from?

LAMPITO

By the twin gods, she's an ambassador—
she's from Boeotia.

MYRRHINE [looking down Ismenia's elegant clothes]
Of course, from Boeotia.
She's got a beautiful lowland region.

CALONICE [peering down Ismenia's dress to see her pubic hair]
Yes. By god, she keeps that territory
elegantly groomed.

LYSISTRATA

Who's the other girl?

LAMPITO

A noble girl, by the two gods, from Corinth.

CALONICE [inspecting the girl's bosom and buttocks]
A really noble girl, by Zeus—it's clear
she's got good lines right here, back here as well.

LAMPITO

²⁷²LAMPITO: In Aristophanes' text, Lampito and other Spartans use a parody of a Spartan dialect, a style of speaking significantly different from (although related to) Athenian Greek. Translators have dealt with this in different ways, usually by giving the Spartans a recognizable English dialect, for example, from the Southern States or Scotland, or English with a foreign accent. The difference between the Spartans' speech and the language of the others reflects the political antagonism between the Athenians and Spartans. Here I have not tried to follow this trend. My main reasons for doing so are (in brief) that, first, some dialects are in places incomprehensible to some readers or have been made irrelevant (e.g., Jack Lindsay's Scottish language in the Bantam edition of Aristophanes or the erratic Russian English of the Perseus translation) and, second, I wish to leave the choice of dialect or accent up to the imagination of the readers or the directors of stage productions (who might like to experiment with dialects which will connect with their particular audiences more immediately than any one I might select).

²⁷³ . . . the two gods: Spartans commonly invoke the divine twins Castor and Pollux, brothers of Helen and Clytemnestra.

All right, who's the one who called the meeting
and brought this bunch of women here?

LYSISTRATA

I did.

LAMPITO

Then lay out what it is you want from us.

MYRRHINE

Come on, dear lady, tell us what's going on,
what's so important to you.

LYSISTRATA

In a minute.

Before I say it, I'm going to ask you
one small question.

CALONICE

Ask whatever you want.

LYSISTRATA

Don't you miss the fathers of your children
when they go off to war? I understand
you all have husbands far away from home.

CALONICE

My dear, it's five full months my man's been gone—
off in Thrace taking care of Eucrates.

MYRRHINE

And mine's been off in Pylos seven whole months.²⁷⁴

LAMPITO

And mine—as soon as he gets home from war
he grabs his shield and buggers off again.

LYSISTRATA

As for old flames and lovers—they're none left.
And since Milesians went against us,
I've not seen a decent eight-inch dildo.

²⁷⁴ . . . after Eucrates: Thrace is a region to the north of Greece, a long way from Athens. Eucrates was an Athenian commander in the region. Pylos is a small area in the south Peloponnese which the Athenians had occupied for a number of years.

Yes, it's just leather, but it helps us out.²⁷⁵
 So would you be willing, if I found a way,
 to work with me to make this fighting end?

MYRRHINE

By the twin goddesses, yes. Even if in just one day I had to pawn this dress and drain
 my purse.

CALONICE

Me too—they could slice me up
 like a flat fish, then use one half of me to get a peace.

LAMPITO

I'd climb up to the top
 of Taygetus to get a glimpse of peace.²⁷⁶

LYSISTRATA

All right I'll tell you. No need to keep quiet
 about my plan. Now, ladies, if we want
 to force the men to have a peace, well then,
 we must give up . . .

MYRRHINE [interrupting]

Give up what? Tell us!

LYSISTRATA

Then, will you do it?

MYRRHINE

Of course, we'll do it,
 even if we have to die.

LYSISTRATA

All right then—
 we have to give up all male penises.

[The women react with general consternation]

Why do you turn away? Where are you going?
 How come you bite your lips and shake your heads?
 And why so pale? How come you're crying like that?
 Will you do it or not? What will it be?

²⁷⁵ . . . went against us: Miletus had rebelled against Athens in the previous year. That city was associated with sexuality and (in this case) the manufacture of sexual toys.

²⁷⁶ . . . Taygetus: a high mountain in the Peloponnese.

MYRRHINE

I won't do it. So let the war drag on.

CALONICE

I won't either. The war can keep on going.

LYSISTRATA

How can you say that, you flatfish? Just now
you said they could slice you into halves.

CALONICE

Ask what you like, but not that! If I had to,
I'd be willing to walk through fire—sooner than
than give up screwing. There's nothing like it,
dear Lysistrata.

LYSISTRATA

And what about you?

MYRRHINE

I'd choose the fire, too.

LYSISTRATA

What a debased race
we women are! It's no wonder men write
tragedies about us. We're good for nothing
but screwing Poseidon in the bath tub.
But my Spartan friend, if you were willing,
just you and me, we still could pull it off.
So help me out.

LAMPITO

By the twin gods, it's hard
for women to sleep all by themselves
without a throbbing cock. But we must try.
We've got to have a peace.

LYSISTRATA

O you're a true friend!
The only real woman in this bunch.

CALONICE

If we really do give up what you say—
I hope it never happens!—would doing that

make peace more likely?

LYSISTRATA

By the two goddesses, yes,
much more likely. If we sit around at home
with all our make up on and in those gowns
made of Amorgos silk, naked underneath,
with our crotches neatly plucked, our husbands
will get hard and want to screw. But then,
if we stay away and won't come near them,
they'll make peace soon enough. I'm sure of it.

LAMPITO

Yes, just like they say—when Menelaus saw Helen's naked tits, he dropped his sword.²⁷⁷

CALONICE

But my friend, what if our men ignore us?

LYSISTRATA

Well then, in the words of Pherecrates,
you'll find another way to skin the dog.²⁷⁸

CALONICE

But fake penises aren't any use at all.
What if they grab us and haul us by force
into the bedroom.

LYSISTRATA

Just grab the door post.

CALONICE

And if they beat us?

LYSISTRATA

Then you must submit—
but do it grudgingly, don't cooperate.
There's no enjoyment for them when they just
force it in. Besides, there are other ways
to make them suffer. They'll soon surrender.

²⁷⁷ . . . naked tits: In a famous story, Menelaus went storming through Troy looking for his wife, Helen, in order to kill her. But when he found her, he was so overcome by her beauty that he relented and took her back home to Sparta.

²⁷⁸Pherecrates: an Athenian comic dramatist. The line may be a quotation from one of his plays.

No husband ever had a happy life
if he did not get on well with his wife.

CALONICE

Well, if you two think it's good, we do, too.

LAMPITO

I'm sure we can persuade our men to work
for a just peace in everything, no tricks.
But how'll you convince the Athenian mob?
They're mad for war.

LYSISTRATA

That's not your worry.
We'll win them over.

LAMPITO

I don't think so—
not while they have triremes under sail
and that huge treasure stashed away
where your goddess makes her home.²⁷⁹

LYSISTRATA

But that's all been well taken care of.
Today we'll capture the Acropolis.
The old women have been assigned the task.
While we sit here planning all the details,
they'll pretend they're going there to sacrifice
and seize the place.

LAMPITO

You've got it all worked out.
What you say sounds good.

LYSISTRATA

All right Lampito,
let's swear an oath as quickly as we can.
That way we'll be united.

LAMPITO

Recite the oath.
Then we'll all swear to it.

²⁷⁹ . . . where your goddess makes her home: The financial reserves of the Athenian state were stored in the Acropolis

LYSISTRATA

That's good advice.

Where's that girl from Scythia?

[The Scythian slave steps forward. She's holding a small shield]

Why stare like that?

Put down your shield, the hollow part on top.

Now, someone get me a victim's innards.

CALONICE

Lysistrata, what sort of oath is this

we're going to swear?

LYSISTRATA

What sort of oath?

One on a shield, just like they did back then
in Aeschylus' play—with slaughtered sheep.

CALONICE

You can't, Lysistrata, not on a shield,
you can't swear an oath for peace on that.

LYSISTRATA

What should the oath be, then?

CALONICE

Let's get a stallion,
a white one, and then offer up its guts!

LYSISTRATA

Why a white horse?

CALONICE

Then how will we make our oath?

LYSISTRATA

I'll tell you, by god, if you want to hear.
Put a large dark bowl down on the ground,
then sacrifice a jug of Thasian wine,
and swear we'll never pour in water.

LAMPITO

Now, if you ask me, that's a super oath!

LYSISTRATA

Someone get the bowl and a jug of wine.

[The Scythian girl goes back in the house and returns with a bowl and a jug of wine. Calonice takes the bowl]

CALONICE

Look, dear ladies, at this splendid bowl.
Just touching this gives instant pleasure.

LYSISTRATA

Put it down. Now join me and place your hands
on our sacrificial victim.

[The women gather around the bowl and lay their hands on the wine jug.
Lysistrata starts the ritual prayer]

O you,

Goddess of Persuasion and the bowl
which we so love, accept this sacrifice,
a women's offering, and be kind to us.

[Lysistrata opens the wine jug and lets the wine pour out into the bowl]

CALONICE

Such healthy blood spurts out so beautifully!

LAMPITO

By Castor, that's a mighty pleasant smell.

MYRRHINE

Ladies, let me be the first to swear the oath.

CALONICE

No, by Aphrodite, no—not unless
your lot is drawn.

LYSISTRATA [holds up a bowl full of wine]

Grab the brim, Lampito,
you and all the others. Someone repeat
for all the rest of you the words I say—
that way you'll pledge your firm allegiance:
No man, no husband and no lover . . .

CALONICE [taking the oath]

No man, no husband and no lover . . .

LYSISTRATA

. . . will get near me with a stiff prick. . . Come on,
say it!

CALONICE

. . . will get near me with a stiff prick.

O Lysistrata, my knees are getting weak!

LYSISTRATA

At home I'll live completely without sex . . .

CALONICE

At home I'll live completely without sex . . .

LYSISTRATA

. . . wearing saffron silks, with lots of make up . . .

CALONICE

. . . wearing saffron silks, with lots of make up . . .

LYSISTRATA

. . . to make my man as horny as I can.

CALONICE

. . . to make my man as horny as I can.

LYSISTRATA

If against my will he takes me by force . . .

CALONICE

If against my will he takes me by force . . .

LYSISTRATA

. . . I'll be a lousy lay, not move a limb.

CALONICE

. . . I'll be a lousy lay, not move a limb.

LYSISTRATA

I'll not raise my slippers up towards the roof . . .

CALONICE

I'll not raise my slippers up towards the roof . . .

LYSISTRATA

. . . nor crouch down like a lioness on all fours.

CALONICE

. . . nor crouch down like a lioness on all fours.

LYSISTRATA

If I do all this, then I may drink this wine.

CALONICE

If I do all this, then I may drink this wine.

LYSISTRATA

If I fail, may this glass fill with water.

CALONICE

If I fail, may this glass fill with water.

LYSISTRATA

Do all you women swear this oath?

ALL

We do.

LYSISTRATA

All right. I'll make the offering.

[Lysistrata drinks some of the wine in the bowl]

CALONICE

Just your share,

my dear, so we all stay firm friends.

[A sound of shouting is heard from offstage]

LAMPITO

What's that noise?

LYSISTRATA

It's what I said just now—the women
have already captured the Acropolis.

So, Lampito, you return to Sparta—
do good work among your people there.

Leave these women here as hostages.

We'll go in the citadel with the others
and help them barricade the doors.

CALONICE

Don't you think the men will band together
and march against us—and quickly, too.

LYSISTRATA

I'm not so worried about them. They'll come
carrying their torches and making threats,
but they'll not pry these gates of ours apart,
not unless they agree to our demands.

CALONICE

Yes, by Aphrodite, that's right. If not,

we'll be labelled weak and gutless women.

[The women enter the citadel. The Chorus of Old Men enters slowly, for they are quite decrepit. They are carrying wood for a fire, glowing coals to start the blaze, and torches to light.]

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Keep moving, Draces, pick up the pace,
even if your shoulder's tired lugging
all this heavy fresh-cut olive wood.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Alas, so many unexpected things take place in a long life. O Strymodorus, ' ' who'd ever think they'd hear such news about our women—the ones we fed in our own homes are truly bad. The sacred statue is in their hands, they've seized my own Acropolis and block the doors with bolts and bars.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Come on Philurgus, let's hurry there as fast as we can go up to the city. We'll set these logs down in a circle, stack them so we keep them bottled up, ' those women who've combined to do this. Then with our own hands we'll set alight a single fire and, as we all agreed in the vote we took, we'll burn them all, beginning first with Lycon's wife.²⁸⁰

CHORUS OF OLD MEN

They'll won't be making fun of me, by Demeter, not while I'm still alive. That man Cleomenes, who was the first to take our citadel, went back unharmed. Snorting Spartan pride he went away, once he'd handed me his weapons, wearing a really tiny little cloak, hungry, filthy, with his hairy face.

²⁸⁰ . . . Lycon's wife: a woman in Athens famous for her promiscuity.

He'd gone six years without a bath.²⁸¹

That's how I fiercely hemmed him in,
our men in ranks of seventeen
we even slept before the gates.
So with these foes of all the gods
and of Euripides, as well, will I not check their insolence?
If I do not, then let my trophies all disappear from Marathon.²⁸²

The rest of the journey I have to make
is uphill to the Acropolis.
We must move fast, but how do we haul
this wood up there without a donkey?
This pair of logs makes my shoulders sore.
But still we've got to soldier on
giving our fire air to breathe.
It may go out when I'm not looking
just as I reach my journey's end.

[They blow on the coals to keep them alight. The smoke comes blowing up in their faces. The Old Men fall back, coughing and rubbing their eyes]

O the smoke!

Lord Hercules, how savagely
it jumped out from the pot right in my face
and bit my eyes like a raving bitch.
It works just like a Lemnian fire
or else it wouldn't use its teeth
to feed on fluids in my eye.
We need to hurry to the citadel
and save the goddess. If not now,
O Laches, when should we help her out?²⁸³

[The men blow on the coals and are again overpowered by the smoke]

²⁸¹Cleomenes, a king of Sparta, once came with a small army to Athens (in 508) to help the oligarch party. He had a very hostile reception and took refuge in the Acropolis, where he stayed under siege for two days. A truce was arranged and the Spartans left peacefully.

²⁸²... from Marathon: Euripides is the famous tragic dramatist, a younger contemporary of Aristophanes. Marathon was the site of the great Greek victory of the Persian expeditionary forces in 490 BC, a high point of Athenian military achievement.

²⁸³... help her out: The reference to Lemnian fire is not clear. The island of Lemnos perhaps had some volcanic activity, or else the reference is to the women of Lemnos who killed all their husbands. There is a pun on the Greek word for Lemnos and the word in the same speech referring to material in the eye.

Damn and blast this smoke!

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Thanks to the gods, the fire's up again—

a lively flame. So what if, first of all, we placed our firewood right down here, then put

a vine branch in the pot, set it alight,
and charged the door like a battering ram?

We'll order women to remove the bars,
and, if they refuse, we'll burn down the doors.

We'll overpower them with the smoke.

All right, put down your loads.

[The men set down their logs. Once again the smoke is too much for them]

This bloody smoke!

Is there any general here from Samos
who'll help us with this wood?²⁸⁴

[He sets down his load of wood]

Ah, that's better.

They're not shrinking my spine any more.

All right, pot, it's now your job to arouse
a fire from those coals, so first of all,
I'll have a lighted torch and lead the charge.

O lady Victory, stand with us here,
so we can set our trophy up in there,
defeat those women in our citadel
put down this present insolence of theirs.

[The Old Men stack their logs in a pile and start lighting their torches on the coals. The Chorus of Old Women enters. They are carrying pitchers of water]

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Ladies, I think I see some flames and smoke,
as if a fire was burning. We'd better hurry. ‘ ‘

CHORUS OF OLD WOMEN

We have to fly, Nicodice, fly
before Critylla is burned up
and Calyce, too, by nasty winds

²⁸⁴ . . . Samos: Samos is an important island near Athens. A number of the generals of Athenian forces came from there.

and old men keen to wipe them out.
 But I'm afraid I'll be too late
 to help them out. I've only just
 filled up my pitcher in the dark.
 It was not easy—at the well
 the place was jammed and noisy too
 with clattering pots, pushy servants,
 and tattooed slaves. But I was keen
 to carry water to these fires
 to help my country's women.

I've heard some dim and dull old men
 are creeping here and carrying logs—
 a great big load—to our fortress,
 as if to warm our public baths.
 They're muttering the most awful things
 how with their fire they need to turn
 these hateful women into ash.
 But, goddess, may I never see
 them burned like that—but witness how
 they rescue cities, all of Greece,
 from war and this insanity.
 That's why, golden-crested goddess
 who guards our city, these women
 now have occupied your shrine.
 O Tritogeneia, I summon you
 to be my ally—if any man
 sets them on fire, help us out
 as we carry this water up.²⁸⁵

[The Old Men have lit their torches and are about to move against the Acropolis.
 The Old Women are blocking their way]

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Hold on, ladies. What this I see? Men—
 dirty old men—hard at work. Honest types,

²⁸⁵Sommerstein observes (p. 171) that the epithet Tritogeneia ("Tritoborn") refers to Athena's birth beside the River Triton or Lake Tritonis in North Africa.

useful, god-fearing men, could never do
the things you do.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

What's happening here
is something we did not expect to see—
a swarm of women standing here like this
to guard the doors.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

So you're afraid of us?
Does it look like there's a huge crowd of us?
You're seeing just a fraction of our size—
there are thousands more.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Hey there, Phaedrias!
Shall we stop her nattering on like this?
Someone hit her, smack her with a log.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Let's put our water jugs down on the ground,
in case they want to lay their hands on us.
Down there they won't get in our way.

[The Old Women set down their water jugs]

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

By god, someone should hit them on the jaw,
two or three times, and then, like Boupalus,
they'll won't have anything much more to say.²⁸⁶

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Come on then—strike me. I'm here, waiting.
No other bitch will ever grab your balls.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Shut up, or I hit you—snuff out your old age.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Try coming up and touching Stratyllis
with your finger tips!

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

²⁸⁶ . . . much more to say: Boupalus was a sculptor from Chios.

What if I thrashed you
with my fists? Would you do something nasty?

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

With my teeth I'll rip out your lungs and guts!

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Euripides is such a clever poet—
the man who says there's no wild animal
more shameless than a woman.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Come on then,
Rhodippe, let's pick up our water jugs.

[The Old Women pick up their water jugs again]

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Why have you damned women even come here
carrying this water?

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

And why are you
bringing fire, you old corpse? Do you intend
to set yourself on fire?

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Me? To start a blaze
and roast your friends.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

I'm here to douse your fire.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

You'll put out my fire?

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Yes I will. You'll see.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS [waving his torch]

I don't know why I'm not just doing it,
frying you in this flame.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Get yourself some soap.

I'm giving you a bath.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

You'll wash me,
you old wrinkled prune?

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Yes, it will be
just like your wedding night.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Listen to her!

She's a nervy bitch!

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

I'm a free woman.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

I'll make you shut up!

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

You don't judge these things.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Set her hair on fire!

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Get to work, Achelous.²⁸⁷

[She throws her jar of water over the Leader of the Men's Chorus, and,
following the leader's example the women throw water all over the old men]

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

O, that's bad!

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Was that hot enough?

[The women continue to throw water on the old men]

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Hot enough?

Won't you stop doing that? What are you doing?

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

I'm watering you to make you bloom.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

I'm too old and withered. I'm shaking.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Well, you've got your fire. Warm yourselves up.

²⁸⁷ . . . to work, Achelous: The Achelous was a large well-known river in northern Greece.

[A Magistrate enters with an armed escort of four public guards and slaves with crowbars and some attendant soldiers]

MAGISTRATE

Has not our women's lewdness shown itself
in how they beat their drums for Sabazius,
that god of excess, or on their rooftops
shed tears for Adonis? That's what I heard
one time in our assembly. Demonstrates—
what a stupid man he is—was arguing
that we should sail to Sicily. Meanwhile,
his wife was dancing round and screaming out
“Alas, Adonis!” While Demonstrates talked,
saying we should levy soldiers from Zacynthus,
the woman was on the roof top, getting drunk
and yelling out “Weep for Adonis! Weep.”²⁸⁸
But he kept on forcing his opinion through,
that mad brutal ox, whom the gods despise.
That's just the kind of loose degenerate stuff
that comes from women.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Wait until I tell you
the insolent things these women did to us—
all their abuse—they dumped their water jugs
on us. So now we have to dry our clothes.
We look as if we've pissed ourselves.

MAGISTRATE

By Poseidon,
god of the salt seas, it serves you right.
We men ourselves share in the blame for this.
We teach our wives their free and easy life,
and so intrigues come flowering out from them.
Here's what we tell some working artisan,
“O goldsmith, about that necklace I bought here—

²⁸⁸ . . . Weep!": Sabazius was a popular foreign god associated with drinking (like Dionysus). Adonis was a mortal youth loved by Aphrodite. An annual festival was celebrated in his memory. Demonstrates was a politician promoting the disastrous Athenian military expedition to Sicily. Zacynthus is an island off the Peloponnese, an ally of Athens.

last night my wife was dancing and the bolt
slipped from its hole. I have to take a boat
to Salamis. If you've got time tonight,
you could visit her with that tool of yours
and fix the way the bolt sits in her hole."

Another man goes to the shoemaker,
a strapping lad with an enormous prick,
and says, "O shoemaker, a sandal strap
is pinching my wife's tender little toe.
Could you come at noon and rub her strap,
stretch it really wide?" That's the sort of thing
that leads to all this trouble. Look at me,
a magistrate in charge of finding oars
and thus in need of money now—these women
have shut the treasury doors to keep me out.
But standing here's no use.

[He calls out to his two slaves]

Bring the crow bars.

I'll stop these women's insolence myself.

[He turns to the armed guards he has brought with him]

What are you gaping at, you idiot!

And you—what are you looking at?

Why are you doing nothing—just staring round
looking for a tavern? Take these crowbars
to the doors there, and then pry them open.
Come, I'll work to force them with you.

LYSISTRATA [opening the doors and walking out]

No need to use those crowbars. I'm coming out—
and of my own free will. Why these crowbars?
This calls for brains and common sense, not force.

MAGISTRATE

Is that so, you slut? Where's that officer?

Seize that woman! Tie her hands!

LYSISTRATA

By Artemis, he may be a public servant, but if

he lays a finger on me, he'll be sorry.

MAGISTRATE [to the first armed guard]

Are you scared of her? Grab her round the waist!

You there, help him out! And tie her up!

OLD WOMAN A²⁸⁹

By Pandrosus, if you lift a hand to her,

I'll beat you until you shit yourself!

[The armed guard is so terrified he shits]

MAGISTRATE

Look at the mess you made! Where is he,
that other officer?

[The Magistrate turns to a third armed officer]

Tie up this one first,

the one who's got such a dirty mouth.

OLD WOMAN B

By the god of light, if you just touch her,

you'll quickly need a cup to fix your eyes.²⁹⁰

[This officer shits his pants and runs off. The Magistrate turns to a fourth officer]

MAGISTRATE

Who's this here? Arrest her! I'll put a stop
to all women in this demonstration!

OLD WOMEN C

By bull-bashing Artemis, if you move

to touch her, I'll rip out all your hair

until you yelp in pain.

[The fourth officer shits himself and runs off in terror]

MAGISTRATE

This is getting bad.

There're no officers left. We can't let ourselves

be beaten back by women. Come on then, you Scythians, form up your ranks.²⁹¹ Then
charge.

²⁸⁹OLD WOMAN A: In modern productions the old women who speak in this scene either come out of the gates to the Acropolis or are members of the Chorus. Alternatively the speeches could be assigned to the characters we have met earlier (Myrrhine and Calonice), who have emerged from the Acropolis behind Lysistrata.

²⁹⁰ . . . fix your eyes: Black eyes were treated with a small cup placed over the eye to reduce the swelling.

²⁹¹Scythians: The armed guards accompanying the Magistrate are traditionally Scythian archers.

Go at them!

LYSISTRATA

By the two goddesses, you'll see—
we've got four companies of women inside,
all fighting fit and fully armed.

MAGISTRATE

Come on, Scythians, twist their arms behind them!

LYSISTRATA [shouting behind her]

Come out here from where you are in there,
all you female allies, on the double—
you market women who sell grain and eggs,
garlic and vegetables, and those who run
our bakeries and taverns, to the attack!

[Many women emerge from the Acropolis, armed in various ways]

Hit them, stomp on them, scratch their eyeballs,
cover them with your abuse! Don't hold back!

[A general tumult occurs in which the women beat back the Scythian guards]

LYSISTRATA

That's enough! Back off! Don't strip the armour
from those you have defeated.

[The armed women return into the Acropolis]

MAGISTRATE

Disaster!

My guards have acted quite disgracefully.

LYSISTRATA

What did you expect? Did you really think
you were facing a bunch of female slaves?
Or is it your belief that mere women
have no spirit in them?

MAGISTRATE

Spirit? By Apollo, yes! If they're near any man who's got some wine.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

In this land you're a magistrate, but here
your words are useless. Why even try
to have a conversation with these bitches?

Don't you know they've just given us a bath
in our own cloaks? And they did not use soap!

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Listen, friend. You should never raise your hand
against your neighbour. If you do, then I
will have to punch you in the eye. I'd prefer
to sit quietly at home, like a young girl,
and not come here to injure anyone
or agitate the nest, unless someone
disturbs the hive and makes me angry.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN

O Zeus, however will we find a way
to deal with these wild beasts? What's going on
is no longer something we can bear.
But we must question them and find out why
they are so angry with us, why they wish
to seize the citadel of Cranaus, the holy ground where people do not go,
on the great rock of the Acropolis.²⁹²

LEADER OF THE MEN'S CHORUS [to Magistrate]

So ask her. Don't let them win you over.
Challenge everything they say. If we left
this matter without seeking out the cause
that would be disgraceful.

MAGISTRATE [turning to Lysistrata]

Well then, by god,
first of all I'd like to know the reason
why you planned to use these barriers here
to barricade our citadel.

LYSISTRATA

To get your money
so you couldn't keep on paying for war.

MAGISTRATE

Is it money that's the cause of war?

LYSISTRATA

²⁹² . . . of the Acropolis: Cranaus was a legendary king of Athens.

Yes, and all the rest of the corruption.
 Peisander and our leading politicians
 need a chance to steal. That's the reason
 they're always stirring up disturbances.²⁹³
 Well, let the ones who wish to do this
 do what they want, but from this moment on
 they'll get no more money.

MAGISTRATE

What will you do?

LYSISTRATA

You ask me that? We'll control it.

MAGISTRATE

You mean
 you're going to manage all the money?

LYSISTRATA

You consider that so strange? Isn't it true
 we take care of all the household money?

MAGISTRATE

That's not the same.

LYSISTRATA

Why not?

MAGISTRATE

We need the cash
 to carry on the war.

LYSISTRATA

Well, first of all,
 there should be no fighting.

MAGISTRATE

But without war
 how will we save ourselves?

LYSISTRATA

We'll do that.

MAGISTRATE

You?

²⁹³ . . . up disturbances: Peisander was a leading Athenian politician, suspected of favouring the war for selfish reasons.

LYSISTRATA

That's right—us.

MAGISTRATE

This is outrageous!

LYSISTRATA

We'll save you,

even if that goes against your wishes.

MAGISTRATE

What you're saying is madness!

LYSISTRATA

You're angry,

but nonetheless we have to do it.

MAGISTRATE

By Demeter, this is against the law!

LYSISTRATA

My dear fellow, we have to rescue you.

MAGISTRATE

And if I don't agree?

LYSISTRATA

Then our reasons

are that much more persuasive.

MAGISTRATE

Is it true

you're really going to deal with peace and war? LYSISTRATA

We're going to speak to that.

MAGISTRATE [with a threatening gesture]

Then speak fast,

or else you may well start to cry.

LYSISTRATA

Then listen—

and try to keep your fists controlled.

MAGISTRATE

I can't.

It's hard for me to hold back my temper.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

It's more likely you're the one who'll weep.

MAGISTRATE

Shut up your croaking, you old bag.

[To Lysistrata]

You—talk to me.

LYSISTRATA

I'll do that. Up to now through this long war
we kept silent about all those things
you men were doing. We were being modest.
And you did not allow us to speak up,
although we were not happy. But still,
we listened faithfully to you, and often
inside the house we heard your wretched plans
for some great deed. And if we ached inside,
we'd force a smile and simply ask, "Today
in the assembly did the men propose
a treaty carved in stone decreeing peace?"
But our husbands said, "Is that your business?
Why don't you shut up?" And I'd stay silent.

OLD WOMAN

I'd not have kept my mouth shut.

MAGISTRATE [to Lysistrata]

You'd have been smacked
if you hadn't been quiet and held your tongue.

LYSISTRATA

So there I am at home, saying nothing.
Then you'd tell us of another project,
even stupider than before. We'd say, '
"How can you carry out a scheme like that?
It's foolish." Immediately he'd frown
and say to me, "If you don't spin your thread,
you'll get a major beating on your head.
War is men's concern."

MAGISTRATE

Yes, by god!

That man spoke the truth.

LYSISTRATA

You idiot!

Is that sensible—not to take advice

when what you're proposing is so silly?

Then we heard you speaking in the streets,

asking openly, "Are there any men

still left here in our land?" and someone said,

"By god, there's no one." Well then, after that

it seemed to us we had to rescue Greece

by bringing wives into a single group

with one shared aim. Why should we delay?

If you'd like to hear us give some good advice,

then start to listen, keep your mouths quite shut,

the way we did. We'll save you from yourselves.

MAGISTRATE

You'll save us? What you're saying is madness.

I'm not going to put up with it!

LYSISTRATA

Shut up!

MAGISTRATE

Should I shut up for you, you witch, someone

with a scarf around her head? I'd sooner die!

LYSISTRATA

If this scarf of mine really bothers you,

take it and wrap it round your head. Here—

[Lysistrata takes off her scarf and wraps it over the Magistrate's head.]

Now keep quiet!

OLD WOMAN A

And take this basket, too!

LYSISTRATA

Now put on a waist band, comb out wool, and chew some beans. This business of
the war

we women will take care of.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Come on, women,
get up and leave those jars. It's our turn now
to join together with our friends.

WOMEN'S CHORUS

With dancing I'll never tire
weariness won't grip my knees
or wear me out. In everything
I'll strive to match the excellence
of these women here—in nature,
wisdom, boldness, charm, and prudent virtue in the way
they love their country.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

You grandchildren of the bravest women,
sprung from fruitful stinging nettles,
let your passion drive you forward
and don't hold back, for now you've got
the winds of fortune at your back.

LYSISTRATA

O Aphrodite born on Cyprus
and, you, sweet passionate Eros, breathe
sexual longing on our breasts and thighs
and fill our men with tortuous desire
and make their pricks erect. If so, I think
we'll win ourselves a name among the Greeks
as those who brought an end to warfare.

MAGISTRATE

What will you do?

LYSISTRATA

For a start, we'll stop
you men hanging around the market place
armed with spears and acting up like fools.

OLD WOMAN A

Yes, that's right, by Paphian Aphrodite!

LYSISTRATA

Right now in the market they stroll around

among the pots and vegetables, fully armed,
like Corybantes.²⁹⁴

MAGISTRATE

Yes, that's right—
it's what brave men should do.

LYSISTRATA

It looks so silly—
going off to purchase tiny little birds
while carrying a Gorgon shield.²⁹⁵

OLD WOMAN A

By god,
I myself saw a cavalry commander—
he had long hair and was on horseback—
pouring out some pudding he'd just bought
from an old woman into his helmet.
Another Thracian was waving his spear
and his shield, as well, just like Tereus,
and terrifying the woman selling figs
while gobbling down the ripest ones she had.²⁹⁶

MAGISTRATE

And how will you find the power to stop
so many violent disturbances
throughout our states and then resolve them?

LYSISTRATA

Very easily.

MAGISTRATE

But how? Explain that.

LYSISTRATA

It's like a bunch of yarn. When it's tangled,
we take it and pass it through the spindle
back and forth—that's how we'll end the war,
if people let us try, by sending out

²⁹⁴ . . . Corybantes: Corybantes were divine attendants on the foreign goddess Cybele. They were associated with ecstatic music and dancing.

²⁹⁵ . . . Gorgon shield: Shields with monstrous Gorgon's heads depicted on them were common in Athens.

²⁹⁶ Tereus: a mythical king of Thrace and a popular figure with Athenian dramatists.

ambassadors here and there, back and forth.

MAGISTRATE

You're an idiot! Do you really think you can end such fearful acts with spindles, spools, and wool? LYSISTRATA

If you had any common sense,
you'd deal with everything the way we do
when we handle yarn.

MAGISTRATE

What does that mean?

Tell me.

LYSISTRATA

First of all, just as we wash the wool
in a rinsing tub to remove the dirt,
you have to lay the city on a bed,
beat out the rascals, and then drive away
the thorns and break apart the groups of men
who join up together in their factions
seeking public office—pluck out their heads.
Then into a common basket of good will
comb out the wool, the entire compound mix,
including foreigners, guests, and allies,
anyone useful to the public good.
Bundle them together. As for those cities
which are colonies of this land, by god,
you must see that, as far as we're concerned,
each is a separate skein. From all of them,
take a piece of wool and bring it here.
Roll them together into a single thing.
Then you'll have made one mighty ball of wool,
from which the public then must weave its clothes.

MAGISTRATE

So women beat wool and roll it in balls!
Isn't that wonderful? That doesn't mean
they bear any part of what goes on in war.

LYSISTRATA

You damned fool, of course it does—we endure
more than twice as much as you. First of all,
we bear children and then send them off
to serve as soldiers.

MAGISTRATE

All right, be quiet.
Don't remind me of all that.

LYSISTRATA

And then,
when we should be having a good time,
enjoying our youth, we have to sleep alone
because our men are in the army.
Setting us aside, it distresses me
that young unmarried girls are growing old
alone in their own homes.

MAGISTRATE

Don't men get old?

LYSISTRATA

By god, that's not the same at all. For men,
even old ones with white hair, can come back
and quickly marry some young girl. For women
time soon runs out. If they don't seize their chance,
no one wants to marry them—they sit there
waiting for an oracle.

MAGISTRATE

But an old man
who can still get his prick erect . . .

LYSISTRATA [interrupting]

O you—

why not learn your lesson and just die? It's time.
Buy a funeral urn. I'll prepare the dough
for honey cakes.²⁹⁷ Take this wreath.

[Lysistrata throws some water over the Magistrate]

²⁹⁷honey cake: A honey cake was traditionally part of the funeral service. It was given to make sure the dead shade reached Hades.

OLD WOMAN A

This one, too—

it's from me!

[Old Woman A throws more water on the Magistrate]

OLD WOMAN B

Here, take this garland!

[Old Woman B throws more water on the Magistrate]

LYSISTRATA

Well now,

what do you need? What are you waiting for?

Step aboard the boat. Charon's calling you.

You're preventing him from casting off.²⁹⁸

MAGISTRATE

I don't have to put up with these insults!

I'll go to the other magistrates, by god,

and show myself exactly as I am!

[The Magistrate exits with his attending slaves]

LYSISTRATA [calling out to him as he leaves]

Are you blaming us for not laying you out

for burial? Well then, on the third day,

we'll come and offer up a sacrifice

on your behalf first thing in the morning.

[Lysistrata and the old women with her return inside the Acropolis]

LEADER OF THE MEN'S CHORUS

You men, no more sleeping on the job

for anyone born free! Let's strip ourselves

for action on this issue. It seems to me

this business stinks—it's large and getting larger.

[The Old Men strip down, taking almost all their clothes off]

CHORUS OF OLD MEN

And I especially smelled some gas—

the tyrant rule of Hippias.

I've a great fear that Spartan men

collected here with Cleisthenes,

²⁹⁸Charon is the ferryman who transports the shades of the dead across the river into Hades.

have with their trickery stirred up
these women, whom the gods all hate,
to seize the treasury and our pay,
the funds I need to live my way.²⁹⁹

It's terrible these women here
are thinking about politics
and prattling on about bronze spears—
they're women!—and making peace
on our behalf with Spartan types,
whom I don't trust, not any more
than gaping wolves. In this affair,
those men are weaving plots for us,
so they can bring back tyranny.
But me, I won't give any ground,
not to a tyrant. I'll stand guard,
from now on carrying a sword
inside my myrtle bough. I'll march
with weapons in the market place
with Aristogeiton at my side.³⁰⁰

I'll stand with him. And now it's time
I struck those hostile to gods' law
and hit that old hag on the jaw.

[The Old Men move to threaten the Old Women with their fists]

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

When you get back home, your own mother
won't know who you are. Come on, old ladies,
you friends of mine, let's first set our burdens
on the ground. WOMEN'S CHORUS

All you fellow citizens,
we'll start to give the city good advice
and rightly, since it raised us splendidly

²⁹⁹Hippias . . . Cleisthenes . . . pay: Hippias was a tyrant in Athens from 528 to 510. Cleisthenes, an Athenian, was a favourite target of Aristophanes, ridiculed as a passive homosexual. Here there's an accusation that he is sympathetic to the Spartans. The pay the old men refer to is a daily payment of three obols from the state to jury men.

³⁰⁰Aristogeiton and his friend Harmodius assassinated the tyrant Hipparchus, the brother of Hippias. The two were celebrated as heroes of democratic Athens.

so we lived very well. At seven years old,
 I carried sacred vessels, and at ten
 I pounded barley for Athena's shrine.
 Later as bear, I shed my yellow dress
 for the rites of Brauronian Artemis.
 And once I was a lovely full-grown girl,
 I wore strings of figs around my neck and was one of those who carried baskets.³⁰¹
 So I am indebted to the city.
 Why not pay it back with good advice?
 I was born a woman, but don't hold that
 against me if I introduce a plan
 to make our present situation better.
 For I make contributions to the state—
 I give birth to men. You miserable old farts,
 you contribute nothing! That pile of cash
 which we collected from the Persian Wars
 you squandered. You don't pay any taxes.
 What's more, the way you act so stupidly
 endangers all of us. What do you say?
 Don't get me riled up. I'll take this filthy shoe
 and smack you one right on the jaw.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Is this not getting way too insolent?
 I think it's better if we paid them back.
 We have to fight this out. So any one
 who's got balls enough to be a man
 take off your clothes so we men can smell
 the way we should—like men. We should strip.
 It's not right to keep ourselves wrapped up.
 We're the ones who've got white feet.
 We marched to Leipsydriion years ago.³⁰²

³⁰¹The Old Women are referring to many city activities and rituals in which girls of noble families played important roles. The phrase "pounding barley" refers to making cakes for sacrifices.

³⁰²Leipsydriion was the site of a battle years before when the tyrant Hippias besieged and defeated his opponents. The old men are treating the event as if they had been victorious. The detail about their white feet, Sommerstein suggests, refers to those who were hostile to Hippias and the tyrants (hence, lovers of freedom).

And now let's stand erect again, aroused
in our whole bodies—shake off our old age.
[The Old Men take off their remaining clothes, hold up their shrivelled phalluses,
and threaten the women]

If one of us gives them the slightest chance
there's nothing these women won't continue
trying to work on—building fighting ships,
attacking us at sea like Artemesia.³⁰³

If they switch to horses, I draw the line.
For women are the best at riding bareback—
their shapely arses do a lovely job.
They don't slip off when grinding at a gallop.
Just look how Micon painted Amazons
fighting men on horseback hand to hand.³⁰⁴
So we must take a piece of wood with holes,
and fit a yoke on them, around their necks.

CHORUS OF OLD WOMEN

By the two goddesses, if you get me roused,
I'll let my wild sow's passion loose and make
you yell to all the people here today
how I'm removing all your hair.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

You ladies,
let's not delay—let's take off all our clothes,
so we can smell a woman's passion
when we're in a ferocious mood.

[The Old Women take off their clothes]

WOMEN'S CHORUS

Now let any man step out against me—
he won't be eating garlic any more,
and no black beans. Just say something nasty,
I'm so boiling mad, I'll treat you the same way

³⁰³Artemesia was queen of Halicarnassus in Asia Minor. She led ships from her city as part of the Persian expedition against Athens in 480 and fought at the Battle of Salamis.

³⁰⁴Micon was a well-known Athenian painter.

the beetle did the eagle—smash your eggs.³⁰⁵

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Not that I give a damn for you, not while
I have Lampito here—Ismenia, too,
my young Theban friend. You have no power,
not even with seven times as many votes.
You're such a miserable old man, even those
who are you neighbours find you hateful.
Just yesterday for the feast of Hecate,
I planned a party, so I asked my neighbours
in Boeotia for one of their companions,
a lovely girl—she was for my children—
a splendid pot of eels.³⁰⁶ But they replied
they couldn't send it because you'd passed
another one of your decrees. It doesn't seem
you'll stop voting in these laws, not before
someone takes your leg, carries you off
and throws you out.

[Lysistrata comes out from the Acropolis, looking very worried and angry.
The leader of the Women's Chorus addresses her]

Here's our glorious leader,
who does the planning for this enterprise.
Why have you come here, outside the building,
and with such a sad expression on your face?

LYSISTRATA

It's the way these women act so badly,
together with their female hearts, that makes
me lose my courage and walk in circles.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

What are you saying? What do you mean?

LYSISTRATA

It's true, so true.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

³⁰⁵beetle . . . eagle: This is a reference to an old story in which the dung beetle got its revenge against an eagle by smashing its eggs. The old woman obviously threatens the man's testicles as she says this.

³⁰⁶Hecate was a goddess whose worship was associated with birth and children.

What's wrong? You can tell us—
we're friends of yours.

LYSISTRATA

I'm ashamed to say, but it's hard to keep it quiet.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Don't hide from me
bad news affecting all of us.

LYSISTRATA

All right,
I'll keep it short—we all want to get laid.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

O Zeus!

LYSISTRATA

What's the point of calling Zeus?

There's nothing he can do about this mess.

I can't keep these women from their men,
not any longer—they're all running off.

First I caught one slipping through a hole
beside the Cave of Pan, then another
trying it with a rope and pulley, a third
deserting on her own, and yesterday
there was a woman on a giant bird intending to fly down to that place
run by Orsilochus.³⁰⁷

I grabbed her hair.

They're all inventing reasons to go home.

[A woman come out of the citadel, trying to sneak off]

Here's one of them on her way right now.

Where do you think you're going?

WOMAN A

Who me?

I want to get back home. Inside the house
I've got bolts of Milesian cloth, and worms
are eating them.

LYSISTRATA

³⁰⁷ Orsilochus is either a well known seducer or someone who keeps a brothel.

What worms? Get back in there!

WOMAN A

I'll come back right away, by god—I just need to spread them on the bed.

LYSISTRATA

Spread them?

You won't be doing that. You're not leaving!

WOMAN A

My wool just goes to waste?

LYSISTRATA

If that's what it takes.

[Woman A trudges back into the Acropolis. Woman B emerges]

WOMAN B

I'm such a fool, I've left my wretched flax back in my house unstripped.

LYSISTRATA

Another one

leaving here to go and strip her flax!

Get back inside!

WOMAN B

By the goddess of light,

I'll be right back, once I've rubbed its skin.

LYSISTRATA

You'll not rub anything. If you start that, some other woman will want to do the same.

[Woman B returns dejected into the citadel. Woman C emerges from the citadel, looking very pregnant]

WOMAN C

O sacred Eileithia, goddess of birth,

hold back my labour pains till I can find a place where I'm permitted to give birth.³⁰⁸

LYSISTRATA

What are you moaning about?

WOMAN C

³⁰⁸permitted to give birth: To have a child in a holy place, like the Acropolis, was considered a sacrilege.

It's my time—

I'm going to have a child!

LYSISTRATA

But yesterday

you weren't even pregnant. WOMAN C

Well, today I am. Send me home, Lysistrata, and quickly.

I need a midwife.

LYSISTRATA [inspecting Woman C's clothing]

What are you saying?

What's this you've got here? It feels quite rigid.

WOMAN C

A little boy.

LYSISTRATA

No, by Aphrodite,

I don't think so. It looks like you've got

some hollow metal here. I'll have a look.

[Lysistrata looks under the woman's dress and pulls out a helmet]

You silly creature, you've got a helmet there,

Athena's sacred helmet. Didn't you say

you were pregnant.

WOMAN C

Yes, and by god, I am.

LYSISTRATA

Then why've you got this helmet?

WOMAN C

Well, in case

I went into labour in the citadel.

I could give birth right in the helmet,

lay it in there like a nesting pigeon.

LYSISTRATA

What are you talking about? You're just making an excuse—that's so obvious.

You'll stay here for at least five days

until your new child's birth is purified.

WOMAN C

I can't get any sleep in the Acropolis,
not since I saw the snake that guards the place.
[More women start sneaking out of the citadel]

WOMAN D

Nor can I. I'm dying from lack of sleep
those wretched owls keep hooting all the time.

LYSISTRATA

Come on ladies, stop all these excuses!
All right, you miss your men. But don't you see
they miss you, too? I'm sure the nights they spend
don't bring them any pleasure. But please, dear friends,
hold on—persevere a little longer.

An oracle has said we will prevail,
if we stand together. That's what it said.

WOMAN A

Tell us what it prophesied.

LYSISTRATA

Then, keep quiet.

"When the sparrows, as they fly away,
escaping from the hoopoe birds, shall stay
together in one place and shall say nay
to sexual encounters, then a bad day
will be rare. High thundering Zeus will say
'What once was underneath on top I'll lay.'" WOMAN B [interrupting]

Women are going to lie on top of men?

LYSISTRATA [continuing the oracle]

" . . . but if the sparrows fight and fly away
out of the holy shrine, people will say
no bird is more promiscuous than they."

WOMAN A

That oracle is clear enough, by god.

LYSISTRATA

All you heavenly gods, can we stop talking
of being in such distress. Let us go back in.
For, my dearest friends, it will be a shame

if we don't live up to this prophecy.

[Lysistrata and the women go back into the citadel, leaving the two choruses]

MEN'S CHORUS

I'd like to tell you all a tale,
which I heard once when I was young
about Melanion, a young lad
who fled from marriage and then came
into the wilds and so he lived
up in the hills. He wove some nets
and hunted hares. He had a dog.
Not once did he return back home
He hated women—they made him sick.
And we are no less wise than he.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Let's kiss, old bag, give it a try.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

You won't need onions to make you cry.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

I'll lift my leg—give you a kick.

LEADER OF WOMAN'S CHORUS

Down there your pubic hair's too thick.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Myronides had a hairy dick
and beat foes with his big black bum.
That Phormio was another one.³⁰⁹

WOMEN'S CHORUS

To you I'd like to tell a tale
to answer your Melanion.
There was a man called Timon once,
a vagabond, the Furies' child.
Wild thistles covered his whole face.
He wandered off filled up with spite
and always cursing evil types.

³⁰⁹Myronides and Phormio were two dead generals who fought for Athens.

But though he always hated men,
those of you who are such rogues,
women he always really loved.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

You'd like a punch right on the chin?

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Not given the state of fear I'm in.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

What if I kicked you with my toe?

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

We'd see your pussy down below. LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

And then you'd see, although I'm old

it's not all matted hair down there,

but singed by lamp and plucked with flair.

[Lysistrata appears on a balcony of the citadel, looking off in the distance. Other women come out after her]

LYSISTRATA

Hey, you women! Over here to me. Come quick!

CALONICE

What's going on? Why are you shouting?

LYSISTRATA

A man!

I see a man approaching mad with love,
seized with desire for Aphrodite's rites.

O holy queen of Cyprus, Cythera,
and Paphos, keep moving down the road,
the straight path you've been travelling on. CALONICE

Where is he, whoever he is?

LYSISTRATA

Over there,
right beside the shrine of Chloe.

CALONICE

Oh yes,
there he is, by god. Who is he?

LYSISTRATA

Have a look.

Do any of you know him?

MYRRHINE

O god, I do.

It's my husband Cinesias.

LYSISTRATA

All right,

your job is to torment him, be a tease,
make him hot, offer to have sex with him
and then refuse, try everything you can,
except the things you swore to on the cup.

MYRRHINE

Don't you worry. I'll do that.

LYSISTRATA

All right, then.

I'll stay here to help you play with him.

We'll warm him up together. You others,
go inside.

[The women go inside, including Myrrhine. Cinesias enters with a very large
erection. An attendant comes with him carrying a young baby]

CINESIAS

I'm in a dreadful way.

It's all this throbbing. And the strain. I feel
as if I'm stretched out on the rack.

LYSISTRATA

Who's there,
standing inside our line of sentinels?

CINESIAS

It's me.

LYSISTRATA

A man?

CINESIAS

Yes, take a look at this!

LYSISTRATA

In that case leave. Go on your way.

CINESIAS

Who are you
to tell me to get out?

LYSISTRATA

The daytime watch.

CINESIAS

Then, by the gods, call Myrrhine for me.

LYSISTRATA

You tell me to summon Myrrhine for you?

Who are you?

CINESIAS

Cinesias, her husband,
from Paeonidae.³¹⁰

LYSISTRATA

Welcome, dear friend, your name
is not unknown to us. Your wife always
has you on her lips. Any time she licks
an apple or an egg she says, "Ah me,
if only this could be Cinesias."

[Lysistrata licks her fist obscenely]

CINESIAS

O my god!

LYSISTRATA

Yes, by Aphrodite, yes. And when our talk
happens to deal with men, your wife speaks up
immediately, "O they're all useless sorts
compared to my Cinesias."

CINESIAS

Please call her out.

LYSISTRATA

Why should I do that? What will you give me?

CINESIAS

Whatever you want, by god. I have this . . .

³¹⁰Paeonidae: Sommerstein (p. 200) points out that Paeonidae is a political district in northern Attica. The name suggest the Greek verb *paiein*, meaning to strike or copulate. Sommerstein offers the translation "Bangwell." Jack Lindsay translates the place as "Bangtown."

[Cinesias waves his erection in front of Lysistrata]

I'll give you what I've got.

LYSISTRATA

No thanks.

I think I'll tell her to come out to you.

[Lysistrata leaves to fetch Myrrhine]

CINESIAS

Hurry up. I've had no pleasure in life
since she's been gone from home. I go out,
but I'm in pain. To me now everything
seems empty. There's no joy in eating food.

I'm just so horny. [Lysistrata appears dragging Myrrhine with her. Myrrhine is
pretending to be reluctant]

MYRRHINE [loudly so that Cinesias can hear]

I love him. I do. But he's unwilling to make love to me,
to love me back. Don't make me go to him.

CINESIAS

O my dear sweetest little Myrrhine,
what are you doing? Come down here.

MYRRHINE

I'm not going there, by god.

CINESIAS

If I ask you,
won't you come down, Myrrhine?

MYRRHINE

You've got no reason to be calling me.

You don't want me.

CINESIAS

You don't think I want you?

I'm absolutely dying for you!

MYRRHINE

I'm leaving.

CINESIAS

Hold on! You might want to hear our child.

Can you call out something to your mama?

CHILD

Mummy, mummy, mummy!

CINESIAS

What's wrong with you?

Don't you feel sorry for the boy. It's now
six days since he's been washed or had some food.

MYRRHINE

Ah yes, I pity him. But it's quite clear
his father doesn't.

CINESIAS

My lovely wife,
come down here to the child.

MYRRHINE

Being a mother
is so demanding. I better go down.

What I put with!

[Myrrhine starts coming down from the Acropolis accentuating the movement of
her hips as she goes]

CINESIAS

She seems to me
to be much younger, easier on the eyes.
She was acting like a shrew and haughty,
but that just roused my passion even more.

MYRRHINE [to the child]

My dear sweet little boy. But your father—
such rotten one. Come here. I'll hold you.
Mummy's little favourite.

CINESIAS

You dim-witted girl,
what are you doing, letting yourself
be led on by these other women,
causing me grief and injuring yourself?

MYRRHINE

Don't lay a hand on me!

CINESIAS

Inside our home
things are a mess. You stopped doing anything.

MYRRHINE

I don't care.

CINESIAS

You don't care your weaving
is being picked apart by hens?

MYRRHINE

So what?

CINESIAS

You haven't honoured holy Aphrodite
by having sex, not for a long time now.
So won't you come back?

MYRRHINE

No, by god, I won't—
unless you give me something in return.
End this war.

CINESIAS

Well now, that's something I'll do,
when it seems all right.

MYRRHINE

Well then, I'll leave here,
when it seems all right. But now I'm under oath.

CINESIAS

At least lie down with me a little while.

MYRRHINE

I can't. I'm not saying I wouldn't like to.

CINESIAS

You'd like to? Then, my little Myrrhine,
lie down right here.

MYRRHINE

You must be joking—
in front of our dear baby child?

CINESIAS

No, by god.

[Cinesias turns toward the attendant]
Manes, take the boy back home. All right then,
the lad's no longer in the way. Lie down.

MYRRHINE

But, you silly man, where do we do it?

CINESIAS

Where? The Cave of Pan's an excellent place.

MYRRHINE

How will I purify myself when I return
into the citadel?

CINESIAS

You can wash yourself
in the water clock. That would do the job.

MYRRHINE

What about the oath I swore? Should I become
a wretched perjurer?

CINESIAS

I'll deal with that.

Don't worry about the oath.

MYRRHINE

Well then,

I'll go and get a bed for us.

CINESIAS

No, no.

The ground will do.

MYRRHINE

No, by Apollo, no!

You may be a rascal, but on the ground?

No, I won't make you lie down there.

[Myrrhine goes back into the Acropolis to fetch a bed]

CINESIAS

Ah, my wife—

she really loves me. That's so obvious.

[Myrrhine reappears carrying a small bed]

MYRRHINE

Here we are. Get on there while I undress.

O dear! I forgot to bring the mattress.

CINESIAS

Why a mattress? I don't need that.

MYRRHINE

You can't lie

on the bed cord. No, no, by Artemis,

that would be a great disgrace.

CINESIAS

Give me a kiss—

right now!

MYRRHINE [kissing him]

There you go.

[Myrrhine goes back to the Acropolis to fetch the mattress]

CINESIAS Oh my god—

get back here quickly!

[Myrrhine reappears with the mattress]

MYRRHINE

Here's the mattress.

You lie down on it. I'll get my clothes off.

O dear me! You don't have a pillow.

CINESIAS

But I don't need a pillow!

MYRRHINE

By god, I do.

[Myrrhine goes back to the Acropolis for a pillow]

CINESIAS

This cock of mine is just like Hercules—

he's being denied his supper.³¹¹

[Myrrhine returns with a pillow]

MYRRHINE

Lift up a bit.

Come on, up! There, I think that's everything. CINESIAS

That's all we need. Come here, my treasure.

³¹¹Hercules was famous for always being hungry and having an enormous appetite .

MYRRHINE

I'm taking off the cloth around my breasts.
Now, don't forget. Don't you go lying to me
about that vote for peace.

CINESIAS

O my god,
may I die before that happens!

MYRRHINE

There's no blanket.

CINESIAS

I don't need one, by god! I want to get laid!

MYRRHINE

Don't worry. You will be. I'll be right back.
[Myrrhine goes back to the Acropolis to fetch a blanket]

CINESIAS

That woman's killing me with all the bedding!
[Myrrhine returns with a blanket]

MYRRHINE

All right, get up.

CINESIAS

But it's already up!

MYRRHINE

You want me to rub some scent on you?

CINESIAS

No, by Apollo. Not for me.

MYRRHINE

I'll do it,
whether you want it rubbed on there or not—
for Aphrodite's sake. [Myrrhine goes back to the Acropolis to get the perfume]

CINESIAS

O great lord Zeus,
pour the perfume out! [Myrrhine returns with the perfume]

MYRRHINE

Hold out your hand, now.
Take that and spread it round.

CINESIAS [rubbing the perfume on himself]

By Apollo,

this stuff doesn't smell so sweet, not unless
it's rubbed on thoroughly—no sexy smell.

MYRRHINE [inspecting the jar of perfume]

I'm such a fool. I brought the Rhodian scent!

CINESIAS

It's fine. Just let it go, my darling.

MYRRHINE [getting up to leave]

You're just saying that.

[Myrrhine goes back to the Acropolis to get the right perfume]

CINESIAS

Damn the wretch who first came up with perfume!

[Myrrhine comes back from the Acropolis with another box of perfume]

MYRRHINE

Grab this alabaster thing.

CINESIAS [waving his cock]

You grab this alabaster cock. Come lie down here, you tease. Don't go and fetch
another thing for me.

MYRRHINE By Artemis, I'll grab it.

I'm taking off my shoes. Now, my darling,
you will be voting to bring on a peace. CINESIAS

I'm planning to.

[Myrrhine goes back to the Acropolis. Cinesias turns and sees she's gone]

That woman's killing me!

She teased me, got me all inflamed, then left.

[Cinesias gets up and declaims in a parody of tragic style]

Alas, why suffer from such agony?

Who can I screw? Why'd she betray me,
the most beautiful woman of them all?

Poor little cock, how can I care for you?

Where's that Cynalopex? I'll pay him well
to nurse this little fellow back to health.³¹²

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

³¹²Cynalopex (= "Fox Dog") was the nickname of Philostratus who apparently was a pimp.

You poor man, in such a fix—your spirit
so tricked and in distress. I pity you.
How can your kidneys stand the strain,
your balls, your loins, your bum, your brain
endure an erection that's hard for you,
without a chance of a morning screw.

CINESIAS

O mighty Zeus, it's started throbbing once again.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

A dirty stinking bitch did this to you.

CINESIAS

No, by god, a loving girl, a sweet one, too.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Sweet? Not her. She's a tease, a slut.

CINESIAS

All right, she is a tease, but—

O Zeus, Zeus, I wish you'd sweep her up there
in a great driving storm,
like dust in the air,
whirl her around,

then fall to the ground. Then as she's carried down,
to earth one more time,
let her fall right away on this pecker of mine.

[Enter the Spartan herald. He, too, has a giant erection, which he is trying to hide
under his cloak]

SPARTAN HERALD

Where's the Athenian Senate and the Prytanes?³¹³

I come with fresh dispatches.

CINESIAS [looking at the Herald's erection]

Are you a man,
or some phallic monster?

SPARTAN HERALD

I'm a herald,
by the twin gods. And my good man,

³¹³Prytanes was the business committee of the Athenian council.

I come from Sparta with a proposal,
arrangements for a truce.

CINESIAS

If that's the case,
why do you have a spear concealed in there?

SPARTAN HERALD

I'm not concealing anything, by god.

CINESIAS

Then why are you turning to one side?
What that thing there, sticking from your cloak?
Has your journey made your groin inflamed?

SPARTAN HERALD

By old Castor, this man's insane!

CINESIAS

You rogue,
you've got a hard on!

SPARTAN HERALD

No I don't, I tell you.

Let's have no more nonsense.

CINESIAS [pointing to the herald's erection]

Then what's that?

SPARTAN HERALD

It's a Spartan herald's stick.

CINESIAS

O that's what it is,
a Spartan herald stick. Let's have a chat.
Tell me the truth. How are things going for you
out there in Sparta?

SPARTAN HERALD

Not good. The Spartans
are all standing tall and the allies, too—
everyone is firm and hard. We need a thrust
in someone's rear.³¹⁴

³¹⁴ . . . in someone's rear: The Greek reads "we need Pellene," an area in the Peloponnese allied with Sparta. But, as Sommerstein points out (p. 206), this is undoubtedly a pun invoking a word meaning vagina or anus. In the exchanges which follow, the Spartans are depicted as having a decided preference for anal sex.

CINESIAS

This trouble of yours—
where did it come from? Was it from Pan?³¹⁵

SPARTAN HERALD

No. I think it started with Lampito.
Then, at her suggestion, other women in Sparta, as if from one starting gate,
ran off to keep men from their honey pots.³¹⁶

CINESIAS

How are you doing?

SPARTAN HERALD

We're all in pain.
We go around the city doubled up,
like men who light the lamps.³¹⁷ The women
won't let us touch their pussies, not until
we've made a peace with all of Greece.

CINESIAS

This matter
is a female plot, a grand conspiracy
affecting all of Greece. Now I understand.
Return to Sparta as fast as you can go.
Tell them they must send out ambassadors
with full authority to deal for peace.
I'll tell out leaders here to make a choice
of our ambassadors. I'll show them my prick.

SPARTAN HERALD

All you've said is good advice. I must fly.
[Cinesias and the Spartan Herald exit in opposite directions]

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

There's no wild animal harder to control
than women, not even blazing fire.
The panther itself displays more shame.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

³¹⁵Pan was a god associated with wild unrestrained sex in the wilderness .

³¹⁶honey pots: The meaning of the Greek word hussakos is very obscure.Sommerstein translates as "pork barrels."

³¹⁷men who light the lamps: The lamplighters had to walk along bent over in order to protect the flame they carried.

If you know that, then why wage war with me?
You old scoundrel, we could be lasting friends.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

But my hatred for women will not stop!

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Whatever you want. But I don't much like
to look at you like this, without your clothes.

It makes me realize how silly you are.

Look, I'll come over and put your shirt on.

[The Leader of the Women's Chorus picks up a tunic, goes over to the Leader of the Men's Chorus, and helps him put it on.]

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

By god, what you've just done is not so bad.

I took it off in a fit of stupid rage.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Now at least you look like a man again.

And people won't find you ridiculous.

If you hadn't been so nasty to me,

I'd grab that insect stuck in your eye
and pull it out. It's still in there.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

So that's what's been troubling me. Here's a ring.

Scrape it off. Get it out and show it to me.

God, that's been injuring my eye for ages.

[The Leader of the Women's Chorus takes the ring and inspects the Leader of the Men's Chorus in the eye]

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

I'll do it. You men are born hard to please.

My god, you picked up a monstrous insect.

Have a look. That's a Tricorynthus bug!³¹⁸

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

By Zeus, you've been a mighty help to me.

That thing's been digging wells in me a while.

Now it's been removed, my eyes are streaming.

³¹⁸Tricorynthus is a region in Attica, near Marathon. Presumably it was famous for its insects.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

I'll wipe it for you, though you're a scoundrel.

I'll give you a kiss.

LEADER OF THE MEN'S CHORUS

I don't want a kiss.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

I'll will, whether it's what you want or not.

[She kisses him]

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

O you've got me. You're born to flatter us.

That saying got it right—it states the case quite well, “These women—one has no life with them, and cannot live without them.”

But now I'll make a truce with you. I won't insult you any more in days to come, and you won't make me suffer. So now, let's make a common group and sing a song.

[The Men's and Women's Choruses combine]

COMBINED CHORUS [addressing the audience]

You citizens, we're not inclined with any of you to be unkind.

Just the reverse—our words to you will be quite nice. We'll act well, too. For now we've had enough bad news.

So if a man or woman here needs ready cash, give out a cheer, and take some minae, two or three. Coins fill our purses now, you see.

And if we get a peace treaty, you take some money from the sack, and keep it. You don't pay it back.

I'm going to have a great shindig—I've got some soup, I'll kill a pig—with Carystian friends, all good men.³¹⁹ “

³¹⁹Carystus is a state from Euboea, allied to Athens.

You'll eat fine tender meat again.
 Come to my house this very day.
 But first wash all the dirt away,
 you and your kids, then walk on by.
 No need to ask a person why.
 Just come straight in, as if my home
 was like your own—for at my place
 we'll shut the door right in your face.

[A group of Spartans enters]

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Ah, here come the Spartan ambassadors
 trailing their long beards. They've got
 something like a pig pen between their thighs.

[The Spartan ambassadors enter, moving with difficulty because of their enormous erections.]

Men of Sparta, first of all, our greetings.
 Tell us how you are. Why have you come?

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

Why waste a lot of words to tell you?
 You see the state that brought us here.

[The Spartans all display their erections with military precision]

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Oh my! The crisis has grown more severe.
 It seems the strain is worse than ever.

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

It's indescribable. What can I say?
 But let someone come, give us a peace
 in any way he can.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Well now, I see our own ambassadors—they look just like
 our wrestling men with their shirts sticking out
 around their bellies or like athletic types
 who need to exercise to cure their sickness.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

Where's Lysistrata? Can someone tell me?

We're men here and, well, look . . .

[The Athenians pull back their cloaks and reveal that, like the Spartans, they all have giant erections]

LEADER OF THE CHORUS They're clearly suffering from the same disease. Hey, does it throb early in the morning?

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

By god, yes. What this is doing to me— 'it's torture. If we don't get a treaty soon we'll going to have to cornhole Cleisthenes.³²⁰

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

If you're smart, keep it covered with your cloak. One of those men who chopped off Hermes' dick might see you.³²¹

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR [pulling his cloak over his erection] By god, that's good advice.

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR [doing the same] Yes, by the twin gods, excellent advice. I'll pull my mantle over it.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

Greetings, Spartans. We're both suffering disgracefully.

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR Yes, dear sir, we'd have been in real pain if one of those dick-clippers had seen us with our peckers sticking up like this.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

All right, Spartans, we each need to talk. Why are you here?

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

Ambassadors for peace.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

Well said. We want the same. Why don't we call

³²⁰Cleisthenes: a well known Athenian, whom Aristophanes frequently ridicules as a passive homosexual.

³²¹Hermes' dick: In 415 the statues of Hermes in Athens were mutilated by having their penises chopped off, a very sacrilegious act .

Lysistrata. She's the only one who'll bring
a resolution to our differences.

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

By the two gods, bring in Lysistratus,
if he's the one you want.

[Lysistrata emerges from the gates of the citadel]

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

It seems there is no need to summon her.
She's heard us, and here she is in person.

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Hail to the bravest woman of them all.

You must now show that you're resilient— stern but yielding, with a good heart but
mean, stately but down-to-earth. The foremost men
in all of Greece in deference to your charms
have come together here before you
so you can arbitrate all their complaints.

LYSISTRATA

That task should not be difficult, unless
they're so aroused they screw each other.
I'll quickly notice that. But where is she,
the young girl Reconciliation?

[The personification of the the goddess Reconciliation comes out.
She's completely naked. Lysistrata addresses her first]³²²

Come here,
and first, take hold of those from Sparta,
don't grab too hard or be too rough, not like
our men who act so boorishly—instead
do it as women do when they're at home.
If they won't extend their hands to you,
then grab their cocks.

[Reconciliation takes two Spartans by their penises and leads them over to
Lysistrata]

Now go and do the same

³²²Reconciliation: In Aristophanes' time, this character would be played by a man with a body stocking prominently displaying female characteristics: breasts, pubic hair, buttocks.

for the Athenians. You can hold them
by whatever they stick out.

[Reconciliation leads the Athenians over to Lysistrata]

Now then,

you men of Sparta, stand here close to me,
and you Athenians over here. All of you,
listen to my words. I am a woman,
but I have a brain, and my common sense
is not so bad—I picked it up quite well
from listening to my father and to speeches
from our senior men. Now I've got you here,
I wish to reprimand you, both of you,
and rightly so. At Olympia, Delphi,
and Thermopylae (I could mention
many other places if I had a mind
to make it a long list) both of you
use the same cup when you sprinkle altars,
as if you share the same ancestral group.³²³
We've got barbarian enemies, and yet
with your armed expeditions you destroy
Greek men and cities. At this point, I'll end
the first part of my speech.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

This erection—
it's killing me!

LYSISTRATA

And now you Spartans,
I'll turn to you. Don't you remember how,
some time ago, Periclidias came,
a fellow Spartan, and sat down right here,
a suppliant at these Athenian altars—
he looked so pale there in his purple robes—
begging for an army? Messenians then

³²³Olympia, Delphi, Thermopylae: Lysistrata is listing some of the festivals where all the Greek states cooperated in the ritual celebrations.

were pressing you so hard, just at the time
god sent the earthquake. So Cimon set out
with four thousand armed infantry and saved
the whole of Sparta.³²⁴ After going through that,
how can you ravage the Athenians' land,
the ones who helped you out?

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

Lysistrata,
you're right, by god. They're in the wrong.

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR [looking at Reconciliation]

Not true,
but look at that incredibly fine ass!

LYSISTRATA

Do you Athenians think I'll forget you?
Don't you remember how these Spartans men,
back in the days when you were dressed as slaves
came here with spears and totally destroyed
those hordes from Thessaly and many friends
of Hippias and those allied with him?
It took them just one day to drive them out
and set you free. At that point you exchanged
your slavish clothes for cloaks which free men wear.

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

I've never seen a more gracious woman.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR [looking at Reconciliation]

I've never seen a finer looking pussy.

LYSISTRATA

If you've done many good things for each other,
why go to war? Why not stop this conflict?
Why not conclude a peace? What's in the way?

[In the negotiations which follow, the ambassadors use the body of Reconciliation
as a map of Greece, pointing to various parts to make their points]

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

³²⁴ . . . the whole of Sparta: In 464 Sparta suffered a massive earthquake, which killed many citizens. Their slaves, who included the Messenians, rose in revolt. Sparta appealed to Athens for help, and the Athenians, after some debate, sent Cimon with an army to assist the Spartans.

We're willing, but the part that's sticking out
we want that handed back.

LYSISTRATA

Which one is that?

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR [pointing to Reconciliation's buttocks]

This one here—that's Pylos. We must have that—
we've been aching for it a long time now.³²⁵

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

By Poseidon, you won't be having that!

LYSISTRATA

My good man, you'll surrender it to them.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

Then how do we make trouble, stir up shit?

LYSISTRATA

Ask for something else of equal value.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR [inspecting Reconciliation's body and pointing to
her public hair]

Then give us this whole area in here—
first, there's Echinous, and the Melian Gulf,
the hollow part behind it, and these legs
which make up Megara.³²⁶

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

By the twin gods,
my good man, you can't have all that!

LYSISTRATA

Let it go.

Don't start fighting over a pair of legs.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

I'd like to strip and start ploughing naked.

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

By god, yes! But me first. I'll fork manure.

LYSISTRATA

You can do those things once you've made peace.

³²⁵Pylos: a small but important part of the south Peloponnese which the Athenians had seized in 425 and held onto ever since.

³²⁶Echinous . . . Melian Gulf . . . Megara: These are places relatively close to Athens.

If these terms seem good, you'll want your allies
to come here to join negotiations.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADORS

What of our allies? We've all got hard ons.

Our allies will agree this is just fine.

They're all dying to get laid!

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

Ours, as well—

no doubt of that.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

And the Carystians—

they'll also be on board, by Zeus.

LYSISTRATA

Well said. Now you must purify yourselves.

We women will host a dinner for you

in the Acropolis. We'll use the food

we brought here in our baskets. In there

you will make a oath and pledge your trust

in one another. Then each of you

can take his wife and go back home.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

Let's go—

and hurry up.

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR [to Lysistrata]

Lead on. Wherever you wish.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR

All right by Zeus, as fast as we can go.

[Lysistrata and Reconciliation lead the Spartan and Athenian delegations into
the Acropolis]

CHORUS

Embroidered gowns and shawls, robes and golden ornaments—

everything I own—I offer you

with an open heart. Take these things

and let your children have them,

if you've a daughter who will be

a basket bearer. I tell you all
take my possessions in my home—
nothing is so securely closed
you can't break open all the seals
and take whatever's there inside.
But if you look, you won't see much
unless your eyesight's really keen,
far sharper than my own.

If anyone is out of corn
to feed his many tiny children
and household slaves, at home
I've got a few fine grains of wheat—
a quart of those will make some bread,
a fresh good-looking loaf. If there's a man
who wants some bread and is in need
let him come with his sacks and bags
to where I live to get his wheat.
My servant Manes will pour it out.
But I should tell you not to come
too near my door—there's a dog
you need to stay well clear of.

ATHENIAN DELEGATE A [from inside the citadel]

Open the door!

[The Athenian Delegate A comes staggering out of the citadel, evidently drunk. He's carrying a torch. Other delegates in the same condition come out behind him. Athenian Delegate A bumps into someone by the door, probably one of a group of Spartan slaves standing around waiting for their masters to come out]³²⁷

ATHENIAN DELEGATE A Why don't you get out of my way?

Why are you lot sitting there? What if I
burned you with this torch? That's a stale routine!³²⁸
I won't do that. Well, if I really must,

³²⁷ . . . by the door: The stage business at this point is somewhat confusing. It's not clear whether the Athenian delegates who now appear are leaving the meeting in the citadel or arriving and wanting to get in. Here I follow Sommerstein, who is following Henderson, and have the delegates emerge from the meeting. The people hanging around the door are probably the slaves who came with the Spartans and who are waiting for their masters inside.

³²⁸ . . . stale routine: This comment is taking a swipe at other comic dramatists who use a stock set of situations or actions, while at the same time the action uses the stock technique (not an uncommon feature of Aristophanic comedy).

to keep you happy, I'll go through with it.

[Athenian Delegate A chases an onlooker away with his torch]

ATHENIAN DELEGATE B [waving a torch]

We'll be here with you to help you do it.

Why not just leave? You may soon be screaming
for that hair of yours.

ATHENIAN DELEGATE A

Go on, piss off!

So the Spartans inside there can come on out
and go away in peace.

[The two Athenian delegates force the Spartan slaves away from the door]

ATHENIAN DELEGATE B

Well now,

I never seen a banquet quite like this.

The Spartans were delightful. As for us,
we had too much wine, but as companions
we said lots of really clever things.

ATHENIAN DELEGATE A

That's right. When we're sober, we lose our minds.

I'll speak up and persuade Athenians

what when our embassies go anywhere

they stay permanently drunk. As it is,

whenever we go sober off to Sparta,

right away we look to stir up trouble.

So we just don't hear what they have to say

and get suspicious of what they don't state.

Then we bring back quite different reports

about the same events. But now these things

have all been sorted out. So if someone there

sang "Telamon" when he should have sung

"Cleitagora," we'd applaud the man

and even swear quite falsely that . . .³²⁹

[The Spartan slaves they forced away from the door are gradually coming back]

Hey, those slaves

³²⁹"Telamon" and "Cleitagora" are well known drinking songs.

are coming here again. You whipping posts,
why can't you go away?

ATHENIAN DELEGATE B

By Zeus,
the ones in there are coming out again.

[The Spartan delegates come out of the citadel. The Spartan ambassador is carrying a musical instrument]

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

Here, my dear sir, take this wind instrument,
so I can dance and sing a lovely song
to honour both Athenians and ourselves.

ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR [turning to one of the slaves]
Yes, by the gods, take the pipes. I love
to see you Spartans dance and sing.

[The music starts. The Spartan Ambassador sings and dances]

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

O Memory, to this young man
send down your child the Muse
who knows the Spartans and Athenians.³³⁰

Back then at Artemesium
they fought the ships like gods of war
and overpowered the Medes,
while we, I know, led by Leonidas
whetted our teeth like boars
with foaming mouths, which dripped
down on our legs. The Persian force
possessed more fighting men
than grains of sea shore sand.
O Artemis, queen of the wild,
slayer of beasts, chaste goddess,
come here to bless our treaty,
to make us long united.
May our peace be always blessed

³³⁰The Spartan Ambassador is singing about two famous battles against the Persians (both in 480), the Athenian naval victory at Artemesium and the Spartan stand of the 300 at Thermopylae. This military campaign was an important highlight of Greek unity.

with friendship and prosperity,
and may we put an end
to all manipulating foxes.
Come here, O come here,
Virgin Goddess of the Hunt.

[Lysistrata emerges from the citadel bringing all the wives with her]

LYSISTRATA³³¹

Come now, since everything has turned out well,
take these women back with you, you Spartans.
And, you Athenians, these ones are yours.
Let each man stand beside his wife, each wife
beside her man, and then to celebrate
good times let's dance in honour of the gods.
And for all future time, let's never make
the same mistake again.

[The Chorus now sings to the assembled group, as the wives and husbands are rejoined]

CHORUS

Lead on the dance, bring on the Graces,
and summon Artemis and her twin,
Apollo, the god who heals us all,
call on Bacchus, Nysa's god, whose eyes blaze forth
amid his Maenads' ecstasy,
and Zeus alight with flaming fire,
and Hera, Zeus' blessed wife,
and other gods whom we will use
as witnesses who won't forget
the meaning of the gentle Peace
made her by goddess Aphrodite.

Alalai! Raise the cry of joy,
raise it high, iai!
the cry of victory, iai!
Evoi, evoi, evoi, evoi!

³³¹There is some dispute about who this speech should be assigned to. Sommerstein (p. 221) has a useful summary of the arguments.

LYSISTRATA Spartan, now offer us another song,
match our new song with something new.

SPARTAN AMBASSADOR

Leave lovely Taygetus once again
and, Spartan Muse, in some way
that is appropriate for us
pay tribute to Amyclae's god,
and to bronze-housed Athena, to Tyndareus' splendid sons,
who play beside the Eurotas.
Step now, with many a nimble turn,
so we may sing a hymn to Sparta,
dancing in honour of the gods,
with stamping feet in that place
where by the river Eurotas young maidens dance,
like fillies raising dust,
tossing their manes,
like bacchantes who play
and wave their thyrsus stalks,
brought on by Leda's lovely child,
their holy leader in the choral dance.³³²

But come let your hands bind up your hair.
Let your feet leap up like deer, sound out the beat
to help our dance. Sing out a song of praise
for our most powerful bronze-house goddess, all-conquering Athena!
[They all exit singing and dancing]

³³²*Taygetus* is an important mountain in Sparta. *Amyclae's god* is Apollo who had a shrine at Amyclae, near Sparta. *Bronze-housed Athena* is a reference to the shrine of Athena in Sparta. *Tyndareus' splendid sons* are Castor and Pollux, the twin gods (brothers of Helen and Clytemnestra). *The Eurotas* is a river near Sparta. The *thyrsus stalk* is a plant stem held by the followers of Bacchus in their ecstatic dancing. *Leda's child* is Helen (wife of Menelaus, sister of Castor and Pollux and Clytemnestra, a child of Zeus).

LYSISTRATA (G.Theodoridis' Translation)

This edition is based on the [publicly available](https://bacchicstage.wordpress.com/aristophanes/lysistrata/)³³³ translation by G. Theodoridis

Aristophanes' "LYSISTRATA" Λυσιστράτη
Written in 411BCE

Lysistrata: From λύω (lyo) to loosen, to undo, to disband and στρατός (stratos) army. Thus, *Lysistrata*: 'undoer of, disbander of armies'.

...

It's clear that in this play the male characters all wear the comic phallus, which is an integral part of the action throughout. Note, too, that in several places in *Lysistrata* there is some confusion and debate over which speeches are assigned to which people. These moments occur, for the most part, in short conversational exchanges. Hence, there may be some differences between the speakers in this text and those in other translations.

...

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The Characters

Women:

Lysistrata
Caloniki
Myrrhini
Lampito
Stratyllis (Women's leader)
Nikothiki
Kallyki
Lampito
Ismenia
Corinthian whore
Skythian – Female archer (policewoman -silent)

Men:

Cinesias
Magistrate
Polycharides
Athenian Delegate 2
Manes (Cinesias' slave- silent)
Cinesias' baby
Spartan Herald
Spartan Delegate 1
Spartan Delegate 2
Drakis
Philourgos

³³³<https://bacchicstage.wordpress.com/aristophanes/lysistrata/>

Other members of Stratyllis' group
Miss Peace

Phadrias
Strynidoros
4 Scythian Archers (policemen-silent)
Various vagrants (silent)
Other members of Drakis group (silent)

Scene 1

Before the curtain is raised or on a dimly lit stage where only shadows are visible, stands the chorus of women, ie, Stratyllis' group.

Sudden introduction of violent, disturbing, martial tambourines.

Fade out: tambourines

Fade in: passionate pleas by a mix of women's voices, and cries of owls.

Women's voices: *They are standing at profile to the audience so that the shadows of their pleading hands can be accentuated.*

Cry, all you mothers! Cry for your Adonis! Cry!

Cry! Adonis! Lament the death of Adonis! Cry,
cry mothers! Your Adonis is gone! Adonis is gone
for ever! Beautiful to all eyes, Adonis is gone!

Lament his death, mothers of sons!

Pause

Angry Woman 1: *within*

Tits and clits! Tits and clits! That's what all this is about! That's all they are ever after!

Angry Woman 2: *within*

That and war!

Angry Woman 3: *within*

Blood and gore!

Raise curtains or turn on appropriate stage lights.

Dawn. A public place in Athens at the foot of the acropolis, the entrance of which is a large gate at the centre of the stage. Gate and Parthenon are prominent. This is where the whole play takes place. The walls on the inside and on either side of the gate have parapets where actors will appear at various times. Lysistrata is holding an "invitation" which she waves about furiously as she paces back and forth. An archer (female police woman) guides two drunken derelicts through left to right.

FX: Fade out sound of owls. Pause.

Lysistrata: *To the audience*

If my invitation was for one of those orgies, like those held for Little Dick or High Dick or Low Clit, you wouldn't be able to get through all the bum- and drum-beaters clogging the streets. But for this, no! Oh, no! Not a bloody woman in sight! Not one of them! Pause. *Sees Caloniki in the distance, SL*

Ah, except for my neighbour! Thank goodness... Hi, Caloniki!

Enter Caloniki

Caloniki:

Hi to you too, Lysistrata! Oh, but look at you, darling! Such frowns, such arrows for eyebrows! Not good for you babe. They're so horribly ugly!

Lysistrata:

I'm fuming, Caloniki! I'm boiling inside. Damned women! Why on earth do men think we're smart and cunning and capable of anything and everything?

Caloniki:

Because we are, darling, we definitely are!

Lysistrata:

But you call them to a meeting, to a proper meeting, to discuss something of some importance –none of that obscene and trivial stuff they're always on about- and where are they? Deaf and asleep!

Caloniki:

But they have heard you, darling. They have. It's just that... you know how it is. A woman's exit from her abode is very, very difficult! Some have to go down on their husband, others have to raise their slave, others still, to put the baby to sleep, another still has to wash it, feed it, clean its poop...

Lysistrata:

There are far more important things to worry about than all that stuff, Caloniki!

Caloniki:

Well? What is it, darling? What is this thing that's so important, you had to bring together every woman in Greece? Is it such a big thing?

Lysistrata:

Huge.

Caloniki:

Oh? And thick?

Lysistrata:

O, it's thick, all right!

Caloniki: Excited at a misconstrued prospect
Well then, where on earth are they all?

Lysistrata: Realises Caloniki is on the wrong prospect
No, no, it's not what you're thinking of, my dear. If it had been that, they'd all be well and truly here by now. No, it's something else. Something that's bothered me for a long time now. Believe me, I've lost a great deal of sleep, tossing this one over.

Caloniki:
Ah, so, it's a very delicate little thingy, then, this thing you've been tossing over?

Lysistrata:
I'll tell you how delicate a thing it is, Caloniki! I've discovered that the salvation of the whole of Greece depends upon us, upon our tits and clits! That's how delicate a thing it is! Tits and clits!
That's what it's all about!

Caloniki:
Upon our tits and clits? She lifts first one tit then the other as if to balance them A delicate little thingy indeed! What a precarious balancing act!

Lysistrata:
All these awful goings on in our city, Caloniki! Just think! We'll be rid of them all! All of them... Spartans, the lot!

Caloniki:
Oh, yes, of course! Out with the Spartan bastards!

Lysistrata:
And of all the Boetians, too.

Caloniki:
Ah, the Boetians! Well, the Boetians themselves, yes; their delicious eels, though, Lysistrata, absolutely not!

Lysistrata:
As for Athens, my tongue won't utter a thing but you get my meaning... If all the women would gather here, Caloniki, from Boetia, from Sparta, all of them, believe me – all of us, together, we can save Greece!

Caloniki:
Us? But my dear, what have we women ever done that's intelligent or that requires any skill at all? We all just sit around on our bums all day long, looking pretty, begemmed, beflowered and plastered with make-up, naked under our see-through saffron gowns and wearing our cute little "fuck-me-please" slippers!

Lysistrata:

Exactly! That's exactly the stuff by which I'm planning to save Greece, darling! With the scents and the make-up and the flowers and those cute little "fuck-me-please-I'm-cute" slippers and the dainty little see-through gowns!

Caloniki:

What? What on earth could you achieve with that stuff?

Lysistrata:

Peace, my dear! Peace among men! No longer will a man thrust his spear against another man!

Caloniki:

Is that right? Well then, if that's the case I'm off to powder my nose right now...

Lysistrata:

Nor will he raise a shield in front of him...

Caloniki:

Mmm... and to put on my see-through...

Lysistrata:

Nor will he ever carry a sword...

Caloniki:

Ohhhh! And my cute little "fuck-me-please" slippers...

Lysistrata:

So! Shouldn't all these women have been here by now?

Caloniki: *back to the issue*

Definitely. They should all have flown right over!

Lysistrata:

Yea, well, what do you expect? Damned Athenian women! Always late! Late for everything! Damn it! Not even those from the shore!

Caloniki:

Yet I do know that they have all hopped off their little Indicating her genitals boats early this morning and they're on their way here, they're... coming right now, I'm sure!

Lysistrata:

Grrr! Not even those I thought showed some real interest in this! They're not here yet, either... God, not even the Acharnians!

Caloniki:

But, darling, even Theagenes' wife is coming. I saw the superstitious twit visiting

Hecate's temple before setting off... Sees some women in the distance) Aha! Here they all are! I told you! They're coming, Lysistrata, all of them! (Pinches her nose) Phew! Where on earth are they all from?

Lysistrata:

Bog Burrow! Twenty Ks south of Thebes!

Caloniki:

Phew! Well, then, let's not stir them up any more than we have to, shall we? Poooooh!

Enter Myrrhini. She's wearing a beautiful gown with which she is very happy and with which is often preoccupied by displaying it admiringly at every occasion; so much so that her words in line 114 have some effect.

Myrrhini:

We're not too late, are we Lysistrata? Lysistrata is too angry to speak Well, what's up, darling? Speak up, darling!

Lysistrata:

Everyone's heard exactly what it's all about, Myrrhini! I'm not impressed with you, at all!

Myrrhini:

But it took me ages to find my knickers in the dark, Lysistrata. Anyway, what's up? What's going on? Tell us, now that we're all here.

Lysistrata:

No, not yet. Let's wait a little longer for the Boetian and Spartan women to arrive.

Myrrhini:

True... she looks around impatiently until... ah, here's Lampito!

Lysistrata: Rushes over to Lampito and, impressed by her body, begins to fondle it excitedly, lasciviously.

Hello Lampito! Oh! Oh, my darling Spartan! How positively fructiferous is your beauty. What a colour, what a vigorous, horny body! Darling, I think you could strangle a bull with this body!

Lampito:

Yeah, I think I could, too, Lysistrata. I exercise regularly. I mean very regularly and I go through every bit of me, every bit of me – including my bumhole!

Lysistrata:

Mmm! Your titties, too!

Lampito:

Hey! Why are you groping me like that... like I was some sacrificial cow?

Lysistrata stops the groping and turns her attention to the new woman on the stage

Lysistrata:

Ah! And this one? Who is this young beauty, then?

Lampito:

That's the delegate sent to you from Boetia. By the name of Ismenia.

Lysistrata: *Prodding similarly*

Boetia, yes! Points at Ismenia's pudenda. Boetia of the beautiful meadows! How positively gorgeous your meadow looks, Ismenia!

Caloniki:

Yea, with elegant little itchy-bitchy curly whirly penny royals growing so neatly and tightly all around that lovely meadow!

Enter Corinthian whore.

Lysistrata:

And this other child?

Lampito:

Ah, yes! Now, that there – that's pure Corinthian whore meat, that one! The real stuff!

All others whisper excitedly to each other the words, "whore", "from Corinth" and "Corinth has the best whores!"

Lysistrata:

Mmmm, yes, pure, indeed! Both front and back!

Lampito:

So, then! Who's gathered this fleet of flesh here?

Lysistrata:

I did.

Lampito:

Aha? And why? Come on, name your passion, girl!

Myrrhini:

Yes, darling, tell us what's so important.

Lysistrata:

I will, I will, but first, let me ask you all one question.

Myrrhini:

Ask away.

Lysistrata:

Tell me, please, all of you: Do you not miss your husband's pricks? Your sons' father? I mean, while he's away at war? I know very well that all of you have your husband away at the moment. Not one of them is here with you. Isn't that so?

Caloniki:

Mine, in fact, the poor bugger, has been in Thrace for the last five months. Guarding that idiot of a general, Eucrates.

Myrrhini:

And mine, seven months at Pylos.

Lampito:

And if mine ever manages to steal away for a quickie, they rush over, nab him by the handle and quickly whisk him away back to the front!

Lysistrata:

And so, girls, when fucking time comes... not the faintest whiff of it anywhere, right? From the time those Milesians betrayed us, we can't even find our eight-fingered leather dildos. At least they'd serve as a sort of small-comfort-flesh-replacement" thingy! So, then! Would you like me to find some mechanism by which we could end this war?

Myrrhini:

If this was truly possible, Lysistrata, darling, I'd start the celebratory drinks right now... Even if it meant I'd have to sell this gorgeous gown to buy the wine.

Caloniki:

Me too! Even if... even if I'm torn in two, like... like a fish on the grill and have half of me thrown away!

Lampito:

And me... I'd climb all the way up to the tip of our mount Taygetus to be able to see our beloved Peace.

Lysistrata:

Well, in that case, I'll tell you now what I've discovered because I don't think I can hide it any longer. Now! If we women really want our men to make peace, then we must... abstain!

Myrrhini:

Huh? From what? Please explain?

Lysistrata: *Still reluctant to make the revelation*

Ummmm... From something... Will you do it?

Myrrhini:

Sure! Even if it means our death, Lysistrata but, tell us, what do we have to do?

Lysistrata:

We will go on strike! We will all abstain from cocks! Triumphant No more cock!

Corinthian whore begins to cry -it's her living. The others begin to walk away.

Distressed now as she sees that the others don't agree with her.

Hey, what's up? Where are you off to? What's with the frowns and the sad looks?

How pale you all look suddenly! What's with the tears? Will you do as we said? Talk to me! What's your decision?

Myrrhini:

Me? I... I just can't do it, Lysistrata. Not me. I... Let the war drag on, Lysistrata!

Caloniki:

Yea, me too, Lysistrata. Let the war go on...

Lysistrata:

Even you, Caloniki! You were just talking about being a fish cut in two, half of it tossed away!

Caloniki:

Anything else, Lysistrata. We'll do anything else you want but... well, better in the fire than out of the bed, sweetheart! Better with the fire than without the cock! That can never do, darling!

Lysistrata:

And you, Lampito? What do you say?

Lampito:

Better in the fire than out of the bed.

Lysistrata:

What a lot of bum-torn sluts each and every single one of our sex is! The tragedians are right about us then! Screwing above all else! No regard for the consequences! Turns to Lampito, imploring her. But you, my darling Spartan, you and I, Lampito, just the two of us could still save the matter. Come on, vote with me!

Lampito: Thinks deeply, paces back and forth, agonises over the question. It's true, damn it! It's a harsh and difficult thing for a woman to go to sleep, alone. Without a prick, I mean. Yet... yet... yet, we must! We must have peace!

Lysistrata: *Exuberant*

Oh, true Spartan! You're the only real woman here!

Caloniki:

But if we did go on strike, if -Zeus forbend!- if we did do as you said... will this really

give us Peace?

Lysistrata:

Absolutely, Caloniki! Look! All we have to do is we simply stay indoors, put our luscious make-up on, naked beneath our flimsy little blouses, our short and curlies thoroughly coiffured and plucked, and we just sit and wait for our man. Soldier-hubby comes in, sees us and immediately stands at attention!

Solid, stiff and horny!

He's torn to shreds with lust. But we move back! We simply don't go to bed with him. I can assure you, darlings, Peace will be signed before you can say, "come again?"

Lampito:

Just like Menelaos and Helen. Helen flashes her tits at him once and our boy throws his sword away for ever! Ha, ha, ha! He was going to kill her only a second before that – for what she'd done to Greece!

Caloniki:

But what if the men go on strike, too and we get horny instead?

Lysistrata:

Well, then darlings, we are all well acquainted with Pherecrates, for goodness' sake, aren't we? We do as he did: beat the beaten bitch! In other words, wank!

Caloniki:

Nah! Mimicking others is crap... What if they drag us into the bedroom?

Lysistrata:

Take a tight grip of your flaps, darling!

Caloniki:

What if they beat us then?

Lysistrata:

Well... all right, we give in to them, then but we make it hard for them, my dears: we cross our legs or something, because it's no fun for them if they have to work hard for it. They'll quickly give up. A man just won't enjoy himself if the woman won't help in the process... of him enjoying himself!

Myrrhini:

Right! Well, then. If you two agree, then we agree also. We are with you Lysistrata!

Lampito:

Yes! All right then. But we, we the Spartan women, we will be able to do this, to persuade our husbands to bring about a good and honourable peace, straight away; but what about all these war-mongering Athenian pricks you've got here? Who'll

straighten them out?

Lysistrata:

Don't you worry about them, Lampito, darling, we'll see to them!

Lampito:

Not very likely. Not while they've got all those ships in the sea and all that loot locked up in there (indicating the Acropolis) Inside the temple of Athena!

Lysistrata:

Nah! We've thought of that, too, Lampito. No problem. Today, we'll take over the Acropolis! While we're all here getting all this prick-protest organised, the older women will be going up, in there, under the pretence of conducting rituals and sacrifices and, as soon as they get inside, they'll seize the place! Take it over!

A Skythian policewoman, armed to the teeth (helmet, bow, arrows, shield, sword, knife) is walking by. She sees the group in a tightly knit gathering and stops to examine suspiciously.

Lampito:

Oh, ho! Well then! That's great! A very well thought-out plan, Lysistrata! Very thorough, indeed! Well done, girl!

Lysistrata:

Thank you, Lampito. Right, then! Now quickly, let's take a good, strong, inexorable, unbreakable, no-loopholes, oath!

Lampito:

Give us the words and deeds, Lysistrata and we'll do it!

Lysistrata:

Good, now... *Sees the Skythian policewoman*

Hey, you! Cop woman! Yes, you! What are you leering at? Bring me that shield of yours here!

The policewoman obeys dumbly

Put it right here! Now turn it upside down.

The policewoman obeys again. Now, someone bring me some entrails!

The policewoman likes all this and from now on joins the group

Caloniki:

Entrails? Entrails, Lysistrata? What sort of an oath do you want us to take, for goodness' sake?

Lysistrata:

What sort? The sort you perform upon a shield, like the one Aischylus mentions

somewhere, you know... where the soldiers kill a sheep and...

Caloniki: *Interrupts*

Lysistrata! We can't swear an oath for Peace by spilling blood on a shield!

Lysistrata:

Well? What sort of an oath do you all want, then?

Caloniki:

I know! Let's grab a white horse from somewhere, kill it and get its sacred little bits!

The horsey's little bits, I mean. How's that?

Lysistrata: *She's shocked*

What white horse, Caloniki? What little bits? What's in that head of yours?

Caloniki:

The little bits underneath... Well what do we swear upon then?

Myrrhini:

I'll tell you what I think, if you like: Let's sacrifice a wine jug, instead. Get a huge black cup, put it on the ground here, then get a jug of that lovely wine from Thasos, break it open and swear to the cup that... that we won't pollute it by adding water to it!

Lampito:

Yes! Now that's what I call an impressive oath!

Lysistrata:

So, let's bring the bowl and the wine skin then!

The Skythian archer runs off enthusiastically and, a moment later, returns with the bowl and wine jug. Lysistrata, impressed at the Skythian's speed, efficiency and willingness to join her rebellious group, smiles at her, takes the jug and lifts it in the air. Caloniki lifts the bowl admiringly.

Caloniki:

Oooh! My darlings, look! What a lovely bowl! One gets horny just by touching it!

Lysistrata:

Caloniki! Put that bowl down and all of you place one hand on my jug!

They all obey. Lysistrata takes on the serious demeanour of an earnest prayer

Goddess Persuasion, and you, too, bowl, accept this, our offering with grace!

She pours the wine into the bowl.

Caloniki:

What sparkling blood! And how well it decants!

Lampito:

And how sweet is its aroma!

Myrrhini:

Let me be the first to take the oath!

Caloniki: Jealous

No! Not unless we draw lots and your name is drawn first!

Lysistrata:

Lampito, and the rest of you, too. All together: Repeat after me:

There's no prick, lover's or husband's...

Together:

There's no prick, lover's or husband's...

Lysistrata:

That will approach me erect...

Together:

That will approach me erect...

Caloniki hesitates

Lysistrata:

Caloniki, speak!

Caloniki:

Damn it, Lysistrata, my knees are wobbly! "That will approach me erect..."

Lysistrata:

Shut in at home, I'll live prickless and chaste...

Together:

Shut in at home, I'll live prickless and chaste...

Lysistrata:

And I'll be dressed seductively and be beautifully made up...

Together:

And I'll be dressed seductively and be beautifully made up...

Lysistrata:

So as to set on fire my man's desire...

Together:

So as to set on fire my man's desire...

Lysistrata:

And let him not fuck me with my consent...

Together:

And let him not fuck me with my consent...

Lysistrata:

But if the prick forces itself upon me...

Together:

But if the prick forces itself upon me...

Lysistrata:

I will not reach orgasm... at the same time as it does...

Together:

I will not reach orgasm... at the same time as it does...

Lysistrata:

I will not have my slippers raised to the ceiling...

Together:

I will not have my slippers raised to the ceiling...

Lysistrata:

Nor will I, like a whore, take up for him the position of the lioness-on-a-cheese-grater...

All the women except the Corinthian Whore look at each other bemused. They've no idea what Lysistrata means by the last oath. The Corinthian Whore though, nods and smiles knowingly.

Together:

Nor will I, like a whore, take up for him the position of the lioness-on-a-cheese-grater...

Lysistrata:

And so, to bind all this together, we hereby drink this wine...

Together:

And so, to bind all this together, we hereby drink this wine...

Lysistrata:

And if I break this solemn oath may the wine I drink turn to water...

Together:

And if I break this solemn oath may the wine I drink turn to water...

Lysistrata:

Have you all sworn with me?

Together:

We sure have!

Lysistrata:

Now bring me the cup that I may sanctify it.

Caloniki:

Give me some too, so that the oath will bind us all well and tight.

Shouting and commotion behind the walls.

Lampito:

What's all the noise?

Lysistrata:

Aha! Just like I said. Our older women have seized the Acropolis. Quickly now, Lampito, you head off to act on your end of the bargain. Go to Sparta, quickly... but leave these friends of yours here with us... (lustily) as goodwill. The rest of us will go over to the Acropolis and toss the bars over the gates.

Caloniki:

But don't you think the men will band together and rush us?

Lysistrata:

I'm not worried about that one little bit, Caloniki. Even if they threaten us with fire and even if they manage to open the gates, so what? We'll do as we've just sworn, right?

Caloniki:

Right! Of course. Yes! Otherwise we'll remain for ever as we always were: cowards and whores to them all!

Exit all into the acropolis.

SCENE 2

A group of twelve men walks in from SL (stage left will henceforth be "their territory." It is where they will be retreating to when business asks for a retreat.) They all wear a surfeit of clothes which they take off one at a time at various instances for comedic effect.

Drakis, its leader, is negotiating his grip on a long branch on his shoulders and a fire-making pot of sorts which makes much smoke. Between them all they are carrying wood of some sort or other, branches, kindling, etc, as well as crow bars, ramming rods and such like implements that may be useful for breaking and entering. Drakis is walking just a little ahead of the others and, like the others, is irritated by coughing fits brought about by the smoke.

Drakis: *Talking to himself*

Go on, my poor boy! Go on Drakis! Even if your shoulder is breaking under the strain

of this huge, damp olive log! Go on, my boy! Cough, cough!

Philourgos: *To Strynidoros*

Long life brings you so many surprises, hey, my good friend, Strynidoros? Things which I have never ever hoped to see or hear.

Women! Women, who we've husbanded, who we've nurtured, who we've maintained and who have caused us so much fuss!

Strynidoros:

So much fuss!

Philourgos:

Now they've gone and taken over the Acropolis. Stolen the sacred statue of our protector, Athena and they've driven bars and padlocks into her gates!

Strynidoros:

Let's move as fast as we can, Philourgos. Come on, let's place these branches all around...

Philourgos:

Let's teach them a lesson...

Drakis:

Let's light a high flame...

Philourgos:

Fry the lot of 'em...

Phadrias:

First, among them all, Lycos' wife, Rhodia! Haha! A bastard of a politician deserves a... slut of a wife!

Philourgos: *Sarcastically*

...a slut of a wife! Cough, cough! A faithful slut! Slut to the end! Hahaha!

Strynidoros:

By Demeter, no one will dare laugh at us while we're alive...

Drakis: Stops, turns and talks to the others, laughing

Remember old Cleomenes, boys?

Strynidoros:

Ah, yes, Drakis! That's right! He tried this little trick once, too, didn't he?

Philourgos:

Even he didn't escape unpunished.

Drakis:

Shat himself and had to surrender his arms to me!

Phadrias:

True Spartan, though. Ran off without a shirt on his back. Unwashed for six years, unshaven...

Strynidoros:

Stank to high Heaven, hey Phadrias? Hahaha! Cough, cough!

Drakis:

Hehehehe! This is how we surrounded the city, men!

Phadrias:

But he was besieged by seventeen men, Drakis. Totally surrounded!

Philourgos:

They spent the whole night at the gates.

Drakis: *Pointing at the Acropolis*

So that these here god-hated women...

Phadrias:

Hated by God and by Euripides, by God!

Drakis: *With contempt*

Bah! These women are nothing to us, hey men? Cough, cough! Nothing!

Philourgos:

Our Victory will shine throughout Athens, our four-headed city!

Drakis: Takes up his equipment again. He's visibly struggling.

Just a little way left now and we're there, Drakis, my good man!

Phadrias:

And we're doing all this without even a donkey to help us, hey, Strynidoros? On our own bare backs!

Strynidoros:

Ouch! Damned logs! Two of them have gone and lodged themselves right into my bones... ah, well, what can one do, Phadrias?

Adjusts himself

Phadrias:

We must go on, go on, go on! Walk up the hill, walk up the hill, walk on, walk on, walk on...

Drakis:

...and blow hard at the fire He blows into the fire pot. The smoke proliferates. Phoo, phoo!

Philourgos:

What smoke! By mighty Hercules, what sooty dread!

Drakis:

What... ouch! Arghhhhhh! What horror -cough, cough- was it that jumped out of there and, like a bitch-on-heat tore at my eyeballs?

Philourgos:

Like the Volcano of Lemnos, hey, Drakis? This machine smokes and smokes... cough, cough!

Drakis:

...and scorched and filled my eyes with gunk.

Phadrias:

You men go on ahead of me to the city! Run to the aid of Athena! Phoo, phoo! What smoke, what horror!

Philourgos: They've now reached SR

It's up to Heaven now, whether the fire burns or not. Let's leave the wood here and light up new, leafless vines.

Phadrias:

Then, all of us together, we'll charge at the gates, hey?

Drakis:

And if the women won't pull back the bolts, then, we'll set them all on fire!

Phadrias:

Phoo, phoo, cough, cough! There! I think now we're winning!

Strynidoros:

Put down the wood. Cough, splatter, choke... The smoke will kill us!

Drakis:

Ah, for a Samian general to take this wood from my hands!

Phadrias:

There, I'm putting mine down here. They've bust my balls.

Drakis: *Talking to the pot*

It's up to you now, little potsy. Light this coal and start the fire! Go on!

Phadrias: *Raises his hands in prayer*

Help us Glorious Victory, come, stand beside us and drive your triumph right up into those cocky women!

They leave the pot down and retreat quietly to their territory, occupying themselves with various preparations. They do not notice the women when they enter the stage later. A small pause before we hear the shouting of women off stage.

When they appear from the opposite side we see that it's a group, similar in number, age and disposition as the old men. They will form the second warring party and SR will be "their territory." Their leader is Stratyllis. They are carrying buckets, urns, jugs and pitchers of all sorts, filled with water. They've noticed the smoke and are walking through it but they've not seen the men yet.

Stratyllis: *Off stage*

Come quickly, girls! All this smoke must mean that there's a lot of fire! Run Niki, run, or you'll burn dear. You, too, Kali, run or you'll burn, sweetie! Kryti, darling! You're surrounded by smoke, dear and so is everything else around here! Hateful men! We'll lose everything with their stupid laws!

Enter women (SR. Their territory). They carry clubs, sticks, brooms and all sorts of other makeshift weapons, as well as buckets full of water.

Krytilli: *To Stratyllis*

I was at the taps very early this morning, Stratyllis, before dawn, even, trying to fill my pitcher with water and help save these poor friends of ours in there but – God, I hope I'm not too late for that! All that commotion and fuss and traffic I had to put up with! Every slave in town was jostling me about. I heard that some old men – must be wankers the lot of them -were carting sticks and logs around here, threatening to set us on fire, turn us all into charcoal, they said!

Dear God, I hope I never get to see my sisters burn like kindling by these bastards.

Kallyki:

Yes, let's save them all from the horror of war!

Krytilli:

Let's save Greece and all her people, my dear goddess, Athena, goddess of the golden helmet!

Stratyllis: She is walking on into the men's territory, still without noticing them. Oh, Athena, thrice-born! We've surrounded your home and ask you to be our ally!

Nikothiki:

God, please give no time to these bastards to build a proper fire. Help us with our water carrying!

Stratyllis suddenly finds herself inside Draki's arms. He frightens her and grabs her by the dress. She runs back towards her friends, screaming. The dress is torn from her. The rest of the men now come into focus also.

Stratyllis:

Let me go, you old wanker! Help, help!

Kallyki:

What is all this? You... you evil bastards! What are you up to, hey? You must be the real nasty type if all this smoke is your doing!

Other women come to Stratyllis' aid and help her escape. They then turn ferociously upon Drakis, pelting him with all their weapons.

Drakis:

Enough! Oh, no! God help us! Looks around him and is terrified at the sight of all the women Ach! Now I've seen everything! A whole paddock of them! A whole herd of them! They're all gathered around the gates. Stuttering with fear. And whaaaaat are you all doing here, then, hey?

He goes and picks up a lighted piece of wood and waves it about threateningly but he is still petrified.

Stratyllis:

Ha! Shitting yourself with fear, are you? (Indicating her friends) What, you mean this little lot? This is nothing. This is just a tiny number of us out here. You should see the rest of us!

Drakis: Outraged

Hey, Phadrias, are we going to let these old weather-beaten shags cackle like this for ever? Shouldn't we break a rod across their back?

Stratyllis:

Girls, put your buckets down and get ready for them – and if they dare raise a hand!

Phadrias:

Just a couple of slaps about the face would do it, I should think, Drakis. That should shut them up. The sort of slaps our famous sculptor, Voupalos, copped. Hahaha! Imitating Boof, boof!

Stratyllis: *Steps between them*

Oh yea? Well, here you are! Do it! Go on, do it!

Offers her face for the slapping. Here's my face. Just try it! Come on!

Phadrias approaches tentatively.

Booh!

Phadrias withdraws frightened

You do boy, and you'll get to know what it would feel like if some wild dogs took a liking to your balls... and ripped them right off and right out of your crotch! Go on, try!

Phadrias: Phadrias withdraws further

If you don't shut up, you old hag, I'll... I'll... I'll rip your guts out!

Kallyki:

Oh, yeah? You just raise one finger against our Strato here and...

Phadrias:

One finger? One finger! Oh, I am soooooo scared now! I'll raise a full fist of them against the silly, old bitch!

Krytilli:

I'll tear your guts AND your lungs out – with my own teeth!

Strynidoros: Looking for support from his group

There's no wiser man -or poet- than Euripides, hey men? And he was right, too, when he said, "There's no creature so vulgar as a woman."

Stratyllis:

Rhodippi, dear, pick up your jug again and get ready.

Strynidoros:

Yea, and... and... why did you... you... God-cursed creature, why did you bring all this water here, hey?

Stratyllis:

And you, you old bum-beater, why did you bring all this fire here, hey? To roast yourselves? Hahahaha!

Phadrias:

No, to build a nice little pyre for you and your friends.

Stratyllis:

And we, we'll quench this fire of yours with our water.

Drakis:

You! You'll quench our fire? Hah!

Stratyllis:

With our water. You'll see!

A battle starts between Stratyllis and Drakis. She tries to throw the water on the fire, he tries to burn her with a lighted branch. Other warring pairs are made here who will be seen as reconciled friends at the close of the play.

Drakis: Lunging at her crotch with the torch

I don't think so. In fact I think I might... just apply a little bit of heat under there for you...

Stratyllis:

Oh, yea?

She approaches him, finds out he smells badly and pinches her nose

Pooh! O, my goodness! Listen, you old piece of filth, if you happen to have a bit of soap with you, I might just do you the favour and give you a bath!

Drakis:

A bath? Me! Oh, you old piece of carcass!

Stratyllis:

Yea, it'll be a real nuptial bath.

Phadrias:

Ohhhh! What arrogance!

Rhodippi:

Because I'm an emancipated woman!

Philourgos:

I'll emancipate your throat for that!

Rhodippi:

Ha! No more shitty, stifling laws from your parliamentary bench, boy!

Strynidoros:

Burn her hair for that!

Stratyllis:

Flood the bastards! Do your stuff girls, drown them now!

The women chase the men about until they pour their water all over the men's heads.

Drakis:

Bloody hell!

Stratyllis:

It's not tooooo hot, for you, is it, deary?

Drakis:

Hot? What's hot?

She throws a bit more water on him, this time directed at his phallus

Stop! What do you think you're doing?

Stratyllis:

I'm... watering you. Pointing at his fallen phallus

See if I can get some new growth out of you!

Drakis:

I'm frrrrreezing, trrrrrembling!

Stratyllis:

Well, go sit by your fire then!

The women withdraw cautiously into their territory (SR). The magistrate, a paradigm of a pompous, corrupt politician, followed by a number -at least four- of Skythian archers enter from stage left. (Note: The archers are the common police force of Athens at the time.)

Magistrate:

Well, then! Has all this womanish pandemonium finished yet? Have they all finished with their lunatic drum beating and their vulgar drunken orgies and their rooftop wailing over their poor little Adonis? All this stuff reminds of the day -may we never see that day again!- when Demonstratus talked us into sailing against Sicily. Remember? His drunken wife began an orgy of lamentations about her little Adonis. Mocking her "Oh, my poor, poor, little Adonis, my poor little Adonis! Oh, my poor, poor, little Adonis." She squealed and squealed interminably. Then Demonstratus, the old piece of dung went on with "we need to enlist soldiers from Zakynthos!" and off she went again! She got up onto her roof this time and began screeching, "Cry, cry, ye all, for our poor, poor Adonis!" She screamed and carried on like this until the old ball-busting, wrath-straddled, God-cursed bastard, Demonstratus, to spite her, pushed his vote through the Assembly! Such are the wild, undisciplined doings of women!

Drakis:

And if you only knew just how wild and undisciplined, they are, sir. The insults these women have subjected us to! Not only have they called us all sorts of disgusting names but then, to add injuries to their insults, they've tossed jugfuls of water all over us -soaked us through and through! We look like... we've pissed ourselves!

Magistrate:

Because, by Salty Poseidon, we are so piss-weak ourselves! All this awful stuff, is our very own fault! Because we are the ones who spoil them rotten and corrupt their little brains. We sow this sort of thinking into their small skulls. Because, what do we husbands do? I'll show you what we do: Here's one husband going to the jeweler's:
Mocks a piss-weak husband

"Hey mister jeweler. You know that bracelet you've made for my wife? You know how we went dancing the other night? Weeeeell, its little thingy broke and it slipped out of its little holey-poley while she was dancing last night and now the thingy is broken. I'm off to war now, so... could you be a nice little boy and go over to her tonight to fix it for her, to put the little thingy back into the little holey polley, please?" Or another idiot will go over to the shoemaker who's a huge, strong man

with a prick to match and he says to him, mocking again "O, please, mister cobbler, my wife's little tootsie wootsie is hurting a bit because the strap on her sandal is a little titsy bitsy, witsy, too tight. Could you please run over to her at midday and stretch it out a bit for her? Make it wiiiiiiider for her, please?" So, here we are now, suffering the consequences of this sort of piss-weak behaviour... I need to go in there now, to get some money to pay the city's rowers. How am I going to do that if these bloody women have bolted all the gates, hey?

But I won't stand for it! Bring me the crow bars, men! I'll make them pay for this insolence! To one of his Skythian archers Hey, you! What are you gaping at, moron? Looking for a tavern, are you? Damn you! Come on men, let's put our ramrods here, under the gates and ram them open! I'll put my rod here with yours, too.

They start at this but Lysistrata enters through the gates of the acropolis. She's followed by Caloniki, Myrrhini, the Skythian policewoman and other wives. They are carrying little baskets out of which they will eventually bring some ribbons, a wreath and a garland.

Lysistrata:

You won't have to ram open any gates, boys! See? I'm here, of my own accord!

Looks about her at the men's efforts

Why the rams, boys? We don't need rams here, we just need a bit of brain. Much better than all the rams in the world. We should just use a bit of grey matter and nous, that's all! This is Athena's Temple. Athena, boys, the Goddess of wisdom!

Magistrate:

Is that a fact, you... you over-defiled wench? He searches among the men.

Where's my archer? Hey, you! Officer! Grab this whore and tie her hands behind her back –both of them!

Lysistrata:

Oh yea? Well, let me tell you, Mister Magistrate, sir! Officer or not, he who touches even my little pinky shall spill plenty of tears for it.

Skythian retreats cowardly.

Magistrate: *Disgusted*

What? Are you afraid man? Two of you then! Quickly, grab her by her waist. Seize her!

Two Skythians attempt this.

Caloniki: Steps forward threateningly. To the Magistrate. Hey! If they as much as lay a finger on our Lysistrata, I'll kick the shit out of you, trust me... sir! I'll make

you brown your pants!

Skythians retreat cowardly behind the other men

Magistrate: Disgusted at his officers again.

Me brown my pants? Me! You'll be the one shitting yourself in a minute!

Looking for his officer again Damn it, where's my officer? Finds one Here, you! Tie up this big mouth first!

The officer attempts this but he's also stopped by Myrrhini

Myrrhini:

Go on then, touch our Caloniki if you dare, go on! One little fingertip, plop face and you'll be calling for surgery.

Magistrate: *Turns to Myrrhini*

By the gods! And who's this one then? Skythian, leave that one and grab this one first! I'll put an end to this outrageous exodus!

Officer attempts this too but again he's stopped by Stratyllis. She is charging forward with the rest of her women.

Stratyllis: *To the Skythian*

You touch our Myrrhini old man and I'll rip all you hair out. Strand by miserable strand. That'll make you squeal like the pig you are!

Skythian retreats behind friendly forces.

Magistrate:

Damn my rotten luck! The cops have vanished! How on earth could we ever let a bunch of women beat us like this? Come on, my good Skythians! Let's all march forward together in a group and rush them!

Lysistrata:

Hahahaha! I think you ought to know, mister Magistrate! There are four battalions of us women here. And we are all very, very well armed, very, very willing, very, very able and very, very ready!

She lunges towards them

Magistrate:

Quick, now! Officers, tie their hands up!

Lysistrata: *To the audience*

Women! Sisters! Come out here, all of you! All you sellers of seed, of pumpkin, of peas and beans; of garlic and wine, of hotel beds and flour and bread! All of you, darlings who've been pushed and smacked around, who've been insulted. Come out all of you!

All men rush to obey the magistrate and all women to assist Lysistrata. A noisy and chaotic melee ensues. The Skythians are soaked to the core. In the battle there's a comical, non-verbal confusion and hints are made at another possible romance, that of the female Skythian and the male Skythian (the one insulted by the magistrate earlier.) Also, the magistrate confronts the female Skythian at one point and he's outraged when he realises she is working on the side of the women. He mumbles, "more womanish treachery!" At the end, the Skythians and Drakis' men suffer great losses and withdraw thoroughly shamed to their territory, at SL.

Magistrate:

By the gods! Look at my poor Archers! They've all been thoroughly thrashed!

Lysistrata:

Of course they did! What did you think? That you were dealing with some little slave girls or women with no fortitude?

Magistrate:

Fortitude? Oh, you've got that all right... You've got balls... when you're drunk!

Drakis:

You've wasted enough words, here, Your Honour. What's the point of exchanging civil words with wild beasts?

Philourgos:

Yeah, can't you see the washing they gave us -clothes and all, and no soap!

Stratyllis: *To the Magistrate*

You need to learn not to raise an angry hand against your neighbour, sir, because if you do, you'll end up with a black eye.

Kallyki: *Also to the Magistrate*

And if I want to just sit on my bum and think all day long, like a demure little maid, hurting no-one and stirring no-one's twig then that's just what I'll do!

Krytilli: *Also to the Magistrate*

And if you want to take the honey from my little honey pot, well then, Mister Magistrate, beware! You'll be stirring my sting!

The Magistrate turns and gathers the men around him for a conference. The women do the same in their territory.

Magistrate:

O, God! How do we deal with these beasts? I can't take much more of this torture!

Drakis:

Let's think this through... Whatever gave them the idea to climb this unclimable cliff,

to this sacred and glorious ground? What made them want to come and take over the Acropolis?

Strynidoros: *To the Magistrate*

Ask her, Your Honour! Question her! And don't trust her. Question everything she says and does.

Philourgos:

It'd be shameful to let this go without a sound trial.

Magistrate:

Right, then!

Breaks the huddle. Walks over to Lysistrata

You! First thing I wish to know from you is, what were your thoughts when you came to shut our Acropolis up with bars and rams?

Lysistrata:

So as to keep the money away from you. So that you can't use it for your stupid war!

Magistrate:

You think we need money for war?

Lysistrata:

Yeah, I think you need money for war! And not only for war but you've also screwed up everything else with it, as well! This war of yours has given crooked leaders like Peisandros – to use but one example- the opportunity to steal money, so as to feed their constantly rumbling guts!

So, my dear Magistrate, what we will do is this: we will let their guts go on rumbling. From now on they won't be able to do what they want with that money. That money will not come down out of there just to shut up the rumbling of their guts, not ever again!

Magistrate:

O yeah? And what will you do with it?

Lysistrata:

What do you mean, "what will we do with it?" We'll keep it safe, that's what we'll do with it!

Magistrate:

You? Keep it safe?

Lysistrata:

What's so hard about that? We've kept the house purses safe for years!

Magistrate:

House purses? House purses? That's a totally different thing, you silly woman!

Lysistrata:

Why is that?

Magistrate:

This is a war fund, you stupid woman! A war fund, get it?

Lysistrata:

And that's exactly our first goal: No more war!

Magistrate:

No war? No war? How on earth are we going to protect ourselves without war?

Lysistrata:

We'll protect you! No need for war!

Magistrate:

You lot? Huh!

Lysistrata: Swinging her bum lasciviously.

Yes, just little ol' us! We, the women!

Magistrate:

Savagery!

Lysistrata:

We'll save you, Mister Magistrate, sir! Whether you like it or not!

Magistrate:

Grrr. What a painful utterance!

Lysistrata:

What are you getting angry about? What needs to be done, must be done!

Magistrate:

But... God! God... It's so... so... bloody unfair!

Lysistrata:

But it's the right, the proper thing to do!

Magistrate:

What if I don't want to?

Lysistrata:

All the more reason, to do it then!

Magistrate:

What got you so concerned about war and peace all of a sudden?

Lysistrata:

What? Well, let me tell you...

Magistrate: *Interrupts her by angrily raising his fists*
Talk fast then, before your tears begin to roll.

Lysistrata:
All right. Listen then but keep your fists to yourself.

Magistrate: Looks at his hands which are still shaking with anger.
I can't... it's... too hard for me. You've got them all angry!

Stratyllis: *Raises her own fist at him*
Then it's you who'll be doing the crying!

Magistrate:
Bah! Go croak those words to yourself, you old hag! (To Lysistrata) You! Talk to me!

Lysistrata:
But of course! Now! Before the war, everything you men did, we suffered in silence and dignity because you wouldn't let us make a sound. Not a peep.
God, we hated you for that! And then, all the time, we'd hear about all those dreadful decisions you'd be making about some very important issue or other. But, we'd put on a smile to hide the pain and we'd come to you with, "how did parliament go today, darling? Any laws posted on the law pillars about peace?" Well, my own husband would answer with, "Grrrr... what's it to you?" and with "Grrrr... won't you ever shut up, woman?" So, I'd shut up.

Stratyllis:
Me? I'd never shut up!

Magistrate:
You! By God, I'd have given you something to squawk about, you old crow!

Lysistrata:
And that's exactly why I did shut up! But then, other stupid decisions of yours would come up and again we'd ask, "husband, how could you do such stupid things?" And the dear hubby would take one frowny look at me and tell me to go back to my weaving or he'd give me something to really scream my head about. Then he'd say what Hektor said to his wife, Adromache, "war is men's business!" The fool's been reading too much Homer!

Magistrate:
And he'd be right, too!

Lysistrata:
But how so, you God-spewed fool? We had to accept your policies even when they were totally ill-judged. All right. We did that for a while but then we began hearing

your pitiful crying in the street, mocking the men crying in the street “We need men! Where are the men? Oh me, oh my! There isn’t a man left in our country, not even a one!” So, we women thought we should get together and try to save Greece. Enough waiting for you lot of foolish men to do it. We, women, can wait no longer. And if you want to take your turn at shutting up and listening to our good advice, we’ll straighten everything out for you!

Magistrate: Fuming with anger

You? You’ll straighten everything out for us? The dreadful things you say, woman! I won’t stand for that! Grrrr!

Lysistrata:

I thought I said, shut up!

Magistrate:

Damned woman! Me shut up, for you? To a woman... a woman wearing a scarf over her head? Never!

Lysistrata: Removes scarf and places it over the Magistrate’s head.

Oh, is this what’s bothering you? Well, here you are! It’s off my head and onto yours, now! Now you can shut up!

Stratyllis: Walks over and hangs a basket over his limp elbow. The Magistrate now looks comically like a woman.

And you can have this little basket, too!

Lysistrata:

Your sewing is in there. And some beans to chew on while you’re working on it. From now on, sewing for you, war for us!

Stratyllis: To the rest of the old women

Put your jugs down, women, so that we can give our friends here, a hand. It’s our turn now.

Kallyki:

Great! I never tire doing the sacred dance and my good knees don’t buckle with the workload.

Krytilli:

Me, too. I want to be just like them in everything. Same nature, same charm, same bravery, same wisdom, just as patriotic, as virtuous and as proud!

Stratyllis:

So, come all you grannies and nannies of the bravest, prickliest of all the nettles! Let loose your anger but don’t slacken the force of your charge. The wind is right behind

us, women! Let's go!

Lysistrata:

And so long as sweet-tempered Eros and Aphrodite are still bulging our breasts and tightening our bums with their lusty breath and so long as they make our men's pricks stand like policemen's truncheons, I'm sure that soon, the whole of Greece will be calling us "Battle Blockers!"

Magistrate:

Is that right? So... what will you do?

Lysistrata:

If we first stop the mindless display of arms and lunacy in the market place...

Stratyllis:

That's right, by Aphrodite!

Lysistrata:

Stupid bastards, they're everywhere! Armed to the teeth and pacing up and down between the cabbage stalls and the pottery shops, like frenzied lunatics! Idiots!

Magistrate:

But of course, woman, that's the way of heroes!

Lysistrata:

But doesn't it look just a little queer to you? I mean, men carrying a huge shield with the drawing of a fearsome gorgon painted all over it... looking to buy sardines?

Stratyllis:

Ha! That's so damned true! I saw a guard the other day. Long haired fool, on a horse, stuffing his shiny bronze helmet full with peas which he'd bought from an old woman's stall. And another one, a Thracian, jerking and shaking his spear and shield about, frightening some poor old woman out of her wits, pinching all the ripe figs from her stall and stuffing himself with them, just like a real barbarian.

Everyone else, including the Magistrate's men, burst into loud chuckles and laughter

Magistrate:

All right, all right! So, how will you... women, be able to put an end to all this terrible turbulence amongst all the nations? How would you undo it all?

Lysistrata:

With great ease!

Magistrate:

Oh, yes? Is that right? Well? How? Come on, show me!

Lysistrata:

We shall undo all this turbulence just like we undo the knots in a ball of wool. We simply pick up the spindles and we pull one thread this way, another that way, another this way, another... Simple! That's how we'll get rid of all the knots. We'll send out some embassies here, some embassies there...

Magistrate:

Fools! You think you can stop such great problems with spindles and wool?

Lysistrata:

But of course! And if you, too, had the intelligence to undo knots in balls of wool, you'd be able to undo knots in the State, as well!

Magistrate:

Knots in wool? Knots in wool? What on earth are you talking about, woman? Show me!

Lysistrata:

Sure!

Lysistrata now turns and speaks directly at the audience as if she's giving them a lecture, as if she's holding them responsible for much of Athens' predicament.

You simply wash the city just like you wash wool.

First, you put the wool into the tub and get rid of all the daggy bits, all the crap around its bum. Then you put it on a bed, take a rod and scrutch and bonk all the burrs and spikes out it. All those burrs and spikes that have gathered themselves into tight knots and balls and are tearing and tangling the wool of State, well, you just tease them out of there. Rip their heads off! Then, off for the combing. You put all the wool together into one basket. All of it! Friends, foreign or local, allies -anyone who's good for the State. Drop them all in there. As well as our citizens from the colonies. Consider them, too, as part of the same ball of wool, only separated from each other. So, what with all those colonies joining the ball, you'll be able to weave a cloak big enough for the whole city.

Magistrate:

How bloody frightening! All this spindle spinning and rod rodding that these women want to do! What do they know about the suffering that goes with war? About bearing the burden of war?

None!

Lysistrata:

None? None! You warped wanker! We suffer twice as much as you.

Firstly, we give birth to these men which you promptly send off to war...

Magistrate: *Interrupts her*

Oh, shut up you stupid woman! Let's forget all this stuff!

Lysistrata: Ignoring the interruption

...and secondly, we women, have every right to be enjoying the prime of our life – which is now! But because of all these campaigns of yours, we all go to bed alone these days. And it's not only us who are suffering but our daughters, too, whose prime is passing them by even faster. They're in there, in their rooms, totally alone.

Magistrate:

And don't men get old, too?

Lysistrata:

You think it's the same? When a man comes back from his battle, even if he's old and grey, he can still find a fuck, whereas a woman's prime races by and if no one grabs it, she'll never get a fuck! So, the poor thing just sits there, in her room, all alone, reading marriage omens!

Magistrate:

Well, yes, if a man can still get it up...

Lysistrata: This time she interrupts him angrily.

War suffering! Bah! You obviously know nothing about real suffering, so... so why don't you just drop dead, hey?

She looks about her.

Here you are! Here's a perfect spot for you! I'll get you a coffin and bake you the burial cake... and here! Takes out a garland from a basket and throws it around his neck.

Crown yourself with this.

The rest of the women gather around him and with hilarity and derision, dress him up as a corpse.

Stratyllis:

Hang on a minute!

Takes out a ribbon from the basket and wraps it around him

And take this from me, too.

Kallyki: *Takes out a wreath and puts it on his head*

And this from me.

Lysistrata:

Need anything else? No? Well? Hop on the boat, then, Mister Magistrate, sir!

Puts her hand to her ear

Hear that? It's Charon calling you. Next stop the Underworld! Go on! Hop it! What's holding you back? Cark it, you old kook!

Magistrate:

My God, the things I have to endure! Right! That's it! I'm off to show my brother magistrates what these women have done to me! I'll go exactly as I am! Just like this!

Magistrate and Skythians exit, stage left. The women burst into laughter.

Lysistrata: *Shouting after him*

Don't complain that we didn't give you a good funeral... and we'll give you your the proper three-day memorial the day after tomorrow, if you want!

Satisfied and with laughter, Lysistrata, Caloniki, Myrrhini and the Skythian woman archer leave the stage through the gates of the acropolis.

Scene 3

Drakis: Moves with his men towards the centre of the battle. He is totally bemused for a few seconds as the scene changes. Then, agitated and determined, he stares his enemy in the face and:

Right! Right! All right then! All right! Time for all free men to stand up and get ready for action. Right! Takes off his cloak, ready for action. Right! Let's strip, men and let's just examine this huge issue.

His limp phallus becomes even more conspicuous now that he's taken off his cloak Right!

His men follow suit

Phadrias: *Suddenly hit by the smell which resulted from their last action*

Buh! I can smell something very foul around here. *Becoming serious*

In fact, I can smell Hippias' rule of tyranny behind all this. I can smell Hippias' type of dilemma: horsey woman on top! I'm... I'm petrified! I have an awful hunch that some Spartan men might have gathered all their women together and tugged them all off to the house of that womaniser, Cleisthenes, who, in turn, got them all to stir up our own women here to seize our funds – and my wages, my daily bread!

Philourgos:

It's grotesque how these women are running around alarming our citizens with ejaculations about bronze shields and about making peace with Spartans... Spartans! They're about as trustworthy as wolves with gaping and salivating mouths!

Strynidoros:

Mates, these things, these things are all threads these bastards are weaving to get a cloth of tyranny together over us. Ah, but, no! We won't bow to tyranny! "I'll stand aloof," as the song goes: Sings saucily "Oh, I'll bury my sword in the myrtle bush, the myrtle bush, the myrtle bush..." and I'll stand -fully armed- behind the statue of our favourite tyrant killer, Aristogeiton, in the market place. I'll stand there just like he did: at the ready for the ambush and... and... Pointing at Stratyllis ...when this God-hated woman turns up, I'll smack her in that big gob of hers!

Stratyllis:

Oh, yeah? You just try and your own mother won't be able to recognise you when you get home -if you get home!

To the women My darling oldies... takes a hold of her jacket, rips it off and throws it to the ground first, let's throw these to the ground!

Kallyki:

Athenians! Let us begin our good work by giving our city some useful words. And it's good and proper that we should give her some good advice because she raised us in absolute luxury. I, for example, when I was but seven years old, I was made a temple attendant. Then, when I turned ten, I was given the duty of grinding the sacred barley at Artemis' temple and was also one of the participants at the festival, one of the little bears, as we call them. I used to have to take off my saffron robe and dance naked in the procession. Later on, of course, when I became a beautiful young woman, I used to carry the string of sacred dried figs at Athena's procession. That's the greatest honour that can be bestowed upon an Athenian girl!

Krytilli:

And that's why I owe it to our city to give something useful back to it, in return. To the men Don't hold it against me for being born a woman or for knowing how to fix these awful problems we are facing at the moment. My contribution to the common cause will be real men! Because you lot, you old codgers and tax dodgers, you've contributed nothing. All you did was to waste what your grandfathers put there. All that wealth they had brought back from their victory in the Persian wars. You've wasted all that up and you're sending us headlong into bankruptcy!

Drakis moves towards her angrily but she takes out her shoe and waves it angrily at him.

And any more grief from you, old man and I'll smash your jaw with my shoe!

Drakis:

My God! Is this arrogance not unbearable? Right! Right! All right then! Fine! I call on... I call on all men with pricks and balls! We must all raise against this outrage right now before it gets many worse!

All the men look at their limp members for a moment. Their histrionics display their dismay.

Philourgos:

Shirts off, men, so that they can see the powerful man and the powerful smell his smell all at once. It's not right to turn our men's bodies into stuffed vine leaves!

They all take off their shirts with rumblings of "that's right," "too bloody right" "we'll show them what we're made of"

Drakis:

Right! Arise, all you men who wear the bright medals of the bright winners of the bright battles a hundred years old – and more! You, brave men who wear the white sandals! Ah, we sure were something back then, weren't we, mates? Let's now rise again, men! Let's rid ourselves of this old age and let's give our bodies new wings!

Phadrias:

Don't let any of you men give these women the slightest grip on anything, because nothing escapes their greasy hands. They'll be building ships and taking off for sea battles next – sailing against us, like that traitor, Artemisia, when we were fighting the Persians. And if they set their minds to take on horse riding, then we can forget about our cavalry! Because when it comes to riding, these women know it all! Even at the gallop you can't get them to fall off! Just look at those paintings of Mikon, for example, with all those Amazons!

These are not women, they are fighting men! So, our duty men, is clearly this: It is to grab them by their neck and place that neck of theirs firmly in the public pillory!

With a sudden move he lunges towards Rhodippi whom she catches for a second but she escapes him

Rhodippi:

My God! Any more of this sort of heat from you, boy and... we'll set loose our lust on you! I'll make you rush off to your little boy friends crying and whimpering like little shagged sheep. Behhhhhehe!

Startyllis:

Right girls! We women have our own smells, too. Let them get a whiff of it girls! Take off your shirts and... rushes at the men... chaaaaaarge!

Kallyki: *Daring the men*

Come on then, one of you try and hit me, come on! Huh! You'll never be able to chew garlic again, nor black beans, if you did.

To Philourgos who begins to charge towards her

One bad word from you, old kook and I'll rip your testicles off... just like the little beetle did to the eagle's eggs in Aesop's little story. Chirp, chirp ouch, ouch!

Stratyllis:

Huh! And me? I'm not worried about you men. Not while my Lampito and that noble girl from Thebes, Ismenia, are still alive. To Drakis You? You lot are totally useless! Seven rounds of legislating and still nothing! That's how much everyone in this city hates you!

Just yesterday I had a party for all of us women, in honour of Hekate so I invited one of the neighbours, a stunning little whore, beautiful, like a Boetian eel, no less, but no, she wasn't allowed to come, thanks to your stupid laws. It seems you'll never stop all this stupid, aggravating, masturbating, legislating, until someone... lunges at Drakis' phallus ...grabs you by your groin's dangler, tosses you about and... rips your bum apart!

The men retreat panic stricken. Under subtle light changes they retreat to their territory and, ashamed, take away all the wood and implements they've brought in with their first entrance. These implements will not be used again for the duration of the play. The men stay at their territory for the duration of the next scene. A small pause before Lysistrata enters through the gates. She looks distressed.

Scene 4

Stratyllis: To Lysistrata, expansively

Ah, leader of this enterprise... leader of this grand scheme! Why have you come down from your lofty chambers? And why do you look so deeply worried, woman?

Lysistrata:

The behaviour of bad women and their sex-clogged brains, Stratyllis! That's why I lose heart! I've been spending all day long pacing nervously up and down!

Krytilli:

Why, Lysistrata? What's up?

Lysistrata:

It's true, girls, we have sex-clogged brains!

Kallyki:

Well? Tell your friends, then! What's the matter, darling?.

Lysistrata: Sighing deeply

Ah! It's too shameful to tell and it's too heavy to carry around in your chest.

Stratyllis::

Well, don't hide it, from us, then Lysistrata. Give us the full damage report.

Lysistrata:

To put it in just four words, girls, "we need a fuck!"

Together:

Oh, my Goddddd!

Lysistrata:

God? God? What are you calling him for? What's he got to do with it! It's the way things are with us. I just can't keep these women off their husbands' pricks! They're constantly running off. One of them I caught scratching a hole on the wall that leads to Pan's cave -you know, where Apollo did all his raping; another was trying to escape by hurling herself down some lever-and- pulley thing, and another – this one decided to climb up onto a bird yesterday, no doubt hoping to fly over to that womaniser's house, Orsilochus, but I tore that one down by her hair. So far, they've used every possible excuse to go home.

Caloniki rushes out of the Acropolis, looking frantic.

Here's one of them now. Hey you! Where are you running off to?

Caloniki:

Um... ummm... I really need to go home, Lysistrata. I need to check my Milesian wool. I think the moths might be eating it.

Lysistrata:

What damned moths? Get back inside, girl!

Caloniki:

I'll be right back, I swear by the Gods, Lysistrata! Just let me go and spread my wool on the bed, Lysistrata. It won't take long!

Lysistrata:

You'll go nowhere and spread nothing, anywhere!

Caloniki:

So will I let my wool just die, then?

Lysistrata:

If that's what will happen, then yes!

Myrrhini rushes out similarly.

Myrrhini:

Oh, what a stupid fool I am! Stupid, stupid, stupid fool! Hahahaha! I forgot my lovely flax totally unscutched at home!

Lysistrata:

Here's another! Out to get her "flax scutched!" Back inside, you!

Myrrhini:

Oh but I swear Lysistrata, by the moon even, please! Do let me just go and bonk it a little. I'll be right back!

Lysistrata:

No, no bonking! Because – because, you stupid girl, if you do it then every other woman in there will want to do it as well!

Ismenia, the Boetian wife, rushes out similarly. This one looks pregnant.

Ismenia:

Dear God, dear God, deary, deary deary me, o, my God! Oh dear God! Oh, divine protector of births! I beg you, hold back this delivery till I get out of this sacred soil!

Lysistrata:

What are you warbling on about, woman?

Ismenia:

I'm about to give birth, Lysistrata!

Lysistrata:

Birth? But you weren't pregnant yesterday.

Ismenia:

Today I am, though. Please, Lysistrata, send me home to the midwife, send me off as quickly as possible!

Lysistrata:

So you're pregnant hey? She feels the bulge And what's this you got here, hey? It's soooo hard!

Ismenia:

Yeah, it's a boy!

Lysistrata:

Let's see then... My god! Taps at the bulge Sounds like there's something bronzey under there... And it sounds like it's hollow inside. Let's see this baby of yours. Lifts up Ismenia's skirt and discloses the article Ah, ha! The sacred helmet of Athena! You're not pregnant after all, are you my stupid girl?

Ismenia:

But I am pregnant, Lysistrata, I know I am! I swear I am!

Lysistrata:

And this helmet is for?

Ismenia:

...in case I was overtaken by the labour pains while I was in the Acropolis. I'd give birth in this helmet... like the pigeons... so that the birth wouldn't touch the sacred ground, you understand, Lysistrata, don't you?... I'm trying not to defile the sacred ground of Acropolis with my birthing... thing!

Lysistrata:

My God! What excuses! Yes, all right. I understand, now... the birth will pollute the holy ground... No! You're not going anywhere, my girl! You'll just have to stay here for the baby's – I mean the helmet's- naming party!

Ismenia:

But Lysistrata, since I saw the sacred snake, roaming about the temple I can't even sleep here.

Corinthian whore rushes out feigning similar distress

Corinthian Whore:

I'm going nuts with these owls! All damned night long! Wooooooo, wooooooo, wooooooo!

Lysistrata:

Enough! Fools! Enough exaggerations! All right! Perhaps you do miss the pricks. All right! But don't you think they miss you too? They are going through some very stiff nights themselves, out there!

Believe me! Control yourselves, darlings and persevere for just a little longer, because... because there's an oracle about us and it predicts a victory for us -that's if we don't split asunder and begin fighting each other! Takes a scroll out of the folds of her dress Here it is!

Myrrhini:

Tell us what it says!

Lysistrata:

Listen then:

“... but when the swallows repel the pricks of the heath cocks and flee from them and gather together in one spot, all their worries will be gone – and as for the rest, All-Cracking Zeus will turn the uppers into lowers and vice-versa.”

Corinthian Whore:

You mean we'll be doing the riding from now on? Horsey on top?

Lysistrata: *continues reading*

"...but! If the swallows should split asunder and raise their wings to fly from the holy temple, then the world will be saying that there's no bird alive, none more lecherous than us, I mean the swallow!"

Ismenia:

Now that's one oracle that's pretty clear in meaning! Very unusual!

Lysistrata:

So, let's not weaken when things go tough on us, girls. Let's go inside.
It would be a sacrilege, my dear friends, if we betray the oracle.

Lysistrata and wives exit into the acropolis. All women except Stratyllis and Kallyki move to their territory.

Dusk then Dawn.

Intermezzo

Philourgos moves towards Kallyki and Drakis towards Stratyllis. This is a short farce, the purpose of which is to create a battleground upon which, slowly, the seeds of romance are sown for these two couples.

Drakis: *To Stratyllis*

I want to tell you something. I want to tell you a story now. One which I heard when I was a young boy, and it's about a man called Melanion. Melanion wanted to escape marriage so he ran off first to the desert and then to the mountains and there, with the help of his dog and his nets, he hunted rabbits; and Melanion, because of this hatred for women, he never came back home. We, men, the wiser among us, we hate them no less than Melanion did.

Philourgos: *To Kallyki*

I want to pucker up my lips and kiss you, you old chook!

Kallyki:

Not with that onion stench in your mouth.

Philourgos: *Cocks his leg up*

Well, then, I'll raise my leg up to root you.

Kallyki:

Woah! Rather thick foliage you have down there, haven't you?

Philourgos:

Sign of real men. Just like Myronithes and Phormio -our great heroes! Their enemies certainly knew just how hairy their bums were!

Stratyllis: *To Drakis*

I, too want to tell you a story, one to match yours. Once upon a time, there was a man called Timon. Timon had no home and he had no good looks either. His face, in fact, looked as if some thorns had given it a good work-over; looked like he was spawned by the Furies, when you think about it, really!

So poor Timon, who was also moved by the same sort of hatred. He went off to the desert as well, spitting curses to all the men, because they're all wicked! Now THAT'S our hero! And, like Timon, we, too, hate men, for they're all wicked! And we'll hate them for ever and ever and ever. As for Timon, every woman loved that boy.

Kallyki: *To Philourgos*

Want a slap in the face?

Philourgos: *To Kallyki*

Oh, no, not a slap on my face! You're terrifying me to death! I'm soooooo scared!

Kallyki:

What about if I kicked your legs and smashed them to little bits?

Philourgos:

You'd be lifting your leg too high and showing your foliage, if you tried that.

Kallyki:

Ha! You won't be seeing much down there. We older ladies like to exfoliate. I've shaved off all of mine last night, by the light of the oil lamp.

Dusk, then Dawn.

Scene 5

Lysistrata appears at the parapet of the acropolis. she's guarding the place. Suddenly she sees something, deep in the distance (stage left) which, both, shocks and amuses her.

Lysistrata:

Woaaaaah! Good God! Women, come over here quickly, come!

Caloniki:

What is it, Lysistrata? Why are you shouting?

Lysistrata:

A man, darling, a man! I see a man... coming! Literally! Coming! Look, there! See? He's coming! Hahaha! He must be totally in the grips of Aphrodite's work, that poor man! Oh, Aphrodite! Goddess of Cyprus and Cythera and Pathos! May the path this

man has chosen be the right one!

Ismenia:

Where, where? Where is this man?

Lysistrata:

There, look, by the Temple of Chloe. There!

Corinthian Whore:

Oh, yeah! My God! Who is this man?

Lysistrata:

Take a good look everyone. Anyone know him?

Loud exclamations from all the women.

Myrrhini:

Oh my God! I do! He's my husband! Cinesias! My 'mover and shaker', 'shaggy' for short. My husband! Ohhhhhh!

Lysistrata:

In that case, Myrrhini, the job is yours! Hahahaha! Now this is what you do, my lovely girl: You roast him, you toss him and you turn him and you shake him all about -in short, darling, you trick him! Over and over again. You first give him lots of loving and then you take it all back. Submit to his every passion except the bit which only you and the oath-cup know about.

Myrrhini: (Feeling sorry for her husband) Ohhhhhh!

(But becomes determined after seeing Lysistrata's angry looks) All right! Have no fear, Lysistrata. I'll do everything you said!

Lysistrata:

Good! I'll just stay here to help you with all the lovely trickery and all the preliminary heating up. To the other wives The rest of you, girls, go! Leave! Myrrhini, you go down and wait for me for a minute.

Everyone except Lysistrata leaves. Cinesias and his slave, Manes, enter, SL. Manes is holding Cinesias' baby. Cinesias is burdened with an agonising, throbbing erection.

Cinesias:

Oh, rotten, rotten, rotten and cursed luck! These jerks and spasms are killing me! It feels soooo stretched... It's like I've just come down from the torture wheel! Talk about blue balls! Ohhhhhh! Ahhhhhh! Such pain! Ouch! Ouch!

Lysistrata:

Who's there? Who's trying to... penetrate our fort?

Cinesias:

Me!

Lysistrata:

A man?

Cinesias:

You can say that again! A man, oh yes! A real man!

Lysistrata:

Then piss off, out of here!

Cinesias:

What? Who are you to tell me to piss off?

Lysistrata:

I'm the Day Guard.

Cinesias:

Then, for God's sake, Day Guard, call Myrrhini for me!

Lysistrata:

Me? Call Myrrhini for you? Why should I? Who are you?

Cinesias:

I am her husband. Cinesias of the clan of Bonk!

Lysistrata:

Cinesias! Of the clan of Bonk! Ah, well, well, well! Well then! Greetings, sweetheart! Your name is quite famous around here. You're certainly not an anonymous man amongst us. Your dear wife has your name on her lips all day long. She can eat neither apple nor egg without first saying, "here's to my little Shaggy!"

Cinesias:

Oh my God! Truly? Is that true?

Lysistrata:

I swear by Aphrodite! And whenever our chats fall on men, your darling wife always says, "compared to my Shaggy, all the other men are... puny, little fiddly dick sticks!"

Cinesias: Phallus spasms

Oh my God, oh my God, Oh my God! So... so go and call her then! Right now!

Lysistrata: Shows surprise at his impatience

All right, but... purposeful delay what do I get in return of my favour?

Cinesias: Looking down at his erection

I... I can certainly give you this, if you want! Lysistrata shakes her head. Or this! Throws her a purse Take it! I've got nothing else on me.

Lysistrata:

I'll take this. I'll go and call Myrrhini for you.

Exit Lysistrata

Cinesias:

Hurry! To the audience

God, since the day she left the house, my life became a total misery. Not the slightest bit of joy! I walk through the door and the place straight away looks totally deserted. Even the food is tasteless. That's how horny I am!

Myrrhini: Within

I love that man! I just love him. I love him sooooo much, I'm crazy about him but he doesn't return my love. Please, oh, please, Lysistrata don't send me out there to him!

After a 'pregnant pause' Myrrhini appears coyly at the parapet.

Cinesias:

Oh my sweet, sweet, sweet Myrrhinaki! What are you doing up there, darling? Please come down here!

Myrrhini:

Oh, God no! I'm not coming out there!

Cinesias:

Myrrhini! I'm calling you and you're not coming? Are you disobeying me?

Myrrhini:

You're calling me but you don't really need me!

Cinesias:

Don't need you? (Indicating his jolting phallus) Can't you see this? I'm absolutely burning for you!

Myrrhini:

Nope, I'm off! Disappears from the parapet

Cinesias: Yells. Oh no, don't! Myrrhini, listen! Listen to your baby, will you? (Goes to the baby and shakes and shouts at it) Call your mummy, won't you?

Baby:

Mummy, mummy, muuuuuuuuumy!

Myrrhini appears again.

Cinesias:

Hey, what's wrong with you, Myrrhini? Listen! This is his sixth day without a wash or a feed. Don't you feel sorry for him?

Myrrhini:

Yes, I do, but the negligence is his father's! Disappears again

Cinesias: Desperate

Come down here, you silly girl. For your baby's sake!

Myrrhini: Appears again, looks down at Cinesias, thinks about it for a protracted moment. Oh, very well! To the audience Motherhood! I just have to come down! Anyway, what possible harm can there be in that?

Myrrhini disappears from the parapet, so as to come out through the gate.

Cinesias: To the audience

She looks a bit younger to me. And that look she gave me! Mmmmmm! Much sweeter, gentler; and all this... hard-to-get stuff and the oh-I'm-so-proud stuff! Mmmmmm! All this rubs at my passion all the more! Ahhhhh!

Myrrhini comes out through the gate tentatively, coyly, and goes to her baby.

Myrrhini:

O, sweet, sweet darling baby! You've got such a nasty man for a father, haven't you? Give him to me Takes the baby Ooooooh! Let me kiss mummy's little sugar bun... Mmmmm!

Cinesias:

Stupid girl, why on earth did you listen to these women in there? You're giving me so much agony... and giving yourself so much grief too! He goes to touch her

Myrrhini:

Don't touch me!

Cinesias: Frightened by the blatant and icy rejection

Our whole house is in a mess, Myrrhini. Everything, your stuff, my stuff, everything's in a mess!

Myrrhini:

Don't care about that stuff!

Cinesias:

What? You don't care if the chooks are running around, wearing your frillies?

Myrrhini: Lying

Na! Not me!

Cinesias:

So... you won't be returning home then? He points at his shuddering erection And... and... and you've left Aphrodite's shrine unattended for such a long time! How long has it been since you performed her rites?

Myrrhini:

I don't know and I don't care, and no! No, I won't be coming back -not until all you

men get together and agree to end the war.

Cinesias:

Done! Not a problem! If that's your wish, Myrrhinaki, we'll do it! Consider it done!

Myrrhini:

Good! All right then! If that's your wish, I'll be coming home. Done! But for now, until you sign that treaty, I am sworn to remain here.

Cinesias: Almost in tears

But Myrrhini! It's been such a loooong time... let's fuck!

Myrrhini: Begins the cock "roasting and turning" We caaaan't, sweetheaaaaart... Which, of course, doesn't mean that I don't loooove you any more!

Cinesias:

You do love me? Then come on, sweetie, lie down! Just lie down! Come on, lie down!

Myrrhini:

Don't be ridiculous! In front of the baby?

Cinesias:

Oh, but of course! Stupid me! Violently rips the baby from her hand and throws it to Manes who catches it precariously Manes, take him home!

Manes and the baby exit.

Right! Your child is no longer a consideration! You can lie down now!

Myrrhini:

And where do you suggest we could do it, you silly boy?

Cinesias: Looks all around frustrated

Where? Where? At Pan's cave. That'd be good!

Myrrhini:

All right... ah, but then, after we do it, how could I return to the Acropolis? I won't be clean any more. I'll need purification.

Cinesias:

Oh, that's easy, darling! The spring is right there. The spring of Clepsyda. Take a splash in there.

Myrrhini:

Darling, are you asking me to betray my vow?

Cinesias:

The vow? Bah! Don't let it bother you one little bit, sweetheart. I'll take full responsibility. Let it all fall upon my head.

Myrrhini:

All right then. Let me bring out a mattress first.

Cinesias:

Do nothing of the sort. The ground is good enough for me.

Myrrhini:

Oh, my God, no! I can't let you do that, you poor man!

She walks off into the acropolis shutting the gates behind her. She'll do this a number of times and each time, the sound of the gate closing becomes progressively more and more ominous – louder and signifying the possible permanency of its closure but not, of course, the closure of Cinesias' dilemma. As well, with every entry into the acropolis, Myrrhini takes just a little longer before she comes back outside, so as to make the cock-roasting more effective.

Cinesias: To the audience. After the sound of the gate slamming behind Myrrhini, the tone of his voice belies the message of his words. I can see she really loves me... a lot...

Myrrhini comes back with a mattress.

Myrrhini:

There you are! Got it! She spreads the mattress on the ground. You lie down darling and I'll quickly strip off.

Cinesias is about to lie down.

Myrrhini:

Oh, no! How awful! No sheet! I must go and get a sheet!

Cinesias:

Sheet? What sheet? Oh, nononononono! No, no, no! No sheet for me!

Myrrhini:

Yes, darling, sheets! It's so vulgar and uncomfortable to do it on the bare cords of the mattress!

Cinesias:

Well... give me a kiss then!

Myrrhini:

Here. Mmmm!

Cinesias:

Oh, do be quick then, sweetheart! Get the sheet, hurry!

Myrrhini goes off again. Cinesias is pacing up and down with roasting temper until she returns.

Myrrhini:

Here's the sheet. Now, let's see... She spreads the sheet onto the mattress but she is being excruciatingly meticulous and slow with it. Finally, after she finishes...

You lie down, darling and I'll undress. Cinesias attempts to lie down but he's again stopped by Myrrhini's new discovery. Oh no! Not again! You've no pillow, sweetheart!

Cinesias:

Pillow? Pillow? I certainly don't need a pillow, darling!

Myrrhini:

Yes, but I do!

Myrrhini goes off again

Cinesias: To the audience and pointing at his jolting prick

My God, this prick! It's worse than starving Hercules, waiting for his lunch.

He lies down waiting, with his phallus pointing at the sky. Myrrhini enters with a pillow.

Myrrhini:

Up you hop, dear! She puts the pillow under his head then looks around Now, have I got everything?

Cinesias:

Absolutely everything. Now come down here, my little golden girl!

Myrrhini:

Coming, darling. I'm just going to undo these little titty straps and then... but you won't forget the Peace treaty, now, will you? Don't you cheat me on that!

Cinesias:

May God strike me dead if I do, dear!

Myrrhini: Another discovery

Ah, but look! You don't have a blanket, darling!

Cinesias:

I don't want a blanket! I want a fuck! A fuck! A fuuuuck!

Myrrhini: Remains cool

Of course you do, darling, and that's just what you'll get... in a minute. I'll be right back!

Myrrhini runs off again.

Cinesias:

That person will kill me with all this bedding stuff!

Myrrhini returns with blanket and throws it over Cinesias' reclined body, his

phallus thoroughly vertical.

Myrrhini:

This is to help you raise your self, Shaggy!

Cinesias:

Raise myself? Help me to raise myself? Darling, I've been raised and roused for a long time. I am well and truly raised and roused!

Pretends to get back to her straps but remembers.

Myrrhini:

Ah! Aromatherapy! That's what we need. Some aromatics, Shaggy?

Cinesias:

No, no, no! God, no! Oh, no! No aromas, please, Myrrhinaki!

Myrrhini:

Yes, yes, yes! You must! By Aphrodite, you'll get the beautiful aromas whether you like it or not!

Myrrhini runs off again

Cinesias: Resigned to the fact

Ah, well, let the oils flow, then, oh, Lord, let them flow!

Myrrhini returns with a flask.

Myrrhini:

Give me your hand, please, Shaggy. He does so and she pours some oil onto it. Now, rub it all over you, darling.

Cinesias: Smells it

Pooh! Not the nicest of aromas this one, is it, darling? Not exactly an aphrodisiac. Pooh! I don't like this one at all!

Myrrhini: Examines the flask

Oh, silly me, silly me! How could I? I've brought you the wrong one.

This is the cheap one from Rhodes. Hold on, sweetheart, I'll get –

Cinesias:

No, no, it's all right. He grips her hand It's good, really, it's all right! She struggles Grrrrr! She escapes his grip and runs towards the gates Forget all this, bitch!

Myrrhini: Feigns shock at his outburst

Darling! You're blubbering!

Myrrhini runs off again.

Cinesias:

I'll kill the bastard who brewed the first scent!

Myrrhini returns with another flask.

Myrrhini:

Now, take this alabaster.

Cinesias:

But I've still got the other one on! Darling, just lie down now and forget all the scents.

Myrrhini:

Right, Shaggy, darling. I'll do just that... I'm getting my shoes off right now... and you really won't forget about voting for the Peace Treaty, now, will you?

She moves erotically around him and then gently blind-folds him with her scarf. This excites Cinesias but also gives Myrrhini the opportunity to quietly sneak off through the gate.

Cinesias:

I'll... think about it. Definitely... The gate now slams loudly, fatally, shut. He turns, takes off the blindfold. Oh, my God, she's gone! Ach! That woman has destroyed me! She has rubbed me up and she has rubbed me down and then she went off, leaving me totally excoriated... Shouts and shakes his finger in her direction

I DID NOT HAVE A SEXUAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THAT WOMAN!

Oh, what am I going to do? I need someone to screw! I've been diddled by the most beautiful woman of them all.

Looking at his excoriated member

How will I ever feed this little hungry orphan now? Searching the audience Is there a whore keeper in the house? Hey, Fox Doggy! Are you out there? Rent me a titty or two, will you please, mate?

Scene 6

Drakis' men come forward to join Cinesias

Drakis: Pointing to Cinesias' "problem" Oh, oh, how awwwwful! You poor, poor boy. This sort of cheating rubs one's soul away!

My sympathies to you! Oh, what kidney could ever hope to cope with such a terrible suffering, what soul, what balls, what loins or bum -stretched out like that and missing out on a sunrise fuck?

Cinesias: Spasms of his phallus

Oh, my God! Oh, no! Here come the awful cursed, cursed jerks and jolts again! Nooooooh!

Phadrias: Waits for the spasms to end and then examines the dilemma closely, with covert sexual interest

So... And that's what she's done to you, hey? That totally hateful woman!

Cinesias:

Ah, but she's such a lovable, sweet, sweet woman!

Phadrias:

Sweet? Sweet, you say?

Cinesias: Thinks for a moment, then looks at his painful phallus

No, you're right! Bahhh! She's foul!

Prays to Zeus

Oh, Zeus! Treat that woman like you treat a bundle of straws. Visit her with your typhoons and your tornadoes and your thunderbolts and whiz her all about and spin her all about, and send her high up into the sky, and then... and then suddenly drop her all the way down... splat! Make her wrap herself around this prick!

Enter Spartan herald, stage right. He has an identical problem with that of Cinesias but he's got it hidden beneath his cloak. Phadrias' eyes light up at the sight of the bulge of the herald's right shoulder and at the testicles hanging heavily under his tunic. Phadrias approaches the herald for another close inspection.

Spartan Herald: Uncomfortably

Where's the Athenian Senate or the State House? I have news for them.

Cinesias: Points at the bulge under his cloak and laughs

Ho, ho! And what on Earth are you? Are you a human or a Horn God?

Spartan Herald:

I'm a herald. I've been sent from Sparta about the Peace talks.

Cinesias: Pointing at the Herald's dilemma

And that? Is that a spear you're hiding under your arm?

Spartan Herald: Twists and turns so as to avoid the inevitable discovery

Oh, no, no, no, it's not! I swear to God!

Cinesias:

Stay still, then. Why are you turning away from me? What's that sticking out from under your tunic? Blue balls, is it? From the long march?

Spartan Herald:

Ha! What a crazy man this one is! By Castor, he's nuts!

Cinesias:

Sly little bastard. You're carrying a stiffy!

Spartan Herald:

No, I'm not! Not me! Don't be so stupid! What a crazy man he is!

Cinesias:

So, what's this then?

Spartan Herald:

That's a... that's a... Spartan message rod.

Cinesias:

Hah! If that's a Spartan message rod then so is this (Indicates his own jerking and shuddering phallus) Don't worry friend, I know what's up. You can tell me the truth. How are things with you men in Sparta?

Spartan Herald: Moral relaxation ensues after the disclosure but he is still visibly, very uncomfortable... physically. All of us, Spartans, as well as our allies, we all have stiffies like this one. We all need a fuck!

Cinesias: Thoughtfully

Hmmm. And who do you think is to blame for this suffering, Pan?

Spartan Herald:

Nah, I don't think it's Pan at all. I think it was that Lampito who started it all. Then all the other women in town got together with her and they are keeping us out of their little meadows, with chook wire, like wolves out of the chook pen

Cinesias:

So, how are you coping with all this then?

Spartan Herald:

We're all solid stiff! We're all wondering around the city bent-over like lantern carriers. And the women just won't let us get anywhere near their myrtle bush. Not until we men get together and make peace with the rest of Greece.

Cinesias:

Yes, this is a conspiracy of all the women everywhere. Now, I understand Myrrhini's little tricks. In that case, get back to Sparta, my friend. Get back there as quickly as you can and tell them to send their representatives here with the full power to speak for you all. I'll go to our own Council, here, and select our own negotiators... and I'll point out to them the plight of this here prick!

Spartan Herald:

I'll be off right away. What you say is absolutely great.

Exit herald SR and Cinesias, SL.

Scene 7

The atmosphere is now softer, more sedate, more conducive to the birth and blossom of a romance... or at least of reconciliation! Stratyllis and her women approach Drakis and his group at centre stage.

Drakis:

There's no beast nor leopard -there is no fire more difficult to fight than a woman... Or more ruthless!

Stratyllis: Tenderly

You know this but you still fight us! Isn't it just possible, you silly, silly man, that I could become your faithful, trusty and true friend?

Drakis: Defiantly

I'll never stop hating women!

Stratyllis::

All right then, as you wish. But for now, here! Picks up his shirt I'm not having you wandering around the city naked. Look how ridiculous you look! Here, let me help you put it on. She helps him

Drakis: Surprised. Slight remorse

Now, that... that's a sort of... kind thing you've just done! And I... I took it off in such anger, too!

Sorry!

Stratyllis:

It's all right! Now, you look just like you looked before: a real man! Not so stupid! And if you hadn't been such a pain in the bum to me just before, I'd rip that little beastie right out of your eye!

Look, it's still there!

Drakis:

Is that what's been bugging me all that time? He gives her his ring Here, take this ring and see if you can scrape it out for me, please and then let me take a look at the damned thing. It's been stinging me for ages!

Stratyllis:

Yes, all right. I'll do that for you... even though you're such a difficult bastard.

Scrapes the "beastie" out of his eye and points it out to him

Oh, my God! Look at the size of this mosquito! Can you see it? You'd think it's flown over all the way from that swamp hole, Three-Plume City!

Drakis:

Ah, thanks! Now, that's... that's real helpful of you! The damned thing's been digging a well in there. Ach! But now that it's out, a whole river of tears is gushing out of my eye!

Stratyllis:

Here, let me dry them for you. She takes a hanky out of her pocket and wipes his tears

There! And I'll even kiss you, too, you wicked boy!

Drakis:

No, no kisses! No kisses! But he doesn't resist too vigorously. In fact, his phallus betrays him.

Stratyllis:

Say what you like, I'm giving you a kiss! Does so MmmmmmmM!

Drakis: Ashamed at the disobedience displayed by his phallus
God damn you women! You're all natural tenderisers. The old saying is true about you pests: You can't live with them and you can't live without them! But I'll still make peace with you and I'll even make a promise to you as well! I promise never to treat you badly... or to accept any bad treatment from you! So let's get our vocals together and sing this song, hey?

Together: To the audience

Hey, folks, don't worry!

We're not getting ready to say anything nasty about you lot.

Not anything nasty to anyone.

Quite the reverse, in fact. We want to say – and do, good things for you!

Och! Enough suffering!

We'd like, in fact, to announce that every man and every woman who's in need of a bit of money, say a mina or two, to... well... to come to us because we've got purses aplenty!

And if and when Peace comes around, all the borrowers can... keep that money!

As well, we'll be inviting some of our Carystian allies to our home this evening. These are all good, honest men, these friends of ours.

We'll have cooked some lovely soup and a whole sow for you!

Yes, a sow!

I've sacrificed her earlier so she'll be nice and tender by then.

So, why not come around?

Ah -BUT!

First, do take yourselves and your kids to the loo for a pee and a poo and while you're at it, have a bath too.

And then... well then... walk right in and take a pew.

You'll need no permission!

Walk right in as if it's your own home!

Be brave, go forth... Because...

Because...

Because, the door will be well and truly...

Well and truly...

And firmly...

Slammed-shut to you! Hahahaha!

Stratyllis and her group retreat.

Scene 8

Enter the Spartan envoy: two delegates, the herald, other free men and a number of slaves. Everyone is encumbered with huge erections which they are trying awkwardly and unsuccessfully to conceal beneath their cloaks.

Drakis:

Oh, yes! Here are the Spartan negotiators with their flowing long beards and their long...

By God! Is that a whorehouse you've got beneath your cloak, man? My God! It's totally engulfed your crotch! Hahahahaha! Spartans, welcome! Come! Please tell us your story!

Spartan Delegate 1:

Ahhhh! What's the use of turning this into an epic of many words, ey?

He looks at the rest of his entourage and together they all lift their cloak

Our story is obvious!

Phadrias: Once again jerks his head forward for a closer inspection

Ooooooh! It sure is! This tribulation has certainly... intensified.

The inflammation seems to have turned into a conflagration! Dreadful, dreadful, awful business this!

Spartan Delegate 2:

Unspeakably dreadful. But what can anyone say? Except, quickly, let someone –

anyone, make peace, somehow – anyhow, anywhere...

Enter Polycharides and an Athenian negotiator, both of whom are also visibly affected by the same tribulation. For the first few moments they don't notice the Spartan group.

Drakis: Pointing at the Athenian erections

Good God! Look! I see that our own, local boys are also holding their cloaks at some distance from their bellies. They look like wrestlers, suffering from dreaded affliction, "Wrestler's Donger!"

Polycharides:

Quick, someone tell us where this Lysistrata is because we are here as men...

Phadrias: Still examining the Athenian phalluses

Ahem! Your affliction seems to be similar to that of these other men, there. Do you also suffer from the dreaded "Morning Jolts and Jerks?"

Polycharides:

God, yes! In fact they're so severe our pricks become totally stripped of skin. See? No skin left on them. Raw flesh! They get to be so sore, soon we'll be needing to visit young Kleisthenes himself for a fuck! (Grimaces at the prospect) Grrrr!

Drakis:

Look... Umm... we better be careful about this, men. You better cover all this up, otherwise those uncouth men who had chopped the dicks off the Hermes statues last year and have still not been caught, might be out there, in the audience. You wouldn't want them to see you like that!

Polycharides:

God, no! Good idea.

They hurriedly try to conceal the protrusions

Spartan Delegate 1: Overhearing the above

Oh, God! Let's put our overcoats on, men, at the double!

Polycharides: Notices the Spartans

Ah! Spartans! Welcome Spartan friends. As you can see, we've suffered some shameful things...

Spartan Delegate 1:

Polycharides, my friend! We too have suffered terrible things, so let's not allow those prick-thieves see us so well and truly flagellated.

They all fix their cloaks, but the result, of course must still be comical!

Polycharides:

Right, then, Spartans! Let's talk about what needs to be done. What are you here for?

Spartan Delegate 1:

We are here to participate in the Peace talks.

Polycharides:

Good, so are we. Now... ummm... well, then, why don't we call Miss Lysistrata out here, since she's the only one who can settle our differences.

Spartan Delegate 2:

Sure! Call anyone! Even Mister Lysistratos, if you want! I'm not fussy, right now!

Gates of the acropolis open slowly and Lysistrata appears with all her friends.

Athenian Delegate:

Ah! No need to call her at all, it seems. She's here. She must have heard us.

Drakis:

Welcome! Welcome, bravest of all the brave! Now, Lysistrata, look! The full cream of Greek men is here so you need to become all things to all of us: terrible, as well as soft; innocent as well as vulgar; demure and sweet as well as a woman... full of experience. We are gripped by your stunning virtues and have forgiven all your evil deeds.

Lysistrata: Looks at the sorry state of the men, sneers at their patronising words and addresses her friends. This job is not too difficult. Not if you get them while they're burning for it, rather than when they're just taking each other's measurements. But, I'll soon find this out what the case is here. Where's Miss Peace?

A beautiful naked woman is brought in. On her body is painted the map of Greece. She is brought to stand next to Lysistrata.

Lysistrata: To Stratyllis

Stratyllis, the Spartans first. Take one of them by the hand. Stratyllis is about to do so harshly but is stopped by Lysistrata No, Stratyllis don't use a heavy, hurtful, arrogant hand, like our ignorant husbands used on us. Use a sweet, homely hand, a woman's hand. And, if they won't give you their hand then grab them by their prick. And you, Kallyki, you get the Athenian men and bring them here. Grab whatever they offer you.

Polycharides refuses to give her his hand so Kallyki is forced to grab his member. Both men are brought to stand next to Miss Peace.

Lysistrata: Continues

Now, gather round, Spartans, and you, too, Athenians and listen to me The men obey. I am a woman and I have a brain. A brain that isn't too bad, having listened to

my father's speeches and the speeches of other elders. The Muse herself didn't do a bad job of educating me either.

So, now that I've got you all here, I'll give it to you straight. I'll tell you all you deserve to hear. You two: Spartans and Athenians alike! You both have the same altars, which you sprinkle with the same sacred water and by using the same cup. Just like relatives and friends. You do this at Olympia, at Thermopylae and at Pytho as well as a whole lot of other towns. Yet, when the enemy, the barbarian, have gathered their forces all around you, what do you do? You go about with your Greek armies, destroying Greek cities. Why is that?

That's the first point of my speech.

To the women

Pretty good, huh?

Polycharides: Stops concentrating on Miss Peace's body for a minute
Did she say, "Destroying?" God, I'm thoroughly destroyed by my own ever-bulging prick!

Lysistrata: Continuing her speech

Now, I'll speak directly, first to you Spartans, alone. Don't you know about your countryman, Pericleidas? That man came and sat by our altars, in his scarlet cloak, pale as a ghost and begged us for a few men to save Sparta from the Messinians when God had shaken your city with an earthquake and all the helots had revolted. Our own General Cimon came to you then, with four thousand troops and saved you all. And now, now you want to repay our good deed by destroying our land!

Polycharides: Taking his eyes off the naked body again
Yeah, they sure are unfair, Lysistrata!

Spartan Delegate 1: Who was also caught ogling over the body of Miss Peace
Huh? Ah, oh, yes, Yes, we're guilty, guilty! Returning his attention to the naked body
What a bum, hey? What a remarkably beautiful bum!

Lysistrata: Continuing

And as for you, Athenians. You think I'll let you off? Have you forgotten the days when, because of Hippias and those Thessalians, you were forced to go about wearing those demeaning old clothes dressed as slaves? Don't you remember that the only people who came to fight by your side were the Spartans? It was they who, with a spear in their hand came here and freed you and let you replace those slave's tunics with the fine clothes of free men.

Spartan Delegate 1:

I've never seen a more majestic looking woman in my entire life!

Polycharides:

And I've never seen a more beautiful little paddock.

Lysistrata:

Well then? Why, having done so much good to each other, do you now fight each other? Why don't you just stop all this hatred?

Pointing to Miss Peace

Why not... conciliate?

The two men are dumbstruck at the opportunity

Come on, approach! What's holding you back?

All the men begin to lustfully examine Miss Peace's body.

Spartan Delegate 1: Pointing at the lower part of the body

We're ready for talks if they'll let us have this bit of the Delta, here.

Lysistrata:

Which bit?

Spartan Delegate 1:

This bit here, Pylos. We've been lusting after this bit for years, caressing it...

Polycharides:

Absolutely not! You won't be getting Pylos!

Lysistrata:

Oh, be kind, leave it for them!

Polycharides:

Well, what do we ask for then?

Lysistrata:

Ask for any other place instead.

Polycharides: Going over the whole body

Mmmmm! Very well, give us... first give us Echinous, around here, at the front... and then goes around her body around the back, Melia's Gulf -mmmm these sweet, sweet apple-like buttocks... as well as both these Megarian thighs here!

Spartan Delegate 1:

You've gone mad! We're not giving you everything!

Lysistrata:

Leave it Spartans. Don't go arguing about thighs now!

Polycharides:

Now I want to throw myself naked at this beautiful, rich soil and start ploughing

straight away!

Spartan Delegate 1:

Me too! First thing tomorrow morning I want to get my plough out and –

Lysistrata: Interrupts

Sign first, work later! And if you're really planning to do some work, then, first go and deliberate. Think about it carefully, men and then go back to your allies and announce your decisions.

Polycharides:

What allies, dearie? They're all so horny like us, they'll all come to the exact same decision: to fuck! Every single one of them!

Spartan Delegate 1:

I know OUR allies will, that's for sure!

Polycharides:

Hahaha! And there sure would be no need to ask our oversexed Carystian friends!

Miss Peace is guided back into the acropolis and exits with all the wives.

Lysistrata:

Well said. For now, though, keep yourselves pure because we women will be bedding you in the Acropolis tonight and we'll be offering you the complete contents of our basket of goodies. In the Acropolis, you can all exchange oaths and pledges to each other and then, afterwards, you may each take his own wife home with him.

Exit Lysistrata through the gates.

Polycharides:

Right! Let's hurry, then, mates!

Spartan Delegate 1:

Lead the way, quick!

Polycharides:

We're off right now.

All except Stratyllis' group of women have left the stage. (SL) Drakis' men simply retreat to their territory.

Stratyllis: To the audience. To all those children who've been chosen to take part in the basket-carrying ceremonies– listen to me! I'll give you, with all my heart, all my possessions: Embroidered linen, fine clothes and jewellery of gold -everything! All of you, I say, come get whatever of mine you find inside my home. There's nothing in here that's so securely locked that you can't just break in and take it. Come on! Take it!

Krytilli:

Hahahaha! But unless your eyes are better than mine, you'll see nothing in there!
And...

Kallyki:

If anyone among you has slaves and children too many to feed and nothing to feed them with, well, you, too, go ahead, come to my house and get some flour. True, it'd be pitiful little grains that you'll find but the loaf of bread they'll bake will be huge -like a virgin's tits.

Rhodippi:

Oh, yes! All the poor and hungry are welcome if they wish! They're welcome to come to my house with their sacks and their bags and take away all my grain. My slave will help you fill them up himself. But!

Stratyllis:

Just a little warning beforehand, though!

Krytilli:

Don't come near my front door!

Rhodippi:

Beware of the dog! Woof, Woof!

All the women together laugh:

Hahaha!

Hahaha!

Women retreat to their territory.

Scene 9

Night. Loud party noises are heard from within the walls of acropolis. Vagrants are milling around the walls, attracted by those noises. They have appeared quietly from both sides of the stage. Some are inside the walls and some at the entrance. Suddenly there's banging against the door. Voice of Polycharides and other men, shouting at the vagrants.

Polycharides: Within

Open the door! Open the door, you! Move out of the way!

Doors open and Athenian Delegates, Cinesias and some others come out. They are carrying torches, are happily inebriated and their penises have obviously been appeased.

Polycharides: To the vagrants
Move out of the way! Hey you! What are you sitting around here for? Want me to scorch your bum with my torch?

Shouts from the two groups of men and women and from the other delegates,
“yeah, yeah!”

Polycharides: To the audience
What an utterly vernacular routine! No, I won't do this! It's absolutely old routine this! Worn out through and through. I won't do it.

Drakis and his men:
Scorch his bum, burn his balls, scorch his bum, burn his balls!

Polycharides: To the audience. Relents.
Oh, all right then, if you insist! Just for your very own gratification, we'll take up that extra burden in our work.

Charges towards a vagrant. Drakis, Stratyllis and other members of the two groups join in the pursuit.

Drakis:
And we'll help you with that bit of extra burden... Piss off you! Run, or you'll be mourning the loss of your long hair!

Polycharides:
Go on, piss off, I said. When the Spartans come out after their feast, we want them to leave in peace. So, piss off!

The vagrants exit in terror, both sides of the stage, pursued by men on SL and Women, SR

Athenian Delegate:
I've never seen such a wonderful drinking party! Such joyful men, these Spartans, hey? And us? We are the wisest of men after a drink or two.

Polycharides:
That's right., of course! Too true, my friend. I'm certain of that!
Abstinence of alcohol -of anything really- makes the brain go sick. I'm very certain of that and if I knew how, I could persuade all the Athenians. I'd tell them that! I'd tell them that from now on we should not go off on diplomatic missions unless we are drunker than a brewer's fart! Not a moment sooner! Because now, when we go to Sorta sporta, I mean to Sparta sober that's what I think I mean- well, when we get there, we immediately go looking for things to stir up trouble with, and so whenever they say something, we don't listen and when they don't say anything we hear all

sorts of things they didn't say; and then, and then, afterwards we come here and we announce all sorts of other things again. But tonight, tonight, however we were all happy with all things, to every things... to the point where if someone had decided to sing one of those swar wongs -I mean war shongs, of Telamon's instead of one of those peash shongs of Cleitagoras, which we should have been singing, seeing this was a piss, I mean peace party, we still praised him and even swore by his talent.

Vagrants enter again

O, Lord, they're back again. I said pish off, you! Get off, you whip stick whacker -wanker!

Drakis and Stratyllis pursue them again until the vagrants leave the stage from both sides. The two groups stand at their territory.

Sounds of drunk men and music approaching from within the walls

Ah, here come the Shpartians! Very good chaps, those boys! Good drinking mates! Every shingle one of them.

Enter the Spartan delegates, also happily drunk and also inguinally appeased. One of them throws his arm around the other who is holding a flute.

Spartan Delegate 1: To his friend, the flute player. Oh, ho! My very delicious -I mean, my delightful- friend! Pick up your little stick with all its little blowholes there and I'll... I'll pick up my two feet and we'll dance and sing a good shlong for all our Athenian friends here and... for all of us, there, hey? I mean, here, too!

Polycharides:

Come on, friend, lift up your little holey polies all the way up to the gods. God, I love to watch you lot dance!

Spartan Herald: Sings and dances drunkenly

Quick, Memory! Quickly rush over here! Memory! rush your Muse to this youth here pointing to the audience Your Muse knows these Athenians well. She knows about their battle at Artemisium. How like gods, these men lifted their sails to charge at the Persians and how they defeated them. And we! Leonidas led us by the husks like one leads a wild boar. Sweat soaked our beards and thighs. More Persians there than grains of sand on the shore.

Oh, Artemis, Killer of beasts, virgin Goddess of all things and manner wild! Come here and aid our pledges, that they may last a long time. And help this rich friendship hold fast these agreements. And make us forget the old, tricky, conniving, foxy dialectics! Oh, come to us, come to us, oh, Virgin Huntress!

Enter Lysistrata leading the band of wives, Caloniki, Myrrhini, Lampito, the

Boetian and the Corinthian as well as the Skythian woman.

Lysistrata:

Now, then. Since you've brought everything to a satisfactory conclusion, you, Spartans, can take your women home with you. Each husband stand by his wife and each wife by her husband and all together let us now show our respect to the deities with a dance, so that we may never, ever sin again.

Waits until they all get ready...

Finale

...During which process they arrange themselves, most conspicuously, thus: Myrrhini snuggles up to Cinesias -penis visibly placated now- Lampito with the first Spartan delegate, Drakis with Stratyllis, Kallyki with Philourgos and Lysistrata with... Caloniki. Phadrias with one of the Spartan delegates, the Boetian and Corinthian women with each other, or with various others as per director's discretion. They all hold hands and begin the dance and the singing.

Lysistrata: Continuing

Let's begin the dance and invite all the Graces, and Artemis and her twin brother, gentle Apollo, the healer and Dionysos of Nysos who shines in the frenzied eyes of his attendants, the Maenads, and Zeus with his blazing flame and his blessed bed-mate, Hera as well as the rest of the gods.

Let them all come as witnesses so that we'll never forget this peace which the wise Goddess Aphrodite has made for us.

All together:

Oh yea, oh yea, oh yea! Raise the dicks! Cock them up, oh yea, oh yea, oh yea! For the sake of Victory, yea, oh yea, hoorahae, hoorahae, hoorah!

Polycharides:

Your turn Spartan! Show us what your Muse is made of! Back-to-back with ours.

Spartan Delegate 1: Raises his hands in prayer

Oh Muse of the Spartans!

Leave the fair peaks of our mountain, Taygetos behind you and come here, to sing with us! Sing for us a hymn extolling the virtues of Amyclae's God, fair Apollo, and of Athena of the Bronze Abode and of the fine sons of Tyndareus, Castor and Polydeuces whose playground is by the waters of Eurotas.

Oh ho! Jump high! Leap and fly!

Oh you Spartans, makers of high-flying songs and dances! Dance for the gods and stomp your feet like roosters! Oh, ho!

By the sweet waters of Eurotas our young girls twist and turn their feet and shake their graceful Locks like fillies and like Bacchus' lovers they play and sway their... wands, led by Helen, Leda's daughter, a leader pure and proper.

Come, Spartans, lead us into the dance! Turn those curls with your hands in your hair, flick high your fff-fawn-like feet and come, stir up some noise... much noise to give this dance its soul.

Sing! All of you! Come, sing to please the Goddess, Omnipotent Athena of the Bronze Abode!

Exit all

Women at the Festival (Thesmophoriazousae)

This edition is based on the [publicly available](https://bacchicstage.wordpress.com/aristophanes/women-at-the-festival-thesmophoriazousae/)³³⁴ translation by G. Theodoridis

ARISTOPHANES' "WOMEN AT THE FESTIVAL" (Thesmophoriazousae) Θεσμοφοριάζουσσαι
Produced at the City Dionysia in 411 B.C.

...

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Euripides (the famous Tragedy poet)

Mnesilochus (Euripides' elderly father-in-law)

Agathon (A poet)

Agathon's male slave

Kleisthenes

Magistrate

Skythian Archer (Policeman)

Kritylla

Mika (Kleonymus' wife)

Garland Seller

Echo (Ekho)

Chorus of Athenian Women (Celebrants of the Festival)

SILENT PARTS:

Thrata (Mnesilochus' female slave)

Mania (Mika's Nurse)

Philista (Mika's slave)

Fawn (A dancing Girl)

Teredon (A flute boy)

...

Day.

Winter.

A street in Athens. The day of the festival.

³³⁴<https://bacchicstage.wordpress.com/aristophanes/women-at-the-festival-thesmophoriazousae/>

There are two houses opposite each other. One is that of the poet Agathon; the other is the Temple of Demeter.

Next to this house is an altar upon which sits a “sacrificial bowl,” used to catch the blood of the victim and a stack of three or four flat wooden, votive shingles. On them are drawn images of Apollo. These will be used by Mnesilochus to scratch S.O.S. messages on.

Next to the altar and nearer to the audience, is a small bench. Enter Euripides who’s anxiously checking each house, searching for the one belonging to Agathon.

Behind Euripides comes his elderly father-in-law, Mnesilochus who’s exhausted, badly limping and looking for a place to sit and rest. Thrata, his female slave, walks behind him. She is carrying a basket with a small, wrapped cake inside it. It is very cold and Mnesilochus feels it more so than the others. They walk silently around the street for a few moments, Euripides, hurriedly, anxiously, Mnesilochus painfully dragging his feet.

Mnesilochus: Looks up, searching the sky. Exasperated.

Dear Zeus! Dear, dear Zeus! Grrrr! Will I ever get to see the first Swallow of Spring?
To the audience

This man here has me walking all over Athens since the crack of Dawn! He’s killing me!

To Euripides

Hey, you! Listen you!

No response from Euripides who is engrossed in his search.

Euripides, I’m talking to you!

Euripides turns to him annoyed

Could you... I mean, before my guts drop, out, Euripides, would you be so kind as to let me know, just where you’re taking me?

Euripides: Who has just found the house he was looking for.

Look here, Mnesilochus! What’s the point of hearing about it when you’re about to see it?

Mnesilochus: Places the palm of his hand behind his ear to help him with his hearing

What? What did you say? No point in hearing? Hearing what?

Euripides:

No, there’s no point in hearing what you’re about to see! Is there?

Mnesilochus:

What? I don't need to see, either?

Euripides:

No, of course not! Not if you're about to hear it!

Mnesilochus: Bewildered

Euripides! What... what is it you're trying to tell me? This is all far too sophisticated for me, far too... too clever for me!

You're saying, I don't need to hear and I don't need to see? Is that right?

Shakes his head in confusion

Euripides:

Look, mate! What I'm trying to tell you is, that it is in the nature of these two senses –that of hearing and that of seeing- that they should be totally different from each other!

You see?

Mnesilochus: Nods but then shakes his head again

...what – hearing and seeing?

Euripides: Rolls his eyes in frustration

Yes! Exactly!

Mnesilochus:

Ehhh, how do you mean, different?

Euripides:

Different! They are two distinct and separate entities.

Mnesilochus looks even more perplexed

All right! Let me explain to you how they got separated from each other, all right?

You see, Aether... Up there, Aether... Well, back in the beginning of time he got separated from Earth, you see? And straightaway, all these little beasties began living inside of him... mortals and birds and flies and suchlike; so, he first thought up this thing we call "eye" – built it in the shape of a disc, like that of the sun, see? Made it so that all the beasties could see.

But for hearing, you see, he thought up something different. For hearing he built something in the shape of a funnel, which we call an "ear." Right?

Mnesilochus: Shakes his head in confusion but then nods as if he had just understood.

Right! So... now that we've got this funnel ear, we can't see and we can't hear!

Now I get it!

By Zeus, what a pleasant lesson! You learn something every day.

The stuff one learns when he walks with wise men!

Euripides:

Stick around, old man and you'll learn much more!

Mnesilochus:

Ehhh, Euripides? Euripides can you also teach me how to limp with both legs? I...

He sees the bench and he sits down.

Euripides:

Mnesilochus, come over here!

Mnesilochus reluctantly gets up and walks over to Euripides.

Now listen. Pay attention to everything I say.

Mnesilochus:

I'm listening.

Euripides: Points at Agathon's door

See this door here?

Mnesilochus: Stands back to observe the door. Loudly.

By Hercules! Yes, I see that door!

Euripides: Puts his index finger across his lips

Shhh! Quiet!

Mnesilochus:

Quiet? What for? Don't speak to the door?

Euripides:

Listen to me!

Mnesilochus:

I'll be quiet to the door and I'll be attentive to your words. Right!

Euripides:

This door here is the door of the house of our very beautiful and very accomplished poet, Agathon. Does excellent work on tragic choruses. Won first prize with his first work... about five or so years ago... gorgeous looking chap...

Mnesilochus:

Agathon, ey? Which Agathon is that, then?

Euripides:

This Agathon is...

Mnesilochus:

Oh, you mean that tall chap with the darkish complexion?

Euripides:

No, no, no! Not that one. This is a different guy. Don't tell me you've never seen him

before?

Mnesilochus:

You mean the one with that massive beard?

Euripides:

Haven't you ever seen him?

Mnesilochus:

No, by Zeus! No. Not as far as I know...

Euripides:

Yeah, right! I'll bet you've fucked him, though... without knowing who he was, I mean!

Noise is heard from within the house.

Shhh! Let's move back a bit.

They go back to where the bench is and Mnesilochus sits down.

A slave exits from Agathon's house, looks around, checking the street and then goes back inside

That's one of his slaves...

The slave comes out again bringing out a brazier and a basket of myrtle branches

A brazier and myrtle branches! He'll probably make a prayer for his master.

He'll probably pray to the Muses to send his master some inspiration... for his poetry.

Slave: Solemnly

Silence! Holy silence all!

Let your mouths be silent and shut!

Here, inside my master's home, the chorus of the holy Muses is constructing odes!

Aether! I call upon you to make silent all your winds!

And you, grey waves of the ocean, cease your murmur!

Mnesilochus: loudly

What bullshit!

Euripides:

Shhh! What was that? What did he say?

Slave:

"...all you feathered birds lie down and be silent!

And you, beasts of the forest, silence your wild hooves...

Mnesilochus: louder

Bullshit, bullshit, bullshit! Utter crap!

Slave:

Be silent all, for my master, the master of exquisite poetry is, at this very minute, getting ready...

Mnesilochus: louder still

...to get fucked!

Slave:

Whaaaaat? Who said that?

Mnesilochus:

That was the windless Aether!

Slave: regaining his composure

...He's getting ready to cut to measure the oaken planks for the keel of a new tragedy! At this very moment he is constructing brand new stanzas – polishing them, spinning them, gluing them together. New metaphors, new similes, forms of speech unheard of by human ears before! All these are being hammered out now, at this very moment, as I speak.

In my master's mind, his play is like soft modelling wax which he will then drop in the casting funnel of bronze and then he will...

Mnesilochus:

...suck cocks!

Slave: This time he cannot go on

Who is the uncouth peasant who dared approach this holy gate?

Mnesilochus: Waving his big phallus at him

An uncouth peasant who'd love to grab a hold of you and your wonderful poet, spin both your gates around and ram this funnelling big cock of mine right up them!

Slave:

Ohh! What a disgusting little boy you must have been once, you old, old, old codger!

Euripides: To the slave.

Forget about him, mate and run up and get Agathon down here. Go on, hurry!

Slave:

I won't have to. Master will be down soon in any case.

With such cold winters it's near impossible for him to twist and turn those stanzas to perfection indoors, away from the sun, so he'll have to come out here soon.

Euripides:

I see... so... what shall I do in the meantime?

Slave:

Just wait. He'll be around soon.

Exit slave into the house

Short awkward pause during which the two friends look at each other perplexed by the Slave's dismissive treatment.

Euripides: bursting out in despair

O, Zeus! O Zeus, Zeus, Zeus! What do you have in store for me today?

Mnesilochus:

And I'd like... by the gods! I'd like to know what on earth is going on here?

Realises that Euripides is worried

Ey? What's up? What are you groaning and moaning about? Tell me, don't keep it all bottled up. Trust me, I'm your daddy... in-law!

Euripides:

It's bad! Very bad, Mnesilochus! Very, very bad! Very, very bad things are being cooked up for me today! Nasty stuff!

Mnesilochus:

Yeah? What sort of nasty stuff?

Euripides:

A question will be asked this very day, Mnesilochus, my good mate!

A judgement will be made: "To kill or not to kill Euripides?"

Mnesilochus:

A judgement? How can a judgement be delivered today? The courts are shut. No cases will be adjudicated today. The parliament isn't sitting either. It's the holy day of the Thesmophoria. Fasting day. Mid-Festival day. Women's Day.

Euripides:

And that's exactly why I'm certain the judgement will be "Kill Euripides!" You see, mate, there's a plot schemed up against me by the women and today the two priestesses of the Festival are going to gather together an assembly at the Temple of Demeter and bring down this judgement about my life... or about my death.

Mnesilochus:

Why would they want to do that, Euripides?

Euripides:

Why, Mnesilochus?

Shrugs his shoulders as if he can't understand women.

Because I write tragedies about them, mate.

Because I say bad things about them.

Mnesilochus:

Quite right, too, Euripides. Quite right. They're right, you know!
By Poseidon, you thoroughly deserve all the suffering you get for that!
Ehh... How you gonna get out of it? By what mechanism will you extract yourself from their clutches?

Euripides:

I'm going to try and persuade Agathon, the great tragedian here, to go to the Temple of Demeter.

Mnesilochus:

Agathon? What can he do there?

Euripides:

What he can do is get himself to that assembly and say to those women whatever needs to be said to save my hide.

Mnesilochus:

Just like that? Openly? A man, among all them women? Or will he go in there... covertly?

Euripides:

Covertly. Covered in women's clothes.

Mnesilochus:

Nice one! Just your style, Euripides! The prize for craftiness will be ours!

Noises from within Agathon's house.

Euripides:

Shhh!

Mnesilochus

What is it?

Euripides:

Agathon is coming out.

Agathon is wheeled out on a lounge chair through his door. Conspicuous is the smallness of his phallus. He is dressed in exaggerated women's clothes.

On his head he wears a hairnet.

Above his dress, around his waist, he is wearing a tight, broad girdle.

A sword is hanging by his side.

One slave is carrying out all sorts of women's clothes, dresses, wigs, garlands, etc,

Another brings out a writing desk with writing paraphernalia on it.

Mnesilochus:

Where, where?

Euripides:

What do you mean where? Right there! That's him being wheeled out right now!

Mnesilochus:

Well, bugger me dead! I must be going blind! I can't see a man there!

Looks more like our famous whore, Kyrene, to me.

Agathon gets up slowly, theatrically. One of the slaves quickly applies make up on his face.

He raises a hand mirror to his face and shows appreciation of what he sees.

He picks up an oil flask and with the oil rubs his arms, armpits and legs.

Then he picks up a lyre and strums it experimentally.

He looks around him sombrely, seriously and takes on the air of an opera diva.

Euripides:

Shhh! He's getting himself ready to sing!

Agathon vocalises the "do, re, mi" scale.

Mnesilochus:

What sort of sickly noise is that he's making? Sounds like ants are crawling up his larynx.

Agathon sings a song that has two parts: that of the leader of a chorus of women and that of the chorus itself. He changes his voice accordingly.

Agathon:

As the leader:

O, Virgins!

or the sake of your free country, take up the sacred

Torch of Demeter and Persephone,

The pair of goddesses of the Underworld,

And dance a thunderous dance!

As the chorus:

Tell us, then, for which god should

We dance?

I love the gods and I respect them so!

As the leader:

Apollo, my dear Muses!

Praise Phoebus, the god whose arrows are of gold and

Who, with Poseidon, built the tall towers in the

Land of Trojan Simois.

As chorus:

O, praises to you, with our delightful songs!

Praises to you, o, Phoebus!

You, Phoebus, are the first to reward the

Holy prize to us, the Muses!

As leader:

Sing praises to Artemis, also!

The virgin goddess who loves her walks

In the oak-dense forests.

As chorus:

I sing and I praise the holy goddess,

Daughter of revered Leto,

Bed-partner of none.

As leader:

Ah, yes! Let us praise, indeed,

Leto and the Asian lyre whose strings

Mark the rhythm for the feet of

The dancing Trojan Graces.

As chorus:

I revere and I praise our Lady Leto

And the lyre, worthy mother of song.

Most famed for its virile sounds.

As leader:

I see Leto's eyes flash and spin as she hears

Our enchanting chants.

Come, Muses, my friends!

Honour the mighty Apollo!

As chorus:

All praise be to you,

Apollo, god,

Son of Leto!

Mnesilochus:

By the holy god of fucking! By Genetyllides, herself!

What a horny song! Full of ardour!

Pussies and tongues right through the whole thing, all locked together!

Made my bumhole shiver with excitement!

Moves close to Agathon and shouts at him angrily.

Now, laddie, let me use Aeschylus' words... the ones he used in a play of his, called, Lycourgeia: "Wherefrom comes this manlike-woman? What is its country?" Good Zeus, lad! Look there at your dress! Look what oddities of behaviour your clothes proclaim, lad! Or is it "lady?" A lyre in the hand and a hairnet on the head! A girdle around your waist and an oil flask that smells of a wrestling school!

So many things that don't fit a man, so many things that don't fit a woman!

Are swords and mirrors relatives? By Zeus, what atrocious taste!

And you, laddie! What are your parents doing with you, raising you as a boy or as a girl? Where's your dick? Where's your man's cloak? What's that you're wearing on your feet? Where are your Spartan sandals, boy?

Agathon shakes his head, trying to stop Mnesilochus from getting it even more wrong.

What? You're trying to tell me you're a woman?

Agathon nods.

Well, where are your tits, then? Come on, speak up, say something!

All right then, you won't tell me so I'll just have to judge your sex by your voice...

Agathon: Exasperated

Old man! Old, old, old man, you've got it all wrong!

I heard the prick of mockery but I felt not its pain!

I, Agathon, wear only the clothes that suit my inspiration!

I, Agathon, am an author of poems and plays; and an author must behave as his plays dictate.

If, for example, an author is writing a play about women, then he must behave like one and...

Mnesilochus: Indicating the "horsey" position

So, when you're writing about our darling cunt, Phaedra, you go off on a fucking ride, is that right?

Agathon:

...but if he's writing about men, then he must also behave like a man, use his manly parts accordingly. Of course, what Nature didn't provide us with, we must provide it for ourselves... by mimicking the real thing...

Mnesilochus:

Hahaha! Well, then, when you're about to write a play about horny satyrs, let me

know. I'll come over with my hard cock and ram it up your arse! That'll inspire you with your play!

Agathon:

...and then, also, it's just totally improper for a poet to look all boorish and beastly. Bring to mind, if you care, poets like Ibycus, for example and Anacreon of Teos and Alkeus –great lyrical love poets of the last century, poets who spiced up their poems with all the harmony their Muse could muster. Well, all these poets used to wear lovely little girl's caps and used to swing their little bums like little Ionian girls. Demonstrates.

And what about our tragedian, Phrynicus?

Mnesilochus shakes his head

Don't tell me you haven't heard of him! No?O, he was such a gorgeous looking man! Wore all those gorgeous looking gowns! That's why all his plays were so gorgeous! So, you see? The Nature of our work reflects our own Nature!

Mnesilochus:

Hehehe! That must be why the sleazy Philocles' poetry is so sleazy, that nasty Xenocles' poetry is so nasty and that frosty Theognis' poetry is so frosty!

Agathon:

That's the Nature of things. That's how it is.

I've learnt all about that and that's why I've treated myself accordingly.

Mnesilochus:

What, in god's name are you on about?

Euripides: To Mnesilochus

Stop hassling the poor boy, Mnesilochus! I used to do the same thing myself, when I was his age, when I first began my writing!

Mnesilochus:

By Zeus, is that right? What a training you must have had, Euripides! Not too much to my liking, I must say!

Euripides: To Agathon

All right, Agathon. Let me tell you why I'm here.

Agathon picks a hand bag, rummages through it, finds a nail file and begins filing his nails.

Agathon:

Tell me.

Euripides:

Agathon, let me quote myself: "The wise man says much with just a few, well-chiselled words." Here I am, begging for your assistance, because a new disaster has befallen me!

Agathon:

O, yes? What sort of assistance?

Euripides:

I... I have said some nasty things about women, so, today, this very day, they'll all gather at the Temple of Demeter and... well, they'll devise a plot to have me utterly and terminally destroyed!

Agathon: Using the "royal 'we'" And so, what could we do about that?

Euripides:

You, you could save my life! It'll be easy for you! I mean look at you! You already look like a woman, so if you go there, to that meeting, dressed as a woman and you stand up for me, and speak on my behalf, you'll bound to save me from being ruined. Agathon is tentative

O, come on, Agathon! You're the only one who can do me justice!

Agathon:

But why don't you go there yourself, mount your own defence?

Euripides:

Why? Let me tell you the reason why, my boy.

First, everybody there knows me. They all know me there. Second, I'm an old man with a beard whereas you, well look at you: you're young, with a bright white, clean-shaven, soft and beautiful face! Even your voice is feminine!

Agathon:

Euripides, I...

Euripides:

Yes?

Agathon:

Tell me: Will I be quoting you correctly if I said, "My son, you think that you love life but so does your father?"

Euripides:

Yes, that's me all right.

Agathon: *using the "royal 'we'" again*

Well, don't expect us now to suffer the consequences of your actions! We're not that crazy! No, yours is the deed and so yours is the suffering of its consequences; and

you should not try and escape the suffering of those consequences by trickery.
Embrace them, Euripides, be honest about them, suffer them!

Mnesilochus: To Agathon

Yeah, right! And you, you little poofter! Did you get that wide bumhole of yours with little speeches about “honesty” or by “embracing” their suffering?

Euripides: To Agathon

But what’s the problem, Agathon? Why are you afraid to go there?

Agathon:

Why? Because they’ll ruin me even more!

Euripides:

What do you mean? Why?

Agathon:

You ask why? Darling, I will be so beautiful, so much more beautiful than any of them, that they’ll think that I will be stealing all of their whoring business! That I’d be running off with the goddess Aphrodite herself!

Mnesilochus:

Ha! Listen to him! “Stealing their whoring business,” he says! Stealing it!

By Zeus! Getting bugged’s more like it! And loving it!

It’s a pretty good excuse though, god damn it!

Euripides:

Well, Agathon, will you do it?

Agathon:

I shouldn’t think so.

He sits by the little desk and begins writing.

Euripides:

O, poor, poor, poor me! This is it then! I’m dead meat! What a way to go!

Mnesilochus:

Come, come, come, now, Euripides, my good mate, my son-in-law! Don’t betray your own worth! Don’t underestimate yourself...

Euripides:

Yeah, but what shall I do?

Mnesilochus:

First, tell him to go to buggery and then let me help you. I’ll do anything you want!

Euripides:

Really? Ponders about the possibilities. Walks around his friend, examining him from

all angles. Mnesilochus looks a little worried.

Well then, if you really want to help me... take off your cloak!

Mnesilochus takes off his cloak, drops it on the ground and immediately feels the cold.

Mnesilochus:

Grrrr! Here you are, it's off! On the ground.

Now what do you want me to do?

Euripides:

First, let's shave this beard off and then... lifts Mnesilochus' tunic, walks around him and examines carefully what's beneath it ...and then we'll have to singe your pubes and all your bum fluff.

Mnesilochus: Loyalty battles with fear for a few seconds.

Well... all right then. Go ahead, if you think that's a good idea.

I've got to suffer the consequences of my own actions, I guess!

Euripides: Walks over to Agathon

Agathon, you're always carrying razors around, don't you? Could you let me borrow one for a minute?

Agathon:

Sure. There's my razor case. Choose one from in there.

Euripides opens the case and selects one.

Euripides:

Thanks. You're a gentleman and a scholar.

He walks back to Mnesilochus.

Right! Now, sit down and don't move.

Puff up your right cheek.

He raises the razor far too enthusiastically for Mnesilochus.

Mnesilochus:

God help me! Ouch!

Euripides continues

O, Zeussy, Zeussy, Zeussy! Heaven help meeeee!

Euripides:

What? Stop that! What are you screaming about? Stop it... stop that or I'll have to ram a stick between your jaws!

Euripides shaves off a bit of Mnesilochus' beard. This hurts Mnesilochus and he jumps up in pain and fright. He begins dancing around in agony, holding his face.

Mnesilochus:

Ouchhhhh! Ouch, ouch, ouch!

He's heading off.

Euripides:

Hey! Stop! Where are you running off to?

Mnesilochus:

I'm running off to the shrine of our Holy Goddesses because, by Demeter, I'm not sitting there getting my face all hacked to pieces!

Euripides:

Stop it, mate! Come back here! You're going to look stupid walking around with only half your face shaved off!

Mnesilochus:

I care very little about that.

Euripides:

Mnesilochus! Mate! My best father-in-law! In the name of all the gods, come back here! Don't let your friend down in his hour of grave need!

Mnesilochus! Surrenders

Every god is against me!

He goes back and sits on the bench, shaking with fear

Euripides:

Come, now. Stop shaking and lean your head back a bit... that's it...

Mnesilochus keeps smarting and tries to escape the rough treatment
Stop moving around!

Mnesilochus:

Ouch! Ouch! Noooo! Ouch!

The shaving has ended. Euripides stands back and admires his work.

Euripides:

What are you "ouching" about? It's all over. You look great!

Mnesilochus runs his hands over his face

Mnesilochus:

God, damn it! They'll be shoving me in the light infantry when I get to the army!

Euripides:

What are you worried about? You look bloody gorgeous!

Euripides walks over to Agathon's table and picks up the mirror, which he proffers to Mnesilochus. Wanna look at yourself?

Mnesilochus:

If I must.

Takes the mirror and looks into it. He's horrified.

Euripides:

You look great, right?

Mnesilochus:

No, I don't! I look like pretty boy Kleisthenes!

He's about to smash the mirror on the ground when one of Agathon's slaves, gives out a squeal of horror and rushes over to him. A minor wrestle ensues and the slave wins the precious mirror. In utter disgust, he takes the mirror back to Agathon who examines it carefully, until he's satisfied that both, his mirror and his face are unhurt.

Euripides:

Now get up so I can singe the rest of your hairs!

Mnesilochus this time is very afraid and edgy.

Bend over and this time don't move!

Mnesilochus:

Me and my big mouth! He'll make roast pork out of my arse in a minute!

Euripides: To Mnesilochus slave

Thrata, go and bring us a torch, please dear!

Thrata walks over to Agathon's slaves, talks to them for a second before one of them runs inside the house and a minute later returns with a torch which she then hands to Euripides.

Euripides: Wielding the torch menacingly

Now bend over!

Mnesilochus does so and his phallus hits the ground. He groans with pain.

Watch out for your dick-head now!

Euripides walks behind Mnesilochus and begins the "singing"

Mnesilochus:

Ouch! I'm watching, I'm watching... Ouch! Bloody hell! My bum's on fire.

He runs around the stage and calls out to the audience.

Fire! Fire! Water someone! Is there any water in the house? Help! Help me before someone else's bum catches fire!

Euripides:

Stop that! There's nothing wrong with you! Be a man, man!

Mnesilochus:

Be a man? Not when my arse is in a blazing inferno!

Euripides:

Come, come, come now! We're over the worst part. Nothing to worry about from now on. Come over here!

Mnesilochus reluctantly, cautiously walks back. On his way he lifts his tunic and has a look at the damage.

Mnesilochus:

Damn! Look at all that black soot! It's changed the colour of my balls... and my bum!

Euripides:

Don't worry about it. There's bound to be someone to... sponge it all off!

Mnesilochus:

Let them just try! No one's going to wipe my bum off for me! I'll kill them!

Euripides, Mnesilochus and Thrata walk over to Agathon

Euripides:

Agathon, if you don't want to help me yourself, could you at least let me borrow a dress and a girdle for this guy here? Come, on, I know you've got plenty of them!

Agathon:

Go ahead, take what you need. I'm not fussed.

All three rummage through the clothes

Mnesilochus:

Hmmm, which one should I take, Euripides?

Euripides:

Let's see... picks up a yellow dress and examines it. Here, try this yellow dress on for size. Looks like it's made for festivals and suchlike. Hands dress to Mnesilochus.

Mnesilochus: brings it to his nose and sniffs hard

Oh, yuuuuum! By the goddess Aphrodite! What a delicious aroma! Very... very dickie! Quick, strap it on me! Puts it on with great difficulty considering the impediments caused by his phallus and corpulence.

Euripides: To Agathon

Can I have a girdle, as well?

Agathon: picks one and hands it to him.

Here, take this.

Mnesilochus: Still having difficulties with the dress

Come on, mate, help me. It won't go over my legs.

Thrata helps him tuck his phallus under the dress. The girdle fastens the phallus to his stomach.

Euripides examines the result.

Euripides:

Hmm, I think we'll need a hairnet and a hat.

Agathon:

No, he'd be better off wearing this wig here.

Hands Thrata a wig which she tries on. I wear this one after dark.

Euripides: Takes it from Thrata and puts it over Mnesilochus' head

By Zeus, that's just absolutely perfect!

Mnesilochus:

Does it fit?

Euripides:

By Zeus! It certainly does, mate! It certainly does. To Agathon What about a shawl?

Do you have one?

Agathon:

There's one on the lounge chair. Take that one.

Thrata dashes to it, snaps it up and tries it on approvingly. She then throws it over Mnesilochus' shoulders.

Euripides:

Shoes?

Agathon: Takes off the shoes he's wearing.

Here take these.

Mnesilochus: Takes them and puts them on

I wonder if they'll fit. Hmm, you love them loose, don't you?

Agathon:

That's for you to decide. Now you've all got what you need, I'm leaving. To his slaves
Come on, dears, wheel me back inside! Hurry!

The slaves rush about collecting everything and wheeling Agathon back inside his house.

Euripides stands back from Mnesilochus and admires his achievement.

Euripides: To Thrata

Our man here looks just like a woman!

Now, mate, remember to talk like a woman, too! Convince everyone you're a girl!

Mnesilochus: in falsetto

I'll have a go.

Euripides:

Ok, then. Off you go!

Mnesilochus:

No way! Not until you swear that...

Euripides:

Swear what?

Mnesilochus:

Swear that you'll save me from any terrible thing that might happen to me! That you'll try everything in your power to save me!

Euripides:

Fine. I swear by Zeus' home, Aether!

Mnesilochus:

Ha! I'd rather you'd swear by the halls and chambers of our dear physician, Hippocrates!

Euripides:

All right, all right! I swear by all the gods in Heaven. Every one of them!

Mnesilochus:

All right, but let me quote you, if you don't mind: "Though my tongue did swear, my heart did not!" I don't want any of those tricks, thank you. Both, your tongue AND your heart have sworn to me, right?

Bells are heard from within

Euripides:

Hell! Go on! Quick, get going! That was the signal for the Festival assembly. I'm off too.

Exit all. Euripides runs off Stage Right while Thrata and Mnesilochus walk out Stage Left.

Pause.

Slow change of light (Dim then bright) during which the door of the Temple of Demeter opens and the chorus of women carrying torches emerges through it. A "smoke machine" creates some momentary haze.

A "soapbox" and a number of chairs are brought out. Baskets of flowers, laurel branches and wreaths are also carried onto the stage.

Mnesilochus: From within

Come, darling Thrata. This way...

Enter Mnesilochus and Thrata.

Mnesilochus: sees all the commotion

Wow, look, Thrata! Good Heavens! Look at all these torches! And all these women coming to the temple of the divine pair of goddesses! Cough, cough! All that smoke! By, Demeter and Persephone, the divine pair of law-givers!

Deliciously beautiful goddesses! Help me survive all this and... help me get home safe afterwards!

Thrata, put the basket down please and give me the sacrificial cake. I wish to make an offering to our two beloved pair of Divinities.

Thrata hands him the cake.

Most holy mother, Demeter and, you, too, wise Persephone! Make me very, very rich so that I might make you lots of offerings in return! If not, then at least, let me get out of this little scheme alive! With my dick intact!

And while we're at it let my daughter, Vagina, find a filthy rich boy –but one that's a total moron, of course- and give my little son, Cockhead, lots of brains and common sense!

Now let me see... I want to find a seat someplace where I can hear everything. Thrata, you better go now, dear. Slaves are not allowed in here. They're not allowed to listen to speeches.

Mnesilochus finds a seat and sits down.

Thrata, picks up the basket and leaves. On her way out, she bumps into Kritylla who has just walked in, rushing towards the soapbox. Kritylla has a document in her hand.

The Garland Seller, Mika and Mania (her Nurse) also enter. Mania is holding a baby in her arms.

The Garland Seller hands Kritylla a garland which she puts on her head before she steps up onto the soapbox.

She is greeted with loud applause from the rest of the floor.

Kritylla:

Silence! Silence please!

Let us pray!

Let us pray to the Divine pair of law protectors, Demeter and Persephone,
And to the gods Wealth and Blueblood,
And to Earth, the nurturer of our youth,
And to Hermes,

And to the Graces.

Let us pray that our gathering here today is conducted well and we all behave excellently and that we bring about wonderful achievements for the citizens of Athens and the greatest of luck for all of us.

Let us also pray that the woman amongst us whose words and deeds most help the State of Athens and the State of Women is adequately rewarded and heeded.

Let this be our prayer!

O, Holy Cock! O, Holy Cock! Holy be they name.

Let us all rejoice!

Chorus:

And so we all shall!

May the Heavens send us a sign that they're pleased with our prayers!

The sound of chirping birds is heard and this is taken by everyone as the sign of approbation they asked for.

O, you, magnificently named father of the gods, Zeus!

Apollo, god of the golden lyre, whose temple is in Delos!

Athena, almighty goddess of the sparkling eyes and of the golden spear! Goddess whose temple is here, in Athens, the city you defended against Poseidon!

Artemis, goddess who has an abundance of names, killer of wild beasts and daughter of Leto of the golden eyes!

Poseidon, revered and respected by all, king of the salty waters, leave now your stormy, fish-abundant deep home!

Daughters of the sea god Nereus!

Nymphs whose feet tread the forests!

Let us join in harmony the strands of Apollo's golden lyre!

And so, let this meeting of noble Athenian women end splendidly!

Kritylla:

And!

Pray, too, to all the gods of Olympus and to all the goddesses thereat!

Pray to all the gods of Delphi and to all the goddesses thereat!

Pray to all the gods of Delos and to all the goddesses thereat!

And pray to all the other gods and goddesses everywhere else, as well!

Let us all pray that:

If any man schemes a scheme or plots a plot with Euripides and with the Persians to cause harm to or to overthrow the Women's Republic,

If any man tries to establish himself or establish some other man as a tyrant of the Women's Republic,

If any man dobs in a woman who has claimed another woman's child as her own,

If any female slave who has knowledge of her mistress' secret affairs dobs her in to her husband,

If a female slave is entrusted by her mistress to deliver a secret message but does not do so and, instead, delivers a false message,

If a lover makes many promises to his woman but delivers none and, instead, tricks her with lies,

If an old hag seduces with gifts the boyfriend of a young girl, or steals him into her house secretly,

If a barman or barwoman rips off customers by short-selling them drinks,

Pray, friends that the gods pour all of their awesome wrath upon these people and upon their families, too and

Pray, too, that the gods give their every blessing only to you!

Chorus:

We are with you in these prayers, Kritylla!

Let us pray that all these prayers be accomplished, for the sake of both, our city, as well as her people and let us pray, too, that the woman whose proposal is the wisest be heeded.

Let me denounce them as sacrilegious and traitorous: those women who betray us by breaking their sacred oath and those women who trample upon our city's laws and those women who betray us to the enemy and those women who because of sheer greed, want to allow the Persians to enter our city!

Almighty Zeus! We are women but we ask you, nevertheless, to hear our prayers and bring the rest of the gods to our side and protect us!

Loud applause from the floor

Kritylla:

Now, please listen to me, ladies!

Clears her throat and then unfurls a document from which she reads.

"In the Women's General Assembly, the Chairwoman of which is Timocleia and the Secretary Lysilla, Sostrate has moved the following motion which was duly passed: 'That a meeting be held at Dawn of the Middle Day of the Thesmophoria Festival, the day during which we have the most time to ourselves, during which meeting the main item of discussion shall be the proper punishment of the man we, women

consider to be a criminal, namely, Euripides.” Now, is there anyone who wishes to speak on this matter?

Mika:

Me!

Kritylla:

Fine, taking the garland off her head and handing it to Mika. Here, put this on first, Mika.

Mika wears the garland, stands on the soapbox and clears her throat

Chorus:

Quiet! Quiet, please! Listen carefully. Mika is clearing her throat and, like a real politician, she’s preparing to make a long speech!

Mika:

Ladies, I’m not up here, to try and impress you with my rhetorical skills.

No, I swear by our beloved pair of Divinities, Demeter and Persephone that I’m not up here because I’m chasing personal praises. No, I’m speaking today because I’m thoroughly sick -sick to the back teeth of putting up with that... that cabbage-seller’s son, Euripides and sick with the insults, the verbal abuse and the invective he endlessly throws upon us, women!

Is there an insult he hasn’t hit us with yet? There is no indignity, not a foul word he hasn’t used yet to sally our name with! Give the bastard an audience, give him a chorus, give him some actors and there’ll be no end to the garbage he’ll find to defame us with.

Yes, ladies, Euripides! He’ll call us fuck-lovers, lecherous seducers of men, alcoholics, chatterboxes, treacherous, sick-in-the-head, a pain-in-the-arse of our husbands, you name it, he’ll find it and he’ll happily throw it at us!

And our husbands listen to that crap in the theatre so the moment they get home, instead of saying ‘hello,’ they give us dirty and suspicious looks and they start searching every nook and cranny of the house looking for a hidden lover!

This man has stuffed up our lives! We can do nothing any more. None of the things we used to do.

He has brainwashed our husbands completely! Clogged their heads up with utter bullshit!

Don’t go weaving a little wreath for yourself because your husband will think you’re in love or something, don’t go dropping a pot or a pan or break some crockery, you know, the sort we send to our boyfriends, ‘cause your idiot husband will straightaway

yell at you: "So, who you got in your head these days, ey? I bet it's that foreigner from Corinth!" God help the poor girl that feels a bit crook. Up will jump her stupid brother and say, "I really, really don't like the colour on that girl's face! I reckon she's pregers!" And God help the childless woman who wants to shut her husband up by passing some other woman's child as her own! It can't happen! Her husband will insist on being right there, next to the delivery room!

Not long ago, our young girls could marry older men. Now, thanks to Euripides' bullshit, that can't happen either! All the old men listened to that line of his... the one that says, "The old man who marries a young woman marries a tyrant!" Outrageous! And what do your houses look like these days, thanks to this Euripides? I'll tell what they look like: They look like and feel like prisons! Locks and bolts everywhere, "special" women's quarters, and mountainous bloody dogs at the front gate to keep our lovers away! Fine! We'll overlook all that but then, once upon a time, we used to have some responsibilities in the running of our households. Not any more!

We can't take care of the food supply, any more; or even go to the pantry to get some flour or some wine, or oil, even!

And why? Because our dear little idiot husbands have locked everything up with those new nasty little Spartan keys. The ones with the tree notches on them; and they carry those keys around their neck all the time! We used to be able to unlock those doors easily, once! We'd buy a special little ring for three obols and, no matter how difficult the lock was, we'd be able to open it! No probs!

Now, though, their miserable little spy, Euripides, showed them how to carry around with them these little seals, stupid things, with wormholes carved into them!

So, I move, therefore, Ladies, that we get rid of this disgusting little pest, Euripides, by poisoning him or whatever, or do anything that will definitely knock him dead!

That, ladies, is why I got up here on the box. That is what I want to announce today! There are other matters, of course, but I'll talk to the Secretary about them and record them in the minutes.

Loud applause from the floor

Chorus:

What an intelligent, eloquent, subtle speech this woman just uttered!

I've never heard anything like it in my life!

This was one seriously impressive speech!

Everything she said is absolutely true!

It's obvious, she's done her homework well: studied the matter from all its angles,

weighed up every little detail of it, churned everything in her wise brain and produced all the necessary arguments that her motion requires.

Even Xenocles himself –you know, Karkinos’ son- couldn’t compete with her on the same platform!

He’d sound like a prattling idiot, compared to her, I reckon!

It’s now the Garland Seller’s turn. She gets up, takes the garland from Mika and changes places with her.

Garland Seller:

Thank you, Mika. You have spoken well and covered all the bases in respect of your indictment. I have only but a few words to add to yours. Words that will explain the monstrous torture that I, personally, have to suffer.

I am a single mother. A widow. My husband died in Cyprus, leaving me with five kids which I had to bring up on my own, with great difficulty and sacrifice. I’m doing it by weaving garlands and selling them in the myrtle market. Raises her basket of garlands for all to see. Until now I wasn’t doing too bad a job of feeding my kids –it was hard but I managed, but now, now this... this tragedy writer, is going around everywhere, telling all the men that there are no gods! He’s gone and convinced them all that there are no gods, for gods’ sake and so what happens? My income is now half it ever was!

And so, ladies, I suggest to you all -no, I beg you all- to punish this idiot severely for all he’s done to us! He’s committed outrageous crimes against us. Wild, brutish stuff! But then what do you expect? His mother sells wild herbs! He was brought up out in the wild!

Looks up at the sun as if to check the time.

But I’ve got to go now. I’ve got to go and weave garlands for some twenty men.

Applause as she gets down from the box and leaves.

Chorus:

Wow! Now this was an even better tailored speech than the first one!

What a well-trimmed, refined piece of cloth!

She’s certainly sewn up a proper lawsuit for him! Everything she said about this monster was filled with intelligence and relevancy. Sound logic, no bullshit and a totally credible prosecution!

This man must be punished in no uncertain terms for his grotesque behaviour towards us!

Mnesilochus rushes over to the soapbox. He’s excited and ready to defend

Euripides.

As he speaks, however, the women get more and more uncomfortable with and suspicious of what he's saying and we hear whispers of outrage right up until the end of his speech.

Mnesilochus:

Girls! Girls! Girls!

O, believe me, girls! I understand you completely! Golly gosh, darlings!

I know very well why your anger against Euripides is so... so... angry! Your boiling bile is well justified! What a dreadful, insulting treatment he dished out to you all!

Totally unacceptable!

I, too, hate the man! I swear by my own kids, I hate the man. Only crazy women wouldn't...

But... but let us think a little. Let us consider our position a bit better. Here, it is just us, women – every one of us – and our words won't go past these walls. So let us think carefully.

All this anger, all these... all these charges we're laying against the man! What's the point? What for? The man has only mentioned one or two of the naughty things we do but he's well aware of all the rest of little indiscretions! Golly gosh! Thousands of them!

Take me, for example -and I'm sure there are other women here who shall remain nameless, who, like me, know full well their own little bits of mischief – but I, myself... hahaha... well this is my greatest bit of mischief:

See, three days after I got married, well, that night, my husband just turned his bum to me and began snoring.

Now a guy, who had plucked my cherry when I was seven years old, had that very night got so horny that he came by my house. I heard him scratching at the door downstairs so I slowly got out of bed, without making a sound and began to go down to let him in. But my husband woke up anyhow and so he asked me angrily, "and where do you think you're going?" I turned 'round and said, "I've got a terrible stomach ache, darling. Colic. I need to go to the dunny." He turns round and says, "all right, then, go!" Then, the fool, gets up and starts grinding together some juniper berries, some aniseed and some sage. Mix them all together for a remedy for me!

But I... Hehehe... I went and oiled the door hinges a bit so they wouldn't creak and then went out to my boyfriend.

Golly gosh! Screwed me right there and then! Bending over Apollo's altar, I was and

holding fast at the Daphne tree beside it!

See? Now that's something Euripides has never ever mentioned! Anywhere!

And has he said anything about the fact that when we get desperate, we screw our slaves and our mule drivers? No, he hasn't! And what about the morning-after-the-night-before? You know, the mornings we chew up all the garlic so that our hubbies won't suspect us of screwing around while the poor buggers were spending the whole night guarding the city walls! Have you seen Euripides say anything about that one at all? Well, have you? Of course not!

So, sometimes he insults Phaedra. So what? Big deal! What's that got to do with us? And what about that other trick we often do? When we've got the boyfriend behind us and the husband turns up –in the middle of the day. What do we do then? What's our saving trick for that?

We spread our cloak wide open so that the boyfriend hides behind it and, while the husband stands gawking at it, admiring it, the boyfriend gets the time to run away! And I know this woman who had her husband believe she had labour pains for ten whole days! Carried on like that right up until she managed to buy herself some other woman's baby and pretend to him that it was hers! Poor husband! She had him run all around in circles looking for drugs and stuff, to help her bring about the delivery quicker!

Hahaha! And while the poor bastard is spinning round all over town, some old woman brings the newborn round to the house. Brought it round in a pot, she did. Had its mouth stuffed full with honeycomb so it wouldn't make a sound.

The old woman comes into the house carrying the baby in the pot, winks at the wife and the wife takes up the farce.

She begins groaning and moaning and pleading with her husband, "Get out now, husband! Get out! I think I'm about to give birth! Run off now, the baby's kicked my belly!" Yeah, right! The belly of the pot she means! So, anyhow, the husband runs out, delirious with joy, the old hag plucks the baby out of the pot, unplugs its gob and poof, the baby begins to cry! Then the old woman picks it up and rushes out to the husband! She puts on a big grin on her face and tells him straight out, "Look at this! You're the father of a lion! Looks just like you! Every bit of him, dick and all. Look at it, bent like a rainbow!" Isn't this the sort of mischief we get up to? Sure it is! By Artemis, it is! And then we go and get angry at Euripides! Goodness! He gives us no more hassle than we deserve, honestly!

Chorus: amidst the booing Outrageous!

This is disgusting stuff she's coming out with!

what land spawned this idiot?

What an impudent bitch!

The nerve of the slut!

The cheek of the bitch!

How dare she throw all this shit at our face!

Brazen bitch!

Incredible!

So it's true what they say about bloody orators: they're like scorpions – hiding under every little stone!

Only one thing's worse than a woman slut and that's another woman slut!

Mika:

Ladies! Ladies! Hang on a minute!

By our heroine Aglaurus! Think! Let's think straight for a moment!

What's the matter with you? Why are you sitting there looking stunned and stupid?

Surely we're not going to let this bitch get away with all this disgusting stuff?

It's a shocking sander!

To the audience

Now, is there anyone among you out there who... ah, never mind, whether there is or there is not, we girls up here will go and grab some hot coals from somewhere and singe the crap out of this slut's cunt!

Applause and nodding from the rest of the women

Trembling fear from Mnesilochus

That will teach the bitch to go round insulting her fellow women!

Mnesilochus:

Ey! Hang on a minute! No, no, no! Not my cunt! No! Girls, no!

We have freedom of speech in this country! Surely we also have it in this meeting!

So I said what I thought about Euripides... and so it was to his favour. Should I get my pinky singed for that? No way!

Mika:

Of course you should! Do you think we should let someone like you get away with going against everything a woman stands for?

This bastard Euripides, has absolutely destroyed our reputation with all his stupid plays about whores and raped women like Melanippe and Phaedra. Why has he never written a play about women like Penelope? Such a lovely, virtuous woman

that Penny! Why has he never written a play about her, ey?

Mnesilochus:

Why? Why? Isn't it obvious? Look at us! Is there a single woman among us who resembles Penelope in any way, shape or form? Look at us! We're all Phaedras! With no exception at all!

Mika:

There she goes again, girls! This slut won't stop insulting us!

Mnesilochus:

By Zeus! I haven't finished yet! Do you want me to spill it all out for you? Tell you all the stories I know?

Mika:

You've already spilled out the lot! You can't have anything left in there!

Mnesilochus:

No way! By Zeus, no! There are millions more stories to tell you about what we girls get up to. What about... for example, what about when we get our body scrapers and use them as straws to siphon the wine out from the barrel, ey? Or when we...

Mika:

Fuck you, you bitch!

Mnesilochus!

When we sneak into the all-male Festivals, the Apaturia and steal their juicy morsels of meat, give them to our boyfriends and then say, "what chops? The cat's pinched the chops!" Isn't that right?

Mika:

Bullshitting bitch!

Mnesilochus:

And what about that woman who bashed the crap out of her husband with an axe? Or the other one, the one who drugged her husband into insanity? I haven't mentioned them yet... and then there's that Acharnian woman who had her father...

Mika:

Die you bitch!

Mnesilochus:

... buried under the bath tub, in the burning coals that boil the water... or...

Mika:

Girls, are we going to sit here and cop all this bullshit?

Mnesilochus: Pointing at Mika

Hehehe! What about you?

Didn't you swap your baby girl with your slave's baby boy?

Mika:

By the two goddesses, you're not getting away with this!

I'll tear out all your pubes, one by one, with my very own hands!

Mnesilochus:

O, no you won't! You keep your hands to yourself!

Mika:

No? Well, you just watch me, bitch!

Mnesilochus:

No, you watch ME, girl!

Mika: She hands her overcoat to Philiste

Hold onto my coat, Philiste!

Mnesilochus:

Oh, yeah? You just touch me, darling and by Artemis, I'll... I'll...

Mika:

Yeah? You'll do what?

Mnesilochus:

I'll beat that sesame-bun you just had, right out of your fat guts!

Kritylla:

Girls, girls, girls!

Stop that! Indicates behind the stage

Stop all this fighting for a moment! I can see a woman rushing towards us.

Enter cross-dresser Kleisthenes

Now let's hear what she has to say. Be quiet please, girls. Quiet!

Kleisthenes takes the soapbox

Kleisthenes:

Darlings! Darlings you know how much I love you! I do everything you do. Behave just like a girl. See? Look how smooth my cheeks are! Not the slightest shadow of a beard! I am your sister!

I just love girls! Wacky about you all! I care about you always!

Now listen! There's an awful bit of rumour doing the rounds in the market about you girls. Simply awful stuff! That's why I'm here.

I want to tell you what that dreadful rumour is about. Get you prepared for it and do what I can to help you from suffering this shocking blow!

Kritylla:

What is it, dear boy? I mean... yes, boy, since your cheeks are so smooth!

Kleisthenes:

They say in the marketplace that Euripides has sent one of his relatives to this very meeting here, today!

Kritylla:

Here? What for? What's he up to?

Kleisthenes:

He's sent him here to spy on you. Listen to everything you girls say and do. Hear all your plans and plots.

Kritylla:

In here? How could a man come here and not be noticed by all us women?

Kleisthenes:

Euripides has singed all his hair, darling! Plucked it all out. Then dressed him up like a woman!

Mnesilochus:

Hahaha! What a joker this little boy is! Hahaha! Could you believe that?

Who'd be stupid enough to let himself be singed and plucked like that? He'd never manage to sit still for it! What a likely story! I doubt it, honey!

By the two goddesses, I doubt it very much sweetheart! Hahaha!

Kleisthenes:

Nonsense, dear girl! Would I have come here to tell you this if I hadn't heard it from a very reliable source?

Kritylla:

What a dreadful thing we've just heard, ladies! Incredible! Well, let's all look around us, seek this bastard out. Don't just sit on your arses. Look for him. Where could he be sitting not to have been noticed? Must be wearing a good disguise.

Kleisthenes, help us, will you? We'll owe you one!

Kleisthenes:

Of course, darling! Now all you girls... all of you must be questioned. Pointing at Mika All of you!

Mnesilochus: aside

Shit, I'm stuffed now!

Mika:

Me? You want to know who I am? I am Mika, Kleonymus' wife! The man who

dropped his shield in the battlefield and ran for his life!

Kleisthenes: suspiciously

Hmmm...

Do you girls know this woman?

Kritylla:

Yes, yes. We know her! Question the rest of them!

Kleisthenes:

And this? Who is she?

Mika:

That's my Mania, my nanny!

Mnesilochus tries to slide away unnoticed.

Kleisthenes: sees Mnesilochus trying to escape

And you! Hey you! Stop right there! Where do you think you're going?

Mnesilochus:

Who me, sweetie? I need to go and do my wee-wees! What a cheeky little boy you are!

Kleisthenes:

All right then, this way. Guides him to the side of the stage. Mnesilochus disappears from view. I'll wait for you out here.

Sounds of urine hitting a metal bucket. They sound suspiciously loud.

Kritylla:

Yes, you stand there and wait for her, Kleisthenes. Watch her! She's the only one here we've never seen before. Don't know who she is.

Mnesilochus seems to be taking too long.

Kleisthenes:

Come on! You're taking ages! You're only doing number one!

Mnesilochus: feigning distress

I know, I know! Damned water cress seeds! Totally constrict my bladder, sweetie!

Kleisthenes:

Water cress seeds, is it? Hmmm, come out here immediately!

Mnesilochus refuses so Kleisthenes rushes to him

Mnesilochus: Obviously in a scuffle

Hey, stop that! Take your hands off me! O, I'm feeling sick!

Kleisthenes drags Mnesilochus onto the stage

Kleisthenes:

So, tell me! You're married, ey? Who's your husband, then? What's his name?

Mnesilochus:

His name? You want to know my husband's name? It's... it's... well, you know the town Cockophile? Kleisthenes nods Well, you know that guy...

Kleisthenes:

What guy?

Mnesilochus:

You know... the guy who... you know! That guy who once... o, dear! You know the guy who's the son of that guy who...

Kleisthenes: losing patience with him

Stop babbling, girl! Have you ever been here before? To this Festival?

Mnesilochus:

Of course I have! By Zeus, I have! Same time, same spot!

Kleisthenes:

Oh yeah? And who did you stay with last year?

Mnesilochus:

Who did I stay with? Let's see... I stayed with a girl, who else?

Kleisthenes:

Bloody hell! You're not giving much away, are you?

Kritylla:

Hang on a minute, Kleisthenes. Let me deal with this girl. I'll interrogate the bitch good and proper. Move away a bit. You're a man and you mustn't hear...

To Mnesilochus

Now, about last year's Festival... Tell me about the litany. What was the first item of the epiphany?

Mnesilochus:

Ahhhh, now let me think... ah, yes, now I remember. The first was... we all had a drink.

Kritylla:

Yes, yes but what then? What came after that?

Mnesilochus:

Then? Then we all had a toast.

Kritylla:

Someone must have told you that. What came after that then?

Mnesilochus: Chuckles cheekily

When... Xenylla had asked for a big bowl 'cause there was no potty anywhere!

Kritylla:

You're talking crap!

Kleisthenes! Kleisthenes come here! This is the man you're talking about!

Kleisthenes: walks over to Mnesilochus and holds him tightly by the arm.

Right! Now... what do I do now, girls?

Kritylla:

Take his gear off. Something's not right with his story.

Mnesilochus:

What? You guys are going to strip naked a mother of nine?

Kleisthenes:

Come on, come on, get that girdle off and be quick about it!

Mnesilochus:

My, my! What a shameless little boy you are!

Kritylla: walks around Mnesilochus and examines him thoroughly, feeling his body. She's a big girl this one, isn't she? And -by Zeus!- where are her tits? She hasn't got them like we do, does she?

Mnesilochus: As he's talking he is also shuffling about trying to conceal his phallus by tucking it between his legs and behind him.

Tits? How can I have any tits? I... I've never had any children so I never got pregnant! I'm a... barren woman!

Kritylla:

Never got pregnant? You just said you've got nine kids!

Kleisthenes:

Stand up straight, you!

I can see what you're doing! You're shoving your cock down between your legs and -there! You're pushing it behind you!

Kritylla: Runs behind Mnesilochus. Begins laughter.

Ahahaha! Here's his prick! Look at its little head! Oh, and what a beautiful colour, darling!

Kleisthenes: Excited at the prospect of seeing a naked prick.

Where? Where is it?

Mnesilochus pulls it back towards his front.

Kritylla:

Oh, it's gone now... here it is, at the front!

Kleisthenes:

No... it's not here!

Kritylla:

Hahahaha! It's back here again!

Kleisthenes:

What a deep canal you've got there, my man! You glide that cock of yours back and forth faster than our neighbours the Corinthians, slide their barges through our isthmus!

Kritylla:

What a shameful bastard! No wonder he puked out all those Euripides insults on us!

Mnesilochus:

Oh, Zeusy, Zeusy, Zeusy! Dear Zeus, what a dreadful web I've weaved for myself!

Kritylla: Turning to Kleisthenes

What do we do now, Kleisthenes?

Kleisthenes: To all the women

Don't let him out your sight while I go tell the cops.

Don't let him get away!

I'm going to the cops right now!

Exit Kleisthenes. Some of the women, including Mika and Mania surround Mnesilochus.

Chorus:

Come, girls, let's go and light up some lamps.

Do a bit of investigative work!

Search around everywhere, including the Assembly House, see if there's another man snuck in amongst us.

Take off your vests and search hard! Search thoroughly, search seriously, search everywhere!

Hurry! Don't waste a minute!

Be quick and quiet about it! Move your feet! Let's get this over and done with quickly!

They all take their vests off and begin the search

Off you go then, follow every track that may lead to a man near by.

Look to your right, look to your left, look to your rear and look all around you again!

Examine every nook and cranny. Examine every hole!

Zeus help the bastard who's committed an act of impiety if I catch him!

He'll cop it good and proper!

We'll make an example of him. Show all the other men what happens when they do disgusting, dreadful and unholy things!

He'll accept the existence of gods!

Other men will learn from him! They will learn to follow, observe, revere and respect the laws of the Gods and the mortals.

They will learn to turn away from their evil ways and do good or else suffer the mighty wrath of the Heavens.

They will learn that he who commits a sin will burn in a blaze of flames and a frenzy of madness!

And!

They will learn that their every move will be abundant proof for all to see –men AND women- that god punishes acts of sin and injustice on the spot, there and then, post haste!

They finally end their search. Mania, in the meantime, sits down exposes her breast and begins to feed Mika's baby which seems to be over-swaddled.

Right! Looks like we've cleared the ground.

Didn't find a man anywhere.

Not hanging around here, anyhow.

Mnesilochus suddenly snatches the baby from Mania's arms and runs towards the altar.

Mika:

Hey! Stop! Where do you think you're going! Stop! Bloody hell! He snatched my baby right off her nurse's tit!

Mnesilochus: Pulls out a knife from under his clothes and waves it about menacingly.

Oh yeah? Scream all you want, girly!

If you won't let me go, right now, this baby will never see another tit again!

I'm going to cut open all the veins of her little thigh! Splatter the altar with her bright red blood!

Right here, right now!

A million cuts!

With this knife!

Mika:

Ahh! No! No!

Women, women, please help me! My only child!

Scream, women, scream blue murder! Stop him! A reward, a reward for his capture!
He's got my only child!

Chorus:

Oh, Holy Fates! What is this new horror I see before my eyes?
What disgusting deed is this he's gone and done now? Is the whole world filled with
such shameful disrespect? Women, what is he doing?

Mnesilochus:

What am I doing? I'm doing something that will rid you of all your shamelessness
and disrespect, that's what I'm doing!

Chorus:

Is there anything more dreadful than what you're doing?

Mika:

Dreadful! Absolutely dreadful! Appalling! He kidnapped my kid!

Chorus:

There're no words for it! He feels no shame in what he's doing!

Mnesilochus:

And it's not over yet, girly!

Chorus:

If you think you're going to get away with performing such a despicable act, you're
badly mistaken! You will not escape punishment, you can be sure of that!

Mnesilochus:

I'm praying for something else here!

Chorus:

Prayers? Wishes? Which one of all the immortal gods will come to help you commit
a crime?

Mnesilochus: laughs sarcastically

Forget it, girls! Scream and squeal all you like!
It'll do you no good! I'll never let go of this kid!

Chorus:

Oh yea?

You're enjoying this aren't you?

Well, by Demeter and Persephone! You won't be enjoying it much longer!

Such a disgraceful behaviour and such a shameless speech will not go unpunished.

A sin for a sin!

Your Fate is turning right now, mister!

Your fall is nigh!

Come, let's all get some firewood together. Quickly!

Burn the horrible bastard!

Turn him into cinders! Hurry!

Mika: Leads Mania by the arm

Come Mania, let's go and collect some firewood.

To Mnesilochus

And you! I'll personally make a spinning fireball out of you!

You wait!

Mnesilochus:

Go ahead, darling! Spin me up and spin me down!

Exit Mika and Mania

To the baby

Now, as for you, young... lady, is it? Yes. Let's get rid of this little Cretan cape of yours... unwraps the baby slowly... and the only one to blame for your death, dear girl is that mother of yours... when the cape is fully unwrapped he is shocked to find a wine skin. Hey! What's this? What's going on here? This isn't a little girl! This is a wine skin... with little Persian booties...

To the women

Oh, you... you... women! Bloody drunkards, the lot of you! That's all you ever think about! Fucking and wine! Make the wine sellers happy and your men miserable!

Destroy your households! Pots, pans, the lot!

Enter Mika and Mania carrying firewood

Mika:

Come on, Mania. Let's stack them up high, right under him.

Mnesilochus: quickly covers the "baby" again.

By all means, girls. As high as you can. Stack them right up!

Ehhh... tell me! This is your baby, right? You gave birth to it. Is that so?

Mika:

Sure did! Carried it the full nine months!

Mnesilochus:

You did, did you? The full nine months?

Mika:

Absolutely! Swear by Artemis!

Mnesilochus: Lets the baby's cape fall slowly, teasingly to the ground

Ripper of a baby, Mika! What's it hold? Three jugs?

Mika:

You're winding me up, you bastard!

You dared take my baby's clothes off? A tiny baby like that?

Shameless creep!

Mnesilochus:

Tiny? By Zeus! How old is it? Three, four wine festivals old?

Mika:

Yeah, around that... born around the last Dionysiac Festival!

Give it to me!

Mnesilochus:

No way! I swear by Apollo you're not getting this little baby!

Mika:

Fine then. We'll burn you!

Mnesilochus: Wields the knife again

Burn away, girls but this little baby gets chopped up!

Sacrificed to Apollo!

Mika:

No! No!

Please, I beg you! Do what you want with me but let my little baby live!

Mnesilochus:

Ah, good ol' "mother's instinct!" Admirable, I must say but still, this little squirt will cop it on the neck!

Mika:

My baby!

Mania, go and get the sacrificial bowl so that I may catch my darling's blood!

Mania gets the bowl from the altar.

Mnesilochus:

Here, bring it under here. It will give me a great pleasure to do you this little favour!

He laughs while he lifts the wine skin above the bowl and tears into it with his knife. The wine splashes into the bowl and elsewhere.

Mika:

Rotten, decrepit creature! Hateful, disgusting little man! I hope you die in agony!

Mnesilochus: shakes the wine skin dry.

And now, this little skin becomes the property of the priestess!

Enter Kritylla:

Kritylla:

Yes? What little skin goes to the priestess?

Mnesilochus offers her the wine skin.

Mnesilochus:

This one here. Here you are, take it!

Kritylla: takes the wine skin. Sadly.

O, poor, poor Mika! Who did this? Who stripped you of your girdle, my girl?

Who ripped your baby from your tit?

Mika:

This cunning bastard here! He did it!

Stay here, Kritylla and keep a close eye on him while I go and get Kleisthenes and tell the cops all about him.

Kritylla approaches Mnesilochus watchfully while Mika and Mania exit.

Mnesilochus: To the audience

Now what do I do?

How do I get out of this? What's my next move?

A plan! A plan! I need a plan!

And where is the man who dropped me right into this mess? Vanished! Still not here!

How do I send a message to him, I wonder?

Suddenly

I know! I'll do what one the men in his play Palamedes did! I'll write a message on some oars and drop them into the sea... Hmm... can't see any oars around here though! I wonder where I could get some oars... looks around him and discovers the wooden shingles on the altar. Ah! The votive shingles! Perfect stuff! I'll write on them and then toss them into the sea. Tests them by tapping onto them and checking them on both sides. Wood, just like the oars. They'll float from one end of the sea to the other!

He pulls out his knife and begins scratching a message onto one of them, pausing, at times to utter the words of the following prayer:

Oh, come, my darling hands!

Try your very, very best to engrave my safe, safe escape from here.

And oh, you, you little tablets of finely sanded wood!

Please receive this knife's work with grace and please be the bearers of my message, a message of my distress!

Suddenly the knife slips

Bugger! This R letter is a real pain in bum!

Concentrates. Pokes his tongue out as he scratches more carefully. Finally he is happy with his work.

Wow! Brilliant! Look at that! What a fantastic job I've done!

Right, then dear tablets, off you go!

Go in every direction, now and hurry!

He hands the tablets to the chorus who pass them on to each other, as if waves in the sea, until all the shingles disappear.

While the chorus utters the lines below, Mnesilochus tries anxiously to find an escape route. Kritylla follows him closely wielding a threatening torch.

Chorus:

And now, ladies!

Let us say a few words praising our own virtues!

Oh, yeah!

Because, ladies, men never stop whinging and whining about us all!

O, they tell us, we are a veritable pain in humanity's bum!

We are, in short, a bum-pain!

We are the very womb of conflict and of clash!

So they say!

We are the cause of dire insurrection, of misery and of war!

To the audience

Come on! I mean if we're so terrible, why do you marry us then?

Oh, yeah!

If we're such bum-pains for you, then why don't you let us get out of the house for a bit? Or even do a bit of window-shopping every now and then?

Goodness! You guard your bum-pains so very, very well!

Oh yeah!

And then, if your little wife happens to go out somewhere and you bump into her out in the street, what do you do?

I ask you!

You carry on like a frenzied rooster, screaming and yelling at the top of your head!

If we're as bad as you say, then you'd be toasting a drink to the gods, thanking them for making your bum-pain vanish for ever from your life!

Oh yeah!

Say we went out, had a great time and fell asleep at a friend's house.

Well, what do our dear hubbies do? They go searching every house, every bedroom and every bed looking for his... bum-pain!

I ask you!

Hehehe!

And if we stood by the window, trying to check out the street, there they'd be, every man and his dog, gawking at us, us, their bum-pain!

Then we get all embarrassed, shy away and hide but the men?

Oh yeah!

But the men become even more keen to gawk at us- their bum-pain- the next time we stand by the window!

Now let's be certain about one thing: We are superior to men! No doubt about it!

Oh, yeah!

Proof? They turn towards Mnesilochus

Did I hear someone ask for proof?

Fair enough! Let's see what we can do here.

Here we have the two sexes disagreeing, each claiming to have superiority over the other! So, let's compare each sex with the other by checking out names; one by one.

Let's see:

Charminus, for example. Now that's a hell of a lot worse than Naustimache. Let the records be examined: Charminus lost a naval battle; Nausimache's name on the other hand, means "sea warrior," that is, she is...nautically victorious!

And then, of course, we've got Kleophon, our great leader! Yuk! Compare that to our Salabakho, the most scrumptious whore in Athens!

And what about our Aristomache, ey? "Excels in battle," that's what her name means!

Or Stratoniki! How many of you men can come up to that Marathon standard?

And of all of last year's councillors, those who retired this year, which of them can stack up to our Euboule? That's right, none!

Oh, yeah!

See? Women are far superior to men!

Look around you! Search the streets! Will you find a woman running off with fifty talents of the State's money, splashing it about on splendid chariots and the like?

No way!

The biggest haul a woman will ever make is a cup of flour from her husband's pantry and then she'll pay him back that very night!

We point all these scoundrels out to you right now. They're all among you, not among us! Fatsoes, thugs, free-loaders, slave mongers, the lot! They're out there, amongst you lot. Men!

Oh, yeah!

They talk about "economy" all the time! They do that while they spend and waste the whole of their father's estate.

Can't save a bloody thing!

We, on the other hand, we know how to save, we know how to keep our baskets, our looms, our shuttles, our umbrellas! Whereas you, men!

Some of our husbands have lost their spears –wood, iron, the lot! Can't find them anywhere in the house; and others, well, they just tossed the shields off their backs on the battlefield, anyhow!

There's lots of stuff that we women are angry about and justly, too!

One of the worse things is that we just don't get recognised for our good work!

I mean, if a woman gives birth to a man who serves the State well, let's say he becomes a Brigadier, or a General, then she should be honoured in some way!

She should be given a seat at the Honours Row at the Stenia and the Scira, as well as all the other women's festivals!

Whereas if a woman whose sons end up as cowards or thugs, or nasty Brigadiers or foolish leaders, then she should have all their hair cut into the shape of a soup-bowl and she should be made to sit behind the good man's mother.

Why should a woman (Indicating one in the crowd) that one there, for example, who gave birth to someone like our idiot politician, Hyperbolus, why should she be able to come in here all prettied up in white gowns and trailing hair and sit right next to the woman who gave birth to a brilliant General like Lamachus and then engage herself in ripping people off with money loans and punishing interest rates?

Really, if anyone has taken a loan from that woman, not only should he not pay her any interest on it but he shouldn't even pay the capital back! And if she demands it back, he should tell her to bugger off. "Pay you interest? You? Me pay you? After you giving us a son like that?"

Mnesilochus has suddenly stopped searching around for Euripides. He and Kritylla appear from behind the altar.

Mnesilochus:

Damn! I think I've gone cross-eyed looking for that man! Can't see him anywhere. Where on earth is he? He's taking a very long time!

I bet he's still feeling sore after the failure of his play, Palamedes! A real ice block that play was!

But then, which of his plays can I use to reel him in here?

I know, I'll take on the role of his Helen. She is the protagonist of his last play, called Helen. I'd be good, too. I'm already dressed for the part. Spins around like a model Woman's wardrobe! Prepares to enunciate.

Kritylla:

Oi! What do you think you're doing now? Stop gawking like that!

You'll cop a real hell of a Helen if you don't smarten up before the cops get here!

Mnesilochus: Throws his arms about as he recites. He has learnt well from Agathon.

O, fair virgin springs of the Nile!

O, you who do Heaven's undone work and quench the thirst of the plains of Egypt!

O, you people of Egypt! You, Egyptians who love your powerful purgatives!

Kritylla:

What a sly old codger this man is, by Hekate the torch bearing goddess!

Mnesilochus:

It is I, Helen and my father's country is not nameless!

She is called Sparta and my House is the House of Tyndareus!

Kritylla:

Ha! You? You're the son of Tyndareus? You, the no-hoper, the loser?

Ha! Phrynondas, our infamous petty thief! That'd be more likely!

Mnesilochus:

And I? I am called Helen! Sits upon the altar and looks sad.

Kritylla:

Hahaha! Another woman act!

We haven't yet punished you for your first impersonation and here you are, at it again!

Mnesilochus continues unperturbed

So many dear souls have expired by the fair streams of Scamander!

Kritylla:

What a shame you weren't one of them!

Mnesilochus:

Yet I am here! Alive!

O, how I wish my poor husband, Menelaos, were here, alive also!

O, why then, am I still alive?

Kritylla:

Because the birds of prey are cunning!

Strange noises from within

Mnesilochus:

Yet, halt!

Something flutters within my heart!

O, Zeus! Toy not with my newfound hope!

Euripides barges in, dressed in the role of Menelaos in his play “Helen”. (Clothes torn and wet, weeds around his neck. He has just survived the sinking of his ship.)

Euripides:

O, behold! What grandiose halls are these?

Who has sway over them?

Will he welcome strangers who have battled the intemperance of the salty oceans?

Will he welcome strangers who have suffered cruel winters and shipwrecks?

Mnesilochus:

Ay, friend, these halls belong to Proteus!

Kritylla:

Proteus, who, you triple loser! To Euripides Don’t listen to him, stranger. Proteus our General has been dead for over a decade! Proteus, indeed!

Euripides:

O, do tell me fair maiden, what land is this that our ship has touched?

Mnesilochus:

Why, friend, this is Egypt!

Euripides:

Egypt!

O, dreadful Fates! How far the dire waves have driven me!

Kritylla:

Stranger, don’t believe this man! He’s a lunatic. He’s stark, raving mad!

This is the Temple of Demeter. We’re in the middle of her festival!

Euripides:

Is King Proteus within his halls or has he gone out?

Kritylla:

Still seasick, ey?

Hmm... obviously; if it didn’t register when I told you that Proteus is dead!

He's neither within nor without, friend!

Euripides:

Dead, is he? O, my! Is Proteus verily dead? In truth? But where is his tomb?

Mnesilochus:

This place here, where I am sitting, is Proteus' tomb!

Kritylla:

Well, don't just sit, there! Die and let Hades take you! She charges at him angrily
And die you shall, you no-hoper! How dare you call Demeter's altar a tomb!

Euripides:

But, o, strange maiden, why do you sit upon his tomb? Why clothe yourself in that
sad clothing?

Mnesilochus:

I'm forced to sleep with Proteus's son. Forced against my will to marry.

Kritylla:

Damned liar! Why lie at the poor stranger?

Stranger, this is one very cunning, sly old bastard. He's walked in here, in the
women's gathering so he can pinch all our gold jewellery!

Mnesilochus: to Kritylla

You may shower my body with insults, if you like! I care not!

Euripides: To Mnesilochus:

Dear lady, who is this old hag who does insult you so?

Mnesilochus:

That there is Proteus' daughter, Theonoe!

Kritylla:

By Persephone and Demeter! I am not Theonoe! I am Kritylla, Antitheus' daughter!
Antitheus from Gargettos and (To Mnesilochus) you! You are a sly, sleaze-bag!

Mnesilochus:

O, Theonoe! Say whatever you want to say! In no way will I ever marry your brother
and betray my husband, Menelaos who's fighting in Troy!

Euripides: Approaches Mnesilochus and touches his cheek fondly

Lady, say your words once more! Turn and let my eyes see yours!

Mnesilochus: wraps her face with the shawl

No, I cannot do that! No, stranger, do not ask me that!

I'm too ashamed to show the shame suffered by my cheeks!

Euripides:

O, what is this that's overtaken my tongue? Some speechlessness has rendered me speechless! He turns Mnesilochus' face towards him O! O, tell me once more, fair girl! Tell me again! What do my eyes perceive?

Lady, who are you?

Mnesilochus:

And you, stranger? Who are you? Your words have been snatched from my mouth!

Euripides:

But... are you Greek?

Or are you from these parts? Are you an Egyptian?

Mnesilochus:

I am a woman born in Greece. You, now tell me everything about you.

Euripides:

Dear Lady! You are identical to my Lady, Helen!

Mnesilochus:

And you! Your clothes, stranger declare a Menelaos!

Euripides:

O, me! Indeed, my Lady your eyes do not deceive you. I am, indeed that very same, unfortunate creature!

They embrace passionately. Euripides' phallus creates a problem until Mnesilochus tucks it in between his legs.

Mnesilochus:

Come, come, come darling husband into your wife's flower!

So long! It's been so long since you have taken me, husband!

Take me! Take me now and hold me deeeep into your arms!

Come, come! Come let me kiss you!

Come, come! Let us elope! Let us run away together quickly!

They begin to sneak away but Kritylla stops them, wielding a threatening torch

Kritylla:

I swear by the two almighty goddesses, Demeter and Persephone! I'll clobber to death anyone who tries to run away with you, you useless loser!

Euripides:

What? Will you begrudge me taking my own wife home to Sparta with me?

This here is Helen! Helen, Tyndareus' very own daughter!

Kritylla:

Oh yeah? I reckon you're just as big a conman as this idiot is and I reckon you two

are mates! Now I know why both of you have been behaving like two sly Egyptians, crapping on about Egypt!

Aha! Now he'll pay his dues! Here's the Magistrate with a cop!

Enter the Magistrate and a Skythian archer.

The archer holds a bow and a whip. A quiver of arrows hangs from his shoulder. From his belt hangs a long menacing sword.

Euripides: whispers to Mnesilochus.

Oh, no! I've gotta slide out of here somehow.

Mnesilochus: whispers back

Hey, what about me? What am I supposed to do?

Euripides:

You just stay calm, mate. I won't let you down. Not, at least while I'm still breathing and while my supply of schemes holds out.

Mnesilochus hops off the altar and stretches his gown wide concealing Euripides' escape.

Mnesilochus:

Bugger! What a waste of time this fishing line was!

Caught nothing with it!

Magistrate: To Kritylla

Right! Is this the crooked bastard that Kleisthenes told us about?

To Mnesilochus

You! You there! Why are you looking so guilty!

To the archer

Take him around the back and tie him to an executioner's plank. Then bring him back here and watch him very carefully. If anyone comes anywhere near him, rip out your whip and whip the crap outa him!

Kritylla:

Yeah! Watch him very carefully because just now a man came around and tried to run off with him! The cunning little sail-patcher!

Mnesilochus: runs over to the Magistrate, takes his hand and pleads.

O, dear Magistrate! Let me take you by this bribe-loving hand of yours and let me beg you, in this the final hour before my execution – do me a small favour?

Magistrate:

What sort of favour?

Mnesilochus:

Please, Your Honour, tell that policeman to strip me naked before tying up at the executioner's plank. Have mercy on an old man, Your Honour. Look at me! I'm clothed in veils and women's dresses. When the vultures come down to tear at my flesh they'll cack themselves laughing!

Magistrate:

Nonsense! Council's orders! You will be executed in the clothes you are now wearing. Let the type and extent of your criminality be noted by everyone!

Mnesilochus: Tugging at his clothes madly

You see clothes? You see what you've gone and done to me? Dresses!

I can't see how on earth I'll save my neck now!

The Magistrate and Kritylla exit one way while the policeman directing Mnesilochus, exit the other.

Chorus:

Right then, Ladies!

It's a Ladies' Festival, the Festival of our two most reverend goddesses, makers of law and so, we should now honour them with the customary celebratory dance!

These are the two goddesses who our very own artist, Pauson the pauper, also honours and respects and for whom he fasts to starvation! He, too, prays, as we do, that these festivals continue to be celebrated for all eternity.

Music

Light on your feet, now, girls! Easy, breezy feet!

That's it, make a circle! Now spin it all about... hold hands... quick steps... that's it!

Careful... keep up with the beat now!

Good! Now look to the left... look to the right... look to the left again... now eyes all around!

Swing your bums a bit... thank you ladies!

Voices! Sing the song of praise now girls!

Chanting

"Praise and glory be to all the gods on Mount Olympus!" Shouts of ecstasy and frenzy interspersed with the song.

And if any of you in the audience think that we'll be shouting abuses at men just because this is a women's festival, you're wrong!

Let's do something new, here, girls! Something innovative!

Let's see some new steps now in this circle! Steps never seen on a stage ever before!

Oh, yeah!

Apollo, god of the lyre, we praise you!

Artemis, chaste goddess of the hunt, we praise you!

Artemis, whose arrows rich far, grant us the crown of victory in the field of war and dance!

Hera, goddess of marriage, guardian of the dance and of the key to the nuptial bedroom, we adore you!

And you, two gods, Hermes the protector of the shepherd and Pan, come with your beloved Nymphs and grace our dance with your approving smiles!

Oh yeah!

Come on girls!

A new step now! Double-quick, double spunk, double the dance, double the fun!

It's a Festival, girls! Give it to the Divine pair!

And don't forget to do your fasting, now! Stay hungry! It's a solemn Festival!

Oh, yeah!

Spin that subtle foot about again, girls! Hold onto the rhythm tight now!

And... sing loud, sing clear, sing well and let the Heaven hear!

Heaven hear us!

Bacchus! Bacchus! Bacchus! God with the ivy crown, lead our dance!

Come Lord Bacchus! It's you we praise, it's for you we dance with such frenzy!

Evius, son of Zeus and Semele, Bromius, lover of noise and din, lover of pretty chorus girls and nymphs of the woody mountains!

Bacchus! You sing with girls and you dance with them and you shout out the sacred sound:

Evoi! Evoi! Evoi!

And your echo resounds in the thick foliage and the crags of mount Kitheron

Evoi! Evoi! Evoi!

And the burgeoning tendrils of the ivy girdle your body.

Mnesilochus enters, chained to a tall wooden cross. He is held by the archer who guides him roughly to the altar. The archer speaks "broken" English with a strong, foreign accent.

Archer:

You stand right there!

You groan and groan all you like now. The winds be your audience!

Mnesilochus:

Please, please, mister archer...

Archer:

No say “please” to me, mate!

Mnesilochus:

Please loosen my chains a bit!

Archer:

Loosen, ey? Sure!

He tightens them instead

Mnesilochus:

Bloody hell! Ouch! Ahhhhh! You’re making them tighter!

Archer:

Want more looser still?

Tightens them a bit more

Mnesilochus:

Ouch, ouch, ouchy ouch! Rotten bastard!

Archer:

Ha! If you no like shut your traps!

Now I’m off to get me a little mat, to me lie down a little bit, while I’m guard for you!

Exit Archer

Mnesilochus:

That’s what I get for loving Euripides!

Suddenly he sees something deep into the sky. He follows it across over the stage.

Yes! By Zeus the Saviour and by all the other gods on Mount Olympus! I can see a ray of hope up there! I think!

What? What was that?

Ah, ha! Looks like the boy hasn’t abandoned me yet!

I just saw him flying across the sky, like Perseus wearing Hermes’ winged sandals and winged cap!

I suppose this means I ought to change roles now. Take up the role of Andromeda, I guess.

Examines his wardrobe. No probs. Chains. I’ve got all the props I need for the job. And he’s flying right this way!

Declaims as if in the part of Andromeda

Oh, dear, dear virgins!

How can I escape from the archer’s chains?

How can I run away?

You, Echo! Echo of deep leafy caves!

Do you hear my call?

He listens for an echo. To no avail.

Allow me, please dear virgins to leave this place and go home to my wife!

Here I am, girls: A man whose Fate has tortured him so much and now has him even chained by this wild beast of an archer!

One bad Fate after another!

I've only just escaped the claws of a miserable old hag and now my full destruction awaits!

It's a destruction I'm sure I won't be able to escape. This... this Skythian cop is all over me! Won't take his ugly eyes off me. Chained me all up and turned me into lunch for the vultures.

Looks all around him

Dear gods! I feel so lonely!

Not a friendly face anywhere!

Where are the girls of my age? Where are the dances? Where is my prayer candle?

Just chains!

Wrapped up and ready to be served as a cute little morsel to that glutton of a man, Glaucetes!

O, dear, dear friends! Sing a song of sorrow for me!

Sing no joyful wedding songs for me!

I am not free, my friends; I am shackled! In shackles and in misery!

Oh, how dreadfully I suffer this suffering!

Poor, poor, alas, poor me!

The tragedy of it is that I suffer this suffering because of a relative of mine!

My own son-in-law has caused me this suffering!

Such suffering!

Hades! I implore you! I send you my tears, my groans!

I implore the man who shaved me!

The man who singed my bum-fluff,

The man who dressed me up in these saffron gowns,

The man who made me come here, to this temple of women!

Save me!

O, God who rules my Fate, why are you so cruel?

Great gods, I am a wretched man!

Could anyone witness my awful suffering and not lose a tear?

O, if only a thunderbolt would strike this barbarian who's guarding me!

Destroy him!

Looks up to the sun

O, I cannot look upon that bright light with pleasure any more!

That immortal light of the sun.

Not while I'm hung up here, chained to this plank!

Not while I'm spinning down to Hades so fast!

Not while I'm in chains!

Not while I'm being strangled to death!

Enter Echo

Echo:

Dear girl, hello!

Examines Mnesilochus' predicament carefully, then goes behind him and behind the altar.

Goodness! I hope the gods make minced meat out of your nasty, nasty daddy, Kepheus! Fancy making you stand out here like this! Fully exposed! Nasty man!

Mnesilochus:

Ey? Who are you? How come you feel sorry for me?

Echo:

Me? My name is Echo.

I... I'm repetitive by nature and repetitive by occupation. In other words, I repeat... everything I hear. It was I who had helped dear old Euripides win the Drama Prize, last year, at this very spot, in fact!

Your turn now! Come on, start wailing!

Mnesilochus:

And, I suppose, you'll repeat my wailing, will you?

Echo:

Yes, that's my job. Go on!

Mnesilochus:

Oooooo, Holy Night!

How tardy you are, Holy Night!

How slowly your horses run their course across the starry heavens, across the starry kingdom of Ether and Olympus!

Echo:

...across the starry kingdom of Ether and Olympus!

Mnesilochus:

O, but why should Andromeda be forced to bear all the misfortunes of the world?

Echo:

...the misfortunes of the world?

Mnesilochus:

What miserable death awaits me!

Echo:

...death awaits me!

Mnesilochus:

You're being bloody annoying, now, you old nag!

Echo:

...now, you old nag!

Mnesilochus:

By Zeus! Very, very bloody annoying! Stop interrupting me!

Echo:

...annoying! Stop interrupting me!

Mnesilochus:

Darling, do me this favour! Let me wail on my own, will you please? There's a good girl! Now, please stop!

Echo:

...girl! Now please stop!

Mnesilochus:

Argh! To the crows with you, woman!

Echo:

Argh! To the crows with you, woman!

Mnesilochus:

What IS it with you?

Echo:

What IS it with you?

Mnesilochus:

Babble, babble, babble!

Echo:

Babble, babble, babble!

Mnesilochus:

Watch out, you'll be doing some real wailing now!

Echo:

...doing some real wailing now!

Mnesilochus:

Die, you bitch!

Echo:

Die, you bitch!

Enter Archer carrying a mat. He cannot see Echo who is behind the altar.

Archer:

Oi! What all this yakity yak about?

Echo:

...all this yakity yak about?

Archer:

Hmm... I think I better call the Magistrates!

Echo:

...think I better call the Magistrates!

Archer:

What's going on?

Echo:

What's going on?

Archer:

Where in Hades is that voice coming from?

Echo:

...is that voice coming from?

Archer: To Mnesilochus

Hey! Is that you?

Echo:

Hey! Is that you?

Archer:

You be running tears of pain from your eyes for this!

Echo:

...running tears of pain from your eyes for this!

Archer:

You pulling me foot?

Echo:
You pulling me foot?
Mnesilochus:
No, no, no, by Zeus! It's not me. It's that woman behind me!
Echo:
...woman behind me!
Archer: Looks around
Woman? Where? Where the woman-bitch?
Echo:
Woman? Where? Where the woman-bitch?
Mnesilochus:
Look, there! She's running away!
Archer:
Hey, where you goin'?
Echo:
Hey, where you goin'?
Archer:
I catch you! You no get away with this!
Echo:
...get away with this!
Archer:
Still squealing, are ya?
Echo:
Still squealing, are ya?
Archer:
Grab the woman-bitch!
Echo: as she runs off the stage
Grab the woman-bitch!
Archer:
Bloody, bloody, bloody squealing squealy woman-bitch!
The Archer lies down on the mat for a short moment before Euripides enters, leaping and bounding about as if trying to fly. He is dressed in the role of Perseus: winged cap and winged sandals and carrying a bag with the head of Medusa in it.
Euripides:
O, gods!

O, speedy sandals! To which barbaric land have you brought me?
I have flown through all the highways and byways of all the skies with my winged feet, heading for Argos.

I am Perseus and in this bag I am carrying the head of a Gorgon!

Archer: Jumps up, whip at the ready.

What you say? You got head of the Suckatary in bag? Suckatary Gorgos?

Euripides:

I said it's the head of a Gorgon!

Archer:

Yeah, I say Gorgos, too!

Euripides: Looks around him pretending he sees Mnesilochus for the first time
Ah, but what is this rock I see before me?

And there! There, beside it, who may this divine maiden be, moored upon it like a fair boat, ready for her virgin voyage?

Mnesilochus:

O, dear, dear friend! Come! Pity me my dire misfortune!

Untie these awful fetters from me!

Archer:

You! No more yakity yak! You say one word and you be dead divine virgin maiden!

Euripides:

O, divine virgin! My heart breaks when I see you hanging there like that!

Archer:

Hahaha! She no virgin! She a dirty man! A naughty, naughty old man! She... eh... he a bad thief and a bad... sneaky, sneaky man!

Euripides:

You're delirious, Skythian! That there is Andromeda, Kepheus' darling daughter!

Archer: Points at Mnesilochus' phallus

Hahaha! Look there! Look at her fig... It's no little fig is it? Nooooo, it's big... gesticulates an enormous cock.

Euripides:

O, do give me her fair hand that I may hold it in mine.

Come, come, Skythian! Let me! All humans have their illness and I'm ill to the heart with lust for this girl!

Archer:

Yuk!

You got sick all right! I no like that one! You... I turn him round and you fuck him backside, yes?

Euripides: becomes physical

Ah, no. Why don't you untie her and let me rush her quickly to my... wedding bed?

Archer:

You want fast fuck? Why you no go behind and dig hole on wood. Fuck him bum good, from there.

Euripides: Clearly frustrated. He moves towards Mnesilochus.

By Zeus, No! I'll just untie...

Archer: Lifts his whip No, no! I whip you!

Euripides:

Nevertheless, I'm going to untie her!

Archer: Pulls out a sword from his belt

I chop off her head with this big sword!

Euripides: Terrified now. To the audience.

Now what?

What am I supposed to do now? Refined words defy the brains of barbarians!

No point in trying anything subtle with such brutes! You're wasting time and effort.

I think I better go away and think some more about it!

Archer: Also to the audience

I think he tricky fox! He try something more tricky again!

Exit Euripides

Mnesilochus: Shouts at Euripides as he leaves.

Perseus! Don't forget the dire trouble I'm in!

Archer:

You like more whip?

Archer goes over to his mat and falls asleep.

Chorus:

Pallas Athena! Dance lover!

The law has it that I must invite you to join our dance,

So, come now, dear Virgin! Dear unwedded girl!

Almighty goddess who alone holds the key to our city and who so righteously despises tyrants!

Appear before us now!

We, the women of the city call you!

Come and bring dance-loving Peace with you!
 You, too, most Divine pair!
 Come, Demeter and Persephone,
 Gentle of heart and joyous of temper!
 Come to this, Ladies! To your very own fair precinct!
 Where men cannot enter!
 Where men cannot witness our sacred rites!
 They cannot take part in the rites which you
 Shower with the light of torches!
 Torches that show us your immortal faces.
 Come goddesses, come! We beg you!
 Reverent law-maker goddesses!
 We've called you before and you came
 So come to us again now because again we beseech you!

Enter Euripides with Fawn, a dancing girl and Teredon, a flute boy.
 Euripides is dressed up as an old procuress. His face is hidden by a veil.

Euripides: Makes an announcement.

Ladies, ladies, ladies!

I hereby give you this chance:

He reveals his face to the sudden astonishment of the women.

Ladies, if you wish to clinch a deal with me, to strike an ever-lasting bargain with me, now is the time! I will sign up to the promise that not one woman will ever be insulted by me again! Never! Not insulted in any way!

Now, that's what I propose!

Chorus:

And you're doing this because?

Euripides:

That guy there, you've got chained at the plank is my father-in-law. If you let me take him home with me, that'll be the end of my insults. You'll never hear a nasty word about you from me. But, if you don't, if you won't release him to me, then, rest assured, all of your seedy activities while your husbands are the battlefield, will be revealed to them upon their return!

Chorus:

Done! It's a deal as far as we're concerned.

But about that chained man, you've got to try and persuade that barbarian there.

Euripides:

Right! I'll do that. To his companions. Now you two! Fawn, do you remember what I told you to do on the way here? Fawn nods Yeah, good, first just lift your skirts a bit and shake your cheeks as you dance back and forth in front of the archer. Teredon, you play something for her to dance to. Something Persian. All right?

The music and dancing begins. Euripides hides his face behind the veil again

Archer: Wakes up

Oi! What's going on? Too many noise! Big party wake me up!

Euripides:

Sorry, mister policeman! The girl is doing a bit of rehearsing before she goes off to entertain some gentlemen.

Archer:

Oooo! Dancing! Sure, she dance! Dance, girly dance! She very, very pretty! She very, very hop-hop. Like a flea in the wool!

Euripides:

Right! Now Fawn, darling. Take off your dress and go sit on the Skythian's lap. She obeys. Good, now bring your legs out for me so I can take off your sandals.

Archer:

Oh, yeaah. Sit down, sit down, yeah, little girlie, yeah, little girlie. Ooooo, what beautiful titties... oooooh, just like beautiful turnips... Ohhhh!

Euripides:

Teredon, play a bit faster for the girl!

Teredon obeys

To Fawn

You're not afraid of the Skythian any more, are you, darling?

Archer:

Ohhh! Very, very good bum, too!

Talking to his phallus

Oi, you! You bad boy! You cry if you no stay inside.

Oooo, beautiful body!

Phallus pops up!

Euripides:

Well done, girl! Now pick up your clothes and both of you run like hell!

Archer: Disappointed

Oh! No kissy, kissy first?

Euripides:

Kissy, kissy? Oh, all right. Go ahead, Fawn, give him a kiss.

She obeys

Archer:

Ooooo, so very, very, sweet! Tongue sweet like the honey from Attica! Oooo, you no want to... sleep with me?

Euripides: Drags her from the archer's arms

No, mister Archer. That wish will not eventuate. Come on, we've got to go.

Archer:

Oooo, old lady wait! Please old lady... one wish only...

Euripides:

You got lots of money for me? One drachma?

Archer:

Sure! Sure, I give lots of money.

Euripides:

Well, where is it? Give it to me!

Archer:

Give it to me? I have nothing with me... (offers him his quiver) Here, you take quiver... but I give you money and you give back to me after! (To Dawn) You, girlie, you come with me. (To Euripides, indicating Mnesilochus) You watch that old man there very, very careful, yes? What's your name, old lady?

Euripides:

Artemisia.

Archer: Poking at his temple

I remember name: Artamoochia!

Exit Archer with Fawn

Euripides: Removes the veil

Good old Hermes! Full of tricks as always. What good luck he's brought me so far!

Teredon, you can run off, too, now! Hands him the quiver And take this stuff with you. I'll go and get the old guy unchained.

Teredon exits. Euripides walks over to Mnesilochus and begins to unchain him

Now listen pop, the moment I let you loose, you run like buggery and go home, right? Off to your wife and kids. Got it?

Mnesilochus:

Absolutely! The very second I'm free!

Euripides:

There you go! Now run! Run off before the archer comes back in and arrests you again.

Mnesilochus:

Done!

Exit Mnesilochus and, a moment later, after taking a final “fairwell” look all around him, Euripides follows.

A short moment before Fawn and the Archer return.

Archer: before noticing the absence of Euripides and Mnesilochus

Your little girlie is very nice, old lady Artamoochia, very, very happy to me. Do everything very, very nice. Easy and nice.

Looks all around.

To the chorus: Hey! Where’s the old lady? O, no! They kill me! O, no! Where’s the old man? Where he gone? Shouts Lady! Lady! Where are you? O, I no like this very, very much! This very, very bad! Artamoooochia! Old lady! O, the old bad, bad lady! She trick me!

To Fawn

You run for her! Run quick! Catch old lady!

Fawn runs off. He searches through his stuff and sees that his quiver is gone

Ha! My quiver! She’s gone! Quiver takes arrows I take shafts. Up the bum! They fuck me very, very good! What I do now? Shit! Shouts Old lady! Old lady, where are you? Artamoooochia!

Chorus:

Are you looking for that old lady with the harp?

Archer:

Yeah, yeah, you see him?

Chorus:

That old lady went off with an old man. That way!

Archer: Turns in the direction she pointed and begins to go that way.

The old man... he wear yellow dress, yes?

Chorus:

Yes, yes, that’s him, all right. If you want to catch them you have to run... that way (indicating the opposite direction now.)

Archer:

Very, very nasty old lady! Which way I run? (Shouts) Artamooooochia!

Chorus:

That way! To the right... up there... Hey where are you going? No, not that way, that way! Quick run! No, not that way! You're going the wrong way again!

Archer:

Oooo! I'm running, I'm running, I'm running! Artamoooooooochia!

Exit Archer

Chorus:

Run, you idiot, run after them! Run all the way to the crows!

And we, too, ladies! Enough fun for a day!

Time for us all to go back to our home and let us pray that the pair of law-loving goddesses reward us well for our work today!

Exit all

PEACE

This edition is based on the [publicly available](http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/aristophanes/peace.htm)³³⁵ translation by Ian Johnston

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BACKGROUND NOTE

At the time *Peace* was produced in Athens, the city had been at war with Sparta for a number of years. However, peace negotiations had been going on, and it looked as if the two sides might just agree to end (or at least suspend) their hostilities.

...

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

FIRST SERVANT: a slave belonging to Trygaeus
SECOND SERVANT: a slave belonging to Trygaeus
DAUGHTERS: two daughters of Trygaeus
TRYGAEUS: a middle-aged farmer
HERMES: a god, divine son of Zeus
WAR: a god
UPROAR: a young servant to War.
CHORUS: farmers and servants from different city states
HIEROCLES: a seller of oracles
SICKLE MAKER
JAR MAKER
ARMS DEALER
ARMOURER
TRUMPET MAKER
SPEAR MAKER
BOY, a son of Lamachus
BOY, a son of Cleonymus
PEACE
THEORIA: a young female attendant on Peace
OPORA: a young female attendant on Peace

[Across the back of the flat open front of the stage, the Orchestra, are four structures: the farm house belonging to Trygaeus, a stable beside or in front of it, a

³³⁵<http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/aristophanes/peace.htm>

cave whose opening is blocked in with rocks, and the palace of Zeus. Two of Trygaeus' slaves are in front of the stable. One is on his knees before a shallow tub preparing balls of dung taken from a pile in the yard, and the other is carrying these balls of dung into the stable]

FIRST SERVANT [coming from the stable door]

Come on, bring us a cake for the beetle.

Get a move on! Hurry up.

SECOND SERVANT [on his knees kneading dung into cakes]

There you go.

Give him that. May it kill the wretched beast!

I hope he never swallows anything
more delicious than that ball of shit.

[First servant takes the cake, goes into the stable, and returns]

FIRST SERVANT

Give him another one. And make this cake
out of pounded donkey dung.

SECOND SERVANT

Back again?

Where's the one you took in there just now?

He can't have eaten it.

FIRST SERVANT

Eaten it? By Zeus,
he grabbed it, rolled in round between his feet,
and then swallowed it—the whole damn thing.
Hurry up and pound out more, lots of them—
and pack them tight.

[First Servant carries another cake into the stable and returns]

SECOND SERVANT [looking at the audience]

You dung collectors out there, in the name of the gods, give me a hand,
unless you want to see me choke.

FIRST SERVANT

Hand me another cake—
from a boy prostitute. He says he needs
something made from shit that's been well pounded.

SECOND SERVANT [tossing him a cake]

There you go.

[First Servant returns to the stable. The Second Servant addresses the audience]

Gentlemen, there's one thing

I think I'll never be found guilty of.

No one will claim that as I pound this muck

I help myself and eat the stuff.³³⁶

FIRST SERVANT [holding his nose]

Good god!

Get me another, and then bring one more,

and then another. Keep packing more.

SECOND SERVANT

No, by Apollo, not me! I can't stand

this disgusting muck a moment longer!

FIRST SERVANT

Then I'll take the dung inside, tub and all.

[The First Servant picks up the tub full of dung and carries it into the stable]

SECOND SERVANT

To hell with it, by god, and you as well.

[addressing the audience]

If any of you knows, please tell me now

where I can get a nose without a nostril.

There's no work that is more miserable

than rolling this stuff up and serving it

to feed a beetle. Now, a pig or dog,

as soon as someone's had a shit, eats it

without a fuss. But this conceited brute,

like some lady, is so full of itself, it won't eat unless I mash the stuff all day then

serve it rolled into a ball by hand.

But I'll take a look, see if it's done eating.

I'll open this door, but just a sliver,

so it won't see me.

[He pushes the stable door slightly and looks inside]

Go on—keep eating,

and don't ever stop, not until you burst

³³⁶ . . . eat the stuff: Stealing food in the kitchen was a common complaint against slaves.

all by yourself in there. That damned creature—
 look how it eats, mashing with its molars, moving its head and arms around like that,
 like a wrestler or those who twist the cords
 to make thick ropes for cargo ships.

FIRST SERVANT [returning from the stable]

That brute—
 smelly, foul and greedy! I've no idea
 what god this stinking apparition comes from,
 but I reckon it wasn't Aphrodite
 or the Graces.³³⁷

SECOND SERVANT

Then who was it?

FIRST SERVANT

It's got to be
 some monstrosity sent down here from Zeus, lord of the thundercrap.

SECOND SERVANT

Well, some youngster
 out there in the audience who thinks he's smart
 by this point will be saying, "What's going on?
 What does this beetle mean?" And an Ionian sitting next to him is saying, "In my
 view,
 it's a reference to Cleon, showing how
 he's not ashamed to wolf down shit all day."³³⁸

FIRST SERVANT [getting ready to urinate]

I'm going in to give the beast a drink.

[First Servant goes back into the stable]

SECOND SERVANT

Well then, I'll explain what's going on here
 for children, youngsters, grown ups, and old men,
 even for these self-important windbags.³³⁹
 My master's got some new form of madness—

³³⁷ . . . or the Graces: Aphrodite is the goddess of sexual love, and the Graces are the goddesses of grace and charm.

³³⁸ . . . shit all day: Cleon was a very influential politician in Athens who had died shortly before the production of the play. He is one of Aristophanes' favourite targets, even after his death.

³³⁹ . . . windbags: This would be a pointed reference to the important political officials sitting in a special section of the audience.

not your kind, but something really new.
All day long he gazes at the heavens
with his mouth open, like this, and cries out,
yelling up at god, "O Zeus," he says,
"What on earth are you doing? What's your plan?
Put that broom aside. Don't sweep Greece away!"
Wait! Hold on! Quiet. I think I hear his voice.

TRYGAEUS [from inside the house]
O Zeus, what will you do for our people?
You'll be devastating all our cities
without any sense of what you're doing.

SECOND SERVANT
That's it, the sickness I've been talking of.
There you hear a sample of his madness.
When this disturbance first came over him,
he'd keep saying to himself, "How can I
gain access to Zeus right now?" So he had
some slender ladders made for him, and then,
he'd try to climb them all the way to heaven,
until he'd tumble down and break his head.
Well then, damn him, he went out yesterday,
I don't know where, and brought back a beetle,
a monstrous thing from Etna. He's forced me
to be its groom, while he keeps stroking it,
as if it were a pony, and saying
"O my little Pegasus, my thoroughbred,
my flying steed, now you must carry me
directly up to Zeus." I'll have a look,
bend down here and see just what he's doing.

[The Second Servant stoops to look through a hole in the walls of the stable]
O this is dreadful! Come here, neighbours! Here!
My master's rising up into the air,
riding astride the beetle like a horse!
[Trygaeus appears on the giant dung beetle rising up into the air behind the
stable]

TRYGAEUS

Easy now, beetle, gently does it, easy.

Don't charge and make things much too rough for me, trusting your strength, right at the start of things,

not until you sweat, and your beating wings

loosen up your joints and make your muscles free.

I beg you, don't breathe on me that filthy smell.

If you do that, you can stay here in your cell.

SECOND SERVANT [calling up to Trygaeus]

Master, my lord, how crazy you've become!

TRYGAEUS [here and in following speeches declaiming in the grand style]

Be silent! Hold your tongue!

SECOND SERVANT

Why are you

flapping through the air so senselessly?

TRYGAEUS

I'm soaring off to help out all the Greeks,

a bold new venture, never done before.

SECOND SERVANT

Why are you flying? Why this mad sickness?

TRYGAEUS

You must speak fair words and never mutter
such trivial sounds. Instead cry out with joy.

Tell men to hold their tongues and to close in

their toilets and their sewers with fresh bricks

and to plug their arse holes firmly shut.

SECOND SERVANT

There's no way I'll stay quiet, not unless

you tell me where you plan to fly.

TRYGAEUS

Where else, but up to Zeus in heaven?

SECOND SERVANT

What for?

TRYGAEUS

To ask him about each and every Greek—

what he's got in store for them.

SECOND SERVANT

And what if
he doesn't tell you?

TRYGAEUS

I'll take him to court
for treason, selling Greeks out to the Medes.³⁴⁰

SECOND SERVANT

No, by Dionysus, you'll never go,
not while I'm alive.

TRYGAEUS

There's no other way.

SECOND SERVANT [shouting into the house]

Help! Help! Help! Children, your father's leaving—
he's secretly abandoning you all
to go to heaven.

[Trygaeus' two young daughters come out of the house]

You poor wretched girls,
try pleading with your father. Beg him.

CHILD

Father, oh father, is this report true,
what those at home are saying about you—
you're leaving me here, going up to the sky,
to the birds and the ravens? You're trying to fly?³⁴¹
O daddy, these stories—are they all quite true?
If you love me, I need an answer from you.

TRYGAEUS

Yes, my girls, it's what you think. The truth is
I've had with you—you keep begging me
for bread and calling me your daddikins,
when there's not a drop of money in the house,
nothing at all. But when I'm successful,

³⁴⁰ . . . Medes: The term Medes refers to the Persians who in Asia Minor were still keen on interfering in Greek political matters.

³⁴¹ . . . to the ravens: In Greek is this a common expression for "Going to Hell," or "Going to the dogs."

when I get back again, you'll soon enjoy
a huge cake with my knuckles for a sauce.³⁴²

DAUGHTER

But how are you going to finish the trip?
You can't travel that road in a sailing ship.

TRYGAEUS

A young horse with wings will be carrying me.
I won't journey there in a ship on the sea.

DAUGHTER

Daddy, how did you plan to capture this thing,
harness it, and go to the gods on the wing?

TRYGAEUS

In those stories by Aesop, I found out
the beetle was the only beast with wings
that could reach the place where gods reside.

DAUGHTER

Father, father, that's false. All folks deny
stories which say that stinking brutes fly
and can come to the gods way on high.

TRYGAEUS

Once, long ago,
when it had a quarrel with an eagle,
it went up there and took out its revenge
by rolling from the nest the eagle's eggs.

DAUGHTER

You should have hitched Pegasus and his wings.
Then the gods would see you as those tragic kings.

TRYGAEUS

My dear girl, I'd have needed twice the food.
But now whatever meal I eat myself
will serve to feed this beetle, too.

DAUGHTER

But what if it falls in the depths out at sea?

³⁴² . . . for a sauce: This obscure joke, Sommerstein explains, depends on the very similar words for knuckle or punch and for a tasty delicacy.

With wings like those ones, how will it flee?

TRYGAEUS [lifting up his phallus or exposing his penis]
For that I've got this rudder I can use.
And the beetle will be just like those boats
they make in Naxos.³⁴³

DAUGHTER

But then as you float,
what harbour will open up for that boat?

TRYGAEUS

Doesn't Piraeus have a Beetle Harbour?³⁴⁴

DAUGHTER

Beware of collisions. You might fall down
from way up there and become a lame clown.
If so, to Euripides you'd give a story,
and he'd turn you into some tragic glory.³⁴⁵

TRYGAEUS

I'll watch out for that. And now good bye!
[Trygaeus addresses the audience as he starts moving higher]
And you for whom I'm doing all this work,
for the next three days you mustn't fart or crap.
If this creature smells that while in the air,
it'll toss me head first and come down to graze.
So come now, Pegasus, be off. Good luck.
Keep those bright ears of yours pricked up
and shake that golden bridle and your bit
until they rattle. What are you doing?
What are you up to? Why turn your nose
toward those stinking sewers? Let yourself
go bravely up above the earth, stretch out
those racing wings of yours and head straight for

³⁴³ . . . in Naxos: The Greek word for beetle (kantharos) was also used to refer to a certain kind of boat (evidently associated with the island of Naxos).

³⁴⁴ . . . Beetle Harbour: Piraeus, the great sea port near Athens, was, Sommerstein notes, officially called the Harbour of Cantharus (the Greek word for beetle), after a local hero.

³⁴⁵ . . . into some tragic glory: Aristophanes is fond of mocking the tragic dramatist Euripides for the way he liked to portray physically injured heroes.

the halls of Zeus. Keep your nose out of the shit,
 away from all the food you eat each day.
 Hey, that man down there, what are you doing?
 I mean that one crapping in Piraeus,
 right by the whorehouse. You're destroying me,
 doing me in. Can't you please bury the stuff,
 pile lots of earth on top, and then plant thyme
 and pour perfume on it? If I fell down
 and something happened to me from up here
 and killed me, the state of Chios would be fined
 five talents, all because of your ass hole.³⁴⁶

O my god, I'm scared. And I'm not joking,
 not any more. You there working this machine,
 take good care of me. Right now there's a wind
 twisting its way around my belly button.
 If you don't watch it, I'll be making stuff
 to feed the beetle. But it seems to me
 I'm getting near the gods. Yes, I can see
 the home of Zeus.

[By this point the beetle has descended and come to rest in front of the house of Zeus.

Trygaeus gets off the beetle and knocks on the door]]

Who's in there, in Zeus' house?

Why won't you open up?

HERMES [from inside]

A human voice!

Where did that come from?

[Hermes opens the door and sees Trygaeus and the dung beetle]

Lord Hercules!

What's that disgusting thing?

TRYGAEUS

A horse beetle.

HERMES

³⁴⁶ . . . ass hole: The reference to Chios here is obscure. If an Athenian were killed in a state subject to Athens, there was a large fine of five talents. But Chios is a long way from Athens, so it's not clear how that law would apply.

You disgusting, reckless, shameless creature!
You scoundrel, you consummate rascal,
the worse rogue there is! How did you get here,
you most villainous of all the villains!
Whats your name? Speak up, won't you?

TRYGAEUS

Super-scoundrel.

HERMES

In what country were you born?
Tell me.

TRYGAEUS

Super-scoundrel.

HERMES

Who's your father?

TRYGAEUS

My father? Super-scoundrel.

HERMES

By this earth,
you'll die for sure if you don't give your name.

TRYGAEUS

I'm Trygaeus and I'm from Athmonum,³⁴⁷
a good vine-grower. I don't slander people,
and I don't like disputes.

HERMES

Why have you come?

TRYGAEUS [handing Hermes a steak]

To bring you this meat.

HERMES [grabbing the meat and in a very different tone]

You poor fellow,
how did you get here?

TRYGAEUS

Well, sticky fingers,
you see how you no longer think of me
as the vilest of all rogues. Please be off now

³⁴⁷ . . . Athmonum: This is the name of a political district to the north of Athens.

and summon Zeus for me.

HERMES

Oh dear, dear, dear!

You won't reach the gods. You're not even close.
They've gone away. They moved out yesterday.

TRYGAEUS

Where on earth they go?

HERMES

They wouldn't go to earth!

TRYGAEUS Well, then, where?

HERMES

Oh, a long, long way away,
under the very dome of heaven itself.

TRYGAEUS

So why have you been left here by yourself?

HERMES

I'm keeping an eye on the furniture,
what's left of it—some little pots and pans,
boards, some wine jugs.

TRYGAEUS

Why have the gods all left?

HERMES

They're angry at the Greeks—so they moved War
into the house where they used to live,
giving him full power to treat you Greeks
any way he wishes. They moved their home
even higher up, as far as they could go,
so they wouldn't see you fighting any more
or hear any of your prayers.

TRYGAEUS

Tell me this—

why have they been treating us like that?

HERMES

Because they tried to make peace many times,
but you prefer to fight. If the Spartans

had a small success, they'd say something like,

"By the twin gods, those Attic types will pay."³⁴⁸

And if, with events turning out quite well

for those in Attica, the Spartans came

to talk of peace, you'd answer right away,

"By Athena, they're playing tricks with us.

No, by Zeus, there's no way we'll go along.

They'll come back, if we hang on to Pylos."³⁴⁹

TRYGAEUS

Yes, that's way folks in our country talk.

HERMES

Well, that's why I don't think you'll ever see

Peace in your time again.

TRYGAEUS

Where's she gone, then?

HERMES

War has thrown her into a deep hole.

TRYGAEUS

What hole?

HERMES [pointing to the walled up cave in the central part of the stage]

That one, way down there. What's more,

you see how many rocks he's piled on top

to stop you hauling her back out again.

TRYGAEUS

Tell me, what's War planning to do to us?

HERMES

All I know is last evening he brought home

a gigantic mortar.

TRYGAEUS

He's got a mortar?

What's he going to do with that?

³⁴⁸ . . . will pay: The twin gods are Castor and Pollux (or Polydeuces), twin brothers of Helen and Clytaemnestra, and important Peloponnesian gods. Attica is the region of Greece around Athens. The Peloponnesian War pitted Sparta and its allies, mainly in the Peloponnese, against Athens and its allies.

³⁴⁹ . . . on to Pylos: Pylos, in the south of the Peloponnese, was the site of a major set back for the Spartans (a few years before the production of *Peace*), when the Athenians took 300 Spartans prisoners and set up an occupying force. The prisoners were an important bargaining chip for the Athenians, since many came from the finest families in Sparta.

HERMES

Well, he wants it
to pulverize the city states of Greece.
But I have to go. I think he's coming out—
he's making such a fuss in there.
[Hermes leaves. The noise inside the house gets louder]
TRYGAEUS [alarmed]

Oh, oh!

I'm in a mess. Come on, I'd better find
some way to get away from him. I think
I hear the sounds of a warlike mortar.

[Trygaeus conceals himself. War enters, carrying a huge mortar and a basket of vegetables]

WAR

Oh you human beings, you mortal men,
you human creatures who endure so much,
how your jaws are soon going to feel the pain!

TRYGAEUS [from his hiding place]

By lord Apollo, look at the mortar,
the size of it! This is a disaster—
that look he's got! Is this the enemy
we're running from—so terrible, so tough,
so hard on a man's legs?³⁵⁰

WAR [taking some leeks and putting them in the mortar]

O Prasiae!

thrice damned, five times damned, damned a thousandfold!
This very day you're going to be demolished.³⁵¹

TRYGAEUS

This is no concern of ours, gentlemen,
since it's a problem for the Spartans.

WAR [putting some garlic in the mortar]

Oh Megara, Megara, how very soon

³⁵⁰ . . . a man's legs: A reference to the way War make men's knees tremble or, Sommerstein suggests, perhaps to an involuntary bowel movement brought on by fear.

³⁵¹ Prasiae: a small coastal town in the Peloponnese.

you be crushed to bits, turned into mincemeat.³⁵²

TRYGAEUS

Whoa, my goodness me, he's throwing in
some bitter tears for the Megarians,
big ones, too.

WAR [grating some cheese into the mortar]
And Sicily, you're destroyed, as well.

TRYGAEUS

Such a great state to be grated down
in such a miserable way.

WAR [pouring honey over the food]
All right, lets pour over this some Attic honey.

TRYGAEUS

Hey, I'd advise you use a different honey.
That stuff costs four obols. So ease up
with that stuff from Attica.

WAR [calling for his servant]
Boy! Boy! Uproar!
[Uproar enters from the house]
UPROAR

Why'd you call me?
WAR

I'll make you really yelp!
Standing there doing nothing. Here's a fist for you!

[War punches Uproar in the face]
UPROAR

That hurts! Oh master, I'm in agony!
Your fist wasn't full of garlic, was it?
WAR

Why don't you run and fetch me a pestle?
UPROAR

We don't have one. It was only yesterday
when we moved in here.

³⁵²Megara: an important city state to the west of Athens, close to the Isthmus of Corinth.

WAR

Then go get one
from the Athenians—and make it fast.

UPROAR

By god, I'll do it. If I don't find one,
then I'll be beaten 'til I howl.

[Uproar runs off in a hurry]

TRYGAEUS

Well now,
what are we poor wretched types to do?
You see there's great danger threatening us.
If he returns and brings along a pestle,
War will sit there using it to pulverize
all our city states. O Dionysus, may he perish and not get back with it!

[Uproar comes running back empty handed]

WAR

Here he is.

UPROAR

What's going on?

WAR

You didn't bring it?

UPROAR

The strange thing is this—those Athenians
have lost their pestle, that tanner who ground
all Greece to powder.³⁵³

TRYGAEUS

By Athena,
that sovereign lady, he did well to die,
just when the city needed him to go,
before he dumped us all into that hash.

WAR

Then go get another one in Sparta
and be quick about it.

³⁵³ . . . to a powder: The tanner referred to is Cleon, an important Athenian politician and a favourite target of Aristophanes. He is famous for stirring the people up in favour of war. Cleon died in BC, shortly before the production of *Peace*.

UPROAR

I'm off master.

[Uproar moves off quickly. War shouts after him]

WAR

And get back here on the double.

TRYGAEUS [to the audience]

Well, men,

what's going to happen to us? At this point,
we're in deep trouble. So if one of you,
by chance, is an initiate of Samothrace,
this would be a splendid time for you to pray
the servant lad sprains both his feet.³⁵⁴

UPROAR [running back on stage and striking an exaggerated pose]

Alas!

O woe is me! And one more time Alas!

WAR

What is it? You mean this is the second time
you've come back without a pestle?

UPROAR

Yes.

The Spartans have lost their pestle, too.

WAR

How'd that happen, you rogue?

UPROAR

Well, they lent it
to some other folks in Thracian country,
and it got lost.

TRYGAEUS

By those two sons of Zeus,
the Thracians did good work! Good luck to them!
You mortal men, keep up your courage!

WAR

Pick up this stuff and take it back inside.

³⁵⁴ . . . initiate of Samothrace: The phrase refers to a member of a religious cult located in Samothrace, an island in the Aegean Sea. This cult, Sommerstein explains, was famous for the success of the prayers offered by those initiated into it.

I'm going in to make myself a pestle.

[War leaves. Up roar collects the mortar and vegetables and follows after him.
Trygaeus emerges from his hiding place]

TRYGAEUS

All right, now it's time to sing that old song

Datis used to sing every day at noon

when he'd yank his cock, "Ah, how that feels good!

O, that's so nice! I'm getting off on this!"³⁵⁵

You men of Greece, now's an excellent time

to set aside our quarreling and fights

and drag up Peace, who's friendly to us all,

before some other pestle interferes.

So you farm labourers and merchants,

you carpenters, craftsmen, immigrants,

foreigners, and islanders, come here,

all common folk, as quickly as you can,

and bring some picks and ropes and levers.

Now's our chance to have a drink together,

a swig from the Good Spirit's cup.³⁵⁶

[The Chorus enters. It consists of working people from many different Greek states]

LEADER OF THE CHORUS

Come on this way, all those of you who're keen

to rescue us right now. It's now or never!

All you Greeks, let's help each other out

by getting rid of all our warlike ranks

and the nasty deep red colour of blood.

The day that Lamachus detests is here.³⁵⁷

[The Chorus Leader turns to address Trygaeus]

So come on, tell us what we need to do.

³⁵⁵ . . . Datis: This is probably a reference to the commander of the Persian expedition sent against Athens and defeated at the battle of Marathon in 490 BC.

³⁵⁶ . . . Good Spirit's cup: This odd expression seems to mean that it's time we all enjoyed common good fellowship. Sommerstein notes that after a meal there was a tribute of neat red wine to the Good Spirit, after which the drinking began in earnest.

³⁵⁷ . . . Lamachus: the name of an Athenian general who, in Aristophanes' eyes, was too eager for the fame and wealth he garnered in battle.

Give us some direction. It seems to me
there's no way I'll be stopping work today
until we've used these levers and machines
to haul out here into the light of day
the greatest goddess of them all, the one
who more than any other loves the vine.

TRYGAEUS

You must keep quiet, just in case your joy
in what we're doing and these shouts of yours
gets War, who's in there, fired up again.

CHORUS LEADER

But we're so pleased to hear your proclamation—
it's not like those which tell us to come out
with rations for three days.³⁵⁸

TRYGAEUS

Be careful now
in case Cerberus howls and yelps down there,
the way he did when he was here on earth,
and makes it hard for us to save the goddess.³⁵⁹

CHORUS LEADER

No one will take her back from us again,
if we can once lay hands on her.

CHORUS

Hip hip hurrah!

TRYGAEUS

You men, if you don't stop those cheers of yours
you'll be the death of me. War will charge out
and his two feet will stomp on everything.

CHORUS LEADER

Well, let him make trouble and shake things up!

Let him walk over everything! Today,
we're not going to stop our celebrations.

³⁵⁸ . . . rations for three days: The orders for military expeditions required the people to bring food for three days with them.

³⁵⁹ Cerberus was the famous dog guarding Hades. This mention of his name seems to be a reference to Cleon, the aggressive Athenian politician in favour of war, who had recently died.

TRYGAEUS

Why seek danger? Men, what's got into you?
You're dancing's going to wreck a splendid plan!

CHORUS LEADER

But I'm not the one who likes this dancing.
It's my legs—they keep hopping on their own
from sheer delight. I'm not moving them.

TRYGAEUS

But that's enough now. Come on, stop dancing.
Stop it!

CHORUS LEADER

All right. Look, I've stopped.

[The Chorus Leader keeps on capering around, his legs out of control]

TRYGAEUS

You say so,
but you haven't stopped at all.

CHORUS LEADER

Well, let me
dance one more turn and then I'm done.

TRYGAEUS

Just one,
and then you'll have to stop—no more dancing.

CHORUS LEADER

If it helps you, we won't dance any more.

TRYGAEUS

But look, you still haven't stopped!

CHORUS LEADER

Yes, by Zeus,
I kick out my right leg like this—that's it!

TRYGAEUS

All right, I'll let you get away with that,
if you don't keep on trying to piss me off.

CHORUS LEADER

Well, I must have my left leg dance as well.
I'm rid of my shield—that makes me so glad,

I fart and laugh, more than if I'd shed old age.

TRYGAEUS

Don't rejoice right now. You don't know for sure,
at least not yet. But when we've got the goddess,
then you can shout and laugh and celebrate.

At that point you can sail or stay at home
or fuck or sleep, watch holy festivals,
play cottabos, or live like Sybarites,
and keep on yelling out "Hurray! Hurray!"³⁶⁰

CHORUS LEADER

How I wish to see that day at last!

I've endured a lot, even mattresses
allotted by the gods to Phormio.³⁶¹

You'll no longer find me as a juryman
bitter and bad tempered, nor, I think,

harsh in my ways, as I was earlier.

Instead you'll see a soft, much younger man,
once I'm free from troubles. For long enough
we've killed each other, wearing ourselves out
on journeys to the Lycaean and back
with sword and shield.³⁶² But what can we do
to bring you most delight? Come on, speak up.

It's happy circumstance that's chosen you
as our supreme commander.

TRYGAEUS

Well, come on.

Let me see how we get these stones removed.

[Enter Hermes]

HERMES

You reckless rogue, what are you going to do?

TRYGAEUS

³⁶⁰ . . . "Hurray! Hurray!": cottabos was a favourite dinner game which involved throwing drops of wine into a balance beam.
A Sybarite is one famous for devoting his life to pleasure.

³⁶¹ . . . to Phormio: Phormio was a successful Athenian general famous for his ability to endure hardships and insisting his men did the same.

³⁶² . . . with sword and spear: The Lycaean was a place in Athens where soldiers practised military drills.

Nothing bad—we're just like Cillicon.³⁶³

HERMES

You evil wretch, you're done for.

TRYGAEUS

Yes, I am,

if that's how my lot turns out—Hermes would know
how to do things with a lottery.³⁶⁴

HERMES

You're doomed!

You're dead!

TRYGAEUS

On what day?

HERMES

Immediately.

TRYGAEUS

But I've not purchased any flour or cheese
for my forced march to death.³⁶⁵

HERMES

No doubt about it,
you're already mincemeat.

TRYGAEUS

Then why is it
receiving such a major benefit
has escaped my notice?

HERMES

Are you not aware
Zeus has issued a decree that anyone
who's caught digging that goddess up must die?

TRYGAEUS

You mean it's absolutely necessary

³⁶³ . . . just like Cillicon: Cillicon betrayed his city Miletus to its enemies. When asked what he was doing, he said "Nothing bad."

³⁶⁴ . . . with a lottery: The Athenians seem to have drawn lots for the order in which they executed condemned criminals. Hermes was the god of chance.

³⁶⁵ . . . I meet my death: Trygaeus is treating his death like a military campaign and complaining that he's being called up too quickly, so that he hasn't had time to get his three days of rations.

I must perish on the spot?

HERMES

Yes. Now you know.

TRYGAEUS

Well then, lend me three drachmas right away,

so I can buy a sucking pig. Before I die,

I have to get myself initiated.³⁶⁶

HERMES

By Zeus, lord of thunder and lightning . . .

TRYGAEUS [interrupting]

Master, I'm imploring you—by the gods—
don't report us!

HERMES

I cannot keep silent.

TRYGAEUS

In the name of those meats I brought for you
from the goodness of my heart.

HERMES

My dear chap,

I'll be destroyed by Zeus if I don't shout
and make a real commotion over this.

TRYGAEUS

No, don't shout. O my dear little Hermes,

I'm begging you!

[Trygaeus turns to address the Chorus]

You men, tell me
what you're doing? You're standing there like statues.
You fools, don't hang around saying nothing,
if you do that, he'll start to yell.

CHORUS [chanting]

Lord Hermes, please don't yell or squeal.

If you recall a tasty meal
of young pig as a gift from me,

³⁶⁶ . . . myself initiated: This phrase refers to the ritual of being initiated into a mystery religious cult. The ceremony required a sucking pig. Those initiated were supposed to enjoy a happier after life.

don't make my words a trivial plea.

TRYGAEUS [joining the chant]

O lord and master, can't you hear
how they are trying to bend your ear?

CHORUS [chanting]

Do not reject the prayers we say
and let us dig up Peace today.

Of all the gods you love men best
and give them gifts, so bless our quest,
if you dislike Pisander's plume,
his spiteful pride, we will resume
our constant offerings to you,
my lord, with great processions, too.³⁶⁷

TRYGAEUS

Come, I beg you, have pity for their cries.

They're honouring you more than they used to do.

HERMES

They're greater robbers than they used to be.³⁶⁸

TRYGAEUS

What's more, I'll tell you of a terrible act,
a major plot against the gods, all of them.

HERMES

All right, tell me. You might win me over.

TRYGAEUS

For some time the Moon and that rascal Sun
have been hatching many plots against you,
to hand Greece over to barbarians.

HERMES

Why would they do that?

TRYGAEUS

Because, by Zeus,
we sacrifice to you—barbarians
make their offerings to them. That's why,

³⁶⁷ . . . great processions, too: Pisander was an Athenian general of reactionary political inclinations.

³⁶⁸ . . . they were used to be: Hermes was the god of thieves and a famous thief himself.

as one might expect, they want all of us
to be totally destroyed, so they alone
will have the rituals all to themselves.

HERMES

So that's why those two for some time now
have been stealing daylight on the sly
and taking bites out of each other's disk,
those scoundrels!³⁶⁹

TRYGAEUS

That's right. So, dear Hermes,
put your heart into helping us find Peace,
and pull her out with us. We'll celebrate
the great Panathenaea in your honour,
and festivals to all the other gods—
the Mysteries, Dipolia and Adonia
will honour Hermes.³⁷⁰ The other cities,
once free of misery, will sacrifice
to Hermes as their guardian everywhere.
You'll get fine things, a huge variety.
To start things off, I'll give you this gift,
a bowl for you to pour libations with.

[Trygaeus pulls a golden bowl from his pocket and gives it to Hermes]

HERMES

My, my, how I'm always keen on presents
when they're made of gold.

TRYGAEUS

Come on then men,
get to work in there. Take those picks of yours,
move in, and get those stones removed. Hurry!

CHORUS LEADER

We'll do it. But you, wisest of the gods,
take charge of us. You understand this task,

³⁶⁹ . . . those scoundrels: The phrases about stealing daylight and biting each other's disks are references to solar and lunar eclipses.

³⁷⁰ . . . will honour Hermes: The Panathenaea was an Athenian festival dedicated to Athena. The Mysteries were a celebration of the cult of Demeter. The Dipolia was a festival honouring Zeus, and the Adonia celebrated Aphrodite and Adonis.

so tell us what we need to do. You'll find
we won't be slack in doing other work.

TRYGAEUS

Come on, hurry up and hold the bowl out,
so we can offer prayers up to the gods
before beginning work.

HERMES

A libation!

A libation! Now speak the reverent words.

Speak well. As we pour out this libation,
let's pray an age begins this very day
when many fine things come for all the Greeks,
and anyone who works with his whole heart
to pull the ropes won't grip his shield again.³⁷¹

TRYGAEUS

By Zeus, may we spend our lives in peace,
embracing mistresses and poking fires.

HERMES

And any man who'd rather be at war . . .

TRYGAEUS [interrupting]

O lord Dionysus, may he never stop
yanking arrows from his funny bone.

HERMES

If there's a man eager for army rank
who does not wish to drag you to the light,
O lady, in his battles . . .

TRYGAEUS [interrupting again]

May he go through
the same experience as Cleomenes.³⁷²

HERMES

And anyone who manufactures spears

³⁷¹ . . . his shield again: The allocation of lines in this speech and in those which follow is much disputed. I have followed Sommerstein's suggestion (although not entirely) and left Hermes in charge of the libation prayers, with Trygaeus making the frequent interruptions, since this seems to be the most dramatically plausible arrangement.

³⁷² . . . as Cleomenes: Cleomenes was an Athenian who disgraced himself by dropping his shield and running away from battle.

or deals in shields and thus is keen for war
because of better trade . . .

TRYGAEUS [interrupting]

Let such a man
be seized by thieves and get no food to eat
but barley.

HERMES

If someone will not work with us
because he wants to be a general,
or if a slave is ready to desert . . .

TRYGAEUS

May he be laid out on a wheel and whipped.

HERMES

May good things come to us! Now raise a shout!
Strike up a cry of joy!

TRYGAEUS

Leave out the strike.
Just shout out for joy.³⁷³

HERMES

Oh, all right, then.
Hail! Hail! That's all I'll say! Hail to Hermes,
the Graces and the Seasons, to Aphrodite
and Desire! What about Ares?

CHORUS

No, no!

TRYGAEUS

And no cheers for Enyalios, right?³⁷⁴

CHORUS

No!

[The Chorus wrap the rope around something in the cavern and start to pull, but, as they make the effort, they get hopelessly confused, pulling in different directions and falling over each other]

³⁷³ . . . for joy: This comment arises from a pun in the Greek, since the word cry out with joy (paeon) closely resembles the word to strike.

³⁷⁴ . . . Enyalios: Ares is the god of warfare. Enyalios is an alternative name for Ares and also the name of a separate god of war.

TRYGAEUS

All right, everyone make a real effort
and pull these ropes to reel her in.

HERMES

Heave away!

CHORUS LEADER

Heave ho!

HERMES

Come on, pull!

CHORUS LEADER

Pull even harder!

HERMES

Heave . . . Come on, heave!

TRYGAEUS

The men won't pull together.

[Trygaeus turns to one group of men]

Why not pull your weight? You're too proud to work.

O you Boeotians, you'll be crying soon.

HERMES

All right now, heave.

TRYGAEUS

Heave ho!

CHORUS LEADER [to Hermes and Trygaeus]

You two there,

come on and pull as well.

TRYGAEUS

Aren't I pulling, too—

holding the rope and hauling furiously,
working really hard?

CHORUS LEADER

Then how come this job
isn't moving forward?

TRYGAEUS [to one of the workmen]

Hey, Lamachus,

you're a problem sitting there, in the way.

My good man, we don't need your monster.³⁷⁵

HERMES

Well, these Argives haven't been hauling long.
They laugh at other people's suffering,
collecting pay and rations from both sides.³⁷⁶

TRYGAEUS

But Spartans, my dear chap, are pulling rope
like real men.

CHORUS LEADER

But look—among that crowd the only ones who're keen to help are those
who've been chained up in jail. The arms makers

keep getting in their way.³⁷⁷

TRYGAEUS

The Megarians
aren't making any effort.

HERMES

Well, they're pulling
and showing all their teeth, like puppy dogs.

TRYGAEUS

Yes, by Zeus, because they're dying of hunger.³⁷⁸

Hey, you men, we're not getting anywhere.

We must all work at this together.

So one more time.

HERMES

Heave!

TRYGAEUS

Heave away!

HERMES

³⁷⁵ . . . your monster: Lamachus, an important Athenian general, had a shield with a Gorgon's head depicted on it (the face of Medusa, which in traditional mythology could turn men to stone).

³⁷⁶ . . . from both sides: In the war both Athens and Sparta sought to win over the Argives as allies, but the Argives maintained a shrewd neutrality. Eventually they joined up with the Athenians. Sommerstein suggests that this line may be a reference to Argives working as paid crewmen on both Athenian and Spartan ships.

³⁷⁷ . . . keep getting in their way: The phrase about the Spartans "in jail" is a reference to the many Spartan prisoners captured by the Athenians at Pylos. They were kept chained up in jail in Athens (the Greeks says "held to wood," referring to the chains attached to the beams in the prison). For them Peace will be much more welcome than for the arms makers, who make weapons.

³⁷⁸ . . . of hunger: Athenian hostilities against Megara had brought starvation to many in the city.

Heave!

TRYGAEUS

By Zeus, pull!

CHORUS LEADER

We're shifting it a little.

TRYGAEUS

This is dreadful—some are pulling one way,
others in another. You Argives there,
you're going to get a beating!

HERMES

Come on, heave!

TRYGAEUS

Pull!

CHORUS LEADER

There're people here with us who're traitors.

TRYGAEUS

But those of you who long for Peace keep pulling—
put your backs into it!

CHORUS LEADER

But some men here
are interfering, getting in the way.

HERMES

Oh, you Megarians, get the hell away!

The goddess hates you, for she remembers you were the first to rub your garlic
on her.³⁷⁹

And you Athenians, I'm telling you
stop holding that position where you're pulling
at the moment—you're not doing anything
but fighting in the courts. If you really wish
to set the goddess free, then move on down,
shift yourselves towards the sea a little.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁹ . . . garlic on her: This phrase means, in effect, to get her angry. Sommerstein points out that fighting cocks were fed garlic to make them more pugnacious.

³⁸⁰ . . . the sea a little: This is a reference to the military policy of Pericles, the major political leader in Athens at the start of the war, which urged Athenians to put all their faith in their fleet, rather than in organizing land expeditions against the Spartans.

CHORUS LEADER

All right, men, let the farmers grab the rope
all by themselves, with no one else.

HERMES

Ah, you men, now things are going much better.

CHORUS LEADER

He says we're getting somewhere. Come on, then,
every man must pull with all he's got!

TRYGAEUS

Hey, the farmers are getting the job done,
all by themselves.

CHORUS LEADER

Come on, all of you.

Come on!

HERMES

Now they're working all together!

CHORUS LEADER

Let's not relax—keep pulling even harder!

HERMES

Here it comes now!

[Something starts to emerge being pulled from inside the cavern]

CHORUS LEADER

Now heave! Everyone, heave! Heave! Heave! Heave! Heave! Heave!
Heave! Heave! Heave! Heave! Heave! Everyone, heave!

[The trolley emerges from the cavern. On it stands Peace with her two attendants
Opora and Theoria in a tableau reminiscent of contestants in a beauty pageant]

TRYGAEUS

O holy lady who provides us grapes,
where can I find words to speak to you,
the ten-thousand-gallon words to greet you?
I didn't bring them when I came from home.
And I welcome you as well, Opora,
and Theoria, too. What a gorgeous face
you've got there, Theoria, and sweet breath!
So fragrant to my heart! It's just lovely—

like perfume or freedom from conscription.

HERMES

You mean she smells just like a soldier's pack?

TRYGAEUS

The hateful pack of such a hateful person
makes me puke—it stinks of onion belches.

She smells of harvest times and festivals,
the Dionysia, flute music, tragic plays,
songs of Sophocles, thrushes, poetic scraps
penned by Euripides . . . ³⁸¹

HERMES [interrupting]

You're in trouble now,
spreading lies like that about her. She hates
that poet who uses trivial phrases
from the law courts.

TRYGAEUS [ignoring the interruption]

. . . ivy, cloths for straining wine, bleating flocks, women's bosoms when they run
out to the fields, a drunken serving girl, a jug of wine when it's been overturned,
and lots of other splendid things.

HERMES

Come now,
look how the city states are reconciled.
They're chatting with each other, laughing,
having a good time, though all of them
have wonderful black eyes with cups attached. ³⁸²

TRYGAEUS

And let's also take a look at faces
in the audience here, to see if we can guess
what each man's trade is.

HERMES

That's a stupid idea.

TRYGAEUS [pointing to someone in the audience]

Can't you see that man who makes battle crests?

³⁸¹ . . . penned by Euripides: The Dionysia was the major drama festival in Athens, a celebration in which Peace was produced.

³⁸² . . . with cups attached: The cups were small metal pieces designed to relieve swelling. The bruises come from wounds they have received in fighting each other.

He's tearing his hair.

HERMES There's someone who makes hoes—
he's just farted at that sword smith.

TRYGAEUS

See that one,
the sickle maker who's feeling so good,
he's flipped his finger at the spear maker?

HERMES

All right, tell these labourers it's time to go.

TRYGAEUS

Listen up, folks. The peasants should be off,
taking their farming tools back to the fields
as soon as possible. But leave behind
your swords and spears and javelins. This place
has now been overrun with mellow Peace.
So all men should move out and back to work—
off to the fields, singing a song of joy!

CHORUS LEADER [to Peace]

Ah, this day our workers have so yearned for
and just men, too! I see you and rejoice.

After such a long, long time, how I wish to greet my vines. How my heart desires
to hold in my embrace those same fig trees I planted in the days when I was young.

TRYGAEUS

Now men, first of all let's offer prayers
to the goddess who's brought us our freedom
from battle crests and Gorgons. After that,
let's head off home, back to our farms. But first,
let's buy a nice little piece of pickled fish
to eat while in the fields.

[The Chorus pick up their various tools and form a line, in preparation for
leaving]

HERMES

By Poseidon,
how fine their ranks look, compact and spirited,
just like a barley cake or a sumptuous feast.

TRYGAEUS

By Zeus, that's a splendid mattock he's got there,
all set to go, and those three-pronged garden forks
are glistening in the sun. They could clear out
the rows between our vines so beautifully!
Now I'm keen to get back home myself,
into the fields, working with my pitch fork,
turning clods of earth after all this time.

You men, remember that old way of life

Peace used to give us in our earlier days,
those figs pressed into cakes or freshly picked,
the myrtles and sweet new wine, the violets
beside the spring, the olives we so longed for.
For the sake of these speak to the goddess now.

CHORUS

Welcome, dearest goddess, welcome!
How I rejoice now that you've come.
Overwhelmed with longing for you,
I kept hoping for a miracle,
to go back to my fields again.

O lady we've been yearning for,
you were the greatest benefit
to all of us who spend our lives
working on the land, for you alone

would help us out. In earlier days,
while you were in control, we had
so many sweet and lovely things
that cost us nothing. For farmers
you meant security and wheat.
Our vineyards and our young fig trees
and all the other plants we have
will smile with joy to welcome you.

CHORUS LEADER

But how can she have stayed away from us
for all this time? Hermes, of all the gods

you're the friendliest to us, so tell me.

HERMES

O you wisest of all working farmers,
listen to my words, if you'd like to hear
how Peace first went astray. It all began
when that Phidias ran into trouble,
and Pericles, afraid he'd share his fate,

for he was frightened of your character
and your ferocious ways, fired up the town, before he had to suffer anything
too drastic, throwing out a little spark,
the Megarian decree, and fanned it
into a conflict so intense, the smoke

drew tears from all the Greeks, not only here,
but in Sparta, too.³⁸³ Well, once that started,
the first vineyards were compelled to crackle
and a pot, once hit, kicked out in anger

at another pot, and there was no one there
who could prevent it any more. And so,
Peace just disappeared.

TRYGAEUS

Well, by Apollo,
no one ever told me that's what happened.
I'd never heard how Peace could be hooked up
with Phidias.

CHORUS LEADER

I hadn't either,
not until just now. But if she's his kin,
that's why she's beautiful. So many things
are kept concealed from us!

HERMES

Well, after that,

³⁸³ . . . but in Sparta, too: Phidias was the most famous sculptor in Athens. He was accused of stealing materials (including gold) from a public commission for a statue of Athena and was banished. Pericles, the leading political figure in Athens, was a close associate of Phidias and one of those charged with overseeing the work. The Megariandecree prohibited any people of Megara from coming to Athens and shut down all trade with the place. This was an extreme hardship for the Megarians. The suggestion here is that the origin of the Peloponnesian War was linked to this scandal. The Greek text does not mention Sparta by name, but uses the phrase "over there," a clear reference to the Spartans.

the towns who were your subjects, once they saw
you were so enraged at one another
and your fangs were out, hatched all sorts of plans
against you, because they feared the tribute,
and then used their gold to bribe the Spartans,
the most important of them, and those men,
being greedy and treacherous with strangers,
tossed Peace out in a disgraceful manner
and held out for war.³⁸⁴ This gained them profit,
but brought the workers to catastrophe.

Warships repeatedly went out from here
to get revenge—they devoured the fig trees,
which belonged to men who bore no blame.

TRYGAEUS

No, that was justified—those men chopped down
one of my trees of dark grey figs, a bush
I'd planted and then nursed with my own hands.

CHORUS LEADER

Yes, by Zeus, that was truly well deserved!
Those men destroyed a storage chest of mine.
They smashed it with a stone. And that box held
six bushels full of corn!

HERMES

Then working men
came from their fields in droves and let themselves,
without their knowing it, be bought and sold, just as the others were. Longing
for figs,
they didn't even have grape pits to eat,
and so they looked toward the demagogues.
These men, who clearly knew how displaced folk
were weak and short of food, with their forked cries
drove Peace out, though she came back in person

³⁸⁴ . . . held out for war: Before the war Athens had developed an alliance among a number of city states, allegedly for defensive purposes. Athens insisted forcibly that these city states pay them tribute money, claiming that they would provide the naval forces for defending them all against the Spartans and their allies. Many of the tributary states were not happy with this arrangement.

many times, moved by affection for the land.
 Then they began to squeeze the rich fat types
 among their allies, on the trumped-up charge
 that they were followers of Brasidas.
 And then you lot would tear the man apart,
 like puppy-dogs. The city was all pale
 and cowering in fear. It would snap up
 every scrap of slander with great pleasure,
 whatever anyone tossed out. Strangers, who saw the blows come raining down on
 them,
 stuffed mouths of the informers shut with gold.
 So they grew rich, while, without your knowledge,
 Greece might have been destroyed. This work was done
 by that man who dealt in leather.³⁸⁵

TRYGAEUS

Stop, lord Hermes!
 That's enough! Don't tell us any more.
 Leave that man where he is, down in Hades.
 He's no longer one of us. No, he's yours.
 He was a villain when he was alive,
 a windbag who liked to slander people,
 an agitator who stirred up trouble,
 but when you mention all these things right now,
 your slandering one of your own people.³⁸⁶

[Trygaeus moves to talk to Peace]

But, reverend goddess, why are you so quiet?

Talk to me.

HERMES

She won't speak to this audience.

³⁸⁵At the start of the Peloponnesian War, the Spartans attacked Athenian territory by land. The Athenians, following the advice of Pericles, abandoned the countryside and brought the country people into the city. These refugees were in considerable distress, and some special welfare provisions were made for them. The "demagogues are the public orators of the party urging war (notably Cleon). Brasidas was an important and (for a while) very successful Spartan general. His death shortly before the production of Peace was one of the reasons there seemed a real chance that the cities might end hostilities. The man who dealt in leather is the demagogue Cleon (who had also died shortly before the production of Peace, as Trygaeus' next speech indicates).

³⁸⁶ . . . your people: Hermes was associated with Hades, since he accompanied the spirits of the dead to the underworld.

All the suffering she's had to undergo
has made her very angry at them.

TRYGAEUS

Then let her say a few words just to you.

HERMES

My dearest lady, tell me what you think
about these people here. Come on now,
of all women you hate war the most.

[Hermes put his ear close to Peace's mouth to listen to her whisper to him] ³⁸⁷

Speak up. I'm listening. That's what annoys you?

I understand.

[Hermes turns to address the audience]

Listen, you people here.

This is what she blames you for. She says
after that fight in Pylos she came here,
of her own free will, bringing a basket
full of treaties to the city, but you lot
turned her down three times in your assembly. ³⁸⁸

TRYGAEUS

We were wrong to do that. But forgive us—
back then our brains were crammed with leather.

HERMES

Listen now to something she's just asked me.

Who was the man most hostile to her here,
and who was friendly, someone really keen
not to fight on?

TRYGAEUS

Well, Cleonymus
was her greatest friend by far.

HERMES

Cleonymus?

What sort of fellow was he in a fight?

³⁸⁷ . . . whisper to him: It's not clear whether or not Peace actually does whisper something to Hermes in this and later speeches or if he just pretends that she does. Since Peace never says another word in the play, the latter option seems dramatically more plausible, especially since Hermes seems to really like lecturing the audience on all the things they did wrong.

³⁸⁸ . . . in your assembly: At Pylos (in 425 BC) the Athenians won an unexpected victory and captured

TRYGAEUS

The very bravest spirit, except for this—
he wasn't the son of the man he claims
as his own father. When he'd march out
with the army, he wouldn't hesitate
to throw away his weapons.

[Hermes places his ear close to Peace's mouth again]

HERMES

One more thing
she's just asked me: Who now governs you
and rules the rocky Pynx?³⁸⁹

TRYGAEUS

That position
is now occupied by Hyperbolus.³⁹⁰

[Peace turns her head away in disgust]

What are you doing? Why turn your head aside?

HERMES

She's turning away from these people here
in anger that they'd choose to vote themselves
such a scoundrel as their leader.

TRYGAEUS

Ah well,
we won't be using him for very long.
At the moment people need a leader.
They feel naked, so, for the time being,
they've wrapped that man around them.

[Hermes again places his ear close to Peace's mouth]

HERMES

She asks
how this choice will benefit the city.

TRYGAEUS

We'll become more politically shrewd.

³⁸⁹ . . . the rocky Pynx: Pynx is the name of a hill where the Athenians held their assemblies.

³⁹⁰ . . . by Hyperbolus: Hyperbolus was a leading Athenian politician, a radical demagogue who inherited Cleon's role after the latter's death. He is a favourite target of Aristophanes' satire.

HERMES

How will you do that?

TRYGAEUS

Because Hyperbolus

makes lamps. Before this, we decided things

by groping in the dark. But now our plans
are made by lamplight.

[Hermes again places his ear close to Peace's mouth]

HERMES

My, my, the things

she's told me to find out from you!

TRYGAEUS

What things?

HERMES

All sorts of stuff, especially ancient things

she left behind so long ago. And first,

she wants to know how Sophocles is doing.

TRYGAEUS

He's well, but something quite astonishing
has happened to him.

HERMES

And what is that?

TRYGAEUS

He's changed from Sophocles into Simonides.³⁹¹

HERMES

Into Simonides? How so?

TRYGAEUS

He's old,

and he's decrepit, but for a profit

he'd go out sailing on a wicker mat.³⁹²

HERMES

³⁹¹ . . . into Simonides: Simonides was a famous lyric poet, well known for his love of money. The line seems to suggest that Sophocles is trying to get money (or more money) from writing.

³⁹² . . . on a wicker mat: It is not clear what these lines mean exactly. Sophocles was about seventy-five years old (and lived for many years more), but there's no sense elsewhere that he was a greedy or rash man. Sommerstein offers the tentative suggestions that these lines may refer to a risky business venture.

Really? Is wise Cratinus still living?³⁹³

TRYGAEUS

He died when the Spartans came marching in.

HERMES

What went wrong with him?

TRYGAEUS

What happened? He collapsed.

He couldn't bear to see jars full of wine
being broken. How many other troubles
have gone on in the city! So, lady,
we'll never ship you out again.

HERMES

Come on then,

if that's so, you should take Opora here
as wife. Live with her in the countryside,
and make yourselves some grapes.

TRYGAEUS [to Opora]

My dearest love,

come over here and kiss me.

[Trygaeus and Opora embrace. Trygaeus turns to Hermes]

Lord Hermes,

do you think it would do me any harm
if, after such a long time with no sex,
I had some with Opora?

HERMES

Not at all,

not if you take pennyroyal later.³⁹⁴

But take Theoria and lead her off

to the council place, where she lived before.

Get a move on!

TRYGAEUS

O that blessed council,

it gets Theoria. You'll be slurping soup

³⁹³ . . . still living: Cratinus was a well known comic poet who died shortly after the Peloponnesian War started.

³⁹⁴ . . . pennyroyal later: pennyroyal was (and still is) a widely used herbal remedy for a number of things, including eating too much fruit. Oporia's name literally means "full fruit."

in huge amounts over the next three days,
eating so much meat and boiled sausage! And so, dear friend Hermes, a fond farewell!

HERMES

And farewell to you, too, human mortal.
May you live happy, and remember me.

[Trygaeus prepares to leave, but when he looks for his flying dung beetle, it's
nowhere to be seen. He starts calling it]

TRYGAEUS

Time to go home, beetle, let's fly off home.

HERMES

He's not in there.

TRYGAEUS

Then where's he gone?

HERMES

He's harnessed to the chariot of Zeus
and bears the lightning bolt.³⁹⁵

TRYGAEUS

The poor thing!
Where will he find shit to eat in heaven?

HERMES

He'll feed on Ganymede's ambrosia.³⁹⁶

TRYGAEUS

All right, but how do I get down?

HERMES

It's easy.
Don't worry. Go this way past the goddess.

TRYGAEUS

This way, girls, just follow me, and quickly.
There's lots of people waiting there for you
with their erections ready.

CHORUS LEADER

Go on! Farewell!

³⁹⁵ . . . the lightning bolt: Hermes' speech here, Sommerstein points out, is a quotation from a lost play by Euripides, which refers to the fabulous winged horse Pegasus.

³⁹⁶ . . . Ganymede's ambrosia: Ganymede was a royal prince of Troy who was so beautiful he was taken up to Olympus to carry Zeus' cup and be his sexual playmate.

[Trygaeus, Opora, Theoria and Hermes leave the stage]
Meanwhile we should hand all this equipment
over to attendants—give it to them
to keep safely. There are many thieving types
who really like to hang around the stage
and look for things to steal.

[The Chorus hands over its various farm implements to stage hands who come in to collect it]

Guard these bravely,
and let's explain to these spectators here
the road our words will take, what's on our minds.

[The Chorus moves to address the audience directly]
CHORUS

The judges here ought to thrash the comic poet
who steps onto the stage in front of these spectators
to praise himself in verse. But, daughter of Zeus,
if it's all right to pay due honour to the man
who is the finest and best known comic writer,
then our producer claims he merits your great praise.
First, he's was the only man who stopped his rivals
making constant fun of rags and fighting wars with lice,
and the first to ridicule and banish from the stage
the Herculeses who were always making cakes
and going hungry. He also dismissed those slaves
who kept on running off, or deceiving someone,
or getting whipped. They were always led out crying,
so one of their fellow slaves could mock the bruises
and ask then: "O you poor miserable fellow,
what's happened to your skin? Surely a huge army
of lashes from a whip has fallen down on you
and laid waste your back?" Yes, our poet has removed
such feeble trash, such commonplace tomfoolery,
and created a great art for us, by building up
high-towered homes from lovely words and thoughts and jokes
which are not trivial stuff. And he does not present

obscure private types or women in his dramas.
 No, with the spirit of Hercules he attacks
 the greatest targets, striding through the dreadful stink
 of stripped-off leather hide and the grandiloquence
 of those with hearts of mud.

CHORUS LEADER

Of all the bouts I fought
 the very first was with the fanged-tooth one himself,
 whose eyes shot out most dreadful rays, like a Bitch Star.
 Round him circled a hundred moaning flatterers,
 who'd spit-lick his head. He had a thundering torrent
 of a voice, and he smelled as nasty as a seal,
 the unwashed balls of Lamia, and camels' arse holes.³⁹⁷
 When I saw this monstrosity, I did not fear,
 but kept fighting constant wars with him, holding out
 on your behalf and for the islanders. And so,
 it's only right that you remember me and show
 your gratitude by paying me back. Before this point,
 when I've had success, I didn't lose my mind and roam
 around the wrestling schools trying to seduce young lads.
 No, I took my theatre gear and went off on my way.
 I didn't cause much pain and brought you great delight,
 producing everything just how it ought to be.

CHORUS

And for this reason men and boys
 should side with me. And we advise
 bald men to join with us and strive
 for victory, since if I win,
 at tables and at festivals
 every man will say, "Here, take this
 to that bald man, give this bald man

³⁹⁷ . . . camels arse holes: This is a monstrous portrait of Cleon, one of Aristophanes' early targets. Sommerstein notes that the phrase "Bitch Star" comes from a female equivalent for "Dog Star" (a particularly bright part of the night sky), which happens also to be the name of a notorious prostitute. Lamia is a well known monster, but is normally female, in which case the "balls" on Lamia would be non-existent, another slur against Cleon. The switch to the first person suggests that either Aristophanes himself is stepping forward to speak or that someone in the chorus is impersonating him. Hence, I have assigned this first-person section to the Chorus Leader.

a sweet dessert, and don't hold back
from a man whose forehead matches
our noble poet's balding skull."³⁹⁸

O Muse, drive wars away and dance,
my friend, dance with us—celebrate
the weddings of the gods, the feasts
of mortal men, and festivals
of those who have been blessed, for these
have from the start been your concern.

And if that Carcinus should come
begging you to join his children
in a dance, don't listen to him
or move to help them with their play.³⁹⁹

Think of them all as homebred quails,
dancing dwarves with long scraggy necks,
sliced-up lumps of dung, who put on
mere artifice. Their father claimed
that once a play he was to stage,
a work no one had thought he'd write,
was choked one evening by a weasel.⁴⁰⁰

Such are the long-haired Muses' songs
the clever poet ought to sing
before the public, when swallows
sitting in the leaves in springtime
let forth their song, and choruses
of Morsimus are not allowed,
nor any from Melanthius,
whose most ear-piercing voice I heard
once screaming out—it was that day
he and his brother put on stage
the tragic chorus. What a pair!

³⁹⁸ . . . balding skull: Aristophanes frequently makes fun of his own baldness.

³⁹⁹ . . . with their play: Carcinus was an Athenian tragic dramatist and his sons were well known as actors and dancers. They were apparently quite small in stature.

⁴⁰⁰ . . . by a weasel: It's not clear what this reference to a weasel means. Perhaps it's based on a popular story about Carcinus, or perhaps the description is supposed to mean that his play was like a small and nasty rodent.

Gorgon epicures and Harpies,
 ravenously devouring roaches,
 foul rogues chasing down old women
 and wiping out whole schools of fish.
 What more, their armpits stink like goats!⁴⁰¹

O goddess Muse, please spit on them—
 a huge, wide gob of phlegm—and then,
 throughout the party, play with me.

[Trygaeus, now back home, enters with Opora and Theoria]

TRYGAEUS

That was tough, going straight up to the gods.
 My legs are really aching. You people
 were tiny from up there. When I peered down,
 from heaven you looked like total scoundrels,
 but from here you seem a great deal worse.

[The First Servant comes from Trygaeus' house]

FIRST SERVANT

Master, you've come back?

TRYGAEUS

That's what I've been told.

FIRST SERVANT

What's happened to you?

TRYGAEUS

My legs are hurting—
 it was a long road to travel.

FIRST SERVANT

So tell me now . . .

TRYGAEUS What?

FIRST SERVANT

Did you see any other human,
 besides yourself, wandering through the air.

TRYGAEUS

⁴⁰¹ . . . stink like goats: Morsimus and Melanthius were tragic poets and frequent targets of Aristophanes (especially for their bad poetry and eating habits); the Gorgons were monsters with large teeth and a reputation for gluttony, and the Harpies were winged monsters with a woman's face and a vulture's body. The roach mentioned is the fish (the Greek word also refers to another fish, the skate, but the English pun on roach also helps to bring out their disgusting greed).

No, except perhaps two or three spirits
of dithyrambic poets.

FIRST SERVANT

What were they doing?

TRYGAEUS

Oh, fluttering about collecting preludes
as they drifted in the airy breezes.

FIRST SERVANT

So it isn't true when people tell us
once we're dead, we'll be stars up in the sky?

TRYGAEUS

No, that's really true.

FIRST SERVANT

Then who's that star there?

TRYGAEUS

That's Ion of Chios, who once composed,
when he was here, a poem about the dawn.
As soon as he got there, they all called him
the Star of Dawn.

FIRST SERVANT

Who are those stars up there
that rush across and blaze out as they move?

TRYGAEUS

They are wealthy stars who, after dinner,
are making their way home, holding lanterns
with lights inside. But come on, hurry up
and take this girl. Conduct her to the house.
Clean the bath tub, and heat some water up.
Prepare the wedding bed for me and her.
When you've finished that, come back here again.
Meanwhile, I'll give this one to the council.

FIRST SERVANT

Where'd you get these girls?

TRYGAEUS

Where else? In heaven.

FIRST SERVANT

I wouldn't give three obols for the gods
if they keep bawdy houses, just like us.

TRYGAEUS

No they don't, but there are some up there
who do live off the trade.

FIRST SERVANT [to Opora]

Come on then, let's go.

Tell me, should I give her something to eat?

TRYGAEUS

No. She won't want to eat any bread or cake.
She always had the habit of licking up
ambrosia with the gods in heaven.

FIRST SERVANT

Well, we'll just have to see if we can find something for her to lick down here.

[First Servant exits with Opora into Trygaeus' house]

CHORUS

This old man, as far as we can see,
is now working things out happily.

TRYGAEUS

What will you think when very soon
you see me as a bright bridegroom?

CHORUS

An old man to envy I presume.

Once more you'll have your youthful bloom
and lie there drenched in sweet perfume.

TRYGAEUS

I think you're right. And in a bit
when I'm in bed and hold her tit?

CHORUS

Happier than a top-spinning lad
who calls that Carcinus his dad.

TRYGAEUS

I deserve it. Is that not true?
I, one man, on a beetle flew

and saved the Greeks, who free from harm
now sleep and fuck on every farm.

[First Servant returns from the house]

FIRST SERVANT

The girl has finished bathing, and her bum
looks splendid. There's a flat cake ready.

And the sesame balls are being rolled up.⁴⁰²

Everything's prepared. All we need now
is an erect cock.

TRYGAEUS

Then let's get going
and present Theoria to the Council.

FIRST SERVANT

This girl here? Who is she?

TRYGAEUS

What do you mean?

This is Theoria.

FIRST SERVANT

What? The girl

we used to travel with to Brauron

and then get drunk and screw?⁴⁰³

TRYGAEUS

The very same.

I had a hard time getting her away.

FIRST SERVANT

Oh, master, look at the ass on her—

I'd wait four years for that!

TRYGAEUS [to the audience]

Now, let's see.

Is there an honest man among you lot?

Where is he? Who'll take charge of this girl here

and guard her for the Council?

[To the First Servant who has been fondling Theoria's backside]

⁴⁰² . . . are being rolled up: These foods are traditional wedding dishes.

⁴⁰³ . . . and screw: Brauron was a town outside of Athens where there was a large celebration in honour of Athena every four years, a festival well known for its debauchery.

Hey you,
what are you doing? Drawing a chart?

FIRST SERVANT

Me? Oh, I'm reserving a camping spot
to house my prick in the Isthmian Games.⁴⁰⁴

TRYGAEUS [to the audience]

Tell me the man who'll look after her.

[To Theoria]

Come here. I'm going to take you down there
and put you in the middle of them.

FIRST SERVANT

Look there—
someone's nodding his head!

TRYGAEUS

Who is it?

FIRST SERVANT

Who is it? It's Ariphrades urging you
to take her over to him.

TRYGAEUS

No, he'll jump her
and start slurping in her lap.

[To Theoria]

Come now,
to start with you can take that clothing off.

[Theoria undresses and stands nude in front of the audience. Trygaeus takes her
to up close to the spectators]⁴⁰⁵

TRYGAEUS

You council members and public officers,
look on this Theoria and witness
the splendid things I bring and give to you.
You can quickly raise these two legs of hers

⁴⁰⁴ . . . Isthmian Games: These games were important and popular athletic competitions. Visitors set up tents on the site. The mention of the games allows Trygaeus in his next long speech to introduce all sorts of sexual innuendoes when he describes the games the councillors can now play

⁴⁰⁵ . . . close to the spectators: In Aristophanes' production, Theoria would have been played by a male actor disguised as a female. Her "nude" body, Sommerstein points out, would be covered with something (a flesh-coloured body stocking, perhaps) painted to depict breasts and public hair. The ambiguous sexuality underlies a good deal of the ribald humour which follows.

high in the air and roast your sacrifice.

Look at the oven she's got.

FIRST SERVANT [peering at Theoria's public hair]

Magnificent! Smoky black down here because the Council used to cook their meat in her before the war.

TRYGAEUS

And now she's yours. At first light tomorrow you can arrange some really splendid games—wrestling on the ground, mounting doggy style, lying her on her side, or on her knees,

bending over, or rubbing on the oil and grappling in a youthful free-for-all, gouging and striking with your fists and prick. Next day you'll organize equestrian games,

where riders straddle riders, chariots crash on top of one another, and blow and pant as they go at it. Then other riders will be lying there with cocks all scraped from falling out while moving round the turns. So come on, you officials of the state,

accept Theoria.

[Theoria moves down to the first row of spectators]

Look how eagerly that public officer's receiving her!

[Addressing the public official Theoria is now giving him a lap dance]

That's a motion you'd never introduce if you weren't going to get a big pay off.

No. I'd have found you reaching for a peace.⁴⁰⁶

CHORUS

A useful man brings the state bliss

And that's the kind of man this is.

TRYGAEUS

When you go gather in your grape

⁴⁰⁶ . . . reaching for a peace: This obscure joke, Sommersteinsuggests, seems to depend on a similarity in sound between the word for hand (which would make the listeners think the official was reaching for a bribe) and the word for peace.

you'll see I'm in much better shape.

CHORUS

But now it's clear what you've become.

You've saved mankind—that's everyone.

TRYGAEUS

Once you've chugged down some new-made wine,
a goblet full, you'll say I'm fine.

CHORUS

And we will constantly attest
but for the gods you are the best.

TRYGAEUS

I'm Trygaeus from Athmonum.
and you owe me a tidy sum.
I've pushed away harsh misery.

Now farm and working folk are free.

I've made Hyperbolus succumb.

FIRST SERVANT

All right, what do we have to do next?

TRYGAEUS

What else but to install the goddess Peace
by offering up some earthen pots?

FIRST SERVANT

With pots?

Just like a grumpy little Hermes?⁴⁰⁷

TRYGAEUS

What do you think we should offer her?

A fattened bull?

FIRST SERVANT

An ox? No not that.

We don't need to serve as ox-iliaries.

TRYGAEUS

Then what about a big fat porker?

FIRST SERVANT

⁴⁰⁷ . . . grumpy little Hermes: This refers to the frequent custom of placing small statues of Hermes outside people's homes. The First Servant is apparently complaining that the statue of Peace deserves more than these small household items.

No, no.

TRYGAEUS

Why not?

FIRST SERVANT

Because we might turn into swine,
just like Theagenes.⁴⁰⁸

TRYGAEUS

Well what do you think?

What other animal?

FIRST SERVANT

What about this,
a bummer lamb?

TRYGAEUS

A bummer?

FIRST SERVANT

Yes, by god.

TRYGAEUS

But that's a slang expression.⁴⁰⁹

FIRST SERVANT

That's deliberate—

so when anyone in the assembly
says we must have war, those sitting there
can all cry out in fear, "War's a bummer!"

TRYGAEUS

That's a fine idea!

FIRST SERVANT

And in other things
we'll be like gentle lambs, being very kind
to one another and a whole lot milder
to our allies.

TRYGAEUS

⁴⁰⁸ . . . just like Theagenes: Theagenes was a citizen of Piraeus (the port of Athens), well known for his ugly appearance and disgusting habits.

⁴⁰⁹ . . . a slang expression: In the Greek the animal proposed is a sheep, and the First Servant uses a word from the Ionic dialect. Trygaeus' response is "But that's an Ionian dialect word." The use of the word bummer (a slang expression for an orphan lamb) is an attempt to get something out of this exchange, especially in connection with the First Servant's next two speeches.

All right, now get cracking.

Find that sheep and bring it here. I'll prepare
an altar so we'll have a sacrifice.

[First Servant leaves]

CHORUS

How everything the gods desire
and fortune turns into a favour
moves on to what we all intend.

One by one, the good things come,
with luck all things work in the end.

TRYGAEUS [pointing to a structure on the raised stage]
That makes good sense. Here's our outside altar.

[Trygaeus goes into his house and reappears with a basket during the Chorus'
next speech]

CHORUS

Hurry while the stiff winds pause.
The gods have shifted them from war.

The spirits clearly want a change
to something better than before.

TRYGAEUS [returning from the house]
Here's the basket with barley seed, ribbons,
and a knife. We've got fire as well. So now,
the only thing we're missing is the sheep.

CHORUS

You'd better get a move on then—

If Chaeris sees you, he'll show up
although you've not invited him.
He'll have his flute with him, as well,
and tootle it for all he's worth.

You'll have to offer him a gift.⁴¹⁰

[First Servant returns with a sheep. Trygaeus brings out some water in a basin]

TRYGAEUS [to the First Servant]

Come on then, you can take the basket

⁴¹⁰ . . . give him something: Chaeris is the name of a musician notorious for his inept playing.

and this water for our hands. Circle round
the altar quickly, moving to the right.

FIRST SERVANT [following the instructions]
Watch, then. Now I've made my way around it.
You can tell me something else.

TRYGAEUS
Hang on.
I'll pick up this piece of burning wood
and plunge it in the water.

[Trygaeus takes the stick out of the water and shakes drops of water on the altar
and on the sheep. He then speaks directly to the sheep]

Nod your head.

[The sheep does nothing]

Hurry up!

[The sheep eventually nods its head. Trygaeus addresses the First Servant]

Give me barley grains.

[The First Servant hands the basket to Trygaeus, who takes some barley grains
out of it and sprinkles them on the altar and on the sheep]

Now that basin—
wash your hands and then give it to me.

[The First Servant and Trygaeus wash their hands in the water in the basin]

Now throw some barley in the audience.

[The First Servant tosses some barley grains out over the spectators]

FIRST SERVANT
There, that's done!
TRYGAEUS
You've thrown them out already?

SERVANT
Yes, by Hermes. There're no spectators here
who didn't get some seed.

TRYGAEUS
But none of it
was taken by the women.⁴¹¹

⁴¹¹ . . . by the women: Sommerstein notes that this comment does not necessarily mean that women were not permitted to attend performances (although it might refer to that). There is evidence from other texts that some women were present at these performances.

FIRST SERVANT

No. Their men
will fill them full of seed once evening comes.

TRYGAEUS

All right. Then let us pray.

[Trygaeus holds up the bowl of water and calls out to start the ritual]

Who is present here?

Where might there be many righteous men?

FIRST SERVANT

Come on, give me the bowl. There's lots of them,
and they're all stout fellows.

[The First Servant takes the bowl and throws the water over the Chorus.
The members of the Chorus back away trying to avoid getting wet]

TRYGAEUS

You really think so?

These are righteous men?

FIRST SERVANT

Yes, they are. We soaked them
with that ritual water, and they've come back.
They stood their ground.

TRYGAEUS

All right, let's pray right away.

CHORUS LEADER

Yes, let us pray.

TRYGAEUS

O most holy goddess, sacred Peace,
queen who rules our choral dancing,
queen of wedding celebrations,
receive our offerings to you.

CHORUS LEADER

Yes, most honoured lady, receive it,
Yes, by Zeus, and don't act like wives
who like to sleep around, those women
who open up the door a crack, peep out,
and then, if anyone starts eyeing them,

pull back again—but if he goes away,
they start looking out once more.
Don't be like that with us again.

TRYGAEUS

No, by god, but like a noble woman
reveal yourself completely to us,
who love you and for thirteen years now
have been longing for you. Dissolve our fights,
our noisy quarrels, so we can call you
our Lysimache.⁴¹² And bring to an end
our subtle suspiciousness, which leads us on
to babble nonsense to each other.
Bring us Greeks together once again,
a new start with the juice of friendship,
soothe our minds with a kinder tolerance,
and let fine goods fill up our market place—
huge garlicks, early cucumbers, apples,
pomegranates, and for our servants cloaks,
but tiny ones. May we see men bringing
geese, ducks, and pigeons from Boeotia,
larks, as well, and may baskets full of eels
arrive from lake Copais. Let all of us
go out to buy them in a common crowd
and jostle with Morychus and Teleas
and Glaucetes and many other gluttons.
Let Malanthius come to market last,
so they're sold out and he begins to wail
and then to sing a song from his Medea,
“I am dying, done for, now I am bereft
the ladies lying hiding in the beets.”⁴¹³
And may men find all that delightful.
Grant these our prayers, most honoured goddess.

⁴¹² . . . our Lysimache: the name literally means “put an end to fighting.” It's not clear whether this name refers to anyone specifically.

⁴¹³ Melanthius was a tragic poet with a reputation for gluttony, and Medea was one of his plays. Beets were commonly served with eels.

FIRST SERVANT

Take the knife and like a true master cook
butcher the sheep.

TRYGAEUS

No. That's not right.

FIRST SERVANT

Why not?

TRYGAEUS

Peace surely gets no joy from slaughter.
Nor should one spill blood across her altar.

Go, take the beast inside and sacrifice it.
Then cut the thigh bones out and bring them here.
That way we'll save the sheep for our producer.
[The First Servant takes the knife and leads the sheep back into the house]

CHORUS

But here outside you'd better stop,
and quickly set the wood you chop,
and then all else you need on top.

TRYGAEUS [arranging kindling for a small fire on the altar]
Well, don't you think I'm setting up the wood
like a real diviner.

CHORUS

You are indeed.
Does anything a clever man should know
escape you? What is there that you don't know
which a man esteemed for his wise mind
and for his daring ought to know?

TRYGAEUS

There we are!

The wood's alight. Stilbides will be upset.⁴¹⁴
I'll go fetch a table. I don't need the lad
[Trygaeus goes inside the house]

CHORUS

⁴¹⁴Stilbides was an important diviner in Athens who went along on the disastrous Sicilian expedition. The slur is that he needs war in order to prosper at his trade and thus won't be happy about a successful offering to Peace.

Who would not praise a man like that
who's put up with so much danger
and has saved our sacred city?
Surely you'll remain the envy
of people for all time to come.

[Trygaeus and the First Servant return with a table and the things needed for the sacrifice, including various parts of the sacrificial sheep]

FIRST SERVANT

All right, it's ready. You take the thigh bones
and set them out. I'll go for the entrails
and the offering of food.

[First Servant goes into the house]

TRYGAEUS

I'll take care of it.

[Trygaeus sets out the thigh bones on the altar, then calls after the First Servant]
You need to be here!

[First Servant returns from the house carrying the entrails and some cakes as offerings]

FIRST SERVANT

All right, here I am.

You don't think I'm wasting time, do you?

TRYGAEUS

Now make sure these things are properly cooked.

[Trygaeus looks to the side and sees someone coming]

Someone's coming here wearing a garland.

It's made of laurel. Who the hell is he?

FIRST SERVANT [looking in the same direction]

The man looks like a total charlatan.

He must be a diviner.

TRYGAEUS

No, by god.

It must be Hierocles from Oreus,
the one who peddles oracles.

FIRST SERVANT

All right.

What's he going to say?

TRYGAEUS

Well, it's clear enough

he's going to oppose the peace agreement.

FIRST SERVANT

No, it's the smell of sacrificial meat

that's brought him here.

TRYGAEUS

Then let's pretend

we don't see him.

FIRST SERVANT

That's all right with me.

[Hierocles enters]

HIEROCLES

What's this sacrifice? To which one of the gods?

TRYGAEUS [to the First Servant]

Keep quiet while your cooking and don't touch
those parts of the rump.

HIEROCLES

Aren't you going to say

who this sacrifice is for?

TRYGAEUS

Ah, that's good—

the tail is roasting well.

FIRST SERVANT

Yes, a good omen.

O dear friend, lady Peace!

HIEROCLES

Come on now,

start the offerings and give me the first piece.

TRYGAEUS

It's better to do the roasting first.

HIEROCLES [peering at the cooking meat]

But these are cooked already.

TRYGAEUS

Whoever you are,
you're too much in the way.

[to the First Servant]

Slice them up.

FIRST SERVANT

Where's the table?

TRYGAEUS

Bring out the libations.

[The First Servant goes into the house]

HIEROCLES

The tongue is cut all by itself.

TRYGAEUS

We know.

You know what you should do?

HIEROCLES

Yes, if you tell me.

TRYGAEUS

Don't say a word to us. We're offering
a holy sacrifice to Peace.

HIEROCLES [in the grand style]

O you miserable foolish mortal men!

TRYGAEUS [interrupting]

It's your head you're talking about!

HIEROCLES [continuing as before]

You who are so ignorant, you don't know
what gods think, you've come to an agreement,
you who are men, with fierce-eyed monkeys.

TRYGAEUS [laughing]

Ha, ha, ha!

HIEROCLES

Why are you laughing?

TRYGAEUS

I liked that—

fierce-eyed monkeys!

HIEROCLES [continuing in the grand style]

Like timid idiots you place your trust in foxes,
who've got deceitful minds, treacherous hearts.

TRYGAEUS

You rascal, I wish your lungs were as hot
as what's cooking here.

HIEROCLES

If those holy nymphs
had not swindled Bacis and Bacis then
had not misled mankind, and if those nymphs
had not tricked Bacis one more time . . . ⁴¹⁵

TRYGAEUS

Damn you!
May you be utterly wiped out if you
don't stop prattling on about that Bacis.

HIEROCLES [continuing as before]

For it has not yet been decreed by Fate
that bonds of Peace should e'er be loosed
until such time as first of all . . .

TRYGAEUS

This food here
be dusted with this salt.

HIEROCLES

The blessed gods
will not be pleased that warfare terminate,
until the wolf is wedded to the sheep.

TRYGAEUS

Damn you, how could a wolf ever get married
to a sheep?

HIEROCLES

As long as the wood bug,
when it flies, emits the foulest smelling farts,
as long as the noisy polecat bitch still strives
to deliver her blind litter, that's how long
it is not right for peace to have been made.

⁴¹⁵ . . . one more time: Bacis was a well-known diviner from Boeotia who allegedly got his inspiration from the nymphs.

TRYGAEUS

Then what should we have done? Not stop the war?

Or decide by lot which of the two groups
should howl the loudest, when there's a chance
for peace and we can then rule Greece together?

HIEROCLES

You will never make the crab walk straight.

TRYGAEUS

In future you will never eat again
at the Prytaneum or offer up
poetic fictions after the event.⁴¹⁶

HIEROCLES

You will never smooth the prickly hedgehog.

TRYGAEUS

You've been deceiving the Athenians—
will there ever come a day when you will stop?

HIEROCLES

What sort of oracle commanded you
to burn these thigh parts to the deities?

TRYGAEUS

Well, of course, it was the work of Homer,
that splendid oracle: "They pushed aside
the hateful cloud of war and then chose Peace,
installing her with beasts for sacrifice.
Once they'd cooked the thighs and tasted entrails,
they poured libations from a cup"—I led the way,
but no one gave a gleaming cup of wine
to the man who peddled oracles.

HIEROCLES

I'll have no part of that. It's not a utterance
delivered by the Sibyl.⁴¹⁷

TRYGAEUS

But, by god, wise Homer does say something pertinent:

⁴¹⁶ . . . at the Prytaneum: The Prytaneum was an important sacred building in Athens where very distinguished people could eat at public expense.

⁴¹⁷ . . . by the Sibyl: The Sibyl is a prophetess in a shrine. Hierocles may be referring to the prophetess of Apollo at Delphi.

“The man in love with dreadful civil war
has no community, no rights, no home.”

HIEROCLES

Be on your guard lest somehow a raptor bird
seizes your wits, deceives you by a trick.

TRYGAEUS [to the First Servant as he comes out of the house]

You, watch out for that bird—this oracle
is threatening our meat. Make a libation
and pass the entrails over here to me.

[The First Servant makes a libation and serves Trygaeus some of the meat]

HIEROCLES

If it's all right with you, I'll help myself.

[Hierocles approaches the table with the offering on it]

TRYGAEUS

Libation! Libation!

HIEROCLES

Pour out some for me.

Present me with a portion of the meat.

TRYGAEUS

But that's not pleasing to the blessed gods.
Not before this happens—we pour a drink
and you get out of here. O lady Peace,
remain with us for all our lives.

HIEROCLES

Serve me the tongue.

TRYGAEUS

Why don't you get your tongue away from here.

HIEROCLES [grabbing some of the wine]

Libation!

TRYGAEUS [hitting Hierocles]

Take this with your libation—
and hurry up.

HIEROCLES

Will no one offer me
the entrails?

TRYGAEUS

That's not possible for us.

We can't give you any, not until the wolf
gets married to the sheep.

HIEROCLES

I'm begging you, by your own knees . . .

TRYGAEUS [imitating Hierocles' earlier style]

A futile supplication.

You'll never make the prickly hedgehog smooth.
[to the audience]

Come on, you spectators, come here and share
these entrails with us.

HIEROCLES

What's for me?

TRYGAEUS

You? You can eat your Sibyl.

HIEROCLES

No, by Earth

you two aren't going to eat that up alone.

I'll grab it from you. It's public property.

[Hierocles tries to steal some meat, but Trygaeus stops him and starts hitting him]

TRYGAEUS

Hit him! Hit this Bacis!

[The First Servant starts hitting Hierocles with a stick]

HIEROCLES

I call as witnesses . . .

TRYGAEUS

And so do I—that you're a greedy fraud!

Keep on hitting him with that stick of yours—
the imposter!

FIRST SERVANT [giving Trygaeus the stick]

You do it. I'll strip him

of those skins he stole from us by lying.

Come on, soothsayer, let go of those skins!

Do you hear me!

[Hierocles runs off in terror of a beating]

What a fine crow he is
that's flown in from Oreus! Why not fly
quickly on your journey to Elymnium!⁴¹⁸

[Trygaeus and the First Servant go into the house]

CHORUS

I'm full of joy, yes, full of joy,
free from helmets, free from cheese,
and free from onions, too.

I don't find battles any fun—

not like the good parties with my friends
and steady drinking round the fire,
blazing wood from well-dried logs
cut up in summer time,
cooking chick peas, roasting acorns,
giving our Thracian girl a kiss,
while the wife is in her bath.

CHORUS LEADER

Nothing's more pleasant, once the sowing done,
than for god to send soft rain drizzling down
and for a friend to say, "Since it's like this,
Comarchides, tell me what we should do."

"Well, since the god is treating us so well,
I'd like to be drinking. So come on, wife,
warm up three measures of those chick peas,
mix in some wheat with them, and give us figs.
Get Sura to call Manes from the fields.
Today it's totally impossible to prune the vines or shovel up the mud.
The ground is soaked right through. Get someone
to fetch the thrush for me and those two finches.
And there was fresh birth milk in the house
and four bits of hare, unless the weasel got off with some of them last evening.
I don't know what was making all that noise

⁴¹⁸ . . . to Elymnium: Oreus is Hierocles' home town, and Elymnium is an island off the coast of Euboea, close to Oreus.

and rattling round in there. And so, my boy,
 serve us up three of them and then take one
 and give it to my father. And then ask
 Aeschinades for some myrtle branches,
 ones with berries, and since it's on the way
 someone should invite Charinades.

So he can come and drink with us
 to god who's giving so much help
 assisting with our crops.

As soon as the cicada sings
 his own sweet song, I love to see
 if those Lemnian vines of mine
 are ripe already, their nature
 makes them the very first to bloom
 and to look at the swelling figs,
 which, when they're ripe, I love to eat
 and keep on eating while I say

"I do love these seasons." And then
 I crush some thyme and stir a drink.
 Yes, I get fat in summer time.

CHORUS LEADER

Much fatter than if I were looking at
 some god damned military officer
 with three helmet plumes and a crimson cloak,
 dazzling red, which he claims is real dye
 from Sardis. But if he ever has to fight
 in his red cloak, then he himself gets dyed the real Cyzicene yellow. He's the first
 to run away, shaking those plumes of his
 just like a brown and yellow horse-cock,⁴¹⁹
 while I stand just like someone watching
 a hunting net. And then when they get home,
 they act in an intolerable way.
 On the conscription list they scribble down
 some of our names and scratch out others,

⁴¹⁹ . . . horse cock: This is an imaginary creature, a combination of a horse and cock with wings.

back and forth two or three times at random.
 Tomorrow is set as the departure date,
 and this man's purchased no provisions.

He had no idea he was moving out.
 Then he stops in front of Pandion's statue,
 sees his name, and rushes off in distress,
 with a bitter glare at his misfortune.⁴²⁰
 They do these things to us country people,
 less so to city folk, these very ones
 who before god and men threw away
 their shields. And if the gods are willing,
 I'll still call them to account for it.

CHORUS

They've injured me with many slights.

Those men act at home are lions,
 but foxes when it comes to fights.

[Trygaeus and the First Servant emerge from the house]

TRYGAEUS [handing the First Servant a plumed helmet]

Oh, oh! What a crowd we've got coming here
 for the wedding dinner. Come on, dust off
 the tables with this thing. There's nothing else
 it's good for any more. And then pile up
 the cakes, the thrushes, plenty of the hare,
 and the bread rolls.

[The First Servant goes into the house. Enter the Sickle Maker and a Potter.
 One is carrying sickles, another a basket of food.]

SICKLE MAKER

Where's Trygaeus? Where is he?

TRYGAEUS

I'm cooking thrushes.

SICKLE MAKER

O dearest Trygaeus,
 you've done us so much good by making Peace!

⁴²⁰ . . . at his misfortune: Pandion's statue is a place in Athens where important public notices were posted, in this case the name of citizens going on the next military expedition.

Before now no one would've paid an obol
for a sickle and now I'm selling them
for fifty drachmas. And this fellow here
flogs jars for three drachmas in the country.
So Trygaeus take some of these sickles
and these jars—take as many as you'd like,
free of charge. And please accept these presents.
We're bringing you these gifts for your wedding
from what we've sold, the profits we have made.

TRYGAEUS

All right. Put them over here beside me,
and go inside as quickly as you can to eat—
there's an arms dealer coming and he looks
as if he's really angry.

[Enter an Arms Dealer, carrying a load of his goods, with an Armourer, a Trumpet Dealer, a Spear Maker, and a Helmet Maker, each carrying a lot of samples of his trade]

ARMS DEALER

Damn it, Trygaeus,
you've completely ruined me!

TRYGAEUS

You poor man,
what's the matter? Are you crestfallen?

ARMS DEALER

You've wiped out my trade, my livelihood,
and this man's and this spear maker's, too.

TRYGAEUS

Well then, what should I pay for these two crests?

ARMS DEALER

What are you offering?

TRYGAEUS

What's my offer?

I'm ashamed to say. Still, a lot of work
has gone into this attachment bracket,
so I might offer for the two of them

three measures of dried figs. I can use them
for dusting off the table.

ARMS DEALER

All right, done.

Now go and bring the figs.

[Trygaeus takes the helmet crests and goes into the house.

The Arms Dealers talks to his companion]

Well, it's better
than getting nothing.

[Trygaeus re-emerges with the helmet crests, which he throws at the Arms Dealer]

Get these out of here!

Take them from my house! To hell with them!

These aren't helmet crests. They're shedding hair!

I wouldn't pay a single fig for them.

ARMOURER

What's a poor fellow like me going to do
with this splendidly made curved breastplate?

It's worth ten minas.

TRYGAEUS [taking the breastplate]

With this one here

you won't lose money. Let me purchase it

for cost price. It'll be really useful

when I need to shit . . .

[Trygaeus puts the armour on the ground and starts pulling up his clothes,
as if he is going to crap in the metal]

ARMOURER

Stop insulting me

and my merchandise.

TRYGAEUS

Like this, but it needs

three stones placed beside it.⁴²¹

[He sits on the armour]

Hey, it works.

⁴²¹ . . . placed beside it: Sommerstein observes that the Greeks used stones to wipe themselves.

ARMOURER

How will you wipe yourself, you idiot?

TRYGAEUS [picking up stones and reaching through the arm holes on the metal]
One hand goes through this hole, the other one . . .

ARMOURER

You wipe yourself with both hands at once?

TRYGAEUS

Yes, by god, so I don't get arrested
for concealing an oar hole on the ship.⁴²²

ARMOURER

So you're going to sit down to take a shit
on something worth ten minas?

TRYGAEUS

Yes I am, you fool. Do you imagine
I'd sell my asshole for a thousand drachmas?⁴²³

ARMOURER

All right, then, hand over the money.

TRYGAEUS [standing up and rubbing his bum]

No, my good man, it irritates my ass.
Take it away. I won't be buying it.

TRUMPET MAKER

What am I going to do with this trumpet.

I once paid sixty drachmas for it.

TRYGAEUS

Pour lead in this hollow part, then up here
fix a long stick on top. And then you'll have
a target for your game of cottabus.

TRUMPET MAKER

Damn you, you're making fun of me.

TRYGAEUS

All right,
I'll give you another idea. Pour lead,

⁴²² . . . on the ship: People paying for the warships sometimes stopped up the oar holes to save themselves the expense of a full crew of rowers. Inspectors required crew members to put both hands through the oar holes so that they could count the actual number of rowers.

⁴²³ . . . a thousand drachma: Historians estimate (roughly) that

as I said, and attach a pan right here,
using small cords, and you'll then have something
to weigh figs for your servants in the fields.

HELMET MAKER

O you damned spirit who's destroyed me,
I once paid a mina for these helmets!
Now what do I do? Who'll buy them now?

TRYGAEUS

Go sell them to the Egyptians. They'll do
for when they measure out their laxatives.

SPEAR MAKER

Alas, helmet maker, things have worked out
so badly for us.

TRYGAEUS

This man's not suffering,
not in the least.

SPEAR MAKER

What about his helmets?
Who will use them anymore?

TRYGAEUS

He should learn to attach handles to them.
then he'd sell them at a much better price
than he does now.

HELMET MAKER

Let's go, Spear Maker.

TRYGAEUS

No, not yet. I'm going to buy spears from him.

SPEAR MAKER

How much will you offer for them, then?

TRYGAEUS

If they were split in two, I'd purchase them
as vineyard poles, a drachma per hundred.

SPEAR MAKER

We're being insulted. Come on, friend, let's go.

[The various arms dealers and weapons manufacturers all leave. As Trygaeus

gives

his next speech, two young boys emerge from the house]

TRYGAEUS

Yes, you should, because children of our guests
are coming here to take a piss. I think
they're also going to sing the opening parts
of what they will perform. Now, young lad,
what song do you intend to sing? Stand here
beside me and before you go inside
sing the beginning of your song.

SON OF LAMACHUS [chanting]

"So now let us begin with younger warriors . . ."

TRYGAEUS

Stop singing of warriors, you wretched child.
We're at peace. And you're a cursed idiot.

SON OF LAMACHUS [continuing]

"When they'd come close up against each other,
they smashed their ox-hide bucklers and their embossed shields."

TRYGAEUS

Shields? Will you stop reminding us of shields!

SON OF LAMACHUS [continuing]

"Then came men groans with shouts of triumph too."

TRYGAEUS [interrupting]

Men's groans? By Dionysus, you'll be crying
as you sing out those groans and embossed shields.

SON OF LAMACHUS

Then what should I sing? Tell me what you like.

TRYGAEUS [quoting from Homer]

"Thus they feasted on cattle meat." Stuff like that.

"They set out breakfast, all the sweetest food to eat."

SON OF LAMACHUS [reciting again]

"Thus they feasted on cattle meat and, tired of war,
loosed their sweating horses from the harnesses."

TRYGAEUS

That's the stuff. They were fed up with warfare

and then they had a feast. Sing about that—
about how they ate after they were tired.

SON OF LAMACHUS

“When they were finished, they strengthened themselves . . .”

TRYGAEUS

I’m sure they were feeling really splendid.

SON OF LAMACHUS [continuing]

“ . . . and poured from the towers. A mighty shout arose . . . ”

TRYGAEUS [interrupting]

To hell with you, boy, you and your battles!

You sing of nothing but war. Whose son are you?

SON OF LAMACHUS

Me?

TRYGAEUS

Yes, by god, you.

SON OF LAMACHUS

I’m Lamachus’ son.

TRYGAEUS Bah! Listening to you sing, I was wondering
if you might be the offspring of someone
addicted to war, who’s sad without one.

Go away! Sing your songs to the spearmen.

Where’s that young son of Cleonymus?

[The Son of Lamachus goes in the house and the other child,
the son of Cleonymus steps forward]

Sing me something before you go inside.

I don’t think you’ll sing about stuff like that.

Your father’s a far too prudent man.

SON OF CLEONYMUS [singing]

“Some man from Sais now glories in my shield,
that splendid shield, which I left, against my will,
beside a bush . . . ”

TRYGAEUS [interrupting]

Tell me, you little prick,

are you singing about your own father?

SON OF CLEONYMUS [continuing]

“But I saved my life . . . “

TRYGAEUS [interrupting]

And shamed your parents.

But let’s go in. I’m sure you won’t forget

what you’ve just been singing about the shield,
not with that father of yours.

[Trygaeus and the Son of Cleonymus start to go into the house.

Trygaeus turns to address the Chorus]

You people who are staying here, your work
is to chomp on all this stuff, chew it up—
don’t just pretend you’re working. Get to it
like real men, with both jaws grinding hard.
You poor sods, your white teeth are no use at all
if they’re not used for chewing.

[Trygaeus goes into the house]

CHORUS LEADER

We’ll take care of it. Thanks for telling us.

Now those of you who were hungry earlier

get going on this hare. It’s not every day
you come across cakes going around unclaimed.
So eat up, or I say you’ll soon be sorry.

[Trygaeus emerges from the house]

TRYGAEUS

You must speak fair words now, and let the bride
come out here. And bring the wedding torches.

Let all the people rejoice together

and sing and dance with us. Now, too, we must
take all equipment back to our land once more
once we have danced and poured out libations,
kicked out Hyperbolus, and made our prayers

to gods to enrich the Greeks, and make us all
harvest many barley crops together,
with lots of wine, figs to eat, and may our wives
bear children for us, and may we gather
once again the good things we started with

all the things we've lost and set aside
the glittering iron of war.

[Opora comes out of the house with her attendants]

Come, wife, to the fields,
and, my lovely one, may you lie
in such beauty at my side.

[In the following exchanges one half the Chorus sings in response to the other half]

FIRST HALF CHORUS

Hymen, Hymenaeus, O!⁴²⁴

SECOND HALF CHORUS

O thrice blessed man, you deserve
these splendid things you now possess!

FIRST HALF CHORUS

Hymen, Hymenaeus, O!

SECOND HALF CHORUS

Hymen, Hymenaeus, O!

FIRST HALF CHORUS

What shall we do with her?

SECOND HALF CHORUS

What shall we do with her?

FIRST HALF CHORUS

We'll harvest her fruit.

SECOND HALF CHORUS

We'll harvest her fruit.

FIRST HALF CHORUS

Those in the front,
lift up the groom. Come, men,
let's carry him off.

SECOND HALF CHORUS

Hymen, Hymenaeus, O!

FIRST HALF CHORUS

Hymen, Hymenaeus, O!

[The Chorus raises Trygaeus up in the air]

⁴²⁴Hymen, Hymenaeus: The traditional wedding song, a tribute to the god of weddings, Hymen or Hymenaeus.

CHORUS LEADER

You'll have a fine home
without any troubles,
tending your figs.

FIRST HALF CHORUS

Hymen, Hymenaeus, O!

SECOND HALF CHORUS

Hymen, Hymenaeus, O!

FIRST HALF CHORUS

His fig is huge and thick.

SECOND HALF CHORUS

And her fig is sweet.

TRYGAEUS

You'll say that when you're feasting,
when you're drinking plenty of wine.

CHORUS

Hymen, Hymenaeus, O!

Hymen, Hymenaeus, O!

TRYGAEUS

Good bye, men, good luck,
and if you follow me
you'll be eating flat cakes!

Spartan citizen-soldiers, a very serious blow to the Spartans, whose population was relatively small. The Spartans made peace overtures in an attempt to get the prisoners released.

drachma in Aristophanes' time was worth about
dollars today. A mina is equivalent to
drachmas.

PLUTUS

This edition is based on the [publicly available](https://bacchicstage.wordpress.com/aristophanes/wealth-ploutos/)⁴²⁵ translation by G.Theodoridis

Wealth (Ploutos, Plutus, Plutos) Πλούτος

Date of 1st production 388(?) BC

...

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Wealth (a blind god)

Chremylus (an elderly farmer)

Mrs Chremylus

Cario (Chremylus' slave)

Blepsidemus (Chremylus' friend)

Poverty (a grotesque looking goddess)

Just Man

Slave (to the Just Man -silent)

Old Woman

Young Man (Old Woman's former lover)

Hermes (Messenger of the gods)

Priest (of Zeus The Saviour)

Informer

Witness (accompanying the Informer -silent)

Chorus (of farmers)

Child (of Just Man- silent)

...

A street in Athens. Stage Right, Chremylus' House. A bench just outside and to the left of the door.

Wealth, a god, is a very old, blind man. He is wearing old, torn, shabby clothes. He enters gingerly from Stage Left with the help of a walking stick. He is followed by Chremylus and Chremylus' slave, Cario. Chremylus is a middle-aged man, bald. His clothes and the clothes of his slave reveal a man living a modest life. He is holding the tail of the blind man's cape and, behind him, Cario is doing the same with Chremylus'

⁴²⁵<https://bacchicstage.wordpress.com/aristophanes/wealth-ploutos/>

cape. Chremylus and Cario wear ceremonial wreaths. Cario is a younger man with long hair and he's carrying a small sack. They walk across the stage slowly, tiredly. Suddenly Wealth stops and farts. A moment later Chremylus also farts and so does Cario soon afterwards. They flagellate the malodorous air around them to send it away, before all three sit on the bench to rest and catch their breath.

A short pause before Cario stands, walks to the front of the stage, outside the hearing distance of the other two and, in an agitated voice, addresses the audience.

Cario:

Oh, Zeus and all you other gods in the heavens! What an awful ordeal it is to be the slave of an idiot!

Such an awful ordeal! Terrible! If the slave comes up with a sensible advise for his master but his master refuses to act upon it, what happens? The slave cops the horrible consequences of his master's rejection of the slave's suggestion, right along with his master!

That's our Fate, that's the Fate of slaves: our body is not owned by us but by the men who buy it. The masters! They can do whatever they like with it and we, the slaves, have no say in the matter at all.

Believe me, I know what I'm talking about!

And then there's Phoebus Apollo! A "wise god," they say.

You know him, he's the one who utters all his oracles sitting on a golden tripod!

Apollo! I've got a bone to pick with him –and quite justly, too!

They call this god a healer, a wise prophet! Ha! It was from his temple that my master came out of with a damaged brain! The old boy's thinking is now back to front, upside down! Always does the opposite of what he should do. You saw him just now, instead of leading the blind, he's following them! And he's forcing me to do the same. I asked him, "why, master? Why do we have to follow this blind man around?" Never get a reply, of course! Not a smidgen of a hint of an inkling of a reply!

Turns to Chremylus

Don't you worry, master! I'll keep asking you the same question over and over again! I'll never shut up! And I'll go on asking you the same question, until I get an answer! You'll get sick of me, you will!

Master, why are we following this blind man around?

Chremylus gives Cario threatening looks

No, no, no! You can't beat me, remember? I'm wearing a holy wreath!

Chremylus: Gets up and angrily approaches Cario

Pester me too much, boy and I'll rip that thing off your head and then beat you up with it. And I can assure you, boy, it's going to hurt you even more then!

Cario:

Bullshit! I'm not shutting up 'till you tell me who this blind man is. Believe me, boss, it's for your own good that I'm asking this question!

Chremylus: Frustrated

All right, all right! I won't hide it from you any longer. You've been the most faithful AND the most thieving slave I've ever had, so I'll tell you.

You see, I'm an honest man, a god-fearing old chap. Been like this all of my life. All my life, I've been an honest man, a good man, a polite man, a gentle man... yet... yet, when it comes to money, I've always been a loser. Not a cracker to my name! Not successful at all! Never made any of it.

Cario:

I know that, boss.

Chremylus: Indicating the audience

But, then, look at all those crooks out there! Look how they've all made it! Temple thieves, politicians, sycophantic bum lickers, sleazebags –they're all filthy bloody rich!

Look at them all! They've all made it big time!

Cario:

I agree with you there, too, boss! Crooks and sleazebags the lot of them!

Chremylus:

Pisses me off no end! And that's why I went to consult Apollo. Not for my sake – I'm old now, I've shot off all my arrows, but for the sake of my one and only son. That's why I went to talk with the god. I wanted to ask him if my boy should change his ways at all. I mean, should he, perhaps, become a crook like the rest of them out there, a dishonest sleazebag, a totally rotten man, a stinker, because, to me, it looks like that's the only way one can make it big in the world these days!

Cario:

Well, what did Phoebus utter through all those sacred garlands of his?

Chremylus:

Well, let me tell you. The god told me, in unambiguous words, mind, to follow the first man I bumped into the moment I walked out of the temple, and then to persuade that man to come home with me.

Cario:

Is that so? And who was the first man you bumped into?

Chremylus: Pointing the finger at Wealth

Him! I bumped into him!

Cario:

You're a complete numbskull, boss! Truly, you're a numbskull! You've got the god's words all wrong, boss! Can't you see? What he has told you, in fact, was that you should bring up your son according to our local customs, here!

Chremylus:

Huh? What makes you say that?

Cario:

It's bloody obvious, boss! Even a blind man could see what the god meant. This is the way of our world, these days. If you want to get ahead in life, you must avoid doing anything good. Avoid virtue at all costs! Embrace evil!

Chremylus:

No, that can't be right! That can't be what the god meant with his oracle. I'm sure his words must have meant something very noble.

Hmmm, now if this chap tells us who he is and what he's on about and why he came all the way here with us, maybe we'll find out what Apollo really meant.

Cario: Shouts at Wealth

Oi, you! Time for you now to tell us who you are, now! Tell us now or else I shall be forced to use force!

Wealth gets up with a struggle and slowly and with the help of his walking stick, walks towards them

Go on, hurry up!

Now tell us!

Wealth:

All right, I'll tell you: go and get stuffed!

Cario: To Chremylus

What? Who did he say he is?

Chremylus:

I don't know but I think he was telling you something... something to match your rudeness and your crassness.

To Wealth Sir, I can see you prefer the polite approach, so, speak with me, if you like, sir. Tell me who you are.

Wealth:

And you can go and get stuffed, too!

Cario:

Charming! There you have it! There's your man and there's your oracle!

Chremylus: Raising his fist to Wealth

By Holy Demeter! You won't get to enjoy that insult!

Cario: Shakes Wealth by the arm

Listen you! Speak up or I'll knock your ugly bloody block off... in a very ugly bloody manner!

Chremylus and Cario grab a tight hold of Wealth's arms.

Wealth:

Would you two wankers let go of me?

Chremylus:

Never!

Cario: To Chremylus

I know what we should do! Get rid of the fool once and for all. Walk him over to some huge cliff and leave him there. Let him fall over the side and kill himself!

Chremylus: To Cario

Good idea. Go ahead, take him over there now!

Wealth:

No! No, don't do that!

Chremylus:

Well, will you tell us who or what you are, then?

Wealth:

I'd like to but I know what will happen afterwards: once you find out who I am, you'll never let me go!

Chremylus:

Oh, no! Not us! I swear by the gods! We'll let you go, if that's what you want.

Wealth:

Well, then, unhand me!

They obey

Chremylus:

There you are. You're free.

Wealth:

Listen then. I had made up my mind not to reveal myself to you but, it looks like I have no choice so, here goes: The man you see before you is a god. The god of Wealth!

Chremylus:

What? You bastard! Why didn't you tell us before? All this time and not a peep out of you! Why-

Cario: Bursts into a laughter of ridicule

Hahaha! You? The god of Wealth? In these rags? Oh, dear, dear Apollo! Apollo and all the other gods and spirits in the heavens! Dear Zeus! Hahaha! You must be joking, right? You? The god of wealth?

Wealth:

Absolutely! Me, the god of wealth!

Chremylus:

In person?

Wealth:

The person himself! Wealth by name!

Chremylus:

But... but you stink! Where have you been that made you so pongy?

Wealth:

I've been to see that old miser, Patrocles, who's never had a wash in his entire life.

Chremylus:

Ah!

Right! Well, tell me, how the hell did you end up losing your sight?

Wealth:

Zeus did it to me! He hates mortals, that god! I used to threaten him when I was young that I'd only visit the mortals who were honourable, wise and virtuous, so he went and plucked my eyes out so that I couldn't see who's who.

See? that's the sort of hatred Zeus has for the good folk on earth.

Chremylus:

But they're the only ones who honour him: the good and the virtuous!

Wealth:

But of course!

Chremylus:

And now? If you were to get your sight back, would you still avoid the crooks?

Wealth:

But of course I would. I hate them!

Chremylus:

You'd be visiting the virtuous again, would you?

Wealth:

Certainly. It's been such a long time since I saw a virtuous man!

Chremylus:

I can believe that! Me too. I haven't seen a virtuous man for a long time either and I've got my eyesight!

Wealth:

Right. Now you know all about me, so... let me go!

Chremylus: Grabs Wealth by the arm again

No way! By Zeus! In fact, now we'll get an even tighter grip on you!

Wealth:

I knew it! See? Didn't I say that you two would be giving me the shits?

Chremylus:

No, no. Hang on, Wealth! Let me explain and don't insist in running away. See, I am a virtuous man. You'll never find a more virtuous man than me, anywhere!

Wealth:

Ha! That's what they all say but the moment they grab a hold of me, the moment they become... wealthy, that's when they become unbearably and utterly evil!

Chremylus:

Sure, sure, but not everyone is evil.

Wealth:

To the very last of them. Evil, the lot of them. Shits. Bastards!

Cario: Threateningly

Now listen, mate! You're going to cop it if you go on with this sort of language and attitude!

Chremylus:

Listen, Wealth. Let me tell you the benefits you'll get if you come with us. Listen carefully. I am certain, I'm hoping very much that –with god's help, of course- I'll be able to get rid of that eye problem of yours and get you your sight back.

Wealth:

No, no! Oh, please don't do that! No, I don't want my sight back, thank you!

Chremylus: Shocked

What? What did you say?

Cario:

What a total loser, this guy is! A congenital loser!

Wealth:

No, listen. Zeus knows all about these rich fools. Knows all about them well, so it'll be me he'll be taking his anger on again! It'll be me who'll be getting tortured.

Chremylus:

But he's torturing you now, making you shuffle and stumble about blindly, this way and that, wandering all over the road.

Wealth:

Yah, I know but... but, to tell you the truth, I'm shit-scared of him!

Chremylus:

You're joking! What a weak... you must be the weakest of all the gods, up there!

Do you think that all his thunderbolts and all of his huge kingdom would be worth any more than a cracker if you got your sight back, even for a second?

Wealth: Trembling with fear

Oh, no, you wretched, sacrilegious man! Don't utter such things!

Chremylus:

Hang on, hang on a minute! Let me prove to you that you're far more powerful than Zeus.

Wealth:

Who, me?

Chremylus:

Heavens yes! Now, tell me, why is it that Zeus lords it over all the other gods?

Cario:

I know! Because of all the money he's got. He's got more of it than all the other gods.

Chremylus:

Quite right. Now tell me, who supplies it all to him?

Cario: Indicating Wealth

This guy does!

Chremylus:

And what does everyone pray for and make sacrifices to Zeus for? Is it not to get some of this guy here?

Cario:

By Zeus, that's for sure! They all want a bit of him. Wealth at all costs! Wealth whatever it takes! Prayer number one: Wealth for me, please Zeus!

Chremylus:

Therefore, Cario, is this blind god here, not responsible for all this injustice? And is it not up to him to put a stop to it all? That is, if he wanted to?

Wealth:

Oi! What do you mean by that?

Chremylus:

What I mean by that, is that, if you wanted to, you would make it impossible for people to go sacrificing bulls and barley cakes, you could make it so that they couldn't sacrifice a thing! If you wanted to.

Wealth:

But how?

Chremylus:

What a silly question! By not making it affordable for them. If you weren't so quick to give them the money, they wouldn't be so quick to go buying the bulls and the barley cakes, see? If you wanted to, you could wreck Zeus' entire kingdom. He gives you the shits? Fine, destroy his power to give you the shits. You could do it all by yourself.

Wealth:

Is that right? Am I responsible for the fact that people sacrifice to Zeus?

Chremylus:

That's exactly what I am saying. And I'm also saying that it is because of you that they can get everything that's beautiful in the world! All those delightful and charming things they get. They get them because of you, because you give them the money! Money's the cause of it all.

Cario:

That's why I am now a slave, mate. I was a free man once but now, because of a few pennies which I didn't have, I'm a slave!

Chremylus:

And, they say that the Corinthian whores take absolutely no notice of the poor blokes but the moment a rich bastard approaches, they quickly turn around and offer their bums to them!

Cario:

And I've heard the boys behave in the same manner. They fuck, not because they love their lover but because they love their lover's money!

Chremylus:

Not the nice boys, of course, just the whore boys. Nice boys don't ask for money.

Cario:

No? What do they ask for then?

Chremylus:

Things like a good horse, or some hunting dogs... that sort of thing.

Cario:

That's because they're ashamed of asking for the real stuff, so they hide their love for it by asking for things that cost a lot of money.

Chremylus: To Wealth

It's all because of you, Wealth! Every trade and every bit of thinking done by man is done because of you. One sits at a bench all day long mending shoes...

Cario:

Another bending bronze or shaving wood...

Chremylus:

Or melting all the gold you fork out to him...

Cario:

Or rob people, or do a bit of breaking and entering...

Chremylus:

Stitching patches on clothes...

Cario:

Washing woollies...

Chremylus:

Beat skins...

Cario:

Flog onions...

Chremylus:

Get caught red handed with someone else's missus and get his bum plugged by the husband... all because of you!

Wealth:

Bloody hell! I had no idea all this was going on because of me!

Cario:

And what about the Great Persian King? Doesn't he get himself all done up because of you? And isn't it because of you that our Assembly gathers?

Chremylus:

And our war ships. Who fits them up and loads them all up with soldiers?

Cario:

And the mercenary force in Corinth? Who pays for their provisions, ey? You, of course! And Pamphylus? Who was the cause of his tears? You, course! He'll now

have to spew out all the money he stole from the Treasury!

Chremylus:

Not only Pamphylus but also his mate, the pins and needles seller!

Cario:

Hahaha! And Argyrios? Aren't you the reason he farts so much?

Chremylus:

And Philepsius and all his bullshitting! You caused him to do that!

And you caused our alliance with Egypt and you caused the Corinthian whore, Lais, to fall in love with that dumb fatso, Philonides!

Cario:

Timotheus' tower...

Chremylus:

should fall on your head, Wealth! The only reason anything happens is because of you! You're the cause of everything that takes place, good and bad! Everything! That's for sure!

Cario:

During war, which side wins? The one you're on, of course! The side with the money always wins!

Wealth:

Wow! Am I capable of perpetrating all this? Me? On my own?

Chremylus:

By Zeus, yes! All that and more! Much more! No one can ever get enough of you!

You can have too much of everything else but of you... never!

You can have too much sex...

Cario:

... or too many bread rolls...

Chremylus:

..too much music...

Cario:

...too many juicy morsels...

Chremylus:

...just too much honour...

Cario:

...too many cakes...

Chremylus:

...too many heroics...

Cario:

...too many figs...

Chremylus:

...too much ambition...

Cario:

...too many barley rolls...

Chremylus:

...too many army ranks...

Cario:

...too much lentil soup...

Chremylus:

But as for you, Wealth, so far, there's never been anyone who ever had enough of you!

Give someone thirteen talents and he'll want sixteen. Put sixteen in his pocket and he'll yell for forty... and then he'll start whingeing that he can't survive on that!

Wealth:

It all sounds true, guys but... there's something that bothers me here.

Chremylus:

Like what?

Wealth:

All this power you two say I have, how on earth can I possibly control it all?

Chremylus:

Ah yes, how? Trying to squirm out of it, are you? No wonder everyone says that wealth creates the most cowards! The more of it you've got the more cowardly you are!

Wealth:

That's bullshit! A burglar gave me that nickname. Entered my house once and found nothing because I had everything locked up, so he called me "Cautious Coward!"

Chremylus:

All right, no worries! If you work with us on this, I'll get you an eyesight that's better than that of Lynceus the sharp-eyed Argonaut.

Wealth:

Can you do a thing like that? You're not a god.

Chremylus:

No but I've got high hopes because of what Phoebus Apollo uttered to me as he shook his Pythian laurel branches!

Wealth:

You mean you've got him hooked in this as well?

Chremylus:

Too right!

Wealth: fearfully

Ohhh, keep a sharp look out then!

Chremylus:

Have no fear, old boy! Now take note: Everything I've promised you shall come to pass. I stake my life upon it!

Cario:

And if needs be, I'll help as well.

Chremylus:

We'll have a whole lot of allies on our side, as well. All those honest folk who are starving.

Wealth:

Oh, no, no, no! Please! Poor people make bad allies!

Chremylus:

Not at all, after all, these poor people will become rich, right? Cario, you run now. Hurry as much as you can.

Cario:

Sure. Tell me where to and I shall hurry there.

Chremylus:

Go get all the other farmers and bring them here, to share in Wealth's gifts. You'll, probably find them all slaving away in their fields.

Cario:

All right, I'm off. Please get one of the slaves to take that meat inside. Indicating the sack he came in with.

Chremylus:

I'll look after that, you just hurry.

Exit Cario

Now, Wealth, the mightiest of all the gods, you come with me. Walks him over to the house. See this house? Wealth first nods then corrects himself by shaking his head. Chremylus guides his hand over the structure. This is the house you're going to fill

with riches today. Yes, today, this very day! One way or another! Fair or foul.

Chremylus opens the door which creaks eerily.

Wealth:

God, how frightened I get whenever I enter a stranger's house! It always turns bad on me! No good ever came out of it for me. If it's the house of a miser, then the bastard buries me in his back yard so that if a decent and kind bloke comes around and asks him for a little loan of me, he cries and whines and whinges and says he never saw me in his life! If, on the other hand I end up in some sleazebag's place, he throws me all away on dice and whores and, in no time, I'm back on my arse again, outside his door!

Chremylus:

That's because you never chanced upon people like me, moderate folk, well mannered. That's how I lived my whole life. I save my money and spend it only when I need to. Come now. Let's go inside. I must introduce you to Mrs Chremylus and to my son whom I love almost as much as I love you.

Wealth:

I believe you.

Chremylus:

Would anyone lie to you?

Exit Chremylus and Wealth into the house.

A moment later we hear Cario within, (SL) talking to a group of old farmers.

Cario:

Come, my old mates, come quick. You've been brought up on beatings and on hard work, on bread and olives –just like my master. Hurry! This is the moment we must stand strong, this is the hour we must work together. Hurry!

Enter the farmers (Chorus) carrying farm implements and wearing dirty old work clothes. They are old and bent from the life long hard work in the fields.

Chorus:

We're hurrying, we're hurrying! Can't you see? We're running as fast as our old limbs can let us. We're old and feeble...

Chorus:

We're running as fast as we can even though you still haven't told us what we're running for! What does your master want with us?

Cario:

I've told you a thousand times! My master called you here so that you can share in

his wealth. From now on you'll be living in luxury and in joy. No more torture, no more hard work, no more trouble!

Chorus:

What on earth is he promising us really?

Chorus:

How could he deliver such a thing?

Cario:

The old guy brought home another old guy, who's also dirty, who's also a hunchback, who's also shrivelled up, who's also stinking poor, who's also stinking, who's also toothless and, by Zeus, I reckon he's also had the skin at the tip of his cock shortened!

Chorus:

What? What did you say?

Chorus:

You golden messenger you! Repeat that for us. Are you saying this old man came here with a heap of money?

Cario: Kidding

No, I didn't say money, I said worries! A heap of woes and worries! Old man stuff.

Chorus: Raising his walking stick threateningly

Watch it! You think you can fool around with us like that? Forget it, boy! I've got my walking stick here!

Cario:

Do you think I'm a congenital dickhead or something? Don't you think I'm capable of saying anything sensible?

Chorus:

You're a smug shit, I know that! Take care of your legs, boy, they're screaming to be chained at the pillory! I can hear them legs of yours yelling, "ouch, ouchy, ouch!" Chains and stocks, boy! Chains and stocks for you!

Cario:

Ha! Now let me pluck your jury ball out of the urn. Let's see what sort of jury service you're on today. Pretending to be reading a ball Aha! Just as I thought! Coffin Court! Charos will hand you your pay ticket. Off you go, old man! Run for it!

Chorus:

You filthy piece of crap! I hope you're splattered into oblivion. Twisted bastard! Stop playing with us! You've made us all rush over here and still haven't explained to us why. We're busy men, you know.

Chorus:

We've ran so fast, we didn't get a chance to stop even for a minute to gather some thyme on the way.

Chorus:

There was so much of it, around, too!

Cario:

Poor things! All right, all right! I won't hold it back any longer. Here it is: My master, Mister Chremylus, has brought the god Wealth here, to make you all rich!

Chorus:

Is that true?

Chorus:

Is that possible? Can we all be made rich?

Cario:

As rich as Midas, all of you... if you could get yourselves some donkey ears, you'd look exactly like Midas himself!

Chorus:

Oh! You've made me so happy, I want to start dancing! You are telling the truth, aren't you?

Cario:

And I, I want to sing the Cyclops song! Tra lala tra lalala!

I'll sing and you dance! Hop! Let me show you: Hop like this, see? Dance properly, you lot. Use both your feet, come on!

Acting the blinded Cyclops, searching for his lambs in his sealed cave.

Come on, my little kiddies! Come, my little lambs! Sing to me your bleating songs loud and clear now! And you, my little goats, raise up your usual stench and crank up your cocks way up high! Come, kiddies, come get your breakfast now!

Chorus:

Tra lala tra lalala! Right! Our turn now to do the Cyclops. Now you be the Cyclops... We'll find you Cyclops, we'll find you... tra lala tra lalala. We'll cry out and bleat out, tra lala tra lalala and find you starving, carrying a sack full of wild cabbages and there you'd be, pissed as a fart, leading your little lambs along. And if you chance to fall deep into sleep, we'll poke your single eye out with a great big hot stick! Tra lala tra lalala!

Cario:

Hang on, hang on! Now I'll do Circe, the potion mixer. Stir those potions, stir, stir,

stir...

She stirred a potion for Philonedes' mates once, in Corinth. Made them all act like little piggies and then she had them eating shit patties that she had kneaded with her very own hands. Now, I'll be her while you lot be the little piggies! Now grunt away and follow mummy! We'll do everything they did.

Chorus:

Well then, if you're going to be Circe, the nasty potion-stirring witch that made those men eat shit, we'll do a happy Odysseus and... grab you by the balls, tip you upside down and rub your face in the dung heap, just like a stinky goat! Then you'll do Aristyllus and call out to us, "come on my darling piggies, follow your mummy!"

As the chorus tries to act out its role

Cario:

Enough, enough! Enough of games now!

I've got to go now. You start off another game while I go and pinch some food out of my master's pantry – just a bit of bread and meat – and then I'll come out again and join you in your work while I'm chomping into it.

Exit Cario. The chorus continues the playacting for a few minutes before Chremylus comes out of his house. He is now wearing better clothes.

Chremylus:

Oh, fellow citizens!

I'd hate to use the old, worn out phrase "Greetings, friends!" so I won't. I'll simply... respectfully welcome you all and thank you all for coming here so willingly, in such an orderly manner and without any undue delay.

Please stay with me now and support me in my efforts to save the god.

Chorus:

No worries, mate! Here we are. Just like war-loving Ares, himself! Ready for you! I mean, we'd be crazy to let the god of Wealth, himself slip away from our fingers when we have to go through all sorts of pushing and shoving just to get our three obols a day at the Council Meetings!

Chremylus: Looking into the distance

Ah, I can see Blepsidemus coming over as well! Look at him! The way he's huffing and puffing and rushing, he must have heard something about all of this.

Enter Blepsidemus

Blepsidemus:

Right oh, right oh! What's going on around here? How come Chremylus here is

suddenly, so bloody... wealthy... all of a sudden? Look at him! I can't believe this! All the barber shops are buzzing with the news, by Heracles! They're all talking about him suddenly becoming rich! And then, what shocked me most, is the fact that even though he's become rich, he's invited all his friends to his home. Now that's not normal, is it?

Chremylus:

All right, all right. I won't keep it from you. I'll tell you everything!

Blepsidemus, my friend, let me tell you that today we're far better off than we were yesterday –wealth wise, that is- and, since you're one of my friends, you'll get a share of it!

Blepsidemus:

They say you're rich now. Is that true?

Chremylus:

Any minute now, god willing. Any minute now. There's just one tiny, little impediment that's holding matters back a bit.

Blepsidemus:

Impediment? What sort of impediment?

Chremylus:

A sort of...

Blepsidemus:

Come on, man! Spit it out!

Chremylus:

A sort of... an impediment which, if removed, we'll all be swimming in joy but if not, then we're all going to be well and truly stuffed!

Blepsidemus:

Something dodgy about all this. I don't like it one bit. One minute you're filthy rich and the next minute, there's an impediment. I reckon you're up to something, here, something very unsanitary!

Chremylus:

"Unsanitary?" What do you mean, "unsanitary?"

Blepsidemus:

How would I know? Perhaps you've stolen some silver or some gold from the temple and now you're sick with worry.

Chremylus:

Apollo, my saviour! By Zeus, no, I've done no such thing, Blepsidemus!

Blepsidemus:

You can't trick me, mate! Cut the bullshit! I know very well what's going on.

Chremylus:

What a dreadfully suspicious mind you've got, Blepsidemus! I've done nothing! Ever!

Blepsidemus:

Dear, dear, dear me! Where has all the human honesty gone? Not a hint of it to be seen anywhere! Just greed! Lust for money, that's all that's left! Profit rules the world!

Chremylus:

You're a raving lunatic, Blepsidemus! By Demeter, I think you've lost it!

Blepsidemus: Pleading to the audience

God, how he's changed! He used to be such a good man, once!

Chremylus:

Poor bastard, you're nuts!

Blepsidemus:

Good Lord! Look at the look in his eye! Very dodgy! That's one very guilty look, that one. The bastard's done something real bad!

Chremylus:

Ha! I know what you're on about, boy! You reckon I stole something and you want a share of it but...

Blepsidemus:

Who, me? A share? A share of what?

Chremylus:

...but the truth is quite different! You've got it all arse-up!

Blepsidemus:

All right, so you didn't steal... you just... nicked 'n snatched things!

Chremylus:

They ought to tie you up, you madman!

Blepsidemus: Surprised

You mean, you didn't nick 'n snatch anything? From anybody?

Chremylus:

Never in my whole life!

Blepsidemus: Pleading

Oh Heracles! What do I do now? He won't tell us the truth!

Chremylus:

You rush off with accusations before you even check out the facts, you wanker!

Blepsidemus:

Mate, listen! Listen to me! For a tiny sum of money I can get the authorities off your back, lock their lips up with a few pieces of silver... before the whole town knows anything about your doings.

Chremylus:

Sure, sure, mate! And you'd do a real honest job of it too! Give the cops three minas and charge me a dozen! Good try!

Blepsidemus:

Oh, I can just see you now, Chremylus! You, your wife, your kids, in court, in the dock, holding the defendant's olive branches! Straight out of Pamphilus' play "Heracles' Children!" What a tragic sight, ey?

Chremylus:

You silly, godforsaken twit! You've got it all arse-up again! I'm going to do the complete opposite. What I'm about to do is to make sure that only the honest people, only the good and the wise folk will get rich!

Blepsidemus:

Good Lord! You mean to tell me you stole that much?

Chremylus:

Bloody hell! I've got my hands full with this one! You're killing me, mate!

Blepsidemus:

Methinks you're killing yourself... mate!

Chremylus:

Mate, why would I want to do that? I've got the very god, himself on my side. Wealth! Wealth himself!

Blepsidemus:

You got wealth? What wealth? Where?

Chremylus:

Yes, Wealth. God Wealth! The god himself!

Blepsidemus:

Oh, yeah? Where is he?

Chremylus: Indicating his house

In there!

Blepsidemus:

In there where?

Chremylus:

In there, in my house!

Blepsidemus:

In there? In your house?

Chremylus:

Absolutely!

Blepsidemus:

The crows you do! Bullshit! You've got the god in there! Utter...

Chremylus:

I swear by all the gods!

Blepsidemus:

True dinks?

Chremylus:

Very true dinks!

Blepsidemus:

Swear by the goddess Hestia!

Chremylus:

By Poseidon! I swear by the goddess Hestia,!

Blepsidemus:

Poseidon who? The god of the sea?

Chremylus:

Of course the god of the sea and if there's another one around, I swear by him, too!

Blepsidemus:

Wealth, ey? Why don't you sent him to visit us, too, us, your mates?

Chremylus:

We're not quite there yet, exactly.

Blepsidemus:

Not quite where, exactly, the sharing bit?

Chremylus:

That's right, by Zeus! First we need to...

Blepsidemus:

Oh, yes? Need to do what... exactly?

Chremylus:

We two need to help him see again.

Blepsidemus:

Help who to see again?

Chremylus:

The god. Wealth. Give him his sight back again. Any way we can.

Blepsidemus:

You mean the god is blind?

Chremylus:

Heavens, yes!

Blepsidemus:

No wonder he could never find my door!

Chremylus:

So let's hope that the gods are willing to let him come to you after this.

Blepsidemus:

Well, then, should we call a doctor?

Chremylus:

A doctor? In this town? They wouldn't earn their keep in this town! Poor people pay poorly. So, no money around, no doctors around.

Blepsidemus: Indicating the auditorium

Well, let's search the place!

Chremylus:

I'm telling you, there's no doctor in the house!

Blepsidemus:

Hmm, I think you might be right...

Chremylus:

Let's try my idea first. I reckon we should take him down to the temple of Asclepius and put him in a bed there. I think that'd be our best option.

Blepsidemus:

Yes, yes, that's a great idea. All right then, let's not waste any time. Hurry up and do whatever you need to do.

Chremylus:

Right! I'm off!

Blepsidemus:

Good. Go, go, go!

Chremylus:

I'm going, I'm going, I'm going!

Chremylus has turned to leave but is stopped dead by the goddess Poverty, a frightfully ugly old hag.

Poverty:

You! Stop right there! You wormy little mortals! Insolent, sacrilegious, crooked, god-hated little mortals! How dare you do this? Where do you think you're off to?

Blepsidemus: shocked with fear.

Abomination! Heracles, help me!

Poverty:

Right! You are carcasses! One way or another you two are going to die! How dare you perform such detestable, insufferable deeds, deeds that neither man nor god has ever before dared to perform?

Chremylus:

Oh yeah? And who are you? You look... bloody carcassy yourself, to me. Sick, are you? Jaundice?

Blepsidemus:

Must be one of those Furies, one of those ugly creatures from some tragedy or other. Euripides, most likely. She certainly looks wild! Out of her mind, too... tragic-like!

Chremylus:

Yeah but she's not carrying any torches like they all do in those tragedies.

Blepsidemus: Moves with his fist clenched

Then I'll beat the ugly witch up!

Poverty:

Hey! Hang on! Hang on a minute! Now look at me! Look at me carefully!

Don't you know who I am?

Chremylus:

Yeah, judging by all that unsolicited squealing you just did, you must be one of those porridge sellers, or maybe, an inn keeper. No one's even touched you and...

Poverty:

No one's touched me? What do you mean, no one's touched me? Aren't you two "touching" me by trying to throw me out of the whole country?

Chremylus:

Not quite. Not the whole Country, at least. We've reserved Killer's Cliff for you. You can go and hop off it, if you want!

Come on, then, out with it. Who in Hades' name are you?

Poverty:

I am she who will get her due justice from you two, for trying to exile me from my own country.

Blepsidemus: To Chremylus

You think it might be that barmaid next door who's always cheating me with my drinks?

Poverty:

I am the goddess Poverty! One of the many citizens of this town for a great many number of years!

Blepsidemus:

Blessed Apollo and you other gods, help us! How do we get out of this?

Chremylus:

What? Get out of it? You can't be that much of a coward, are you? You stay right here, my friend!

Blepsidemus:

No way! I'm not hanging around here...

Chremylus:

Of course you are! There's two of us –two men against one woman!

Blepsidemus:

A woman? A woman? That's the goddess Poverty, mate! There's no creature known to man that's more abominable, more devastating than Poverty! She's vile!

Chremylus:

Yeah, all right, all right! Now just hold on a minute!

Blepsidemus:

Nope, no way! I'm outa here!

Chremylus:

It'd be a cowardly and dishonourable act for us two to run off and leave this disgusting creature to have her way with our god, Wealth, without first fighting her... to death, if necessary!

Blepsidemus:

You got a sword hidden somewhere? A knife? Some sort of weapon? You still got a breastplate or a shield or something in that house of yours, anything that this freak of a goddess hasn't sent off to the pawnshop yet?

Chremylus:

Courage, mate! Courage! Trust me, our god will beat the nastiness out of this... this nasty creature!

Poverty:

You pair of scumbags! You still have the gall to whinge about my deeds when I've

just caught both of you, red handed, scheming about doing even worse deeds to me!

Chremylus:

And you, you horrible creature, what was all that screaming about? We did you no harm!

Poverty:

By all the gods in the heavens! You're trying to give Wealth back his eyesight! You don't think that's harm enough to me?

Chremylus:

How is it harm to you when all we're doing is bringing joy to the world?

Poverty:

What joy are you two capable of ever bringing to the world?

Chremylus:

What joy? To begin with, the joy of getting rid of you! Throw you right out of Greece!

Poverty:

Throw me out of Greece? You call that "joy?" This would be the biggest disaster you could cause to the people of Greece!

Chremylus:

An even bigger disaster would be caused if we did not fulfil our aims.

Poverty:

Well then, just about this little matter, let me give you some advice. Let me make you see the light right now! The fact is, I am the very fountain of all joy! Of all life, even! Now, if I can't prove this little fact to you, well then, you may do whatever you like with me.

Chremylus:

Ugly looking bitch! How dare you suggest a thing like that?

Poverty:

How? Quite easily. Listen and you'll see just how utterly wrong it would be for you to make only the honest people rich.

Chremylus:

Oh, no! Oh, no! Oh, no, bloody no! Cudgels, pillories, sticks and stones! Where are you all? Come to my aid now!

Poverty:

Why scream and squeal before you hear what I have to say?

Chremylus:

Who wouldn't scream and shout? The crap you talk! It's not possible for me to hold

back the outrage! Oh, no! Oh, no! Cudgels, pillories, get up here, all of you!

Poverty:

Oh well! Whatever turns you on, darling!

Chremylus:

So... how should I punish you if you fail to persuade me?

Poverty:

How? Anyway you like. Name my punishment!

Chremylus:

Beauty! This'll be good!

Poverty:

But! If you lose, you'll suffer the same punishment, right?

Chremylus: To Blepsidemus

What do you reckon? Death twenty times over?

Blepsidemus:

Sure, for her; for us, though, just twice will be more than enough!

Poverty:

Right! Well then, prepare to die, you two! Your death is nigh. There's no way, no fair way you can beat my argument.

Chorus:: To Chremylus and Blepsidemus

Up to you two guys, now. Use your wits and come up with a good speech to topple her argument. Make it real tough for her.

Chremylus:

It's so bloody obvious! Everyone knows that the good folk, the god-fearing folk, the folk who do an honest day's work, should be the ones who deserve to be rich, not the dishonest, godless crooks! That's what we're after and that's why we've come up with this honest and god-fearing plan, a plan which is good and full of virtue, a plan which will serve the whole of humanity! If the god of Wealth regains his eyesight, he won't be wandering aimlessly and blindly about like he does now and he'll be able to see who's honest and who's not and so he'll go to the good folk and shun all the godless crooks and all the bastards. The result? Everyone will become good and god-fearing... and rich!

So tell me, goddess Poverty, can anyone perform a better deed to humanity than this?

Blepsidemus:

Absolutely none, I swear! Don't bother asking that horrible bitch!

Chremylus:

Look at the way things are now! Humans have a deplorable life. They're cursed by the gods and they're mindless and they're dreadful! Surely, everyone agrees on that! Who are the wealthy? The crooks, of course! They're the ones who prosper; and they do it all by dishonesty and by disregarding the laws of the land. And the others? The honest and virtuous folk? They suffer and they spend most of their life in your wretched company! It's all your fault, Poverty!

And that's why I say that if we let Wealth regain his eyesight he'll stop this awful goddess here dead on her tracks. And what would be a better deed than that for the mortals?

Poverty:

You poor old fools! Must be paid up members of the Old Foggies Society for the Dopey and the Garrulous, no doubt. Both of you! You gullible twits! Listen, if your wishes were to be granted you'd be mortally sorry!

Listen and listen well! If Wealth were to get his sight back and if he spread himself around to everyone, who'd be doing any of the work then or even any of the thinking? And, once the work and the thinking disappear, who on earth would be doing all the work of the smiths and of the ship builders, of the tailors, the cartwheel makers, the cobblers, the brick makers, the launderers, the tanners? And who'll bother to till the soil with the ploughs and then reap Demeter's harvest afterwards, ey?

Who'll be doing all of that work if all you ever want to do is sit around idly all day, doing nothing and caring about nothing?

Chremylus:

What a lot of crap you're spewing out, witch! All this stuff you've just mentioned will be done by slaves!

Poverty:

Slaves? Slaves? Where are you going to get them from?

Chremylus:

Who, me? I'll have enough money to buy as many slaves as I want, of course!

Poverty:

Yeah? And who'd be selling them to you? And why would he... sell them to you, if he'd have all the money he needed as well?

Chremylus:

Who? Some greedy slave trader from Thessaly, of course. The place is clogged with them, that's who!

Poverty:

But, according to your silly logic, you won't be able to find a single slave trader in the whole world! Who, on earth would want to risk soul and limb trying out that sort of stuff, if he's already rich? Why would he want to any more? He'll have all the money he wants! No, sonny, it'd be you who'll have to do all that work. All that ploughing and all that digging and all that other work –it'd be you and you alone who'd have to do it. Your life will become even more difficult than it is now!

Chremylus:

Crap! May that be your Fate!

Poverty:

And forget about your nice, soft little bed with its warm and cosy coverings. Who'd be bothered making them for you? All that sewing and weaving! Why bother if you're already in the money? And as for your brides! When you men get married –if you ever get married!- and you want to bring your girls home, you'd have to do it without all those perfumes and all those beautiful, expensive gowns, so intricately and delicately made!

Nope! No delicate perfumes and no delicately woven and delightfully dyed and wonderfully decorated gowns for your brides, boys!

So, I ask you: what's the good of all that money if you can't get all that? No, boys! If you want all this stuff, then you've got to believe in me because it is I who stands next to these clever craftspeople and does the boss's work. It is I who forces them to do all that work. Yes, me, Poverty, whom they all want to avoid and earn themselves a livelihood, it is I who'll be making them do all that work for you!

Chremylus:

Oh yeah? And what about you, you stingy witch? Poverty, ey? What sort of life do you create? Burned bums at the bath houses, hoards of starving kids and old ladies, clouds and clouds of mozzies, gnats and fleas, all buzzing around our heads, keeping us awake all night, annoying us, whistling in our ears and warning us: "Wake up, boy" they scream all night, "wake up or you'll go hungry!"

And my clothes? Not lovely cloaks but old rags! My bed? Some old mat made out of some lice-infested twine! My blankets? Rags made out of hessian! Not a wink of sleep all night. As for pillows, we get the pleasure of resting our heads on huge rocks! And forget about bread and cakes. It's mallow shoots and withered old radish leaves, with you around! Chairs? What chairs? Broken old crock pots! Where do we knead our dough? Not in proper kneading troughs but in broken down old half barrels! And that, you old witch is the sort of life you give to people! That and worse!

Poverty:

You, you sly old shit. That's not the life of the poor people you've just described, that's the life of beggars!

Chremylus:

What's the difference? Don't we say that Poverty and Beggary are sisters?

Poverty:

Yeah, right! Just like the other thing you say: Thrasybulus, the great democrat, is the brother of Dionysius, the great tyrant! Democracy, Tyranny, it's all the same to you lot, isn't it?

Nope, no way! What you've just described has nothing to do with my life. Never had anything to do with it and it never will. Beggars have no possessions. They have nothing, whereas the poor people are cautious with their money. They work hard and even though they've got nothing to spare, they've got all they need. That's the difference.

Chremylus:

What a delightful life you've just described for the poor! By Demeter! Absolutely delightful! You tighten your belt more and more every day and you slog your guts out and then, when you finally kick the bucket you can't even afford your own funeral!

Poverty:

You're not being serious now! You're turning this into a farce, a bad comedy! You know very well that the sort of people that I create are far better than those created by Wealth! Both, the brain and the body of my men are far superior to those of Wealth. What do his men look like?

(Indicating the audience) Look at them: Limping around with gout, a fat bum, grotesque fat guts, swollen legs... you feel like puking just by looking at them! Now look at mine. See there? Lovely, slender body, the waist of a wasp, unbeatable in battle!

Chremylus:

Maybe they get their waspy waist from endless starvation, ey?

Poverty:

And let me tell you another thing about the poor. They are modest and civil, whereas the rich are all arrogant.

Chremylus:

Modest and civil means digging holes in walls and robbing people.

Blepsidemus:

Why not, if you can steal without getting caught? That's civil, isn't it?

Poverty:

Check out the politicians if you want. In every country. When they're poor, they're doing all sorts of good things for the public but then, when they become rich on public money, they all become real crooks. They scheme and plan and commit all sorts of vile wrongs on the poor folk.

Chremylus:

Well, you're not wrong there, even though you are a sly old witch. Still, don't think that your punishment is going to be any softer by trying to convince us that poverty is better than wealth!

Poverty:

But what about you? You haven't managed to prove the opposite, have you? All you're doing is waffling about crap and (indicating his animated hands) flapping your hands about as if they're the wings of some giant bird!

Chremylus:

So, tell me this then: Why does everyone run away from you?

Poverty:

Because I try to make better people out of them. They behave just like kids do when they run away from their father who's wise and wants to make them better grownups. Just like the kids, they find it too hard to understand the difference between good and evil.

Chremylus:

So you're saying that Zeus isn't wise, are you? Because that god is filthy rich!

Blepsidemus:

Yeah, he's rich all right but what is he doing for us, poor folk? He goes and sends this witch to us! (Sarcastically) Thank you, ZEUS!

Poverty:

Sick little brains! Antiquated, blind brains! You're both wrong! Zeus, in fact is very poor and I'll prove it to you. Wealthy he's not, otherwise, at the Olympic games, which are held every four years and where the cream of the Greek athletes gather to compete, if he was rich, he wouldn't be crowning the winners with wreaths made of mere wild olive branches! If he was truly rich, he'd be crowning their heads with wreaths made of pure gold!

Chremylus:

Which just proves that he's rich and, just like all the rich bastards, he's stingy and

keeps all the gold to himself. The winners get crap!

Poverty:

Oh, I see! You're trying to accuse the father of our gods not only of being rich but also of being something even more shameful than being poor: you're accusing him of being a greedy crook!

Chremylus:

I hope Zeus crowns you with a wreath made out of wild olive branches and then blows you to smithereens, you horrible creature!

Poverty:

You've still got the nerve to deny that it's to me, Poverty that you owe all your good luck?

Chremylus:

Ask Hekate, if you want! The very goddess of witchcraft. She'll tell you who's what! Ask her who's better off, the rich or the poor. She'll tell you about the meals that the rich put out in her honour. The moment the rich put their scraps up on the table, the poor snatch it all up!

Now piss off and stop your nagging! Not another word from you! There's no way you're going to convince me even if you do convince me!

Poverty: Frustrated

To quote Euripides: Oh, thou city of Argos, heed though this man's words!

Chremylus:

No, go to Aristophanes and call for one of his paupers, Pauson, your fellow diner.

Poverty:

Oh, the suffering I'm forced to endure!

Chremylus:

No need to endure anything. Just piss off out of here... NOW!

Poverty:

Piss off? Piss off where? Where on earth can I go?

Chremylus:

Go hang yourself! Go, go, go!

Poverty: As she's exiting

You'll be sorry for this! You'll be very sorry! You'll be begging me to come back again, very, very soon, you watch!

Chremylus:

Yeah right! Don't call us we'll call you! Meantime, I'd rather suffer the consequences

of being rich, thank you very much! If you want to go on whining, then get the hell out of here! Piss off as far away as you can!

Exit Poverty

Blepsidemus:

By Zeus! Give me wealth any day! Money, kids, wife, a warm bath, then a promenade around the city, the lot of us sparkling clean and farting in the face of the workers and Poverty! Yeah, give me wealth!

Chremylus:

Right! We've got rid of that irritating bitch. Now, mate, let's hurry up and take Wealth over to the shrine of Asclepius, the healer and make a bed there for him.

Blepsidemus:

Yes, we better hurry in case some other bastard comes along and wastes our time again and stuffs up our good work. Goes to the door and knocks. Cario appears.

Cario, my boy, go and get Wealth... and bring out the bedding for him and everything else you think he may need for a sleepover. Help him with whatever he needs.

Cario disappears into the house and a few seconds later he reappears guiding Wealth. They are followed by other slaves who are carrying bedding materials and sacks full with various (kitchen) items. All talk among themselves as they exit the stage.

Night comes and then dawn

Enter Cario. He is excited by the news he is about to announce.

Cario: To the Chorus. Rejoice you guys! Mates! Good old folk! Remember how you used to mop up your soup with your tiny, crumby little bread roll during the Theseus Festival? Well, mates, forget that now! And not only you but also every other honest human being in this city! No more crumby little bread rolls! We're all rich!

Chorus:

Is that right? Tell us, Cario, what's happened? Must be bloody good news by looks of you.

Cario:

Brilliant news, guys! Oh, how lucky my master is! And Wealth, himself of course, who, to quote Sophocles, "thanks to the kindness of the healer Asclepius, from blindness he has recovered and now he walks with seeing eyes and bright pupils."

Chorus:

Oh, what joyful words! Shouts Words worthy of shouting! Hurrahhhhhh!

Cario:

Joy is inescapable!

Chorus:

Hurrah for Asclepius! Hurrah for his light, the light of all humanity! Blessed are his children!

Enter Chremylus' wife

Wife:

What are you all shouting about? Sounds like good news. God, how I long for some good news! Cooped up in there all day, waiting and waiting...

Cario:

Go inside, woman and get the wine jug and we'll let you have some too! I know how you love the stuff, don't you worry! Go and I'll tell you a whole heap of great news! Now go! Hurry!

Wife:

Well? What news?

Cario:

You'll find out. In due course. I'll be making a speech about it all in a minute.

Wife:

Make it now and make it quick! Tell me!

Cario:

Oh, all right then! I'll break open the whole fuss and joy to you. I'll tell you everything, from beginning to end. Head to toe!

Wife:

Stay away from my head!

Cario:

Don't you even want to break open the good news?

Wife:

The good news you can break on my head. It's the fuss I don't want!

Cario:

Well, we first took this old man to the shrine of the god. What a miserable looking creature he was at that stage! Afterwards, of course, he became one of the happiest, most blessed men on earth. But first, we took him to the sea, to give him a bit of a wash.

Wife:

And what a blessing that would have been for the old guy: to be washed in the

freezing waves of the sea! Pure blessing, that would have been for him that one!

Cario:

It was. Then we took him to the shrine's precinct and, after we did all the proper sacrifices of the cakes and stuff, to sweeten Hephaistos' flame, as someone once said, we made a bed for the old man, got him to lie down and then we all made our own mats to sleep on.

Wife:

Did you see any other sick folk there?

Cario:

One in particular and many others in general. The one in particular was Neokleidis. He's blind in the eyes but has better vision than the folk with eyesight when it comes to snatching purses! There were people there with all sorts of diseases.

Anyhow, after we got out mats down, one of the shrine's overseers came out and told us all to snuff out all the candles and to go to sleep and not to make a noise, no matter what noises we heard during the night. So we all lay there quietly and orderly. But I just couldn't fall off to sleep. Right next to me was a little old lady and right beside her head was a pot of porridge. How could I possibly sleep with that pot of lovely porridge just sitting there? It drove me insane! I was overwhelmed by the desire to drag myself towards it. So I opened my eyes and looked up and what did I see? There was the shrine's overseer, going round all the altars and the sacred tables, snatching quietly all the sacred sacrifices, all the little sacred cakes and all the sacred figs and all the rest of the sacred stuff, so, I thought that the overseer must have been performing a sacred act and so, I went ahead and dragged myself from the bed to the pot of porridge.

Wife:

What? You rotten thief! Weren't you afraid of the god?

Cario:

Afraid? Of course I was afraid of the god! I was afraid that the god would turn up, sacred garland and all, and get to the pot before me! That's what I thought as I was watching his overseer guy!

Anyhow, the old woman heard me moving about so she stretched her hand over the pot but I hissed like a snake and bit her hand hard. She nearly shat herself with fear. She quickly pulled her hand back under her blanket and lay there quietly, shaking and farting for all her worth and stinking the place worse than a weasel! So, I quietly took a huge slurp of the porridge; huge enough to fill my stomach!

Wife:

But what about the god? Didn't he come out to you?

Cario:

Not just that very moment but, when he did come out later, I did another funny thing. As he was coming near me, I let out a loud series of farts. I couldn't help it. My guts were so full they were going to explode!

Wife:

At which point the god, no doubt, would have thought you were an absolute stinker!

Cario:

No, not him but his daughters, Iaso and Panacea were affected by it. Iaso turned red in the face and Panacea pinched her nose and turned her head away. Hehe, you see, darling, I don't let out perfume from my rear!

Wife:

What about the god himself? What did he do?

Cario:

It didn't bother him in the slightest!

Wife:

You're saying the god is an idiot?

Cario:

No, by Zeus, he's not an idiot, he's just a typical doctor. They all, you know... examine shit... sniff it and taste it and eat it. Very much used to the smell.

Wife:

Oh, you dreadful beast!

Cario:

Anyhow, after that, I got real scared, so I wrapped myself tightly under my cloak. The doctor went about examining all the other sick people. Very organised, he was, too. Went from one person to the next, carefully checking out what they were suffering from. Then an assistant of his came out and brought him a stone mortar and a pestle and then a box.

Wife:

The box was made of stone?

Cario:

No, not the box, just the mortar.

Wife:

Now how the hell do you know what he did? You said you were all rugged up in

your cloak. Bloody liar. How could you see what he did?

Cario:

My cloak is full of holes, woman. You can see right through them.

Anyhow, Neokleides was his first port of call. The god examined him and grounded a potion for him: Dropped three heads of Tenian garlic into the mortar, some fig juice, some dog onion, some Sphettian vinegar, pounded it all together and then, lifted Neokleidis' eyelids up and smeared the stuff right into his eyes, smeared it deep into his eyes and hard, to make the pain even more unbearable for him.

Well, Neokleidis jumps up with excruciating pain, screams, yells and shouts and tries to run away but the god grabbed him by the collar and said to him, "You stop right here, Neokleidis. Stay right here with the potion stuck in your eyes. That'll stop you from bringing false affidavits into the courts!"

Wife:

Now that's very patriotic of the god! Very clever, too, I might add.

Cario:

Anyhow... after that, the god went and sat next to our own old man, Wealth. He sat there and first pick up the old man's head, gently ran his hands over it, and with a clean towel wiped both the old guy's eyelids.

Then Panacea took a bit of red cloth and wrapped it round Wealth's face. Then the god gave out a hiss and two huge snakes came slithering out. Huge ones!

Wife:

Oh, my loving Lord!

Cario:

They slipped under the red cloth and, I guess, they just licked clean Wealth's eyelids. Well, not a minute later –less than the time it takes one to drink ten cups of wine, dear lady- our old man, Wealth jumps right up and, there he was, able to see perfectly!

Then, quick as a flash, god and snakes vanish!

Well you should have seen everyone's reaction! They all gathered round Wealth and kissed him and hugged him and stayed up with him all night long. I made a great speech praising the god Asclepius for giving sight to Wealth's eyes and for taking it completely away from Neokleides!

Wife:

Oh, Lord! Lord of Lords, what great powers you possess! Where's Wealth now?

Cario:

On his way here now but he's held back by a huge crowd that gathered around

him. You should have seen them all! All those who lived honestly but had no money came to him all full of smiles and joy and they were shaking his hand, whereas all the wealthy crooks, all those who got their money dishonestly, frowned and knitted their eyebrows tight! All the rest followed behind, singing and laughing and wearing garlands and calling out blessings to Wealth. You could hear the lovely beat the old guys made with their shoes as they all marched along!

So, come on, now, folks! Dance! Come on, all together now: dance and sing and march and be happy because the day will never come again when you come home and find your flour sack empty! Dance!

Wife:

By the goddess Hekate! What wonderful news! Just for that I'm going to hang a long necklace of bread rolls around your neck!

Cario:

Well, hurry then because they'll be here any minute now!

Wife:

All right, then, I'll run in and bring out some sweets to welcome the newly found sight!

Cario:

Yes, and I'll get myself ready to greet them all.

Wife exits into the house while Cario into the wing (S.R.)

Wealth: From within, (S.L) angry at the crowd following him

Yes, yes, yes! All right, then! All right!

Enter Wealth

Wealth:

Ah! Here we are! First and foremost, I bow to the Sun (does so) then, I bow to the glorious soil of our majestic goddess, Palas Athena and then I bow to the whole territory of Cecrops, the very first King of Athens.

I am ashamed at my previous attitude, ashamed at the company I associated with before, completely neglecting those who were, in fact, in grave need of me and deserved my support. That was terrible of me. Wrong in both cases. Neglected the wrong people and supported the wrong people. In short, I was a blind ignoramus. But, have no fear, my next move will be to reverse these wrongs and to show you all that I had no wish to be used by the crooks, by all that dishonest rabble.

Enter Chremylus and Cario from S.R. Chremylus has a lot of wreaths on his head. Again we hear shouts of an excited crowd within.

Chremylus: To the crowd

The hell with you all! Go on, piss off the lot of you! Go on, piss off!

Turns back to Cario

What a pain in the bum! How I hate all these so called friend that suddenly appear out of the blue, once the word gets around that you've become rich! Damn them! They crush you about, step on your toes, do all sorts of things to get to you and then ask you for a favour. Takes off the wreaths and throws them away in disgust. The whole damned town called out to me and shoved a wreath on my head! Everyone! Every old wanker in the place, damn them!

Enter wife carrying a tray of sweets

Wife: Greeting all three, Chremylus first.

Here you are, darling! You, too, Wealth and you, too, Cario. Greeting to all of you. Now, Wealth, let me do the traditional honours! Come here. Let me offer you some of these sweets...

Wealth:

Oh, no, dear lady! Oh no, no, no! You mustn't do anything of the sort because since it is the first time that I'm actually seeing the house and since is the first time I'm entering the house with my sight restored, nothing must be taken out of the house; instead, something must be taken into it!

Wife:

So you're going to refuse my sweets?

Wealth:

We must have them inside, by the hearth. That's the real tradition. Otherwise (Indicating the audience) the crowd out there will laugh at us. It's just not the done thing for the playwright of this wonderful comedy to be tossing figs and sweet munchies to the crowd hoping to gain their approval!

Wife:

Quite so, quite right! Looks into the audience and points at someone Hahaha! Look there! I can see Dexinikos already jumping up and down hoping to catch some figs!

All exit into the house and after a short pause cheery noises of a pleasant celebration are heard from within the house for a short while, then a quite pause, before Cario comes out. Smoke emanates from the house as he opens the door.

Cario: To the chorus

Oh, mates! What a lot of fun it is! How sweet it is to be happy without having to spend your own money! The house is packed with wonderful things, things acquired

without hurting anyone, no injustice done to anyone, no one suffered. Our pantry is bulging with flour, our coffers are clogged with gold and silver, enough to make you lose your mind!

Our oil pots are brimming with olive oil, our perfume jars with the most fragrant perfumes, and the attic, the attic is stuffed full of figs. You should see all our pots and pans and dishes! They're all bronze now! And you should see all those old fish pans we used to have! They're all made of shiny silver now! Even our lantern is now made of ivory. We slaves –you should see us playing dice! Forget the old pennies: These days we play with the big drachmas! Yes and when we go to the dunny, we don't wipe our bums with stones and rubbish, oh, no we use garlic leaves, to make our bums nice and soft!

And you should see our master right now! A garland on his head and crackling pig and roast goat and ram on his tray. He's offering it to everyone! The smoke he made roasting those animals on the spit! I couldn't stand it anymore. I had to get out of there. Burning the crap out of my eyes, it was.

Enter the Just Man followed by his slave who is carrying an old torn cloak and worn out shoes.

Just Man:

Come, my son, follow me. We're going to the god's house, just there.

Cario:

Hello? Who've got here?

Just Man:

Just a man, my good man. A man who was miserable once but who's very happy now.

Cario:

By the looks of you, you must be a just and honourable man!

Just Man:

Oh, very much so, very much so! Very just, very honourable!

Cario:

Soooo... what are you after now?

Just Man:

Me? I'm just looking for the god Wealth. I'm looking for him because, well, because he gave me so many good things! See, my father has just suddenly died and left me a great deal of money, so, I thought I'd do the just and honourable and useful thing and help out all my needy friends...

Cario:

So, let me guess now: You've completely run out of all that money daddy left you.

Just Man:

Yep!

Cario:

And so now, you're well and truly stuffed!

Just Man:

Yep! See, I was under the impression that helping friends in need was a good thing because if you were ever in need, then those you've helped when they were in need, would come and help you... in your hour of need, that is but... but the bastards, the moment they see me down the street, they dash over to the other side and pretend they don't know me!

Cario:

Bastards! And so, when you were in need, they were all laughing at you behind your back, as well, ey?

Just Man:

Yep. In need, alright! Lost the lot! Possession drought! Totally ruined. But, that was then, that's not now. Now, I'm here to show my gratitude and appreciation to the god.

Cario:

So, what's with this rag of a cloak the kid is carrying?

Just Man:

It's an offering. To the god, in there.

Cario: Takes it and examines it. He's appalled by it.

Good God! This is what you wore at the Great Mysteries... on your initiation day, isn't it?

Just Man:

No, that's not it but it's the one I froze to death in for the last thirteen years!

Cario:

And what about those shoes?

Just Man:

Them too. We fought a whole lot of blizzards together.

Cario:

And they're an offering too, are they?

Just Man:

Too right!

Cario:

Charming stuff! He'll be delighted with your offerings, I'm sure.

Enter Informer followed by a witness

Informer:

Penetrated! Stuffed! Screwed through and through! Done over! Impregnated! Poor bastard! I've been screwed over and over again! Three times over. No, four times! No, five times! No, a dozen times! A million times! Poor suck! What a disaster!

Cario:

Apollo save us! Apollo and all you other gods! What in Hades' name is wrong with that man?

Informer:

What a disaster, I tell you! My whole fortune is gone! Everything in my house is gone and it's all that god's fault! All his fault, I tell you and if there's any justice in this world, he'll be made blind again!

Just Man:

Hmmm... I think I can see what's happened here. Looks like our visitor's had a rough time of it recently but... he also looks a bit dodgy, I reckon.

Cario:

A bit dodgy all right. Then it serves him right, by Zeus!

Informer:

So where is that nasty creature of a god? The one who made all those promises about making us all rich once he regained his eyesight, ey? Ruin us, more like it! Totally bloody destroyed us, he did!

Cario:

Yeah? Who exactly is it that he's ruined?

Informer:

Who? Who? Me of course! He's ruined me! Myself!

Cario:

In that case you must be one of the crooks, one of those who love breaking and entering!

Informer:

Not me, mate! By Zeus, not I! Never! It's you lot who are the crooks! It's obvious: it's your lot that robbed me of all my money and possessions!

Cario:

By my darling goddess Demeter! What we have here is an informer! A blithering blubbering informer! A starving informer, even! How about that?

Informer:

You! They should be stretching you out on the wheel, at the market place! Torture you 'till you confess all your crimes!

Cario:

Yah, I reckon they ought to be doing that to you, mate, not me!

Just Man:

By Zeus the saviour! If only our dear god would somehow –anyhow!- put all these miserable informers out of circulation! The whole of Greece would rejoice!

Informer:

You too? Damn it man! You're in there with them? You, mocking me as well? Hang on! Where did you get this lovely cloak from all of a sudden? Yesterday you wearing worn-out rags.

Just Man:

I'm not afraid of you! I'm wearing this protective ring. Protects you from venomous snakes! Bought it for a drach from Eudamus.

Cario:

Hahaha! Ah, but alas, my friend, there's nothing in the world that can protect you from the bite of an informer!

Informer:

How bloody outrageous! Now you're both making fun of me! What on earth are you two doing hanging around here, anyway? I bet you're up to something nasty!

Cario:

Nasty for you, that's for sure!

Informer:

And I bet my bottom drachma, you'll be dining and wining with my money!

By Zeus!

Just Man:

And I hope you bust your gut, you bastard!

Cario:

And it'd be an empty gut, I hope!

Informer:

So you won't tell me what you're up to? You rotten slime balls! I bet that house is chokers with beautiful fish and meat. I can smell them cooking from here. Sniffs the

air Mmmmm! Mmmmm!

Cario:

What's you sniffing about, idiot?

Just Man:

I think he's got the sniffles. Caught a cold, I reckon. Look at that flimsy little jacket he's got on!

Informer:

Oh, Zeus and all you other gods and goddesses! Witness their dreadful arrogance! Towards me! Me, an honest, prim and proper, patriotic individual! Witness the suffering I'm suffering!

Just Man:

Hahaha! You? You? An honest and patriotic individual?

Informer:

Absolutely! There's no one more honest and more patriotic than me!

Just Man:

Is that right? Well, mate, I've got a question for you.

Informer:

Go on...

Just Man:

Are you a... farmer?

Informer:

What? Do you think I'm mad?

Just Man:

Are you a business man, then?

Informer:

Yeah... when I get the chance to do a bit of business.

Just Man:

Well, have you learnt a trade of any sort?

Informer:

Zeus, no!

Just Man:

So, you earn a living by doing nothing, ey? How do you manage that?

Informer:

Manage? I manage everything: everything regarding the State as well as the private sector!

Just Man:

Everything? How do you manage all that?

Informer:

I'm a... voluntary consultant!

Just Man:

You mean a meddler. One who meddles in other people's business. You crook! You! An honest and patriotic individual! Ha!

Informer:

Of course I'm honest and patriotic, you fool! Do I not help my city as much as I can?

Just Man:

So, you reckon sticking your nose in everybody else's business is helping the city?

Informer:

And isn't making sure that the city's laws are obeyed by everyone and that no one breaks them and gets away with it, isn't that helping the city?

Just Man:

But that's what the city pays jurors for!

Informer:

Of course it does but who does the prosecution work?

Just Man:

Busybodies.

Informer:

So, I, as a busybody... eh, a voluntary consultant, am, therefore, helping the city! See? The city's business is my business! I am her protector!

Just Man:

No wonder protection is such a rotten racket in this city! By Zeus!

Anyhow, look: wouldn't you rather mind your own business and have no business worries?

Informer:

I'm not a sheep, mate! I don't roam the paddocks aimlessly.

Just Man:

No point in asking you to mend your ways then, is there?

Informer:

Nope! Absolutely not. Not even if you handed me Wealth himself on a platter and all the fennel in Battus' pantry!

Cario:

Right! Then take off your cloak, right now!

Just Man: To the informer

Oi! He's talking to you!

Cario:

And your shoes!

Just Man:

He's still talking to you!

Informer:

Oh yeah? Well come and get them if you dare!

Cario:

I dare!

Cario rushes over to the informer and after a brief tussle, he removes the informer's cloak and shoes.

Informer:

Help! Oh, poor me! They're stripping me naked in broad daylight!

Cario:

That'll teach you ripping people off for a living!

Informer: To his witness

See this? You see what he's doing? You be my witness here!

Witness runs off in a fright.

Cario:

Hahaha! There goes your witness! Shot off the scene of the crime!

Informer:

Oh, no! Abandoned and all alone!

Cario:

What's you screaming about now?

Informer:

I'm screaming because I'm hurt!

Cario: To Just Man

Mate, hand me that old cloak of yours. I want to wrap it around him.

Just Man:

Oh, no, Cario! Please! I'm offering it to Wealth!

Cario:

Wealth doesn't wear such rotten rubbish. Rotten rubbish like this is only fit for rotten crooks like him. Wealth wears only modest and dignified clothes.

Cario makes the Informer wear Just Man's cloak.

Just Man:

Hang on, what about the shoes? What are we going to do with the shoes?

Cario:

The shoes? I'll nail the shoes on his bald head, like the offerings people nail on wild olive trees!

Informer:

All right, all right! You win! I'm leaving. It's obvious I can't take on the both of you but, believe me, if I can get myself a mate -any mate will do- to help me here, I'll have that mighty god of yours brought before the courts before the day's end. I'll have him charged with taking the city's laws into his own hands and trying to overthrow our Democracy, unilaterally and without the consent of the People's Assembly!

Just Man:

Hahaha! Go! Run quickly to the bath houses. With my battle gear on, you'll need to go stand guard at the fireplaces there to keep yourself warm. That was my spot for years!

Exit Informer

Cario:

Hahaha! But the owner of the bath house will take one look at him, figure him out for the crook that he is, grab him by his testicles and toss the nasty prick out!

Come on! Let's go inside now so that you can make your offerings to the god.

Exit Cario, Just Man and Just Man's slave into Chremylus' house.

Enter Old Woman with a slave who's carrying a tray of food.

Old Woman: To the men of the chorus

Ah! Tell me, please, old gentlemen, am I at the god's house or have I completely lost my way?

Chorus:

Hahaha! A girly question from an old girl! Yes, sweetie, you're right here. That there is the door to his house.

Old Woman:

Well then, let me call one of them out here...

Chremylus comes out of the house

Chremylus:

Don't bother. Here I am. What's up, dearie?

Old Woman:

What's up? Everything's up, dearie! I've suffered dreadful sufferings! Dreadful, unbearable injustices! So much suffering I've suffered after that god, Wealth got his eyesight back! My life's become... totally unliveable!

Chremylus:

Is that a fact? Don't tell me you're one of those female informers, are you? One of those that spy and inform on other women?

Old Woman:

Zeus, what are you saying? Certainly not!

Chremylus:

Well then... you're not one of those women who appear at drinking parties without an invitation card, are you?

Old Woman:

Stop making fun of me! Can't you see I'm desperate? I'm badly, badly burnt, sweetie!

Chremylus:

Burnt? Where? What do you mean?

Old Woman:

Well, you see, sweetie, I used to have a lovely young stud of a lover; a poor boy, not a cracker to his name but a damned good lover! Delicious boy, handsome, well mannered, did whatever I asked him to do... did it perfectly well, too. And, of course, I repaid all the favours, special and all.

Chremylus:

Special? What sort of special favours?

Old Woman:

Well, nothing much really. He was so modest with his requests. Very much so. For instance, he'd ask for, say, twenty drachmas for a cloak, or eight drachmas for a pair of shoes... and he'd get me to buy little skirts for his sisters or a dress for his mum... once he asked me for a sack of wheat...

Chremylus: sarcastically

Oh yeah, I can see he wasn't asking for much. He was certainly very... modest with his requests.

Old Woman:

That's right. And not only that but he never asked for anything just because he was greedy but because he loved me so much. Every time he wore the cloak I bought him he'd be thinking of me. That's why he wanted me to buy it for him.

Chremylus:

Now that's one very loving lover!

Old Woman:

But now! Now he's turned on me! Total shit, now! Totally changed. A different boy altogether. See this pie? And these figs and nuts? I've sent them to him on this very platter with a message that I'd be paying him a little visit tonight...

Chremylus:

And? This is getting interesting!

Old Woman:

And... and he sent the lot back along with this little cake here and this message –hang on- listen to this: Opens a folded piece of paper and reads, “there was a time when the Milesians were unbeatable but now...” Obviously he thinks I've had my day!

Chremylus:

Obviously! Quite good manners from the boy, as I see it, in fact. When he was poor, he'd eat anything but now that he's rich, he's obviously sick of your lentil soup.

Old Woman:

Heavens, yes. Before that he'd be knocking at my door every day! Never missed!

Chremylus:

Obviously waiting for your funeral...

Old Woman:

Zeus no! The boy loved to hear my voice.

Chremylus:

Loved his little gifts, more like it.

Old Woman:

And whenever he noticed that I was a bit sad, he'd call me his “little dove” and his “little hen.”

Chremylus:

And straight after that he'd be asking you for a pair of shoes, ey?

Old Woman:

He loved me so much, the boy was jealous of every other boy. Once, at the Great Mysteries, I was parading in my chariot and he suddenly noticed that some other boy turned his head towards me. Well, that day I got such a thrashing! I was beaten all day long!

Chremylus:

That's because, no doubt, he didn't want to share his lentils with anyone else!

Old Woman:

He said I had such beautiful hands...

Chremylus:

Whenever they were stuffed full of drachmas and stretched out to him, ey?

Old Woman:

And then he'd say, "my! How delightfully your skin smells!"

Chremylus:

As you're topping up his glass with a fine red, Thracian wine, right?

Old Woman:

How he loved my eyes! Told me they were all nice and gooey!

Chremylus:

Hahaha! Gooey, ey? He was a clever young man that one! He knew how to suck up all the goods off a horny old woman! Very clever boy!

Old Woman:

So, my good man, this new god of ours is not good! He says he will make sure that he'll look after the honest people but he does the exact opposite!

Chremylus:

Well, tell him what to do and he'll do it! What is it you want him to do?

Old Woman:

He should forced my lover to do the right thing by me. Repay me for my kindness. Or else to make sure he never gets to have a good life.

Chremylus:

But, surely, he repaid you every single night, hasn't he?

Old Woman:

Yes, but he's promised me he'd never leave me! Never, so long as I lived.

Chremylus:

Yes, so he must obviously think that you're dead now.

Old Woman:

Well no, I'm not dead but I am in the grips of grief, dearie. Believe me, I'm in agony, wasting away!

Chremylus:

No, not in the grips of grief but in the grips of death, old darling. You're not wasting away, you're rotting away, old girl!

Old Woman:

Yes, I'm wasting away so much, you could pull me right through a ring...

Chremylus:

Yes, one of those rings that hold a barrel together, that is!

Old Woman: Indicating behind the wing

Oh, look! Here comes the boy now! Oh! There he is! The very one I've been reproaching all this time. Oh, look! I think he's off to some party!

Chremylus:

Looks like it. He's covered in garlands and he's carrying a torch.

Enter a Young Man wearing a garland but carrying some more in his hand. A small sack of walnuts hangs from his belt.

Young Man:

G'day all!

Old Woman: to Chremylus

What was that? What did he say?

Chremylus:

Heavens, old girl! How fast you're aging!

Old Woman:

God help me! The insults I'm insulted with!

Chremylus:

By the looks of it, it must have been a very long time since he last saw you.

Old Woman:

What are you talking about, "long time?" He was at my place only yesterday!

Chremylus:

Then he's suffering the reverse of a very common ailment: He eyesight becomes sharper with wine.

Old Woman:

No, he was always a naughty boy!

Young Man: Brings his torch near her face and rudely inspects it.

O, Poseidon! God of the world's oceans! And all you, other ancient, ancient gods!

Look at the infinite number of wrinkles on her face! Simply infinite!

Old Woman: almost in tears with shame

Oh! Oh! Get that torch off me! Take it away from my face!

Chremylus: to Young Man

She's right, you! Take it away. One little spark from that and she's up in flames. Up like a dried up harvest wreath!

Young Man: to Old Woman

Hey, old dar!', you wanna spent some time with me? Spent a little time... playing up?

Old Woman: Excited at the prospect
Yeah, yeah... but where?

Young Man: Hands her a little sack of nuts
Right here, girly. Hang on, take these nuts!

Old Woman: Takes the nuts
What sort of game are we playing?

Young Man:
A guessing game. We'll see who can guess how many teeth you've got.

Chremylus:
Let me, let me! Let me guess how many she's got... I'd say three... or four maybe...

Young Man:
You lose! Pay up! She's only got one! One solitary, single, lonely, old molar!

Old Woman:
You deranged little shit! You're the absolute pits! You've gone and flooded me with insults in front of all these men!

Young Man:
It'll do you the world of good, old girl. The flood will wash some of that dirt off you.

Chremylus: puts his arm around her. His hand is wandering...
Wouldn't do her any good at all! It'd also wash all that make up off her. See how well she's prepared herself for a trick? The wash would reveal all the old ruins of her face.

Old Woman: To Chremylus
Looks like old age has scrambled your brain, old man.

Young Man:
I think he's after you, darling. I think he's trying to grab your tits when he thinks I'm not looking!

Old Woman: Disgusted at Chremylus
By Aphrodite! You're not grabbing my tits, you stinker!

Chremylus: removes his hand
Hahaha! By Hekate! No, I'm not that far gone!

Turning to Young Man

But, you! Listen, boy, I won't let you treat this little girl with such hatred!

Young Man:
Hatred? Who me? No! I absolutely adore this... little girl!

Chremylus:
So why does she make all these complains about you, then?

Young Man:

Complains? What sort of complains has she made about me?

Chremylus:

She says that you're full of insults and that you told her that "there was a time when the Milesians were unbeatable but now..."

Young Man:

All right, you win! She's all yours. You can have her! I'll let you take her from me without a fight!

Chremylus:

What are you on about, boy?

Young Man:

I mean, I won't fight you for her because I respect your age. It's an offer I wouldn't make to anyone else, old man, so, go ahead: take the young lady and go!

Chremylus:

Oh, I know what you're thinking! You're thinking you're too good for her.

Old Woman: To Young Man

Oi! Who gave you permission to give me away like that?

Young Man:

Darling, I simply don't want to fuck someone who's been fucked by... thirteen thousand years!

Chremylus:

Well, now, young man, no! Not how it works. You drank all the wine so, now you must also drink all the dregs.

Young Man:

Dregs? These dregs are ancient, mate! They're old, foul!

Chremylus:

No probs, just push it through the strainer sack.

Young Man:

Listen, I'd like to go inside now and dedicate these garlands to the god.

Old Woman:

Me, too! I want to tell him a couple of things, myself.

Young Man:

In that case, I'm not going in.

Chremylus:

Courage, boy! Don't worry, she's not going to rape you!

Young Man:

Just as well! I've been smearing her bum long enough now!

Old Woman:

Move, sonny! I'm right behind you!

Exit Young Man and Old Woman into Chremylus' house.

Chremylus:

Such tenacity! By Zeus, that old woman sticks to that young man like a clam on a rock!

Exit Chremylus into his house.

Enter Hermes from SL. He walks to the door and knocks on it and then hides behind the bench.

Cario: From within

Who is it? Who's knocking at my door? Opens the door, comes out and looks all around him. What's going on around here? I can't see anyone around here. Stupid door! Doing its own banging now!

Turns to go back inside

Hermes: Reveals himself

Oi, Cario! Hang on a tick!

Cario:

You! Were you banging so loudly on my door just then?

Hermes:

Who me? No way! But I was going to. You just beat me to it. Now run in, quickly and bring your boss out here... and his wife... and his kids... and his slaves, his dog, his pig and then bring yourself out, too! Go on! Run!

Cario:

Tell me what for, first!

Hermes:

It's Zeus, stupid! You've got him so angry he's going to toss you all into a big mortar and pestle you all up and then throw you to the dogs!

Cario:

News like that will have my tongue sliced and tossed on the sacrificial altar! What's got Zeus so bloody angry?

Hermes:

He's angry, stupid, because from the moment you gave Wealth his sight back, we gods received nothing from you mortals! Not a single sacrifice, not a whiff of incense, not

a single leaf of bay, not a single barley cake, not one victim, nothing! Absolutely nothing!

Cario:

Quite right, too. Why should we? And we won't be giving you anything in the future either. You gods have treated us so miserably in the past!

Hermes:

Listen, I don't particularly care too much about all the other gods but me? I'm absolutely ruined by all this!

Cario:

Smart thinking.

Hermes:

I used to get all sorts of delicious delights from the barmaids before. First thing in the morning. Out would come the wine cakes and the honey and the figs, offerings of all sorts for me. Hermes loves his delights, you know. Well, now I get bugger all. There I am, feet up in the air, stomach rumbling...

Cario:

It's a case of just deserts, isn't it? Didn't you often punish those very folks who made you those offerings?

Hermes:

Oh, dear! Oh dearie, dearie, me! There goes my Fourth of the Month cake! Oh dear!

Cario:

To quote the scribes, "You long for and lament for one that's long gone!" You get it, Hermes? No more cakes! Cakes are all gone!

Hermes:

Oh, how I long for and lament the loss of all those thigh bones I used to debone!

Cario:

You've done all the deboning of thighs you'll ever do. That's it!

Hermes:

And for all those tender gizzards...

Cario:

Looks like your own gizzards are in pain right now.

Hermes:

That delicious mixture of half wine, half water!

Cario: Turns his bum to Hermes and farts.

Here, mate, have a sip of this one. You gotta run fast to catch it though. Go on, off

you go!

Hermes:

Oh, go on, do your old friend a favour!

Cario:

Sure, if I can.

Hermes:

Go on, get me a well baked loaf of bread and a big, juicy steak to eat, from the stuff you're sacrificing in there.

Cario:

It's not a takeaway, mate.

Hermes:

But what about all the times I've helped you get away with pinching stuff from your master's house?

Cario:

Yeah, you helped me, all right. Helped me so that you could get your share of it, you crook! You'd always end up with some deliciously made little cake or other!

Hermes:

But in whose mouth did they end up?

Cario:

But you never took your share of the wounds inflicted upon my body whenever I got caught doing something.... naughty!

Hermes:

All right, all right! Thyle has been captured and the Spartans have high-tailed it from here. The victory is yours. Now, can we have Peace, please? In heaven's name, invite me into the house, let me live with you lot!

Cario:

What? So you want to leave all the gods behind and come and live down here?

Hermes:

Yes. Looks like you mortals down here, have it much better than we do up there.

Cario:

What? You're not going to desert your country, are you? Not a very polite thing to do.

Hermes:

One's country is where one's life is good.

Cario:

Is that a fact? And what do we get if we let you live with us?

Hermes:

You could use me as a Door Hinge Protector God. Have me standing in front of your door, protecting your door hinges, making sure no one smashes them and robs you blind.

Cario:

Na! No need for a Door Hinge Protector God any more.

Hermes:

Well, you can use me as a Middleman God, for all your wheeling and dealing.

Cario:

But we're all wealthy now. We don't need to be paying some Hermes the Middleman!

Hermes:

How about making me Protector of Crooks?

Cario:

Protector of Crooks? Mate, we don't need any crooks or their protectors. We are now all honest.

Hermes:

As a Guiding God?

Cario:

No need for one of them either. Our god can see now, see? He can do all the guiding we need.

Hermes:

All right then, I'll be your Protector of Sport God, then. Surely you can't say anything against that! All those contests on music and athletics, all done in the nude... Wealth would be pleased with that.

Cario: To the audience

What a lovely thing it is to have so many titles, ey? Can't miss out making a living when you can be the god of so many things! Our jurors must have learnt their tricks from this guy. That's why, one way or another, they get their names plastered on a whole lot of judicial lists.

Hermes:

Well? Am I in or am I out?

Cario:

Oh, all right, then! You can go in but when you do, go straight to the wash basin and wash some of the entrails –to show them you can do the job of an apprentice.

Both enter the house.

Enter Priest from SL

Priest: To the Chorus

Can someone tell me, clearly please, where Chremylus lives?

Enter Chremylus from the house

Chremylus:

What's up, mate?

Priest:

What's up? What's up? Nothing but trouble, mate! Shocking stuff! Starvation! Acute starvation! Ever since that god, Wealth, got his eyesight back, I've been left to starve, famished! I, the priest of Zeus, have nothing to eat!

Chremylus:

By the gods! How did that happen?

Priest:

It happened because nobody worries about sacrifices anymore.

Chremylus:

Is that right? Why ever not?

Priest:

Why? Because everyone is wealthy now, that's why! Before, when they were all poor, there was always the sacrifice made by a thankful merchant who returned home safely, or some man who was acquitted in the courts... and then all those folk whose sacrifices brought good omens would invite me to their home. Whereas now! No one, not a one, single man sacrifices anything nor visits the shrine anymore... the only visitors we get are those who want to use our toilet! Millions of them!

Chremylus:

No sharing the shit, then, ey?

Priest:

And that's why I'm saying good bye to Zeus and hello to Wealth. I want to live here, with you!

Chremylus:

Fear not, my good man because, if the god wills it, everything will be all right. Zeus himself –yes, the very god, Zeus the Saviour himself- is in there with us. He just walked in, totally of his own accord.

Priest:

What delightful news! I'm going right in!

Chremylus:

Patience, my good man, patience. We're about to install our god, Wealth, back in his old spot, in Acropolis, in Athena's temple, as a permanent guardian of her Treasure Chamber.

Now, somebody please bring us some lighted torches and you, priest, you can lead Wealth's procession.

Torches are brought and one is handed to the Priest.

Priest:

Many thanks!

Chremylus:

Someone call Wealth out here, please!

Old Woman and a slave come out of the house. The old woman is dressed in colourful, new clothes. The slave is carrying some chamber pots.

Old Woman:

And me? What can I do?

Chremylus:

Well, since you're all dressed up so colourfully, you can carry all the chamber pots on your head, in a dignified manner, of course, all the way to Athena's temple.

Old Woman:

But what about my problem? The one that brought me here in the first place?

Chremylus:

It's all going to be worked out. Your young lover will pay you a visit tonight.

Old Woman:

Well, if you can guarantee that for me, then I'll certainly carry the chamber pots.

Slave hands chamber pots to Old Woman who places them on her head.

Chremylus:

Well, look at that! The usual thing is for the chamber pots to carry the scum. Here we have the scum carrying the pots!

From the house come Wealth, followed by his family and slaves, Hermes, Zeus etc, who form a procession line, lead by the Priest

Chorus:

Let's not slow things down at all, ey guys?!

Chorus:

Yes, let us fall in behind the procession.

Chorus:

PLUTUS

dccv

Singing a holy song!

Exit all

KNIGHTS

This edition is based on the [publicly available](#)⁴²⁶ translation by Ian Johnston

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

Aristophanes' *Knights* is a sharp, bawdy, and, in some places, grim satiric allegory on Athenian political life. While the targets of the satire are clear enough, the translator or editor is forced to make some decisions about the names of the characters, because specific names are given only to Demos (whose name means "the people") and to the chorus of Knights.

The main butt of the jokes is clearly Cleon, the popular demagogue of Athenian politics, but the character who represents him is called the Paphlagonian, and Cleon's name is mentioned only once in the play. The term Paphlagonian refers not to an origin in Asia Minor but to his very aggressive rhetoric, since the name comes from the verb meaning "to bluster." The Paphlagonian's main opponent, the Sausage Seller, does have a name (Agoracrites), but that fact does not emerge until very late in the play. Hence, I have used the terms Paphlagonian and Sausage Seller to indicate these characters (some other editions of the play use the names Cleon and Agoracrites throughout).

The two slaves who open the play are not named specifically in the manuscripts, but traditionally they have been called Demosthenes and Nicias, after the two Athenian generals who were enemies of Cleon. I have retained these names because that seemed better than making up alternatives or calling them Slave A and Slave B.

The term Knights refers to an elite group of about a thousand cavalry in the Athenian military forces. Each Knight had to provide his own horse and would have expenses which he would have to pay himself. However, membership was considered socially prestigious and would be drawn from the richer, more aristocratic Athenians, who tended to be hostile to the populist demagogue Cleon.

At the time *Knights* was first produced (424 BC), Athens and Sparta had been at war for about seven years. The previous year Athens had won an important victory at Pylos against the Spartans, capturing a number of prisoners and bringing them

⁴²⁶<http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/aristophanes/knightsweb.htm>

back to Athens. Cleon engineered things so that he received the major credit for this success. As a result, he acquired considerable popularity and was awarded a number of state honours. However, in the view of many Athenians he had, in effect, stolen the credit from Demosthenes. This point is frequently mentioned in the play.

Knights was awarded first prize in the drama competition at the Lenaea festival in 424 BC.

...

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

DEMOSTHENES: a slave in the service of Demos

NICIAS: a slave in the service of Demos

A SAUSAGE SELLER: a low-born Athenian street merchant

PAPHLAGONIAN: a slave in the service of Demos

DEMOS: an elderly Athenian citizen

CHORUS OF KNIGHTS.

[The action takes place in an Athenian street in the Pnyx, the part of the city where the public assemblies were held. At the back there is an entrance to the house belonging to Demos. From within the house comes the noise of a slave being beaten with a whip and crying out in pain.]

DEMOSTHENES [bursting out of the door]

All right, that's it, that's just too much to take!

I've had it! That bastard interloper!

That miserable Paphlagonian!

I wish the gods would obliterate him—

him and his schemes. Since that awful day

he came into this house, because of him

we slaves keep getting beaten all the time.

NICIAS [coming out behind Demosthenes, in obvious pain]

That man is the very worst—a first-class

Paphlagonian—all those lies he tells!

DEMOSTHENES

Hey, you poor man, how you doing?

NICIAS

Not good.

The same as you.

DEMOSTHENES

All right, come over here,
so we can moan together, pipe a tune,
a duet in the manner of Olympus.

[Demosthenes and Nicias put their heads together and act as if they are both playing flutes, making whimpering sounds in harmony.]

DEMOSTHENES AND NICIAS

What can we do-o-ooooo,
We're just so black and blue-oo-oo.⁴²⁷

DEMOSTHENES

Why waste our moaning? We should stop whining
and look for some way to preserve our hides.

NICIAS

How could we do that?

DEMOSTHENES

Well, suggest something.

NICIAS

No, you tell me—that way I can avoid
fighting you about it.

[Here Demosthenes and Nicias briefly parody the grand tragic style.]

DEMOSTHENES

No. By Apollo. No.

I shall not speak.

NICIAS

Ah, if only you would tell me
what I should say.

DEMOSTHENES

Come. Screw your courage up
and speak. And then I shall confide in you.

NICIAS

But I dare not. How could I ever utter
the delicate phrasings of Euripides—
“Can’t thou not speak for me what I must say”?⁴²⁸

⁴²⁷Olympus was a musician from the 7th century who composed flute music. The Greek simply has them repeating a series of mu sounds, without any lyrics.

⁴²⁸Nicias is here quoting Euripides, a line where Phaedra wishes to confess her passion for her stepson without actually saying the words.

DEMOSTHENES

No, I don't want that. Don't toss those herbs around.
Instead find us some way we can dance off
and leave our master.⁴²⁹

NICIAS [miming masturbation]

Then say, "Let's beat off"—
all in one word, as I do.

DEMOSTHENES [copying Nicias]

All right, then,
I say, "Let's beat off."

NICIAS

Now after "Let's beat off,"
say "out of here."

DEMOSTHENES

"Out of here."

NICIAS

Very good.
It's like when you give yourself a hand job—
at first you say it gently, "Let's beat off,"
then you quickly speed it up—"out of here."

DEMOSTHENES [copying the gesture]

Let's beat off . . . out of here, let's beat off . . .

[Finally he sees what Nicias is getting at.]

Ah, we beat off out of here—we run away!

NICIAS

Well, what about it? Doesn't that sound sweet?

DEMOSTHENES

Yes, by god, it does—except for one thing:
I'm terrified that beating it like this
might be a prophecy about my skin.⁴³⁰

NICIAS

Why's that?

⁴²⁹Aristophanes is satirizing Euripides' origins by reminding people of the false rumour that his mother, Cleito, sold vegetables. The previous lines also satirize Euripides' style.

⁴³⁰The punishment for slaves who ran away during wartime was a ferocious whipping. Nonetheless, desertions were not uncommon.

DEMOSTHENES

Because when you pound your snake
the skin comes off.

NICIAS

The way things are right now
the best thing we can do is head on out
and throw ourselves down before some statue
of a god.

DEMOSTHENES

A statue? What kind of statue?
Do you really believe that there are gods?

NICIAS

Of course I do.

DEMOSTHENES

What sort of evidence
have you got for that?

NICIAS

Well, I'm someone
they obviously don't like. Doesn't that count
as sufficient evidence?⁴³¹

DEMOSTHENES

Proof enough for me.
So we'd better look for help some place else.
Do you want me to tell this audience
what's going on?

NICIAS

That's not a bad idea.
We could ask them to do one thing for us—
show us by their faces if they enjoy
what we say and what we do.

DEMOSTHENES

Then I'll speak up.

[He directs his explanation to the audience.]

We have a bad tempered and crude master.

⁴³¹The fact that he is so wretched demonstrates that there must be gods. Otherwise he would be better off.

He chews beans and is angry all the time—
Demos of the Pnyx, a grumpy old man
who's half deaf.⁴³² Last new moon he bought a slave,
a Paphlagonian tanner, a great scoundrel,
the most slanderous of rogues.⁴³³ And this slave,
this tanner from Paphlagonia, observed
the old man's habits. He threw himself down
at our master's feet and began fawning,
wheedling, flattering, buttering him up
with tiny scraps of leather, saying things like
"O Demos, once you've tried a single case
then take a bath," "Taste this," "Gulp this down,"
"Eat up," "Take three obols," "Would you like me
to get an evening meal ready for you?"⁴³⁴
Then that Paphlagonian grabs from one of us
something we've prepared and offers it up
to our master. Just a few days ago,
when I'd kneaded a Spartan barley cake
at Pylos, that devilish rogue somehow
snuck past me, seized the cake which I had made,
and presented it as his.⁴³⁵ He makes sure
we keep our distance and will not allow
anyone else to attend on Demos.
When our master's eating dinner, he stands
holding a leather thong and flicks away

⁴³²The detail about chewing beans may be a reference to Demos' crude habits. Some commentators see an allusion here to the use of beans to count votes in the election of public officials.

⁴³³Paphlagonia is a remote, rugged area on the southern shores of the Black Sea. The reference to a "tanner" identifies the slave for the audience as Cleon, a powerful politician and general in Athens, whose family derived their wealth from a tanning business. He was not from Paphlagonia. That word, however, also alludes to a blustery style of speech. Cleon was an opponent of the richer, aristocratic classes and was very aggressive in prosecuting the war with Sparta.

⁴³⁴This is an invitation to Demos to cut short his public duties at the law court and enjoy the pleasures of a bath and food, while still taking the full fee for his services. Three obols was the daily amount given for jury duty (Cleon had had the amount increased from two obols). The phrase "tiny bits of leather" is alleging that Cleon distributes small bribes to get his way with Demos (the people).

⁴³⁵In 425 BC (the year before the production of *Knights*) the Athenian general Demosthenes had engineered a military triumph against the Spartans at Pylos. Cleon had come out in the final stages of the campaign and together he and Demosthenes had inflicted a major defeat on the Spartans. Cleon received almost all the credit for the victory and, as a result, was extremely popular.

the orators. He chants out oracles,
so the old man is mad for prophecies.
And when he sees that he's quite lost his wits,
he goes to work according to his plan—
accusing those inside with outright lies,
so we get whipped, while that Paphlagonian
scampers around the servants, making demands,
stirring up trouble, taking bribes. He'll say,
“You see how I set things up so Hylas
got a beating.⁴³⁶ If you don't win me over,
then you're dead meat today.” So we pay up.
If we don't, the old man abuses us,
and we shit out eight times as much.

[Demosthenes turns back to Nicias.]

So now,
my friend, let's come up with something fast—
what pathway can we turn to and to whom?

NICIAS

The best way, my friend, is that beating off—
getting out of here.

DEMOSTHENES

But there's no damn way
we can escape the Paphlagonian.
That man sees everything. He has one leg
in Pylos, and he keeps his other leg
in the assembly. His two feet are spread
this far apart.

[Demosthenes demonstrates his words by almost doing the splits and keeps
talking from an awkward position, which gets worse as he goes on.]

His asshole is right here
over the Chaones, his hands are there,
in Aetolia, and his mind is over here,

⁴³⁶Hylas is a common name for a slave.

among the Clopidians.⁴³⁷

NICIAS

Then the best thing
for us would be to die.

DEMOSTHENES [getting up]

All right, let's see.

The most manly way we two could perish—
what would that be?

NICIAS

The most courageous way?

The best would be for us to drink bull's blood—
that's a good one to choose. Themistocles
died from that.⁴³⁸

DEMOSTHENES

No, by god, not that. But wine—
undiluted from the Good Spirit cup!

Then perhaps we'll think of something useful.⁴³⁹

NICIAS

O yes, unmixed wine! It's natural you'd think
of having a drink. But can anyone
come up with good advice when he's plastered?

DEMOSTHENES

What a thing to ask! Bah! You're a fountain
spouting streams of liquid bullshit! You dare
complain that wine disturbs the way we think?

What can you find better than some wine
for getting men to act effectively?

You see that when men drink, they get wealthy,

⁴³⁷The Chaones are a group living in north-west Greece. The Greek names for these places bring out certain double meanings which are lost in translation (except perhaps for the pun Cahones-cojones). Aetolia sounds like the Greek word meaning to demand, and Clopidae, a small part of Athens, sounds as if it comes from the Greek word for thief. The basic satiric point is that Cleon's reach is extensive and corrupt everywhere.

⁴³⁸Themistocles was a leading Athenian politician at the time of the Persian invasions and played a decisive role in the Persian defeat in 480 BC. Bull's blood was believed to be poisonous. However, there is no reliable evidence that Themistocles died drinking it.

⁴³⁹After dinner a libation of unmixed wine was made to the Good Spirit (i.e., Dionysus). In the regular drinking which followed the libation, the wine was mixed with water.

they are successful, they win their lawsuits,
they become happy and help out their friends.
Come, bring me out a jug of wine right now,
so I can refresh my mind and think up
something really clever.

NICIAS

By all the gods,
what will you end up doing to us
with this drinking of yours?

DEMOSTHENES

Something good.
Go get it, while I sit myself down right here.

[Nicias goes into the house.]

For if I do get drunk, then I'll spatter
tiny schemes and fancies, miniscule ideas,
in all directions.

[Nicias returns from the house with large jug of wine and a cup.]

NICIAS

It's a good thing
I wasn't caught in there stealing this wine.

DEMOSTHENES

Tell me—what's the Paphlagonian doing?

NICIAS

That slanderous rogue has been licking up
some cake he confiscated. Now he's drunk—
lying on his back, snoring on his hides.

DEMOSTHENES

Well, come on then, pour me a generous hit
of that unmixed wine . . . for a libation.⁴⁴⁰

NICIAS [pouring out the wine]

There. Take it and offer a libation
to the Good Spirit.

⁴⁴⁰A libation is an offering to a god in which a small amount of liquid is poured out, usually wine onto the ground or an altar. Nicias suspects Demosthenes is simply going to drink the wine; hence, the latter reassures him that he wants the wine for a religious purpose.

DEMOSTHENES [smelling and then gulping down the wine]
Drink this and swill down
the fine Pramnian spirit.⁴⁴¹ O excellent Spirit,
the idea is yours—not mine.

NICIAS

All right tell me.
I'm asking you. What is that great idea?

DEMOSTHENES

Get inside there and steal the oracles
belonging to the Paphlagonian—
quickly while he's asleep.⁴⁴²

NICIAS

All right, I'll go.
But I'm afraid I might find this Good Spirit
becomes the genius of my misfortune.

[Nicias goes back into the house]

DEMOSTHENES

Let's see now—I'll bring this jug over here
beside me so I can moisten my mind
and come up with some fabulous idea.

[Demosthenes takes another drink. Nicias comes back from the house with a scroll.]

NICIAS

That Paphlagonian—what a noise he makes
farting and snoring. Thanks to that I grabbed
the sacred oracle, the one he guards
so carefully, without him noticing.

DEMOSTHENES

You are the craftiest of men! Give it here,
so I can look it over—and pour me
a drink. Hurry up! Well now, let me see,
what's in here.

[Demosthenes reads the scroll.]

⁴⁴¹The term Pramnian refers to a wine of good quality produced in different places.

⁴⁴²The oracles are prophecies written out on scrolls.

O these prophecies! Quick!
Give me a drink! Come on!

NICIAS [pouring the wine]
Here you go. Well?
What does the oracle say?

DEMOSTHENES [draining the cup and holding it out]
Pour me another.

NICIAS [taking the cup]
That's what it says in there? "Pour another drink"?

DEMOSTHENES
O Bacis!⁴⁴³

NICIAS [pouring out more wine]
What is it?

DEMOSTHENES
Quick! Pass me that cup!

NICIAS
Bacis really gets to use that cup a lot.

DEMOSTHENES [looking at the scroll]
O you disgraceful Paphlagonian!
So that's why you've been protecting yourself
all this time! You're terrified of this oracle—
it's about you!

NICIAS
Why's that?

DEMOSTHENES
In here it says
how he's to be destroyed.

NICIAS
And how is that?

DEMOSTHENES
How? Well, this oracle states clearly
that first a dealer in hemp will come along
and, to start with, control city business.⁴⁴⁴

⁴⁴³Bacis was a well-known contemporary prophet, who is said to have predicted many events of the war.

⁴⁴⁴The dealer in hemp is Eucrates, an Athenian politician, who opposed and was removed from power by Cleon.

NICIAS

That's one wheeler dealer. So who comes next?

Tell me.

DEMOSTHENES

After that one comes another—
someone who deals in sheep.⁴⁴⁵

NICIAS

That's two dealers.

What's supposed to happen to that second one?

DEMOSTHENES

He's to be in charge until someone else,
a more repulsive man, comes on the scene.
Once that happens, he dies. His successor
is a leather dealer and a robber,
a Paphlagonian with a screaming voice,
like the raging stream of Cycloborus.⁴⁴⁶

NICIAS

So fate decreed that the dealer in sheep
was toppled by the leather dealer?

DEMOSTHENES

That's right.

NICIAS

Then heaven help us—we're in deep trouble!
I wish some other dealer might show up
from somewhere—just one!

DEMOSTHENES

Well, there is one—
he has a splendid trade.

NICIAS

Tell me who that is.

Come on, I'm asking you.

DEMOSTHENES

⁴⁴⁵The sheep dealer is a reference to Lysicles, who was killed in a military action in 428 BC. The repeated notion of political leaders who first make money from common trades, as Sommerstein suggests, is emphasizing a new breed of politician in the state, a middle-class merchant who uses his money to gain political influence and power.

⁴⁴⁶The Cycloborus was a stream near Athens which turned into a noisy torrent in the spring.

Want me to tell you?

NICIAS

Yes. For god's sake!

DEMOSTHENES [reading from the scroll]

The man who will destroy
the Paphlagonian is a sausage dealer.

NICIAS

A sausage dealer? O Poseidon, what a trade!

Let's see, where do we find a man like that?

DEMOSTHENES

Let's go look for him.

[Enter the Sausage Seller carrying a table, knives, sausages, and so on.]

NICIAS

Hey, there's one coming here,
as if he's off to market. A stroke of luck!

DEMOSTHENES [calling to the Sausage Seller]

Hey, sausage seller—you blessed creature.

Come on over here, dear friend—over here.⁴⁴⁷

You show up as a saviour for the city
and for the two of us.

SAUSAGE SELLER

What's going on?

Why are you calling me?

DEMOSTHENES

Come over here,
so you can find out your enormous luck,
how tremendously fortunate you are.

[The Sausage Seller climbs up from the orchestra onto the stage with Demosthenes and Nicias.]

NICIAS

Come on, take that table from him. Tell him
what the god's oracle proclaims. I'll go
and keep watch on the Paphlagonian.

[Nicias exits into the house.]

⁴⁴⁷The Greek says "up here," because Demosthenes is on a stage, above the orchestra, where the Sausage Seller enters.

DEMOSTHENES

All right. First of all, set that equipment down on the ground here. And make a sacred salute to the earth and to the gods.⁴⁴⁸

SAUSAGE SELLER [carrying out those actions]
There! What's going on?

DEMOSTHENES

O you most blest of men! And wealthy, too!
Today you have nothing, but tomorrow
you will be immensely great, chief leader
of a happy Athens!

SAUSAGE SELLER

My good fellow,
why not leave me alone to wash my tripe
and sell sausages, instead of mocking me?

DEMOSTHENES

You silly fool! Forget about your tripe!
Look over there. Do you see these people,
all these rows?

SAUSAGE SELLER

I see them.

DEMOSTHENES

You're going to be
lord and master of them all, in control
of the market places and the harbours
and of the Pnyx. You'll stomp on the Council,
keep generals in line, tie people up,
throw them in jail—and in the Prytaneum
you'll be sucking cocks.⁴⁴⁹

SAUSAGE SELLER

⁴⁴⁸Merry notes that the salute would be with the thumb and forefinger touching the lips, a gesture made at a moment of great good fortune.

⁴⁴⁹The Pnyx is a large amphitheatre west of the Acropolis in Athens where the Athenian assembly met. The Prytaneum was the symbolic centre of civic life, a building where a sacred fire was kept and important figures were entertained. Citizens who had given exceptional service to the state could gain the privilege of eating there at public expense. Sommerstein notes that the sexual depravity is a swipe at Athenian politicians and an indication of the Sausage Seller's fitness for public office, since he does not object to the gross insult which calls him, in effect, a public prostitute.

Me?

DEMOSTHENES

Yes, you of course.

But you're not seeing the whole picture yet.

Climb up on this table of yours—gaze out
at all the islands there surrounding us.

SAUSAGE SELLER [climbs up on his table and looks out]

I see them.

DEMOSTHENES

What do you see? Trading ports?

Merchant ships?

SAUSAGE SELLER

Yes. I see those.

DEMOSTHENES

All right then,

how can you not be immensely fortunate?

Now turn your right eye towards Caria

and the other eye towards Carthage.⁴⁵⁰

SAUSAGE SELLER [in great discomfort]

I'll be happy

once I dislocate my neck!

DEMOSTHENES

That not the point.

All that land is to be traded away,

thanks to you. For you are going to be

the most powerful of men—this oracle

says so right here.

SAUSAGE SELLER

Then explain this to me—

How am I, a seller of sausages,

going to change to someone respectable?

DEMOSTHENES

The very reason you'll be powerful

⁴⁵⁰Caria is a city on the east coast of Asia Minor and Carthage is far to the west of Athens. The Sausage Seller is being asked to survey virtually the whole eastern and central Mediterranean. Neither Caria nor Carthage is part of the Athenian empire, but some ambitious politicians were hoping to extend that empire in both directions.[Back to Text]

is that you're a shameless market rascal—
and impudent, as well.

SAUSAGE SELLER

But I don't think
I'm good enough to have great influence.

DEMOSTHENES

Good heavens, whatever is wrong with you
to make you say you're not good enough?
You must, I'm sure, know something remarkable
about yourself. What about your parents?
Don't you come from good and honest people?

SAUSAGE SELLER

By god no! Nothing but worthless rabble.

DEMOSTHENES

O you fine fellow! Such amazing luck!
For political affairs you really have
such great advantages!

SAUSAGE SELLER

But, my good man,
I have no education, nothing but
reading and writing, and I'm bad at those—
real bad.

DEMOSTHENES

That's the only thing stopping you,
that you can read and write even poorly—
real bad. You see, a leader of the people
no longer needs to have any training
or be honest in his dealings. Instead
he should be ignorant and disgusting.
But you must not disregard what the gods
are offering you in this oracle.

SAUSAGE SELLER

What does the oracle say?

DEMOSTHENES

By the gods,

it's good—but its style is rather intricate,
written as a sophisticated riddle.

[He reads the oracle in a solemn tone.]

“But when the eagle tanner with his crooked claws
shall in his beak seize the stupid, blood-sucking serpent,
then will perish the Paphlagonian's pickled garlic,
and then the gods will bestow enormous fame
on those whose vocation is to market tripe
unless they would prefer to sell their sausages.”

SAUSAGE SELLER

How has this got anything to do with me?

DEMOSTHENES

Well, the eagle tanner is that man there—

[Demosthenes points to Cleon sitting in the audience.]
the Paphlagonian . . .

SAUSAGE SELLER

Those “crooked claws”—
what are they?

DEMODOCUS

What those words mean is clear.
He seizes things in hands crooked like claws
and confiscates them.

SAUSAGE SELLER

What about the serpent?

DEMOSTHENES

That's obvious. The serpent is elongated,
as is the sausage, which is also long.
And sausages, like serpents, suck up blood.
Hence, it says the serpent will now conquer
the eagle tanner, unless his resolve
is broken down by words.⁴⁵¹

SAUSAGE SELLER

Well, this oracle

⁴⁵¹This seems to mean, as Sommerstein points out, that the serpent-sausage maker will prevail, unless he is intimidated by Cleon's bluster. Green notes (following Walsh) that the mention of blood suggests that the sausages may be more like black pudding than conventional sausages.

makes me sound good. Still, I'm wondering how I'll be able to rule the people.

DEMOSTHENES

That's ridiculously easy. Keep doing what you're doing. Make a complete hash of public business, mix things together, like sausage meat, and always win people to your side with well-cooked little phrases to sweeten them. The other qualities a leader of the public really needs you have already—a disgusting voice and disreputable birth—and what's more, you're a product of the market place. You possess all the qualities essential for politics. The oracles agree, including Apollo's shrine at Delphi. So crown yourself with a garland wreath, make a libation to the god of idiots, and then give that man what he deserves.

SAUSAGE SELLER

Who is going to help me out? Rich men fear him, and poor men are so terrified they fart.

DEMOSTHENES

But there are a thousand excellent men, the Knights, who hate him. They will assist you—along with the upright and honest men among the citizens, all people here in this audience who have any brains, and me. The god will help you out as well. Have no fear. You won't see a face like his—the men who make the masks were just too scared to dare prepare something that looked like him. But he'll still be easy to recognize—

the audience is smart enough for that!⁴⁵²

NICIAS [from inside]

What the hell! The Paphlagonian—
he's coming out! We're done for!

[The Paphlagonian rushes out of the house.]

PAPHLAGONIAN [roaring]

By the twelve gods, you won't get away with this—
an ongoing conspiracy against the public!
What going on with this Chalcidian cup?

You must be stirring an insurgency
among Chalcidians. You will be killed—
you pair of polluted rogues—you will perish!⁴⁵³

[The Sausage Seller backs away in terror.]

DEMOSTHENES [to the Sausage Seller]

Hey, why are you backing off? Stand up to him!
O noble sausage seller, do not betray
our public cause!

[Demosthenes starts shouting at the Chorus offstage in the wings.]

You Knights, cavalry men,
help us out—now is a time of crisis!
Simon, Panaetius! Charge the right wing!

[He goes to the Sausage Seller and turns him to face the Paphlagonian.]

They're getting close. Come on, defend yourself!
Wheel round for an attack! Their cloud of dust
is clearly visible. They're coming on—
almost here. So fight back, chase him away,
get that Paphlagonian out of here!

[Demosthenes pushes the Sausage Seller towards the Paphlagonian as the Chorus
of Knights comes running in. They chase the Paphlagonian around the stage.]

CHORUS LEADER

⁴⁵²This is either a joke at Cleon's expense (his face is so hideous and terrifying that artists are too scared to create a likeness) or else, as Sommerstein suggests, Aristophanes may have had legal reasons for not depicting Cleon visually (or using his name in the play). Given the comic possibilities of a mask, it seems odd that one is not used for the Paphlagonian. According to tradition, Aristophanes may have played the part of the Paphlagonian himself with his face smeared with ochre and wine-lees. [Back to Text]

⁴⁵³The cup Demodocus has been using is made of silver from Chalcis. The Paphlagonian immediately concludes they must be fomenting a revolt against Athens in the region of Chalcis.

Hit him! Hit that wretch who spreads confusion
among the cavalry! That tax collector!
That gaping gulf of greed! That Charybdis!⁴⁵⁴
Villain, villain, villain—I'll say that word
again and again, for he's a villain
many times a day! Beat him! Chase him off!
Keep after him! Don't give him any peace!
Show you hate that man as much as we do—
and shout out as you swarm all over him!
Take care he doesn't get away from you.
He knows the alleyways Eucrates took
to run off straight back to the market place.⁴⁵⁵

PAPHLAGONIAN [addressing the audience]

You old jurymen, my three-obol brothers,
whom I nourish with my raucous shouting
of just and unjust things, help me out now!
I'm being lambasted by conspirators.

CHORUS LEADER

And justly so! Because you gobble up
public funds before you're picked for office,
and when state officials submit accounts,
you squeeze them, as if you were picking figs,
to see which ones are green and hard, or ripe,
or not yet fully seasoned.⁴⁵⁶ And what's more,
you keep your eye peeled for any citizen
who's stupid as a sheep but has money
and who's terrified of public business,
and if you find one, some simple fool
who avoids all politics, you haul him back
from the Chersonese, then wrap him up

⁴⁵⁴Charybdis was a destructive whirlpool which sucked everything down into it. In Odyssey 12, it is an important hazard Odysseus and his crew must cope with.

⁴⁵⁵The precise meaning of this line is obscure. Merry notes that it might refer to the fact that Eucrates, once he was driven from political power by Cleon, went back to being a commercially successful bran merchant. Green suggests that it might be based on a well-known event when Eucrates escaped danger by hiding under a pile of bran.

⁴⁵⁶Outgoing public officials had to have their use of public money checked by an audit, a process which, so this states, Cleon abused.

in slanders, hook his knees, twist his shoulder,
fall all over him, and swallow him up.⁴⁵⁷

PAPHLAGONIAN

You're attacking me as well? But, my good men,
it's because of you I'm being beaten up—
I was just on the point of proposing
we ought to set up a memorial
to your bravery here in the city.

[The Chorus has moved to surround the Paphlagonian.]

CHORUS LEADER [threatening the Paphlagonian with his fist]

O you impostor! You slippery rogue!
See how he sweet talks and swindles us,
as if we were senile old men? But if
he jumps this way, I'll thump him with this fist.
If he slips down here my legs will kick him.

PAPHLAGONIAN [appealing to the audience]

O you people! O city! Look at this—
savage beasts are pummelling my belly.

[Demosthenes pushes the Sausage Seller into the crowd surrounding the Paphlagonian.]

SAUSAGE SELLER

Ah, are you now rabble rousing, the way
you always do when bullying the city?⁴⁵⁸

PAPHLAGONIAN

With this loud voice of mine I'll make a start
by forcing you to run away.

CHORUS LEADER

If your shouting
defeats him, then bully for you—you win.
But if his shamelessness surpasses yours,

⁴⁵⁷I follow Merry and Sommerstein and others in placing lines 264 and 265 of the Greek text between lines 260 and 261. The Chersonese is a distant region to the north east of Athens, in Thrace. The suggestion seems to be that the Athenian citizen had gone there for a peaceful, non-political life.

⁴⁵⁸There is some doubt over the speaker of these lines. Along with other editors, I assign them to the Sausage Seller, since he must enter the argument at some point, and assigning this speech to the Chorus Leader, as the manuscript does, creates a staging problem.

then the victory cake belongs to us.⁴⁵⁹

PAPHLAGONIAN [pointing to the Sausage Seller]
I denounce this man. I claim he smuggles soup
out to the Peloponnesian warships!

SAUSAGE SELLER

And I, by god, am accusing this man
of running into the Prytaneum
with an empty stomach, then coming out
with his guts crammed full.

DEMOSTHENES

That's right, by god.
And he carries off prohibited stuff—
bread, meat, slices of fried fish. The people
never considered Pericles worthy
of that honour.⁴⁶⁰

[The Paphlagonian and the Sausage Seller now get into a shouting match.]

PAPHLAGONIAN

The two of you will die—
right on the spot!

SAUSAGE SELLER

I'll keep on screaming out
three times as loud as you!

PAPHLAGONIAN

I'll yell so loud
I'll drown out your noise!

SAUSAGE SELLER

And when I bellow,
your hollering will cease.

PAPHLAGONIAN

If you become
a general, I'll smear your name with dirt.

⁴⁵⁹A honey cake was a prize at a drinking party for the best performer and for the one who stayed awake the longest.

⁴⁶⁰Pericles was the political leader in Athens at the height of its glory. He died of the plague a year after war broke out. These lines apparently mean that he never received the honour of dining at public expense at the Prytaneum. They also suggest that whoever did have that honour was not entitled to take food away with him.

SAUSAGE SELLER

I'll thrash your back, as if you were a dog.

PAPHLAGONIAN

I'll skin you alive with false accusations.

SAUSAGE SELLER

I'll use illegal ways to block your path.

PAPHLAGONIAN

Look me right in the eye. Try not to blink.

[The Paphlagonian and the Sausage Seller are now engaged in a stare-down contest with very little distance between them.]

SAUSAGE SELLER

I, too, was brought up in the market place.⁴⁶¹

PAPHLAGONIAN

If you make a sound, I'll tear you apart.

SAUSAGE SELLER

Say a word and I'll stuff your mouth with shit.

[Pause as they try to stare each other down. The Paphlagonian is the first to look away, straighten up, and continue.]

PAPHLAGONIAN

I admit I'm a thief. You don't do that.

SAUSAGE SELLER

By Hermes of the market place, yes I do.

And if anybody sees me stealing,

I just lie—perjure myself under oath.

PAPHLAGONIAN

Then you're copying someone else's tricks—

doing what I do! And I denounce you

to the city council for possessing

sacred tripe for which you've paid no taxes.⁴⁶²

CHORUS

You're a wretched, disreputable screamer!

[They start a rhythmic chant around the Paphlagonian.]

⁴⁶¹In other words, I'm just as capable of putting a bold face on things as you are.

⁴⁶²The Greek uses the word Prytanes, which, as Sommerstein notes, is the business committee of the City Council. He also suggests that with the phrase "sacred tripe" the Paphlagonian may be stating that the Sausage Seller's wares are spoils of war and thus subject to tax.

The whole world is full of your impudent snorts—
all meetings, all taxes, decrees, and the courts
you stir up like mud and disrupt the whole town
and deafen our Athens by shouting us down.
For money from tribute you take careful stock,
like spying out tuna from high on a rock.⁴⁶³

PAPHLAGONIAN

I know what's going on here—it's been sliced out
of an old piece of leather.

SAUSAGE SELLER

Well, if you
don't know a thing about cutting leather,
then I know nothing about sausages.
You're the one who used a misleading cut
to slice leather from a crappy ox hide
and cheated country folk by selling it,
so before they'd worn it a single day,
it had stretched and was two palm widths bigger.⁴⁶⁴

DEMOSTHENES

Yes, by god, he did the same thing to me.
It made me a huge laughing stock to friends
and neighbours. Before I'd reached Pergase,
it was like I was swimming in my sandals.⁴⁶⁵

CHORUS [continuing their chant]

And right from the start weren't you shameless as hell,
the single protection for those who speak well?
Relying on your crassness you squeeze money out
from strangers with cash, for you've got all the clout.
Hippodamus' son is watching in tears,
but now someone else I like better appears.⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶³Merry notes that in coastal regions people on land kept watch for shoals of tuna fish.

⁴⁶⁴The leather was cut obliquely so as to look thick and strong, but it was so bad, it quickly expanded, and the shoes no longer fit.

⁴⁶⁵Pergase was a community close to Athens. Hence, the trip to it would be a short walk.

⁴⁶⁶Hippodamus' son is Archeptolemus, a well-known politician. From this reference it would appear that he is opposed to Cleon's aggressive war policies but is doing nothing about them. Merry mentions that Archeptolemus was probably in the audience, so that the phrase "watching in tears" takes on an added significance.

He's more shameless by far, and he will win through—
his impudent swindles will clearly beat you.

CHORUS LEADER [to the Sausage Seller]

All right, you who were brought up in that place
where men worthy of the name come from,
show us now how a decent upbringing
doesn't mean a thing.⁴⁶⁷

SAUSAGE SELLER

Well, then you must hear
what sort of citizen this fellow is.

PAPHLAGONIAN

Will you let me speak?

SAUSAGE SELLER

Of course, I won't,
because I'm a low life, just like you.

DEMOSTHENES

If he doesn't surrender on that point,
tell him you come from a family of thieves.

PAPHLAGONIAN

Are you going to allow me to speak?

SAUSAGE SELLER

No, by god, I'm not!

PAPHLAGONIAN [getting very angry]

Yes, by god, you will!

SAUSAGE SELLER

No, by Poseidon, I won't. I'll fight first
to see who will speak before the other.

PAPHLAGONIAN

Bloody hell! I'm going to explode!

SAUSAGE SELLER

No, you're not.

I won't allow it.

CHORUS LEADER

Let him burst, for god's sake—

⁴⁶⁷The place where the "worthy" men are brought up now is, of course, the market place.

let him!

PAPHLAGONIAN

And what makes you so confident
you think can confront me face to face?

SAUSAGE SELLER

Because I am capable of prattling on
and of cooking up some spicy sauces.

PAHPLAGONIAN

So you can speak! Bah! If some business matter—
a ripped-up bloody mess—fell in your lap
and you grabbed it, you'd handle it so well!
O yes, you'd arrange things with such expertise!
You know what I think has happened to you?
Like many others, I suppose you gave
a pretty speech in a petty lawsuit
against some foreign resident.⁴⁶⁸ You rehearsed
it all night long and babbled it to yourself
in the streets, slurping water, practising
to friends and irritating them with it.
And now you think you can speak in public.
You fool! You've mad!

SAUSAGE SELLER

What have you been drinking
to make the city a place where you now,
all by yourself, shout everybody down
and silence them?

PAPHLAGONIAN

Can you find any man
to rival me? I'll gobble up slices
of hot tuna and wash that down with wine—
a jug full and unmixed—and after that I'll bum fuck the generals at Pylos.

SAUSAGE SELLER

I'll swallow a ox stomach and pig tripe

⁴⁶⁸Merry notes that winning a case in court against a foreigner was probably easier than winning one against an Athenian citizen.

and after that gulp down the sauce, as well—
then without bothering to wash myself
I'll drown the politicians with my shouts
and put Nicias in a tizzy.

DEMOSTHENES

I do like
what you just said, but there is one thing
I'm not happy with—you're going to drink up
the political gravy all by yourself.

PAPHLAGONIAN

But you're not going to stuff yourself with sea bass
from Miletus and later blow them off.⁴⁶⁹

SAUSAGE SELLER

But I will dine on beef ribs. After that,
I'll buy up leases on some silver mines.⁴⁷⁰

PAPHLAGONIAN

I'll use force to jump into the Council—
make them all panic.

SAUSAGE SELLER

I'll stuff your arse hole—
just like a sausage skin.

PAPHLAGONIAN

I'll force you outside
by your buttocks—head down through the door.

DEMOSTHENES

If you're going to drag him outside, by god,
then you'll have to haul me out there, as well.

PAPHLAGONIAN

How I'll clap you in the stocks!

SAUSAGE SELLER

I'll denounce you
as an arrant coward!

⁴⁶⁹Miletus was famous for its sea bass. Sommerstein suggests the speech may have something to do with Cleon's accepting a bribe from the Milesians and then ignoring them.

⁴⁷⁰The rich silver mines in Attica were owned by the state but leased to individuals. The implication is that he will use his political influence to make himself very rich.[Back to Text]

PAPHLAGONIAN

I'll stretch your hide
across my tanning bench.

SAUSAGE SELLER

I'll skin you alive—
turn you into a robber's belly bag.

PAPHLAGONIAN

You'll be pegged down—at full stretch on the ground.

SAUSAGE SELLER

I'll slice you up, grind you into mincemeat.

PAPHLAGONIAN

I'll pluck out your eyelashes.

SAUSAGE SELLER

I'll slice your throat.

DEMOSTHENES

By god, we'll force a peg inside his mouth,
like cooks do with pigs, then tear out his tongue,
and peer down past his gaping jaws to see
if there are any pimples up his ass.⁴⁷¹

CHORUS

There are things in the city, it's clear from this case,
which are hotter than fire, more full of disgrace
than those scandalous speeches all over the place.
This issue matters—it's not just cheap smut,
so let's go at this man, twist him by his butt—
no room for half measures now we've grabbed his gut.

[The Chorus seizes the Paphlagonian.]

CHORUS LEADER

If you wear him down now with a thrashing
you'll find he's a coward. I know his style.

SAUSAGE SELLER

He's been that sort of fellow all his life,
but these days he thinks he's a real man for harvesting someone else's grain crop.

⁴⁷¹Cooks checked on the health of a pig by forcing its mouth open, pushing its tongue aside, and checking for spots. An unsatisfactory pig, Merry notes, had white spots. Here the sense is that if they followed this procedure with Cleon, they'll be able to see right down to his anus to check it for disease.

And now he's tied that crop up in prison,
the ears of grain he carried back from there—
he's drying them out and wants to sell them.⁴⁷²

PAPHLAGONIAN

I'm not afraid of you, not while the Senate
is alive and kicking and the people
just sit around looking like total fools.

CHORUS

Whatever happens he has no shame.
His colour always remains the same.
If you're not a fellow I despise,
let me be spread beneath the thighs
of Cratinus as his piss-soaked fleece,
or may I be taught to sing a piece
by Morsimus, some tragical song.⁴⁷³
You pest, you're always buzzing along,
searching around all through the town,
wherever you go, and settling down
on bribery blooms. O may you please
vomit mouthfuls of cash with the same ease
you sucked them down—for then I would sing
“Drink, let us drink—it's such a good thing!”

CHORUS LEADER

And Ulius, I think, who checks grain, too,
and keeps his eye cruising for lads to screw,
would sing out to Bacchus, “O god, thank you.”⁴⁷⁴

PAPHLAGONIAN

⁴⁷²The grain crop is a reference to the Spartan prisoners captured in the victory in the Peloponnese (for which Cleon saw to it that he received all the credit). He had these men (120 in all) brought back to Athens and thrown into prison under desperate conditions, without sufficient water or food. The suggestion here is that he is negotiating to ransom them for profit.

⁴⁷³Cratinus, a successful comic poet, is a frequent target of Aristophanic satire. He was, by reputation, a notorious drinker. Hence, the fleece or blanket on which he slept would be frequently soaked in urine. I have made that reference more explicit than it is in the Greek (by adding the phrase about the thighs). Morsimus was a tragic poet Aristophanes often attacks for his wretched poetry.

⁴⁷⁴The reference here is obscure. The best conjecture is that the lines refer to someone called Ulius, a man in charge of checking wheat supplies, who was a lover of young boys. In the Greek there is possibly a pun involved on “watching the grain” and “looking out for boys.” Ulius will be happy if Cleon repents, because then less food will be stolen. Sommerstein points out that there is historical evidence for a man called Uliuſof about the right age.

By Poseidon, you will not outdo me
in shamelessness. If you do, may I never
have any part of those offerings of meat
to Zeus, god of our public meeting place!⁴⁷⁵

SAUSAGE SELLER

And I swear by the many fists whose thrashings
I've had so often since I was a kid
and by the cuts from butcher's knives, I know
in this business I will outperform you.
If not, there'd be no point in being so large
after eating nothing but finger wipes.⁴⁷⁶

PAPHLAGONIAN

You mean bread for wiping hands, just like a dog?
You silly fool, on a diet of dog food,
how will you battle a dog-faced baboon?

SAUSAGE SELLER

By god, I have other tricks from my youth.
I'd swindle the butchers by saying things like,
"Hey lads, take a look. You see that swallow?
Springtime is here!" And when they'd gaze up,
right then I'd snatch off some of their meat.

DEMOSTHENES

O cleverest of men! You planned that well—
like those who eat nettles, you stole your meat
before the swallows came.⁴⁷⁷

SAUSAGE SELLER

And I did it
without being noticed! If one of them saw,
I'd hide the stuff—shove it in my butt crack
and swear by the gods I'd done nothing wrong.
When some politician saw what I did,

⁴⁷⁵The offerings to Zeus were part of the rites performed in honour of Zeus at the opening of the Public Assembly. The statement indicates that the Paphlagonian would no longer take part in the Assembly (i.e., give up political life).

⁴⁷⁶Diners cleaned their fingers by wiping them on pieces of bread, which were then fed to dogs.

⁴⁷⁷Merry notes that nettles in salad were tasty only at the very beginning of spring. The Athenians made much of the arrival of the first swallows, a sign of the arrival of spring.

he said, “There’s no doubt about it—this child is someone who will control the people.”

DEMOSTHENES

What he said was right. And it’s very clear what led him to arrive at that judgment—you could steal, perjure yourself, and shove meat inside your ass.

PAPHLAGONIAN

I’ll stop this man’s insolence—
or rather, I’ll put an end to both of you.
I’ll come at the two of you, sweeping down
with a driving mighty wind, confounding
land and sea into a common chaos.

SAUSAGE SELLER

Then I’ll haul in the sausages and let
myself sail along before the friendly breeze,
while telling you to wail and howl away.

DEMOSTHENES

I’ll watch out for the bilges, just in case
we start to spring a leak.

PAPHLAGONIAN

By Demeter,
you’re not going to get away with stealing
so many talents from the Athenians!

DEMOSTHENES [pretending he’s on a ship]
Keep your eyes peeled! Ease off on the sail rope!
There’s a north-east wind starting to blow in
a storm of accusations!

SAUSAGE SELLER

I understand
you took ten talents from Potidaea.⁴⁷⁸

PAPHLAGONIAN

What about it? Would you like one talent

⁴⁷⁸Potidaea was a city which had surrendered to Athens some years before after a long siege. The accusation is that the Paphlagonian accepted a huge bribe to argue for more generous peace terms. A talent was worth many thousands of dollars in today’s money.

to keep your mouth shut?

[The Paphlagonian offers the Sausage Seller a sum of money.]

DEMOSTHENES [grabbing the money]

He'd be happy to take it.

Slacken the main brace! The wind's easing off.

PAPHLAGONIAN

You'll be charged [with bribery]—four lawsuits—
each one carries a hundred talent fine.⁴⁷⁹

SAUSAGE SELLER

You'll be charged with twenty for skipping out
on military service—and thousands more
for theft.

PAPHLAGONIAN

I claim you are a descendant
of those who carried out a sacrilege
against our goddess.⁴⁸⁰

SAUSAGE SELLER

And your grandfather,
I proclaim, was one of the bodyguards . . .

PAPHLAGONIAN

What bodyguards? Tell us.

SAUSAGE SELLER

. . . to Bursina,
who was wife of Hippias the tyrant.⁴⁸¹

PAMPHLAGONIAN

You're a total rogue!

SAUSAGE SELLER

And you're a scoundrel.

[The Sausage Seller threatens to hit the Paphlagonian with a string of sausages.]

⁴⁷⁹Part of the line is missing. I follow Sommerstein's suggestion for the missing words. The inserted phrase is in square brackets.

⁴⁸⁰The Paphlagonian is accusing the Sausage Seller that he comes from an aristocratic family who, many years before, had murdered some political refugees who had taken refuge in the Temple of Athena, after promising them safety. The family was still considered under a curse.

⁴⁸¹Hippias, who ruled Athens at the end of the 6th century (i.e., long before), was a tyrant. He remained a symbol of anti-democratic practices. His wife's name was Myrsine. The change of name to Bursina, Green suggests, may be an attempt at a pun on bursa, the Greek word for hide, a reference to Cleon's business in leather.

DEMOSTHENES

Hit him! Give him a hefty swipe!

[The Sausage Seller starts hitting the Paphlagonian with his sausages.]

PAPHLAGONIAN

Ooooowww! That hurts!

These conspirators are beating me up!

DEMOSTHENES

Hit him as hard as you can! And lash him
on the stomach with your tripe and guts.

Punch him in that paunch of his!

[The Paphlagonian sinks down under the assault by the Sausage Seller.]

CHORUS LEADER [to the Sausage Seller]

You brave heart!

The noblest of all slabs of meat! You show up
as a saviour for our city and for us,
its citizens—how well, how brilliantly
your speeches have demoralized that man.

What praise for you can match the joy we feel?

PAPHLAGONIAN [pulling himself together and getting up]

By Demeter, I was not unaware
of this conspiracy they were framing—
I knew what they were nailing together
and hammering into one—the whole scheme!

SAUSAGE SELLER

And I'm not unaware of what you're doing
in Argos. He pretends he's making Argives our friends, but he's negotiating there
with Spartans—one of his private deals.⁴⁸²

DEMOSTHENES

Come on, aren't you going to use any words
to match his language from the building trades?⁴⁸³

SAUSAGE SELLER

⁴⁸²Argos, an important city state in the central Peloponnese, was officially neutral at the start of the war. Winning that state to one's cause would be a natural and important strategy.

⁴⁸³Demosthenes is upset because the Sausage Seller has not responded to the Paphlagonian's use of the language of carpentry. The Greek uses the word meaning "wheelwright." I have substituted a more general term ("building trades"). The placement of this line varies, but, as Merry and Sommerstein and others note, this seems to be the most obvious place for it.

And I know why the bellows are blowing—
they're forging something for the prisoners.⁴⁸⁴

DEMOSTHENES

Good! O that's good! His carpentry answered
with phrases from the blacksmith's forge.

SAUSAGE SELLER

There are men
in Sparta hammering at it as well.
But if you offer me gold or silver
or ship me your friends, you won't stop me
announcing this to all Athenians.

PAPHLAGONIAN

Well, I'm going to the Council right away
to inform them of the conspiracies
involving all of you—those meetings
you have in the city during the night,
all your secret dealings with the Persians
and their Great King and how you're making hay
with the Boeotians.⁴⁸⁵

SAUSAGE SELLER

Ah, hay! In Boeotia
what's the going rate for hay?

PAPHLAGONIAN [exasperated]

By Hercules,

I'll stretch that hide of yours!

[The Paphlagonian leaves, moving toward the city.]

DEMOSTHENES [to Sausage Seller]

Come on now!

What sort of brain and heart do you possess?

Now's the time to show if you really hid
that meat inside your butt crack way back when,

⁴⁸⁴The allegation here is that Cleon is arranging some private deal for the ransom of the Spartan prisoners mentioned earlier (the ones he had brought back to Athens after the Athenian victory in the Peloponnese).

⁴⁸⁵The general Demosthenes had been involved in negotiations with democratic citizens in the city state of Boeotia, trying to win that region over to the Athenian cause. Cleon is accusing him of consorting with the enemy. I have used the phrase "making hay" (meaning "work for one's own advantage") in place of the Greek verb which refers to making cheese.

the way you say you did. You've got to dash
to the Council rooms—running all the way.
That man is about to descend on them
and slander every one of us, howling
and kicking up a fuss.

SAUSAGE SELLER

I'm going. But first,
I'll get rid of my tripe and sausages—
I'll leave them here.

DEMOSTHENES

Hang on! Rub some of this grease
on your neck and throat, so you can slide out
from his false charges.

SAUSAGE SELLER

Excellent advice—
spoken like a wrestling master.

DEMOSTHENES [rubbing meat grease on the Sausage Seller]

All right.

Now take this and swallow it!

SAUSAGE SELLER

What is it?

DEMOSTHENES

You'll fight better when you're stuffed with garlic.

Hurry up! Get a move on!⁴⁸⁶

SAUSAGE SELLER

That's what I'm doing!

[The Sausage Seller leaves in the same direction as the Paphlagonian.]

DEMOSTHENES [shouting after the Sausage Seller]

Remember now—bite the man, slander him,
eat up his coxcomb. Don't come back here
until you've gobbled his wattles.

CHORUS LEADER [in the direction of the Sausage Seller]

Go and good luck!

⁴⁸⁶Fighting cocks were given garlic to make them fight more aggressively. Demosthenes continues the metaphor of the cockfight in his next speech.

May you live up to my hopes, and may Zeus
god of our public assembly, protect you,
and may you come back to us in triumph,
adorned with the garlands of victory.

[Demosthenes exits into the house. The Chorus Leader turns to address the audience.]

Now pay attention to our formal verse,
you who have on your own already heard
all the different offerings of the Muse.⁴⁸⁷

If one of the comic playwrights from long ago
had tried to make us step out to this audience
and recite a speech, it would not have been easy
for him to get his way. But today our poet
is worth the effort, because he hates the same men
we despise and dares to speak the truth, charging
courageously against typhoon and hurricane.
He says that many of you have come up to him
astonished that he did not long ago request
a chorus in his own name and questioning him
about it. He has asked us to explain to you
why this has happened.⁴⁸⁸ He asserts that it was not
foolishness that prompted his delay but rather
that he considered producing comic drama
the most difficult task of all. Many attempt
to court the Comic Muse, but she grants her favours
only to a few. And he has long recognized
that you have a fickle nature—for you betrayed
earlier poets once they grew old. He knows well
what Magnes went through as soon as his hair turned white.⁴⁸⁹
He had hoisted many trophies of victory
over his rivals, and though he had created

⁴⁸⁷In this passage, which announces a shift in tone to a more serious passage, the Greek says “listen to our anapaests.” But since that is not the rhythm in the English, I have substituted “formal verse” and switched to hexameters.

⁴⁸⁸Aristophanes earlier plays were produced by other people and not under his own name. Usually a playwright would request the appropriate official to name a sponsor who would pay for the production.

⁴⁸⁹Mages was an earlier comic poet who had recently died.

every kind of sound for your delight, by singing,
 flapping his wings, performing as a Lydian
 or a gnat, or smearing himself green as a frog,
 that was not enough. In his youth things turned out well,
 but at the end, in old age, you hissed him away,
 that old man, whose jokes had lost their satiric bite.⁴⁹⁰
 After that, our poet brought to mind Cratinus,
 who once, flowing on torrents of your approval,
 raced through unencumbered plains and, as he sped on,
 uprooted oak and plane trees and his rivals, too,
 and carried them away.⁴⁹¹ And at drinking parties
 the only songs were “O Goddess of Bribery,
 with sandals made of figs,” and “O you composers
 of intricate hymns”—that’s how famous he was then.⁴⁹²
 But look at him now—he’s a decrepit old man.
 His tuning pegs are gone, his tone has disappeared,
 his joints have split apart, yet you don’t pity him.
 He wanders around in his dotage, like Connas,
 wearing a withered garland and dying of thirst.⁴⁹³
 Given his previous triumphs, he should be drinking
 in the Prytaneum, and instead of acting
 like an idiot, he should be sitting smartly groomed
 with the spectators alongside Dionysus.⁴⁹⁴
 Look at how much Crates suffered from your abuse
 and anger, a man who used to provide you snacks
 for not much money and then send you home again,
 coming up with the most elegant conceptions
 from his decorous lips.⁴⁹⁵ But he kept persisting,
 on his own, sometimes failing, sometimes succeeding.

⁴⁹⁰Merry notes that Magnes had written plays featuring harp players, birds, frogs, Lydians, and gall flies.

⁴⁹¹Cratinus (519 BC to 422 BC) was an important comic playwright and rival of Aristophanes.

⁴⁹²The “sandals of figs” is a parody of a Homeric phrase “sandals of gold.” And the phrase contains in Greek an allusion to sycophant (meaning a servile flatterer), a word put together from sykon (fig) and phanein (show).

⁴⁹³Connus was a well-known and successful musician who, in his old age, was very poor.

⁴⁹⁴The name Dionysus refers to a statue of the god in the theatre.

⁴⁹⁵Crates was a successful writer of comic dramas. There is a criticism here that Crates’ productions were relatively cheap (as Sommerstein observes) and insufficiently ribald.

Fearing such treatment, our poet kept on stalling.
 What's more, he would tell himself he should first of all
 be a rower before his hand gripped the tiller,
 and later he'd watch from the prow to check the winds—
 and only then would he be his own pilot.
 For all these reasons, he moved with great prudence,
 not rushing in like a fool and babbling nonsense.

So raise a cheer for the man, a powerful surge
 with all of your fingers a generous urge
 at our feast of Lenaea, so that our poet
 leaves here with joy and success and can know it—
 his forehead all bright with glistening delight.⁴⁹⁶

CHORUS

O Poseidon, lord of horses
 who rejoices in horses' neighs,
 in the clatter of bronze-shod hooves,
 in swift triremes with deep-blue prows
 carrying tribute on the sea,
 in contests where those youthful lads
 who seek fame by racing chariots
 can suffer catastrophic spills,
 come to us here, to your chorus,
 O god of the golden trident, you who watches over dolphins,
 who are worshipped at Sunium,
 lord of Geraestus, son of Cronos,
 dearest favourite of Phormio,
 and for Athenians the god
 more beloved than all the others,
 the one our present crisis needs.⁴⁹⁷

CHORUS LEADER

⁴⁹⁶The Lenaeian feast is the festival at which the comic dramas were staged. The reference to the poet's forehead may be a reference to Aristophanes' baldness. The Greek here involves an elliptical metaphor taken from rowing, in which the audience is urged to applaud with "eleven oars." Green suggests this may refer to a galley with eleven oars on each side used in a naval escort honouring someone. I have substituted the phrase "all of your fingers."

⁴⁹⁷Sunium and Geraestus were promontories, important landmarks for sailors. Phormio was a very successful Athenian naval commander. The Athenian supremacy at sea was one of their most important military advantages in the war with the Spartans.

We wish to sing the praises of our ancestors,
 men worthy of this land who deserved to carry
 the ceremonial robe.⁴⁹⁸ In battles fought on land
 or on the sea they were victorious all the time,
 wherever they went—they brought our city honour.
 And when they viewed their enemies, none of them
 ever counted up their number. Instead, their hearts
 at once were ready for the fray. If they fell down
 on their shoulder in a fight, they wiped off the dust
 and denied they'd had a fall. Then they would resume
 the struggle once again. No earlier general
 would have asked Cleaenetus to serve him dinner
 at state expense.⁴⁹⁹ But now they say they will not fight
 unless they get the privilege of front-row seats
 and meals, as well. As for us, we believe we should
 nobly guard our city and our country's gods
 without being paid. We ask for nothing beyond that,
 except this one condition: if peace ever comes
 and brings our hard work to an end, you will not mind
 if we wear long hair and keep our skin well scrubbed.⁵⁰⁰

CHORUS

O Pallas, guardian of our city,
 shielding this most sacred place,
 surpassing every land in war,
 in poetry, and in her might,
 come to us here and bring with you
 the one who in campaigns and fights
 stands there beside us, Victory,
 companion in our choral songs,
 who wars with us against our foes.

⁴⁹⁸At the Panathenaea festival a sacred robe was carried in a procession to the temple of Athena in the Acropolis, where it was placed on the statue of the goddess.

⁴⁹⁹None of the older generals would have expected to be rewarded with free meals at the Prytaneum. Now, generals try to get that privilege through Cleaenetus, Cleon's father.

⁵⁰⁰Long hair was fashionable among rich young men who made up the ranks of the Knights and a sign of social snobbery. Keeping the body well scrubbed is a sign of frequent bathing and, Merry suggests, might be considered effeminate.

Now show yourself before us here.
For if there ever is a time
when you must give a victory
by any means to these men here
that time has come right now.⁵⁰¹

CHORUS LEADER

We know our horses well and wish to praise them.
They are worthy of our tributes, for along with us
they have endured so many battles and attacks.
But we admire them not so much for these events
as when they bravely jumped on board the transport ships,
once they had purchased drinking cups—and some of them
got garlic, too, and onions.⁵⁰² Then they grabbed the oars,
just as we humans do, pulled hard on them, shouting,
“Horses, heave! Who’s doing the rowing? Pull back harder!
What are we doing? Hey you, you pedigree nag,
why aren’t you rowing?” They disembarked at Corinth.
The youngest then dug resting places with their hooves
and went to bring back blankets. Instead of clover,
they fed themselves on crabs if any scuttled up
onshore, or else they caught them on the ocean floor,
so that Theorus said a Corinthian crab
would cry, “O Poseidon, what a cruel misfortune,
if I cannot evade those knights either by land,
or even in the ocean depths, or on the sea.”⁵⁰³

[The Sausage Seller enters, returning from the city.]

CHORUS LEADER

O dearest and most vigorous of men,
how worried I have been since you’ve been gone.
Now you’re back again safe and sound, tell us

⁵⁰¹The victory mentioned refers to the competition to win first place in the drama contest.

⁵⁰²Here the chorus of Knights imagines that the horses have human qualities so that they can pay tribute, in effect, to themselves.

⁵⁰³The Chorus here is referring to a cavalry expedition against Corinth, an ally of Sparta, in the previous year. It is not clear who Theorus was. Sommerstein suggests he may be an associate of Cleon’s. Green states that the word crab was a derogatory label for a Corinthian.

how did you make out in the competition?

SAUSAGE SELLER

The result is this—I've crushed the Council.

CHORUS [chanting]

Then everyone now
should shout with delight!
You speak very well
but your actions excite
much more than your words.

So come on, lay out
in very clear terms
what you've been about.
I really believe
I'd go a long way
to hear what it is
that you have to say.

So my dear fellow,
be brave and tell all—
Each one of us gets
such joy from your gall.

SAUSAGE SELLER

Well then listen. The story is worth hearing.
I went rushing from here right behind him.
He was inside bursting with verbiage,
hurling his thunder, attacking the Knights
with fantastic stories, mountains of words,
shouting they were conspirators—his speech
was very convincing. The whole Council,
as it listened to his lies, grew spice hot,
with gazes like mustard and eyebrows tense.
When I saw they believed what he was saying
and were falling for his lies and bull crap,
I said, "Come on, spirits of impudence,
you cheats, you boobies, you rogues and rascals,
and the Market, too, where I was brought up

as a child, give me boundless brazenness,
a salesman's chatter, and a shameless voice."
As I was saying this to myself, a man
whose arse hole had been bugged out of shape
let rip a fart to my right, an omen
from the gods for which I gave them thanks.⁵⁰⁴
I banged the barrier and knocked it over
with my bum, opened my mouth really wide,
and shouted out, "Members of the Council,
I bring excellent news, and I am keen
you be the first to hear it: since the time
this war broke over us, I've never seen
a cheaper price for sardines."⁵⁰⁵ Their faces
immediately relaxed—they were prepared
to crown me for my good news. So I said,
as if I were telling them a secret,
that in order to buy lots of sardines
for just one obol, they should with all speed
confiscate all bowls from pottery shops.
They looked at me with their mouths wide open
and applauded.⁵⁰⁶ But the Paphlagonian,
guessing what I was up to and knowing the kind of talk the Council really loved,
made a suggestion, "Gentlemen, I think,
in honour of this wonderful event
which has just been reported, we should now
offer a sacrifice to the goddess—
one hundred oxen for this happy news."
The Council then swung back his way again.
So when I noticed I was being beaten
by his bullshit, I upped the ante on him
by shouting out, "Two hundred oxen!"
And then I recommended they make a vow

⁵⁰⁴This remark is parodying Homer where thunder on the right is a favourable message from the gods.

⁵⁰⁵The barrier separated the public from the members of the Council.

⁵⁰⁶If there were no bowls available for the public, then people would not purchase sardines, because they would have no way of transporting them, and thus the price would stay low.

to Artemis, offering a thousand goats
tomorrow if the price of sardines
is a single obol for a hundred fish.
The Council was looking my way once more,
and eagerly. The Paphlagonian,
when he heard what I had said, was stunned—
he started to prattle raving nonsense.
So then the presidents and the archers
began to drag him off.⁵⁰⁷ The Council members
stood around babbling on about sardines.
The Paphlagonian kept pleading with them,
saying, “Wait a little, so you can hear
what the Spartan messenger has to say.
He’s arrived here with a peace proposal.”
But with one voice the Councillors all shouted,
“Why sue for a treaty now? My dear fellow,
it’s because they’ve learned our sardines are cheap.
We don’t want treaties! Let the war go on!”
They called for the presidents to adjourn
the assembly and then jumped the railing
in all directions. I snuck off quickly
to buy up all the coriander seeds
and onions on sale in the market place.
Then I passed them all around free of charge
as seasonings, a gift to Councillors,
who had no spices to put on their fish.
They all sang my praises and lavished me
with their attention, so I won over
all the Council with some coriander—
an obol’s worth! Then I came back here.

CHORUS [chanting]

In all of these things
you’ve been very good,

⁵⁰⁷The Presidents (Prytaneis) were a special committee of 50 members of the Council. The archers were the security forces guarding the Council.

getting your way
as a lucky man should.

The rascal's now knows
that he's met defeat—
another man beat him
at being a cheat,
a far greater rogue,
with many more tricks,
and intricate lies,
and smooth talk that sticks.

You need to take care
to come off the best
when you fight once again
and are put to the test.
You've known for a while
that we are a friend,
your trustworthy ally
right to the end.

[The Paphlagonian enters, returning from the city.]

SAUSAGE SELLER

Ah ha! Here comes the Paphlagonian,
driving an fearful swell in front of him,
seething and foaming, as if he's ready
to swallow me up. My goodness, he's brash!

PAPHLAGONIAN

If I have any of my old lies left,
I'll wipe you out—otherwise I'm done for
completely up the creek!

SAUSAGE SELLER

I love your threats!
Your smoke-and-mirror chatter makes me laugh
and dance a horny jig—the chicken dance!

[The Sausage Seller taunts the Paphlagonian by imitating a chicken—flapping his
arms, hopping around, and making chicken-like noises.]

PAPHLAGONIAN

By Demeter, if I don't eat you up,
kick you out of here, I'll never survive.

SAUSAGE SELLER

If you don't eat me up? And I won't live,
if I don't drink you down and then explode
with you stuffed in my guts.

PAPHLAGONIAN

I'll destroy you—
I swear that by the privileged seating
I won by my victory at Pylos.

SAUSAGE SELLER

My, my—privileged seating! How I long
to see you tossed from your privileged seat
and sitting in a row right at the back.

PAPHLAGONIAN

By heaven, I'll have you clapped in the stocks!

SAUSAGE SELLER

What a nasty temper! Now, let me see—
what can I give you to eat? What nourishment
would you find truly sweet? Why not this purse?

[The Sausage Seller holds up a purse and jingles the coins in front of the Paphlagonian.]

PAPHLAGONIAN

I'll eviscerate you with my nails!

SAUSAGE SELLER

I'll pare down your Pyrtaneum dinners!

PAPHLAGONIAN

I'll drag you to Demos—I'll have justice
from you!

SAUSAGE SELLER

Then I'll haul you off to him—
I can produce more slanders than you can.

PAPHLAGONIAN

You poor idiot! He won't believe you.
I play around with him just as I wish.

SAUSAGE SELLER

You think of Demos as someone you own.

PAPHLAGONIAN

It's because I know all the finger foods
he likes to nibble.

SAUSAGE SELLER

Yes, but you feed him
like a dishonest nurse—you chew the food,
then give him a small piece, once you've swallowed
three times as much yourself.

PAPHLAGONIAN

Besides, with my skill,
I can make Demos do whatever I want—
I can open him up or close him tight.⁵⁰⁸

SAUSAGE SELLER

Even my arse hole knows how to do that.

PAPHLAGONIAN

Well, my dear fellow, you won't be a man
who's known to have showered me with insults
there in the Council. Let's go to Demos.

SAUSAGE SELLER

There's nothing to stop us. So come on then.

[The Sausage Seller moves towards the door of the house, beckoning the Paphlagonian over.]

Get moving. We should not hold back.

[The Sausage Seller and the Paphlagonian move to the door of the house and begin knocking on it.]

PAPHLAGONIAN [calling into the house through the door]

Demos!

Come on out here!

SAUSAGE SELLER [calling into the house]

Yes, father, for Zeus' sake,
come outside!

⁵⁰⁸The Greek says, "I can make Demos wide or narrow." Sommerstein points out that this must be a proverbial expression meaning "I can do anything I like with Demos."

PAPHLAGONIAN

Come out, dearest little Demos—
so you can see how I am being abused.

DEMOS [coming from the house]

Who's doing all the shouting? Get out of here—
leave my doorway! You've torn this apart,
my harvest wreath.⁵⁰⁹

[Demos recognizes the Paphlagonian.]

Ah, Paphlagonian,
who's being nasty to you?

PAPHLAGONIAN

Because of you

I'm being assaulted by this fellow here
and by these young men.

DEMOS

Why is that?

PAPHLAGONIAN

Because I am your loving friend, Demos,
and am very fond of you.

DEMOS [to the Sausage Seller]

And who are you?

SAUSAGE SELLER

I am this man's rival. For a long time
I have loved you and wished to help you out—
along with many other fine good people.
But we have not been able to do that,
because of this man here. You're like those lads
who play around with lovers, refusing
worthy, decent men and giving yourself
to lamp dealers, cobblers, shoemakers,
and men who trade in leather.

PAPHLAGONIAN

Yes, because

⁵⁰⁹The harvest wreath, Merry explains, is a garland of twigs and olive and wool interwoven with fruits and berries. It was used in certain festivals and then placed on the front door.

I am good for Demos.

SAUSAGE SELLER

All right, tell me
just what do you do for him?

PAPHLAGONIAN

What do I do?

When the generals were dithering around,
I sailed in there and then brought those Spartans
back from Pylos.

SAUSAGE SELLER

And I, while strolling around,
stole a boiling pot from someone else's shop.

PAPLAGONIAN

Demos, summon an assembly right now
to find out which one of the two of us
is more friendly to you. And then decide,
so you can make that man the one you love.

SAUSAGE SELLER

Yes, do that. Make a choice. Just don't do it
at the Pnyx.

DEMOS

I would not sit in judgment
in any other place. So we must move
up there. You must appear before the Pnyx.

[They all move over to a rock on one side of the orchestra. Demos sits down on
the rock.]

SAUSAGE SELLER [aside, as they move]

Bloody hell, I've had now. The old man
is very sensible when he's at home,
but whenever he sits down on that rock
he's a gaping idiot, just like some child
trying to catch figs with mouth wide open.⁵¹⁰

CHORUS

⁵¹⁰It is not entirely clear what this metaphor refers to. Whatever the reference, the comparison involves a picture of open-mouthed stupidity.

Now you must spread out all your sail—
 keep your spirit strong. Do not fail
 in argument. Beat down that man.
 He's tricky—always with a plan
 when he seems done for. So attack
 like a raging wind. Don't hold back!

CHORUS LEADER

But take care! Before he closes in on you,
 first hoist your lead weights into position,
 then run your ship at him along the side.⁵¹¹

PAPHLAGONIAN

I pray to lady Athena, who guards
 our city, that if I have been the best
 at serving the Athenian citizens—
 apart from Lysicles and those two sluts
 Cynna and Salabaccho—I may dine
 in the Prytaneum, as I do now,
 though I haven't achieved a thing.⁵¹² But if
 I hate you, Demos, if I'm not prepared
 to fight bravely for you all by myself,
 may I be destroyed—sawn in two, cut up
 into leather straps for horses' halters.

SAUSAGE SELLER

And if I don't love and value you, Demos,
 may I be diced up and boiled as mincemeat.
 If you don't believe that, may I be grated
 on this very table, chopped up with cheese,
 mashed into a paste, may I be dragged off
 to Kerameikos by my own meat hook
 speared through my balls.⁵¹³

⁵¹¹The lead weights (called "dolphins" because of their shape) were raised high and then dropped on the deck of the enemy ship in order to shatter its timbers.

⁵¹²Lysicles was a political figure in Athens who had died in the war. He lived with Pericles' mistress after Pericles died of the plague. Cynna and Salabaccha were well-known prostitutes. I have added the word "sluts" to make that more explicit.

⁵¹³Kerameikos is a region of Athens. Sommerstein notes that it was the area with the largest cemeteries, so that the Sausage Seller may be saying he'll be hauled off for burial.

PAPHLAGONIAN

Demos, how could there be
a citizen who loves you more than me?
First of all, when I was on the Council,
in the treasury I produced for you
massive sums of money—I had some men
tortured, others throttled, and from others
I asked for a financial split—and I
never worried about private citizens,
if I could make you happy.

SAUSAGE SELLER

Hey, Demos,
there's nothing so wonderful about that.
I'll do that for you, as well. I'll steal bread
from other men and serve it up to you.
This man does not love you, and his feelings
for you are not friendly—except for one thing:
he enjoys warming himself at your fire.
That's the first thing I'll demonstrate to you.
You who took your swords against the Persians
at Marathon to save your native land,
and by winning gave us a chance to shout
such glorious tributes—you're sitting down there
on those hard rocks, and this man doesn't care,
unlike me, for I bring you this cushion,
which I sewed myself. Now, lift yourself up,
and sit down gently so you don't strain
that arse that did so well at Salamis.⁵¹⁴

[The Sausage Seller helps Demos get up and sit down again on a cushion he has brought with him.]

DEMOS

Who are you? Are you from that fine family

⁵¹⁴In the Battle of Marathon (490 BC) an army of Greek states led by Athenians defeated the Persian force, a highlight of Athenian history. In the Battle of Salamis (480 BC) the Persians were defeated at sea, one of a series of defeats which ended the second Persian invasion. The "arse that did so well" in the battle was the backside of each man on the rowing benches, which, as Merry remarks, had a thin cushion underneath it.

of Harmodius? I must say you've done
a truly noble act—you're a real friend
of the people!⁵¹⁵

PAPHLAGONIAN

Such tiny flatteries
to win him over!

SAUSAGE SELLER

Well, you got him hooked
with lures much tinier than these!

PAPHLAGONIAN

I'm willing to wager my head and state
that no man has ever shown up who loved
Demos more than I do or who was better
at protecting him.

SAUSAGE SELLER

How could you love him
when for eight years you have seen him living
in casks, crannies, and turrets, yet show him
no pity—instead you keep him locked in
and steal his honey? When Archeptolemus
brought peace proposals, you ripped them to shreds
and drove the embassy offering peace terms
out of town, whipping their backsides.⁵¹⁶

PAPHLAGONIAN

I did that
so Demos might rule over all the Greeks—
for the oracles declare that one day
he must sit in judgment in Arcadia
at five obols a day, if he bides his time.
At any rate, I will feed and care for him
and use fair and foul means to see to it

⁵¹⁵Harmodius and his brother in 514 had assassinated a brother of the tyrant Hippias. His name became synonymous with Athenians who loved democracy and would fight for it.

⁵¹⁶The war broke out in 431 BC, seven years earlier, but the various provocations which initiated war started earlier than that. The mention of cramped living conditions refers to the fact that in the early part of the war, the countryside was left undefended and all the country folk came to take refuge in Athens, so that there was an acute shortage of living space. The Spartans sought terms of peace after the defeat at Pylos. Archeptolemus was probably one of the negotiators.

that he receives three obols every day.⁵¹⁷

SAUSAGE SELLER

By god, you're not thinking of how Demos
could rule Arcadia—no—but of how
you can rob and take bribes from our allies
and of how the fog of war will guarantee
Demos doesn't see the crap you're up to,
so in his distress, need, and lack of cash
he'll keep gawping after you. But if he
ever takes off for the countryside and lives
in peace there, regaining his fortitude
by munching wheat cakes and saying hello
to his pressed olives, he will realize
how you cheated him of many benefits
with the salary you paid. Then he'll come back
from farming country an angry man, seeking
a voting pebble to use against you.⁵¹⁸
You know all this and keep him in the dark,
with deceiving dreams about his future.

PAPHLAGONIAN

Is it not disgraceful that you talk of me
in this manner, falsely accusing me
in front of these Athenians and Demos,
when I have done more good things by far
for Athens than Themistocles ever did.

SAUSAGE SELLER [declaiming the first sentence in tragic style]

O city of Argos hearken to the things
of which he speaks!

[turning his attention to the Paphlagonian]

You dare compare yourself
with Themistocles? He found our city

⁵¹⁷ Arcadia is a large region in the Peloponnese. Hence, the implication is that the Athenian people will one day take over that territory and that jurymen will be paid more.

⁵¹⁸ Small stones were used to tally the votes in the assembly. Sommerstein points out that Cleon wanted the war to continue, because once it ended the country people would return to their land and realize how much they had lost thanks to the warmongers like Cleon.

partially full and left it overflowing.
 What's more, while she was enjoying breakfast
 he prepared Piraeus for her to eat
 and served up new varieties of fish
 without getting rid of all the old ones.
 But you keep trying to make Athenians
 small-town citizens by constructing walls
 that close them in and chanting oracles—
 and you compare yourself to Themistocles!
 He is sent in exile from the city,
 while you wipe fingers on fine barley cake.⁵¹⁹

PAPHLAGONIAN

O Demos, is it not shameful to hear
 things like this about me from this fellow,
 all because I love you?

DEMOS [to the Paphlagonian]

Just shut up, you!
 Stop this foul abuse. For far too long now
 you've been getting away with duping me.

SAUSAGE SELLER

My dear little Demos, he's the worst of rogues,
 who's carried out all sorts of nasty schemes.
 Whenever you are yawning, he taps into
 the sap of those who audit the accounts
 and slurps it down—he uses both his hands
 to scoop up public money.

PAPHLAGONIAN

You'll pay for that!
 I'll convict you of stealing city cash—
 thirty thousand drachmas!

SAUSAGE SELLER

Why use your oar

⁵¹⁹It is not clear what walls Cleon built. Themistocles was responsible for the long walls which joined Athens and the port of Piraeus in one defensive unit. Themistocles was condemned to exile from Athens for running away when charged with treason. The barley cake is called in the Greek "Achillean," a reference to its superior quality. The fact that Cleon uses such fine cake as a napkin to wipe his fingers on is a sign of his extravagance in a time of war.

just to make a splash? You've been committing
the most disgraceful things against the people
here in Athens. And I will clearly show,
by Demeter, that you received a bribe
from Mytilene—more than forty minas.⁵²⁰
If not, then may I not remain alive.

CHORUS

O you who appear the greatest benefactor
for all men, how I envy your persuasive tongue.
If you keep on attacking in this way, you'll be
the greatest of the Greeks, and you, all by yourself,
will govern in the city, control our allies,
and, with a trident in your hand, will shake things up,
and by confusing things make piles and piles of money.⁵²¹

CHORUS LEADER

Don't let this man slip away, now he's let
you get a grip on him. With lungs like yours
you'll have no trouble overpowering him.

PAPHLAGONIAN

Things have not yet gone that far, my good friends,
by Poseidon. For what I have achieved
is marvellous enough to shut the mouths
of my enemies, each and every one,
as long as one of those shields from Pylos
still remains.⁵²²

SAUSAGE SELLER

You keep clinging to those shields!
You've given me something to grab hold of.
If you loved the people, then you should not
allow these shields to be hung up on show

⁵²⁰Mytilene, a city in the Athenian alliance, rebelled against Athens. The Athenians reacted savagely. Cleon was particularly vehement in proposing vicious punishments against the city. The bribe (a relatively small amount) may have been to get him to mitigate his proposals.

⁵²¹The trident is associated with Poseidon, god of the sea and of earthquakes.

⁵²²The shields of the Spartans captured at Pylos were set up as trophies and put on display. Green notes that when shields were hung up in this way, their straps were normally removed.

with their straps attached. It's a clever scheme,
Demos, so that if you wish to punish him,
you won't be able to. You see how he has
a mob of young leather workers with him.
Close to them live men who sell our honey
and those who deal in cheese. All these men
have put their heads together in one group.
So if you were upset and looked as if
you might play around with broken pottery
and have them ostracized, then late at night
they would all charge out and take down those shields,
then seize the entries to our stores of grain.⁵²³

DEMOS

That's terrible. Do they still have their straps?
You scoundrel! You've been cheating me too long!
And short changing people!

PAPHLAGONIAN

But my dear sir,
don't be the slave of the last word spoken.
And don't think you will ever come across
a better friend than me. I am the one
who put a stop to the conspirators,
and without my having knowledge of it,
no one can start a hostile mutiny.
I shout out who they are immediately.

SAUSAGE SELLER

You're like the fishermen who hunt for eels.
In calm waters, they catch nothing at all,
but if they stir up mud, they get a catch.
So you, too, gain something profitable
if you disturb the city. Tell me this—
from all those treated hides you have for sale
have you ever given this Demos here,

⁵²³Playing around with broken pottery refers to a children's pastime, but it also evokes the practice of ostracism (from the word ostraka, the piece of broken pottery used in the voting), by which an Athenian citizen could be exiled for ten years after a vote in the Assembly.

who you say you love, soles for his shoes.

DEMOS

No, by Apollo. He never has.

SAUSAGE SELLER

Well then,

do you now see the kind of man he is?

I, on the other hand, bought this pair of shoes,
and I'm giving them to you to wear.

[The Sausage Seller gives Demos a pair of shoes.]

DEMOS [putting on the shoes]

Of all men I know, you are, in my view,
the finest where the people are concerned,
the most dedicated to the city—
and to my toes.

PAPHLAGONIAN

Isn't it terrible

a pair of shoes could be so important,
and you can't remember all I've done
on your behalf? I'm the one who stopped
those who screw other men illegally,
by taking Gryttus from the voting rolls.⁵²⁴

SAUSAGE SELLER

Surely what is terrible is that you
inspected arse holes and prevented
buggers breaking laws when there's no doubt
you made them stop out of sheer jealousy,
fearing they might turn into politicians.
But you can look at Demos, who's so old,
without a coat, and, even in winter,
you don't think it's proper to offer him
a garment with two sleeves. I, by contrast,
am presenting this to you.

[The Sausage Seller takes off his outer coat or cloak and gives it to Demos. Demos

⁵²⁴Sommerstein notes that any citizen who was a male prostitute could have his name stricken from the voting rolls. It is not clear who Gryttus refers to.

tries it on.]

DEMOS

What a fine idea—
even Themistocles never thought of that!
And although that business with Piraeus
was clever enough, in my opinion
it's not a greater notion than this coat.⁵²⁵

PAPHLAGONIAN

My god, what silly tricks you keep using
to attack me!

SAUSAGE SELLER

No, I'm simply borrowing
your strategies, in the same way a man
who's been drinking, when he needs a shit,
might help himself to someone else's slippers.⁵²⁶

PAPHLAGONIAN [taking off his coat]

You're not going to outdo me with flattery!
I'll put this over him. You can shove it,
you scoundrel!

[The Paphlagonian tries to place his coat around Demos, who rejects the offer.]

DEMOS [struggling against the Paphlagonian]

Bah! Damn and blast you to hell!
It stinks of leather—totally disgusting!

SAUSAGE SELLER

He tried to wrap you in that deliberately
so he could suffocate you. That's the scheme
he worked on you before. You know the time
the cost of silphium stalks was so cheap?⁵²⁷

DEMOS

Yes, I remember that.

SAUSAGE SELLER

⁵²⁵The business with Piraeus was the decision to fortify Piraeus and build the long walls, so that Athens and its harbour would form a single defensive unit. Themistocles was the moving spirit behind that idea.

⁵²⁶Merry explains that at a drinking party the slippers were left in the hall. Someone in a hurry to go to the toilet might take any pair of slippers.

⁵²⁷Silphium was an important herb in the Athenian diet.

Well, this man here
made sure the cost was low on purpose,
so people would buy the stuff and eat it,
and then jury men sitting in the courts
would kill each other with their farts.

DEMOS

By Poseidon,
that's just what a man from Shitsville told me.⁵²⁸

SAUSAGE SELLER

At that time did you not all turn reddish brown
from all the farting.

DEMOS

By god, that was a scheme
worthy of some rogue we caught red handed.⁵²⁹

PAPHLAGONIAN [aside to the Sausage Seller]

You bastard!

You're pissing me off with all this foolery.

SAUSAGE SELLER

Well, the goddess told me I could beat you
in slinging bullshit.

PAPHLAGONIAN

But you won't prevail.

[He turns back to Demos]

Demos, I say I'll offer you a bowl
of state money, a salary, to feast on—
and you don't ever have to do a thing!

SAUSAGE SELLER

And I'm giving you this small container,
some ointment, to rub over these bruises
on your shins.

PAPHLAGONIAN

But I'll pluck out your grey hairs
and make you young again.

⁵²⁸The Greek place named in the text is Kopros (meaning dung), an urban area close to Athens.

⁵²⁹The Greek text says "worthy of Pyrrhandrus," a reference which is unclear. The first part of the name means red or tawny. I have substituted the notion of catching someone "red handed."

SAUSAGE SELLER

Look here, take this—

a hare's tail to wipe your dear little eyes.

PAPHLAGONIAN [putting his head in Demos' lap]

Blow your nose, Demos, and then use my head
to wipe snot from your fingers.

SAUSAGE SELLER [shoving his head down, too]

No, no. Use mine.

PAPHLAGONIAN

No, mine!

[To the Sausage Seller]

I'll make you captain of a ship—
that will take all your money. You'll have
an old ship, so you never see an end
to spending cash and making more repairs.
I'll make sure you get one with rotten sails.⁵³⁰

SAUSAGE SELLER [pretending to be very alarmed]

The man is on the boil! Stop! That's enough!
He's boiling over. We have to pull away
some of the faggots and skim off his threats
with this ladle.⁵³¹

PAPHLAGONIAN

I'll make you pay for this—
I'll crush you with taxes. I'll make sure your name
is listed among those with lots of cash.⁵³²

SAUSAGE SELLER

I will make no threats. But I have a wish—
may your saucepan of squid be standing there
sizzling hot and you about to announce
your view of the Milesians and so gain

⁵³⁰The military leaders appointed commanders of warships, who had to supply and repair the ships, an expensive matter.

⁵³¹The Sausage Seller is here comparing the Paphlagonian to a boiling pot which needs some of the hot liquid removed. The word ladle is not in the Greek, but the Sausage Seller, as Merry suggests (following Green), could produce one from his equipment.

⁵³²Merry points out that property taxes were first imposed during the war when the treasury was in dire need of money. The amount paid depended on a person's wealth.

a talent for yourself if you win out; may you be making haste to eat the squid
and still get to the meeting in good time,
but before you eat the meal, may a man
come for you, and you, in your eagerness
to get that talent, swallow down the squid
and choke on it.

CHORUS LEADER

By Zeus, that's a splendid wish!
Yes, by Apollo and Demeter, too!

DEMOS

I agree, and it's clear enough this man
is a fine citizen. It's been ages
since a man of his sort has come along
for the vulgar common folk. As for you,
Paphlagonian, you say you love me,
but you just make me ready for a fight.
Now, hand back my signet ring—no longer
will you be my steward.

PAPHLAGONIAN [removing a large ring]

Take it. But know this—
if you won't allow me to be your steward,
another man will show up and get his turn,
someone more disreputable than me.

DEMOS [inspecting the ring]

This cannot be my ring. It looks as if
there's a different seal, unless I'm going blind.

SAUSAGE SELLER

Let me have a look. What was your seal?

DEMOS

A fig leaf stuffed with beef fat.

SAUSAGE SELLER

That's not what's here.

DEMOS

Not a fig leaf? What is it, then?

SAUSAGE SELLER

A sea gull
with its mouth wide open—making a speech
from the top of a rock.⁵³³

DEMOS

O that's dreadful!

SAUSAGE SELLER

What's the matter?

DEMOS

Put that ring away!

Out of my sight! It's not my signet ring.

It has to belong to Cleonymus.⁵³⁴

[Demos produces another ring.]

I'll give you this one. You can be my steward.

PAPHLAGONIAN

Master, don't do that yet, I implore you.

Not before you've heard my oracles.

SAUSAGE SELLER

And mine, as well.

PAPHLAGONIAN

If you believe this man,

you'll be flayed into a leather bottle.

SAUSAGE SELLER

And if you trust him, your prick will be sliced

and cut down to a twig.

PAPHLAGONIAN

My oracles

state that you are to govern every land

with a crown of roses.

SAUSAGE SELLER

And mine predict

you will wear an embroidered purple robe

with a crown and, standing in a gold chariot,

⁵³³The sea gull (or cormorant) was synonymous with gluttony.

⁵³⁴Cleonymus, a favourite target of Aristophanes, was an ally of Cleon's and an Athenian general. He had a reputation as a coward and a glutton.

you'll pursue Smicythos and his husband
in the courts.⁵³⁵

CHORUS LEADER [to Sausage Seller]

Well then, get the oracles,
so that this man can listen to them.

SAUSAGE SELLER

All right.

CHORUS LEADER [To the Paphlagonian]

And you get yours, as well.

PAPHLAGONIAN

I'll get them.

SAUSAGE SELLER

By god, we'll do it. Nothing's stopping us.

[The Paphlagonian goes into the house to fetch his oracles. The Sausage Seller moves over to his stuff and rummages through it to find some papers that he can pretend are oracles.]

CHORUS

How very sweet will be the light of day
for those who visit here and those who stay
if Cleon is destroyed—though I did hear
some crotchety old geezers speaking near
the list of law suits by the market gate
who claimed if he had not become so great
the city would lack two useful boons
our pounding pestles and stirring spoons.⁵³⁶

I'm amazed in music he's such a swine.
His class mates at school say all the time
he'd tune his strings in the Dorian way,
unwilling to find out how he might play
a different mode.⁵³⁷ His teacher grew stern
and sent him away, "This boy cannot learn.

⁵³⁵Smithythos is a man known for his effeminate ways. His husband would be with him in the court since a woman could not represent herself in a lawsuit.

⁵³⁶These two implements are for breaking things down and mixing them up; hence, they are associated with Cleon's style of politics. Note that this is the only time Cleon's name is mentioned in the play.

⁵³⁷Merry notes that the Dorian style was more serious than the passionate Phrygian style and the more lyrical Lydian style.

All he will play is the Dorian style—
he won't pull strings if it's not worth his while."⁵³⁸

PAPHLAGONIAN [coming from the house with a pile of scrolls]
Here, look at this lot. I haven't brought out
all of them.

SAUSAGE SELLER [with an even bigger pile of scrolls]
By god, I need to take a shit!
I'm not carrying them all.

DEMOS
What is this?

PAPHLAGONIAN
Oracles.

DEMOS
All of them?

PAPHLAGONIAN
Are you surprised?
By god, I've got a chest jammed full of them.

SAUSAGE SELLER
I've got an attic and two apartments full.
DEMOS

Come on, let's have a look. These oracles—
who do they come from?

PAPHLAGONIAN
Mine are from Bacis.

DEMOS [to the Sausage Seller]
Who do yours come from?

SAUSAGE SELLER
They're from Glanis,
Bacis' elder brother.

DEMOS [to the Paphlagonian]
What are they about?

PAPHLAGONIAN
About Athens, about Pylos, about you,

⁵³⁸The final lines involve an untranslatable Greek pun linking Dorian to dora, meaning bribes or gifts, suggesting that Cleon would only play the Dorian style because he loved bribes so much, even as a young boy. The last line has been added to make some English sense out of the text.

about me, about everything.

DEMOS [to the Sausage Seller]

And yours?

What are they about?

SAUSAGE SELLER

They're about Athens,
about lentil soup, about the Spartans,
about fresh mackerel, about flour merchants
who give false measure in the market place,
about you, about me. That man there—

[indicating the Paphlagonian]

let him suck his own cock.

DEMOS

Well, come on then,
read them to me—especially that one
which I enjoy so much, that I'll become
an eagle in the clouds.⁵³⁹

PAPHLAGONIAN

Then listen,

and give me now your complete attention:

[The Paphlagonian reads from one of the scrolls]

“Son of Erechtheus, hearken to the intent
of Apollo's oracles, which he pronounces
through holy tripods from his inner shrine.
He has ordered you to keep safe the sacred hound
with the jagged teeth who barks in your defence,
and on your behalf yowls out alarming noises.
He will furnish you with payments, and if he fails,
he will go under, for there are countless jackdaws
who hate that dog and keep screaming after him.”

DEMOS

By Demeter, I do not understand
a word he says. What does Erechtheus
have to do with jackdaws and a dog?

⁵³⁹This mention of an eagle is a reference to a famous oracle of Bacis which promised eternal greatness to Athens.

PAPHLAGONIAN

I am that dog. I howl in your defence.

Phoebus tells you to protect your dog—me.⁵⁴⁰

SAUSAGE SELLER

The oracle says nothing of the sort.

This dog here . . .

[The Sausage Seller indicates the Paphlagonian.]

1

. . . is chewing up your oracles

the way dogs chew on doorposts. I have here
the proper prophecy about the dog.

DEMOS

Then state it. But first I'll pick up this stone,
so the oracle about the dog won't bite.

SAUSAGE SELLER [pretending to read from his scroll]

"Son of Erechtheus, beware of Cerberus,
the dog which kidnaps men.⁵⁴¹ When you are at a meal
he fawns on you with wagging tail, but he's watching
to devour your dishes, when you look away,
your mouth agape. Often in the night he sneaks
into your kitchen rooms, while you are unaware,
and, like a dog, licks clean your plates and islands."

DEMOS

By Poseidon, Glanis, that's much better!

PAPHLAGONIAN

Well, listen to this one and then decide:

[The Paphlagonian reads from another scroll]

"A woman in sacred Athens will bear a lion,
who will fight for the people against huge clouds
of gnats, as if he were protecting his own cubs.
Look after him. Build wooden walls around him
and towers of iron."

⁵⁴⁰Phoebus is another name for Apollo. Erechtheus was a legendary king of Athens. His descendants or sons are the Athenians.

⁵⁴¹Cerberus is the dog guarding the entrance to the underworld.

Do you know what that means?

DEMOS

By Apollo, I don't.

PAPHLAGONIAN

The god clearly states
you should look after me, because I am
that lion symbol.

DEMOS

How did you become
the lion Simba without my knowledge?⁵⁴²

SAUSAGE SELLER

He's quite deliberately not explaining
something in that saying—the only wall
made out of iron and wood inside which
Loxias has told you to preserve the man.⁵⁴³

DEMOS

Why does the god say these words?

SAUSAGE SELLER

He's telling you
to tie this man down in those wooden stocks,
the ones which have five holes.⁵⁴⁴

DEMOS

I think that oracle
is just about to be fulfilled.

PAPHLAGONIAN

Don't believe him!

The crows are jealous. They keep cawing at me.

[The Paphlagonian reads from another scroll.]

“Cherish the hawk, and remember in your heart
he was the one who on your behalf brought back
those young Spartan ravens all chained together.”

⁵⁴²In the Greek there is a relatively feeble joke on the name Antileon (meaning instead of a lion). Sommerstein states that Antileon is the name of a tyrant from Chalcis. With the name Simba and the word symbol I have tried to provide some equally feeble English humour.

⁵⁴³Loxias is a common name for Apollo.

⁵⁴⁴The wooden stocks have separate holes for each hand, each foot, and the head.

SAUSAGE SELLER

The Paphlagonian was drunk that day—
that's why he took such a dangerous risk.

[The Sausage Seller pretends to read from one of his scrolls.]

“O poorly counselled son of Cecrops, why believe
that was a mighty deed?⁵⁴⁵ For even a woman
can bear a load if a man places it on her.
But she won't fight.”

[The Sausage Seller points to the Paphlagonian.]

If he went into battle,
he'd shit himself.

PAPHLAGONIAN

But consider the phrase
“Pylos before Pylos,” something the god
has drawn to your attention—there is
“A Pylos before Pylos.”

DEMOS

What does he mean
by that expression “Pylos before Pylos”?⁵⁴⁶

SAUSAGE SELLER

He's saying he will pile up piles of bath tubs
and take them from the wash house.⁵⁴⁷

DEMOS

So today
I won't be having my bath?

SAUSAGE SELLER

No, you won't,
since he's taken away our tubs. Here's one—
an oracle about the fleet. You should
give it your very close attention.

DEMOS

⁵⁴⁵Cecrops was another legendary king of Athens. His sons are the Athenians.

⁵⁴⁶There was a well known verse (“There is a Pylos before Pylos, and there is another Pylos besides”) which refers to the fact that there were a number of places in the Peloponnese called Pylos, all claiming to be the original city ruled by Nestor in Homer's Iliad. The Paphlagonian is obviously keen to keep mentioning his great military success in the war.

⁵⁴⁷The Greek joke turns on a similarity between the sound of Pylos (the place) and puelos (meaning a bath tub).

I'm listening. You read it. First of all,
how my sailors are going to get their pay.

SAUSAGE SELLER [pretending to read from a scroll]
"Son of Aegeus, beware of the fox-dog,
in case he tricks you. He's full of deceit,
runs fast, and is cunning and resourceful."

Do you know what that means?

DEMOS

Well, the dog fox—
that's Philostratus.⁵⁴⁸

SAUSAGE SELLER

That's not what it says.
It's about the fast ships which collect cash,
the ones this fellow here keeps requesting.⁵⁴⁹
Loxias is telling you not to give them.

DEMOS

How does a warship become a fox dog?

SAUSAGE SELLER

How come? Because warships and fox dogs
both move fast.

DEMOS

Then why does it say fox dog
instead of just dog?

SAUSAGE SELLER

It's a comparison.

It's saying fox dogs resemble soldiers,
who, like them, feed on grapes from vineyards.⁵⁵⁰

DEMOS

All right, then. Where's the pay for these fox cubs?

SAUSAGE SELLER

I'll see to that and within three days, too.
But pay attention to this oracle,

⁵⁴⁸Philostratus was a pimp whose nickname was dog fox.

⁵⁴⁹The fast ships collecting cash are the ones sent around to the allies of Athens to collect the money they owe for their alliance.

⁵⁵⁰Merry notes that Athenian soldiers who had not been paid foraged for food on the farms.

where Leto's son tells you to shun the port
called Crooked Harbour—that place may trick you.⁵⁵¹

DEMOS

What's Crooked Harbour?

SAUSAGE SELLER [indicating the Paphlagonian]

It clearly states here
that Crooked Harbour is this fellow's hand—
since he's always saying, "My hand's crooked,
so put something in it."

PAPHLAGONIAN

He's telling lies!

The correct reading of that cryptic saying
is that Phoebus means by "Crooked Harbour"
the hand of Diopeithes.⁵⁵² But look here,
I have an oracle with wings—about you.
You will become an eagle and a king
ruling all the earth.

SAUSAGE SELLER

I have one, as well—
you will rule the Earth and Red Sea, too,
be a presiding judge in Ebatana
and lick up decorated cakes.⁵⁵³

PAPHLAGONIAN

In a dream

I have seen Athena herself. I saw her
pouring health and wealth all over Demos
with a bucket.

SAUSAGE SELLER

I've seen the goddess, too.

I saw her come in person, moving out

⁵⁵¹Leto's son is Apollo. The Greek names the port Cyllene, a place in Elis, which leads to the pun on the word kullos, meaning deformed or crooked.

⁵⁵²Diopeithes was known for his extreme religious views, but there is no evidence he was corrupt or that he had a deformed hand (a characteristic which would seem to be demanded by the dialogue).

⁵⁵³Merry notes that by the name Red Sea Aristophanes is referring to the Indian Ocean and that Ecbatana, the capital of Media, is synonymous with enormous wealth and power.

from the Acropolis—she had an owl
perched on her helmet. Then over your head
she poured ambrosia from a little jug,
and over his head . . .

[indicating the Paphlagonian]
. . . she dumped pickled garlic.

DEMOS

That's wonderful! It's really true that no one
is cleverer than Glanis. And so now
I commit myself to you, to guide me
in my old age and to educate me
once more from the start.

PAPHLAGONIAN

No, no! Not yet!
I'm begging you. Just wait a little while,
so I can provide some barley for you
and what you need to live on every day.

DEMOS

I can't stand to hear you talk of barley.
I've been cheated too many times by you
and by Thuphanes.⁵⁵⁴

PAPHLAGONIAN

Then I'll provide you
specially prepared flour cakes.

SAUSAGE SELLER

I'll give you
well-kneaded scones and nicely roasted meat,
All you have to do is eat it.

DEMOS

All right.
Get a move on with what you're going to do.
Then I'll hand over the keys to the Pnyx
to whichever one of you is better
at giving me good service.

⁵⁵⁴Thuphanes was a minor public official and a crony of Cleon's.

PAPHLAGONIAN

I'll be the first
to run inside.

SAUSAGE SELLER

No you won't. I will!

[The Paphlagonian and the Sausage Seller both rush into the house.]

CHORUS

O Demos your rule
is surely so fine,
you're like a tyrant
men fear all the time.
But you're easy to fool,
you like flattering cries
and love to be praised
and told plenty of lies.
You listen to speakers
with mouth open wide
your mind may be present
but it's gone for a ride.

DEMOS

If you think I'm a dolt,
then beneath your long hair
you've got no brain at all.
I am fully aware
that I act like a fool—
I like drinking each day,
and I raise up a thief
for political sway,
with this purpose in mind—
when he's stuffed himself fat,
then I lift up my hand
and knock him down flat.

CHORUS

What you do then is good,
and your style, as you say,

in these things is profound,
 if you use a sly way
 to keep raising these men
 like our victims of state.
 They grow great on the Pnyx,
 so you won't have to wait.
 Then you take one who's fat,
 if you need to eat meat,
 set him up as an offering
 and have something to eat.⁵⁵⁵

DEMOS

Look at me—I am smart.
 I deceive all those men
 who think they're so clever
 and can fool me again.
 I'm on watch for them all, '
 and my eye always looks
 though I don't seem to see,
 when they're acting like crooks.
 Then I make them throw up
 what they've stolen from folk—
 on the voting urn top
 they all puke when I poke.⁵⁵⁶

[The Paphlagonian and the Sausage Seller return from the house. They are each carrying a chest full of food and are getting in each other's way.]

PAPHLAGONIAN

Get the devil out of my way!

SAUSAGE SELLER

Shove off!

PAPHLAGONIAN

Demos, for a long, long time I've been here
 sitting ready, really keen to serve you.

SAUSAGE SELLER

⁵⁵⁵The victims of state or public victims were slaves or captives or prisoners who were kept to be sacrificed as scapegoats in a ritual designed to protect the state.

⁵⁵⁶The top of the voting urn or ballot box was shaped like a funnel.

And I've been ready for ages and ages—
ten, twelve, a thousand—an infinite time.

DEMOS

I've been waiting thirty thousand ages,
fed up with you both for an eternity.

SAUSAGE SELLER

You know what you should do?

DEMOS

I will if you tell me.

SAUSAGE SELLER

Send me and him out from a starting line,
so we can race to see who serves you best—
under equal conditions.

DEMOS

That we must do.

Get in line.⁵⁵⁷

[The Paphlagonian and the Sausage Seller assume the positions of sprinters about to race off.]

PAPHLAGONIAN AND SAUSAGE SELLER

Ready!

DEMOS

Then off you go!

[The Paphlagonian and the Sausage Seller race off to their separate chests and piles of stuff.]

SAUSAGE SELLER

I won't let you win by some secret trick!

DEMOS

By god, today my lovers will make me
extremely happy or else I'll have to
keep playing the coy coquette.

PAPHLAGONIAN [running back to Demos]

Look at this!

I'm the first here—I'm bringing you a chair!

⁵⁵⁷ Merry notes that the stage directions here involve a race, with the Paphlagonian and the Sausage Seller having chests of food and various goods in different places (on either side of the stage), and Demos having a central position in between the two. Hence, there is a lot of stage business involved in the running to and fro.

SAUSAGE SELLER

But not a table—I was the first with that.

PAPHLAGONIAN

Look at this. I've brought you barley cake
prepared by hand with grain from Pylos.

SAUSAGE SELLER

I've got some scooped out bread crusts. They were made
by the goddess' ivory hand.

DEMOS

Lady Athena,
how huge your fingers are!⁵⁵⁸

PAPLAGONIAN

I have pea soup—
tasty and a splendid colour. Pallas,
who fought at Pylos, stirred it herself.

SAUSAGE SELLER

O Demos, the goddess is watching you—
that's clear enough—and now above your head
she holds a pot brim full of broth.

DEMOS

Do you think
we'd still be inhabiting this city
if she was not clearly holding over us
a pan of broth?

PAPHLAGONIAN

And here's a slice of fish—
it's a present to you from the goddess
who strikes panic into every army.

SAUSAGE SELLER

And here is meat cooked in its own juices
from the daughter of a mighty father—
along with a slice of tripe and sausage.

DEMOS

⁵⁵⁸The statue of Athena in the Parthenon was 33 feet high. Hence, the hands on the goddess were immense. Scooped out bread crusts were used as spoons for soup. Green notes that the line makes better sense if the bread crust is very large so that the part scooped out with a finger is quite big.

She's remembering the robe I gave her.

That's nice.

PAPHLAGONIAN

The goddess of the dreadful plume
bids you eat this pound cake—with its rhythms
we'll be better at rowing ships.⁵⁵⁹

SAUSAGE SELLER

Take this, too.

DEMOS

What do I do with these bits of stomach?

SAUSAGE SELLER

The goddess sends these to you on purpose—
to fix our ships bellies. That makes it clear
her eye is on our fleet. Have a drink now,
two measures of wine, three measures of water.⁵⁶⁰

DEMOS [sampling the wine]

Ah Zeus, how delicious that is—the wine
carries well the three measures of water.

SAUSAGE SELLER

Athena, thrice born, mixed in the three parts.⁵⁶¹

PAPHLAGONIAN

Here, take this slice of rich flat-cake from me.

SAUSAGE SELLER

But from me you will get this entire cake.

PAPHLAGONIAN

But you don't have stewed hare to give him. I do!

SAUSAGE SELLER [to himself]

Damn and blast it! Where can I get a hare?

Come on, brain, produce some devious trick.⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁹There is a pun in the Greek involving the word for cake and the word for row. I have added the phrase “with its rhythms” to make something in English of the sense.

⁵⁶⁰The Greeks rarely drank undiluted wine. A solution of two parts wine to three parts water was common.

⁵⁶¹Athena was commonly called Tritogeneia. It is not clear what the word means but etymologically it could have something to do with the number three (e.g. thrice born, born third). Hence, the link to the wine-and-water mixture.

⁵⁶²Merry explains that hare was considered a delicacy in Athens but that during the war they were very scarce, since the Spartans occupied much of the countryside and there were restrictions on imports (hence the later mention of a risk involved).

PAPHLAGONIAN [pulling a hare from his supply]
You see this, you miserable devil!

SAUSAGE SELLER [looking into the wings]
I don't give a damn. I see men coming—
ambassadors to me bringing bags of cash.

PAPHLAGONIAN [putting the hare down and moving toward the wings]
Where? Where are they?

SAUSAGE SELLER [grabbing the hare]
What do you care?
Can't you ever stop bothering foreigners?
My dear little Demos, you see this hare—
I'm bringing it for you.

PAPHLAGONIAN
You bloody cheat!
You've stolen my stuff! That's not fair!

SAUSAGE SELLER Yes, I have,
by Poseidon, just as you nicked those men
from Pylos.

DEMOS [to the Sausage Seller]
If you don't mind my asking,
tell me this—how did you get that idea
to steal the hare?

SAUSAGE SELLER
The idea is from Athena,
but the theft is all my own.

PAPHLAGONIAN
I took the risk,
and, in addition, I prepared the meat.

DEMOS
Get out of here. The one who brings the food
is the only one to get my grateful thanks.

PAPHLAGONIAN [aside]
Good god, his shamelessness will conquer mine!

SAUSAGE SELLER
All right, Demos, why not judge which of us

was the best to you and to your stomach?

DEMOS

How do I decide between the two of you,
using facts that will make the audience
believe I am making a wise judgment?

SAUSAGE SELLER [pulling Demos aside and lowering his voice]
I'll tell you. Don't say a word. Go over there
to my basket. Check out what's inside it.
Then, do that to the Paphlagonian's.
That's all you need to judge correctly.

DEMOS [moving to the Sausage Seller's hamper]
Well then, let's see. What's in here?

SAUSAGE SELLER

It's empty.
Can't you see that? My dear little father,
I brought everything to you.

DEMOS

This hamper
is on the people's side.

SAUSAGE SELLER

Now, stroll over here
to the Paphlagonian's. Do you see?

DEMOS

O my, it's full of so many good things!
A huge piece of cake he kept for himself!
He cut off a slice and gave it to me—
only this big!

SAUSAGE SELLER

That's what he did before.
He gave you a tiny part of what he took
and set aside most of it for himself.

DEMOS [to the Paphlagonian]

You wretch! Was that how you were cheating me,
by stealing? That symbol of your office—

I gave it to you.⁵⁶³ I showered you with gifts.

PAPHLAGONIAN

I did steal, but for the city's benefit.

DEMOS

Take that badge off—and quickly, so that I
can confer it on that man.

SAUSAGE SELLER

Hand it over fast.

You worthless rogue, you deserve a whipping.

PAPHLAGONIAN

No. There is a Pythian oracle
which reveals the name of the only man
who is destined to overthrow me.

SAUSAGE SELLER

It spoke my name, and it was very clear.

PAPHLAGONIAN

All right. I wish to put you through a test
with certain evidence, to make quite sure
you match what the god intended. And so
I will start by examining who you are.
As a boy, what schooling did you go through?

SAUSAGE SELLER

I was taught by being thrashed in the pits
where pigs are singed.

PAPHLAGON

What's that you just said?

[aside to himself]

That oracle will give me a heart attack!

[returns to questioning the Sausage Seller]

All right. What did you learn from the teacher
in charge of wrestling?

SAUSAGE SELLER

Well, I learned this—

⁵⁶³The symbol of office (in the Greek a garland) would be something like an official wreath on his head.

when I was stealing, I looked straight ahead
and told a lie.

PAPHLAGONIAN [aside to himself]

“O Phoebus Apollo,
lord of Lycia, what will you do to me?”⁵⁶⁴

[resuming the questioning of the Sausage Seller]
When you were grown up, what was your trade?
SAUSAGE SELLER

I sold sausages and fucked a bit for cash.

PAPHLAGONIAN [aside to himself]

My god, I’m screwed! I’m nothing anymore!
But I’m still riding on one slender hope.

[resuming his questioning of the Sausage Seller]
Tell me this—where did you sell sausages,

in the market or at the city gates?

SAUSAGE SELLER

By the gates, where salted foods are sold.

PAPHLAGONIAN [in tragic style]

Alas, The god’s oracle has been fulfilled!
Roll this ill-fated wretch inside the house.

[He takes off the garland symbolizing his office]

Farewell, my garland, you must now leave me.

With great reluctance I abandon you.

Some other man will now take you up
and will possess you—no greater thief,
but perhaps someone with more good fortune.⁵⁶⁵

[The Paphlagonian tosses the garland away and collapses, lying inert on the
ground. The Sausage Seller catches the garland and puts it on his own head.]

SAUSAGE SELLER

O Zeus, god of the Greeks, this victory
belongs to you.

CHORUS LEADER

Hail, glorious conqueror!

⁵⁶⁴This is a quotation from the Telephus of Euripides.

⁵⁶⁵These lines, in a parody of tragic style, echo a lament in Euripides’ tragedy Alcestis.

Remember that you have become a man
thanks to me. I ask for something trifling—
to be your Phanos and sign your law suits.⁵⁶⁶

DEMOS [to Sausage Seller]

Tell me your name.

SAUSAGE SELLER

Agoracritus—
because I was raised on disagreements
in the market.

DEMOS

Well then, I place myself
in the care of Agoracritus—to him
I hand over the Paphlagonian here.

SAUSAGE SELLER

Demos, I will look after you really well.
You will agree you could not imagine
any man more friendly to this city
full of those who love to yawn and gape.

[Demos and the Sausage Seller go into the house. Some members of the Chorus
haul the Paphlagonian off to one side of the stage by his feet and return without him.]

CHORUS

What is more beautiful than to sing
at the start or finish of our choral song
of those who drive swift horses—with no jokes
aimed at Lysistratus and in our hearts
no deliberate wish to injure Thumantis,
who has no home and craves food all the time—
O dear Apollo, with many tears he clings
to thy quiver there in Delphi, begging
not to live in such wretched poverty.⁵⁶⁷

⁵⁶⁶The Chorus Leader is asking to work for the Sausage Seller by helping him initiate law suits and prosecutions. Phanos performed this work for Cleon. The speech is sometimes assigned to Demosthenes. There is some justification for that, since he first recruited the Sausage Seller, but his reappearance here is dramatically awkward, because he has been absent for so long and has no other lines.

⁵⁶⁷Lysistratus was apparently a well-known pauper in Athens. Thumantis was, one assumes from this passage, an Athenian very down on his luck. The passage seems to mean that at this moment we wish to celebrate ourselves (as Knights) rather than satirize the less fortunate.

CHORUS LEADER

There is nothing hateful in aiming one's abuse
 at wicked rogues—no, if one reasons well,
 it's paying a tribute to worthwhile citizens.
 So if the man about whom we must now proclaim
 many bad things were himself well known to all,
 I would not mention someone who is my friend.
 Now, there is no one who can tell the colour white
 from Orthian melodies who does not know
 Agrignotus. Well, that man has a brother,
 Aripbrates, who in his habits is not like him
 and who wants to be like that.⁵⁶⁸ He's not only bad—
 if that were all, I wouldn't pay him any mind—
 not only completely nasty, but has invented
 something even worse. He corrupts his own tongue
 with revolting pleasures, licking disgusting juices
 inside the cunts of prostitutes, staining his beard,
 stirring up coals in those hot fires, carrying on
 like Polymnestus, and hanging out with Oeonichus.
 Any person who does not despise a man like that
 will never drink from the same cup as I do.⁵⁶⁹

CHORUS

At night certain thoughts often come to me,
 and I wonder where Cleonymus gets food
 for that voracious appetite he has. They say
 that when he grazed on rich men's tables
 he'd never leave the tub of food alone.
 And they'd keep begging him in unison,
 "O lord, by your knees, leave, and spare our table."⁵⁷⁰

CHORUS LEADER

⁵⁶⁸Agrignotus was a musician popular in Athens. His brother Aripbrates, Sommerstein notes, is a frequent target of Aristophanes.

⁵⁶⁹Polymnestus and Oeonichus are, one assumes, known figures in Athens. We have no knowledge of their personal habits apart from this reference.

⁵⁷⁰Cleonymus, an Athenian politician, is one of the most frequently attacked targets in Aristophanes' plays, usually for his gluttony or his cowardice.

They say our warships once all met together
 to chat to one another, and one of them,
 an older lady, said, “Girls, don’t you realize
 what’s going on in the city? People are claiming
 some man is requisitioning one hundred of us
 to sail off to Carthage—some worthless citizen
 called sour Hyperbolus.”⁵⁷¹ All of them thought this
 totally outrageous and would not endure it.
 One of those ships, a virgin who’d not yet come near
 a crew of men, declared, “May god protect us,
 that man will never become my master! Instead,
 I’ll grow old here, if I must, with festering wood
 chewed up by worms.” “By the gods, he’ll not command
 Nauphanta, daughter of Nauson, not if I, too,
 am constructed out of pine and timbers. And so,
 if Athenians take up Hyperbolus’ scheme,
 then I think we should hoist sail and seek refuge
 at the Theseum or the Furies’ sanctuary.
 He won’t take charge of us and mock the city.
 If that’s what he wants, let him go all by himself,
 sail off down to Hades once he’s launched those tubs
 he used when trying to sell those lamps of his.”⁵⁷²

[Enter the Sausage Seller from the house. He is wearing a rich, new outfit.]

SAUSAGE SELLER

We must maintain a holy silence,
 keeping our mouths firmly closed, refraining
 from giving evidence, and closing those courts
 from which the city gets so much delight.
 To salute our new good fortune, people here
 should sing a sacred song of gratitude.

CHORUS LEADER

⁵⁷¹Hyperbolus, another favourite target of Aristophanes, was an up-and-coming politician in Athens. His commercial business was selling lamps. The most ambitious of the war-mongering Athenians, as mentioned before, had lofty imperial ambitions to extend the Athenian empire to Carthage, in North Africa.

⁵⁷²The Theseum, the Temple of Theseus, Merry notes, was a famous sanctuary, where slaves took refuge from cruel masters. The Temple of the Furies was a shrine in Athens. Since these were in the city, Sommerstein observes, the ships could not literally sail there.

O you flaming light for sacred Athens,
protector of the islands, what good news
do you carry as you move here, for which
we will make our streets fill up with the smell
of smoking sacrifices?

SAUSAGE SELLER

I have boiled Demos,
made him young again for you and transformed
something ugly into something beautiful.⁵⁷³

CHORUS LEADER

And so, you fountain of marvellous schemes,
where is he now?

SAUSAGE SELLER

He lives in ancient Athens,
that city crowned with violets.

CHORUS LEADER

How can we see him?
What style of clothing is he wearing?
What sort of man has he become?

SAUSAGE SELLER

He has become what he was earlier,
when he lived alongside Aristides
and Miltiades. But you yourselves can see—
for I already hear doors opening
in the Propylaea.⁵⁷⁴ Shout out with joy,
as ancient Athens now comes into view,
that wonderful place, so often praised in hymns,
the place where celebrated Demos dwells.

CHORUS LEADER

Splendid, envied Athens, crowned with violets,
show us the king of all the land of Greece.

⁵⁷³Merry notes that this mention of boiling is a reference to the famous story in which Medea, a queen with magical powers, rejuvenates Pelias, an old man, in her cauldron.

⁵⁷⁴Aristides and Miltiades were celebrated Athenian leaders in the days of the Persian Wars. The Propylaea is the entrance to the Acropolis in Athens. Presumably we are to assume that Demos' house has now become that symbol of democratic government. The Acropolis of Aristophanes' time did not exist during the Persian Wars. Sommerstein suggests that at this point a platform is rolled out of the doors of the house with a structure on it symbolizing the Propylaea of ancient Athens.

[Demos emerges through the doors of the Propylaea. He has been completely rejuvenated and is dressed in traditional clothes.]

SAUSAGE SELLER

Gaze upon this man, with the cicada
in his hair, glorious in his ancient robes,
anointed with myrrh and smelling now,
not of mussel shells, but offerings of peace.⁵⁷⁵

CHORUS LEADER

Hail king of the Greeks. We rejoice with you.
What you do is worthy of the city
and of our trophy raised at Marathon.⁵⁷⁶

DEMOS

Come here, Agoracritos, dearest of men.
What great things you have done, by boiling me!

SAUSAGE SELLER

I did? My friend, if you do not understand
the kind of person you were previously
and what sort of things you did, you would think
I was a god.

DEMOS

Tell me—what did I do before?
What was I like?

SAUSAGE SELLER

Well, for a start, when someone
announced in the assembly, “O Demos,
I am such an ardent lover of yours,
I am concerned for you and I alone
look out for what you need,” at that point—
after someone used these opening phrases—
you’d always flap your wings and toss your horns.

DEMOS

I did that?

⁵⁷⁵The cicada brooch worn in the hair was a mark of traditional styles of dress, long out of fashion. Mussel shells were used in the law courts as voting tokens.

⁵⁷⁶Marathon was the site of the famous victory against the first Persian expedition in 490 BC.

SAUSAGE SELLER

Once he'd completely fooled you
merely with these words, he'd go away.

DEMOS

What are you saying? They did that to me,
and I never noticed?

SAUSAGE SELLER

Yes. And then, by god,
your ears would open like a parasol
and then close again.

DEMOS

Was I so stupid
and such a dotard?

SAUSAGE SELLER

Yes, by Zeus, you were.
If two orators spoke up, one proposing
to build long ships for war and the other
to spend the same amount to pay off
certain citizens, the one who spoke of pay
would always go away victorious
over the man who spoke of war ships.

[Demos turns his head aside.]

Why hang your head? Can't you stand firm here?

DEMOS

Well, I'm ashamed of earlier mistakes.

SAUSAGE SELLER

You shouldn't think about them. Those mistakes
were not your fault—no, they were brought about
by the men who lied to you. Now, tell me,
if some impudent advocate cried out,
“You jury men, there'll be no wheat for you,
unless you convict someone in this case,”
what would you do to the man who made that plea?

DEMOS

I'd string him up above the ground, fling him

into the Barathron, with Hyperbolus
hanging round his neck.⁵⁷⁷

SAUSAGE SELLER

Now you're talking
in a reasonable and proper way.
All right, let's see, what other policies
would you undertake? Tell me.

DEMOS

First of all,
whenever the long ships return to port,
I'll give the rowers their pay in full.

SAUSAGE SELLER

You'll please many a worn and blistered bum.

DEMOS

And then, no soldier whose name is entered
on the roll will be transferred somewhere else
because of special interests. It will stay
where it was written down originally.

SAUSAGE SELLER

That will sting Cleonymus on his shield band.⁵⁷⁸

DEMOS

And no one will hang around the market place
unless he has a beard.

SAUSAGE SELLER

If that's the case,
where will Cleisthenes and Strato buy things?⁵⁷⁹

DEMOS

By that I mean those young men at the market
where perfumes are sold, who sit there and chat,
saying things like, "That Phaeax is so smart!

⁵⁷⁷The Barathron was a natural gully into which criminals were thrown.

⁵⁷⁸Citizens eligible for military service had their names written on a list and were conscripted in order, but it was possible to use one's influence to get the position of the name changed and thus to evade having to fight. Cleonymus, a common target of Aristophanes, had a reputation as a coward.

⁵⁷⁹Cleisthenes is often satirized as a beardless and effeminate man. Strato is linked to him elsewhere in Aristophanes as another immature man without a beard.

The way he escaped death was so clever!
How stylish the man is, how logical,
how good at formulating new expressions,
clear and pointed, and he's the very best
at silencing those nasty hecklers."⁵⁸⁰

SAUSAGE SELLER

Surely you'll give these chatterers the finger?

DEMOS

No, by Zeus. I'll force them all to go hunting
and stop proposing to vote in decrees.

SAUSAGE SELLER [beckoning to a slave]

All right then, given that, accept this stool,
and this slave who will carry it for you.
He's got enormous balls, and if you like,
you can make him your camp stool.

DEMOS

My goodness!

I am reassuming my old habits!

SAUSAGE SELLER

You will claim that for sure when I give you
the peace terms for a truce of thirty years.⁵⁸¹

[He calls into the house.]

Terms of peace, come out here quickly.

[Enter two scantily clad or perhaps naked young girls whom the Sausage Seller presents to Demos.]

DEMOS

Holy Zeus, they are lovely. By the gods, '
can I play around with them for thirty years?
Let me ask you—where did you find them?

SAUSAGE SELLER

Didn't you know the Paphlagonian
was keeping them locked up in the house
where you wouldn't find them? I'm giving them

⁵⁸⁰Phaeax was a well known orator in Athens.

⁵⁸¹Athens had secured a thirty-year truce with the Spartans in 445 BC.

to you so you can take them with you
when you go back to your country home.

DEMOS

And what about the Paphlagonian
who did all this. How will you punish him?

SAUSAGE SELLER

Nothing excessive. He will carry on
with my old trade beside the city gates,
selling sausages all by himself. He'll keep
making a hash of things, but from now on
with dog and donkey meat. And when he's drunk,
he'll swap his swear words with the prostitutes,
and drink foul water from the public baths.

DEMOS

What you've proposed that man richly deserves,
a slanging match with whores and bath attendants.
And now, in return, I am inviting you
to the Prytaneum, to take the seat
which that piece of filth once occupied.
Put on this frog-green robe and follow me.
Someone take that fellow away from here
where he may ply his trade, so that strangers
whom he used to hurt so much may see him.

[Some of the Chorus haul away the Paphlagonian. Demos, the Sausage Seller, the
Peace Treaty Girls, and the Chorus move off towards the city]

Acharnians

This edition is based on the [publicly available](#)⁵⁸² translation by G. Theodoridis

Acharnians «Ἀχαρνείς» or «Ἀχαρνής»

Produced in 425BCE

...

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

DICAEOPOLIS: A mild-mannered farmer

XANTHIAS: A Slave to Dicaeopolis

A SECOND SLAVE TO DICAEOPOLIS

A DAUGHTER TO DICAEOPOLIS

A WIFE TO DICAEOPOLIS

EURIPIDES: The Athenian tragedian

KIFISOPHOS: A slave to Euripides

LAMACHUS: A bombastic general

FOUR SLAVES TO EURIPIDES

FOUR MEMBERS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

MAYBEGOD: A peace negotiator

TWO AMBASSADORS TO THE PERSIAN COURT

PSEUDOARTABAS: “The King’s Eye”

TWO EUNUCHS TO PSEUDOARTABAS

THEORUS: Ambassador to Thrace

FIVE ODOMANTIAN SOLDIERS

MEGARIAN: A mild-mannered pauper

TWO DAUGHTERS TO THE MEGARIAN

BOETIAN: A mild-mannered merchant

ISMENIAS: His slave

INFORMER

NIKARHOS: Another informer.

MISS PEACE

DERKETES: A wealthy farmer

⁵⁸²<https://bacchicstage.wordpress.com/aristophanes/acharnians/>

BEST MAN
BRIDESMAID

HERALD A
HERALD B

CHORUS:
LACRATIDIS
MARILADES
DRAKYLOS
EUFORIDES
PRINIDES
OTHER MEMBERS

TWO ARCHERS (Female)
TWO FLUTE PLAYERS Following the Boetian
CROWD AT THE PNYX

Scene 1

The stage is divided into two parts. On Stage Left is Dicaeopolis' house. Front door aspect. On Stage Right is a building which will serve as first, the Pnyx, then Euripides' house –both front door aspect and indoors and finally as Lamachus' house, front only. Both houses have a window through which the audience may witness indoor business. Next to Dicaeopolis' house is an altar to Dionysus. The Pnyx has benches around for the people to sit upon and tables for the Executive Committee.

Day. The Open Air Assembly Pnyx. Dicaeopolis is standing, all alone, waiting. Next to him is a sack of garlic which he has brought from his farm. He keeps moving it about to be near him, whenever he moves. He's slowly pacing up and down, shaking his head, despondency slowly giving way to anger and, between comedic pauses, he farts, scratches his bum and inguinal area, stares tearfully into the distance, scratches the ground with his feet, sits down, stands up, frets with anxiety and impatience.

Dicaeopolis: Looks into the distance again and this time, yells angrily
Buy! Buy! Buy! Sell! Sell! Sell!

Sighs several times before he speaks and when he does so, his speech is ponderous, agonised and peppered with more sighs. God, there are so many things that eat away at my poor little ticker! Oh, yes! So many worries! And the pleasures? Shakes his head despondently So few pleasures! Thinks while counting on his fingers. First in

one hand, then in the other, then back to the first hand... Drops his hands to his side in despair. Four, to be utterly precise! Four! Whereas my pains! Shows his two hands – that’s what he was counting after all! The pains I’ve suffered were... b’zillions! Heaps and heaps of them! More sighs Let me see, now. Which of these pleasures were really worthy of the name? Oh, yes! Laughs I remember now! This was a real delectation, this one! It gave my soul something to be really chirpy about. That was when our leader, Cleon had to vomit back the five talents shows the fingers on his hand again –count them – five talents, to the Treasury! Five talents –that’s Back to counting his fingers again. That’s... let’s see, six thousand drachs to a talent... that makes... Ooooooh, a lot! Hahaha! He had ripped off our allies by promising them that he could persuade our council to lower their taxes, so they gave him a neat little bribe of all these drachmas. But the Knights sniffed out the job and so they made him cough it all up again. Hahaha! What a beautiful job the Knights did on him! I love them for that! Men and deed, worthy of Greece! Thinks for a little while and a thought saddens him. But then, there was this tragic torture I had to endure. While I was at the theatre, expecting some brilliant Aeschylean thing, I hear the words, “Permission granted for Theognis to direct his chorus!” Grrr! Theognis! Cold, cold-hearted creep. That’s why they call him “Snowy, Old Snowy,” they call him!

My God! Can you imagine how that froze my heart? (Back to thinking. This time it’s a happy thought.) But then again, what a joy it was to have that crap lyre-player, Moschus, followed by divine Dexitheus! Oh, what a delightful voice that boy has! He came on to sing some lovely Boetian songs. Absolute delight! (Back to thinking. Sigh of sadness again). Completely the opposite of what happened this year! Disgusting! Damn near killed myself trying to look away when that gruesome sight of a flute player, sneaked onto the stage to play his martial airs. Tararam, tararam, tarararararram! Horrible, stuff, just horrible... believe me, it was horrible! (Looks around him, anger swelling). But, my God! My eyes have never burned so much as they do now at the sight of this. Not since mummy gave me my first bath, did they burn so much! (Waving his arms about, indicating the emptiness of the place) Look at this! You wouldn’t believe it but this is a proper, normal day for the sitting of the Assembly. Yet, look at it! The place is deserted! Totally! They’re all at the market, gossiping as usual or running up and down the place trying to avoid the staining rope of the cops when they try to round them up. Even the Executive aren’t here yet. They’ll come late – as per always!- all in one go, preferring to push and shove each other to get to the front row, rather than to talk about peace. Oh, Athens, Athens!

My poor little country! What are you doing? What are you on about these days?

Here I am, as per always the first one here and as per always, I sit and wait. And wait, and wait! And, what can I do with myself? All alone, here? Groans I groan, and groan and I yawn and I gawk... Stretches his limbs and I stretch and I scratch and... Farts loudly, then chuckles and I fart and fart –pooh, stinky garlic farts! Then I don't know what else to do... Scratches his groin so I start scratching... pictures on the ground, start tearing at my pubes... I ponder about life... I look far towards my fields and I long for peace! Peace! How I long for peace! Deep sigh. I hate the city... but I love the village! I love the village! None of this, "I need to buy coal," or "I need to buy vinegar" or oil or... or anything! We know nothing of "buying" up there. We supply everything ourselves – we gave "buying" the axe! Peace! Here I am then, absolutely determined to scream and shout and swear at the speakers if any of them want to talk about anything else but peace.

Enter the Executive Committee, a Herald, two archers and a crowd, jostling for the front seats.

Ah! Here they are. It must be midday! What did I tell you? They're pushing and shoving each other to get to the front planks. Pushing, pushing, pushing! Everyone is pushing!

Herald:Directing everyone This way! This way please! Come in through, into the consecrated area, please! This way!

Enter Maybegod, last of all and looking concerned.

Maybegod:To Dicaeopolis Has anyone spoken yet?

Dicaeopolis shakes his head.

Herald:

Right! Is there anyone who wishes to speak?

Maybegod:

I do!

Herald:

Who are you?

Maybegod:

I am Maybegod

Herald:

Maybegod? You mean, you are not a mortal?

Maybegod:

No, not a mortal. I am immortal! Because Maybegod senior married Demeter and

they gave birth to Triptolemos. By him was born Keleos who wedded grandma – that’s Faenarete- from whom emerged Lycinos and from Lycinos came I! That’s me! Immortal Maybegod! And as such, the gods have entrusted me –me alone- with the peace negotiations with Sparta! But, men, though I am immortal, I still need financial support but pleads The Executive will just not give me that support!

Herald:

Archers! Out with this idiot!

The archers come and grab Maybegod.

Maybegod:

Oh Triptolemos and Keleos, have you forsaken me?

Maybegod is thrown out of the pnyx by the archers.

Dicaeopolis:

Unfair! Unfair! The Committee is being unfair to the Assembly by throwing out a man who wants to negotiate peace and to rid us of our war shields!

Herald:

You, sit down and shut up!

Dicaeopolis:

I will not sit down and shut up until you start discussing peace!

Herald:

Our ambassadors from The King’s Court!

Dicaeopolis:

Which King’s Court? I hate all these wanky, peacocky feathery, crappy ambassadors!

Herald:

Quiet!

From Stage right enter slowly and, pompously feigning dignity, the Persian ambassadors dressed in overdone Persian garb. Their phalluses protrude through their many feathers.

Dicaeopolis:

Oh, Ekvatana, baby! Look at those posers!

Ambassador: Addressing the Executive Committee. Angrily. Gentlemen! You have sent us to the Great King on a salary of two drachmas per day. That was over ten years ago, during the archonship of Euthymenes!

Dicaeopolis:

Ah, the poor little drachmas!

Ambassador:

And we have suffered terribly. We were thoroughly bored as we strolled under the sun umbrellas along the plains of Carystros, lying in those luxurious coaches... we nearly died of it all!

Dicaeopolis:

While I was taking it easy, sleeping on crap beds at the battlements!

Ambassador:

And wherever we dined, the hosts would always force us to drink out of golden goblets and crystal cups! All that sweet, unmixed wine!

Dicaeopolis:

Oh, Athens, great city of Kranaos! Can you feel how these ambassadors are mocking you?

Ambassador:

That's because the barbarians consider real men only those who drink and eat a great deal.

Dicaeopolis:

Whereas we, here in Athens consider real men those who fuck or get fucked a great deal!

Ambassador:

At the end of the fourth year, we arrived at the Great King's Court but he had to vacate... he took his army and went off looking for a dunny. And there they all sat and shat, for eight months! Made huge mountains of gold! Mountains and mountains of it!

Dicaeopolis:

Affluent effluence! Hahaha! Eight months, hey? Yells so that the ambassador may hear him I wonder how long it took him to gather this huge... bumhole of his, back together again?

Ambassador: Responding to Dicaeopolis A full moon! Then he came back home and made us eat oxen, roasted whole in the bread oven!

Dicaeopolis:

Buuuull- shit! Who ever saw oxen roasted in bread ovens?

Ambassador: Still with Dicaeopolis Swear to Zeus and hope to die! Then he served us a huge bird... Real huge, it was, three times the size of Cleonymus' bum! This bird was called... trying to remember Lyre, no, Ripper!

Dicaeopolis:

You're the liar! You're the one who's ripped us off with shitful lies like this –ripped

us off of our two drachs per day! Per every day!

Ambassador:

And now, we have come here bringing with us, Pseudoartabas, who's called. "The King's Spy," errr, I mean, "Eye."

Dicaeopolis:

I wish the crows would rip your eye out mister Ambassador!

Herald: Yells

The King's Eye! All stand for the King's Eye!

Enter "The King's Eye" Pseudoartabas with his two eunuchs. Their attire is even more contrived than that of the Ambassadors' and the manner and air of Pseudoartabas is even more pompous and condescending. He is wearing a frightening mask upon which is painted a huge eye, much like those one sees at the sides of the front of old Persian ships.

Dicaeopolis:

Great Hercules! Oh my, oh my, oh my, oh my God! Man what an eye! What do you use it for, as a look out? Are you the one on the ship who shouts out the warning, "war ship ahoy!" or are you the eye on the ship's nose searching for a shit house, I mean, ship house? And what a piece of beaten hide surrounds it!

Ambassador:

Right! Pseudoartabas, now please tell the Athenians what the Great King has sent you to say.

Pseud: Makes rude gestures, swinging and pointing first at his bum, then at his phallus Artaman exarzan! Colo megalo, holo satra!

Ambassador: To the people

Did you all get what he said?

Dicaeopolis:

Not me, no!

Ambassador:

He said that the Great King will be sending you all a great deal of gold Leans to Pseudo and whispers in his ear Say the word "gold" loudly and clearly.

Pseud:

Greeks him muchy bummy hole not get him muchy goldy.

Dicaeopolis:

Now, that was clear enough all right! Damned idiot!

Ambassador:

Yeah? What did he say?

Dicaeopolis:

What did he say? He says we've got overused bum holes and so we won't get any gold from the damned barbarians!

Ambassador:

No, you're wrong. He didn't say "bums," he said "tons!" He means the King is going to send us tons of gold!

Dicaeopolis:

Tons, my bum! You're just as big a wanker as he is! Ah, forget it! Piss off! I'll ask the questions from now on. To Pseudoartabas Come now, you... King's prick! Talk to me and be clear about it or else I'll be painting your bum Sardinian red. Now! Is that great king of yours going to send us any gold? Pseudoartabas shakes his head So... these ambassadors here are lying to us? This time he nods. Dicaeopolis is highly surprised. Now... that was a real Greek nod that one, wasn't it? No doubt about it... Looks closely at him and at the eunuchs These wankers are all from around here! These eunuchs... Aha! I recognise one of them! That one there! He's Cleisthenes, the son of Sybirtius, that one! But... Looks closer Cleisthenes didn't have a beard... Looks even closer at him until the penny drops It is you! You, with your hot, passionate – and smooth-shaved bum! Did you really think you could fool us, pretending to be a eunuch with this monkey beard? And this one? Isn't he Stratos?

Herald:

You! Shut up and sit down! Ahem! The Assembly invites The King's Eye to the Prytaneum!

Ambassadors, Pseudoartabas and his eunuchs leave the Pnyx. While Dicaeopolis speaks the Executive Committee prepares the next item in the agenda.

Dicaeopolis: To the audience

Doesn't this sort of stuff make you homicidal? Here I am, straining to survive from one day to the next while the doors to the dining halls are never shut for these crooks! Thanks for a moment Right! That's it! I thought me a great and mighty thought! Now where's my little Maybegod?

Maybegod pokes his head from behind a wall.

Maybegod:

Here I am! Right here!

Dicaeopolis:

Here, Maybegod. Searches in every pocket and fold of his cloak and tunic and gathers

up some coins. Counts them and hands them to Maybegod Take these eight drachmas of mine and go and make peace with the Spartans for me, my children and my nearest and dearest! To the Executive Committee And you, gentlemen, you can go on with your ambassadorising and with your looking like idiotic dorks!

Maybegod chuckles with sly joy and runs off.

Herald:

Let Theorus, ambassador from the court of Sitalces, King of Thrace, approach!

Enter Theorus, dressed in equally exaggerated Thracian clothes.

Dicaeopolis: To the audience

Here we go again! Another costume, another wanker!

Theorus:

We would have not stayed in Thrace for so long...

Dicaeopolis:

...if your salary wasn't so great!

Theorus:

If the whole of Thrace wasn't covered with snow...

Dicaeopolis: To the audience

That's the time when Theognis, old "swowzy," I told you about, produced his tragedy. Sure brings on the winter with his tragedies, that boy! Brrrr!

Theorus:

I was drinking with Sitalces during all that time. He loves the Athenians so much! He adores them, you know! He lusts after them! So much so that he had covered all his walls with graffiti, saying, "Athenians are beautiful!" And his son, the one we made an Athenian citizen, he was eager to come to Athens and eat some of our sausages during our Cheater's festivals, so he begged his father to come to the aid of his newly adopted country. To which his father agreed and took an oath and swore that he would help the Athenians by sending them so huge an army that when they saw it they'd think a plague of locusts had descended upon them!

Dicaeopolis: To the audience I'd be buggered if I believe any of this... except the locusts bit!

Theorus: Indicating behind the curtain

So he has sent you these here soldiers. They are from one of the most genuine war-loving tribes in Thrace.

Dicaeopolis: To the audience

Now this will be good! We'll get to see the real colour of their money!

Herald:

Ahem! The Thracians whom Theorus has brought – please approach!

A motley band of soldiers, ill equipped, ill dressed, looking as if they're starved and not at all "war loving" are ushered in. Their phalluses look "strange."

Dicaeopolis: Laughs heartily as he mocks them What is this ugly lot of Dickyskins? In fact... He approaches them for closer scrutiny talking about Dickys...

Theorus:

You are looking at the Odomantian Army, sir!

Dicaeopolis:

Odomantian what? Pointing at their phalluses

And who snipped off the figskins from their Odomantian pricks?

Theorus: Like an insulted salesman

These here soldiers –if you give them a mere two drachs a day they'll have the whole of Boetia conquered!

Some soldiers have discovered Dicaeopolis' sack of garlic and they're furtively eating it.

Dicaeopolis:

Two drachs for these halfcocks? Oh, God! What tears would flow from the eyes of those true soldiers, those rowers who fought the really great battles, our city savers, if the heard of this outrage. Two drachs a day –for snipped Dickys!... Sees the soldiers tearing hungrily at his garlic Oi! Shit! Stop that you rotten buggers! Leave my garlic alone! Grabs a spring garlic from the teeth of one of the soldiers Give it back!

Theorus:

Oh no! Oh, no! Poor fool. Don't go near them, now, you idiot! Once they get a bit of garlic into them they get so horny they turn into fighting cocks!

Dicaeopolis: At the Exec. Committee. Fuming with anger

Are you lot going to sit there and watch as a bunch of barbarians do this to me, in my own country? No response from the Committee Right! Then I insist that no discussion should take place about the salary of these... Thracians... The Assembly should be dismissed –right now! Zeus has spoken. He has sent us a signal. I have felt a drop of rain on my head!

Herald:

Right! The Assembly is dismissed! The Thracians may come back the day after tomorrow.

All stand up and leave, while Dicaeopolis is fighting with one of the starving

Thracians over his garlic.

Scene 2

The Pnyx is cleared Of people, benches and tables and turned into the front of Euripides' house, perhaps while the following is going on. Outside Dicaeopolis' house. Dicaeopolis is examining the strings of garlic hanging from the eaves of his house. He is shaking his head at the small number remaining.

Dicaeopolis:

Damned thieves! Odomantian soldiers! Thieves, damned thieves the lot of them! Halfcocks and thieves! They've eaten all my garlic! I've hardly got any left. Sees Maybegod approaching, out of breath Maybegod! You're back from Sparta already!

Maybegod:

Quick, Dicaeopolis, I've got to run! The Acharnians are chasing me.

Dicaeopolis:

Why, what's up?

Maybegod:

I was on my way here, bringing you the peace treaties I've signed for you with Sparta, and I was running as fast as I could but then, somehow, some old Acharnians, tough bits of stick the lot of them, hearts of oak, twisted old soldiers from the days of Marathon, tough as maple and steel and rock, sniffed me out and they all came after me, yelling at me, "you, most god-cursed creature. You're bringing peace treaties from Sparta while our vines are lying there, destroyed by them?" Then I saw they were gathering stones and putting them in their cloaks, so I ran. They're still following me with shouts.

Dicaeopolis:

Never mind their shouting. Have you brought me the treaties?

Maybegod:

Of course! Brings out of his cloak three small wine bottles I brought you three types to try. Hands him one Here! This one here is a five-year one. Taste it!

Dicaeopolis: Takes the top off and takes a sniff

Yuk! Poh!

Maybegod:

What's wrong?

Dicaeopolis:

It's awful! Stinks of tar and ship building!

Maybegod: Hands him another bottle

All right, taste this one, then. It's a ten-year treaty. What do you think?

Dicaeopolis: Smells this one also and is still unsatisfied

Naaaah! Very sour! It really smells strongly of delegates going around the cities urging their allies to get a move on with the war preparation.

Maybegod: Anxious that the Acharnians might appear any second, hands him a third bottle

Well, this one is a thirty-year treaty. Both, for sea and land. Quick, have a taste!

Dicaeopolis: Smells it and finds it most agreeable.

Mmmmm! What a delicious, scrumptious aroma. Smells again Ah, yes! This is the scent of Dionysiac festivals, of nectar and of... takes another whiff let me see, subtle but assertive traces of... of ambrosia! This truce here does not utter words like, "take three days' provisions and head to the front!" No this... Takes yet another whiff, then puts his ear to the mouth of the bottle This says, "you may go wherever you wish!" Mmmmm! Yes! I'll take this one and pour libations and drink it to the very last drop and wish the Acharnians all the joy in the world.

Loud shouting of the approaching Acharnians.

And I, now that I've excluded myself from the war, I shall go to my fields to celebrate the Dionysiac festival.

Maybegod: Aware of the noises And I shall rush off before the Acharnians get me!

Exit Maybegod, stage Left and Dicaeopolis goes into his house. A moment later the chorus rushes in, Stage Right. They are the Acharnians who are pursuing Maybegod. Very old, out of breath, in pursuit of Maybegod. They are running all around the stage looking for him.

Lacratides: Out of breath Ask every one, everywhere! Ask all the people ask them about this traitor. Come on, this way. The city needs to capture him. Tell me if you see this evil truce bearer anywhere. Overtaken by despondency. Ach! He has run off! Escaped! We've lost him! God, I am so old! I hate my old age! He's being overwhelmed by nostalgia. There was a time when... when I could run so fast –even with a sack of coals on my back, I could and did outrun real athletes. Kept up with Phaylos once. Pythian champion! This traitor here wouldn't have a hope in Hades back in the old days. I don't care how fast he can run! He wouldn't be escaping me so lightly back

then. But now!

Marilades:

But now, now, poor old Lacratides! You've lost your limbs, and your legs are getting heavier and heavier by the day and the traitor has escaped us!

Lacratidis:

No! Let's go after him, Acharnians. No one should be able to boast that they've escaped us! Us, Acharnians, even at our age.

Drakylos:

Despairing Zeus, almighty! Who would dare sign treaties with the enemy now? We need the war to continue so as to avenge our ruined farms!

Prinides:

And I won't stop fighting until I plunge –full vengeance!– like a sharp, painful rod deep into their flesh. That should stop them from setting foot upon our vineyards again!

Lacratides:

I shall seek this man out from place to place even if I have to go all the way to Palene, and when I find him I shall enjoy stoning the traitor –to death!

Dicaeopolis: Shouts from within his house

Quiet! Quiet please, all! Reverence from all of you, please! Reverence!

Lacratides:

Sushhhh Quiet a minute! Listen friends... Did you hear that? They all prick their ears He's after reverence! Listen!

Prinides:

That's the very man we're after! Let's get out of the way and hide. I think he's about to come out for a sacrifice.

Dicaeopolis comes out of his house, followed by his daughter and two slaves. He's carrying a pot, his daughter a basket and one of the slaves, Xanthias, a standard, which is a huge phallus and which he is holding it rather carelessly, irreverently. Dicaeopolis' wife is inside the house, standing by the window, watching them.

Dicaeopolis:

Reverence, reverence all! Basket bearer at the front! Xanthias! Hold that cock straight! Put the basket down here, please daughter, so that we can begin the sacrifice.

They walk to the altar of Dionysus upon which the daughter puts the basket.

Daughter:

Mum, bring me the ladle so that I can spread the sacred potion on the bread.

Mother obeys daughter, who, solemnly pours the potion onto the bread. Dicaeopolis observes and when she's done he takes up a reverential attitude and, with a supervisory glance all around him, demands attention from all.

Dicaeopolis:

Right! Xanthias takes this as a cue to stand straight again and to make sure that the phallus he's holding stands equally as respectfully. The second slave also adjusts his posture We're all ready! Oh, Great Lord, Dionysos! I'm sending you this offering as thanks for allowing me, along with my own folks, to celebrate the Rural Dionysia and for releasing us from the burdens of war. Through our offerings I ask you, Lord, to let our Thirty-year Peace Treaty be joyous to us all. To his daughter Now, sweetie, mind how you carry the basket around. Daughter picks up the basket Hmmm! Darling, you are so beautiful that you've got to make yourself look ugly. Pretend you've just eaten something sour and make an ugly face. Daughter tries. That's it! She walks ahead a little and Dicaeopolis talks sarcastically behind her back, as if she can't hear him Oh, yes! Oh, how happy the man who'll marry you will be, my darling! Oh yes! And, no doubt the two of you will produce a couple of little weasels, just like you: morning farts instead of morning fucks... lazing about all day! Hehehe! Louder now, addressing her And watch out that no one in the crowd It's only the four of them but he looks suspiciously at the two slaves pinches your little jewels. To Xanthias Xanthias! You and I will walk behind her bearing the sacred phallus. Chides him Erectly! Xanthias adjusts I shall now sing the phallic song. You, wife, watch from the house. Intones religiously as they start walking around the altar.

Oh, Phallus, loving boy of Dionysos, orgy lover, night wanderer, seducer of all, pederast! I greet you again, after six long years! I have returned to our village with my heart full of joy because I made a truce with the Spartans, and got myself rid of the bothersome business of war and of all the Lamachuses, war-mongering generals, one and all! Oh, Phallus, Phallus! Stops singing as he falls deep into a fantasy What joy, Phallus, oh Phallus, my Phallus! What a joy it would give me – oh what a joy, if somehow you grant it that, one fine day, I find Strymodorus' slave, Thraca – oh, that girl who right now is at the peak of her beauty!- what joy it would give me, if I, accidentally on purpose, walking around Mount Phelleus, I find her stealing wood and I catch her from behind, grab her tightly under her arms, throw her to the ground, play with her and... take the pip right out of her cherry! The other participants are surprised by the lewdness of his ecstasy and Slave 2 taps him on the shoulder. Dicaeopolis snaps out of it and sighs. Then he regains his composure

and continues the prayer. Oh, Phallus, Phallus, my dear Phallus! Come drink with us now and revel with us and, in the morning you'll drink a cup of my peace wine and I shall hang my shield over the smoking hearth.

Suddenly the Acharnians jump out in front of them yelling and throwing stones at them.

Lacratidis:

That's him! That's the man! Stone him, stone him! Hit the despicable man, hit him! Come on, men, stone him!

Dicaeopolis' people drop everything –basket, pot and phallus- and flee into the house, slamming firm the door behind them.

Dicaeopolis:

From the window Great Hercules! What's this? Watch out, you'll smash my pot!

Marilades:

We're aiming at your head, you disgraceful droplet of snot!

Dicaeopolis:

But why, dear, elderly Acharnians?

Drakyllos:

You dare ask why? You slimy, disgusting, traitor! You dare look us in the face after you went and signed up a treaty with our enemy, all on your own?

Dicaeopolis:

Ohhhh, the Peace treaty! Well, you obviously don't know why I did that. Listen and let me explain to you why I did that.

Euforides:

Listen to you? Listen to a dead man? We'll burry you with our stones in a minute!

Dicaeopolis:

Not before you listen to me, you won't! Please, dear friends, stop and listen to me!

Lacratidis:

Forget it! I won't let you spin us a story. I hate you more than leather beater leader of ours, Cleon, whose hide I'm going to turn into sandals for our brave, young Knights, one day. As for you, long speeches won't save you. Not after your treaties with the Spartans!

Dicaeopolis:

Dear friends! Forget the Spartans for a minute and let's talk about Peace. And then you'll see if I haven't done a good deed by getting this treaty.

Marilades:

Good deed? Good deed? How could it be a good deed? You've signed a truce with a people whose word is not bound by either altar or faith! They're infidels! No religion to put fear into them. Or Honour to their word. How could that be a good deed?

Dicaeopolis:

Because, men, we blame the Spartans too much! I know for certain that the Spartans are not the sole cause of all our problems.

Drakylos:

Is that right, you sly creep? They are not the cause of our problems? You dare say this to us so blatantly and expect us to spare you?

Dicaeopolis:

Not of all our problems, not all! In fact while I'm at it, I can prove to you that they are also the victims of many of our own doings!

Euforides:

Fuming with anger Ooooh! You dare defend our enemies like that! This is so awful! So terrible! Puts his hand to his heart Ohhhh! My heart is boiling!

Dicaeopolis:

If I'm not telling the truth and I can't convince the people, (Indicating the audience) I'll put my head on the chopping block!

Lacratidis:

Let's hurl our stones at this traitor, neighbours and beat him till he's as red as our necks!

Dicaeopolis:

What black anger is burning your heart, Acharnians! Will you not listen to me? Will you really not listen to me?

Marilades:

Absolutely not!

Dicaeopolis:

Oh well, then, it looks like I've had it!

Drakylos:

Kill me if I ever listen to you!

Dicaeopolis:

No, Acharnians, I beg you!

Euforides:

You're already dead, boy! You're gone, now! More stones thrown at them

Dicaeopolis:

Right! That's it! Now I'm going to show you! My blood for yours! I have here as hostage the dearest of your friends! He disappears into the house.

Lacratidis:

What does this threat mean, neighbours? Does he have one of our children inside? Is that what's giving him this courage?

Dicaeopolis comes back to the window. He's holding a pannier full of charcoal in one hand and a threatening dagger in the other. He's black all over from the coal dust. The Acharnians are horror-struck by this.

Dicaeopolis:

All right then. Cast your stones at me if you wish. But you'll never see this baby again! Now we'll see if any you love your coals as much as you all say you do! Come on, let's see! How much do you love your coals?

Lacratidis:

To his friends On, no! We're stuffed! We've had it now, men! Examines more closely the pannier and recognises it And that pannier! I recognise it. It's from my village. Shouts at Dicaeopolis No, don't! Don't do it! No! Your thinking is all wrong! Nononononono!

Dicaeopolis:

Feigns a murderous disposition I will! I'll kill this baby and you can scream all you like! I won't listen to your crap any longer!

Marilades:

No, please! This dear little basket is as old as we are. We grew up together... and we're from the same village... and we're both coal lovers. Don't kill it!

Dicaeopolis:

You wouldn't listen to me before, would you? Well now –

Drakylos:

No, no! Speak, if you want. Tell us whatever you like... that you love the Spartans... I'll let you say anything... I won't forsake my little coal basket!

Dicaeopolis:

First chuck away your stones!

The Acharnians do so.

Acharnians together:

There! Now put your dagger down!

Dicaeopolis:

Oh yeah? Check your cloaks please and see that there are no stones hiding in there!

The Acharnians all shake their cloaks to give proof that there are no stones “hiding.” One last stone is heard dropping noisily.

Lacratidis:

See? They’re all on the ground. See?

Prinides:

All shaken out. Stop stuffing around. At the count of three, put your dagger down. All together One... two... and three!

Dicaeopolis drops his dagger and comes out of the house.

Dicaeopolis:

Right! Well done! You’ve just managed to save the lives of some adorable little Parnethian coals, here. Imagine the howling you’d be making if I’d kill them! And if something did happen to them it would be the fault of their own neighbours. Shakes the black dust from his body Poor little basket. It got so frightened it spat out ink, like a do. God, you’ve got such awful manners, you Acharnians! All that shouting and stone throwing! So vulgar. You won’t listen to me even when I offer to put my head on the block for my good arguments. I do love my life, you know!

Lacratidis:

Still angry Well, come on then! Bring out your block and start talking, you piece of chucked out scum.

Marilades:

Let’s hear those great arguments of yours. I want to know what you think there is to say.

Drakyllos:

You chose the means of judgement so, go get your block!

Dicaeopolis goes into the house and comes out again with the chopping block which he puts down.

Dicaeopolis:

Here we are. One block to act as court. Takes up posture as if to make a speech Ahem! I am a bad speaker, I know but I just must speak. I shall speak plainly and freely. I’m not one to hide behind my shield, like some cowardly generals. I’ll tell you of my views on the Spartans. Looks about him with some trepidation But I’m still very afraid though. Because I know for certain what peasants are like. They love it when some damned sycophant comes along and flatters them and their city-rightly or wrongly. The peasants just do not see that these mongrels are traitors who are in it for the money and for nothing more... As for the rest of the men, I know their

souls. I know exactly what they'll do:

They'll just bite my head off with their voting! That's what they did to poor Aristophanes last year when, in his play, he had a few words to say about Cleon. Well, Cleon immediately rushed him off to the Council and there spat out a whole tongue-torrent of spinning abuses and lies and crap about him that the poor man nearly drowned in all the injustice. So, in view of this, let me dress in the clothes which would draw the most pity from you. I need to look like a real pauper, a real beggar.

Lacratidis:

Why all these twists and turns and tricky delays? For all we care you can get yourself disguised as The Invisible Man, if you like! Go down to Hades, get Hieronymous' ugly, hairy helmet and cover your ugly face with it, or go and get one of Sisyphous' many tricks but this debate is not going to wait any longer!

The Acharnians recede to the background while the next scene unfolds.

Dicaeopolis: To the audience

This is where I must show what stuff my soul is made off! I know... I shall go over to Euripides. Walks over to Euripides' house and knocks on the door. Hellooooo! Hey boy, are you there? Slave? Where are you?

Kifisophos: Through a half-opened door

Yes? Who is it?

Dicaeopolis:

Ah, Kifisophos! Is your master, Euripides home?

Kifisophos: Ponderously, pseudophilosophically, condescendingly

He is and he isn't... Work that out if you got the brains!

Dicaeopolis: Tries to work it out

He is and he isn't. How can that be?

Kifisophos: Exasperated at Dicaeopolis' lack of intelligence Just as I said, old man! In and out... sees that Dicaeopolis is lost Look! His mind is wandering around looking for verses, so that's not in; but his body is there, lying down, constructing a play.

Dicaeopolis:

Oh, dear Euripides, how fortunate you are to have such a witty slave who can answer the door with such oh-so-clever remarks. Call him for me, please, Kifisophos!

Kifisophos:

That's impossible! Slams the door in Dicaeopolis' face

Dicaeopolis:

Impossible or not, I'm not leaving, even if I have to smash the door down. Shouts Hey Euripides! No answer Euripides! No answer again Hey Eury, boy! Can you hear me? Come on, Eury, you've let me in before so let me in again, now! Euryyyyyyyy! It's me, Dicaeopolis Chollidis, your friend!

Euripides: From within I've got no time to waste.

Dicaeopolis:

So, don't waste any time! Make it fast and roll down here!

Euripides: From within

Impossible!

Dicaeopolis:

No it's not!

Euripides: From within All right. I'll roll down but I've got no time to waste!

Sounds of someone rolling down the stairs.

Scene 3

Continuing from previous scene. They've just entered Euripides' house. Euripides climbs back onto his bed, which is somehow raised precariously well above ground level. At his bedside comes and sits his slave, Kifisophos. On the wall and elsewhere hang various old rags and bits and pieces of theatrical costumes and other props. Both, Euripides and Kifisophos are wearing ragged clothes. From the scrolls and quills strewn about the bed it's obvious Euripides had been writing.

Dicaeopolis:

He's astonished to see the state of Euripides' habitat Dear Lord! Euripides!

Euripides: Makes himself comfortable in his bed Yeah, what's with you?

Dicaeopolis:

Well... you sit yourself up there, in midair like a bird in a straw nest to do your writing! Why... why on earth can't you do it down here? On solid ground? No wonder all your characters are lame... and look at your clothes! Rags! No wonder your characters are also paupers and beggars... Remembers why he's there and kneels down and begs Ah, yes, beggars! Euripides, I beg you! On my knee caps. Lend me some rags from some old tragedy of yours so that I can make a long speech to the chorus –they'll kill me if I don't say it well.

Euripides:

Which rags do you want? The ones I used for Oeneus, that poor, unfortunate hero?

Dicaeopolis:

No, not Oeneus –someone worse off.

Euripides:

Blind Phoenix?

Dicaeopolis:

Thinks a moment No, not Phoenix's either. Someone worse still.

Euripides: To Kifisophos, angrily What rags does the man want? Back to Dicaeopolis Do you mean those of poor Philoktetes?

Dicaeopolis:

No, no, even poorer than him!

Euripides:

Ohhh! I know! You're after the filthy rags of Bellerophon? That poor lame creature?

Dicaeopolis:

No... He's trying to think of the name of the character he's got in mind. No... the one I'm thinking of is not only a beggar and lame but also a brilliant orator...

Euripides:

Ah! Now I know who you're thinking of! It's Telephos, the Mysian, right?

Dicaeopolis:

That's it! Telephos! The Mysian!

Euripides: To Kifisophos

Boy, give him Telephos' rags.

Kifisophos gets up and looks for them.

They're there, on top of Thyestis' rags, amongst those of Inos.

Kifisophos: Hands them to Dicaeopolis

Here you are.

Dicaeopolis:

Takes the costume and examines it. Show is to the public. It's a true bundle of tatters. He puts his fingers through all the holes and brings the rags close to his face, which the audience can see through the holes. Oh, holy Zeus! Zeus, whose eye sees through all things struggles to put on the clothes. His phallus is in the way and sticks out from under the tunic... and (indicating his phallus) sees below all things! Oh, Zeus, please dress me up like the most wretched mortal... Sees a cap on the wall Euripides, since you were kind enough to lend me these rags, could you also lend me something which will really match them? That little cap there, which Telephos wore on his head. I need to be a real pauper today. "To be, but not to look like what I be!" as your Telephos

put it. (Indicating the audience). That lot should know who I'll be but the chorus out there is like one of yours, too stupid to work it out and they'll be just standing there, gaping at my subtle verbiage and loquacity. Chuckles wickedly What games, I'll be able to play with them! To the audience You lot know I'm Aristophanes, don't you? The author? Of this play?

Euripides:

To Kifisophos Give him the cap. You've got a dense and subtle little engine in that pointy head of yours, haven't you?

Kifisophos nods with a chuckle. He's beginning to enjoy this banter between Dicaeopolis and Euripides. From now on he behaves like an over-energetic puppy waiting for Dicaeopolis to give him the next command.

Dicaeopolis:

Takes the cap Bless you, friend and to hell with Telephos! Oh, I can feel my brain flooding with all these subtle little phrases of yours. Looks about him But I think I also need a walking stick.

Euripides: Nods to Kifisophos who goes and brings a walking stick to Dicaeopolis Take it. Now go! Enough! Get out of my marble abode!

Dicaeopolis:

Feigns hurt soul Ooooh! Addressing his soul Poor soul! See how he's chucking you out even though you're still in need of so many items? No, I need to be a bit gluey here. One of those really oily beggars. Back to Euripides Euripides, please give me that little cane lamp holder as well... please! You don't need it. Look, it's all smoky and burnt.

Euripides:

What on earth do you want to do with that cane lamp holder?

Dicaeopolis:

Do with it? Nothing really. I just need it, that's all!

Euripides:

Getting impatient You know? You're being a real bum-ache now. Come on, get out! Out of my house!

Dicaeopolis:

Oh, all right, all right and may the gods grand you your mother's fate. Impishly confiding to the audience Selling cabbages, hihihihihhi!

Euripides: Furious

Piss off!

Dicaeopolis:

All right, all right! Goes towards the exit but remembers What about a little cup... one of those with chipped lips?

Euripides: Nods to Kifisophos who finds it and hands it to Dicaeopolis
Take the damned thing and go! You irritating little man! Now get out! Out!

Dicaeopolis:

Takes the cup and examines it. Then remembers. Oh, no! How this hurts! Euripides, you don't know how this hurts... Darling, dearest Euripides, friend! One more little, tiny thing... a little potty... you know one of those with a hole broken in them and... a sponge in the hole to keep it from dripping...

Euripides:

Man! You're ripping the heart right out of my tragedy!

Kifisophos has the potty ready even before Euripides tells him. He hands it to Dicaeopolis, smiling sympathetically.

Now, take the potty and shove off!

Dicaeopolis: Examines the potty Right. Now, I'm going! Hesitates But... Euripides what can I do? I need something else desperately! I'm dead without it! Sweet, sweet, Euripides... one more little thing. Just one more. Just give me some of those cabbage leaves your mother throws out. I need to put them in this cane lamp holder.

Euripides:

Grrr! This is really knocking me about this! Kifisophos has moved enthusiastically again and produced the leaves There! Take them! There go all my dramatic props!

Dicaeopolis:

Examines the leaves and puts them in the lamp holder Right! Don't worry dear Euripides. Now I'm really going! Moves towards the exit but once again he remembers Oh, no! I forgot again! Darling Euripides... I know I'm a pain, "a pain great enough to rouse the ire of kings," as your Telephos would say, hey? But I forgot the most important thing, Euripides. Sweet, sweet, Euripides. You know how I love you don't you? Sooooo much! Kill me if I ask you for anything else except... except one more thing... some of those dried up parsley leaves your mother throws out-

Euripides: Interrupts him infuriated

The man is making fun of me! To Kifisophos Throw him out and bolt the doors!

Kifisophos is sadly obedient.

Scene 4

In front of Dicaeopolis' house. The chopping block is still there. The chorus is slowly moving in on him.

Dicaeopolis:

To himself Oh, my poor soul! Poor, poor soul! You've got to do the whole thing without the parsley now! Poor soul! Have you any idea what contest you're going to contest? You're about to make a speech in favour of the Spartans! After a few moments, he sighs and lifts his chin up. All right then. Head erect, my soul and forward march! That's it! Moves to make a speech but sees the chopping block and recoils What's up? What's stopping you, Dicaeopolis? You shouldn't have any worries, not while you're full of Euripides. How could you go wrong? Courage, my soul! Go ahead! Put your brave head on the block and say what's in it! Oh, what a brave heart, you've got, Dicaeopolis! Puts his phallus on the block

Lacratidis:

So... what are you doing? What are you going to say? You know you've got to be real brave, here don't you? A real iron man. You've put your one and only Dicky on the chopper, and you're about to speak against all of us! Turns to his colleagues with surprise The thing doesn't bother him at all, men! Back to Dicaeopolis All right then, speak, if you want!

During Dicaeopolis' speech the Acharnians move, one by one as they are being persuaded by the argument, into two camps.

Dicaeopolis:

Well, here I am, a pauper and a writer –of comedies, no less! And I am about to speak to you, my dear audience of matters that are important to our city. You all think this is a dreadful thing to do, I know. Well, don't! Comedians know justice and I'm a comedian, so I'll speak about justice, no matter how hard it sounds to your ears. The things I will say will be hard but fair. Right. Let's see now. Ah yes! Firstly, I can see that there's isn't a foreigner amongst you, not one, so our leader, Cleon spits at the sound of his name he won't be able to accuse me –as he did last year- that I'm bagging you in front of foreigners. We are here, all on our own, celebrating our own Lenaia festival, no foreigners of any sort, tax payers or allies. No one! What we have here is thoroughly winnowed wheat. That's us. No chaff –that's the foreigners, chaff! Chuckles I call them "the chaff of the city" Resumes his serious posture.

Folks, I really hate the Spartans. I really do, and I hope that Poseidon, their own God,

sends them a damned huge earthquake and sinks all their houses, because the scum have torn down my own vines, as well. But then, speaking to my friends here, can we really blame the Spartans for this? Because some of our own men, some Athenians –I don’t mean the city Athens, listen carefully to this, please. I don’t means Athens the city but Athenians, the men. Some men! Or, rather some vile and hateful morons, losers, dishonourable scum. Human forgeries, strange strangers have begun making accusations about some products from Megara, calling them “enemy goods.” First it was those cute little Megarian cloaks, then the cucumbers, and then the rabbits and then the little piggies and then the garlic, and then the rock salt! No sooner would they see anyone selling anything from Megara and straight away they’d shout, “enemy goods!” and they’d confiscate the damned thing and on that very day, you’d see them in the market selling those “enemy goods” themselves and pocketing the money.

Well, so far, we might call this a petty crime, the sort that we do ourselves... Frequently! But then these drunken fools, they went to Megara and kidnapped their whore, Simetha. Well, we all know Simetha is Megara’s pride and joy! This was followed by some highly irate Megarians kidnapping our own whores, two of them, belonging to Aspasia, Pericles’ own whore boss. So there you have it! The whole war amongst all the Greeks begins here; because of three whores! Because you see, Pericles –our own, Olympian marvel, our own glorious Pericles- got so angry that he began shooting lightning out of his mouth and making thunder and stirring the whole of Greece with laws which sounded like post-orgy songs:

Sings “We shall fight them on the beaches, we shall fight them on the land, we shall fight them in the market, no Megarian any where!”

That’s why, the Megarians after a while were becoming desperately hungry – starving, in fact. So what could they do? They began begging the Spartans to reverse that whore-begotten law! They had asked us, Athenians, many times but we had refused. And here begins the clamour of the clashing shields. One may say that there was no need for that but then one might also ask, well then, what was it we needed to do? If for example someone discovered that the Spartans sailed over say to one of our tiny islands, Seriphos, for example and smuggled out of there some little puppy, what would you do, stay at home? Of course you wouldn’t! You’d be out there, launching three hundred ships, immediately, and the city would be drowned under the noise of soldiers choosing their captain and distributing their pay, and you’d be seeing the hustle and bustle as all of the figure heads of Athena were being regilded and the Pireas market would be buzzing with crowds distributing wheat at one stall, men

buying wine skins and oar straps and wine brimming jars, at another stall and garlic and oil and sacks of onions at yet another stall and wreaths and anchovies and... there'd be flute girls and... black eyes. And at the docks people would be making oars, banging nails, tying oar straps and oars to the oar holes. And you'd hear flutes, whistles, whistling commands to the oar hands at the oar holes... I know for a fact that that's what you'd be doing! (Indicating his costume) And do we not know that Telephus himself would also be acting thus? If we don't then we don't have a brain between us. And thus I conclude my speech!

By now the Acharnians are split into two sides.

Lacratidis:

Sees the split in the ranks and gets very angry Is that right, you screwed up piece of disgrace? You – you, a mere beggar dare talk to us like this? So what's the harm if one of us happens to be an informer, hey? What's with all this agony?

Marilades:

By Zeus! I think that every word Dicaeopolis said was the truth. Not a single lie amongst them!

Lacratidis:

Charging towards Dicaeopolis, intending to beat him up Truth or not, there was no need to mention all this stuff. This boldness of his won't make him a happier man, I'll tell you that much!

Marilades:

Trying to stop Lacratidis Hey, hold it! Hold it! What are you getting angry for? Stop! Stop! Hey listen! Lacratidis stops and looks threateningly back at Marilades who suddenly becomes frightened. If you try and hit this man... he'll... he'll hurt you more.

Other members of the chorus come and grab Lacratidis noisily from the waist.

Lacratidis:

O Lamachus! You, whose eyes are like lightning! Wearer of the terrifying helmet! Friend and relative! Come and help me! To the audience And you, captains and generals and attackers of walls, come quickly! Hurry, they've got me by the waist!

Noisy, bombastic, martial fanfare introduces Lamachus, who is fully armed, with sword and shield at the ready. He is wearing a helmet with a ludicrous abundance of plumes and feathers. A huge bright and frightening gorgon is painted on his shield.

Lamachus:

Who shouted the war cry? Who needs my help? What clamour must I join? Who

stirred the Gorgon on my shield?

Dicaeopolis:

Oh, Sarcastically Here he is! Lamachus! Hero... of the feathered crests and armies!

Lacratidis: Indicating Dicaeopolis This man has been saying nasty things about our city for hours now!

Lamachus: To Dicaeopolis

You? A beggar? You dare speak against Athens? A beggar, dares speak against mighty Athens?

Dicaeopolis:

Oh, Lamachus, forgive me! I know I'm a beggar and I know I said a little too much!

Lamachus:

What did you say about Athens? Tell me!

Dicaeopolis:

Feigns nausea I... I don't know. I... I beg you, military doodahs make me nauseous... (Indicating the shield) can you put that beastie gorgon of yours away?

Lamachus:

Moves shield away from him. There!

Dicaeopolis:

No, put it down. Upside down. On its back...

Lamachus: Does so

There!

Dicaeopolis:

That's it. Make it look like a wash basin. Now give me that feather from your helmet!

Lamachus: Does so Here, take it!

Dicaeopolis:He tickles his face with it Yiiiik! Now hold on to my head so I can vomit. These plumes make me so sick!

Lamachus: Tries to snatch the feather away from him

Oi! What do you think you're doing? Using my feathers to vomit with? It's a feather, not a tickler!

Dicaeopolis:

A feather, not a tickler. Well then tell me what poor bird's bum was the whole plume plucked out of? A peacock's bum? A lyre bird's bum? A wanker's bum?

Lamachus: Fuming with anger

Right! You're a dead bird's bum!

Dicaeopolis:

No, no, Lamachus! That's not your forte! Your forte is to decapitate pricks.

He brandishes his phallus

Here! Come on, do mine... if you're so strong! You've got all the tools you need!

Sword, spear, shield, feathers...

Lamachus:

You! You... dare talk to a general like this? You? A mere beggar?

Dicaeopolis:

Me? A mere beggar?

Lamachus:

Of course you are. What else?

Dicaeopolis:

What else? What else? I'm a useful citizen, that's what else! Not some Chief Dick in the Government... And during war time I'm a simple Private Dick, whereas you! As soon as the war starts you rush off and become a Fully Paid Dick!

Lamachus: Indignant

I was hand picked!

Dicaeopolis:

Sure you were. By three cuckoo birds! That's exactly why I've made my own peace treaties! It made me sick watching old men go off to the front line while you, you, young pricklets run away from it. Some of you go off to Thrace, drawing three drachmas a day! Like Tisa-bloody-fanny-pus and Pano-bloody-prickatus and then there are those near Chari-bloody-tus and others around Chaon. As well as the other lot:

Geres-bloody-godsgift-prickus and Pede-bloody-rastus and those at Kamarine and Gela and Gela-not!

Lamachus:

Proudly Every one of them hand picked!

Dicaeopolis:

So why is it then that you lot, somehow always get paid whereas those (Indicating some members of the chorus) poor old buggers, get nothing? You, Marilades, old age is closing in on you. Have you ever been made an ambassador? Marilades shakes his head See? He says never! And yet he's a smart man and a hard worker. What about you Drakyllos? You Euforides or you, Prinides? Has any one of you ever been to Ekvatana or Chaon? They all shake their heads See? They all said no. But ask Lamachus and ask Koisiros' son, and you'll find that they've all got to know

these places very well. People like these two who, only yesterday, because of their mounting debts and unpaid subscriptions, folks would yell “shit ahoy!” as soon as they saw them in the street... like when people empty their slop out of the window in the evening! They’ve been there all right!

Lamachus:

Oh Democracy! Do we have to put up with this?

Dicaeopolis:

Not unless you get paid for it, right?

Lamachus: Infuriated

Right! I’m off! I’m off to fight! To fight all the Peloponnesians. All of them, and always! And I’ll stir up the whole place, with the navy and with the infantry! With all my might and strength!

Exits in a anger. Similar martial fanfare.

Dicaeopolis:

And I shall announce that all the Peloponnesians and the Megarians and the Boetians may come and buy and sell from me as they wish and... Shouts at the back of Lamachus to forget about Lamachus!

Exits also in anger. While the chorus is going through the next recitation the stage is set for Act 2. Dicaeopolis, with the help of his slaves, his wife and daughter, silently set up a couple of market stalls whereupon various products are arrayed. They measure a space and draw lines and put markers to establish the boundaries of their “market place.” A sign is placed at some point, with the words “Dicky Mart” on it. Xanthias with the daughter and Slave 2 with Dicaeopolis’ wife have established to the eyes of the audience but not to those of Dicaeopolis an unequivocal sexual bond. The work is completed just as the chorus has finished the following.

Lacratides:

The man has completely changed the minds of the people about the peace treaties.

Marilades:

But, men, let’s take our clothes off and play our part in the play.

Drakylos:

Since the days our poet has first begun putting on plays, he had never used the opportunity to boast about how fantastic he is at it. However seeing that his enemies have managed to persuade the gullible Athenians that he has made fun of them and berated our city, he finds himself today, forced to answer these charges.

Euforides:

He says that he's done a great deal for you. For example, the fact that you are no longer so easily persuaded by foreigners who come here trying to seduce you and cheat you with flattery, is due to his good teaching.

Prinides:

The fact that you are no longer the gorking twits that you once were, is thanks to Aristophanes. In earlier days, all these foreign ambassadors had to do was to call you violet-crowned men and the word "violet" would have raising your bums to the wind. Or, if one of them tickled your vanity with "Athens is a rich and sleek city," well! That word, "sleek" would get him anything he wanted.

Lacratides:

For god's sake he used the adjective one uses to describe anchovies drenched in oil! I mean, "sleek," for goodness sake! He has served you well, our poet, simply by the fact that he warned you against these awful tricks.

Marilades:

He has also shown the governments of our subject States how our sort of Democracy is really governing them!

Drakylos:

Now, the next time these ambassadors come to pay their taxes, they would want to see the best of your poets, the one who put himself in so much danger so as to show the Athenians what justice is.

Euforides:

His fame and audacity has reached so far that the Great King himself, examining the Spartan ambassadors about the fate of our war, asked them first who has the best navy and then he wanted to know about which side the poet says nasty things.

Prinides:

Because, the Great King thinks, those who take Aristophanes' advice will become better human beings and they'll also be the ones who'll win the war. That's why the Spartans are asking for peace and demand to keep our poet's birth place, Aigina. Not because they want the little island for extra territory but because they can then claim our poet to be one of them. And you, you ought never give him up because his comedies will always be a fight for justice.

Lacratides:

He also says that he'll be teaching you a lot more wonderful things, to make your lot a happier one. He won't be licking your bumholes or making you false promises, or giving you nothing sleeky trickery, or hocus-pocus or raining praises upon you. Just

good old, pure teaching. The best of it That's what he'll be giving you! The very best teaching available! A real education!

Marilades:

As for Cleon, let him do his worst. His schemes and tricks will bear no fruit. Justice and the Good are his allies; and good old Aristophanes won't be caught hanging around the city like him, a coward and a letch-arse!

Drakyllos:

So, come to us , O Muse! Show us now your fiery glow and your Acharnian strength which burns like a spark amidst the coals of oak! Show us the spark which flares with the breeze to fry the frying fish for some and to bake a cake or two for others, while others yet –a slave or two- knead bread or spin with spinning hands the Thasian appetisers. So come to us, neighbours to you, one and all with rustic fervour in your song.

Euforides:

We, oldies accuse the city of not cherishing our old age in a manner worthy of all our naval exploits. Because instead of respect, we suffer terrible indignities and, as aged men the youth is constantly taking us to court, or we'd be laughed at by speech makers as being losers and nobodies as well as deaf and overused flutes holes. Our walking sticks are the only Poseidon, our only saviour and support.

Prinides:

Old age and youth, hey? We get to the courts and we'd be lucky to get but an inkling, a misty shadow of justice! Whereas our prosecutor, a youth himself –and a lusty youth at that- wanting to show just how lusty his youth is -at our expense, of course- bombards us with huge, well-rounded missiles of words.

Lacratides:

Take old Tithonos, for example. A very old man. Well some young and lusty, self-important prosecutor, hauls him up onto the stand and sets upon him with traps and lures and with muddying the waters and leaving the poor man, confounded, mumbling and withdrawing from court with a stinging fine. Outside, poor Tithonos sees his friends, and begins to whimper and cry that the few drachs he had left won't go to pay for his coffin now but for this fine.

Marilades:

How can this be fair, to ruin such an elderly man in a place where the speeches are timed and regulated? Is that a court of justice or what? A man who suffered so much and spilled so much manly, hot sweat fighting at Marathon? A Man, worthy of the

name, worthy of our city? One minute we are fighting at Marathon and the next we are pursued by idiots until we are ruined! What would smart arse orator Marpsias say to that?

Drakylos:

Or Thucydides, another poor old warrior! Is it right that such a man, bent with years to be lost in a real brutal, Skythian type of legal desert against Kifisodemos, another savage, crap-spitting prosecutor?

Euforides:

I was so sad, I cried when I saw this hateful archer torture this old man. By Demeter, when Thucydides was a young man, when he was the true Thucydides he wouldn't have taken any insults even from Demeter herself and he would have floored ten hefty wrestlers, no lesser than Euathlos himself. He would have shouted down three thousand archers and his own arrows would have pierced through them -and through their whole family tree!

Lacratides:

Well then, if you won't leave the oldies to their peace, have two types of court. Let the old man have his toothless old lawyer and let the young man have his young Alcibiades, you know that wide-holed chatterbox son of Kleinias. So make such laws as necessary to have old men brought to court by old men and young men by one of their own age.

Acharnians withdraw to the sides.

ACT TWO

Scene 5

Everyone except Dicaeopolis has gone back into the house. He has just thanked everyone, smacked his hands clean and, putting on a smile of self-satisfaction, takes his place behind one of the stalls to wait for customers.

Dicaeopolis: Pointing at the boundaries he drew

Right then! Here are the boundaries of my market place where everyone, Peloponnesians as well as Megarians and Boetians can come and trade with me and Shouts at Lamachu's door Lamachus can go and get stuffed! He indicates the three leather whips As inspectors of the market place I appoint these three horse whips, which came to me from Whip City. And let it be known also that I'll have no sycophantic traitors or informers around here! I'll go and get the law pillar and place it right here,

so that everyone can see it

Goes into the house. Enter a Megarian with his two daughters and an almost empty sack on his back.

Megarian:

Oh, darling market! Athenian market, loved by all Megarians, greetings! Oh, how I've missed you! Like a baby misses its mummy! Takes his bag down and offers it to his daughters Come darling, worthless daughters of a miserable father, see if you can find something in here to eat. They examine the sack and find only some old leaves which they throw down. They shake their heads Well then let your empty stomachs listen to me well:

Which do you prefer –to be sold or be starved?

Daughters:

To be sold, to be sold!

Megarian:

That's what I say, too! Examines them with dissatisfaction But then, who would be so stupid as to make such an obvious loss? Thinks for a minute and comes up with a solution Yes! That's it! I just remembered an old Megarian trick! I shall turn you both into little pigs! Hehehe! Looks into his sack and finds some trotters Here we are. Put these on your hands and feet! They do so but their posture is careless Come on, girls! Try and look as if you're from good stock. Make pretend that a good sow gave birth to you! Because, by Hermes, if I don't sell you, you'll be feeling the full rage of a real hunger when we get home! Looks into his sack again and comes up with two snouts which he hands to them Now put these snouts on. They obey and he examines them. He is satisfied Now squeeze yourselves into the sack. They obey. Once they're into the sack he taps on the head of one And, don't forget, every now and then squeal and make a koi-koi, make the sort of piggy noises that the sacrificial piggies make, all right? Nods from within the sack I'll call Dicaeopolis now. Yells Hey, Dicaeopolis! Dicky where are you? Dicaeopolis appears at the door carrying the law pillar. Do you want to buy some little piggies?

Dicaeopolis:

Very excited at the sight of the Megarian What? A real Megarian?

Megarian:

Yes! I'm here to do business.

Dicaeopolis:

Ah, good, god, very good! puts the law pillar down So, how are things in Megara,

then?

Megarian: Miserably Ah, well! Gesturing at his stomach Our stomachs are still singing around the fireplace!

Dicaeopolis:

Ah, yes, the empty stomach and the empty fireplace! The hungry stomach and the empty fireplace, hey? What a duet they could put compose! All they need is a good flute player, right? And what else is news in Megara?

Megarian:

What else? Well, let me see... The day I was leaving for the market, the politicians were wondering what to do to bring about the quickest possible death to us all!

Dicaeopolis:

That would put a certain end to all of your worries then, wouldn't it?

Megarian:

Correct!

Dicaeopolis:

So... what else, my friend? What's the price of wheat these days?

Megarian:

Wheat? The price of wheat is at an absolute premium! It has shot up so high, soooooo high... only the gods can buy it!

Dicaeopolis: Nods in sympathy, then, indicating the sack Is this salt, you're bringing us?

Megarian:

Salt? After your occupation of Minoa, and since you're the masters of the sea, it'd be you who'd be the lords of the salts, wouldn't you?

Dicaeopolis:

Is it garlic, then?

Megarian:

Garlic? What garlic? Whenever you lot attacked us, you'd come charging into our fields like mice and burrow yourselves underground and rip all their heads off!

Dicaeopolis:

So what have you got in here, then?

Megarian:

Proudly I am bringing you piglets. Little beauties. Special. The sort they use for sacrifices.

Dicaeopolis:

Oh! Well done! Show me!

Megarian:

Oh ho! You're gonna love this! They are so beautiful! Feel them if you like! They are so plump, so delicious!

Dicaeopolis: Feels around the outside of the sack... finds the tits
Hello, what's this?

Megarian:

A piglet, I swear! A little sow!

Dicaeopolis: Feels around a bit more... finds the bums. Becomes more and more suspicious.

A piglet, hey? And where do such piggies grow?

Megarian:

Megara, of course, where else? What? Don't you think they're little sows?

Dicaeopolis: Feels around the sack a bit more. I... no! I don't think they're little piggies. Sows or otherwise!

Megarian:

Wanna bet? Ho, ho ho! What a silly doubting Dicky you are! Ha! To the audience He says they're not piglets! Could you believe it? I bet you, salt to oregano, they're little sows. That's what they're called in Athenian, sow. "Sow, sow!" You hear them yelling at them all the time, "Hey, you old sow!" and "Come here you little pig!" and "You little porker, you!" They yell it all the time!

Dicaeopolis: Looking even more uncertain
They seem to be... of the human variety!

Megarian:

Not giving an inch But of course they are! Of course they are! By our Grand, Megarian hero, Diocles! They are my very own variety. Whose did you think they were? Sees that Dicaeopolis is not convinced Do you want to hear their voice?

Dicaeopolis:

Now, that I'd love to hear!

Megarian:

Right you are! Right, my little piggies, say hello! Silence from the sack. Leans over and, after smacking one on the head, speaks softly but sternly to them. Listen, you little shits, if you don't say something, you'll be back home before you can say "Hermes!"

Daughter: Timidly Koi, koi!

Megarian:

Now, was that a piggy or not?

Dicaeopolis is about to laugh but controls himself. Instead he mumbles, “either piglet or pussy” and wonders how the Megarian will pull this through. The Megarian, frustrated at the man’s disbelief, opens the sack and one of the daughters jumps up!

Dicaeopolis: Bursts into laughter

Wow! It... it certainly looks like a little piggy now... but I think when she grows up she’ll be a real cunt! Hohohohoho!

Megarian:

In five years she’ll look just like her mum!

Dicaeopolis:

But she’s not yet ready for the altar.

Megarian:

What? Of course she’s ready for the altar.

Dicaeopolis:

Walks around the daughter and inspects her closely But this little... piggie is missing a tail!

Megarian:

Oh, that’s because she’s still young. Wait till she grows up a bit. Then she’ll get a real beauty! A real big one. Fat and red. You’ll see. Stuff her full of good food and she’ll grow up to be a real good sow for you!

Second daughter emerges from the sack. Angry at being left out of the deal.

Dicaeopolis:

Oh, ho! Well, look at that! These cunts look identical!

Megarian:

Same mother, same father! (Indicating their vagina) And when these little beauties grow up a bit and get a bit more hair around them, they’ll be perfect for the altar of Aphrodite!

Dicaeopolis:

They don’t sacrifice pigs on Afro’s altar!

Megarian:

Don’t they? But she’s the only god who loves them, bless her! And, of course, after the sacrifice, shove a skewer into them and the flesh of these little piglets is scrumptious!

Dicaeopolis:

Can they eat without their mother yet?

Megarian:

Of course! As well as without their father!

Dicaeopolis:

So... what do they like eating mostly?

Megarian:

Whatever you give them. Ask them yourself!

Dicaeopolis:

To the daughters Little pig, little pig...

Daughters:

Koi, koi!

Dicaeopolis:

Do you eat... chick peas, piggies?

Daughters:

Koi, koi!

Dicaeopolis:

And figs from Fivalos?

Daughters:

Koi, koi!

Dicaeopolis:

You eat figs, too, do you?

Daughters: With enthusiasm this time

Koi, koi, koi, koi, koi!

Dicaeopolis:

How loudly you squeal about the figs! Shouts towards the house Xanthias!

Xanthias appears at the door, obviously having been interrupted from his amorous work.

Dicaeopolis:

Xanthias bring us here the figs I've got inside and let's see if these piggies will eat them.

Xanthias disappears into the house, comes back with the figs and places them on one of the stalls. He's in a hurry to get back to his work so he does so. As soon as the figs are put onto the table, the "piglets" charge at them.

Dicaeopolis:

Wow! They sure love their figs! Look how greedily they're gobbling them up... Great Hercules! Where did you say these little piggies are from, Gluttony?

Megarian:

Ah, sorry, mate. It wasn't just them. I snatched one myself!

Dicaeopolis:

I love the way they eat! Very... decorously, very... city like! Right, I'll take them. Tell me, how much do you want for the little porkers?

Megarian:

For this one here a string of garlic and for this one... a bag of salt.

Dicaeopolis:

Right. I'm buying them! Wait here a moment.

Megarian:

I'll be right here. To the audience Oh Hermes! God of Trade! If only I could sell off my wife that easily... and my mother!

Dicaeopolis goes to his house, stops at the porch where the garlic is hanging –a reminder of the beginning of scene 2, looks at and ponders over their diminishing quantity for a moment but then, convinced he's doing the right thing, tears a string off. Then he goes inside to get the salt. While all this is going on, an Informer enters, brandishing a fearful truncheon and looking very mean. He approaches the Megarian and his daughters. The daughters see him and, frightened, scramble back into the sack.

Informer:

You! Where are you from?

Megarian:

Me? I'm a pig seller from Megara.

Informer:

Right! I'm confiscating the pigs and expose you as a seller of enemy products!

Megarian:

Here we go again! This is the sort of crap that brought about all our woes in the first place! He grabs at the bag protectively

Informer:

That's Megarian talk, that! You'll cop it now! He tries to drag the sack away Let go of the sack!

Megarian:

Shouts Dicaeopolis! Dicky! A sycophant is here and he says he's going to expose me! Dicky, help!

Dicaeopolis:

From within. Very angry. Who? A sycophant? Who? Who's exposing whom? Comes out of the house, rushes to his stall, pulls down the whip and looks furiously at the informer. Addressing the whip. Right! Come on, Market Inspector, let's get these informers out of our market place, shall we? To the informer Now! What sort of exposure have we here, hey?

Informer:

Frightened a bit but defiant I'm exposing the enemy. Should I not expose the enemy?

Dicaeopolis: Comes around the stall to the Informer and chases him away. Piss off! Go and do your exposing somewhere else!

Exit the Informer. The piglets come out again.

Megarian:

What a slimy plague this lot must be to you Athenians, hey?

Dicaeopolis:

Don't worry about them, Megarian. Here you are, here's the price you've asked for the piglets. Hands him the goods. Here's the string of garlic and the salt, and joy aplenty to you!

Megarian:

We don't say that in Megara any more!

Dicaeopolis:

What, "Joy aplenty?" A bit over the top, is it? Sorry. Well, "Joy aplenty" to me, then! Hohohoho!

Megarian:

To his daughters Well, my little piglets, even without your father, now, you should still try and get whatever they give you: bread, salt, prick. Take whatever they give you.

Exit the Megarian and Dicaeopolis takes the "piglets" into his house.

Scene 6

Lacratides:

Well, here's a man with joy aplenty!

Marilades:

Did you hear how well his plans came through? He'll be able to feed himself well, simply by sitting down at his own little market.

Drakylos:

And if informers like Ktesias want to come around, they'll be shedding tears.

From now on, Dicaeopolis and his family –including his daughter, the two “piglets,” his wife and his two slaves- come and go, bringing various stuff out to the stall and taking other stuff back inside, generally looking busy and jolly. Xanthias is now happier with his master's new, female acquisitions. Everyone is still there when the Boetian enters.

Euforides:

No other man will be able to cheat you, with your shopping, Dicaeopolis –by buying everything before you get to the market – hihhi! You'll already be there, before everyone else! Choose your goods at your own pace! Hahahaha!

Prinides:

And Prepis that loose-arse, won't be dropping his guts on you. Pinches his nose Pohhh!

Lacratides:

And Cleonymus won't be able to screw you, here at your own market. No, your cloak will always be clean and you'll be seen walking the whole length of your market without bumping into characters like Hyperbolous, the summons psycho...

Marilades:

...or into Kratinos, who's always wearing that stupid haircut –you know the one? The skinhead sort. The one which makes him look like a real sleazebag!

Drakylos:

Or that other slimy character, Artemos, who calls himself a musician and whose armpits stink as if he's descended from a herd of goats!

Euforides:

Or that crook, Pauson! He won't be able to chuck insults at you any more, and you'll never again need to meet Lysistratos...

Prinides:

...that piece of shame from Cholareis, who's steeped in evil and who's always shivering and always hungry – for longer than thirty days a month!

Enter a Boetian, with Ismenias, his slave. Both are burdened by a great many wares for the market. They are followed by some flute players.

Boetian:

In agony By Hercules I've really stuffed up my shoulder with all this. Ismenias, put the oregano down – gently! And you, Theban musicians, blow “The Bitch's Bum”

on your bony flutes.

The music is intolerable for Dicaeopolis and the rest.

Dicaeopolis:

What the crows... Get these buzzing wasps away from my gates! How did these children of Cheris that dreadful bag pipe player get to my door?

Boetian:

By Hercules' boyfriend, the Theban Iolaus! Good stranger, you'd be doing me a favour if you'd send them away. They've been right behind me blowing those stupid pipes all the way from Thebes. They've blown off all the tips of my oregano! You want to buy some of my stuff? I've got chooks and four-winged thingies!

Dicaeopolis:

A Boetian! Bread-stick lovers one and all! Welcome! Greetings, my friend! Let's see, what have you got there?

Boetian:

All of Boetia's goodies: Oregano, baskets, ducks, wicks, jays, woodcocks, water fowl, wrens, divers –

Dicaeopolis:

Interrupts him You've come here like the rough wind that drops all the birds from the sky!

Boetian:

Ah, but I also bring geese, rabbits, foxes, moles, porcupines, cats, lyres, martins, otters and Copaic eels.

Dicaeopolis:

Ahhhhhh! Copaic eels! My friend! You have brought me the most delicious of morsels. Let me say hello to your eels!

Boetian:

To his eels Come! Let the eldest of the fifty Copaic water virgins come out of there and make this stranger happy.

Dicaeopolis:

Oh, beloved eel, you! I've longed for you for so long! The poets sigh hot sighs for you and Morychus adores you! Finally, oh, finally, you've come! To his slaves Get the grill and the bellows out boys and –Oh, look at it, will you! What a sweet looking eel. We've been waiting for it for six long years! Look at it! Darling daughter, say hello to this beauty! I'll get the coal for our delicious, darling stranger! Take her in, folks and even death won't separate me from her, not when she's garnished with a

bit of beet root!

Dicaeopolis hands the eel to Xanthias. Dicaeopolis' family goes into the house to prepare the eel. Appropriate –as well as inappropriate- noises issue from there, suggesting a good time in the kitchen.

Boetian:

What about me? Where is my money?

Dicaeopolis:

The eel is the price of your entry into the market. What else do you want to sell me?

Boetian:

The lot, of course!

Dicaeopolis:

Tell me then, how much do you want? Or would you rather barter?

Boetian:

I'll barter. I'll get whatever you Athenians have but we Boetians don't.

Dicaeopolis:

Examines his wares Let's see... we have Anchovies from Phaliron and... pottery.

Boetian:

Anchovies and pottery? We've got those. I need to get stuff we don't have back there.

Dicaeopolis:

Ah! I know just the thing you're after. Pointing at a jar Take this informer. He's dressed up as a jar.

Boetian:

An informer! Yes! By the twin gods. I'd be making a lot of money if I took one of them back with me. Full of dirty monkey business, they are!

Enter Nikarhos, an informer. He's short and overdressed, pompous and Dictatorial. He too, brandishes a fearful truncheon.

Dicaeopolis:

Talking of monkeys, here's our own Nikarhos!

Boetians:

He's a little short for an informer, isn't he?

Dicaeopolis:

Short but full of venom!

Nikarhos: Pointing at the Boetian's wares with his truncheon Whose load is this?

Boetian:

Mine. I brought it all the way from Thebes. Sees that Nikarhos is doubtful Swear by

Zeus!

Nikarhos:

Then I expose them as enemy products!

Boetian:

Mocks him and laughs You've got a war going with the little Dicky birds?

Nikarhos:

Yes, I shall expose your Dicky birds as well as you!

Boetian:

Me? What have I done to you?

Nikarhos: Pompously indicating the audience and with his truncheon pointing at the wares

I'll tell you, for the sake of the audience: You have brought to this country enemy wicks.

Dicaeopolis:

You'll expose the man because of a lamp wick?

Nikarhos:

Indeed! One man could set a whole fleet on fire with a lamp wick!

Dicaeopolis:

A whole fleet, with a wick?

Nikarhos:

I'm certain of it!

Dicaeopolis:

How?

Nikarhos:

A Boetian can tie the wick to the wings of a mosquito, then light it, then shove it into the sewer which leads to the docks, wait there for a strong Northerly which, when it gets there, will make the flames big enough and strong enough to turn our whole navy into ashes, within seconds!

Dicaeopolis:

Into ashes, you... Smacks him on the head with the butt of the whip you escaped fart!
A spark and a mossy can turn our navy into ashes?

Nikarhos:

Distressed turns to everyone around him See that? You're all witnesses.

Dicaeopolis:

Grab him! Shut his mouth up! They all attack and grab Nikarhos Bring me some of

that packing, someone. Boetian hands him some straw I'll pack the idiot up like a vase so he won't break on the way there.

Nikarhos is "packed" and a rope is tied around his neck.

Lacratides:

Tie him well, Dicky. Tie his prick well –firmly, so it won't wobble about and break on the way.

Dicaeopolis:

No worries! I'll take care of that, all right. Taps and pulls at Nikarhos' phallus which, in response makes an odd sound It's a sad sound, this one, isn't it? Sort of cracked... badly baked. The Gods hate that sort of sound!

Marilades:

So what's the use of a prick like that, then?

Dicaeopolis:

Oh, lot's of foul and disgusting things! This the sort of prick that's used as a pestle to grind law suits and foul indictments, a wick to spy with, a stick to stir shit with... make all sorts of poisons...

Drakylos:

How can anyone feel safe using such a foul-sounding tool?

Dicaeopolis:

He's finished with the stuffing and, smacking his hands with satisfaction Well, it's made of sturdy stuff, really, if you hang it by the feet.

Euforides:

To the Boetian He's done a good job with the straw.

Boetian:

Laughs Yeah! It looks like harvest time!

Prinides:

He's all yours for the harvest, good stranger. Take this sycophant now and make what good use you can of him. Take him all around and expose him to everyone for the informer that he is.

Dicaeopolis:

It took a bit out of me, but I managed to do a good job with the fart, don't you think? Hands the rope to the Boetian

Boetian:

Takes the rope from Dicaeopolis but offers it to his slave Here, Isminias, take him and be careful how you handle him.

Dicaeopolis:

You're taking home a bad piece of work but still, making a profit out of informing on informers would be a good thing.

Boetian, Nikarhos and Ismenias exit. Dicaeopolis goes inside his house.

Scene 7

A slave comes out of Lamachus' house and yells in front of Dicaeopolis' house.

Slave:

Dicaeopolis! Dicky! Diiiickyyyyy!

Dicaeopolis:

Yes? Who is it? Comes out Yeah, what do you want?

Slave:

Lamachus has asked me to ask you to sell him some Dicky birds and a bit of eel... he's given me to give you one drachma for the Dicky birds and he's given me to give you three more drachmas for the eel. He's going to the festival of Wine Drunks... I mean, Wine Cups.

Dicaeopolis:

Lamachus? Lamachus? Who is this Lamachus who wants some of my eel?

Slave:

You know Lamachus! My master! That fearful, bull-strong, shaker of the shield upon which a fierce Gorgon is painted and wears three plumes that beshadow his mighty shadow crest.

Dicaeopolis:

Ohhh! Shouts in the direction of Lamachus' home so that Lamachus can hear him That Lamachus! No! I wouldn't give him anything, even if he gave me that shield of his. Let him and his plumes eat beshadowed sardines... and if he starts shouting again like before, Picks up his whip and shakes it at the slave I'll call the market inspectors again!

Slave runs back into Lamachus' house.

I'll start packing everything up, I think. Starts doing so as he intones:

Oh, on the wings of a dove and the beak of a sparrow, I am carried away...

While the chorus speaks, all the members of Dicaeopolis' family come out and, forming a "chain gang," help bring all the merchandise into the house, until they are all inside. The door shuts firmly behind them. Again, noises are heard which suggest

a good time in the kitchen and elsewhere in the house.

Lacratides: To the audience

Did you see Athenians? Did you all see how wise and prudent this man is?

Marilades:

How with his own treaty he managed to buy all the things he needs for his household and all the delicious things that are worthy of his table? So easily!

Drakylos:

Without bother or fuss, all good things come to him.

Euforides:

I shall never invite War into my house, nor will I sing with him the martial songs of Harmodius.

Prinides:

He's a loud drunk, who burst into my party once and, while we were all enjoying ourselves with all sorts of delightful things, in he goes and does all the harm he can, smashing and spilling everything and arguing and fighting with everyone; and no matter how often I told him to sit down and to take this lovely cup and enjoy the drink, he still went on and wildly burned down my vine stakes and even more wildly spilled all our wine!

Dicaeopolis comes out and carefully, proudly, places a bundle of feathers next to his door. They are the feathers of the chickens and all the other birds they've slaughtered for their dinner. He smiles with satisfaction, burps, farts, chuckles and goes back inside.

Lacratides:

Whereas, this man, Dicky, here, has his table covered with delicious morsels and, as you saw, proud of what he's done, puts the customary feathers at his entrance, a sign of the good life that's going on inside.

Dicaeopolis' door opens once again and this time a woman, the personification of Peace comes and stands in front of it.

Marilades:

Oh Peace! Ohhhh! Stunning mate of Aphrodite! Beloved of the Graces. We've forgotten just how beautiful your face is!

Drakylos:

Ohhh! If only, if only Eros would join us –just you and me together- somehow!

Euforides:

Even in a painting, like those which the artists draw with all those wreaths and

blossoms! Or do you think I'm too old for you? Hehehe!

Prinides:

I reckon I could still manage three little tasks for you, deary! Old or not...

Lacratides:

...I'd first plant a loooooong vine into you and then...

Marilades:

...snuggled right up close to it, right next to that vine I'd plant a couple of figs, and thirdly...

Drakylos:

Thirdly, all around that vine and those two figs I'd pop in some olive trees.

Euforides:

Then, we'd be able to have our New Moon ritual by anointing our bodies with olive oil.

Peace smiles appreciatively and goes back inside. A moment later enters a Herald.

Herald:

Hear me people! Let everyone, at the sound of the trumpet, drink fast from his jug. He whose jug is the first to be empty, will, as did our forefathers, win a wine skin the size of Ktisiphos' stomach!

Herald leaves.

Dicaeopolis:

From within. Did you hear that wife? Children? Slaves? Piglets? Peace? Did you all hear the proclamation? Move! Boil and roast and turn the meat about! Pull those rabbits out of the fire...Get those wreaths done... pass me the skewers to stick into the Dicky birds!

A moment later Dicaeopolis comes out, flustered but happy with anticipation.

Prinides:

To Dicaeopolis I envy your good sense but even more, I envy your joy!

Dicaeopolis:

Ah, you'll see just how joyful I am when you see my roasted Dicky birds!

Lacratides:

I think you're right about that as well!

Dicaeopolis: Goes to the window and shouts chef-like commands at the household Stir the fire a bit!

Marilades: To the audience

Do you hear him? See what a refined cook he is? See how well he knows the art of

cooking?

Enter Derketes, a farmer, dressed in bright, wealth- white clothes. He is “Almost” blind and holding a cup. He looks very sad.

Derketes: Distressed

Hades! Hades! Hades! Hades!

Dicaeopolis:

Who on Earth is that?

Drakyllos:

Some poor, god-forsaken, misery-clogged man.

Dicaeopolis:

Yeah? Well, on your way, misery-man! We don’t need any misery today, thanks!

Derketes: Stretches out his cup to him Dear Dicaeopolis, darling Dicky. Since you’re the only one who’s got any peace around here, please let me have some... just a little bit... even if it’s just for five years.

Dicaeopolis:

Why? What happened to you?

Derketes:

Oh, poor me! Poor me! I’m screwed! I’ve lost my oxen!

Dicaeopolis:

How?

Derketes:

The Boetians invaded my village, Phylae. They ran off with them.

Dicaeopolis:

Shouldn’t you be in mourning, then, you sly shit? You’re dressed in white.

Derketes:

Well, shit is right! The oxen made me wealthy with their manure!

Dicaeopolis:

So what is it you would possibly need then?

Derketes: Feigns total blindness

Oh, well, I’ve cried so much about my poor oxen, I’ve lost my sight. Please, Dicky, if you care for poor Derketes from Phylae, just rub a bit of your peace on my eyes, quick!

Dicaeopolis:

Ohhhh, poor Derketes! Sorry, but I’m not in public medicine, like Dr. Pittalos!

Derketes:

Please help me! Perhaps I'll be able to see the oxen!

Dicaeopolis:

Nope! Go and cry at Pittalos' people.

Derketes:

From his cloak he takes out a little reed Please, Dicky, just drop me a drop or two of your peace in this tiny little reed.

Dicaeopolis:

No, not even a droplet. Go cry elsewhere!

Derketes:

Oh, my ploughing oxen! My poor, poor ploughing oxen!

Exit Derketes.

Euforides:

Our man has discovered that peace is sweet and doesn't want to share it with anyone else.

Dicaeopolis goes back to his window and shouts similar chef-like orders to those within

Dicaeopolis:

Hey, you! Spread a bit of honey over the entrails and turn the Dicky birds over!

Prinides: To the audience

Hear him? His orders are as sweet as a song!

Dicaeopolis:

And toss the eels!

Lacratides: To Dicaeopolis God, you're killing me with hunger; and all this smoke and all your shouts will also kill the neighbours.

Dicaeopolis: Even more pompously

Get that fish fried till it's nice and brown!

Goes inside to show them what he means Enter a Best Man and Bridesmaid. He has come from the wedding feast and he's holding a platter with food on it and a small bottle made of alabaster. The Bridesmaid is holding onto the Best Man's phallus and they both have a cheeky grin on their face.

Best Man:

Dicaeopolis! Hey, Dicky! cheekily Hihihihihih!

Dicaeopolis:

From within What? Who? Comes out Where?

Best Man:

I'm the Best Man at a wedding and the groom has sent this meat for you from his wedding dinner. Both chuckle

Dicaeopolis: Comes down and inspects the meat

Ah! Yes, he's done it very well, whoever he is!

Best Man:

He asks, in return for this meat –hihihihihi!- for you to put a bit of your peace in this alabaster bottle, so that he can go on –hihihihihihi!- screwing instead of going to war.

Dicaeopolis:

Get off! Take it, take it all back! There's no way I'll be giving you any of my peace, not for a million drachs! The Bridesmaid chuckles But who's this?

Best Man:

This here is the Bridesmaid and she's got a personal message for you from the bride. Hihihihihhi!

Dicaeopolis:

Well, come on, then, tell me! She moves towards him, still holding onto the Best Man's phallus. This makes the Best Man move closer to Dicaeopolis also. More chuckles from both. Finally, she manages to whisper coyly. Dicaeopolis laughs at her message and they all laugh together Hahaha! Oh gods! What a funny thing! What a funny thing the bride has asked this girl to ask of me! Hahaha! She's asked her to ask me to help her keep the prick – I mean her husband's prick – home! Ohhohohoho! Call out towards the house Xanthias! Bring here my peace bottle. This is the only donation I'll make. Women have no reason to suffer during war. Hohohohoho! Keep the prick home! Hohohohoho! Xanthias brings the peace bottle and hands it to Dicaeopolis Come, darling, bring me your little bottle. Dicaeopolis pours some wine into her bottle Now, you know what to do? Tell the bride that when the order comes for the men to enlist, that night, to rub some of this on her husband's Dicky. All right? She nods but from the expression on the couple's faces we can tell that the Peace Wine will be rubbed on the Best Man's prick. Dicaeopolis, also understands this, so he pours a bit extra in the bottle Good! Hands the peace bottle to Xanthias Right! Xanthias, take this back and bring me the for the festival. I must be off.

Xanthias takes the bottle and runs back inside. Bridesmaid and Best Man hop off happily. Enter, unhappily Herald A. He's running.

Marilades:

Now here's someone clearly not happy. Look at his twisted eyebrows. He's running

to tell us something awful, I bet.

Herald A:

Oh what tortures and pains! Worthy of Lamachus himself! He knocks on Lamachus' door

Lamachus: Bombastically within

Who knocks upon the doors of these war-blessed halls, where the shiny bronze of shields and spears outshine the sun?

Herald A:

The generals, sir, have given orders that you should take all your troops and all your helmets and all your plumes and hurry to the snow, to guard our borders. There's been a report that Boetian thieves are coming to the Festival of the Cups to do their usual dirty work.

Lamachus:

By now he has opened the door. His Phallus is sad. Damned Generals! High in number, low in use! How dreadful! How terrible! Can I not at least have time for one festival?

Exit Herald A.

Dicaeopolis: Laughs at Lamachus' misfortune

Oh, Lamachus the battle boy! Lamachus the lame... brain! Lamachus' crest has fallen!

Lamachus:

Furious at his misfortune as well as at Dicaeopolis You! You... god-cursed coward! You dare laugh at me?

Dicaeopolis: Pointing at Lamachus' fallen phallus

And is this the mighty four-winged Geryon with which you'll fight the enemy?

Lamachus: Distressed Oioioioio! What a terrible message the messenger has brought me!

Enter Herald B. He's is also rushing. Heading for Dicaeopolis.

Dicaeopolis:

Oioioioio! What terrible message this messenger will bring me!

Herald B:

Dicaeopolis! Tries to catch his breath

Dicaeopolis: Impatient Yes? What is it?

Herald B: Takes a deep breath now and rattles off this long list of goodies in such a way that it hurts Lamachus to hear. To "rub it in" the Herald turns occasionally to Lamachus. Dicaeopolis, of course, is ecstatic. Quick, grab your food platter and your

cup and run to the dinner. The priest of Dionysus has personally invited you. Hurry! They've been waiting for hours to begin the orgy- I mean the festivities. Everything is ready. Couches, tables, mattresses, cushions, garlands, perfumes, sweets of all sorts, whores galore, cakes, pastry bits and pieces, sesame rolls, little biscuits... and those delightful dancers, those beautiful lovers of Harmodius...Mmmmm! Hurry!

Lamachus: Even more distressed and green with envy
Oioioioioioioi! Luck has forsaken me!

Exit Herald B

Dicaeopolis: To Lamachus Well, what can I say? You chose the great ugly Gorgon, I chose sweet, beautiful peace! Xanthias! Shut the door behind you and prepare the platter for the dinner.

They both go into their respective houses but both can be seen through the window. It's a time of busy and furious, loudly made contrasts. An "Agon," as it is usually called, a combat between two ideas.

Lamachus:

Slave, bring my army sack!

Dicaeopolis:

Slave, bring me my food platter!

Lamachus:

Some salt with oregano and onions!

Dicaeopolis:

Fish for me, Xanthias. I hate onions!

Lamachus:

Some of the anchovies. The ones cooked in fig leaves.

Dicaeopolis:

Some nice tripe in my fig leaves, Xanthias. I'll cook it there.

Lamachus:

Bring me my plumes!

Dicaeopolis:

Bring me the pigeons and the Dicky birds!

Lamachus: Checking it and proudly displaying it to the audience This plume is beautiful. Ostrich! So white!

Dicaeopolis: Similarly displaying it to the audience Ohhhh! This Dicky bird is so scrumptious, so brown!

Lamachus: Angry at Dicaeopolis

Will you stop mocking my war stuff, man?

Dicaeopolis:

Man, you wanna stop ogling my Dicky bird?

Lamachus:

Back to his slave Bring me the case for the three plumes.

Dicaeopolis:

Bring me the platter with the hare.

Lamachus:

Examining the plumes Damn! The hair-worms have eaten these plumes!

Dicaeopolis:

Shall I eat this hare before dinner?

Lamachus:

Angrier, at Dicaeopolis Man, would you stop talking to me?

Dicaeopolis:

Man, I'm not talking to you! I'm debating with the boy here! To Xanthias Would you like to bet on what is nicer, locusts or Dicky birds? We'll let Lamachus here decide.

Lamachus: To the audience

Look how the man insults me!

Dicaeopolis: To the audience Yeap, he prefers, the locusts, all right!

Lamachus:

Take down my spear and bring it to me, boy!

Dicaeopolis:

Boy, rips the snags out of the fire and bring them to me!

Lamachus:

Come, slave, hold this spear for me so that I can pull it out of its sheath. Hold it tight... That's right. Ahhhh!

Dicaeopolis: Indicating his phallus And you, little piglet, hold tight on this!

Lamachus:

Boy, bring the braces for my shield.

Dicaeopolis:

And the... bread loaves for my... stomach!

Lamachus:

My round shield, the one adorned with the Gorgon.

Dicaeopolis:

And my pie.. the one adorned with cheese.

Lamachus: Indicating the audience
Now isn't that a coarse joke for our audience?

Dicaeopolis: Displaying it to the audience
Now isn't this a beautiful, sweet cheese pie for our audience?

Lamachus:
Boy, put a bit of oil on this shield. I can see a man in it, one about to be prosecuted for cowardice.

Dicaeopolis:
You pour the honey now, boy. I can see... I can see... I can see with my little eye... I can see a man in tears, by the name of Lamachus the Gorgonhead!

Lamachus:
Boy, bring me my battle-proof breast plate!

Dicaeopolis:
Boy, my battle-proof wine cup!

Lamachus:
Puts his breast plate on and smacks at it with pride Ah, yes! Armed with this I'll be right amongst the enemy!

Dicaeopolis: Brandishing the cup
Ah, yes! Armed with this, I'll be right amongst my drinking mates!

Lamachus:
Secure the mats on the shield.

Dicaeopolis:
Secure the food into the basket.

Lamachus:
I'll pick up my back pack.

Dicaeopolis:
And I'll pick up my cloak and go.

Lamachus:
Boy, pick up the shield and start walking. Damn! It's snowing. Brrrr! This is wintry work!

Dicaeopolis:
Boy, pick up our food and let's go have a good drinking orgy!

Lamachus and his slave exit and Dicaeopolis and Xanthias as well as the two "piglets," dressed to kill come out of their respective houses. Lamachus is in full armour and his slave, loaded with military equipment is trembling with fear and

trepidation. The two “piglets” throw a brilliant cloak over Dicaeopolis’ shoulders. Xanthias is carrying a basket of goodies for the festival. In contrast to Lamachus and his slave, Dicaeopolis and his retinue looks very happy. Both sides glance at each other with appropriate expressions of scorn, before they exit from different directions.

Euforides:

Go forth, young men, each on a very different path to the other!

Prinides:

One path ends with drinks and garlands the other with ice and snow and outpost guard duty. The first though, ah, the first!

Lacratides:

He... will have a young beauty, rubbing his Dicky in bed! Hahahaha!

Marilades:

As for Antimachus, that creep, that saliva drip, that so-called author of lyric poets –you know the one!

Drakylos:

The one who wrote up a petition to stop the chorus sponsors from paying the chorus! That’s the one. Well, I’ve got four words you, Master Antimachus!

Euforides:

May Zeus murder you! The stingy bum left me –me! A poor chorus master, to go home -after the stunning show I put on a couple of years ago, he made me go home starving.

Prinides:

The creep left me off his list for the “after-the-show” dinner! Me! You, Antimachus! This is how I’d like to see you suffer:

Lacratides:

Imagine, Antimachus! You’re standing there, in front of a delicious cuttle fish, all nicely salted, deliciously cooked, just served –sizzling hot!- and your eyes are devouring it...

Marilades:

Still with me, Antimachus? Your eyes are devouring this beautiful cuttle fish and your mouth –as per usual- dripping spit everywhere. Well, just as your hand moves towards it, what happens?

Drakylos:

A dog snatches it from under your nose and runs off with it! May the gods grant me

this sight! That's my first wish, boy! There is another.

Euforides:

One which takes place at night.

Prinides:

You're returning from a day of horse riding, Antimachus, and you're all hot and sweaty and utterly bothered.

Lacratides:

It's night, remember? Well, our friend Orestes the drunk sees you and gongs you one on the head.

Marilades:

So, you're furious and you're mad and it's night...

Drakylos:

...so you can't see too well, and you get off the horse and grab –you want a rock, right?

Euforides:

No, you grab a turd –a freshly made one, of course!-

Prinides:

Swooshy and squashy and mushy...

Lacratides:

...and squishy... and you toss it and it...

Marilades:

...and it misses and it hits... no, not Orestes our drunken friend but...

Drakylos:

... Cratinus, our buggers' friend.

Euforides:

Still with me Antimachus?

Scene 8

Enter Lamachus' slave. He's all hot and bothered. He runs up to Lamachus' house and knocks at the door.

Slave:

Hey, servants of Lamachus! Quick, get some water! Get some hot water, Quick. Heat some water in a pot! A servant comes out of the house Quick! Get some cloth and waxed wool and lint and bandages and stuff, for his ankle. The servant runs off inside

and slave now turns to the audience The master hurt himself jumping over a ditch. He hit a stake and dislocated and twisted his ankle, broke his head by some falling stone and the Gorgon shot off right out of his shield! Swoosh! Ah, the poor man! How his beautiful plumes rolled on the ground. He got so angry at that, he let out such a sad, sad lamentation! He said, Takes up a tragic posture “Oh, bright light, this is the last my eyes will see of you. I die... my eyes will see no more...” Well, you wouldn’t believe it but straight after he said this, he sees a band of thieves, so he gets up out of the ditch and chases the thieves and all the other runaways with his spear. Right up their bum his spear was! Ah, here he is now!

Enter Lamachus. He’s all bruised and bandaged, helped by a slave on either side. Bodies and phalluses are in concert as to the state of their general disposition.

Lamachus:

Oioioioioioiiiiiii! What awful pains! Achhhh! Dreadful aches! Achhhh! I’m dyiiiiiiing! Muuuuuuumy! I’m hit! I’ve been hit by an enemy spear. Achhhhh! You think I’m screaming because of these wounds, because I’m going to die? No! I’m screaming because that rotten man, Dicaeopolis is going to see me like this and laugh at me and at my woes! Oioioioioioiiiiiii!

Enter Dicaeopolis “helped” by the two “piglets,” one on each side, of course, and each holding Dicaeopolis’ phallus with one hand. They are all drunk, very happy and with a garland somewhere around the vicinity of the top of their head. A cup is dangling from Dicaeopolis’ phallus. He is fondling the breasts of the “piglets.”

Dicaeopolis:

Oioioioioioiiiiiii! What delightful tits! Firm like quinces! Mmmmmmm! To one of them Oh, sweet, sweet, sweetie porky pie, give me a kiss. A deeeeeeep kiss... with the innermost lips... like lockjaw... as a prize for winning the drinking contest! Hick! I was the first to empty my cup, you know! Hick!

Lamachus:

Envious Oioioioioioiiiiiii! What suffering, what bitter pain these fiery wounds give me! Oioioioioiiiiiii!

Dicaeopolis:

Ohohoho! Well, hello, Sir Lamachus, Sir Knight of the Gorgon’s head!

Lamachus:More envious

Oioioioioioiiiiiii! Achhhh!

Dicaeopolis:

To one of the girls Will you kiss me? Erotically? She does and as she does, her hand

lets go of his phallus.

Lamachus: Green with envy

Oioioioioioioiii! Achhhhh!

Dicaeopolis: After the kiss, turns to the other girl

Will you bite me? Erotically? She does so and also lets her hand off his phallus, which, now unpropped, drops.

Lamachus:

Greener with envy Oioioiiii! How hard I paid for that battle!

Dicaeopolis:

Has everyone paid their dues for the orgy?

Lamachus: Disgusted

Oh Apollo, Apollo, Apollo!

Dicaeopolis: Indicating his phallus

Can't pull it any more, today, boy! It's exhausted! Try again at the feast of the Healer! Hahahaha!

Lamachus: Even more disgusted

Take me, boy, take me by the arms! Friends hold me!

Dicaeopolis: Again indicating his phallus Me, too, girls, grab my prick from the middle and hold it! Pleeeeease! They do. Dignity is restored!

Lamachus: seeking sympathy

I'm a bit dizzy. The stone hit me and my sight is fading.

Dicaeopolis:

Me too! I wanna go to bed. (Indicating his phallus) Look, it's rising! It's gonna blow up!

Lamachus: Seeking more sympathy

Quick, men! Take me to Dr. Pittalus' clinic, to his soothing hands.

Dicaeopolis:

And me, take me to the judges! About to walk but stumbles Oooops, someone else do the driving. Where is the chief? I forgot... I... want my prize!

Lamachus: Desperately seeking sympathy

The sharp spear ran itself right through my bones!

Dicaeopolis: Suddenly discovers his cup

Ohhhh! Look at my poor empty cup! Hurrah for me! Hurrah for my victory! To the girls, the audience and the chorus Come on, shout with me, hurrah!

They all do so

Lacratides:

Well, hurrah!

Marilades:

Hurrah for your brilliant victory, Dicaeopolis!

All Acharnians together:

Hurrah for our old Dicky!

Dicaeopolis:

Hehehe! Once again, I drained my brimming cup, a cup full of unmixed wine! One
glug! One solitary glug! Shows the empty cup around See? My cup is empty!

Drakyllos:

You're the hero of the skin!

Euforides:

You're a winner with the drink.

Prinides:

Go and get your prize, Dicky boy!

Dicaeopolis: To the girls as he heads towards the exit to go and claim his prize
Come with me girls and let's sing to our victory!

All Acharnians together: Following him towards the exit

We're with you, boy! We're with you! Oh, Victory, Victory, Victory! She's yours,
Dicaeopolis! She's yours, Dicky Boy!

Exit all but Lamachus with his slaves who look like they've lost the contest.

Wasps

This edition is based on the [publicly available](https://bacchicstage.wordpress.com/aristophanes/wasps/)⁵⁸³ translation by G.Theodoridis

Aristophanes' "WASPS" Σφήκες

Written in 422BCE

...

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Philocleon

Misocleon (his son)

Sosias and Xanthias (slaves of Philocleon)

Boy (son of the Chorus leader)

Demagogue (Victim of Philocleon)

Myrtia (A Woman Baker)

Accuser of Philocleon

Chorus (of old jurymen, dressed as wasps)

Silent Parts:

Misocleon's donkey

Boys (sons of Jurymen)

Midas, Masyntias, Frygas (Slaves of Misocleon)

Barker (Aexone's dog)

Puppies of Barker

Kitchen Utensils

Dardanis (a girl flute player)

Victims of Philocleon

Chaerephon

Witness of the Accuser

Carcinus

Three dancers (sons of Carcinus)

...

The set represents the house of Philocleon and Misocleon.

The altar of Dionysus stands at Front, Stage Right.

⁵⁸³<https://bacchicstage.wordpress.com/aristophanes/wasps/>

The whole house is wrapped with a huge net. A large bar and a locked padlock are attached to the front door. Here and there are planks of wood, stones, a millstone and some branches. On the roof sleeps Misocleon.

A small room inside the house is Philocleon's sleeping quarters. Xanthias and Sosias guard the front door.

Dawn is breaking.

Xanthias is turning and tossing, making a great deal of noise.

Sosias:

Hey, Xanthias, you evil demon, what's the matter with you?

Xanthias:

I'm thinking about how to shorten the night watch.

Sosias:

You're thinking about how to increase the pain on your arse, you mean! Don't you know what sort of a bastard we're guarding here?

Xanthias:

Yeah, I know but I just want to forget that for just a little while. Distance my brain from the task a bit...

Sosias:

You're looking for trouble my friend. Still something delightful is weighing down upon my eyelids, too... sleeeeeep... sleeeeeep... *begins to snore heavily*

Xanthias:

Oi! Either you're gone nuts or you're in the middle of a beauty of a wet dream!

Sosias:

No, no... just a few... frenzied drunk women... slaves... sleeeeeep... sleeeeeep... ahhhh! Yes!

Xanthias:

Just as I thought! We're in the same dream my friend! Caught me a moment ago when a delightful weight fell upon my eyelids too. Heavy weight. You'd reckon a whole platoon of Persians was standing on them! Ahhhh, and what an enchanting dream! Wondrous to behold!

Sosias:

No kidding, me too! I've never had a dream like it but you tell me yours first.

Xanthias:

Well, it seems I saw this huge eagle flying over the market. Huge bastard. Flying around the market until down it comes and with its huge talons it snatches a shield

made of bronze. Then it flew high up into the Heavens again and from there... and from there... Kleonymos the coward, the deserter, dropped it!

Sosias:

Yeah, Kleonymos the shield dropper does make a funny riddle, doesn't he? I mean, fancy dropping your shield and running off in the middle of a battle. Good ol' Kleonymos!

Xanthias:

Yeah... What do you mean a "good riddle?"

Sosias:

Well, a man could ask his mates at the pub "what sort of beast drops its shield on land, in the air and at sea?"

Xanthias:

O, my! A dream like that! What rotten things are heading my way, I wonder?

Sosias:

Nah! Don't worry, mate. Nothing bad is going to happen to you... Not unless the gods will it!

Xanthias:

It's a dreadful thing though, a man dropping his arms like that, I mean... Now tell me your dream!

Sosias:

Oh, mine's huge! It's about the whole ship of State!

Xanthias:

Well, hurry then, tell me... begin with the hull!

Sosias:

Well, at the first nod, I dreamed in my dream a whole lot of sheep gathering at the gates of the parliament and these sheep were wearing short leather jackets and carrying walking sticks. Then, all of a sudden a huge whale, an absolutely gluttonous beast started making a speech, with what I thought, was the shrill voice of a poked pig.

Xanthias:

Oh, no!

Sosias:

What's up?

Xanthias:

Enough, enough! Shut up! Your dream stinks of rotten leather!

Sosias: Ignoring Xanthias

Then, this huge stinking beast was holding a pair of scales and was weighing... ox fat! Or was it fat people?

Xanthias:

Frightening! Very frightening! I think he wants to divide the people!

Sosias:

And I dreamed that Theorus was there with the head of crow, squatting on the ground, next to the huge cock of a beast and then Alcibiades turned to me and said with his usual lisp, "Thee there? There's Theowus with the head of a clow!"

Xanthias:

He lithped cowwectly, that Althibiades!

Sosias:

Awkward idea that isn't it? I mean Theorus turning into a crow?

Xanthias:

Not at all. It's an excellent sign!

Sosias:

How do you mean?

Xanthias:

Well, look: First Theorus is a man and then he turns himself into a crow. Doesn't this signify that he's about to leave us and fly off to... the crows?

Sosias:

What an expert dream interpreter! Will you accept a two-obols-a-day permanent job with me?

Xanthias:

Well, now, be quiet and let me delineate the play to our audience! First though a few words, like a sort of a prologue.

Turning to the audience

Don't expect from us either anything grand or anything as low as those dreadful, coarse jokes told by the Megarians. Nor will you see the spectacle of two slaves holding a basket of nuts which they throw at you; nor Heracles whose food they pinch, nor stupid abuse thrown at Euripides. Nor will we make for the second time minced meat out of Cleon who had this recent bit of shining good luck!

No, what you will see is a bright little piece of work... but, of course, no brighter than you though, still not so low as to be insufferable.

Out there, snoring on the roof, we have our boss, a man most noteworthy. He has

told us to guard his father and make sure he doesn't escape from lock and key. This is because his father has this terrible and strange disease which if we were not to tell you what it is, you'd never think of it nor would you know of it, nor yet could guess of it! Go on, try guessing what it might be!

Sosias:

Pronapes' son Amynias, says that the old man suffers from an acute case of dice-o-philía, in other words, love of the dice! What a gambler the man is!

Xanthias:

Utter nonsense! He's using his own affliction to judge that of our master, by Zeus, by Zeus!

But this word "philía" is the core of his problem. There's a certain Sosias who has told a certain Dercylus that he, Dercylus, suffers from wine-o-philía.

Sosias:

Utter nonsense! Everyone knows that wine-o-philía is the disease that afflicts the important men amongst us.

Xanthias:

Nikostratus, though, our great and successful general, who hails from Scambonidae, is of another opinion. His guess is that our master suffers from sacrifice-o-philía... or xenophilía.

Sosias:

Now that's a doggy poo, Nikostratus! Xenophilus is a... queer! You know that!

Xanthias:

Stop guessing, you're nowhere near the truth with all this chit chat. Shut up if you want to learn the truth. I'll tell you what my master suffers from. He suffers from jury-o-philía. And how! More than anyone else would ever love being a juror! You'll hear him sighing deep sighs if he's too late to catch a front row seat!

Not a wink of sleep during the night! Even if sleep does have a chance at his eyelids for a moment his mind will be constantly hovering around the jury's time piece. All night! Imagine, this habit he has of holding the vote between his three fingers, well, those fingers are now permanently stuck together –like this, see? – and when he gets up he rushes off as if he's taking incense to the altar for the first of the month prayers! And, by the gods, if he sees a sign on some door that says, let's say, "Pyrilampes' son, Demos, is a cutie pie," he goes and writes next to it, "the ballot box is a cutie pie."

If his own cock woke him up too late even as early as bedtime, our master would accuse him of waking him up too late because the magistrates had bribed him. The

moment the evening meal is finished he shouts for his shoes to be brought to him. Then he runs off to the courthouse very early and, being too early he stands stuck by a post like a barnacle. Stuck there like that until the time comes for him to do his judging.

When the time comes for him to show the extent of the guilt of all the accused, he, being such a nasty bugger, draws this huge line across the wax tablet so that his finger nails are so thick with wax that he looks like a bee or a bumblebee. He is so frightened that he'll run out of voting shells that he's got the whole beach brought here into his house. That's how crazy our master is and the more people try to reason with him the worse he gets –the more cases he wants to judge.

That's why we've got him locked up, preventing him from escaping.

His son, up there (indicating Misocleon) is very worried about the old man's madness. At first he tried to persuade him with words: not to wear the juror's cape nor to keep running off to the courthouse like that but this old man just wouldn't listen. Couldn't care a less!

Then we gave him expiation baths but to no avail. Then his son took him to the temple of the Chorybants, hoping for some cure but off he goes again to the court banging on his little drum and there he is again, listening to more cases!

When all these efforts didn't succeed, Misocleon carries him one night to the temple of Asclepios in Aigina and lies him down there but he, even before Dawn, there he is back at the court's gate.

From then on we've got him all locked up but still the bugger kept escaping from different holes or the gutters, so we stopped all the holes with plugs and sealed them up inscrutably. So what does he do then? He hammers great pegs into the wall and... runs up them like a pet crow and off he hops back to the courthouse! That's why we've put the nets all over the house and the courtyard and we're standing guard all around it.

The old guy has a name: Philocleon. It's true! He's a Cleon lover! His son, Misocleon hates Cleon and that's why they say he's a difficult man, sort of hoity-toity.

Pause. Snoring from Misocleon for a few seconds before we notice that Philocleon is creeping away from his bed room and has disappeared into the house. Suddenly great noises wake everyone up, including Misocleon

Misocleon: (From the roof)

Xanthias, Sosias are you asleep?

Xanthias:

Oh no!

Sosias:

What is it?

Xanthias:

Misocleon is up!

Misocleon:

One of you run around the house. My old man has managed to get himself into the oven and he's spinning around like a mouse. You! Look into the bath room in case he tries to escape from the chimney stack. And you, stand by the door and watch it carefully.

Sosias runs around the back of the house, effectively exiting.

Xanthias:

Yes boss!

Misocleon:

By the Lord Poseidon! What's the noise in the chimney? Ey, you down there! Who are you?

Philocleon: (appearing behind the netting)

Me? You're talking to me? I am... smoke and I'm coming out.

Misocleon:

Ah! You're smoke, ey? Let me see now, from what sort of wood?

Philocleon:

Fig tree wood. Pride of the sycophants!

Misocleon:

Ah but of course! What other type would you be but the most irritating kind of smoke! Good for coughing and splattering your lungs to death. But you won't escape! Searches for a plank. Now where is the plank? Here it is! Get back! He places the plank upon the chimney stack. There, I've put the piece of wood on the chimney. Now go find some other means of escape. Honestly, the troubles I've got. Soon they'll be calling me son of Old Smokey! What a joke of a Comedian that man was!

Philocleon:

Ey, you, slave?

Xanthias:

Ah! He's pushing at the door!

Misocleon:

Then lean hard against it! I'm coming down there as well. And keep an eye on the

bar and the padlock. He might eat it!

Philocleon:

What are you up to? Let me out, you... you stinkers! Let me out or else Mr Slippery will slip away scot free before I can even hear his case!

Xanthias:

And that would upset you so very much?

Philocleon:

Too right, it would! Look! When I went to the Delphic oracle seeking advice, the god prophesied that if I ever let anyone slip away, I'd be a carked man!

Xanthias:

Wow! What a prophesy! By Apollo the protector!

Philocleon:

Come on, I beg you! Let me out or I'll blow up!

Xanthias:

No, by Poseidon, no way!

Philocleon:

Then I'll chew up all the netting with my teeth.

Xanthias:

Teeth? What teeth?

Philocleon:

Ah poor wretch! How can I kill him! Someone give a sword! Or the tablet to draw the length of his penalty!

Misocleon has by now come down from the roof.

Misocleon:

That man is up to something evil!

Philocleon:

No, by the gods! Trust me I just want to sell a donkey and some panniers. It's market day today.

Misocleon:

I can do that.

Philocleon:

No, you can't! Not as well as I can.

Misocleon:

No, I can do it better than you.

Philocleon:

All right then, get the donkey out!

Xanthias:

By the gods! What a clever man this is! What a clever lure he has devised for you to let him out!

Misocleon:

But his lure has failed and he caught nothing! I know him and his lures! Still I'll go and get the donkey myself. I don't want the old man to escape again!

Goes into the house and returns with the donkey. The donkey is braying.

Little ass, little ass, why are you crying? Don't you want to be sold? Come on, walk a little faster. What's all the noise? Don't tell me you're carrying some Odysseus or other?

Xanthias:

By Zeus, yes! She's certainly carrying somebody under her belly. Here he is! Look!

Misocleon:

Who is it? Let me look! Here he is! Now what is this? Who are you? Tell me my good man?

Philocleon:

My name is Nobody!

Misocleon:

Nobody? You're Mr Nobody? And where are you from?

Philocleon:

Me? I'm from Ithaca. Son of Escape-ass.

Misocleon:

Well, Mr Nobody, you'll enjoy no scheme of escape-ass. Quick, drag the fool out from under there. Look where the stinker crawled! Looks more like a summoner's ass to me than Mr Escapeass' ass!

Philocleon:

Let me go or else we'll end up fighting!

Misocleon:

Indeed! Fighting about what?

Philocleon:

Eh... the ass' shadow!

Misocleon:

You're the sliest of the sly and the worst of the worse!

Philocleon:

Me? The worst of the worse? By Zeus, no! You don't have a clue of my true worth! Not until you bite off a piece of a tough old juror's gut!

Misocleon:

Go on! You and the old donkey get into the house.

Misocleon and the donkey are hustled into the house.

Philocleon:

Comrade jurors! General Cleon! Help!

Misocleon:

Now that you're inside you may yell all you like. Xanthias pile up lots of stones around the door and pull that bolt back across into its slot... and reinforce it with another plank and hurry! Roll that big millstone against the door, too!

Xanthias completes the tasks and stands by the door. A moment later a small stone falls on his head.

Xanthias:

Ouch! Now where did this stone come from?

Misocleon:

Perhaps a mouse threw it from the roof!

Xanthias:

What mouse are you talking about? Look up there! There's someone hiding beneath the roof. There he is, our juror! A juror of roofs!

Misocleon:

Damn it! He's turning himself into a sparrow. He'll fly away. Where's the netting gone? Shoo! Shoo you shit and shoo again! Get back in there! Damn it! I'd rather be a guard at the traitorous city Scione than have to deal with such a father!

Xanthias feels exhausted and under the impression that the hard work is over.

Xanthias:

Now that we've done with the old man and there's no way he can escape, what do you say for a bit of a snooze, hey?

Misocleon:

You idiot! Any minute now his juror mates will turn up to take my father to the courthouse!

Xanthias:

What are you on about? It's still the middle of the night!

Misocleon:

And I'm telling you, by Zeus, they're late tonight. They always come out at midnight,

swinging their torches and warbling their silly ancient Siddon melodies by that old crooner, Phrynicus. That's how they call the old man out.

Xanthias:

If the worse comes to worst we'll start throwing stones at them.

Misocleon:

You're such an idiot, boy! Getting the old men angry is like getting a wasp's nest angry. These old guys have great big, sharp stingers sticking out of their bums, which they use to sting people with. They jump and charge like scorching sparks.

Xanthias:

Don't you worry boss. With enough stones I can scatter many nests of jurors.

The two lie down and soon begin to snore. Enter the chorus of old jurors dressed as wasps and carrying torches. Part of their dress includes a cape They are accompanied by the boys who are guiding them. The boys are carrying on their shoulder a small "shopping bag."

Chorus:

Onward and forward lusty chaps! Ey, you, Komias! You're very slow these days. Not like in the olden days when you were tough like a dog's leash. See, now even Charinares walks faster than you!

Chorus:

Strymodorus of Conthyle, my best comrade juror! Can you see Evergides or Chabes of Phlya anywhere? No? Oh dear, look at us! I'm afraid that's all that's left of that beautiful youth that did guard duty at Byzantium. Just the two of us! Hey, remember when we went roaming about the streets one night, pinched a bread-woman's kneading bowl, turned it into firewood and we cooked some pimperl? Come on then boys, let's get on with it. We're hearing Laches' case today. They're all saying he stuffed his hive full of money! That's why our patron the General Cleon has given orders yesterday for us to get there very early, each of us carrying three days' rations of rotten rage for Laches so that he will not escape our punishment.

Chorus:

Come on then, old comrades before it gets to be daybreak. Let's move on and make sure we look carefully everywhere with our torches that we don't stumble on any stones and hurt our selves badly.

Boy:

Careful, daddy. Careful the mud there!

Chorus:

Well, pick up a twig from the ground and trim the torch!

Boy: Holding up a finger No, it's all right, I think I'll use this.

Chorus:

You idiot! Who taught you to trim the torch with you fingers? You know how expensive oil is? But then again, it's not you who feels the bite when the prices rise like that! Slaps him one.

Boy:

Oi! Slap me once more to teach me a lesson and I promise you, we'll blow out all the torches and run off home on our own. You'll be stumbling around in the dark then and sloshing about in the mud like a partridge.

Chorus:

Watch it, me lad! I've taught lessons to bigger folk than you. But... damn! I think I've stepped into some mud! Well then, I say that this means that it will rain within four days! And I can see that the torch is gathering mold and that's when the rain loves to come down. All those crops that aren't up yet will need the rain followed by the breath of the North wind... They've reached Philocleon's house Hey, what's going on here? What's the matter with our comrade juror, Philocleon? Isn't he coming out to join our crew? I wonder what's wrong with him. He's never been late before. He's always been the first among us and he'd be singing the Phrynicus repertoire. He always loved those songs.

Chorus:

My friends, I think we should stand here for a while and sing him out of the house. Once he hears my voice he'll be most happy to slide out of his door.

What could the matter be with the old man?

Why isn't he standing before us, by his door?

Has he lost his shoes perhaps?

Stubbed his toes, perhaps?

Hurt his ankle being such an oldie?

Chorus:

A case of swollen balls?

He used to be keener than all of us

Once!

Once he'd get a thought in his head,

He'd never let it go

And if anyone asked him for a favour

He'd say, "poor suck, up your Kyber!"

Chorus:

Perhaps it is because of Caristos the Samian's
Case yesterday! The rotten man tricked us into
Thinking he was pro-Athenian and
Told us the goings on at Samos. He slipped
Through our fingers.

Chorus:

Perhaps that made the old man so angry that
He's lying in his bed with a fever!
That's our old Philocleon,
What a man!

Chorus:Shouting

But, dear, sweet chap do get up and out of bed!
Don't feel so bad or angry about your self,
They brought us a real heavyweight today
One of those who betrayed us at Thrace,
Let's make sure we have him in the pot
Old boy!
Move on, boy, move on!

Boy:

Daddy, if I ask you for something will you give it me?

Chorus:

By all means my dear boy! Tell daddy what
Nice things you want him to buy for you.
Knuckle sandwich, perhaps?

Boy:

No daddy, I prefer some dried figs
They're much sweeter!

Chorus:

No, by Zeus! Not even if you go hang yourself!

Boy: Pulls his torch away

Then I'll stop guiding you.

Chorus:

Listen you! With this tiny wage I've got to buy three things: flour, firewood and food

for the three of us. What figs are you on about, boy?

Boy: Thinks for a moment

Tell me daddy, if the Minister doesn't call the court into session today, how are we going to eat? Do you hold any hope for the provision of food for these little Hellenes?

Chorus:

Ah! Poor me! I have no idea how and from where I'll get us a bite.

Boy:

Oh, my poor, wretched mother why did you give birth to me?

Chorus:

Why? She gave birth to you so that I would have to deal with the worry of feeding you, that's why!

Boy: Talking to his shopping bag hanging from his shoulder

What a useless little ornament you turned out to be my poor, little shopping bag!

Philocleon: Pokes his head out of a window

My dear, dear friends! I've been listening to your sweet voices all this time with a broken heart because I just can't get out of here. What shall I do? These men are guarding the door because I want to go with you to the court house and give someone some big sentence.

O Zeus! Zeus the great chunderer! Do turn me into smoke, or else into a Proxenides the great boaster or into the son of Sellus a real boaster of the vine climber nature. Do me this favour great Lord! Pity my torture and smash your great burning thunder bolt upon my head, turn me into ashes, throw me into a hot sauce... either that or turn me into a pebble... the sort the jurors use to count votes!

Chorus:

But who is it that locked you up in there? Tell us, we're your friends.

Philocleon:

My son, but don't yell. He's asleep up there. Lower your voices.

Chorus:

You stupid suck! What excuse does he use to do this to you?

Philocleon:

He won't let me do my judging, he won't let me give out my heavy punishments but he forces me to wine and dine! Now I certainly don't want that! Not what I want at all!

Chorus:

I know why. This young skunk dared to do a Demologocleon because you tell the

truth about youth and boats. Such shame he wouldn't dare inflict on you even he was a spy!

But it's now about time you found a way of escaping without him noticing you, so you can come out here with us.

Philocleon:

But what could this idea be? You think one up for me. I'm willing to do anything. Anything! That's how strong my desire is to be around the ballot boxes with a pebble in my hand.

Chorus:

Perhaps there's some gap in the woodwork that you might be able to widen a bit and then you could come out disguised like sly old Odysseus, wearing rags when he entered Troy.

Philocleon:

They've sealed everything so tightly that not even a gnat can escape from here. You have to think of something else. I certainly can't turn myself into runny whey!

Chorus:

Do you remember when you were a soldier during our Naxos campaign? You stole some skewers and poking them into the wall you managed to enter the city?

Philocleon:

I do, I do remember. Well? What of it? Not the same thing. I was young and brave those days. Sharp as a tack, I was! No one was guarding me then and I could escape without fear. Now there are armed guards in the streets. There's two of them right there in front of the door, holding skewers – watching me like a cat that's stolen some meat.

Chorus:

Well, my darling little honey bunny, you had better come up with a plan again and pronto, because it's getting late.

Philocleon:

Well, the best plan that's left then is for me to chew through the netting.

Oh, goddess Netting forgive me!

Chorus:

That's the boy! That's what a true man does when he wants to escape. Get those teeth working!

Philocleon: success

Done! But be quiet. We don't want to wake up Misocleon!

Chorus:

Fear not at all, my friend! Fear not at all! If he just as make a mere boo, I'll have him eating his own heart out and running wildly in the streets to try and save his life! That will teach him to treat the legislation of our two goddesses with such contempt! Tie the rope on the window frame, comrade and let yourself down. Come on, fill your heart with Diopeithes' trust in the Divine.

Philocleon:

Yeah, sure but what if these two wake up and reel me up with their hook all the way inside? What will you do then? Quick, answer me!

Chorus:

What we'll do is... we'll all help you... We'll gather our hardwood courage and defend you to the hilt and they won't be able to hold onto you. That's what we'll do!

Philocleon:

All right, I'll do it but –are you listening?- if anything happens to me, take me with the usual laments and bury me next to the Court House.

Chorus:

Nothing will happen to you, stop trembling. Come down now, darling, courage and pray to the ancestral gods.

Philocleon:praying

O, my neighbourhood hero Lycus!

We enjoy the same delightful things: the wailings and the lamentations of the defendants every day, every day! You chose to live where you could best hear them, next to them and you chose to sit next to those who cry the most. Come, pity our comrade now and save him and I swear that I'll neither piss on your fence nor leave you with thunderous flatulence.

Misocleon: To Xanthias

Ey, you, wake up!

Xanthias:

Wwwwwhat? What is it?

Misocleon:

I think I hear voices. The old man hasn't tried to run off again has he?

Xanthias:

Indeed not, by Zeus but I can see him climbing down a rope!

Misocleon:

What are you up to, you stinker? Don't you get down there! To Xanthias Quick run

around the other way and beat him with those branches. Perhaps if he's beaten with the harvest wreath it will make him back water.

Philocleon:

Help me! Comrade prosecutors, you who've got cases coming up this year, come and help me! Smicythion, Teisiades, Mr Needy and you, too, Mr Dinnerbringer! Come now before they drag me back inside the house!

Chorus:

Tell me, friend, why do we take so long to let our bile burst forth when someone tries to irritate our nest? Bring it out now, bring it out now, bring out now your sharp big prick. Stretch it out long and sharp, a real punishment for these two. (Handing their capes to the boys)

Take our capes boys and run to Cleon screaming. Tell him the news, tell him to come and crush an enemy of the state, to destroy the man who insists that we must no longer judge!

Misocleon:

Friends! Friends! Stop shouting and listen to facts!

Chorus:

I'll shout, by Zeus! All the way to the Heavens!

Misocleon:

In that case, forget it. I will not let him go!

Chorus:

What a frightful tyranny this is! O Athens, my city! Athens that only has one Theorus, the rogue and only a few other cock suckers who stand up for us.

Xanthias: indicating the stingers worn by the chorus

By Heracles! Look at them stingers! Look boss!

Misocleon:

The very same stingers they used to destroy Philipus, the son of Gorgias.

Chorus:

These very stingers will also destroy you!

Come comrades turn this way and drawing into a thick phalanx, stretch your stingers to the full and everyone attack with his heart full of wrathful passion and let's teach him what sort of wasps' nest he's disturbed.

Xanthias:

Boss, I feel we're in for a bastard of a battle. These stingers frighten me a lot!

Chorus: To Misocleon

Now let our comrade go! Otherwise you'd be wishing you were a turtle hidden in his shell!

Philocleon:

Come on, comrade jurors! Attack the bastards! One lot anger yourselves to the brim and shove your stinger up their arse! The other lot, sting them in their eyeballs! Their fingers, too!

Misocleon: shouting into the house for more slaves

Midas, Masyntias, Frygas, come out here and help!

Grab the old man and don't let anyone take him, otherwise I'll have you all wrapped in chains and kept starving. I can recognise the sounds of empty bluster when I hear it!

Xanthias and Misocleon enter the house.

Chorus: Indicating his stinger

Let him go or something's going to poke you!

Philocleon:

O Cecrops, my Lord, my Hero! Dragonfoot! Will you just look upon this disgrace and do nothing? Look how I'm pushed around by the very barbarians whom I taught the lesson of crying "four tears to the quart?"

Chorus:

And then they have the audacity to tell you that old age is an easy street with no mysteries or torture by the tonne! Yet it's so obvious. Look there! Look how these two drag their old boss around! They've forgotten the leather jackets and tunics and caps he used to buy them and they've forgotten, too, the fact that he used to watch out their feet didn't freeze during winter!

No, they see no need for respect at all for all their former shoes.

Philocleon: (held by Midas and Frygas)

You still won't release me, you evil beast? Don't you remember how once I caught you stealing grapes and I had you marched to the olive tree and had you submit to the right brave thing of being played raw and everyone envied you? Obviously you were ungrateful!

Come on now you two, let me go before my son rushes out!

Chorus:

Any minute now! You'll pay for this dearly! Soon you'll know what sort of full spirited and virtuous men we are! Men whose mere glance is mustard.

The Chorus attacks. Enter Misocleon with a bee-smoking device and Xanthias

with a stick.

Misocleon:

Xanthias, beat the bees away from the house!

Xanthias:

I'm doing exactly that but you help also! Blow lots of smoke at them.

Misocleon:

Shoo, shoo, you buggers! Piss off to the crows with you! Boy, beat them up with your stick!

Xanthias:

And you, too, boss, choke them dead with a cloud of smoke, a cloud of Aeschines, son of Sellartius the hot air man.

The chorus retreats

Misocleon:

Huh! I knew we'd eventually send you back!

Philocleon:

But you wouldn't have done it so easily if they had swallowed some of the Spartan General Philocles' songs.

Philocleon digs his phallus into the bum of one of the members of the chorus

Chorus:

Ouch! Surely the poor folk saw this? Tyranny has sneaked up on me from behind and tried to hump me! And all this because you, you bastard, you long-haired Spartan, bastard, you, you Amynias, you, hater of our lord Cleon, tried to deny us our country's long-established rights with not as much as an excuse, or an argument. You want to be our State's tyrant!

Misocleon:

Right, then! Can we do this? Can we enter into a logical discussion and bring about a compromise without all this shouting and squealing?

Chorus:

Discussion? Discussion with you, you monarchy lover, you enemy of democracy, Brasida's mate! Look at you! Little woollen tufts on your clothes and... and a rough beard on your face!

Misocleon:

By Zeus! I think, it'd be better, to give up and hand my father over to them than having to endure these sea battles on a daily basis!

Chorus:

Huh! You think these are troubles! Mate, you haven't begun yet. To use a couple of metaphors you're not even at the parsley, let alone at the main vegies! Wait till a prosecutor comes and dumps your own phrases back all over your head, twists them and calls you a conspirator! No, boy, you battles are not over.

Misocleon:

By the heavens above! Have you decreed that we're to spend the whole day trying to skin each other alive? Can you get off my back?

Chorus:

No, no way, never! Not even when there's bugger all left of me. I won't stop arguing with a man who wants to be our tyrant.

Misocleon:

No matter what issue is being talked about, whether it's important or not, off you go turning it into a discussion about tyranny or conspiracy. I haven't heard these words for at least fifty years but now, they're like sardines in the market place. They're everywhere! If someone, for example, wants to buy trout but reject the anchovy, the offended anchovy seller looks at him and says, "this gourmet prefers tyranny!" Or if you want a free onion to add a bit of taste to your dish, there'd be an offended cabbage vendor who'd cry out at you, "ah, so you prefer tyranny, ey? Do you think the Athenian's taxes should be used to grow spices for the likes of you?"

Xanthias:

Yesterday afternoon I visited my whore and asked her to ride me. "Well," she screamed at me, "you want to bring in Hippias' junta back, do you?"

Misocleon:

That's the sort of stuff they love hearing about! But now I want my father to stop all this torture. No more waking up at the crack of Dawn and running off to sue everyone and everything and to serve in the jury. I want him to drop all these trouble-seeking habits and live a life of sweet rest, like that of Morychus. That's why they call me a conspirator and a lover of tyranny.

Philocleon:

And they're quite right, too! I wouldn't swap my life with pigeon's milk to get the sort of life you want me to have. Forget the mullet and the eels and all such like delicacies. Give me a delicious lawsuit-pot anytime!

Misocleon:

Sure, that's because you're addicted to all this jury stuff. But be quiet for a moment and listen to my words. I'm certain I'll prove to you that you're wrong in all respects.

Philocleon:

Wrong to be a juror?

Misocleon:

Not only that but you're the laughing stock of those whose arse you lick. You don't even know you've become enslaved by them!

Philocleon:

Enslaved? Enslaved? Me? I'll have you know that I am everyone's master!

Misocleon:

No, you serve them like a slave but you think that you're their master! Tell us father, what is your benefit from reaping the fruits of Greece?

Philocleon:

My rewards? Listen! Make these men here the arbitrators of the contest you're setting up.

Misocleon:

All right. I agree. Let him loose, everyone!

The slaves release him and go inside.

Philocleon:

And give me a sword. If I lose this contest I'll fall on it!

Misocleon:

But tell me, if you don't respect the opinion of the judges? What then?

Philocleon:

If that happens I shall never toast the Good demon with unmixed... jury pay!

Chorus:

Now, Philocleon, since you've come out of our school you must say something that will show...

Misocleon interrupts them

Misocleon:

Someone bring me a pen to write down everything he says.

Chorus: continues from above

...that your words differ from this young man's. As you see, your contest is enormous and perhaps –knock on wood- he might win.

Misocleon:

Right! I'm writing down everything you say!

Philocleon:

Comrades, what did you say will happen if he beats me in this contest?

Chorus:

If he beats you it will mean that the elderly are no good at anything other than as olive bearers in the old men's parade at the Panathenaic festival. They'll be laughing at us from every corner, so since you've taken the task for the whole of our brotherhood, you'd better sharpen your tongue, take courage and work hard!

Philocleon:

I shall indeed and, bolting straight out of the racing gate I shall prove that our own sovereignty is just as mighty as any king's. Is there a more fortunate being, more mollicoddled, more happy, more able to spread fear than a juror, especially if he's old? Even before I'm awake, while I'm at the railings of the Court House, I'm watched by several important looking young men, six feet tall and more. The moment I approach the gate I can feel the soft hand of one of them touching me. It's a hand that had dipped itself deep into the public purse. The men beg me with a soft, humbled voice, "please, father, pity my plight, I beg you! Surely you, too, once, when you were a holder of some office, pocketed something. Perhaps even during your military service you might have pinched some of your messmates' field rations." The young idiot, had he not survived a judgement before, he wouldn't know I existed!

Misocleon:

Hold on, let me make a note of this... Hmmm! Begging... Right, go on!

Philocleon:

Then, the moment I'm inside the Court House, I forget all of my promises and let my anger subside from all that begging and I sit and listen to all sorts of voices from those who want to be found innocent. And there you will hear all sorts of excuses. Is there any piece of flattery that does not give a juror sweet pleasure? Some blubber on about their poverty. Talk about exaggerations! They pile on upon what they've got all sorts of other dreadful circumstances, so much so that they make their troubles look greater than mine!

Some entertain us with myths, others tell us funny stories from Aesop and others again, perform all sorts of funny acts to make me laugh and forget my anger. And if, after all that, we jurors don't change our mind, the man will roll out his children, one by one, holding both girl and boy by the arm. And they begin to cringe and bleat with their heads bowed. Then their father comes and, with trembling knees, he begs me –as if I were a god!- to give him the verdict of innocence. "Please sir, if you love the sound of a lamb, of my young boy here, pity us. Or, if it's little cunts you want to hear, here's my young daughter's voice. Let it make you change your mind!" Then,

we loosen a bit the strings of our wild anger.

Now isn't this a sign of huge authority over and a total contempt of wealth?

Misocleon:

A second note: Contempt of wealth. Got it. Now remind me of the benefits you supposedly get since you tell us you're master of Greece.

Philocleon:

The first benefit is that when the young boys are being checked for registration with the various precincts, we get to look at their dicks; and if an actor like Oeagrus arrives before us as a defendant he won't be freed until he chooses the best speech from the play Niobe and recites it to us. As well, if a flute player wins his case, he must pay the jurors by playing a tune for us to exit with. Or, if some dying father bequeaths in his will, his heiress daughter, to someone, we can tell that bequest to go soak itself and we do the same to the fancy clasp and the seal over which it's sitting prettily and we award the girl to whoever talks us into it.

And for all this, we are accountable to no one. Such benefits are gained by no other office bearers.

Misocleon:

Yes, so far that's the only thing I praise you on but it's a terrible thing for you to undo the clasp that holds an heiress' endowments!

Philocleon:

As well, when the Parliament and the people find it difficult to judge an important case, they hold a vote and send the defendants to the jurors. Then our nice sycophant orator, Euathlos and the greater sycophant still, Mr Bumlicker (who had disappeared after throwing away his shield) come and swear that they will always fight on the side of the populus and will never betray us. And no one carries a motion before the Council unless he says, "the jurors may retire even after judging one case only." As well, Cleon the loudmouth, looks after us only. He'll even shoo away the flies and pat us on the back. Have you ever done such a lovely thing for your father? Even Theorus, not at all a lesser arselicker than Euphemius, drops a sponge into a bowl of water and wipes clean our shoes.

See what benefits you drag me out of and hold me back from, by saying that they're slavery and servitude.

Misocleon:

Go on, guts yourself with your own words, you'll have enough of them eventually and then you'll be found to be no more than an unwashed bum hole, one who, with

all its grandstanding, can't find the time to wash its shit.

Philocleon:

Ah, but I've forgotten the sweetest benefit of them all! And I get this when I come home with my payment, because everyone welcomes me at the front door and goes after my money. First in line is my darling daughter who gives me a bath, rubs my feet and relaxes them splendidly before she bends down and kisses me with "daddy this and daddy that" while at the same time she uses her tongue to fish out my three obols from inside my mouth. Next comes the little wife who pats me and hugs me and brings me nice, frothy pastries, sits down next me and coaxes me with, "eat this, honey, eat this, too, my sweetheart." These things bring joy to my heart. Not like having to rely on you and your cook to deliver me my meal with insolence and whining curses in case I ask for another piece of pie! Against all this torture I've got my three obols to protect me and they do an excellent job –like an armour plate against the arrows!

And as for your measly goblet of wine which you won't serve me anyway, well, I simply fill up my donkey-eared flask and, on my way back, I tip it up and gulp myself a drink. This good old donkey-eared flask opens wide and lets out a huge fart directed at your stupid goblet!

Well, then, isn't this authority of mine as great as that of Zeus? What he hears, I hear. For instance if we're in an uproar inside the Court House, the passers by outside exclaim, "Zeus Almighty, the jury's really thundering today!" And if anger make me look like lightning, both the mighty and the rich turn pale and whisper, "O, my God!" and shit in their pants with fear. In fact, admit it by Demeter: you, too, are afraid of me as well! Shaking in your sandals you are. Yet I'd be damned if I'm afraid of you, boy!

Chorus:

What articulation! What intelligence! Such oratory we've never heard been uttered by anyone!

Philocleon:

Too right! Indicating his son, The silly boy thought he was going to run into an unguarded vineyard and quick as a flash, steal all the grapes he wanted! He knows very well that in this type of business I'm the boss!

Chorus:

How he analysed the whole situation! He mentioned everything, one by one and forgetting nothing! Oh, what joy it was to listen to our comrade! It felt like I was

getting so tall, I was a juror in the Isles of the Blessed Immortals!

Philocleon:

Look at him squirm, boys! Look at him twist and turn his body! He's completely lost it! Ha! Today I'll make you ask yourself, "where can I hide?"

Chorus: To Misocleon

So, young man, in order for you to escape you must come up with all sorts of schemes. It will be difficult for anyone to temper my anger if he doesn't say things that are to my taste. So now the right moment has arrived for you to find a newly made millstone with new treads and hard enough to soften my anger –that's if you can't say anything logical.

Misocleon:

A very difficult task, indeed, one that needs the sharpest of wits, sharper than that of comedians even. What remedy can one possibly use for such an ancient sickness that enthroned itself in the city? Still, here goes: Our father, who art the son of Cronus...

Philocleon:

Stop! Stop all this "father" stuff! Your job is to prove that I, a juror am a slave and if you fail to do this then you won't escape your death even if it means I'll be barred from all sacrifices because I'll be a murderer!

Misocleon:

Relax then poppy and listen. Lose a bit of that frown of yours and listen to me. Let's do a bit of a rough arithmetic first. No counters, no calculators, just a rough bit of counting with your fingers. Let's add up all the taxes that we get from our allies, shall we? Then, on a separate account, check out all the taxes, all the many "one percenters", all the court taxes, the money from the mines, the taxes from all the buying and the selling, from all the harbours, all the rents and all the receipts from confiscations. What is our total income from all this? I'll tell you: it's some 2000 talents. From this sum subtract all the pay given to the jurors for a whole year – some 6000 of them! Our city was never burdened by so many of you! What does this pay come to? I'll tell you: it comes to some 150 talents...

Philocleon:

God! We don't even get one tenth of the city's revenue!

Misocleon:

But of course you don't. By Zeus you certainly don't!

Philocleon:

Well then where does all the rest of it go?

Misocleon:

Where does it all go? I'll tell you. It goes to that lot who swear the oath, "I won't betray the masses of our city, Athens, but I shall always fight for the people!" You, father, have chosen to let them rule you because you've been tricked by their fat, juicy words. After that, they rip off fifty talents out of our allies by frightening them witless with threats like, "give us the dough, or will thunder upon you and turn you into ashes!" And you are endlessly grateful that due to your "high office" you are allowed a few bread crumbs to chew onto. When the allies have figured out your true state of living conditions, that you have nothing to eat and less to enjoy, they began thinking of you as an insect, lesser than a fly. At the same time they bring the best of everything to the thugs: fish, wine, rugs cheese honey, urns for their pickles, horseman's cloaks, mugs, cushions and wreaths, jewellery, tumblers –wealth upon wealth! You, however, of all those you supposedly rule and from whom you've suffered all this torment on both, land and sea, of all those people, not one of them brings you as much as a head of garlic for your fish and cabbage soup.

Philocleon:

By Zeus, you're right! I had to send for three cloves from Eucharides' grocery myself! But still you've said nothing about my being a slave and this is making me angry.

Misocleon:

Well, isn't this "slavery?" All these thugs and their little cronies to have the good life and the high offices, while you, you live on the three obols a day? For which, mind you, you fought, on foot, against castles and ships? What's more, it's "yes, sir, no sir, three bags full sir," with you lot. But what really sticks up my craw is the fact that you'll also cop some young queer–Chaeres' son, for example, who'll come here swing his dandied up arse about, like this, opens his legs wiiiiide, like this and command you to get to the Court House bright and early for your jury duty and not to be late because if any of you "misses the signal" you'll miss out on your three obols! Zeus forbid!

Of course the little shit, even if he gets there late himself, he still gets his six obols – as a prosecutor, of course! Not only that but if some defendant offers him a bribe he splits it up with one of his colleagues and the two of them "work" on the case like two expert sawyers, one pulling the saw this way while the other pulls it the opposite way. All this while you lot are so keen to get your three obols that you have no idea what's going on!

Philocleon:

Is that what they're up to?

Really?

You've shaken up me up good and proper and you've got me to believe your views! I've no idea what I'm doing now! What have you done to me?

Misocleon:

What have they done to you? Well think of this poopy: Instead of making you lot rich, these so called "defenders of the Athenian people" have got you totally surrounded –and I don't know how they did this, you who have come back from victory after victory of a whole lot of cities all the way from the Pontus to Sardinia! You lot have ended up with this miserly three obols –which they give you as if it were droplets of oil – drip by drip –just enough to keep you alive. And why? I'll tell you why! So that you stay poor and hungry and so that you know who's the boss, who's the man who grabs you by the reins and when he whistles and puts you in front of some enemy of his, you rush at that man like a wild savage.

Yet if they really wanted the people to be living in luxury all they'd have to do is this: There are now one thousand cities that pay us tribute. If everyone of them had been ordered to look after twenty citizens, then, immediately 20,000 Athenians would be living in the lap of luxury, with hare meat, with cream, with pure milk and with crowns and they'd be enjoying all the benefits that a city like this –a city, mind, which has won in the battle of Marathon- deserves!

But, instead, what do you do? I'll tell you what you do! You go about following the man who holds your obols, bent over like the little old ladies who gather the fallen olives.

Philocleon:

Oh, no! What's happened to me? I feel like my hand has gone numb and I can't even hold onto my sword... I'm feeling knackered, boys!

Misocleon:

Yet whenever they're scared, out they come with their fat words, promising you the whole of Euboa and getting you thinking that they'll be also distributing to each of you a fifty-bushel ration of wheat. But, of you course, you never get that. Yesterday they gave you five bushels of barley –in one quart instalments, mind- instead and even that you've got only after a challenge to your citizenship which, let me remind you, you've won only narrowly!

That's why I'm keeping you locked up in here. Prevent them from mocking you and turning you into an utter fool with their fat words. I want to feed you myself...

Now, I really want to give you whatever your heart desires, except of course the milk of the public purse.

Chorus:

What a wise man he was who said, “don’t judge till you heard both sides of the story!” (indicating Misocleon) I reckon you’re right and so I throw my stick away along with my anger.

Turning to Philocleon

But you, comrade and one of the same age, heed his words and don’t be foolish. Nor be too hard a nut or obstinate like a mule! I only wish I had such a relative to look after me and to give me such reasonable words of advice! It’s quite clear that a god has intervened just now to help you. You should accept his help most readily.

Misocleon:

Yes, tell him! Because I’ll be providing for him everything that an old man needs: gruel to slurp up, a thick coat, a porn star to massage his cock and bum hole... Oh no! Now look! He’s not even making a sound. I don’t like the looks of this.

Chorus:

Well, he’s been educated now about all those things that used to make him mad. He’s wiser now and so he’s criticising himself for not having listened to your good advice all this time. Perhaps he’s now churning everything up in his head and trying to adjust his thinking so as to be listening to you from now on.

Philocleon: after a short pause of silence

Ahhhhhhhh! Ahhhhhh!

Misocleon:

Oi! What are you screaming at?

Philocleon:

Promise me none of all your promises! What I yearn for is to be over there! There where the herald cries out, “Those who have not voted they should do so now!” That’s what I yearn for! To be the last juror to come up to the ballot box. “Run my poor soul, run!” But where is my soul? “Let me pass, you shadows...” I swear by the great Heracles, that I hope I’ll never be put on the jury that convicts Cleon of stealing!

Misocleon:

Please, pooppy, for god’s sake trust me!

Philocleon:

Trust you about what? Tell me. Anything! Anything but...

Misocleon:

Anything but what?

Philocleon:

About anything except being a juror. Before I ever get to do that, it'll be Death who'll do the deciding.

Misocleon:

All right then, if you love doing your jury service so much, stop going to the Court House and stay here to judge the slaves.

Philocleon:

Judge them about what? What are you crapping on about?

Misocleon:

It's not crap. You'll be doing nothing different to what you've always been doing in court. For example, if, let's say the maid opens the door without your permission, you give her a fine... a stiff one like you used to do in court, only now you'll be doing it in a reasonable sort of way. Like if it's warm at dawn, you'll be doing your judging out in the sun, if it's snowing, then you'll be sitting by the fire, if it's pouring rain then you'll be indoors and, finally, if you're still snoring at noon, there'll be no magistrate who'll close the gate on you.

Philocleon:

Now that I like!

Misocleon:

What's more, if someone is making a long and unbearable speech, you, as well as the defendant, don't have to sit there, starving and gnashing your teeth.

Philocleon:

But how on earth would I be able to perform my duty as competently as I have been doing so far if I'm sitting there with my jaws busy with food?

Misocleon:

How? I'll tell you how. Don't people say, when witnesses lie, that the jurors head straight for the meat of the issue by... chewing it over?

Philocleon:

Yes... I'm beginning to trust you... still there's still one little matter you haven't discussed. Where do I get my obols?

Misocleon:

I'll tell you. You'll get them from me.

Philocleon:

Great, Then I'll be getting my pay all to my self instead of having to split a drachma

into obols with someone else. You know what a thief that Lysistratus is? A few days ago he played a very dirty trick on me. No sooner we got our drachma and he ran off to the market to change it. When he came back, instead of shoving the three obols into my mouth, he tossed three fish scales in there. Mullet to be exact. Well, I immediately smelled them, retched and spat them out. But I've managed to grab a hold of him and to run him down to the court...

Misocleon:

And? And what did he have to say for himself?

Philocleon:

What did he say? He said that I have the stomach of a cock and that I've sucked the obols in a hurry.

Misocleon:

You see? You won't have to worry about this sort of stuff either!

Philocleon:

Quite right! Well then get on with it. Get on with your plan.

Misocleon:

Hold on, I'll bring out all the necessary equipment.

Misocleon goes indoors.

Philocleon:

Well look how the prophecies come true! I heard once that some day all the Athenians would be holding court inside their very own houses and that everyone would build himself a tiny little law court in his yard and, just like the shrines of Hecate. They'll be on the threshold of every house.

Misocleon and the slaves enter carrying court room paraphernalia, including a chamber pot, a casserole, a rooster (which he places on the roof).

Misocleon:

Here you are. Look what I brought you. What do you think ey? I've brought you everything you need plus more. This chamber pot, for example, I'll hook it up on this peg here in case you need to have a piss.

Philocleon:

Ah, this is fantastic! You're a genius! Everything an old man wants. You've just discovered a cure for an old man's incontinence.

Misocleon:

Indeed. Here's some fire, too and some lentils for you to slurp down if you need to.

Philocleon:

Hmmm, that's good too. Even if I am running a fever, I'll still get paid because I'll be here, slurping up my lentils! But what's with the rooster?

Misocleon:

Why? Because if you get to fall asleep while the defendant is talking, that there cock will wake you up!

Philocleon:

Hmmm, yes, everything is just right except that... except I'm still missing one tiny thing!

Misocleon:

Oh, yes? And what might that be?

Philocleon:

Can you get me a painting of Lycus?

Misocleon: motioning one of the slaves to approach

Sure, here is the man himself!

Philocleon:

My lord, my hero! Wow what a hard face!

Misocleon:

Identical, I reckon to Cleonymus!

Philocleon: Pointing at the fact that the slave has no phallus

Yes, I must admit, hero or not he's lost his equipment too.

Misocleon:

Come on, come on! The sooner you take your seat the sooner I'll call the first case!

Philocleon:

Go on then! Here I am, sitting patiently.

Misocleon:

Right, now let's see... whom should I bring out first? Any of the slaves misbehaved recently? What about that Thracian girl who scorched the pot yesterday...

Philocleon: Interrupting him

Hold on, hold on, there sonny! You're killing me with this. You're calling a case for me to hear without even a tiny bit of railing? Railings are the first of the holy objects we see when we're at the Court House!

Misocleon:

Oh, dear Zeus, there is none around!

Philocleon:

Well, hang on then and I'll run into the house and find some that will do the job.

Philocleon goes into the house.

Misocleon:

See what a powerful thing a habit is?

Enter Philocleon carrying some fencing wood.

Philocleon:

Damn it, what a dog to look after!

Misocleon:

Now what?

Philocleon:

That bitch of a dog, Barker, came into the kitchen and pinched a whole wheel of Sicilian soft cheese!

Misocleon:

Well then, that's the first indictment I shall bring before my daddy. Come, Mr prosecutor, come and sit here.

Philocleon:

O, no! No, no, no! Not me! He says that the prosecutor should be the other dog if someone else reads out the case.

Misocleon:

All right then, bring both of them out here.

Philocleon:

Done!

Misocleon: Indicating the rails

What's this?

Philocleon:

The pigpen of the goddess Hestia.

Misocleon:

Did you steal it, you sacrilegious bastard?

Philocleon:

Not at all. I'll be slaughtering someone so I'll begin with Hestia. So, come on then, read the case! I can smell the fines already!

Misocleon:

Hold on, I'll go and bring the tablets and the dockets.

Philocleon:

God damn it! You'll kill me with all your delays! All I need to do is to draw a line!

Misocleon: Showing a tablet

Here you are.

Philocleon:

Come on then, come on, call the case!

Misocleon:

All right.

Philocleon:

Now who is the first among this lot?

Misocleon: Gets up and heads for indoors

Oh, no, damn it! This will kill me! I've forgotten to bring out the voting urns!

Philocleon:

Where are you off to now? Hold on!

Misocleon:

I need to bring the ballot boxes.

Philocleon:

Forget them. We don't need them. I've brought these ladles.

Misocleon:

Fine. Then we've got everything except the water clock.

Philocleon: Indicating the chamber pot

So what's this then if it isn't a water clock?

Misocleon:

You're a true Athenian, full of wisdom! Quickly, someone bring out of the house fire, myrtle and incense, so that we may begin with a prayer to the gods.

Chorus:

We too, will add our propitious prayer for you, to celebrate your truce and the way you've settled your enmity and strife so politely.

Misocleon:

Silence! Let there be sacred silence first!

Chorus:

O Phoebus Apollo, Pythian!

Let this strange machination which this man has started inside his doors be a success for him as well as for us all and let all our errors be forgotten.

O, Paian, Io!

Misocleon:

O, Lord and Master, Apollo, my neighbourhood god who protects my threshold! Receive this new ceremony, Lord, as I have prepared it for my father.

Soften him, Lord! Let some honey run into his heart!

Soften his oaken disposition, make him feel more for the accused than the accuser, extricate his hatred for humanity and make him feel the tears that fall when people beg him for a mercy call.

Tear away his nasty temper and cut away the anger from his waspy sting.

Chorus:

We join in your song and in your prayers for your new system. Your utterances were well received.

Now that we know that you of all the young men, love the people more than anyone else, we stand by you.

Misocleon:

Let any juror standing at the door enter now. No admittance once the show starts.

Philocleon:

So, let's see. Who's this defendant then? He's really going to cop it!

Misocleon:

Hear ye, hear ye all! This is the charge against the defendant: "The Watchdog, a citizen of Cydatheneum, accuses Barker, citizen of Aixone, of having grossly cheated him of his share of one rich Cicilian wheel of cheese because he ate it all by himself. Penalty, a collar made of sycophantic wood."

Philocleon:

Not on your life! If this dog is found guilty, he'll cop the ultimate dog's death penalty!

Misocleon:

And here's the accused, Barker.

Philocleon:

Wow, what a dirty stinker! His face says it all: Thief! Look how he shows his teeth! He thinks he'll pull the wool over my eyes. Where is his accuser, the watchdog of Cydatheneum?

Watchdog:

Woof, woof!

Misocleon:

He's present, sir.

Philocleon:

Good one. Just another Barker, if you ask me. He barks well but licks the bowls better!

Misocleon: To Watchdog

Quiet you. Come here at the stand and pronounce your accusation!

Philocleon:

Meantime I shall sip some lentil soup.

Watchdog:

You've already heard my accusations, friends of the jury. Barker here has committed unspeakable atrocities against me and our whole navy. He ran off into a dark corner of the house and there he wolfed down a whole Sicilian cheese...

Philocleon:

By Zeus, that's obvious! What a dreadful cheese-stinking burp he just gave in my direction!

Watchdog:

...and when I asked him for some he refused. Tell me then who'll be able to do you justice if your watchdog doesn't get a scrap or two thrown his way?

Philocleon:

Didn't share it with you and he didn't share it with me, the public. The dog is as blistering as this lentil soup, damn him!

Misocleon:

By the gods, pappy, don't prejudge! You must hear both sides of the story.

Philocleon:

But my dear son! This is a most obvious case. Can't you hear it? It barks at you!

Watchdog:

Don't you let him off then! Of all the dogs he's the most unilateral eater! He circumnavigated all around the island and ate the place out completely –every rind of every city!

Philocleon:

And here I am, not having the tiniest bit of plaster to patch my urn!

Watchdog:

That's why you should definitely punish him! No single bush can feed two thieves! And don't make me bark unnecessarily here, or else I'll never bark again!

Philocleon:

Ho, ho! What a lot of deplorable deeds this man has denounced! What a thief! (to the rooster on the roof) What do you say Mr Cock? Yes, judging by the wink he gave me, I do believe he agrees with me. Now Mr Chairman... where is he? Pass me the chamber pot.

Misocleon:

Get it down yourself. I'm calling in the witnesses. Calls into the house All those

witnesses for the defendant, Barker, come out, please: Bowl, Pestle, Cheese grater, Brazier, Pot and the rest of the utensils come out and testify.

Meantime, Philocleon has brought down the chamber pot and began pissing into it. The utensils have entered the “court room.” Are you still doing your wees? Come on, finish up and sit down!

Philocleon:

Sure but as for this defendant here, I think he’ll be shitting himself today.

Misocleon:

Will you stop being so difficult and awful to the defendants? Must you constantly be biting them?

To Barker Come on then, take over and defend yourself. Come on, speak, say something!

Philocleon:

It seems he’s got nothing to say.

Misocleon:

No. Hmmm, I think the same happened to Melisia’s son, Thucydides, Pericles’ chief enemy. He was testifying one day when his jaws suddenly became numb. Gentlemen of the jury, it’s difficult to defend a dog that’s been slandered. Nevertheless, I shall try and speak for him. Gentlemen, Barker, here, is a good dog, a brave dog that chases away the wolves.

Philocleon:

Rubbish! This dog is nothing more than a thief and a conspirator!

Misocleon:

On the contrary. Barker, here, is superior to any dog of the current generation. He can look after a great many sheep.

Philocleon:

What’s the good of that, if he eats our cheese? What’s the good of him?

Misocleon:

What’s the good of him? He guards your door, he fights for you and he is, in all other respects, a virtuoso! All right, he might have stolen from you but... well, he’s not exactly highly educated. He hasn’t been sent to the lyre school to learn how to play the instrument, so you must forgive him.

Philocleon:

Indeed, I wish he hadn’t got educated at all so that he wouldn’t be stuffing up our accounts.

Misocleon:

Listen to my witnesses, my dear man...

To Barker You, cheese grater! Come, take the stand and speak loudly so that we can all hear. You were an Accountant at the time, is that right? Speak clearly. Explain what were your duties. All that cheese you grated off, you distributed among the soldiers, didn't you?

Barker barks a "yes" He says "yes."

Philocleon:

What a bloody liar!

Misocleon:

My dear man! Feel sorry for the bedraggled! Barker here, only eats scraps of chicken necks and bones and he never hangs around in the same spot for long, whereas the other dog, Mr Watchdog, he hangs around here all day long, doing nothing and when all the others come home, he demands his share of the food. And if he doesn't get it, he begins his biting.

Philocleon:

Good Lord! Good Lord! What on earth is going on with me? I am being softened by something evil! I am changing my mind!

Misocleon:

Come on, poppy, be merciful to him. Don't destroy our poor Barker! Now, where are his puppies? Shouts inside the house Come on you lot, come and take a seat, poor babies, let your tears fall, start crying, begging and grovelling.

Philocleon:

Get down from there! Get down, get down, I say! Get down!

Misocleon:

I will get down, even though this phrase, "get down" has tricked a great many people. But, here you are, I've stepped down.

Philocleon:

The crows take it! It's no good slurping lentil soup. I'm crying now for no other reason but because I've slurped so much of it!

Misocleon:

So he's not getting off?

Philocleon:

Hard to say.

Misocleon:

Come on, pappy. Turn over to another page. Be nice. Take this pebble and with your eyes shut, walk over to that second urn and acquit the poor bugger!

Philocleon:

Nope! I haven't been taught to play the lyre either!

Misocleon:

Come on then, daddy, let me take you around. This way... it's the quickest.

Philocleon:

Is this the first urn?

Misocleon:

Yes.

Philocleon: drops the pebble into the urn

There she goes!

Misocleon:

Ha, ha, ha, ha! I've tricked him! I've got him to vote for acquittal without his knowing!

Come pappy, let's do the count.

Philocleon:

So... what's our verdict?

Misocleon: Looks into the urn and brings out the single pebble.

We'll soon know... Barker, you're a free dog. Misocleon looks faint, then falls onto his chair. Pappy, daddy, what's the matter, pooppy? Oh, dear. Where's some water?

Come on, pappy, come to!

Philocleon:

Tell me this one thing: Is he a free dog?

Misocleon:

He is, by Zeus.

Philocleon:

Damn! And I am a big fat zero! A nobody!

Misocleon:

Don't think about it now, darling. Come on, get up!

Philocleon:

How in Heaven's name am I going to live with this? How could I have let a defendant go scot free? Most honourable gods above, forgive me. I did it accidentally. This is not my way at all!

Misocleon:

Come on, now, don't get so angry. I'll take excellent care of you. I'll feed you well,

take you to the theatre, to dinner and to parties. You will live the happiest of lives from now on and no one will be laughing at you when Hyperbolicus plays his tricks on you. Come, let's go inside.

Philocleon:

Oh, all right, if that's what you want.

All except the chorus go inside the house.

Chorus:

Joy be with you wherever you wish to go.

And you, too, spectators, countless myriads of you,

Make sure now that the good words you're about to

Hear from us don't end up fallen on the ground.

That's the sort of thing one expects from

Dumb spectators, not from the likes of you.

Chorus:

Now then, folks, pay attention, if you like the clean, straight talk.

Listen carefully because our poet wants to reproach you today. In the past, he claims, you have done him a great injustice, in spite of the fact he was so generous towards you.

Applying the art of the ventriloquist and prophet, Eurycles, and by slipping into other men's bellies, our poet has helped many other poets enormously, poets who spread enormous laughter among the audience. Then he, too, appeared, alone and did so by grabbing the reins of his own muses and those of others. And when he became great and was awarded so many honours –more than any of you have ever attained- he didn't get a swollen head or become arrogant in any way. He didn't hang around the wrestling schools like some sleaze bag, looking for lovers; and if some man, jaded by someone asked our poet to mock his lover in his plays, our poet would refuse, saying he wasn't about to turn his muses into whores.

Chorus:

Nor did our poet attack the common man but with Herculean fury he threw himself up against the elite and, with enormous courage, fought against the likes of that shark, Cleon, himself, a man whose eyes flashed dire lightning, just like our famous whore Cyna, whose head was circled by the tongues of a hundred cursed sycophants. Old Sharky had the thunderous voice of a deadly torrent, the stench of a seal, the unwashed balls of the hermaphrodite, Lamia and the bum hole of a camel.

Chorus:

He wasn't afraid of that beast's horrible apparition, nor did he accept its bribes but fought it gallantly then as he is doing now. Then, last year, he fought against dreadful monsters that fill one's body with fevers and shivers and who, every night, choked to death fathers and strangled grandfathers. Beasts that entered the beds of the quiet citizens among you, putting together affidavits, summonses and depositions, to give you the fright of your life, to make you jump and rush to the General!

Chorus:

And though you've found this most excellent doctor who drives away all the ills of the land, last year you've betrayed him. You've paid no attention to his wonderful new ideas and they were totally wasted. And yet, your poet swears most profoundly that no one has heard better comic verses than his. It is a disgrace to those who have not understood the meaning of these verses immediately. Still, our poet has lost none of his credibility in the eyes of the wise, even though he saw his chariot fall apart while he quickly overtook his rivals.

Chorus:

From now on, though, my dear spectators, you must love and respect those poets who are trying to find something new to say. Look after their ideas really well –store them in the same cases you store your apples and that way your whole wardrobe will smell of... sweet wisdom all year round!

Chorus:

Oh, yes! In the olden days we were the braves of the choruses. And we were the braves in the battles, brave were our cocks, true men in every way! That was then – in the olden days. Now those days are gone and our hair has turned grey, white like the feathers of a swan. But still from these remnants we must recreate the might of youth because I can see that my old age is preferable to those men who wear their hair long and curly and their bum wide and swinging.

Chorus:

Those spectators who see our wasp-like waists and wonder what our sting is all about, let me explain in easy words, easy enough for even the uneducated among you.

It was only our lot, the lot whose bum sports a sting, that are the genuine, Athenian-born heroes, who helped most valiantly this city in its war with the barbarians when they came spewing smoke and fire and trying to burn down our city and force our hives out of existence.

Chorus:

We charged at them with spear and shield right away and we fought them, clashed with them, with hardened hearts, each wasp standing next to another in tight lines, biting our lips while the enemy's arrows filled the sky.

But with the help of the gods we pushed the bastards back and we saw Athena's loving bird the owl flying over our men. And then we chased them away, digging our sharp stingers into their baggy pants and as they were fleeing we stung them on the jaws and on their eyebrows.

That's why to this day all barbarians everywhere say that there's nowhere a more valiant wasp than that of Athens.

Chorus:

What a fearful specimen of manhood I was then! Everyone feared me. I destroyed all my enemies by sailing against them with my triremes. We had no time for pretty speeches then, no time for sycophancy. We only had our eye on who was the best oarsman. And so we took from the Persians many cities and brought tributes to Athens, which, of course the youth steal now.

Chorus:

And so. If anyone wants to check our shape, size, manners and looks he'll find that we're in all respects very similar to wasps. To begin with, when we're angered, there's no creature with a temper more cutting or more crabby than ours. And then we behave like wasps in many other ways: we gather in swarms as if in hives and some of us do the judging at the Archon's Court, others at the Court of the Eleven and others still in Pericles' old haunt, the Court of Odeum. There we gather as a tightly knit swarm up against the walls bending over the ground like worms in their cells, barely moving. As to how we make our living, we can come up with many schemes: we sting everyone with a bitter sting and out pops our loaf of bread.

Chorus:

But alas, there are the lazy stingless drones who sit at home all day long and who, making no effort at all, eat the tributes away! But what bugs us most is this: Some people whose hands have seen no calluses through oars or spears held against the enemy of our land, and yet they steal our wages! Simply put I say these few words: Those of you who have no sting should receive the wages of a juror.

Enter Philocleon, Misocleon and a slave who's carrying new clothes and boots. Misocleon is trying to have his father change his clothes.

Philocleon:

No, no, no! I'm not taking it off! I wore these clothes for over fifty years! Ever since

the Persian king –that “Great Northerly Wind- attacked us. They saved me then...

Misocleon:

It's obvious you don't want to have anything nice done for you.

Philocleon:

No, no, no! It does me no good this. The other day, I had my fill of sardines, it cost me three obols to have them cleaned.

Misocleon:

At least try them on. Let's see what they look like on you. After all, you put me in charge of your wellbeing!

Philocleon:

So, what do you want me to do then?

Misocleon:

Take off this old cloak and put on this bright, brand new one.

Philocleon:

What is the point of having kids and nurturing them when all the while they want to choke you?

Misocleon:

Will you stop your babbling and put this on?

Philocleon:

But what the hell is this thing?

Misocleon:

Well, some folk call it a Persian cloak and others a Kaunack.

Philocleon:

And there I was thinking it's a local one... from our very own suburbs.

Misocleon:

Of course you'd think that. You've never been overseas, not to Sardis, the capital of Lydia, for example. You would have recognised it then.

Philocleon:

By Zeus, that's true but it certainly looks like Marychus' knapsack! What a glutton that man is!

Misocleon:

It looks nothing like it. These cloaks are woven in Ecbatana!

Philocleon:

Don't they make woollen sausages in Ecbatana?

Misocleon:

Where on earth did you get that idea from, darling? These cloaks are made in Persia. Very expensive stuff. The wool alone would easily cost a talent!

Philocleon:

A talent! Sheesh, they shouldn't have called it Kaunack then. A better name of it would be Woolsucker!

Misocleon: Tries to put it on him

Come now, pappy, let me put it on you!

Philocleon: Sniffs at it then throws it to the ground in disgust
Phew! God damn it! What an awful breath it has. It nearly killed me!

Misocleon: Picking it up and insisting

Come on, pappy, please put it on.

Philocleon:

Nope, absolutely not! By Zeus, no!

Misocleon:

But darling!

Philocleon:

If this dressing up is compulsory then wrap me up in an oven instead.

Misocleon:

All right then, I'll put it on you myself. To the slave Off you go!

Philocleon: Puts it on

Quick, bring a meat hook!

Misocleon:

Whatever for?

Philocleon:

So you can bring me out of here when I disintegrate.

Misocleon:

All right but hurry up now and throw away those accursed sandals of yours. Put on these beautiful, dazzling, red Spartan boots. Made for real men.

Philocleon:

I'll never do that! Never will I wear the damned shoes of a damned enemy!

Misocleon:

Come on now, darling, put them on and walk like a true Spartan. Come on, hurry up.

Philocleon:

You do me wrong to insist that I put my foot inside an enemy boot.

Misocleon:

Come on now, put the other foot in as well.

Philocleon:

Oh no! Not this foot! One of the toes on this foot hates the Spartans with a vengeance.

Misocleon:

No, you've got to put it on.

Philocleon:

What wretched luck I have! Now I won't be able to look forward to any corns in my old age!

Misocleon:

Will you hurry up with the boots? Come on, wear them and then you can walk like the wealthy, swinging your bum this way and that... very sexily!

Philocleon: puts the puts on.

Here you are. Now watch me and see if you can work out which rich man walks like this.

Misocleon:

Which rich man? You look like someone who had his sore dressed in garlic.

Philocleon: shakes his bum

Well then I'm ready to shake it!

Misocleon:

Now let's see. Will you know how to talk in front of learned and wise folk?

Philocleon:

But of course!

Misocleon:

So what would you tell them all?

Philocleon:

Oh, lots of stuff. First, I'd tell them how Lamia was caught farting and then how when Kordopionas grabbed his mother and...

Misocleon:

No, forget the myths! Just talk about stuff that we all talk about at home. Simple, common sayings.

Philocleon:

Sure. I know many such common sayings. For example, "once upon a time there was a cat and a mouse..."

Misocleon:

Idiot! “Uneducated fool!” as Theogenes said to the dung collector when they were arguing. Is that what you’ll be talking about in front of polite company? Mice and cats?

Philocleon:

Well, what sort of stories should I talk about then?

Misocleon:

Grandiose stories. Tell them for example how you went around with Androcles and Cleisthenes to a grand, official embassy!

Philocleon:

But I’ve never been on any embassies –except the one to Paros and then I was only paid two obols!

Misocleon:

Well, forget the Paros embassy then and talk about the battle between Ephudion and Ascondas at the pancration when Ephudion was old and grey but still had that huge chest and those great hands and thighs, that splendid thorax...

Philocleon:

Arms? Thorax? Don’t be silly. You’re not allowed to fight in the pancration wearing arms and a thorax!

Misocleon:

Don’t worry about it. That’s how the polite company talks. Now tell me something else: When you’re drinking with strangers which story about your brave youth do you think is worth telling them?

Philocleon:

I know the one! The one about how I ran off with all the vine poles from Ergasion’s vineyard!

Misocleon:

What vine poles are you on about? You’ll be the death of me with your nonsense. Talk about how you hunted hares or some wild boar or how you ran some torch race. Tell them about some real brave deed you’ve accomplished.

Philocleon:

I know! I know what brave deed I’ve accomplished! When I was but a young bull, I once beat the runner Phaylus. He defamed me once and I beat him by two votes in the courts.

Misocleon:

Enough! Come, lie down here and learn how to be a true symposiac and act

convivially.

Philocleon:

Lie down, how? Show me.

Misocleon:

With grace and modesty.

Philocleon:

Like this?

Misocleon:

No, no, no!

Philocleon:

But how, then?

Misocleon:

Bend your knees. The way they do at the gymnasia and spread yourself onto the cushions. Then gently praise some bronze statue or other, look up at the ceiling and admire the room's pictures. Wash your hands then and... now they are bringing the dishes. We are dining, we have cleaned our hands and mouths... now we are pouring the wine...

Philocleon:

Good gods! Are we dining on dream food?

Misocleon:

Listen! The girl piper has begun her tune. Your fellow drinkers are Theorus, Aeschines, Phanus, Cleon and another foreigner sitting next to you, Acestor's son. With men like these as your feast companions you must take up your part of the singing in a proper fashion.

Philocleon:

Oh yeah? I'll do it even better than any of the Diacrians!

Misocleon:

Let's see if that's true. Now pretend I'm Cleon and I start singing the Harmodius song. You have to take it up after me... "Never was an Athenian man..."

Philocleon:

...as great a scoundrel and as great a thief...

Misocleon:

Is that how you'll behave? They'll destroy you with heckles! He'll be threatening you with destruction, extermination and exile!

Philocleon:

Well, if he does any threatening I'll sing another song: "Hey you! You who's after the State's tiller. The ship is sinking... look, it's tilting."

Misocleon:

But then what will you sing if Theorus, who is lying at your feet, touches Cleon's right hand and sings, "The story of Admetus remember friend and love the honest mates." How will you answer that?

Philocleon:

I shall be lyrical. "You cannot act like the fox nor befriend both sides."

Misocleon:

Well then, after him will come Aeschines' Airhead's son and he, being a highly sophisticated and learned man will go on with, "Money and good life for Klitseller and me, among the Thessalians..."

Philocleon:

"... oh, yes! What bullshit we spun then, you and I..."

Misocleon:

Right. Well then you seem to have this part well under control. Now let's go to Philoctemon's for our dinner. Calling inside Boy! Hey boy! Chrysus, pack up a dinner for us two! At long last we're going to have a real drunken orgy!

Philocleon:

Oh no! No drunken orgies! Drinking is bad for you. Wine is the cause of breaking and entering, of getting beaten up and of looking for money for the damages, and all this while you're hung over!

Misocleon:

No, not if you're in the company of decent folk. They'll beg forgiveness on your part... either that or you just crack a joke from, say, Aesop or about those sops in Sybaris... one of those stories you've learnt at the symposia. Then the whole thing turns into a joke and your victim goes away. Simple!

Philocleon:

Right! Well then I better learn many of those stories so that if I cause any damages I won't owe any money.

Enter Chrysus (a slave) with the dinner baskets

Misocleon:

Come on, now, pappy. Let's go. Let nothing stop us now.

Exit Slave, Philocleon and Misocleon.

Chorus:

I've often thought myself to be a highly intelligent chappy –never an idiot! Now, Amynias, though, son of Airhead, of the family of Hairballs is even sharper than me because there he was, instead of having an apple or pomegranate for dinner, I saw him having a splendid meal with wealthy old Leogoras! True! That man is as big a glutton as Antiphon. So much so that he even went off on an embassy to Pharsalus, in Thessaly and there he spent his whole time on one-on-one meetings with the starving Thessalians, himself being more starving than any one of them.

Chorus:

Oh, blessed Automenes! Blessed we all call you because you've begotten children that are truly talented. Your first one is that wonderful man who plays the lyre better than anyone and who we all love. Charm herself accompanies him! Second comes the brilliant actor and third –third is Aphridates with that profound wit of his. His father swore that Aphridates is self taught in this intricate art of using his tongue whenever he's in a brothel!

Chorus:

There are those who say that I've settled my differences with Cleon when he had attacked me and stung me so horribly with bitter, venomous insults. Not only that but there were those who, when I was being torn to shreds by him, they were laughing. Laughing while he was shouting loudly at me and with no feelings at all for me, wondering, I thought, if, while I was being tortured like that I would chuck up a joke or two. Well, I saw all that and I've pulled a little monkey business on him. Here we are today and, as you see, the vine pole is playing the vine for a fool!

Xanthias rushes in, in dreadful pain.

Xanthias:

How blessed you are, you tortoises! How I envy you your shells. How clever you were to cover your backs and flanks with those tiles of yours! Me? I've been thrashed within an inch of my life with a stick!

Chorus:

What's up, boy? Old man or not it's fair to call someone a boy when he takes such a beating!

Xanthias:

What's up? The old man was a wild beast at the party. Awful, simply awful! The worst piece of drunken behaviour I've ever seen! Drunker than all the rest, even though present were Antiphon, Theophrastus, Ippylus, Lycon, the whole Phrynichus group as well as Lysistratus! He was the worst of them all! After he had clogged himself

with food and drink, he jumped up and began to dance about, farting and insulting people and laughing –you’d swear he was a donkey with a gutful of barley! Me? He started beating me up like there was no tomorrow, all the while singing, “boy! Boy!” At one point, Lysistratus took a good look at him and said, “Old man, you look like one of those young ones who’s just got his hands on some wealth; either that or like some donkey who slipped away from his stable.” To which the old man replied, “And you, Lysistratus, you look like a locust that’s lost its wings from its clothes; either that or like Sthenelus whom they stripped of all his costumes and stage props.” Everyone laughed at this exchange. Everyone that is, except Thuphrastus. He puckered up his lips, trying to look intelligent. Well! The old man saw this and said to him, “tell us Thuphrastus, why are you acting all high and mighty and all so refined like a toff when all you are is a parasite, a clown who’s sucking up to anyone who’s got a bit of money now?” That’s how he insulted every one of them, all of them one by one! Laughing at them all, like a real peasant and spouting off all sorts of stories, totally inappropriate to the situation. Then, after he’s thoroughly drunk he makes his way for home, belting the hell out of everyone he comes across.

Ah, here he comes now! Pissed as a fart! I’m getting out of here before he starts throwing punches at me.

Xanthias rushes into the house.

Enter Philocleon with his arm wrapped around the nude flute girl, Dardanis. He is holding a torch. Behind them are Philocleon’s angry victims.

Philocleon: Singing

Lift the flame up! Higher!

Oh, spread the light in front of me and those who come behind me will soon be crying!

Lose yourselves, you bastards or I’ll fry you all with this torch!

Victim:

Young cock or old, you’ll hear from us all tomorrow. We’ll all be here tomorrow waving our summonses at you. Justice must be done!

Philocleon:

Poo, poo! Summonses, ey? Ancient stuff that! Haven’t you heard? I hate summonses and lawsuits, now. Poo, poo stuff! Want to know what I like? Cuddles up to the flute girl I’d like to destroy all the voting urns. Go on! Off you go! Get out of here you lot! Juror? What juror?

All except the flute girl run away.

Indicating his phallus

Come here, my blonde sweetheart, climb onto this. Hold onto this... rope. Careful, though, it's a little worn out... Still, look at it ey, it sure loves a bit of a rubbing. Did you notice how cleverly I ripped you away just when you were about to suck off the other drinking guests? Now it's time for you to repay your debt to this here little rope. Ah, but I know! I know you won't be repaying your debt. You just won't... do it! You'll trick me like you've tricked all the others and poke your tongue right out but, you'll leave holding my rope.

Listen, if you give me some love, the moment my son dies I'll buy you and turn you into a free woman, my sweet little cunt. I'll make you my number one mistress!

I don't have any money of my own yet. You see I'm still very young and under constant surveillance by my little boy. He's a grouchy bastard and a real stingy, wingey, miserly, skinflint. Stupid child, he's worried I might be heading up the wrong path and, after all, I'm the only father he's got! Ha! Mention the name and here's the very self same donkey! Stand absolutely still and hold the torch like a statue. I want to play one of those kiddies jokes on him. Like those he used to play on me when I went for the initiation ceremonies.

Misocleon rushes in.

Misocleon:

Hey you! You dirty old cunt tickler! Back to you old coffin-chasing ways, I see! By Apollo, you won't get away with it this time!

Philocleon:

Oh, I can see you'd love to chomp into some sour justice, now, wouldn't you?

Misocleon:

Are you kidding me? How dare you pinch the flute girl from the rest of the drunks?

Philocleon:

Flute girl? What flute girl? What are you jabbering about, boy? Have you lost your marbles?

Misocleon:

Yeah? Who's this then you've got there, if it's not Dardanis?

Philocleon:

This here? Hahahaha! This is not Dardanis. This here is a marketplace torch. Burning itself for the gods.

Misocleon:

This is a torch?

Philocleon:

Of course it is a torch! Can't you see how it's split up?

Misocleon:

And... what this then? This black bit in the middle?

Philocleon:

This black bit? That's the tar, running down when it gets good and hot.

Misocleon:

And what about back here? Isn't this a bum hole?

Philocleon:

Bum hole? No, this is a knot hole, poking out of the torch.

Misocleon:

Knot hole, my bum hole! Grabs Dardanis' hand. To Dardanis: You, you come with me. Heading towards the house

Philocleon:

Oi! Hey you! What do you think you're doing?

Misocleon:

I am grabbing her and dragging her away from you. Look at you! You're totally used up and utterly incapable of any type of performance!

Philocleon:

Now listen you! You want to talk about old men? Listen! When I was on an embassy to Olympia, there was Ephudion, an old man, and he put up quite a show, fighting Ascondas, a young man. Ephudion smashed his fist on Ascondas and knocked him down, so you be careful you don't end up with a couple of black "shiners," my boy!

Misocleon:

Oh, yes, by Zeus! You sure know all about Olympia now!

Dardanis runs off.

Enter Myrtia the woman baker, holding an empty baker's tray. She's followed by Chaerephon.

Myrtia: to Chaerephon

Come, Chaerephon! Come and support me here. Please, in the name of all the gods! Indication Philocleon That's him! That's the man who beat me up with his torch to near death and then knocked off ten obols of bread from this here tray... plus four loaves more!

Misocleon:

See? You see what you've gone and done? Now we're in for it! Now we'll cop lawsuits

and all sorts of troubles, thanks to your drinking!

Philocleon:

Troubles? Lawsuits? Not at all! A nice little clever short story will satisfy this woman. Settlement is in sight!

Myrtia:

No, not by the twin Gods you won't! You're not going escape from Myrtia, daughter of Sostrata and Agkyllion with fairy tales! Not after you've totally destroyed my whole stock!

Philocleon:

My dear madam! Please let me tell you this most charming story!

Myrtia:

By Zeus, you won't be telling me any charming stories!

Philocleon:

One night, when Aesop was going home from a dinner, he came across a drunk impudent bitch who began barking at him. Aesop looked at her and said, "I think you'd do a wise thing if you traded that bitchy tongue of yours with some wheat."

Myrtia:

So, you're making fun of me as well, now, are you? Right! I'm summoning you – whoever you are- to appear before the court of the market place for ruining my stock. Chaerephon here is my witness.

Philocleon:

No, by Zeus, hang on one minute longer. Listen and see if I'm not making good sense. Once upon a time the poets Lasus and Simonides were training rival choruses and Lasus said... "I couldn't care a less!"

Myrtia:

Is that right?

Myrtia and Chaerephon walk out

Philocleon:

Hey, Chaerephon! You're just the perfect match, aren't you? Acting the witness to this tallow-faced woman. She's just like Ino, dangling from Euripides' feet!

Misocleon:

Oh no! Here we go! Here's another one! Looks like another summons to me. And he's got his witness with him!

Enter Accuser and his witness

Accuser: Holding a bump on his head

O, me! Oh, my poor head! O, the pain! I summon you, you old bastard for assault and battery!

Misocleon:

What's this? Assault? Battery? Oh no! Heavens no! Don't summon him for that. I'll compensate you on his behalf. Ask whatever amount you want. I'll pay and with thanks.

Philocleon:

No, no! Forget it. I'll do my own deals thank you. I admit it. I have punched and beaten up this man. Now, you! You come over here and listen to me. Let me decide the amount I should pay for this little matter and then we'll both be friends, ey, what do you say? Or would you rather make your own proposal?

Accuser:

No, you say how much. I don't need the fuss of lawyers and lawsuits.

Philocleon:

Well, then listen. Once there was a man from Sybaris who fell out of his chariot and somehow broke his head rather badly. You see, he wasn't much good at all with horses and chariots. So a friend of his stood above him and said, "A man should only practice what he knows." So now, why don't you run off to Pittalus' clinic?

Misocleon:

Same technique as with all the rest, I see, ey?

Accuser: To the witness

Remember his reply!

Philocleon:

Hey, don't go! Listen: Once upon a time a woman in Sybaris broke her urn...

Accuser:

Witness, take note of al this!

Philocleon:

...so this urn told its friend to be a witness, but the woman said, "by Kore, if you'd forget about this witness stuff and went and bought a bandage right away, you'd be acting far more wisely."

Accuser:

Go on, mock away –until the magistrate calls your name!

Exit Accuser and his witness

Misocleon: to Philocleon

By Demetre, that's it! You're not staying out here any longer! I'm going to pick you

up and carry you...

Philocleon:

Hey! What do you think you're doing?

Misocleon lifts Philocleon onto his shoulders

Misocleon:

What am I doing? I am carrying you into the house because if I don't all these accusers of yours will run out of witnesses!

Philocleon: From Misocleon's shoulder

Once upon a time the people of Delphi accused Aesop...

Misocleon:

I couldn't care a less!

Philocleon:

...of stealing a bowl from a god. Aesop told them how once upon a time a beetle...

Misocleon:

God damn you! You'll be the death of me with those beetles of yours!

The two go into the house. A few moments later, we hear the sounds of a loud party emanating from the house.

Chorus:

Oh, how I envy the old man his luck! How he's changed his old dry ways and crusty lifestyle! His new inclinations have given him a life of mollycoddling luxury.

But then again, perhaps he won't love this new way so much –who can honestly stray away so much from his own, normal character? Though, it's a common enough occurrence for people to change their ways once they've been shown different ideas.

Chorus:

I give him much high praise and so do all the folk whose minds are well tempered. Praise too, the most, goes to the man who got him there, his one and only son, who loves him so much and who showed him the necessary wisdom, Philocleon's son, Misocleon. I've never come across a man so kind and one whose sweet manners made me ecstatic and had moved my heart to melt. Misocleon came out of all this victorious with his words, trying to give his daddy a better life.

Xanthias appears from the house

Xanthias:

By Dionysus! Some daemon has set the house into a peculiar disaster! The old man has missed his drink and song so much that last night his heart brimmed with joy and he hasn't stopped dancing those old Thespian dances he used to dance during

the competitions. Next thing, he says, he'll be taking on those new and modern tragic dancers and show that they're no more than ancient dances, going back to the days of Cronus!

Philocleon: From within

Hey! Who's spread himself onto my doorstep?

Xanthias:

Oh, no! Here he is. Here's trouble!

Enter Philocleon drunk and dancing.

Philocleon:

Lift the door's bolt! Hehehehe! Here's a new dance for you and here are the first steps!

Xanthias:

Dance? Steps? More like the first steps to madness.

Philocleon:

Here we go: Bend and twist the chest like a brave man in battle. Like this. Look at my nostrils now. Look how they blow and look at my back. Look how the spine cracks!

Xanthias:

You need a drink of herbs, my friend. Try the hellebore. Great cure for the whackos!

Philocleon:

... and then there's Phrynicus doing the rooster squat...

Xanthias:

Listen, old man, it's either the herbs or the stones. They'll be throwing them at you soon.

Philocleon:

...and kicking his legs sky high... hahaha, his bum hole opens wiiiiide...

Xanthias:

Hey, careful there! You'll hurt yourself!

Philocleon:

... and so all my joints roll perfectly into their sockets! Wow, wasn't that great?

Xanthias:

Great? Certainly not great! You're a madman! You're crazy!

Philocleon:

Come now, let me say this: I call on all those who want to challenge me on my dancing dexterity! Come on up here! Anyone from the tragedy side of things who thinks he's better than me, come over here now and dance against me. Come on, any tragedancers out there? No? Not a one? Hahahahaha

Xanthias: Pointing at someone in the audience. It's Carcinus's Middle son.
There's one! That man over there.

The First son of Carcinus, dressed as a crab climbs onto the stage,

Philocleon:

And who is this poor suck?

Xanthias:

It's Carcinus' Middle son.

Philocleon:

I'll make mince meat out of him. I'll smash him with my ballet fists. He knows nothing of rhythm.

Xanthias:

Stupid old man! Here's trouble for you. Here's another crab. Carcinus' other son.

Enter Carcinus' Second son.

Philocleon:

Oh yeah? Well, by Zeus, I've got myself a full meal here.

Xanthias:

No you don't! What you've got here is three crabs now because here comes Carcinus' third son.

Enter Third son of Carcinus.

Philocleon:

What's that thing crawling towards us? Is it a mole or a mouse?

Xanthias:

He's the littlest crab in the Carcinus family. The tiniest one of them. He's the one who writes tragedies.

Philocleon:

Bless you Carcinus and your fine sons! What a throng of buzzards is descending upon me! I better go and do battle with them. And you, if I win prepare the sauce.

Exit all

Chorus:

Well then, let us all move back and give them some room. Give them the room to spin around free and easy.

Go now you, famous sons of the old salt, Carcinus! Whirl, jump, spin along the sands and the shore of the barren sea. Brothers of prawns, whirl your speedy feet around and – hey! And do like Phrynicus: kick your feet high – high, so high that the audience will scream “oh, yae!”

Chorus:

Whirl, I say, twirl and twist about! Smack your guts! Kick a leg, sky high! Spin about!
All of you!

Here's your Lord and master of the deep seas, showing how proud he is of his three
sons, the three young buzzards.

Come now, lead us out of here with a fast step or two and do you know that no one
else has done this before: to end a comedy with a dance.

Exit all

MENANDER'S "THE GROUCH"

This edition is based on the [publicly available](https://bacchicstage.wordpress.com/the-grouch-2-2/)⁵⁸⁴ translation by G.Theodoridis

MENANDER'S "THE GROUCH" (aka Dyskolos, Δύσκολος, The Difficult Man)
First performed at Lenaia circa 317BCE

...

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

PAN (A god)

SOSTRATOS (The suitor. A wealthy, young man)

KALLIPIDES (Sostratos' father)

GETAS (Kallippides' slave)

CHAEREAS (Sostratos' friend)

PYRRHIAS (Sostratos' slave)

KNEMON (A grouchy old farmer)

MYRRHINE (Knemon's daughter)

GORGAS (Myrrhine's half-brother, Knemon's son by another marriage)

DAOS (Gorgias' old slave)

SICON (a cook)

SIMIKE (Myrrhine's Old Nurse)

SILENT CHARACTERS:

SOSTRATOS' MOTHER

SOSTRATOS' SISTER (Plangon)

GORGAS' MOTHER (unnamed)

DONAX

VARIOUS GUESTS

...

Day.

Phyle, a town in the deme of Attica, the capital of which is Athens.

In the background, the Cave of the Nymphs, a shrine.

Centre Stage, in front of the cave: A statue of Pan

Stage Left: Knemon's house

⁵⁸⁴<https://bacchicstage.wordpress.com/the-grouch-2-2/>

Stage Right: Gorgias' house

A road that leads to the farms, on one end and to the city on the other, separates the stage and the two houses.

ACT ONE

Enter Pan from the cave and addresses the audience

Pan: Waves his hand over the set.

Well then, let me ask you to imagine, please, that we are in Attica. A town called Phyle, in fact.

And that this cave behind me, the cave from which I had just come out, is a shrine and it's one which belongs to all the people of Phyle. Farmers who toil hard all over these rocky grounds and that this place here, right here, is a well known, a very famous, sacred place.

Now, this farm here, on my right, is Knemon's farm. He lives here.

Old man Knemon hates everyone!

A grouch to one and all! Grumpy all day long!

Detests every single mortal, both, individually as well in a crowd.

Crowd? Did I say crowd? Ha! Our Knemon has never, ever opened his mouth to utter a word to anyone! Not a single pleasant word to anyone! Never the first to say "g'day, mate, how you goin'?" No idle chit chat for our Knemon!

Well, except to me, of course. He'll say g'day to me, being his neighbour and all. He speaks to me, as he goes by – in passing. Well, he can't very well avoid me, can he? Pleasantries by obligation.

Pleasantries in passing.

Pleasantries in passing by neighbours like me, Pan, a god!

Still, such pleasantries turn into regrets the moment immediately after they've... passed by, with our Knemon!

Still, again, with all his misanthropy, our Knemon, went and married a freshly made widow with a son. And immediately, from that wedding day onwards, our Knemon's mouth opened and like a pent up tempest, began the loud arguments. Day and night, night and day! A daughter was born from that unholy union and from then on things worsened even more.

Their life had sunk into the blackest pits of misery! A misery that the poor woman found utterly unbearable, so much so that, one day she packed up her stuff and went

off to live with her son, Gorgias. That's the son she had with her previous husband.
Indicating the house on his left

Gorgias has a small farm, this one here, in fact, and this fine, mature young man now looks after his frail old mother with the help of a slave who his father left him as part of his inheritance. A sensible young man, more sensible than young men of the same age.

Life's troubles bring quick maturity to men.

So, now, old man Knemon lives a lonely life here, *Indicating Knemon's house* with his daughter, Myrrhini and with an old woman slave, Simike, who does all the household chores.

All day long Knemon toils with tilling the soil and with chopping up the fire wood and all day long he fights with everyone, beginning with his slave and with all his neighbours around here and including everyone else, going all the way down to the village of Cholargos!

His daughter, on the other hand is a most honest and most virtuous young girl, who knows no meanness whatsoever and who serves my companions, the Nymphs of this shrine, with utmost reverence and devotion. Her behaviour has touched our hearts and so we, that is I, the god and my attendant nymphs, wish very much to help her.

Now, there is also a young man in this story!

A young man whose wealthy father owns a farm worth a lot of money, not very far from here, in fact. But this young man is a bit of a city slicker. Spends almost all of his time there, in the big city. One day, however, he came past here with a friend of his on their way to do some hunting and that is when I found the opportunity to get him to meet this girl and to fall in love with her.

This, generally speaking, is the plot of this tale and, if you wish to see the details –and I do hope that you do- you'll be able to see them as they emerge in its telling. Ah! I think I can see our young lover and his friend heading our way, deep in conversation about this very thing, in fact!

I better leave them to it.

Exit Pan into the shrine

Enter Sostratos and Chaereas

Chaereas:

So, let me get this right, Sostratos. You're trying to tell me Sostratos, that you saw some free born girl around here, crowning the nymphs with garlands and, bang,

crash and without further ado, you immediately fell in love with her, is that right?

Sostratos:

Bang, crash and immediately!

Chaereas:

That's truly very fast, mate! Very fast, indeed! My feeling is though that you've walked out of your house that morning, determined to find someone to fall in love with and so...

Sostratos: Interrupting

Chaereas, you're making fun of me! I'm telling you, mate, I am suffering! I am truly suffering! I am in love! Swooning In love! Don't you understand? In love!

Chaereas:

Hmmm, yes I can see that! You're in love! You are suffering!

Sostratos:

This why I've come to you. I've brought you here, not only as a friend but as someone experienced in such matters.

Chaereas:

In such matters, my friend, this is what I usually do:

Let's say some friend of mine takes me along to some whore he fell in love with and he wants me to help him with her, right? Well, I simply grab her! Grab her straight away, quick smart, and take her over to him. If I need to, I'll get drunk first, burn down the door, even, if I must but I won't be engaging in any little chit chat with her about it.

No need to ask her any personal details in that case. Just drag her off to him.

Slow work, you see, arouses the desire but fast work brings a fast end to it, so you must give him a bit of each.

I act quite differently however, if that mate of mine is talking to me, as you are doing now, about marriage and about free born girls! That's an altogether different type of case that one and in that case, I act totally differently. In that case, I go slowly about the whole thing: I ask the young lady about her family, about her life, what money she's got to live on for the rest of her life, everything! I do all this because what I want to leave my mate with after it's all over, is a memento of a deed well done!

Sostratos:

Good thinking, Chaereas... but I'm not so sure I like how things have gone for me so far!

Chaereas:

Well then, Sostratos, tell me the whole story from the beginning so that I'll know which way to go about things.

Sostratos:

Well, first thing this morning I've sent Pyrrhias, my hunting partner off to... *hesitates*

Chaereas:

Yes? Off to? Where off to?

Sostratos: Indicating Knemon's house

To the girl's father. In there. To arrange a meeting with him. The father or the head of the household, or whatever he is.

Chaereas:

By Herakles, Sostratos! What are you saying, mate?

Sostratos:

I think it was a mistake, Chaereas. Perhaps sending a slave to such errands was the wrong thing to do. But I'm in love, Chaereas and people in love make mistakes. It's not easy to know what to do when you're in love! You can't see right from wrong when you're in that state! It's a chaotic state to be in!

And now I'm worried!

He's taking so long in there! I told the man. "Go in, find out what's what and then come straight back home!" Pause as they wait.

Suddenly the door of Knemon's house opens and Pyrrhias rushes out frightened and breathless. His face is bruised and muddy.

Pyrrhias:

Make way, make way, everyone! Let me through! Make way!

To Sostratos Run, mate, run! Everyone run away!

There's a wild madman man chasing me! He's crazy! Run!

Sostratos:

Pyrrhias, what's wrong, boy?

Pyrrhias:

Run, I tell you Sostratos! Run away!

Sostratos:

But why, what's up?

Pyrrhias:

He's throwing rocks at me, Sostratos! Great big clods of dirt and great big dirty stones!

Run, I tell you, run! He wants to kill me!

Sostratos: He looks around and sees no one

Stop it boy! What rocks? Where? What are you talking about?

Pyrrhias: Turns around and looks back into the distance
Isn't he chasing me any more?

Sostratos:

By Zeus, boy! No, no one is chasing you, boy!

Pyrrhias:

I was certain he was still chasing me!

Sostratos:

What on earth are you talking about, man?

Pyrrhias:

Come, Sostratos, let's get out of here, please! I'm begging you! Let's go. Quick!

Sostratos:

Get out of where, Pyrrhias?

Pyrrhias: Indicating Knemon's door

Out of here, Sostratos. As far away from that door as possible!

He's the very spawn of trouble, that man, Sostratos! I'm telling you, Sostratos, he's in the grips of evil spirits! That man in there, Sostratos, the one you've sent me to see, is totally insane!

Jumps up and down and rubs his hurting toes

Damn! Ouch, ouch, ouch! I must have banged my toes on every stone along the way!

Damn it, I must have broken every one of them!

Sostratos:

Certainly looks like it!

Pyrrhias:

Come, Sostratos, let's go! Let's go because we're going to be dead if we don't!

We have to watch out! Save ourselves!

By Zeus! I can't talk any more. I'm totally out of breath!

Chaereas:

But why, what happened, Pyrrhias?

Pyrrhias: Frustrated at his friend's obstinacy.

I knocked on that door there and asked to see the master of the house. Some old hag came out, all the way out here where we're standing now and she pointed him out, out there Indicating with his hand into the distance within up on that hill there. And there he was, walking around his damned pear trees, madly collecting fire wood for himself.

Chaereas: Sarcastically

What a frightening sight that must have been for you, Pyrrhias! A man collecting fire wood.

What then, you poor man?

Pyrrhias:

So, I walked over to his paddock and wandered towards him and, wanting to be polite and friendly and tactful, I greeted him from a distance. I said to him, "hello, father! I've come to see you about some bit of urgent business I would like to discuss with you." That's what I said to him, in a friendly, polite and tactful manner but he, straight away got furiously angry at me and started shouting at me! "What are you doing walking onto my land, you god-cursed man?" he asks and the very next moment, he bends down, picks up a dirty big, huge sod and throws it at me!

Right at my face!

Chaereas:

May the Lord of the underworld, Hades take the bastard!

Pyrrhias:

I shut my eyes to protect them from the dirt and cursed him. Cursed that stupid bastard! I said to him "Poseidon shit on you" but just then he grabs some stick or other and starts bringing it down over my head, all the while screeching at me at the top of his voice, "What sort of business would you and I could possibly have to discuss, ey? Didn't you see the public road back there? Why are you here, on my land?"

Chaereas:

From the way you describe him, Pyrrhias I'd say, that's one insane farmer, that one!

Pyrrhias:

In the end I had to try and run away but that madman ran right after me. Chased me for, oh, a good couple of miles, he did! First he chased me all around the hill and then through the woods all the while throwing big lumps of dirt and stones at me and when he ran out of those stones he started on his pears! He started throwing his pears at me!

Sostratos:

He must be a real wild nutter that old man, ey Pyrrhias?

Pyrrhias:

He certainly is, so please, come on, let's get out of here!

Sostratos:

But that would be a cowardly act, Pyrrhias, wouldn't it? And we, my good friend, we are not cowards, are we?

Pyrrhias:

Mates, you two just don't understand! You don't know what you're in for, hanging around here. I'm telling you, this madman will tear us to shreds if he catches us!

Chaereas:

Sostratos, perhaps this madman is a bit too angry today for us to go on with the meeting. Maybe we should just put the meeting off for now. Wait till he's calmed down a bit. That'd be the best time, I think. And remember, Sostratos, the best outcome of any business comes about when it's done at the right time. Timing, Sostratos, timing is everything, every time!

Pyrrhias:

Yes, Sostratos, that's a very sensible approach! Listen to him! Always approach things at the right time! Now let's go home!

Chaereas:

Farmers! They're almost all alike. They are poor and they are bitter and they can be downright nasty! But now that I know the house, I'll come and see him alone, first thing tomorrow. You go home for now Pyrrhias. This will all turn out fine, believe me!

Pyrrhias:

Ah, logic, at long last!

Exit Pyrrhias

Sostratos:

Ha! I knew it! Full of excuses that man! I knew straight away that he really didn't want to come here and do this for me. I knew that he wasn't too keen on this marriage going ahead!

And you, Chaereas! You're useless as a friend! May all the gods curse you a million curses!

Chaereas:

Me? By Herakles, Sostratos, what on earth have I done?

Sostratos:

And what wrong have I done by coming to this man's farm?

Chaereas:

Did anyone beat you up for doing so?

Sostratos: Indicating into the distance

Ah, here comes the man himself!

Chaereas:

Mate, quick, let's get out of here!

Sostratos:

No, we're not going anywhere and you are going to do the talking.

Chaereas:

No way, Sostratos! No way, by Zeus!

Nobody ever listens to me or believes me when I speak; and to speak to this man – are you kidding? No way man, forget it! I'm off!

Exit Chaereas

Sostratos:

Damn, I don't like this at all! Perhaps I was a bit hasty with this meeting... I think I better move away from his door. He looks like he's truly off his head. Walking and talking to himself like that! He's right off his skull!

By all the gods and by Apollo himself, if I were to make a confession, I'd be confessing that I'm scared to death!

Enter Knemon mumbling loudly to himself

Knemon:

Well, don't they say that Perseus was twice blessed? Blessed once because he was able to fly like a bird and not having to meet any of these people who walk around on earth and blessed a second time because he was able to turn to stone those who pestered him!

Now, if I had powers like that, I'd fill the place up with statues! Statues made of stone! But, by Asclepios, without these gifts, this life is no life at all!

They come right up onto my fields these days! Right up onto my land to talk to me making me waste the whole day up there, every day, up there, next to the main road. Chit chat, chit chat, yakity yak! By Zeus! They make me waste the whole day, by Zeus!

Damn them all, I hardly ever get any work done on that part of the farm these days! I don't even bother to go down there any more.

Moved all the way up the hill, trying to escape those annoying wanderers but now they've started to hunt me down! They come all the way up the hill these days!

Curse this overpopulation!

Suddenly notices Sostratos

By the Lord of the underworld, Hades himself! Who on earth is that standing by my

door now? Where did he sprout from?

Sostratos:

Oh, gods, is he going to hit me now?

Knemon:

Bah! There's no place on earth where one can find some peace and quiet nowadays!
Not even a place to hang yourself!

Sostratos:

Oh, no! He's angry at me!

To Knemon

Father no! I... I've got an appointment with someone, father. I'm supposed to be meeting him here.

Knemon:

To the audience

See what I mean?

Back to Sostratos

Here? Why, here? Have you decided that this is a meeting place of some sort have you? Have you decided that this is the shrine of Leos? Do you always conduct your meetings here, in front of my door?

Sostratos nods and then corrects himself. He moves back in fear.

Well then, why don't you also build a seat or two around here? Make it cosier, easier on your bums! Build a whole board room here, if you like!

The nerve of these people!

Knemon exits into his house

Pyrrhias creeps timidly back

Sostratos:

Damn! What a grouch! I think I've bitten more than I can chew here!

Pyrrhias:

Yes, I've got a hunch that there's more to this story than meets the eye, Sostratos. Worse things are about to hit us, I think!

Sostratos:

Yes, by all the gods, I think you're right, Pyrrhias! I think I better go and get my father's slave, Getas. He's got a real brain on him that man and he's into a million things. I think he's the only one able to soften this madman's rage.

I hate leaving things unfinished for too long. Lots can happen in a single day.

Hang on, Pyrrhias. Stand back. I think I can hear someone coming to the door.

They move back and hide behind the statue of Pan
Enter Myrrhini from the house, carrying an urn

Myrrhini: To the audience

Ah, poor, poor, me! Problems upon problems! They never ever end!
What am I to do now?

My Nurse has dropped the bucket in the well!

Sostratos: dazzled by her beauty

Oh, Zeus! Oh, Zeusy Zeus! Oh Phoebus Apollo with your sweet, sweet lyre! Oh
darling sons of Leto in the sky, dear, dear Dioskouri!

What unchallengeable gorgeousness!

Myrrhini:

"Get some water for me," daddy told us just before he went out. "Get some water and
get it hot and ready for my bath" he told us.

Sostratos:

Oh, what unequalled gorgeousness – unchallengeable beauty!

Myrrhini:

If he finds out what happened he'll beat the old woman to death! But there's no time
to waste on talking about it now!

Turns to the statue and talks to it.

Dear, dear Pan and you Nymphs, can I take some water from your stream in there?

Suddenly she sees the two men

Oh, I do hope I'm not disturbing people in their prayer!

Sostratos reveals himself

Sostratos:

Let me do this for you, dear girl.

Let me have your urn and I'll go inside, fill it up for you and come right back out
again!

Myrrhini:

Ah, thank you. Yes, take it and please hurry back.

Sostratos takes the urn

Sostratos:

Ah, what a gentle creature! What a polite girl! And what an uncouth peasant that
grouch inside is!

Exit Sostratos into the cave

Myrrhini:

Oh, my blessed gods of Olympos, who will save me from all my misery?
Suddenly a sound emanates from Gorgias' house, across the road from Knemon's
Ah! What was that noise? Gods, I hope it's not daddy. He'll kill me if he sees me
outside the house!

Enter Daos from Gorgias' house

Daos:

I've been waiting and watching you from inside for a while now. I wanted to come
out and help you, Myrrhini. Your poor father must be working all by himself on his
farm now. I think I better go look for him and help him for a bit.

Raising his hands up in prayer

Ah, wretched goddess, Poverty! What have we done to deserve your constant
attendance? Why live with us, in our house, so permanently, so contentedly?

Enter Sostratos with the urn which he hands to Myrrhini.

Sostratos:

Here you are, young lady!

Daos: Takes the urn from Sostratos' hand

Here, give this to me!

To Myrrhini

What on earth does this fool want?

Hands the urn to Myrrhini

Here, take this and go and take care your father, Myrrhini!

Myrrhini takes the urn and rushes back into her house.

Sostratos:

Curse me and my luck!

Pyrrhias:

Stop worrying, Sostratos! That which needs to be done shall still be done!

Sostratos:

How will it be done?

Pyrrhias:

I said, don't worry! Now, you wanted to go find Getas, right? So, go and find Getas!
Explain to him what's going on and then come back here.

Exit Pyrrhias and Sostratos

Daos: To the audience

Now what sort of peculiar business was this? I don't like this little game at all!

Who is this young man who's cruising around Myrrhini? It all looks a bit too sneaky

to me.

Damn you Knemon!

May the gods destroy you totally for leaving a young, innocent girl, like Myrrhini alone and unprotected in the world like this, as if her house is empty and deserted!

Obviously our little friend here sniffed this out and has come to try out his luck with her. I must talk to her bother about all this and try and protect her as best we can.

Yes, I think I better go and see him straight away.

He hears noises of revellers within from people approaching

Ah, I see some worshipers of Pan coming this way. A bit drunk by the looks of them.

Better not stand in their way.

Exit Daos into Gorgias' house

Pause

ACT TWO

(or a choral interlude)

Enter Gorgias and Daos from Gorgias' house. Gorgias is carrying a spade and Daos a pick.

Gorgias:

Now tell me once more, Daos. How is it you treated such a serious matter so casually!

Daos:

How else could I have treated it, Gorgias?

Gorgias:

How? Daos, you should have approached this rascal the moment he approached Myrrhini and warned him there and then: "Approach this girl once more and you will approach great suffering!" You should have told him that! You should have said that to him. Instead, you just stood right back and let him get on with it, as if you didn't care about our Myrrhini at all!

You are our slave, Daos! Our slave and you have duties to our family! Very serious duties, Daos!

Myrrhini is my sister, Daos and I care very much for her welfare, so you must look after her. And just because our father wants to behave like a stranger to us and just because he is such a grouch, that doesn't mean that we should behave in the same manner and ignore the poor girl! Because, if that poor girl falls into something... you know, something shameful, the disgrace will be mine. Neighbours won't know what

had actually happened, they'll just know that something did and that it would be my fault for not protecting her from it.

They walk to Knemon's house, Daos reluctantly so.

Now let's knock on their door.

Gorgias knocks on the door

Daos:

Gorgias, I... I am afraid of the old grouch. I'm afraid the moment he sees me near his door he'll start a war!

Gorgias:

Yes, he is a bit difficult that man, always starting a fight, even when he doesn't need to.

I've no idea how anyone could change him, though. I don't know what advice one could possibly give the old grump to make him change his ways. No good trying to force him into being good humoured, the law is on his side about that and nor is it any good trying to advise him, he's far too well grown into the bad tempered man that he is! It's who he is: A very difficult man! A very grouchy grouch! A very grumpy grump!

Daos: He sees Sostratos in the distance

Ah, look! We haven't wasted our time coming here after all!

Indicating Sostratos

Didn't I tell you? Our man might have gone away but he has returned!

Gorgias:

That man over there, you mean? The one with the classy cloak?

Daos:

The very same!

Gorgias:

Classy cloak and classy expression add up to no good, to my way of thinking!

They hide behind the statue of Pan

Enter Sostratos. He turns and speaks to the audience

Sostratos:

Damn it, I couldn't get a hold of Getas. Mother's to blame for that. She's off on her daily routine of sacrificing! every day a sacrifice of some sort for her! This god one day, that god the next, god only knows to what god she's sacrificing today. The whole district has been blessed with her sacrifices and the whole district usually turns up for a feed at our place. Poor Getas was sent off to fetch a cook to cook for the feast,

so, no Getas to be had by me!

And, anyhow, I said to myself, enough of this messing about! I'm going to deal with this matter directly and by myself! So, I skipped the sacrifices and came back here to continue from where I had left off.

Now, let's see. I'll begin again by knocking on the door.

This will stop me weighing the matter over and over in my head for too long!

Gorgias and Daos emerge from behind the statue.

Gorgias:

Young man, may I have a few words with you? They are of quite some import to your good self.

Sostratos:

But of course, go ahead!

Gorgias:

My view, young man is that there is a limit for all of us, whether we are prosperous or in difficult financial circumstances. And when that limit is reached, a change begins to take place. Now, the prosperous man, will continue to be prosperous, so long as his prosperity does not come about from injuring others. If, however, this prosperity of his leads him to cause injury to others, then, you can be sure, young man, that a change will come about; a change for the worse!

The same of course will happen for those who lead a life under financial difficulties. If these financial difficulties don't lead them to cause injury to others but they carry their difficulties bravely and virtuously, there may well come a time when their difficulties end and the change comes, a change which will bring happy times.

See? Change! Get my meaning, young man?

Sostratos nods but then corrects himself.

Gorgias tugs at Sostratos' cape menacingly

My meaning is this – young man!

Don't rely too much on your prosperity continuing for ever. Don't look down on us folk because we are in difficult financial circumstances. Do you get my meaning now?

Sostratos nods

People should judge you by your actions. They should be able to tell by those actions if you are worthy of your good or bad fortune.

Sostratos:

So... I am causing some injury to others?

Gorgias:

Well, yes. It looks to me like you've set your mind upon doing just that. To cause some injury to others. It seems to me that you are trying to trick a virtuous girl into committing an un-virtuous, wicked and shameful act! A free-born girl, mind! You are lurking about, waiting for the right moment to lurch in and do something which would bring about... which would bring about your death – many times over! Get my meaning now?

Sostratos:

Dearest Apollo!

Gorgias:

It's not the correct behaviour now, is it, that you, the lazy, the idle one, to come here, causing us, the hard working folk, a whole lot of mess and trouble, is it? No, it isn't! And there is also one other thing you must be made fully aware of and it is this: There's nothing worse than for the poor to suffer the sufferings of injustice. First, because it is a very sad thing and second because they will regard this suffering of theirs not as a simple injustice but as a gross arrogance of the grossest type by those who have caused them to suffer that gross injustice! Get my meaning now?

Sostratos:

Well now, hang on a bit my friend! First let me wish for you that Fortune send you her blessings in abundance; but now just listen to me for a bit as well, ey? Just listen for a bit. See if you can get my meaning, just as I got yours.

Daos: To Gorgias

Bravo, master! Bravo! Well deserved blessings to you, master! Bravo!

Sostratos: To Daos

And you, big mouth, pay attention!

To both

I merely saw a beautiful young girl and fell in love with her, that's all! Now if this is an unjust thing to do then, perhaps, I have committed an injustice, what else can one say about such a thing? It's love! I ask you, is love an injustice?

And no, I'm not hanging around here so as to trick her into committing something un-virtuous but because I want to speak to her father. I am, Sostratos, a wealthy man and a free born man and I am very willing to marry her even if she has no dowry and I am willing, too, to swear to her that I shall be with her and that I will love her always and for ever!

Now, if I had come here with nasty schemes in my head against you, my friends,

well, let this god, here, Pan and all the Nymphs attending him, strike me dead this very moment, on this very spot, right here, right now and in front of your very own door!

If this is the sort of impression I give you about me, the impression that I'm a nasty schemer, then this would bother me a great deal! Get my meaning?

Gorgias:

Oh, now... hold on! Perhaps I have said a few words more than I should have, young man. Don't you worry about it! You have totally changed my mind and you have totally made a new friend! And, friend, accept this friendship, not from a stranger but from a brother. The girl's half brother. I am Gorgias and Myrrhini is my half-sister!

Sostratos:

Ah, but in that case, you'll be able to help me, by Zeus! Help me on all sorts of other things as well!

Gorgias:

Help you, how?

Sostratos:

Well, Gorgias, I take you for a wise man. I believe you know what sort of help I would need, no?

Gorgias:

Ah! I get your meaning. Now, look, Sostratos! It would be very easy for me to just find some excuse and send you away but I must try and make everything clear to you. You see, Myrrhini has such a father –such a father, that, well you just won't find his like anywhere on earth! Not now, not in the past and not in the future!

Sostratos:

You mean he's a real grump, right? I think I've gathered that already.

Gorgias:

A grump and a grouch! A grouch and a miser! A miser and misanthrope!

He owns this farm here, which is worth quite a bit really. One, two talents, who knows, but a lot. Anyhow, he works it all by himself. Ploughs the whole paddock with his bare hands. He has no servants, lives with no man and hires no one to help him with it. He does it all himself.

He loves nothing more than to avoid seeing anyone and everyone! The only one he lets go near him when he's working is his daughter. He'll talk with her and with no one else. Only her, and he says that this daughter of his, Myrrhini, will marry only

when he, personally, when he, himself personally, finds for her a husband and that husband will have to be just like him in every way! Just like him! Imagine! Just like old Knemon!

Sostratos:

Ha! Which means never, right?

Gorgias:

Which means never, yes. And that's why, my dear friend I think you should simply not bother yourself with this enterprise. You'll be wasting your time. Fate has dished these problems out to us, his own children, so leave them for us to deal with.

Sostratos:

But by the gods, Gorgias, have you never fallen in love?

Gorgias:

Who me? No, not possible!

Sostratos:

Not possible? Why is that? What on earth is stopping you?

Gorgias:

Troubles, concerns, more troubles and more concerns. They come relentlessly and repeatedly. Not a moment's rest from them!

Sostratos:

Hmm, well then, it's obvious young man, that you lack the experience to deal with matters of love and that's why you counsel me to stop wooing Myrrhini. But this is not up to me, you see, Gorgias! Love is always in the hands of the gods!

Gorgias:

Look, Sostratos, your love affair will cause no grief to us but it will cause quite some grief to you. Unnecessary grief at that.

Sostratos:

So, tell me, how can I get that girl?

Gorgias:

You can't get that girl!

He sees Sostratos' determination on his face

Ah, well, all right then. You win! We will help you.

Well then, follow me and always stand next to me! We're going up to our farm. His is on the glen next to it.

Sostratos:

And then what?

Gorgias:

And then I'll start a conversation with him about his daughter's marriage, pretend it just came up quite casually. Now that's a marriage that I, personally would very much like to see!

No one else dares talk to him about that. The moment they utter the first word about it, he jumps up and flies off the handle and then starts chucking insults left, right and centre! Whoever mentions marriage to his daughter gets insulted for being a lazy, good for nothing, hopeless, useless... and so, if he ever sees you looking idle and looking like some pampered rich boy, he won't even want to look at you, let alone talk to you!

Sostratos:

Is he there right now?

Gorgias:

Not quite yet but he's been waiting for me for quite a while so he'll be out very soon. He'll be heading to the fields by his usual path.

Sostratos:

And the girl? Will he be taking Myrrhini along?

Gorgias:

I'm not sure.

Sostratos:

Oh, how happy that would make me!

Lead on, my good man. Lead on wherever you wish to lead on to and... and you will support me in my efforts, now won't you?

Gorgias:

Support you? How exactly will I support you?

Sostratos:

Any way you can but... let's just first go to wherever you say he is.

Gorgias:

Alright but what about you?

Sostratos:

Me? What about me?

Gorgias:

What will you be doing while we're working, just standing around in your pretty cape?

Sostratos:

What? Why not?

Gorgias:

Because Knemon will be chucking dirt balls at you and then he'll start screeching at you and calling you all sorts of names, including useless bum! No, mate. You'll need to be doing some hard work, some digging, like us. Then he might see you working and take you for a poor man working hard for his crust and allow himself to listen to a word or two from you. Otherwise...

Sostratos:

I am ready and willing to obey your every command Gorgias. Let us proceed!

Gorgias:

Why on earth are you in such a hurry to torture yourself, anyhow, mate?

Daos pulls Gorgias to one side and whispers to him

Daos:

Listen, boss, I think that we should work so hard that we get this guy to collapse from exhaustion. That will stop him from coming around here again, making trouble for everyone!

Sostratos:

Right! Hand me a pick, someone!

Daos:

Here, take mine and, you two go ahead. I'll get back to building the stone fence at the other end of the field. It's another job that needs doing.

Sostratos:

Fine! Give it here!

Daos:

Thanks man, you've saved my life!

To Gorgias:

Right, I'm off to the wall, boss. You'll find me working there.

Exit Daos

Sostratos:

Here's what I'm thinking, Gorgias. It's an either or for me: either death or that sweet Myrrhini for me!

Gorgias:

If what you're saying is what you're thinking, then god's blessings to you, Sostratos!

Exit Gorgias

Sostratos: Raising his hands to the sky in prayer

Oh, gods! Most blessed gods!

All these hurdles you've put in front of me on this enterprise of mine, most blessed gods, have made me redouble my efforts, redouble my desires, redouble my determination!

If, as they say, my Myrrhini is a girl who's innocent of the crowding gatherings of women, innocent of the cunning and the sly ways of this life; if she hasn't been frightened by some aunt or nurse, if she has lived all her life with that rough old grouch father of hers who gives her a free-born's home and who keeps her away from dishonourable men, then would not my marrying her be a true blessing?

Groans as he lifts up the pick

Argh! This pick weighs a ton and a half! Ouch! It's killing me!

Ah, well, no good whingeing now, now that I've got things on the right path!

Exit Sostratos in the same direction as Gorgias.

Pause

Enter Sicon the cook, carrying a sheep on his shoulders and Getas loaded with a huge bundle of cushions and rugs

Sicon:

This is a very odd sheep this one, Getas. A weird sort of sheep. Contrarian. Stubborn. Highly undisciplined!

Damn you sheep!

When I carry it on my shoulders like this, the stupid animal opens its huge jaws wide and grabs branches hanging from olive trees and fig trees and then twists itself all around until it manages to get away from me. On the other hand, if I put it down on the ground, the damned thing won't move! Not forward, not backward, not sideways, not East and not West!

It's a very bad mannered sheep, this one! Ill bred, I'd say!

Here I am, a cook being turned into a roast by the very sheep I want to roast!

Ah, thank goodness, we have arrived!

Turns and sees Getas well behind him

Come on, slow goat!

We're here, Getas! The Cave of the Nymphs! End of our woes and tribulations and the beginning of the woes and tribulations of this beast! Let's get on with the sacrifice! Hello Pan! How you doing?

Getas: In agony under the heavy load he's carrying
Gods help me!

Why on earth have these damned women loaded me up with a load fit to break the backs of four donkeys?

Sicon:

They must be expecting hundreds of people, Getas. Look at all those rugs and cushions you're carrying!

Getas:

What do I do now?

Sicon:

Just drop them down here!

Getas: Does so

Agh, that's better!

What if she sees another dream, one about the other Pan, the one they have in Paiania? I bet she'll have us get up immediately and start walking all the way there to do more sacrifices!

Sicon:

What? Who dreamed what?

Getas:

Oh, man! Leave me alone, man!

Sicon:

Yes, but who are you talking about? Who dreamed what?

Getas:

The woman who owns me, man, who do you think?

Sicon:

Yes? And what dream did she dream?

Getas: Confidingly

Oh, alright then but you won't do me in, will you?

Sicon:

No, tell me!

Getas:

In her dream she dreamed that Pan –

Sicon:

Which Pan, this one?

Getas:

Yes, this one.

Sicon:

So, yes, what did this Pan do in her dream?

Getas:

Sostratos... (hesitating)

Sicon:

Which Sostratos, your master, Sostratos?

Getas:

Yes, my master, Sostratos. By Zeus, Sicon, who else do you think I mean?

Sicon:

What a lovely man that one, ey? Well, go on!

Getas:

Well, she dreamed that Pan tied my master up in chains...

Sicon:

Oh! Lord, Apollo!

Getas:

Then the god gave Sostratos a pick and a spade and sent him off to a farm nearby and ordered him to dig it all up!

Sicon:

I've never heard of such a dream before!

Getas:

That's why we're doing the sacrifice. To turn evil into good!

Sicon:

I see. Alright then, grab the stuff and bring them into the cave.

We'll make it all very comfortable in there and get everything ready for them.

And then get ourselves all prepared for when they arrive so we can give them a perfect sacrifice.

Ah, good luck to them! Good luck to them all!

Relax, man! Stop frowning like that, you bag of misery guts! Today I'll feed you like you've never been fed before!

Getas: flatteringly I have always said you're the best cook around, Sicon!

The best... that is if only I could believe you when you say you'll feed me!

Both exit into the cave

ACT THREE

(or a choral interlude)

Knemon opens his door and from the threshold he turns his head and shouts inside

Knemon:

Now, Simike, shut the door after me and don't open it for anyone but me! I won't be returning until it's well and truly dark! You hear me?

Noises from the revellers within just as Knemon shuts the door behind him and is about to move away from his house.

He sees the crowd of guests approaching and stops in anger

Enter the guests for the sacrifice, headed by Sostratos' mother.

A young woman has a flute, two others are carrying baskets (with offerings for the sacrifice). Others are carrying wine flasks

Sostratos' Mother:

Come on, Phlangon, come on girl! Move your feet. We should have had the sacrifice done by now!

Knemon: Aghast at the sight of the crowd arriving

By Zeus! What is this cursed crowd suddenly swarming in?

Curse them! People! Bah!

Sostratos' Mother:

And you, young lady, lift up your flute and play for our lord god Pan!

Pan, they say, does not like people approaching him in silence.

Enter Getas from the cave

Getas:

Thank Zeus, you all got here alright!

Knemon:

Mighty Herakles, what a shocking disgrace!

Getas: To Sostratos' mother

We've been sitting here waiting for you for so long!

Sostratos' Mother:

Everything in order, in there?

Getas:

They certainly are, by Zeus... except the sheep couldn't wait for you and died of old age! Hahahaha!

Go! Go inside!

Sostratos' Mother:

Well, come on, folks! Go inside! Hurry. Go and get all the baskets with the offerings

ready.

Getas

The cakes, the purifying water, the incense... Have you got everything?

Some women nod

Turns to Knemon

Well, old man? What is it? What's made your jaw drop like that?

Knemon:

To the crows with you, you lazy scum! You're turning me, too, into a useless loafer!

Exit Gekas into the cave

How am I supposed to leave my house and go to work with you lot hanging about?

These sacred Nymphs are such pain! What neighbours to have, ey? Bah! I feel like tearing this house down and going off to build another somewhere else, as far away from here as I can!

Indicating the crowd which is still turning up

Look at them all!

In they come with their beds and their flasks of wine... for themselves, of course, not the god!

All it takes is a bit of incense and some flat cake to toss over a small fire on the altar, with reverence. That's all the god needs. This bunch of thieves toss the worst part of the meat to the god -the bony bit of the tail- some offal and they chomp down the rest! Some piety!

Bangs onto his door

Hey, Simike, open up, old woman! I'm coming back. I think we should do the indoors work today. I need to keep an eye on the house!

Knemon's door opens, Simike comes out.

I'm coming back. I think we should do the indoors work today. I need to keep an eye on the house!

Both go inside

Pause

Enter Getas from the cave followed by one of the slave girls

He is angry

Getas:

Are you people completely stupid? Or drunk? Or both? Or what? How could you forget the pot, for Zeus' sake? The pot! How are we going to cook the meat now? Are you all nursing a hangover or something?

What on earth am I going to do now, ey? Tell me girl!

The girl shrugs

No, that's right! No idea! Zeus damn you all!

Looks like I'll have to knock on this door here and bother the god's neighbour!

Zeus damn you and curse you all!

He walks over to Knemon's door and knocks and Shouts

Hello? Hey Boy! Hello? Boy open up!

Back to the slave girl

What a spoiled bunch of slave girls you all are these days! Spoiled and useless! Useless for anything but screwing! Screwing every man and boy around!

Right, girl? Am I not right, girl?

Knocks on the door again, anger rising.

Hey, boy! Open up!

The modern slave girls know nothing about anything and can do nothing! Head full of hot air and hot sex!

Back to the slave girl

Isn't that right, girl? Am I not right, girl? I am right, right?

Girl shrugs her shoulders again

Getas knocks again

Come on, boy open up!

Sex and blackmail when they're caught doing it.

Knocks again. He is furious

Hey, boy! Come on, open this door!

The girl, frightened now, turns and runs back into the cave

What on earth is going on here? Where are the slaves of this house?

Loud, ominous footsteps are heard from inside the house

Ah! Finally! I hear someone coming.

Knemon opens the door and steps out. He is furious. Getas steps back in fear

Knemon:

You miserable, miserable, miserable useless wretch!

What are you doing banging at my door? What do you want?

Getas:

Hey, old man! You don't have to bite my head off!

Knemon:

By Zeus! You, you miserable creature, I'll not only bite your head off but I'll eat you

alive, if I want to, you useless little no hoper!

Getas: Playfully

Oh no, you wouldn't. Not really. Eh, would you?

Knemon:

What business do you and I share, you god-cursed fool?

Getas:

None. No business at all. Showing that he's holding no papers in his hands No requests for loan repayments, see? No witnesses, no business at all. I just came to ask you if I could borrow a pot from you. I need a pot to cook the sacrificial meat... for the sacrifice we're having in there.

Knemon:

A pot? A pot? Do you think I'm into pots and pans and sacrifices of bulls and chooks, you idle slug?

Getas: aside

No, clearly, not even a slug! Right, I'll be off then!

The women told me to come over and knock on your door. See if you've got a pot. That I did. You don't. Now I'm going back to tell them that you are not into pots. Have a nice day!

Walks away but stops in front of the statue

Lord Pan, almighty! What a grey haired snake you've got for a neighbour!

Exit Getas into the cave.

Knemon:

Blood sucking animals!

Bang, bang, bang at your door as if you're their long lost friend!

Walks up to the mouth of the cave and shouts

If I catch any of you walking up to my door, I'll make an example of you, such an example that the whole city will learn from it that I'm not like everyone else. I am quite different!

And, by the way, the one you've just sent out here before, whoever he is, he is damned lucky!

Exit Knemon into his house

Enter Sicon and Getas from the cave

Sicon:

Damn the bastard!

He was having you on, Getas. Took you for a sucker. Perhaps you spoke to him as

if you were some shit stirring nuisance! Some people, people like you know nothing about the subtle art of conning people into giving them stuff.

I'm an expert at this. I have conned lots of people in the city. Thousands and thousands of them, in fact. I know how to trick them, see?

I bug them all the time, over and over again and I get them to give me lots and lots and lots of all sorts of kitchen utensils.

See, you've got to sweet talk them into stuff like this.

If an old codger answers the door, I address him with a syrupy "father" or "daddy."

If it's an old hag, you say, "dear mother" or "mummy," if she's older still, you greet her with "priestess" and if it's the slave boy who answers, you utter the words, "my dearest young man." Get me?

But you! You, Getas are only good for the noose! You're ignorant! You can't just knock on people's doors and yell out, "hey, boy!" Now watch and learn!

Goes to Knemon's door and knocks gently then shouts softly, syrupy.

Hey, boyyyyyy? Come and open the door, please young man!

The ominous steps again before Knemon opens the door, raging with anger. Sicon steps back petrified for a second but soon regains his composure.

Oh, hi father! I was just calling you. Come outside for a minute?

Knemon: To Getas

You again!

Getas: terrified, runs to hide behind Sicon

Here we go again!

Sicon:

Ah, yes, father. I'm here for that very same thing!

Knemon:

You're busting my guts on purpose, now, aren't you? Didn't I tell you not to knock on my door ever again?

Shouts inside

Simike, bring me my whip!

Sicon:

No, no, no! Hang on a minute my good man! Hang on a minute! In the name of Zeus, father, hang on, little daddy!

He moves back a bit, frightened but returns

Knemon:

You're back again to pester me!

Sicon: about to curse
May Poseidon...

Knemon:
Are you still here?

Sicon:
I came to ask you for a little cooking vessel!

Knemon:
I have no cooking vessels! I have no cleaver! I have no salt and I have no vinegar!
I have told you never to approach my door again!

Sicon:
Not to me you didn't!

Knemon:
I just did!

Sicon:
Many thanks! Very civil of you, daddy.
But, could you perhaps inform me as to the possible whereabouts of one such vessel?

Knemon:
Have I not told you? Are you still blubbering?

Sicon: moving away
Have a nice day, daddy!

Knemon:
I have no desire to have a nice day!

Sicon:
As you please, sir. Have a terrible day, if that is your wish.

Knemon:
Argh! Will I never be rid of these pests?

Exit Knemon into his house

Sicon:
Wow! What dexterity! He certainly did me over, the bastard, didn't he? He conned us, Getas! The rotten man, conned us well and truly!

Getas:
He did, yes, he did that. It seems begging takes a lot more dexterity than we've got.

Sicon:
Yes, and things are also different from one door to the next. I don't know if we should knock on another door now though. I mean, if they all use dexterity so dexterously

I'm going to find this begging business far too hard, around these parts.

I think I'll better forget about the pot and just roast the meat. I've got a sort of a frying pan, anyhow. Right then, I shall use what I've got and stuff you, people of Phyle! Stuff you all! I don't need you!

Exit Sicon and Getas into the cave.

Pause

Enter Sostratos from the field, limping and covered with dirt. He is tired and in pain

Sostratos:

Anyone who's missing out on some troubles, let him come over here! He'll get his fill of them!

Ouch! Ouch! The pain! The pains! My back, my guts, my neck, my whole body is in agonizing torment!

Leans against the statue

The moment I got to the paddock, I went straight to work, just like a young man would. I lifted the pick up and dropped it down and dug at the soil with all my might, like a regular farm hand! On and on I dug and dug and dug at that soil, as if I loved all that hard work.

For quite a while, anyhow.

And, while I was doing all that hard work, I kept turning and looking all around me, hoping to see the old man with the girl. With Myrrhini. That's when I'd steal a chance to rub my lower back without the two boys noticing but as time dragged on I kept bending my back further and further, until I ended up a hunchback and at that stage it became as hard as a block of wood.

Hours passed and no one appeared. The sun above us was scorching.

Gorgias kept looking over at me as I was bending over and straightening up, bending over and straightening up like the bucket arm over a well.

Suddenly he stops and says to me, "mate, it doesn't look as if he's coming today." So I said to him, to Gorgias, I mean, "well then, what do we do?" And then he said to me, "we'll have to let it go for today and look out for him again tomorrow." Then Daos came to take over from me.

So, that's how the first turn of the dance ended.

Now, I have no idea why or how I ended up here, in this situation. What's wrong with me? I feel as if this business has dragged me here against my will, as if, somehow, I am someone's puppet.

Smoke from the sacrifice emanates from the cave.

Sostratos notices with curiosity. He looks into the cave, sees nothing and withdraws further back to avoid the smoke.

Pause

From within the cave we hear Getas, coughing and splattering and talking to angrily to a slave girl, who ends up crying in distress.

He is on his way out.

Getas:

That's the new generation of slaves for you! You are all so hopeless, soooooo hopeless, I need sixty hands to do the work! Useless! It is I, woman, I, who pokes at the coals, who kneads the flour, who chops the meats, who must toss them about and tease them about. and it looks like it will be I, alone, who'll be taking care of the whole feast! Damn this smoke! It is blinding me!

Enter Getas, coughing and splattering and rubbing his eyes.

Sostratos:

Getas!

Getas: still rubbing his eyes

Who, who's calling my name?

Sostratos:

Getas, it's me!

Getas:

Me? Who's Me?

Sostratos:

Me, I!

Getas:

Me, I, who?

Sostratos:

Can't you see me, Getas? Oh, you poor man!

Getas: Finally manages to see

Ah! Yes, I can now see me... I... my master! Hi boss!

Sostratos:

What on earth are you up to in there?

Getas:

What are we up to? Well, we've just done a sacrifice and now we're preparing the feast.

Sostratos:

Is mother in there with you?

Getas:

Been there all along.

Sostratos:

Father, too?

Getas:

No, we're still waiting for your father.

Sostratos: Whispering conspiratorially

Getas, come closer!

Getas obeys

Getas, the sacrifice is really quite timely. I'll go right now and invite Gorgias and his slave to the feast. Once they partake of the delicious food, they'll support me even better in my efforts to marry my Myrrhini.

Getas:

What are you saying, boss? You want to invite even more people to this feast? Oh, that's great! That's just great, boss! Boss no! Sees Sostratos' determination Oh, fine then! Invite every one! Invite three thousand of them! Fine! I should have known that I won't manage to put even a single tiny morsel in my mouth! Go on, then, invite the whole town! Invite them all, the sacrificed sheep is done to perfection, everyone should take a bite out of it!

Ah, but boss, these women in there, boss! They are very funny, master! No, not funny, odd! No, not odd, stingy! Do you think they'll offer anyone even as much as a pinch of salty salt?

By Demetre no! No way!

Sostratos:

Getas, no, don't worry, boy! Today is going to be a great day. I am full of good prophesies today suddenly, as if sorry for his hubris, turns remorsefully to Pan. Oh, Pan, my god! I pray to you every time I go past your statue. Truly, I do! It makes me... it makes me... more philanthropic!

Exit Sostratos to go fetch Gorgias and Daos

Enter Simike from Knemon's house. She is clearly distressed

Simike:

Oh, Zeus! Oh, Zeusy Zeus! Oh my dearest Zeus! Dear, dear Zeus! The misery you've burdened me with! Oh, Zeusy, Zeus, dearest!

Getas:

Well, stone my crows! Would you believe it? A woman just came out of that old grump's house!

Simike:

Oh, Zeusy, Zeus! Am I going to cop it now! Am I going to get hurt now! Am I going to get beaten up now! Oh, that damned bucket! That cursed bucket! I've dropped it in the well and I tried to get it out before my master found out about it. I tried!

Getas:

Yes, yes, so, what happened?

Simike:

I tied his hoe to some frayed old piece of rope and... well the rope was rotten and so it broke on me! Splash! Down they both went! Drowned! Hoe and bucket together!

Getas:

Haha! Good! Serve you right, old woman! You and him together! Like bucket and hoe! Hahaha!

Simike:

Oh, I'm going to suffer now! And how! I let his hoe fall into the well along with the bucket! Ahhhh! Zeus help me! Zeus save me!

Getas:

Now all that remains to be done is for you to fall in there after them and the job will be completed!

Simike:

And to add to my miserable luck, the master is running around madly looking for his hoe, shouting and screaming for it, banging doors everywhere. He wants to move some dung about the back yard, the poor man! What a time for him to want to do that!

The sound of heavy angry footsteps and grunts from within the house

Oh, no, I can hear him coming! What am I going to do now?

Getas:

Run away, old girl! Run away! He'll kill you if he catches you!

The door opens and Knemon appears

Oops! Too late! Well, try and defend yourself then, old darling!

Simike runs and hides behind Getas

Enter Knemon

Knemon:

Where's that thieving woman?

Simike: Giving up

Master, I didn't mean to! Honest, master! It just fell into the well, master. I didn't mean to let it fall into the well master! It just fell by itself, master!

Knemon:

You! Go inside, you!

Simike:

Why, what are you going to do with me?

Knemon:

Who me? I'm going to tie you up and lower you down the well.

Simike:

Oh, no, master! No! No you can't do that! It's not proper for a woman to go down into a well!

Knemon:

And I will use the same rope! By the gods, I will! And, with a bit of luck, it will be even more rotten than the last!

Simike: Shouts towards Gorgias' house

Help! Help! Daos, neighbour, come help me!

Knemon:

You're calling Daos, are you, you god-cursed old hag?

Simike goes over and knocks on Gorgias' door

Knemon:

Hey! I'm talking to you! Inside! Go on! Inside you!

Simike:

Oh, poor woman! I'll be all alone in there! There's no one here to help me! Oh, poor creature!

Exit Simike into Knemon's house

Getas approaches Knemon

Getas:

If you like, I can go down the well. I can go down as well as any man. For the bucket, or the hoe, or whatever else there is down there! And we Indicating the crowd inside the cave we can get a rope, as well, if you want!

Knemon:

You! May the gods curse you with curses upon curses and destroy you whole, if ever I ask even the slightest thing from you!

Exit Knemon into his house angrily

Getas:

Off his head again!

What a miserable man, ey? A life burdened by a million miseries!

That's the genuine Attic peasant in there! Attica's two-oxen man! Attica's farmer!

Battling with barren rocks all day. Nothing but thyme and sage comes out of those rocks! Crops of agony and nothing more.

He sees Sostratos with Gorgias and Daos in the distance within

Ah! And here comes my master with a couple of guests, laborers! The man is mad!

Why is he bringing these people here now and how did he become so chummy with them?

Well, I'm not hanging around here to find out, that's for sure!

Exit Getas into the cave

Enter Sostratos, Gorgias and Daos

Sostratos:

No, no, NO! I'm not letting you get out of this one, men! We have everything in there!

By my dear Herakles! Is there a man in the world who would refuse an invitation to his friend's table, when his friend has just done a sacrifice to a god?

Believe me, I was just like an old friend of yours even before I got to know you!

Hands Daos the tools

Take these inside, Daos and hurry back again.

Gorgias: To Daos

No, no, Daos. Don't leave mother on her own. Stay there and look after her. I'll be there soon, as well.

Exit Daos into Gorgias' house and Gorgias follows Sostratos into the cave.

Pause

ACT FOUR

(or a choral interlude)

Enter Simike from Knemon's house

Simike:

Help! Someone please help me! Rushes over to Pan Oh, god, please help me!

Runs about the stage wildly.

Is there no one around who can help me?

Enter Sicon from the cave

Sicon:

Oh, by Herakles! Lord and master!

In the name of all the gods and all the spirits, woman! Will you not give us some peace to conduct our sacred sacrifice? What is it with you people in that house? You insult one another, you beat one another up, you scream at each other, you screech and you yell and you wail! What a strange household you're running in there!

Simike:

It's my master! He is down! He's fallen down, inside the well! All the way to the bottom!

Sicon:

Inside the what? What well? How did he get in there?

Simike:

What do you mean how did he get in there?

Sicon:

I mean how did he get in there?

Simike:

He got in there so he could bring up his hoe and the bucket! He slipped on the way down. Slipped and fell to the bottom! All the way to the bottom!

Sicon:

Who, the grouch? That nasty old grouch?

Simike: Timidly in agreement

Yes, him!

Sicon:

But my dear, dear old woman! That's the best thing he's ever done in his whole life! Now it's up to you to finish the job!

Simike:

What job?

Sicon:

Listen! Just go grab something heavy, a rock, a stone, anything and chuck it down, all the way down, onto his head...

Simike: Interrupts him. The suggestion abhors her

Won't you go down there yourself, please my good man? Please go and save him!

Sicon:

Who me? Dear Poseidon, me? And end up being the fool in that story about the man who fought the mad dog in the well? No way, old woman, not I!

Simike: Knocks on the door of Gorgias' house
Gorgias? Gorgias? Come out, Gorgias!
Gorgias comes out from the cave. He looks dazed.
Gorgias:
Where on earth am I? Simike, is that you? Did you call me?

Simike:
Yes Gorgias!
Gorgias:
What is it? What's the problem?

Simike:
It's my master, Gorgias. My master has fallen in the well!

Gorgias:
Oh, Lord! *Turns towards the cave*
Sostratos! Sostratos come out here!
Sostratos enters from the cave

To Simike
Come, lead on! Quick!
Sostratos, Simike and Gorgias rush into Knemon's house.
Sicon is left alone on the stage

Sicon:
Well, this proves well and truly that there are gods! Gods do exist! By Dionysos, there ARE gods!

Turns to Knemon's door and speaks to it
See? You don't lend your pot to people who need it for a sacrifice! You refuse to do so, as if you're holding some grudge against them!

So! Now, you... you temple-thief you! Now you're at the bottom of a well, so, so now drink all the water that's down there so you won't have to share even that with anyone either! Not even water! Just rewards for you ey?

The Nymphs have made you pay well for your stinginess by exacting revenge on my behalf! Justice!

Ha! No one who does wrong to cooks escapes the wrath of the nymphs!

Our work is almost holy. The waiters though, well, don't worry about the waiters! You can do whatever you like to the waiters! No worries!

Myrrhini: From inside the house
Oh, gods! Is he dead? Someone please save my darling father!

Sicon:

Ah! I hear voices!

What a terrible feast this turned out to be! Never seen anything like it! One lot is dying, another lot is crying! Herakles save me and avert all ill will against me!

Goes and puts his ear close to the door

Can't hear anything now! Looks like someone has gone down the well to bring the old grouch back up again.

Ha! Remember the face on the old man? What a splendid sight it would be now, ey? Soaked and shivering and trembling! Grrrr! I'd love to see it here and now, by Apollo! Shouts into the cave

You women, in there! Offer libations on behalf of these good folk out here Indicating the audience and pray that he survives but is left maimed... rather badly, if the gods will agree! That'll make him less of a pain to Pan here! And to all his neighbours! And to all those people who offer sacrifices! That'll be good for a cook like me! I'll get a lot of work then!

Enter Sostratos from Knemon's house

Sostratos:

Sicon!

Sicon:

Sostratos, what happened in there?

Sostratos:

By all the gods, Sicon and by Demeter and Asclepios, as well!

I have never in my life seen a man undergo a near-drowning experience at the most appropriate moment, the moment when life was beginning to turn on its sweetest charm!

We rushed into the house and, straight away, Gorgias rushed to the well.

Down he went, up the gorgeous Myrrhini and I stayed. We did nothing unbecoming, of course – in any case what could we ever do under such turbulent circumstances? The girl was out of her wits with distress! She was pulling her hair out and wailing and beating her breasts and pulling her hair out and wailing... Well I, like the good man that I am, I swear by the gods that I behaved just like a comforting nanny to her. I stood right beside her and, awe-struck by her statuesque body, begged her and prayed to her to stop crying!

So awe-struck I was by her incomparable body that I had completely forgotten about the fallen body below! I cared about him less than I cared about anything.

Still, I was supposed to keep pulling at the rope to bring him up. Boring nonsense that, so... I... Indicates that he let the rope slip through his fingers

Sicon:

I can imagine!

Sostratos:

Ha! Nearly killed the man, by Zeus! I was so taken by the body standing next to me that the rope slipped from my hand three times! Lucky for him, Gorgias –a real Atlas that man!- who was under him, in the well, managed to hold him up until I, eventually, hauled him all the way out of the well. The moment he got out, I shot out of the place and here I am. I just couldn't control my desires any longer. A minute later I'd be kissing that stunning looking woman!

I love her so passionately! So very, very fiercely that I want to marry her and I must make up my mind – Noises from inside Knemon's house interrupt him

Ah, they're at the door now!

Sicon:

And here's where I run off!

Exit Sicon into the cave

Enter Myrrhini, Gorgias and Simike. They are carrying Knemon on a stretcher.

Sostratos:

Zeus, my saviour, what vision is this?

Gorgias:

Knemon, is there anything you want me to do for you, old man? Tell me!

Knemon:

What could there possibly be? Look at the state I'm in!

Gorgias:

Courage, Knemon! Have courage!

Knemon:

I will die! I will die and you'll never have to worry about Knemon, the old grump pestering you ever again!

Gorgias:

You see, Knemon? Being alone is a terrible thing.

You see? Just now, suddenly and out of nowhere you nearly died! At your age, Knemon, you need to think about yourself a bit more. About your life, I mean. About having someone to look after you.

Knemon:

Gorgias, I've had it. I know that. Call your mother quickly!

It seems we need to get into trouble before we learn how to avert it.

Exit Gorgias to his house

To Myrrhini:

My darling daughter, lift my head up a bit, if you can, please.

She does so

Sostratos:

You're a very lucky man, Knemon!

Knemon: to Sostratos

And you! You useless loaf! Why are you still hanging around my door? Do you think it's your private club or some public shop or something? Leave! Get lost and don't let me ever see you again! Go on! be off with you!

Sostratos:

Alright, alright, old man! I'm leaving! I'm leaving right now!

Retreats to the edge of the stage

Knemon: To Myrrhini and Gorgias

You should have left me down there, you two. Down at the bottom of the well. Now that I am up here, alive, now that you've saved me, I must face up to the horrible state I'm in. You should have let me die down there. Don't get me wrong, I don't mean anything bad by it but I am a stubborn old man. No one will ever change me. I cannot change!

Perhaps I was wrong on this one thing though and that is that I always believed that man is his own boss; that he can manage things all on his own and needs no one else's help. Perhaps I was wrong on that matter but now, now that I've seen for myself that life is short and that it can end very abruptly I've learnt my lesson. I've learnt that I was wrong. The shortness of life and its ability to end so suddenly is a fact that I have never before understood.

That's how far off the rails I was, by Hephaistos! I use to think that everyone's life, with all the trickery and villainy that is thrown upon it from every quarter, well I never thought that there could be a man anywhere in the world who could honestly be good and helpful to his fellow man!

It was that fault in my thinking that had made me so hard, so difficult a man to deal with.

But now Gorgias has taught me this lesson and he has corrected this fault in my thinking. This is a lesson that comes from a noble and generous heart. And I say this

because this is the man who, even though I have never allowed him to even knock on my door, let alone give him a hand with anything, a man I have never greeted, never ever said a kind word to him, he has saved my life!

Gorgias:

Whenever you were right and you told me to keep out of your way, I did and perhaps also, you might have never done us a favour but then again, neither have we, until now, done you one...

Knemon:

Well then, Gorgias? What do we do now, my boy? I'm not well now my son and I very much doubt I'll ever get better so, well, now I adopt you as my very own, fully legitimate son! From now on, Gorgias, consider all my wealth yours!

Indicating Myrrhini

And I entrust you with this young woman, your step sister, Gorgias. Find her a husband and marry her off because, even if I regain my health, I wouldn't be able to do that on my own and, in any case I don't think I'd approve of any man to marry her. Marry her off and then let me live the remainder of my life the way I want.

And take care of everything else, as well, Gorgias. Manage them your way. You have a good brain, thank the gods, and you are a good guardian for your step sister. Divide the property in two and give her half of it as dowry. Keep the other half yourself and look after me and your mother.

To Myrrhini

You can let my head down now, daughter.

Now, son, it's not right for a man to say more words than are necessary but there are a couple more things I'd like to say to you about life and about human nature.

If every man had a good mind, there would be no courts and no prisons to lock them into. Nor would there be any wars. And everyone would be happy with owning only what he needed.

But, I suppose, people like the way things are now, so carry on behaving as before. This old and difficult man is now going to leave you alone.

Gorgias:

Yes, I accept all that, Knemon. But as for Myrrhini, we must find her a husband that you also like.

Knemon:

Gorgias, I've told you all my thoughts on the matter, so, no bother me no more with it!

Gorgias:
Someone here wants to say something to you.

Knemon:
No, in the name of all the gods, I want to talk to no one!

Gorgias:
He wants to ask you for your daughter's hand in marriage.

Knemon:
None of this is my business any more.

Gorgias:
He helped me save your life.

Knemon:
Who's that?

Gorgias:
He's over there.

To Sostratos
Hey, you, Sostratos! Come over here!

Knemon:
He looks a bit sunburned. Is he a farmer too?

Gorgias:
Yes, father. He's not one of those idle loafers who wander about the earth, doing nothing all day, or one of those rich show offs!

Knemon:
If you want to give her to him, fine, go ahead but leave me out of it.

Gorgias:
Yes, I think it'd be best do that! I think it would be best if I did all the marriage arrangements myself. Simike, help him, please. Take him inside.

Knemon: As he's leaving
Gorgias, take good care of her from now on.

Gorgias:
Rest easy father. I shall.

Exit Simike, Myrrhini and Knemon, leaving Gorgias alone with Sostratos.

Gorgias:
I'd say you're in luck, Sostratos! Her father will disagree on nothing now!
Well then, I hereby betroth you to her and before all these witnesses, I grant you all her wealth, whatever it is as her dowry, a just grant for you, since you have come

here not in secrecy and hiding dishonest schemes but in all honesty, to woo her and to marry her. You have shown yourself to be a man of virtue and nobility. You willingly picked up the pick and you worked hard in the field. And this is how you can tell a man is noble: even if he is wealthy he still respects the poor and treats them as his equals. Your character is good, Sostratos and I only hope that it remains so always.

Sostratos:

Thank you, Gorgias! The best praise is the praise one receives from others. Seeing his father approaching in the distance.

Ah! Here's my father! Perfect timing!

Gorgias:

Is Kallippides your father?

Sostratos:

But of course!

Gorgias:

But, by Zeus, he is such a wealthy man, Sostratos but no wonder! He is a farmer through and through and, in farming he has no equal!

Enter Kallippides

Kallippides: Muttering to himself

I bet I've missed out on all the food by now! They would have gobbled it all up and then gone off and disappeared into the fields!

Gorgias:

By Zeus, what a hunger he must have, Sostratos! Should we talk to him about our matter now?

Sostratos:

Best if he eats first, Gorgias. Put him in a better mood for it.

Kallippides:

How are you son? Have you all eaten?

Sostratos:

Yes, father but, don't worry, we left some for you, too. Come through.

Kallippides:

That I shall do, son, that I shall do! I am starving!

Exit Kallippides into the cave

Gorgias: Heading towards his own house

You go inside too, Sostratos! Go after him and talk to him on your own.

Sostratos:

Will you wait for me in your place?

Gorgias:

Yes, yes, I won't go anywhere.

Sostratos:

Fine. I won't be long. I'll come out and call you.

Exit both. Gorgias into his house and Sostratos into the cave

ACT FIVE

(Or a choral interlude)

Enter Kallippides and Sostratos from the cave

Sostratos:

Father, you never ever let me do what I want! Oh, well, I didn't think you would, anyway! Never mind!

Kallippides:

What are you saying, son? Have I not agreed that you can marry whoever you want? Whoever you love? Son, not only do I want this for you, I also say you should do it! You should marry this girl! Everyone should marry who they love!

Sostratos:

But that's not how I think you really see things, dad.

Kallippides:

By the gods, son! I know very well how I see things and what I am saying is that the best marriage for a young person is a marriage that is urged by love!

Sostratos:

Well then, why is it all right for me to marry this young man's sister and it's not right for him to marry my sister?

Kallippides:

Ah, now you're being stupid Sostratos! It is because I don't want, both, a poor daughter-in-law and a poor son-in-law! One poor in-law in a family is more than enough!

Sostratos:

Father, you are talking about money. Wealth. Uncertain stuff.

If you have the confidence that this wealth of yours will stay with you until you die, then, by all means. keep it, give none of it to anyone else. Share none of it.

But if you think that it is yours only because the goddess Fortune has put it in your hands for now, temporarily, then share it! Share it around, father! Do not hold on to all of it yourself because the goddess could take it all away from you just as easily as she has given it to you! All of it, any time she likes! She could take it all and hand it over to someone who might not even deserve it!

And that's why, father, I ask you to be generous with it. While you've still got, while the goddess allows you to have it, treat it with an open heart. Help as many poor people as you can and make as many of them as you can, rich with it! Because that's the only thing that survives death. Kindness and generosity and when Fortune turns nasty on you, it is this generosity and this kindness that will come back for you.

The friend you can see is a far better friend than all the wealth buried deep below the soil.

Kallippides:

Son, you know me well. You know very well that none of my money is buried anywhere. Why would I do a thing like that? It's all out in the open and it's all yours.

And if what you want to do with this money is use it to make friends, well, by all means, go ahead! Try it and good luck with it. No need to explain yourself to me, son. Go ahead, give it away! Spread it around, as you say. I am not going to stop you!

Sostratos:

Is that your wish, truly? Do you really mean it?

Kallippides:

Yes, yes, that is my wish, truly and I truly mean it! You have convinced me of the error of my ways, Sostratos, so don't worry about a thing. Do as you please with it! It is, after all, your own wealth!

Sostratos:

In that case, I'll call Gorgias!

Gorgias! Gorgias, are you in there?

Enter Gorgias from his house

Gorgias:

I've heard everything! I've heard everything you two said from the very start of your conversation. But still, Sostratos – Sostratos, you're a wonderful, generous man and I think of you as a true and loyal friend and I love you a lot but – but, Sostratos, I don't want any more wealth than what I need and I have that. In any case, even if I wanted it, I couldn't have it.

Sostratos:

What? Why ever not? I don't understand, Gorgias.

Gorgias:

Sostratos, I am giving you my sister as your wife but for you to give me your sister, well, that's just not right, Sostratos!

Sostratos:

What do you mean, it's not right?

Gorgias:

It won't be me, Sostratos. That's not who I am. I will be living like a wealthy man with someone else's earnings. That's not my way. I want to be the earner of my own wealth.

Sostratos:

What nonsense, Gorgias! Do you not think yourself worthy of a marriage?

Gorgias:

No, I do think myself worthy of marrying your sister but I do not think it right for me to have a lot when I only have a little.

Kallippides:

By the great Zeus, man, has kindness made you stupid?

Gorgias:

What? What do you mean?

Kallippides:

You're a pauper, Gorgias, a pauper who wants to stay a pauper. What pauper thinks like that? Nonsense, man!

Well, all right then, do as you please but you see that my son has made me change my mind about such matters. Now change your mind, too and take some money!

He hands Gorgias a purse full of coin.

Gorgias: Jiggles the purse

Well now, this tactic has indeed, persuaded me. I would be both, a pauper and an idiot if I didn't take this money. How can I refuse it from a man who offers me and my future wife, such security?

Sostratos:

Now, men, there's only one more thing left to be done: The betrothal.

Kallippides: To Gorgias

Right: Let me do that now! I, Kallippides, father of Sostratos do hereby betroth my daughter to you, Gorgias, to have many legitimate children and I hereby also add to

her dowry another three talents.

Gorgias:

And I have one talent dowry for my sister!

Kallippides:

Don't waste your money, Gorgias. You don't have that much of it.

Gorgias:

Yes, I do, I have the farm!

Kallippides:

Gorgias, keep the farm all to yourself.

Now go and fetch your mother and your sister and bring them here with our women.

Gorgias:

Yes, I should do that.

Sostratos:

Tonight we'll all stay here together and tomorrow we'll conduct the wedding ceremonies and the feasts. Gorgias, bring old man, Knemon over, as well. He'll be looked after better with us.

Gorgias:

Sostratos, I don't think he'll want to do that.

Sostratos:

Try, Gorgias. See if you can convince him.

Gorgias:

Alright, I'll try!

Exit Gorgias into Knemon's house

Sostratos:

Father, we better get a good drinking party for us men and make the women keep an all night vigil.

Kallippides:

I think the opposite will happen, son: the ladies will drink and we'll be kept awake all night! I'll go and get things ready.

Sostratos:

Fine, see you later dad!

Exit Kallippides into the cave. Sostratos is alone on the stage.

Sostratos:

The wise man must never change his mind. About anything!
Everything gets accomplished with knowledge and effort.

Let me give you just this one example: In one single day I have managed to get the whole business completed for a wedding! One which no one would ever believe it was possible!

Enter Gorgias with his mother and his sister, Myrrhini.

Gorgias: To the women

Hurry, then, walk a bit faster, you two!

Sostratos:

Welcome ladies!

Enter his mother from the cave

Sostratos:

Mother, say hello to these ladies!

They nod their mutual greeting

Gorgias: To Sostratos

Old Knemon wouldn't budge and he kept urging the old girl to come so he could be left alone.

Sostratos:

What a stubborn old skull, that one, ey? It will never change! Still, let him be.

Let's go in then!

Gorgias:

Sostratos, I feel a bit... well, a bit too embarrassed to meet all those women in there.

Sostratos:

Nonsense, Gorgias! From now on, all those women in there will be your family!

All exit into the cave

Enter Simike from Knemon's house.

Simike: To Knemon inside

By Artemis, I'm leaving as well! You can lie in there all by yourself from now on!

You and your horrible temper! All these folks wanted to do with you was to take you to the god, but you! Oh, no! You just refused! Always refuse, always say no!

I'm telling you, Knemon, I swear by the two goddesses, we'll end up with another big mess again, bigger than ever before but, if that happens, you will deserve everything you get!

Enter Getas from the cave.

He is followed by a flute girl

Getas:

I'm going in there to see how old Knemon is.

The flute girl blows a couple of happy notes

Getas: Interrupts her

Stop that, you silly girl! This is not yet the right time for that! I have been sent to check on the old grouch in there!

Simike:

One of you should go in and sit with him. I'm losing my young mistress to a marriage today. I want to go and have a little chat with her before that. Kiss her goodbye. Give her some womanly advice.

Getas:

That's a good idea. Go on then! I'll look after him for a while.

Exit Simike into the cave

I wanted to do this for a long time now but just couldn't work out how and when. I wanted to pay him back for all the nastiness he showed me. I'm not afraid of the old grouch any more! The old fool can't even stand on his own two feet now.

Shouts into the cave

Sicon! Sicon, come out here quick! Man, what a great idea I've got!

Enter Sicon from the cave

Sicon:

You called me?

Getas:

Yes, I did, Sicon. How would you like to earn a bit of revenge for all the suffering that the old grouch in there put you through?

Sicon:

Me? What trouble? What nonsense are you up to now, Getas?

Getas:

The old man is just laying in there all on his own.

Sicon:

Yes, and how is he?

Getas:

Not too bad, really... for now!

Sicon:

So he can't get up and beat us up, right?

Getas:

I don't think he's got the courage to get up.

Sicon:

Now that is good news! I think I'll go in and ask for something. Send him right off his skull!

Getas:

But first I think we should drag him all the way out here, ey? Drop him right out here and then go bang on his door real loud. Bang, bang, bang. Ask him for all sorts of things. Hehehe! He'll choke on his anger! A party for us! What do you think?

Sicon:

Getas, I'm afraid of Gorgias. If he catches us it'll be us who'll be getting beaten up!

Getas:

Nah, don't worry, Sicon. There's so much noise in there and they're so drunk, they won't hear a thing of what's going on out here. And, anyhow, Sicon, we've got to teach the old man a lesson. Curb his manners a bit. Tame the wild beast in him! We're all related to him now, see. What if he never mends his crabby ways? How will we ever be able to endure his nasty temper?

Sicon:

So how are we going to do this?

Getas:

We'll do it in secret. Quietly, secretly without anyone seeing us or hearing us. We'll bring him out here with great care.

Makes a few steps towards Knemon's house

Come on, then. Make a move!

Sicon:

Hang on a minute now! Don't go off without me! And don't make so much noise!

Getas:

I'm not!

They enter Knemon's house and a minute later return, gingerly, carrying the stretcher upon which Knemon is sleeping. They are being careful not to wake him up.

Sicon:

Put him down here.

The stretcher is carefully and gently put down

Getas:

Now, let's go!

Sicon:

Now, I'll start first and you, you keep with rhythm.

Bangs hard at the door and shouts loudly. Mockingly
Boy! Ey boy! Boys! melodically Ey, booooooys! I'm calling youuuuuuuuu!
Come out, boyyyyyyys!

Knemon: wakes with fright

Oh, no! I'm dead! I'm dead! Heeeelp! Who are you? Recognises Sicon Oh, you're...
you are that man... What in Hades' name do you want now? Heeeelp!

Sicon:

What do I want? You know what I want: I want some pots and pans! Hahahaha!

Knemon:

Someone help me up!

Sicon:

Come on, I know you've got some in there! I want some pots and pans!

Getas:

And I want seven three-legged stools and a dozen tables! Hahaha! Three-legged
stools, get it?

Shouts through Knemon's door

Come on boys! Boyyyyys! Bring them out, now come on! Hurry, hurry, hurry, 'cause
I'm in a hurry, hurry, hurry! Hahahaha!

Knemon:

There's no point in you shouting in there. There's no one home! I told you, you nasty
man!

Getas:

What? No one? Really? Let me see: Hello boyyyyyyys! Boys, are you in there?

Knemon:

No, they're not! Are you deaf? Do you want me to repeat myself a thousand times?
There's no one home!

Sicon:

Oh, well in that case, I better run off and look for them elsewhere.

Pretends to be leaving

Knemon:

By horrible Hades! How on earth did I end up out here, in the middle of the road?
Who dragged me out here? Be off with you! Be off, you bastards!

Sicon:

Oh, it would be my pleasure, good sir!

Pretends to be leaving but goes and bangs hard at Knemon's door and shouts loudly

again:

Boy! Ey boy! Boys! Melodically Ey, booooooys! I'm calling youuuuuuuuu!

Come out, boyyyyyyys! Men, women and booooooys! Bangs loudly on the door

Knemon:

Have you gone mad? Ey! You're smashing my door!

Sicon:

Give us nine rugs!

Knemon:

What nine rugs? What are you talking about? Where am I going to find nine rugs?

Sicon:

And a nice, Persian curtain...

Getas:

Woven... Persian. Persian and woven!

Sicon:

One hundred feet long! Hahaha!

Knemon:

I wish I had one!

Sicon:

Oh, but you do! You do have one! A little birdie told me that you do have one!

Knemon:

I do? Where is it? Curse you!

Shouts

Simike? Simike where are you? Where is that old woman?

Sicon: Pretends to be listening for Simike

Hmmm, can't hear anything. I think she left you!

Getas:

For good and for ever!

Sicon:

I think I'll go look for her!

Knemon:

Do that! Do that and leave me in peace! Shouts again Simike! Simike, old woman!

To the men May the gods grant you a death with the most horrible torture, you evil creatures! What is it you want from me, ey? What is it?

Sicon:

Me? I'm looking for a wine mixer...

Getas:

A bronze one. A largish one! It must be a largish bronze wine mixer!

Knemon:

Ah! Will no one help me up!

Sicon:

Now, I know you've got one. I'm sure of it! A little birdie told me...

Getas:

And what about the curtain, granpa?

Knemon: shouts

Boy! Boy where are you, damn you! Where's that cursed slave of mine!

Sicon:

Come on, go and get us a wine mixer! Where's our wine mixer?

Knemon:

I'm going to kill that Simike!

Getas:

Lie there and shut up, grumpy grouch!

You hate people, you hate women, you hate everyone – why, you didn't even let those good folk take you to the sacrifice!

Sicon:

Well then, serves you right, old man!

Getas:

Accept your punishment, old boy!

Sicon:

You'll find there's no one willing to help you out of your misery this time, you old grouch!

Getas:

We're all right here and from now on you'll listen to us and you'll obey us!

Sicon:

Now come with us to the sacrifice in the cave and give us no more trouble!

Getas:

The women have no need of your groaning and griping and complaining any more. Get my meaning... old boy?

Knemon:

And what about you two, ey? What good have you two ever done for them?

Getas:

Well, Fate's twists and turns have benefited your daughter and your wife and their meeting one another was not wasted.

Sicon:

And so to add to their joy I organised a drinking party for them and the rest of the folk... Ey, do you hear me? You're not asleep, are you?

Knemon:

Gods forbid!

Sicon:

Do you want to come to that party? Listen to the whole story about the party!

Things were a little rushed, you see, so I spread rugs around the tables. It's my job as a cook, right? Remember that, I'm a good cook and a good man! So, anyhow, one of the men poured wine –the aged stuff- into the deep bowl, mixed it with the crystal clear water from Nymphs' streams and passed around. Then he offered a toast to all the men. Then another man offered a toast to all the women.

Ha! It was like they were trying to quench the thirst of a dirty big sand dune! You know what I mean? Cup after cup after cup after cup! Down all the parched gullets they went!

Then some beautiful young flower, a little tipsy I might add, got up, walked shyly up to the dance floor and began to shake and dance. Then another young woman got up, held her hand and joined her in the shaking and the dancing!

Getas: To Knemon

Oh, all right! Come on then, you've suffered enough for one day. Now get up and come in with us! Come and dance with us!

Knemon:

What? What on earth are talking about, you scum?

Sicon and Getas grab him and lift him up

Sicon:

Come on, you grumpy farmer! Come and dance with us!

Knemon:

No way! In the name of all the gods, no way! I do not dance! Ever!

Sicon:

Come on! Come on now! Let's go inside!

Knemon:

And do what, you pair of bums?

Getas:

I told you, to dance, grumpy bum, to dance!

Knemon:

Ah, well! Might as well! Take me in then! Perhaps it's better to try and cope with the torture in there then with that out here!

Gekas:

See, you do have some sense in that grouchy skull of yours!

He helps Knemon up.

Enter Donax from the cave

Getas:

Hurrah! we win, men, we win! We win a strong victory!

Ah, Donax! You too, Sicon, come help me. Help this man inside.

And you, Knemon! Now you had better be very careful we don't catch you being your usual misanthropic grouch again and start upsetting everyone! Because if we do, rest assured, old man, that we won't be so easy on you the next time.

Now! For our victory! Someone get us some garlands and some torches!

Exit the party goers from the cave and distribute garlands and torches.

Getas: gives a garland to Knemon

Here's one for you old man!

To the audience

Well now, friends, if you have enjoyed the victory we had over this old grumpy grouch, all of you, children, boys, men, women, give us a hearty applause!

And may Victory, that noble, ever-smiling girl be with us in good will always!

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END OF MENANDER'S "GROUCH"