

## THE FROGS

by Aristophanes

translated by Benjamin Bickley Rogers

### CHARACTERS

#### CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

XANTHIAS, servant of Dionysus  
DIONYSUS  
HERACLES  
A CORPSE  
CHARON  
AEACUS  
A MAID SERVANT OF PERSEPHONE  
HOSTESS, keeper of cook-shop  
PLATHANE, her partner  
EURIPIDES  
AESCHYLUS  
PLUTO  
CHORUS OF FROGS  
CHORUS OF BLESSED MYSTICS

### THE\_FROGS

The scene shows the house of HERACLES in the background. There enter two travellers: DIONYSUS on foot, in his customary yellow robe and buskins but also with the club and lion's skin of Heracles, and his servant XANTHIAS on a donkey, carrying the luggage on a pole over his shoulder.

XANTHIAS

Shall I crack any of those old jokes, master,  
At which the audience never fail to laugh?

DIONYSUS

Aye, what you will, except "I'm getting crushed":  
Fight shy of that: I'm sick of that already.

XANTHIAS

Nothing else smart?

DIONYSUS

Aye, save "my shoulder's aching."

XANTHIAS

Come now, that comical joke?

DIONYSUS

With all my heart.

Only be careful not to shift your pole,  
And-

XANTHIAS

What?

DIONYSUS

And vow that you've a belly-ache.

XANTHIAS

May I not say I'm overburdened so  
That if none ease me, I must ease myself?

DIONYSUS

For mercy's sake, not till I'm going to vomit.

XANTHIAS

What! must I bear these burdens, and not make  
One of the jokes Ameipsias and Lycis  
And Phrynichus, in every play they write,  
Put in the mouths of their burden-bearers?

DIONYSUS

Don't make them; no! I tell you when I see  
Their plays, and hear those jokes, I come away  
More than a twelvemonth older than I went.

XANTHIAS

O thrice unlucky neck of mine, which now  
Is getting crushed, yet must not crack its joke!

DIONYSUS

Now is not this fine pampered insolence  
When I myself, Dionysus, son of- Pipkin,  
Toil on afoot, and let this fellow ride,  
Taking no trouble, and no burden bearing?

XANTHIAS

What, don't I bear?

DIONYSUS

How can you when you're riding?

XANTHIAS

Why, I bear these.

DIONYSUS

How?

XANTHIAS

Most unwillingly.

DIONYSUS

Does not the donkey bear the load you're bearing?

XANTHIAS

Not what I bear myself: by Zeus, not he.

DIONYSUS

How can you bear, when you are borne yourself?

XANTHIAS

Don't know: but anyhow my shoulder's aching.

DIONYSUS

Then since you say the donkey helps you not,  
You lift him up and carry him in turn.

XANTHIAS

O hang it all! why didn't I fight at sea?  
You should have smarted bitterly for this.

DIONYSUS

Get down, you rascal; I've been trudging on  
Till now I've reached the portal, where I'm going  
First to turn in. Boy! Boy! I say there, Boy!

Enter HERACLES from house.

HERACLES

Who banged the door? How like prancing Centaur  
He drove against it! Mercy o' me, what's this?

DIONYSUS

Boy.

XANTHIAS

Yes.

DIONYSUS

Did you observe?

XANTHIAS

What?

DIONYSUS

How alarmed

He is.

XANTHIAS

Aye truly, lest you've lost your wits.

HERACLES

O by Demeter, I can't choose but laugh.  
Biting my lips won't stop me. Ha! ha! ha!

DIONYSUS

Pray you, come hither, I have need of you.

HERACLES

I vow I can't help laughing, I can't help it.  
A lion's hide upon a yellow silk,  
A club and buskin! What's it all about?  
Where were you going?

DIONYSUS

I was serving lately  
Aboard the- Cleisthenes.

HERACLES

And fought?

DIONYSUS

And sank

More than a dozen of the enemy's ships.

HERACLES

You two?

DIONYSUS

We two.

HERACLES

And then I awoke, and lo!

DIONYSUS

There as, on deck, I'm reading to myself  
The Andromeda, a sudden pang of longing.  
Shoots through my heart, you can't conceive how keenly.

HERACLES

How big a pang?

DIONYSUS

A small one, Molon's size.

HERACLES

Caused by a woman?

DIONYSUS

No.

HERACLES

A boy?

DIONYSUS

No, no.

HERACLES

A man?

DIONYSUS

Ah! ah!

HERACLES

Was it for Cleisthenes?

DIONYSUS

Don't mock me, brother: on my life I am

In a bad way: such fierce desire consumes me.

HERACLES

Aye, little brother? how?

DIONYSUS

I can't describe it.

But yet I'll tell you in a riddling way.

Have you e'er felt a sudden lust for soup?

HERACLES

Soup! Zeus-a-mercy, yes, ten thousand times.

DIONYSUS

Is the thing clear, or must I speak again?

HERACLES

Not of the soup: I'm clear about the soup.

DIONYSUS

Well, just that sort of pang devours my heart

For lost Euripides.

HERACLES

A dead man too.

DIONYSUS

And no one shall persuade me not to go

After the man.

HERACLES

Do you mean below, to Hades?

DIONYSUS

And lower still, if there's a lower still.

HERACLES

What on earth for?

DIONYSUS

I want a genuine poet,

"For some are not, and those that are, are bad."

HERACLES

What! does not Iophon live?

DIONYSUS

Well, he's the sole  
Good thing remaining, if even he is good.  
For even of that I'm not exactly certain.

HERACLES

If go you must, there's Sophocles- he comes  
Before Euripides- why not take him?

DIONYSUS

Not till I've tried if Iophon's coin rings true  
When he's alone, apart from Sophocles.  
Besides, Euripides, the crafty rogue,  
Will find a thousand shifts to get away,  
But he was easy here, is easy there.

HERACLES

But Agathon, where is he?

DIONYSUS

He has gone and left us.

A genial poet, by his friends much missed.

HERACLES

Gone where?

DIONYSUS

To join the blessed in their banquets.

HERACLES

But what of Xenocles?

DIONYSUS

O he be hanged!

HERACLES

Pythangelus?

XANTHIAS

But never a word of me,

Not though my shoulder's chafed so terribly.

HERACLES

But have you not a shoal of little songsters,  
Tragedians by the myriad, who can chatter  
A furlong faster than Euripides?

DIONYSUS

Those be mere vintage-leavings, jabberers, choirs  
Of swallow-broods, degraders of their art,  
Who get one chorus, and are seen no more,  
The Muses' love once gained. But O, my friend,  
Search where you will, you'll never find a true  
Creative genius, uttering startling things.

HERACLES

Creative? how do you mean?

DIONYSUS

I mean a man

Who'll dare some novel venturesome conceit,  
"Air, Zeus's chamber," or "Time's foot," or this,  
"'Twas not my mind that swore: my tongue committed  
A little perjury on its own account."

HERACLES

You like that style?

DIONYSUS

Like it? I dote upon it.

HERACLES

I vow its ribald nonsense, and you know it.

DIONYSUS

"Rule not my mind": you've got a house to mind.

HERACLES

Really and truly though 'tis paltry stuff.

DIONYSUS

Teach me to dine!

XANTHIAS

But never a word of me.

DIONYSUS

But tell me truly- 'twas for this I came  
Dressed up to mimic you- what friends received  
And entertained you when you went below  
To bring back Cerberus, in case I need them.  
And tell me too the havens, fountains, shops,  
Roads, resting-places, stews, refreshment-rooms,  
Towns, lodgings, hostesses, with whom were found  
The fewest bugs.

XANTHIAS

But never a word of me.

HERACLES

You are really game to go?

DIONYSUS

O drop that, can't you?

And tell me this: of all the roads you know  
Which is the quickest way to get to Hades?  
I want one not too warm, nor yet too cold.

HERACLES

Which shall I tell you first? which shall it be?  
There's one by rope and bench: you launch away  
And- hang yourself.

DIONYSUS

No thank you: that's too stifling.

HERACLES

Then there's a track, a short and beaten cut,  
By pestle and mortar.

DIONYSUS

Hemlock, do you mean?

HERACLES

Just so.

DIONYSUS

No, that's too deathly cold a way;  
You have hardly started ere your shins get numbed.

HERACLES

Well, would you like a steep and swift descent?  
DIONYSUS  
Aye, that's the style: my walking powers are small.  
HERACLES  
Go down to the Cerameicus.  
DIONYSUS  
And do what?  
HERACLES  
Climb to the tower's top pinnacle-  
DIONYSUS  
And then?  
HERACLES  
Observe the torch-race started, and when all  
The multitude is shouting "Let them go,"  
Let yourself go.  
DIONYSUS  
Go! whither?  
HERACLES  
To the ground.  
DIONYSUS  
And lose, forsooth, two envelopes of brain.  
I'll not try that.  
HERACLES  
Which will you try?  
DIONYSUS  
The way  
You went yourself.  
HERACLES  
A parlous voyage that,  
For first you'll come to an enormous lake  
Of fathomless depth.  
DIONYSUS  
And how am I to cross?  
HERACLES  
An ancient mariner will row you over  
In a wee boat, so big. The fare's two obols.  
DIONYSUS  
Fie! The power two obols have, the whole world through!  
How came they thither!  
HERACLES  
Theseus took them down.  
And next you'll see great snakes and savage monsters  
In tens of thousands.  
DIONYSUS  
You needn't try to scare me,  
I'm going to go.  
HERACLES  
Then weltering seas of filth  
And ever-rippling dung: and plunged therein,

Whoso has wronged the stranger here on earth,  
Or robbed his boylove of the promised pay,  
Or swung his mother, or profanely smitten  
His father's check, or sworn an oath forsworn,  
Or copied out a speech of Morsimus.

DIONYSUS

There too, perdie, should he be plunged, whoe'er  
Has danced the sword-dance of Cinesias.

HERACLES

And next the breath of flutes will float around you,  
And glorious sunshine, such as ours, you'll see,  
And myrtle groves, and happy bands who clap  
Their hands in triumph, men and women too.

DIONYSUS

And who are they?

HERACLES

The happy mystic bands,

XANTHIAS

And I'm the donkey in the mystery show.  
But I'll not stand it, not one instant longer.

HERACLES

Who'll tell you everything you want to know.  
You'll find them dwelling close beside the road  
You are going to travel, just at Pluto's gate.  
And fare thee well, my brother.

DIONYSUS

And to you

Good cheer. (Exit HERACLES.) Now sirrah, pick you up the traps.

XANTHIAS

Before I've put them down?

DIONYSUS

And quickly too.

XANTHIAS

No, prithee, no: but hire a body, one  
They're carrying out, on purpose for the trip.

DIONYSUS

If I can't find one?

XANTHIAS

Then I'll take them.

DIONYSUS

Good.

And see! they are carrying out a body now.  
Here a CORPSE, wrapped in its grave-clothes, and  
lying on a bier, is carried across the stage.  
Hallo! you there, you deadman, are you willing  
To carry down our little traps to Hades?

CORPSE

What are they?

DIONYSUS



These.

CORPSE

Two drachmas for the job?

DIONYSUS

Nay, that's too much.

CORPSE

Out of the pathway, you!

DIONYSUS

Beshrew thee, stop: may-be we'll strike a bargain.

CORPSE

Pay me two drachmas, or it's no use talking.

DIONYSUS

One and a half.

CORPSE

I'd liefer live again!

XANTHIAS

How absolute the knave is! He be hanged!

I'll go myself.

DIONYSUS

You're the right sort, my man.

Now to the ferry.

Enter CHARON.

CHARON

Yoh, up! lay her to.

XANTHIAS

Whatever's that?

DIONYSUS

Why, that's the lake, by Zeus,

Whereof he spake, and yon's the ferry-boat.

XANTHIAS

Poseidon, yes, and that old fellow's Charon.

DIONYSUS

Charon! O welcome, Charon! welcome, Charon!

CHARON

Who's for the Rest from every pain and ill?

Who's for the Lethe's plain? the Donkey-shearings?

Who's for Cerberia? Taenarum? or the Ravens?

DIONYSUS

I.

CHARON

Hurry in.

DIONYSUS

But where are you going really?

In truth to the Ravens?

CHARON

Aye, for your behoof.

Step in.

DIONYSUS (to XANTHIAS)

Now, lad.

CHARON

A slave? I take no slave,  
Unless he has fought for his bodyrights at sea.

XANTHIAS

I couldn't go. I'd got the eye-disease.

CHARON

Then fetch a circuit round about the lake.

XANTHIAS

Where must I wait?

CHARON

Beside the Withering stone,  
Hard by the Rest.

DIONYSUS

You understand?

XANTHIAS

Too well.

O, what ill omen crossed me as I started! Exit.

CHARON (to DIONYSUS)

Sit to the oar. (calling) Who else for the boat? Be quick.  
(to DIONYSUS) Hi! what are you doing?

DIONYSUS

What am I doing? Sitting  
On to the oar. You told me to, yourself.

CHARON

Now sit you there, you little Potgut.

DIONYSUS

So?

CHARON

Now stretch your arms full length before you.

DIONYSUS

So?

CHARON

Come, don't keep fooling; plant your feet, and now  
Pull with a will.

DIONYSUS

Why, how am I to pull?

I'm not an oarsman, seaman, Salaminian.  
I can't.

CHARON

You can. Just dip your oar in once,  
You'll hear the loveliest timing songs.

DIONYSUS

What from?

CHARON

Frog-swans, most wonderful.

DIONYSUS

Then give the word.

CHARON

Heave ahoy! heave ahoy!

FROGS (off stage)

Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax,  
Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax!

We children of the fountain and the lake  
Let us wake

Our full choir-shout, as the flutes are ringing out,  
Our symphony of clear-voiced song.

The song we used to love in the Marshland up above,  
In praise of Dionysus to produce,

Of Nysaeon Dionysus, son of Zeus,

When the revel-tipsy throng, all crapulous and gay,  
To our precinct reeled along on the holy Pitcher day,

Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax.

DIONYSUS

O, dear! O, dear! now I declare  
I've got a bump upon my rump,

FROGS

Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax.

DIONYSUS

But you, perchance, don't care.

FROGS

Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax.

DIONYSUS

Hang you, and your ko-axing too!

There's nothing but ko-ax with you.

FROGS

That is right, Mr. Busybody, right!

For the Muses of the lyre love us well;

And hornfoot Pan who plays

on the pipe his jocund lays;

And Apollo, Harper bright,

in our Chorus takes delight;

For the strong reed's sake

which I grow within my lake

To be girdled in his lyre's deep shell.

Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax.

DIONYSUS

My hands are blistered very sore;

My stern below is sweltering so,

'Twill soon, I know, upturn and roar

Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax.

O tuneful race, O pray give o'er,

O sing no more.

FROGS

Ah, no! ah, no!

Loud and louder our chant must flow.

Sing if ever ye sang of yore,

When in sunny and glorious days

Through the rushes and marsh-flags springing

On we swept, in the joy of singing  
Myriad-diving roundelays.  
Or when fleeing the storm, we went  
Down to the depths, and our choral song  
Wildly raised to a loud and long  
Bubble-bursting accompaniment.  
FROGS and DIONYSUS  
Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax.  
DIONYSUS  
This timing song I take from you.  
FROGS  
That's a dreadful thing to do.  
DIONYSUS  
Much more dreadful, if I row  
Till I burst myself, I trow.  
FROGS and DIONYSUS  
Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax.  
DIONYSUS  
Go, hang yourselves; for what care I?  
FROGS  
All the same we'll shout and cry,  
Stretching all our throats with song,  
Shouting, crying, all day long,  
FROGS and DIONYSUS  
Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax.  
DIONYSUS  
In this you'll never, never win.  
FROGS  
This you shall not beat us in.  
DIONYSUS  
No, nor ye prevail o'er me.  
Never! never! I'll my song,  
Shout, if need be, all day long,  
Until I've learned to master your ko-ax.  
Brekekekex, ko-ax, ko-ax.  
I thought I'd put a stop to your ko-ax.  
CHARON  
Stop! Easy! Take the oar and push her to.  
Now pay your fare and go.  
DIONYSUS  
Here' tis: two obols.  
Xanthias! where's Xanthias? Is it Xanthias there?  
XANTHIAS (off stage)  
Hoi, hoi!  
DIONYSUS  
Come hither.  
XANTHIAS (entering)  
Glad to meet you, master.  
DIONYSUS

What have you there?

XANTHIAS

Nothing but filth and darkness.

DIONYSUS

But tell me, did you see the parricides  
And perjured folk he mentioned?

XANTHIAS

Didn't you?

DIONYSUS

Poseidon, yes. Why look! (pointing to the audience)

I see them now.

What's the next step?

XANTHIAS

We'd best be moving on.

This is the spot where Heracles declared  
Those savage monsters dwell.

DIONYSUS

O hang the fellow.

That's all his bluff: he thought to scare me off,  
The jealous dog, knowing my plucky ways.  
There's no such swaggerer lives as Heracles.  
Why, I'd like nothing better than to achieve  
Some bold adventure, worthy of our trip.

XANTHIAS

I know you would. Hallo! I hear a noise.

DIONYSUS

Where? what?

XANTHIAS

Behind us, there.

DIONYSUS

Get you behind.

XANTHIAS

No, it's in front.

DIONYSUS

Get you in front directly.

XANTHIAS

And now I see the most ferocious monster.

DIONYSUS

O, what's it like?

XANTHIAS

Like everything by turns.

Now it's a bull: now it's a mule: and now  
The loveliest girl.

DIONYSUS

O, where? I'll go and meet her.

XANTHIAS

It's ceased to be a girl: it's a dog now.

DIONYSUS

It is Empusa!

XANTHIAS

Well, its face is all  
Ablaze with fire.

DIONYSUS

Has it a copper leg?

XANTHIAS

A copper leg? yes, one; and one of cow dung.

DIONYSUS

O, whither shall I flee?

XANTHIAS

O, whither I?

DIONYSUS

My priest, protect me, and we'll sup together.

XANTHIAS

King Heracles, we're done for.

DIONYSUS

O, forbear,

Good fellow, call me anything but that.

XANTHIAS

Well then, Dionysus.

DIONYSUS

O, that's worse again,

XANTHIAS (to the SPECTRE)

Aye, go thy way. O master, here, come here.

DIONYSUS

O, what's up now?

XANTHIAS

Take courage; all's serene.

And, like Hegelochus, we now may say  
"Out of the storm there comes a new wether."

Empusa's gone.

DIONYSUS

Swear it.

XANTHIAS

By Zeus she is.

DIONYSUS

Swear it again.

XANTHIAS

By Zeus.

DIONYSUS

Again.

XANTHIAS

By Zeus.

O dear, O dear, how pale I grew to see her,  
But he, from fright has yellowed me all over.

DIONYSUS

Ah me, whence fall these evils on my head?

Who is the god to blame for my destruction?

Air, Zeus's chamber, or the Foot of Time?

(A flute is played behind the scenes.)

XANTHIAS

What's the matter?

DIONYSUS

Didn't you hear it?

XANTHIAS

What?

DIONYSUS

The breath of flutes.

XANTHIAS

Aye, and a whiff of torches

Breathed o'er me too; a very mystic whiff.

DIONYSUS

Then crouch we down, and mark what's going on.

CHORUS (in the distance)

O Iacchus! O Iacchus! O Iacchus!

XANTHIAS

I have it, master: 'tis those blessed Mystics,

Of whom he told us, sporting hereabouts.

They sing the Iacchus which Diagoras made.

DIONYSUS

I think so too: we had better both keep quiet

And so find out exactly what it is.

Enter CHORUS, who had chanted the songs of the FROGS,  
as initiates.

CHORUS

O Iacchus! power excelling,  
here in stately temples dwelling.

O Iacchus! O Iacchus!

Come to tread this verdant level,

Come to dance in mystic revel,

Come whilst round thy forehead hurtles

Many a wreath of fruitful myrtles,

Come with wild and saucy paces

Mingling in our joyous dance,

Pure and holy, which embraces

all the charms of all the Graces,

When the mystic choirs advance.

XANTHIAS

Holy and sacred queen, Demeter's daughter,

O, what a jolly whiff of pork breathed o'er me!

DIONYSUS

Hist! and perchance you'll get some tripe yourself.

CHORUS

Come, arise, from sleep awaking,  
come the fiery torches shaking,

O Iacchus! O Iacchus!

Morning Star that shinest nightly.

Lo, the mead is blazing brightly,

Age forgets its years and sadness,  
Aged knees curvet for gladness,  
Lift thy flashing torches o'er us,  
Marshal all thy blameless train,  
Lead, O lead the way before us;  
    lead the lovely youthful Chorus  
    To the marshy flowery plain.  
All evil thoughts and profane be still:  
    far hence, far hence from our choirs depart,  
Who knows not well what the Mystics tell,  
    or is not holy and pure of heart;  
Who ne'er has the noble revelry learned,  
    or danced the dance of the Muses high;  
Or shared in the Bacchic rites which old  
    bull-eating Cratinus's words supply;  
Who vulgar coarse buffoonery loves,  
    though all untimely the they make;  
Or lives not easy and kind with all,  
    or kindling faction forbears to slake,  
But fans the fire, from a base desire  
    some pitiful gain for himself to reap;  
Or takes, in office, his gifts and bribes,  
    while the city is tossed on the stormy deep;  
Who fort or fleet to the foe betrays;  
    or, a vile Thorycion, ships away  
Forbidden stores from Aegina's shores,  
    to Epidaurus across the Bay  
Transmitting oar-pads and sails and tar,  
    that curst collector of five per cents;  
The knave who tries to procure supplies  
    for the use of the enemy's armaments;  
The Cyclian singer who dares befoul  
    the Lady Hecate's wayside shrine;  
The public speaker who once lampooned  
    in our Bacchic feasts would, with heart malign,  
Keep nibbling away the Comedians' pay;-  
    to these I utter my warning cry,  
I charge them once, I charge them twice,  
    I charge them thrice, that they draw not nigh  
To the sacred dance of the Mystic choir.  
    But ye, my comrades, awake the song,  
The night-long revels of joy and mirth  
    which ever of right to our feast belong.  
Advance, true hearts, advance!  
On to the gladsome bowers,  
On to the sward, with flowers  
Embosomed bright!  
March on with jest, and jeer, and dance,  
Full well ye've supped to-night.



March, chanting loud your lays,  
Your hearts and voices raising,  
The Saviour goddess praising  
Who vows she'll still  
Our city save to endless days,  
Whate'er Thorycion's will.

Break off the measure, and change the time;  
and now with chanting and hymns adorn  
Demeter, goddess mighty and high,  
the harvest-queen, the giver of corn.

O Lady, over our rites presiding,  
Preserve and succour thy choral throng,  
And grant us all, in thy help confiding,  
To dance and revel the whole day long;  
AND MUCH in earnest, and much in jest,  
Worthy thy feast, may we speak therein.  
And when we have bantered and laughed our best,  
The victor's wreath be it ours to win.

Call we now the youthful god,  
call him hither without delay,  
Him who travels amongst his chorus,  
dancing along on the Sacred Way.

O, come with the joy of thy festival song,  
O, come to the goddess, O, mix with our throng  
Untired, though the journey be never so long.

O Lord of the frolic and dance,  
Iacchus, beside me advance!

For fun, and for cheapness, our dress thou hast rent,  
Through thee we may dance to the top of our bent,  
Reviling, and jeering, and none will resent.

O Lord of the frolic and dance,  
Iacchus, beside me advance!

A sweet pretty girl I observed in the show,  
Her robe had been torn in the scuffle, and lo,  
There peeped through the tatters a bosom of snow.

O Lord of the frolic and dance,  
Iacchus, beside me advance!

DIONYSUS

Wouldn't I like to follow on, and try  
A little sport and dancing?

XANTHIAS

Wouldn't I?

CHORUS

Shall we all a merry joke  
At Archedemus poke,  
Who has not cut his guildsmen yet, though seven years old;  
Yet up among the dead  
He is demagogue and head  
And contrives the topmost place of the rascaldom to hold?

And Cleisthenes, they say,  
Is among the tombs all day,  
Bewailing for his lover with a lamentable whine.  
And Callias, I'm told,  
Has become a sailor bold,  
And casts a lion's hide o'er his members feminine.

DIONYSUS

Can any of you tell  
Where Pluto here may dwell,  
For we, sirs, are two strangers who were never here before?

CHORUS

O, then no further stray,  
Nor again inquire the way,  
For know that ye have journeyed to his very entrance-door.

DIONYSUS

Take up the wraps, my lad.

XANTHIAS

Now is not this too bad?  
Like "Zeus's Corinth," he "the wraps" keeps saying o'er and o'er.

CHORUS

Now wheel your sacred dances through the glade with flowers  
bedight,  
All ye who are partakers of the holy festal rite;  
And I will with the women and the holy maidens go  
Where they keep the nightly vigil, an auspicious light to show.  
Now haste we to the roses,  
And the meadows full of posies,  
Now haste we to the meadows  
In our own old way,  
In choral dances blending,  
In dances never ending,  
Which only for the holy  
The Destinies array.  
O, happy mystic chorus,  
The blessed sunshine o'er us  
On us alone is smiling,  
In its soft sweet light:  
On us who strove forever  
With holy, pure endeavour,  
Alike by friend and stranger  
To guide our steps aright.

DIONYSUS

What's the right way to knock? I wonder how  
The natives here are wont to knock at doors.

XANTHIAS

No dawdling: taste the door. You've got, remember,  
The lion-hide and pride of Heracles.

DIONYSUS (knocking)

Boy! boy!

The door opens. AEACUS appears.

AEACUS

Who's there?

DIONYSUS

I, Heracles the strong!

AEACUS

O, you most shameless desperate ruffian, you!

O, villain, villain, arrant vilest villain!

Who seized our Cerberus by the throat, and fled,

And ran, and rushed, and bolted, haling off

The dog, my charge! But now I've got thee fast.

So close the Styx's inky-hearted rock,

The blood-bedabbled peak of Acheron

Shall hem thee in: the hell-hounds of Cocytus

Prowl round thee; whilst the hundred-headed Asp

Shall rive thy heart-strings: the Tartesian Lamprey

Prey on thy lungs: and those Tithrasian Gorgons

Mangle and tear thy kidneys, mauling them,

Entrails and all, into one bloody mash.

I'll speed a running foot to fetch them hither.

Exit AEACUS.

XANTHIAS

Hallo! what now?

DIONYSUS

I've done it: call the god.

XANTHIAS

Get up, you laughing-stock; get up directly,

Before you're seen.

DIONYSUS

What, I get up? I'm fainting.

Please dab a sponge of water on my heart.

XANTHIAS

Here! Dab it on.

DIONYSUS

Where is it?

XANTHIAS

Ye golden gods,

Lies your heart there?

DIONYSUS

It got so terrified

It fluttered down into my stomach's pit.

XANTHIAS

Cowardliest of gods and men!

DIONYSUS

The cowardliest? I?

What I, who asked you for a sponge, a thing

A coward never would have done!

XANTHIAS

What then?

DIONYSUS

A coward would have lain there wallowing;  
But I stood up, and wiped myself withal.

XANTHIAS

Poseidon! quite heroic.

DIONYSUS

'Deed I think so.

But weren't you frightened at those dreadful threats  
And shoutings?

XANTHIAS

Frightened? Not a bit. I cared not.

DIONYSUS

Come then, if you're so very brave a man,  
Will you be I, and take the hero's club  
And lion's skin, since you're so monstrous plucky?  
And I'll be now the slave, and bear the luggage.

XANTHIAS

Hand them across. I cannot choose but take them.  
And now observe the Xanthio-heracles  
If I'm a coward and a sneak like you.

DIONYSUS

Nay, you're the rogue from Melite's own self.  
And I'll pick up and carry on the traps.

Enter a MAID-SERVANT of Persephone, from the door.

MAID

O welcome, Heracles! come in, sweetheart.  
My Lady, when they told her, set to work,  
Baked mighty loaves, boiled two or three tureens  
Of lentil soup, roasted a prime ox whole,  
Made rolls and honey-cakes. So come along.

XANTHIAS (declining)

You are too kind.

MAID

I will not let you go.

I will not let you! Why, she's stewing slices  
Of juicy bird's-flesh, and she's making comfits,  
And tempering down her richest wine. Come, dear,  
Come along in.

XANTHIAS (still declining)

Pray thank her.

MAID

O you're jesting,

I shall not let you off: there's such a lovely  
Flute-girl all ready, and we've two or three  
Dancing-girls also.

XANTHIAS

Eh! what! Dancing-girls?

MAID

Young budding virgins, freshly tired and trimmed.

Come, dear, come in. The cook was dishing up  
The cutlets, and they are bringing in the tables.

XANTHIAS

Then go you in, and tell those dancing-girls  
Of whom you spake, I'm coming in Myself.

Exit MAID.

Pick up the traps, my lad, and follow me.

DIONYSUS

Hi! stop! you're not in earnest, just because  
I dressed you up, in fun, as Heracles?  
Come, don't keep fooling, Xanthias, but lift  
And carry in the traps yourself.

XANTHIAS

Why! what!

You are never going to strip me of these togs  
You gave me!

DIONYSUS

Going to? No, I'm doing it now.

Off with that lion-skin.

XANTHIAS

Bear witness all,  
The gods shall judge between us.

DIONYSUS

Gods, indeed!

Why, how could you (the vain and foolish thought!)  
A slave, a mortal, act Alcmena's son?

XANTHIAS

All right then, take them; maybe, if God will,  
You'll soon require my services again.

CHORUS

This is the part of a dexterous clever  
Man with his wits about him ever,  
One who has travelled the world to see;  
Always to shift, and to keep through all  
Close to the sunny side of the wall;  
Not like a pictured block to be,  
Standing always in one position;  
Nay but to veer, with expedition,  
And ever to catch the favouring breeze,  
This is the part of a shrewd tactician,  
This is to be a- Theramenes!

DIONYSUS

Truly an exquisite joke 'twould be,  
Him with a dancing-girl to see,  
Lolling at ease on Milesian rugs;  
Me, like a slave, beside him standing,  
Aught that he wants to his lordship handing;  
Then as the damsel fair he hugs,  
Seeing me all on fire to embrace her,

He would perchance (for there's no man baser),  
Turning him round like a lazy lout,  
Straight on my mouth deliver a facer,  
Knocking my ivory choirmen out.

Enter HOSTESS and PLATHANE.

HOSTESS

O Plathane! Plathane! Here's that naughty man,  
That's he who got into our tavern once,  
And ate up sixteen loaves.

PLATHANE

O, so he is!

The very man.

XANTHIAS

Bad luck for somebody!

HOSTESS

O and, besides, those twenty bits of stew,  
Half-obol pieces.

XANTHIAS

Somebody's going to catch it!

HOSTESS

That garlic too.

DIONYSUS

Woman, you're talking nonsense.

You don't know what you're saying.

HOSTESS

O, you thought

I shouldn't know you with your buskins on!  
Ah, and I've not yet mentioned all that fish,  
No, nor the new-made cheese: he gulped it down,  
Baskets and all, unlucky that we were.  
And when I just alluded to the price,  
He looked so fierce, and bellowed like a bull.

XANTHIAS

Yes, that's his way: that's what he always does.

HOSTESS

O, and he drew his sword, and seemed quite mad.

PLATHANE

O, that he did.

HOSTESS

And terrified us so

We sprang up to the cockloft, she and I.  
Then out he hurled, decamping with the rugs.

XANTHIAS

That's his way too; something must be done.

HOSTESS

Quick, run and call my patron Cleon here!

PLATHANE

O, if you meet him, call Hyperbolus!  
We'll pay you out to-day.

HOSTESS

O filthy throat,  
O how I'd like to take a stone, and hack  
Those grinders out with which you chewed my wares.

PLATHANE

I'd like to pitch you in the deadman's pit.

HOSTESS

I'd like to get a reaping-hook and scoop  
That gullet out with which you gorged my tripe.  
But I'll to Cleon: he'll soon serve his writs;  
He'll twist it out of you to-day, he will.

Exeunt HOSTESS and PLATHANE.

DIONYSUS

Perdition seize me, if I don't love Xanthias.

XANTHIAS

Aye, aye, I know your drift: stop, stop that talking  
I won't be Heracles.

DIONYSUS

O, don't say so,  
Dear, darling Xanthias.

XANTHIAS

Why, how can I,  
A slave, a mortal, act Alcmena's son!

DIONYSUS

Aye, aye, I know you are vexed, and I deserve it,  
And if you pummel me, I won't complain.  
But if I strip you of these togs again,  
Perdition seize myself, my wife, my children,  
And, most of all, that blear-eyed Archedemus.

XANTHIAS

That oath contents me: on those terms I take them.

CHORUS

Now that at last you appear once more,  
Wearing the garb that at first you wore,  
Wielding the club and the tawny skin,  
Now it is yours to be up and doing,  
Glaring like mad, and your youth renewing,  
Mindful of him whose guise you are in.  
If, when caught in a bit of a scrape, you  
Suffer a word of alarm to escape you,  
Showing yourself but a feckless knave,  
Then will your master at once undrape you,  
Then you'll again be the toiling slave.

XANTHIAS

There, I admit, you have given to me a  
Capital hint, and the like idea,  
Friends, had occurred to myself before.  
Truly if anything good befell  
He would be wanting, I know full well,

Wanting to take to the togs once more.  
Nevertheless, while in these I'm vested,  
Ne'er shall you find me craven-crested,  
No, for a dittany look I'll wear,  
Aye and methinks it will soon be tested,  
Hark! how the portals are rustling there.

Re-enter AEACUS with assistants.

AEACUS

Seize the dog-stealer, bind him, pinion him,  
Drag him to justice!

DIONYSUS

Somebody's going to catch it.

XANTHIAS (striking out)

Hands off! get away! stand back!

AEACUS

Eh? You're for fighting.

Ho! Ditylas, Scebylas, and Pardocas,  
Come hither, quick; fight me this sturdy knave.

DIONYSUS

Now isn't it a shame the man should strike  
And he a thief besides?

AEACUS

A monstrous shame!

DIONYSUS

A regular burning shame!

XANTHIAS

By the Lord Zeus,  
If ever I was here before, if ever  
I stole one hair's-worth from you, let me die!  
And now I'll make you a right noble offer,  
Arrest my lad: torture him as you will,  
And if you find I'm guilty, take and kill me.

AEACUS

Torture him, how?

XANTHIAS

In any mode you please.  
Pile bricks upon him: stuff his nose with acid:  
Flay, rack him, hoist him; flog him with a scourge  
Of prickly bristles: only not with this,  
A soft-leaved onion, or a tender leek.

AEACUS

A fair proposal. If I strike too hard  
And maim the boy, I'll make you compensation.

XANTHIAS

I shan't require it. Take him out and flog him.

AEACUS

Nay, but I'll do it here before your eyes.  
Now then, put down the traps, and mind you speak  
The truth, young fellow.



DIONYSUS (in agony)

Man' don't torture me!

I am a god. You'll blame yourself hereafter

If you touch me.

AEACUS

Hillo! What's that you are saying?

DIONYSUS

I say I'm Bacchus, son of Zeus, a god,

And he's the slave.

AEACUS

You hear him?

XANTHIAS

Hear him? Yes.

All the more reason you should flog him well.

For if he is a god, he won't perceive it.

DIONYSUS

Well, but you say that you're a god yourself.

So why not you be flogged as well as I?

XANTHIAS

A fair proposal. And be this the test,

Whichever of us two you first behold

Flinching or crying out- he's not the god.

AEACUS

Upon my word you're quite the gentleman,

You're all for right and justice. Strip then, both.

XANTHIAS

How can you test us fairly?

AEACUS

Easily.

I'll give you blow for blow.

XANTHIAS

A good idea.

We're ready now! (AEACUS strikes him) see if you catch me  
flinching.

AEACUS

I struck you.

XANTHIAS (incredulously)

No!

AEACUS

Well, it seems "no" indeed.

Now then I'll strike the other. (Strikes DIONYSUS.)

DIONYSUS

Tell me when?

AEACUS

I struck you.

DIONYSUS

Struck me? Then why didn't I sneeze?

AEACUS

Don't know, I'm sure. I'll try the other again.

XANTHIAS

And quickly too. Good gracious!

AEACUS

Why "good gracious"?

Not hurt you, did I?

XANTHIAS

No, I merely thought of

The Diomeian feast of Heracles.

AEACUS

A holy man! 'Tis now the other's turn.

DIONYSUS

Hi! Hi!

AEACUS

Hallo!

DIONYSUS

Look at those horsemen, look!

AEACUS

But why these tears?

DIONYSUS

There's such a smell of onions.

AEACUS

Then you don't mind it?

DIONYSUS (cheerfully)

Mind it? Not a bit.

AEACUS

Well, I must go to the other one again.

XANTHIAS

O! O!

AEACUS

Hallo!

XANTHIAS

Do pray pull out this thorn.

AEACUS

What does it mean? 'Tis this one's turn again.

DIONYSUS (shrieking)

Apollo! Lord! (calmly) of Delos and of Pytho.

XANTHIAS

He flinched! You heard him?

DIONYSUS

Not at all; a jolly

Verse of Hipponax flashed across my mind.

XANTHIAS

You don't half do it: cut his flanks to pieces.

AEACUS

By Zeus, well thought on. Turn your belly here.

DIONYSUS (screaming)

Poseidon!

XANTHIAS

There! he's flinching.

DIONYSUS (singing)

who dost reign

Amongst the Aegean peaks and creeks

And o'er the deep blue main.

AEACUS

No, by Demeter, still I can't find out

Which is the god, but come ye both indoors;

My lord himself and Persephassa there,

Being gods themselves, will soon find out the truth.

DIONYSUS

Right! right! I only wish you had thought of that

Before you gave me those tremendous whacks.

Exeunt DIONYSUS, XANTHIAS, AEACUS, and attendants.

CHORUS

Come, Muse, to our Mystical Chorus,

O come to the joy of my song,

O see on the benches before us

that countless and wonderful throng,

Where wits by the thousand abide,

with more than a Cleophon's pride-

On the lips of that foreigner base,

of Athens the bane and disgrace,

There is shrieking, his kinsman by race,

The garrulous swallow of Thrace;

From that perch of exotic descent,

Rejoicing her sorrow to vent,

She pours to her spirit's content,

a nightingale's woful lament,

That e'en though the voting be equal,

his ruin will soon be the sequel.

Well it suits the holy Chorus

evermore with counsel wise

To exhort and teach the city;

this we therefore now advise-

End the townsmen's apprehensions;

equalize the rights of all;

If by Phrynichus's wrestlings

some perchance sustained a fall,

Yet to these 'tis surely open,

having put away their sin,

For their slips and vacillations

pardon at your hands to win.

Give your brethren back their franchise.

Sin and shame it were that slaves,

Who have once with stern devotion

fought your battle on the waves,

Should be straightway lords and masters,

yea Plataeans fully blown-

Not that this deserves our censure;

there I praise you; there alone  
Has the city, in her anguish,  
policy and wisdom shown-  
Nay but these, of old accustomed  
on our ships to fight and win,  
(They, their fathers too before them),  
these our very kith and kin,  
You should likewise, when they ask you,  
pardon for their single sin.  
O by nature best and wisest,  
O relax your jealous ire,  
Let us all the world as kinsfolk  
and as citizens acquire,  
All who on our ships will battle  
well and bravely by our side.  
If we cocker up our city,  
narrowing her with senseless pride,  
Now when she is rocked and reeling  
in the cradles of the sea,  
Here again will after ages deem we acted brainlessly.  
And O if I'm able to scan  
the habits and life of a man  
Who shall rue his iniquities soon!  
not long shall that little baboon,  
That Cleigenes shifty and small,  
the wickedest bathman of all  
Who are lords of the earth- which is brought  
from the isle of Cimolus, and wrought  
With nitre and lye into soap-  
Not long shall he vex us, I hope.  
And this the unlucky one knows,  
Yet ventures a peace to oppose,  
And being addicted to blows  
he carries a stick as he goes,  
Lest while he is tipsy and reeling,  
some robber his cloak should be stealing.  
Often has it crossed my fancy,  
that the city loves to deal  
With the very best and noblest  
members of her commonweal,  
Just as with our ancient coinage,  
and the newly-minted gold.  
Yea for these, our sterling pieces,  
all of pure Athenian mould,  
All of perfect die and metal,  
all the fairest of the fair,  
All of workmanship unequalled,  
proved and valued everywhere  
Both amongst our own Hellenes

and Barbarians far away,  
These we use not: but the worthless  
pinchbeck coins of yesterday,  
Vilest die and basest metal,  
now we always use instead.  
Even so, our sterling townsmen,  
nobly born and nobly bred,  
Men of worth and rank and mettle,  
men of honourable fame,  
Trained in every liberal science,  
choral dance and manly game,  
These we treat with scorn and insult,  
but the strangers newliest come,  
Worthless sons of worthless fathers,  
pinchbeck townsmen, yellowy scum,  
Whom in earlier days the city  
hardly would have stooped to use  
Even for her scapegoat victims,  
these for every task we choose.  
O unwise and foolish people,  
yet to mend your ways begin;  
Use again the good and useful:  
so hereafter, if ye win  
'Twill be due to this your wisdom:  
if ye fall, at least 'twill be  
Not a fall that brings dishonour,  
falling from a worthy tree.  
Enter AEACUS, XANTHIAS and two attendants.

AEACUS

By Zeus the Saviour, quite the gentleman  
Your master is.

XANTHIAS

Gentleman? I believe you.  
He's all for wine and women, is my master.

AEACUS

But not to have flogged you, when the truth came out  
That you, the slave, were passing off as master!

XANTHIAS

He'd get the worst of that.

AEACUS

Bravo! that's spoken  
Like a true slave: that's what I love myself.

XANTHIAS

You love it, do you?

AEACUS

Love it? I'm entranced  
When I can curse my lord behind his back.

XANTHIAS

How about grumbling, when you have felt the stick,

And scurry out of doors?

AEACUS

That's jolly too.

XANTHIAS

How about prying?

AEACUS

That beats everything!

XANTHIAS

Great Kin-god Zeus! And what of overhearing  
Your master's secrets?

AEACUS

What? I'm mad with joy.

XANTHIAS

And blabbing them abroad?

AEACUS

O heaven and earth!

When I do that, I can't contain myself.

XANTHIAS

Phoebus Apollo! clap your hand in mine,  
Kiss and be kissed: and prithee tell me this,  
Tell me by Zeus, our rascaldom's own god,  
What's all that noise within? What means this hubbub  
And row?

AEACUS

That's Aeschylus and Euripides.

XANTHIAS

Eh?

AEACUS

Wonderful, wonderful things are going on.  
The dead are rioting, taking different sides.

XANTHIAS

Why, what's the matter?

AEACUS

There's a custom here

With all the crafts, the good and noble crafts,  
That the chief master of his art in each  
Shall have his dinner in the assembly hall,  
And sit by Pluto's side.

XANTHIAS

I understand.

AEACUS

Until another comes, more wise than he  
In the same art: then must the first give way.

XANTHIAS

And how has this disturbed our Aeschylus?

AEACUS

'Twas he that occupied the tragic chair,  
As, in his craft, the noblest.

XANTHIAS

Who does now?

AEACUS

But when Euripides came down, he kept  
Flourishing off before the highwaymen,  
Thieves, burglars, parricides- these form our mob  
In Hades- till with listening to his twists  
And turns, and pleas and counterpleas, they went  
Mad on the man, and hailed him first and wisest:  
Elate with this, he claimed the tragic chair  
Where Aeschylus was seated.

XANTHIAS

Wasn't he pelted?

AEACUS

Not he: the populace clamoured out to try  
Which of the twain was wiser in his art.

XANTHIAS

You mean the rascals?

AEACUS

Aye, as high as heaven!

XANTHIAS

But were there none to side with Aeschylus?

AEACUS

Scanty and sparse the good, (regards the audience) the same as  
here.

XANTHIAS

And what does Pluto now propose to do?

AEACUS

He means to hold a tournament, and bring  
Their tragedies to the proof.

XANTHIAS

But Sophocles,

How came not he to claim the tragic chair?

AEACUS

Claim it? Not he! When he came down, he kissed  
With reverence Aeschylus, and clasped his hand,  
And yielded willingly the chair to him.  
But now he's going, says Cleidemides,  
To sit third-man: and then if Aeschylus win,  
He'll stay content: if not, for his art's sake,  
He'll fight to the death against Euripides.

XANTHIAS

Will it come off?

AEACUS

O yes, by Zeus, directly.

And then, I hear, will wonderful things be done,  
The art poetic will be weighed in scales.

XANTHIAS

What! weigh out tragedy, like butcher's meat?

AEACUS

Levels they'll bring, and measuring-tapes for words,  
And moulded oblongs,

XANTHIAS

Is it bricks they are making?

AEACUS

Wedges and compasses: for Euripides  
Vows that he'll test the dramas, word by word.

XANTHIAS

Aeschylus chafes at this, I fancy.

AEACUS

Well,

He lowered his brows, upglaring like a bull.

XANTHIAS

And who's to be the judge?

AEACUS

There came the rub.

Skilled men were hard to find: for with the Athenians  
Aeschylus, somehow, did not hit it off,

XANTHIAS

Too many burglars, I expect, he thought.

AEACUS

And all the rest, he said, were trash and nonsense  
To judge poetic wits. So then at last  
They chose your lord, an expert in the art.  
But we go in: for when our lords are bent  
On urgent business, that means blows for us.

CHORUS

O surely with terrible wrath  
will the thunder-voiced monarch be filled,  
When he sees his opponent beside him,  
the tonguester, the artifice-skilled,  
Stand, whetting his tusks for the fight!  
O surely, his eyes rolling-fell  
Will with terrible madness be fraught!  
O then will be charging of plume-waving words  
with their wild-floating mane,  
And then will be whirling of splinters,  
and phrases smoothed down with the plane,  
When the man would the grand-stepping maxims,  
the language gigantic, repel  
Of the hero-creator of thought.  
There will his shaggy-born crest  
upbristle for anger and woe,  
Horribly frowning and growling,  
his fury will launch at the foe  
Huge-clamped masses of words,  
with exertion Titanic up-tearing  
Great ship-timber planks for the fray.  
But here will the tongue be at work,



uncoiling, word-testing, refining,  
Sophist-creator of phrases,  
dissecting, detracting, maligning,  
Shaking the envious bits,  
and with subtle analysis paring  
The lung's large labour away.

Here apparently there is a complete change of scene, to the Hall  
of Pluto, with himself sitting on his throne, and DIONYSUS, AESCHYLUS,  
and EURIPIDES in the foreground.

EURIPIDES

Don't talk to me; I won't give up the chair,  
I say I am better in the art than he.

DIONYSUS

You hear him, Aeschylus: why don't you speak?

EURIPIDES

He'll do the grand at first, the juggling trick  
He used to play in all his tragedies.

DIONYSUS

Come, my fine fellow, pray don't talk too big.

EURIPIDES

I know the man, I've scanned him through and through,  
A savage-creating stubborn-pulling fellow,  
Uncurbed, unfettered, uncontrolled of speech,  
Unperiphrastic, bombastiloquent.

AESCHYLUS

Hah! sayest thou so, child of the garden quean!  
And this to me, thou chattering-babble-collector,  
Thou pauper-creating rags-and-patches-stitcher?  
Thou shalt abye it dearly!

DIONYSUS

Pray, be still;  
Nor heat thy soul to fury, Aeschylus.

AESCHYLUS

Not till I've made you see the sort of man  
This cripple-maker is who crows so loudly.

DIONYSUS

Bring out a ewe, a black-fleeced ewe, my boys:  
Here's a typhoon about to burst upon us.

AESCHYLUS

Thou picker-up of Cretan monodies,  
Foisting thy tales of incest on the stage-

DIONYSUS

Forbear, forbear, most honoured Aeschylus;  
And you, my poor Euripides, begone  
If you are wise, out of this pitiless hail,  
Lest with some heady word he crack your scull  
And batter out your brain- less Telephus.  
And not with passion, Aeschylus, but calmly  
Test and be tested. 'Tis not meet for poets

To scold each other, like two baking-girls.  
But you go roaring like an oak on fire.

EURIPIDES

I'm ready, !! I don't draw back one bit.  
I'll lash or, if he will, let him lash first  
The talk, the lays, the sinews of a play:  
Aye and my Peleus, aye and Aeolus.  
And Meleager, aye and Telephus.

DIONYSUS

And what do you propose? Speak, Aeschylus.

AESCHYLUS

I could have wished to meet him elsewhere.  
We fight not here on equal terms.

DIONYSUS

Why not?

AESCHYLUS

My poetry survived me: his died with him:  
He's got it here, all handy to recite.  
Howbeit, if so you wish it, so we'll have it.

DIONYSUS

O bring me fire, and bring me frankincense.  
I'll pray, or e'er the clash of wits begin,  
To judge the strife with high poetic skill.  
Meanwhile (to the CHORUS) invoke the Muses with a song.

CHORUS

O Muses, the daughters divine  
of Zeus, the immaculate Nine,  
Who gaze from your mansions serene  
on intellects subtle and keen,  
When down to the tournament lists,  
in bright-polished wit they descend,  
With wrestling and turnings and twists  
in the battle of words to contend,  
O come and behold what the two  
antagonist poets can do,  
Whose mouths are the swiftest to teach  
grand language and filings of speech:  
For now of their wits is the sternest  
encounter commencing in earnest.

DIONYSUS

Ye two, put up your prayers before ye start.

AESCHYLUS

Demeter, mistress, nourisher of my soul,  
O make me worthy of thy mystic rites!

DIONYSUS (to EURIPIDES)

Now put on incense, you.

EURIPIDES

Excuse me, no;  
My vows are paid to other gods than these.

DIONYSUS

What, a new coinage of your own?

EURIPIDES

Precisely.

DIONYSUS

Pray then to them, those private gods of yours.

EURIPIDES

Ether, my pasture, volubly-rolling tongue,  
Intelligent wit and critic nostrils keen,  
O well and neatly may I trounce his plays!

CHORUS

We also are yearning from these to be learning  
Some stately measure, some majestic grand  
Movement telling of conflicts nigh.  
Now for battle arrayed they stand,  
Tongues embittered, and anger high.  
Each has got a venturesome will,  
Each an eager and nimble mind;  
One will wield, with artistic skill,  
Clearcut phrases, and wit refined;  
Then the other, with words defiant,  
Stern and strong, like an angry giant  
Laying on with uprooted trees,  
Soon will scatter a world of these  
Superscholastic subtleties.

DIONYSUS

Now then, commence your arguments,  
and mind you both display  
True wit, not metaphors, nor things  
which any fool could say.

EURIPIDES

As for myself, good people all,  
I'll tell you by-and-by  
My own poetic worth and claims;  
but first of all I'll try  
To show how this portentous quack  
beguiled the silly fools  
Whose tastes were nurtured, ere he came,  
in Phrynichus's schools.  
He'd bring some single mourner on,  
seated and veiled, 'twould be  
Achilles, say, or Niobe  
-the face you could not see-  
An empty show of tragic woe,  
who uttered not one thing.

DIONYSUS

'Tis true.

EURIPIDES

Then in the Chorus came,

and rattled off a string  
Of four continuous lyric odes:  
the mourner never stirred.

DIONYSUS

I liked it too. I sometimes think  
that I those mutes preferred  
To all your chatterers now-a-days.

EURIPIDES

Because, if you must know,  
You were an ass.

DIONYSUS

An ass, no doubt;  
what made him do it though?

EURIPIDES

That was his quackery, don't you see,  
to set the audience guessing  
When Niobe would speak; meanwhile,  
the drama was progressing.

DIONYSUS

The rascal, how he took me in!  
'Twas shameful, was it not?  
(To AESCHYLUS) What makes you stamp and fidget so?

EURIPIDES

He's catching it so hot.  
So when he had humbugged thus awhile,  
and now his wretched play  
Was halfway through, a dozen words,  
great wild-bull words, he'd say,  
Fierce Bugaboos, with bristling crests,  
and shaggy eyebrows too,  
Which not a soul could understand.

AESCHYLUS

O heavens!

DIONYSUS

Be quiet, do.

EURIPIDES

But not one single word was clear.

DIONYSUS

St! don't your teeth be gnashing.

EURIPIDES

'Twas all Scamanders, moated camps,  
and griffin-eagles flashing  
In burnished copper on the shields,  
chivalric-precipice-high  
Expressions, hard to comprehend.

DIONYSUS

Aye, by the Powers, and I  
Full many a sleepless night have spent  
in anxious thought, because

I'd find the tawny cock-horse out,  
what sort of bird it was!

AESCHYLUS

It was a sign, you stupid dolt,  
engraved the ships upon.

DIONYSUS

Eryxis I supposed it was,  
Philoxenus's son.

EURIPIDES

Now really should a cock be brought  
into a tragic play?

AESCHYLUS

You enemy gods and men,  
what was your practice, pray?

EURIPIDES

No cock-horse in my plays, by Zeus,  
no goat-stag there you'll see,  
Such figures as are blazoned forth  
in Median tapestry.

When first I took the art from you,  
bloated and swoln, poor thing,  
With turgid gasconading words  
and heavy dieting,

First I reduced and toned her down,  
and made her slim and neat  
With wordlets and with exercise  
and poultices of beet,

And next a dose of chatterjuice,  
distilled from books, I gave her,  
And monodies she took, with sharp  
Cephisophon for flavour.

I never used haphazard words,  
or plunged abruptly in;  
Who entered first explained at large  
the drama's origin

And source.

AESCHYLUS

Its source, I really trust,  
was better than your own.

EURIPIDES

Then from the very opening lines  
no idleness was shown;  
The mistress talked with all her might,  
the servant talked as much,  
The master talked, the maiden talked,  
the beldame talked.

AESCHYLUS

For such  
An outrage was not death your due?

EURIPIDES

No, by Apollo, no:  
That was my democratic way.

DIONYSUS

Ah, let that topic go.  
Your record is not there, my friend,  
particularly good.

EURIPIDES

Then next I taught all these to speak.

AESCHYLUS

You did so, and I would  
That ere such mischief you had wrought,  
your very rungs had split.

EURIPIDES

Canons of verse I introduced,  
and neatly chiselled wit;  
To look, to scan: to plot, to plan:  
to twist, to turn, to woo:  
On all to spy; in all to pry.

AESCHYLUS

You did: I say so too.

EURIPIDES

I showed them scenes of common life,  
the things we know and see,  
Where any blunder would at once  
by all detected be.  
I never blustered on, or took  
their breath and wits away  
By Cynuses or Memnons clad  
in terrible array,  
With bells upon their horses' heads,  
the audience to dismay.  
Look at his pupils, look at mine:  
and there the contrast view.  
Uncouth Megaenetus is his,  
and rough Phormisius too;  
Great long-beard-lance-and-trumpet-men,  
flesh-tearers with the pine:  
But natty smart Theramenes,  
and Cleitophon are mine.

DIONYSUS

Theramenes? a clever man  
and wonderfully sly:  
Immerse him in a flood of ills,  
he'll soon be high and dry,  
"A Kian with a kappa, sir,  
not Chian with a chi."

EURIPIDES

I taught them all these knowing ways

By chopping logic in my plays,  
And making all my speakers try  
To reason out the How and Why.  
So now the people trace the springs,  
The sources and the roots of things,  
And manage all their households too  
Far better than they used to do,  
Scanning and searching "What's amiss?"  
And, "Why was that?" And, "How is this?"

DIONYSUS

Ay, truly, never now a man  
Comes home, but he begins to scan;  
And to his household loudly cries,  
"Why, where's my pitcher? What's the matter?  
'Tis dead and gone my last year's platter.  
Who gnawed these olives? Bless the sprat,  
Who nibbled off the head of that?  
And where's the garlic vanished, pray,  
I purchased only yesterday?"  
-Whereas, of old, our stupid youths  
Would sit, with open mouths and eyes,  
Like any dull-brained Mammacouths.

CHORUS

"All this thou beholdest, Achilles our boldest."  
And what wilt thou reply? Draw tight the rein  
Lest that fiery soul of thine  
Whirl thee out of the listed plain,  
Past the olives, and o'er the line.  
Dire and grievous the charge he brings.  
See thou answer him, noble heart,  
Not with passionate bickerings.  
Shape thy course with a sailor's art,  
Reef the canvas, shorten the sails,  
Shift them edgewise to shun the gales.  
When the breezes are soft and low,  
Then, well under control, you'll go  
Quick and quicker to strike the foe.

O first of all the Hellenic bards  
    high loftily-towering verse to rear,  
And tragic phrase from the dust to raise,  
    pour forth thy fountain with right good cheer.

AESCHYLUS

My wrath is hot at this vile mischance,  
    and my spirit revolts at the thought that I  
Must bandy words with a fellow like him:  
    but lest he should vaunt that I can't reply-  
Come, tell me what are the points for which  
    a noble poet our praise obtains.

EURIPIDES

For his ready wit, and his counsels sage,  
and because the citizen folk he trains  
To be better townsmen and worthier men.

AESCHYLUS

If then you have done the very reverse,  
Found noble-hearted and virtuous men,  
and altered them, each and all, for the worse,  
Pray what is the meed you deserve to get?

DIONYSUS

Nay, ask not him. He deserves to die.

AESCHYLUS

For just consider what style of men  
he received from me, great six-foot-high  
Heroical souls, who never would blench  
from a townsman's duties in peace or war;  
Not idle loafers, or low buffoons,  
or rascally scamps such as now they are.  
But men who were breathing spears and helms,  
and the snow-white plume in its crested pride,  
The greave, and the dart, and the warrior's heart  
in its sevenfold casing of tough bull-hide.

DIONYSUS

He'll stun me, I know, with his armoury-work;  
this business is going from bad to worse.

EURIPIDES

And how did you manage to make them so grand,  
exalted, and brave with your wonderful verse?

DIONYSUS

Come, Aeschylus, answer, and don't stand mute  
in your self-willed pride and arrogant spleen.

AESCHYLUS

A drama I wrote with the War-god filled.

DIONYSUS

Its name?

AESCHYLUS

'Tis the Seven against Thebes that I mean.  
Which whoso beheld, with eagerness swelled  
to rush to the battlefield there and then.

DIONYSUS

O that was a scandalous thing you did!  
You have made the Thebans mightier men,  
More eager by far for the business of war.  
Now, therefore, receive this punch on the head.

AESCHYLUS

Ah, ye might have practised the same yourselves,  
but ye turned to other pursuits instead.  
Then next the Persians I wrote, in praise  
of the noblest deed that the world can show,  
And each man longed for the victor's wreath,



to fight and to vanquish his country's foe.

DIONYSUS

I was pleased, I own, when I heard their moan  
for old Darius, their great king, dead;  
When they smote together their hands, like this,  
and "Evir alake" the Chorus said.

AESCHYLUS

Aye, such are the poet's appropriate works:  
and just consider how all along  
From the very first they have wrought you good,  
the noble bards, the masters of song.  
First, Orpheus taught you religious rites,  
and from bloody murder to stay your hands:  
Musaeus healing and oracle lore;  
and Hesiod all the culture of lands,  
The time to gather, the time to plough.  
And gat not Homer his glory divine  
By singing of valour, and honour, and right,  
and the sheen of the battle-extended line,  
The ranging of troops and the arming of men?

DIONYSUS

O ay, but he didn't teach that, I opine,  
To Pantacles; when he was leading the show  
I couldn't imagine what he was at,  
He had fastened his helm on the top of his head,  
he was trying to fasten his plume upon that.

AESCHYLUS

But others, many and brave, he taught,  
of whom was Lamachus, hero true;  
And thence my spirit the impress took,  
and many a lion-heart chief I drew,  
Patrocluses, Teucers, illustrious names;  
for I fain the citizen-folk would spur  
To stretch themselves to their measure and height,  
whenever the trumpet of war they hear.  
But Phaedras and Stheneboeas? No!  
no harlotry business deformed my plays.  
And none can say that ever I drew  
a love-sick woman in all my days.

EURIPIDES

For you no lot or portion had got  
in Queen Aphrodite.

AESCHYLUS

Thank Heaven for that.  
But ever on you and yours, my friend,  
the mighty goddess mightily sat;  
Yourself she cast to the ground at last.

DIONYSUS

O ay, that uncommonly pat.

You showed how cuckolds are made, and lo,  
you were struck yourself by the very same fate.

EURIPIDES

But say, you cross-grained censor of mine,  
how my Stheneboeas could harm the state.

AESCHYLUS

Full many a noble dame, the wife  
of a noble citizen, hemlock took,  
And died, unable the shame and sin  
of your Bellerophon-scenes to brook.

EURIPIDES

Was then, I wonder, the tale I told  
of Phaedra's passionate love untrue?

AESCHYLUS

Not so: but tales of incestuous vice  
the sacred poet should hide from view,  
Nor ever exhibit and blazon forth  
on the public stage to the public ken.  
For boys a teacher at school is found,  
but we, the poets, are teachers of men.  
We are bound things honest and pure to speak.

EURIPIDES

And to speak great Lycabettuses, pray,  
And massive blocks of Parnassian rocks,  
is that things honest and pure to say?  
In human fashion we ought to speak.

AESCHYLUS

Alas, poor witling, and can't you see  
That for mighty thoughts and heroic aims,  
the words themselves must appropriate be?  
And grander belike on the ear should strike  
the speech of heroes and godlike powers,  
Since even the robes that invest their limbs  
are statelier, grander robes than ours.  
Such was my plan: but when you began,  
you spoilt and degraded it all.

EURIPIDES

How so?

AESCHYLUS

Your kings in tatters and rags you dressed,  
and brought them on, a beggarly show,  
To move, forsooth, our pity and ruth.

EURIPIDES

And what was the harm, I should like to know.

AESCHYLUS

No more will a wealthy citizen now  
equip for the state a galley of war.  
He wraps his limbs in tatters and rags,  
and whines he is "poor, too poor by far."

DIONYSUS

But under his rags he is wearing a vest,  
as woolly and soft as a man could wish.  
Let him gull the state, and he's off to the mart;  
an eager, extravagant buyer of fish.

AESCHYLUS

Moreover to prate, to harangue, to debate,  
is now the ambition of all in the state.  
Each exercise-ground is in consequence found  
deserted and empty: to evil repute  
Your lessons have brought our youngsters, and taught  
our sailors to challenge, discuss, and refute  
The orders they get from their captains and yet,  
when I was alive, I protest that the knaves  
Knew nothing at all, save for rations to call,  
and to sing "Rhyppapae" as they pulled through the waves.

DIONYSUS

And bedad to let fly from their sterns in the eye  
of the fellow who tugged at the undermost oar,  
And a jolly young messmate with filth to besmirch,  
and to land for a filching adventure ashore;  
But now they harangue, and dispute, and won't row  
And idly and aimlessly float to and fro.

AESCHYLUS

Of what ills is he not the creator and cause?  
Consider the scandalous scenes that he draws,  
His bawds, and his panders, his women who give  
Give birth in the sacredest shrine,  
Whilst others with brothers are wedded and bedded,  
And others opine  
That "not to be living" is truly "to live."  
And therefore our city is swarming to-day  
With clerks and with demagogue-monkeys, who play  
Their jackanape tricks at all times, in all places,  
Deluding the people of Athens; but none  
Has training enough in athletics to run  
With the torch in his hand at the races.

DIONYSUS

By the Powers, you are right! At the Panathenaea  
I laughed till I felt like a potsherd to see a  
Pale, paunchy young gentleman pounding along,  
With his head butting forward, the last of the throng,  
In the direst of straits; and behold at the gates,  
The Ceramites flapped him, and smacked him, and slapped him,  
In the ribs, and the loin, and the flank, and the groin,  
And still, as they spanked him, he puffed and he panted,  
Till at one mighty cuff, he discharged such a puff  
That he blew out his torch and levanted.

CHORUS

Dread the battle, and stout the combat,  
mighty and manifold looms the war.  
Hard to decide is the fight they're waging,  
One like a stormy tempest raging,  
One alert in the rally and skirmish,  
clever to parry and foin and spar.  
Nay but don't be content to sit  
Always in one position only:  
many the fields for your keen-edged wit.  
On then, wrangle in every way,  
Argue, battle, be flayed and flay,  
Old and new from your stores display,  
Yea, and strive with venturesome daring  
something subtle and neat to say.  
Fear ye this, that to-day's spectators  
lack the grace of artistic lore,  
Lack the knowledge they need for taking  
All the points ye will soon be making?  
Fear it not: the alarm is groundless:  
that, be sure, is the case no more.  
All have fought the campaign ere this:  
Each a book of the words is holding;  
never a single point they'll miss.  
Bright their natures, and now, I ween,  
Newly whetted, and sharp, and keen.  
Dread not any defect of wit,  
Battle away without misgiving,  
sure that the audience, at least, are fit.

EURIPIDES

Well then I'll turn me to your prologues now,  
Beginning first to test the first beginning  
Of this fine poet's plays. Why he's obscure  
Even in the enunciation of the facts.

DIONYSUS

Which of them will you test?

EURIPIDES

Many: but first

Give us that famous one from the Oresteia.

DIONYSUS

St! Silence all! Now, Aeschylus, begin.

AESCHYLUS

"Grave Hermes, witnessing a father's power,  
Be thou my saviour and mine aid to-day,  
For here I come and hither I return."

DIONYSUS

Any fault there?

EURIPIDES

A dozen faults and more.

DIONYSUS

Eh! why the lines are only three in all.  
EURIPIDES  
But every one contains a score of faults.  
DIONYSUS  
Now Aeschylus, keep silent; if you don't  
You won't get off with three iambic lines.  
AESCHYLUS  
Silent for him!  
DIONYSUS  
If my advice you'll take.  
EURIPIDES  
Why, at first starting here's a fault skyhigh.  
AESCHYLUS (to DIONYSUS)  
You see your folly?  
DIONYSUS  
Have your way; I care not.  
AESCHYLUS (to EURIPIDES)  
What is my fault?  
EURIPIDES  
Begin the lines again.  
AESCHYLUS  
"Grave Hermes, witnessing a father's power-"  
EURIPIDES  
And this beside his murdered father's grave  
Orestes speaks?  
AESCHYLUS  
I say not otherwise.  
EURIPIDES  
Then does he mean that when his father fell  
By craft and violence at a woman's hand,  
The god of craft was witnessing the deed?  
AESCHYLUS  
It was not he: it was the Helper Hermes  
He called the grave: and this he showed by adding  
It was his sire's prerogative he held.  
EURIPIDES  
Why this is worse than all. If from his father  
He held this office grave, why then-  
DIONYSUS  
He was  
A graveyard rifler on his father's side.  
AESCHYLUS  
Bacchus, the wine you drink is stale and fusty.  
DIONYSUS  
Give him another: (to EURIPIDES) you, look out for faults.  
AESCHYLUS  
"Be thou my saviour and mine aid to-day,  
For here I come, and hither I return."  
EURIPIDES

The same thing twice says clever Aeschylus.

DIONYSUS

How twice?

EURIPIDES

Why, just consider: I'll explain.

"I come," says he; and "I return," says he:

It's the same thing, to "come" and to "return."

DIONYSUS

Aye, just as if you said, "Good fellow, lend me

A kneading trough: likewise, a trough to knead in."

AESCHYLUS

It is not so, you everlasting talker,

They're not the same, the words are right enough.

DIONYSUS

How so? inform me how you use the words.

AESCHYLUS

A man, not banished from his home, may "come"

To any land, with no especial chance.

A home-bound exile both "returns" and "comes."

DIONYSUS

O good, by Apollo!

What do you say, Euripides, to that?

EURIPIDES

I say Orestes never did "return."

He came in secret: nobody recalled him.

DIONYSUS

O good, by Hermes!

(Aside) I've not the least suspicion what he means.

EURIPIDES

Repeat another line.

DIONYSUS

Ay, Aeschylus,

Repeat one instantly: you, mark what's wrong.

AESCHYLUS

"Now on this funeral mound I call my father

To hear, to hearken."

EURIPIDES

There he is again.

To "hear," to "hearken"; the same thing, exactly.

DIONYSUS

Aye, but he's speaking to the dead, you knave,

Who cannot hear us though we call them thrice.

AESCHYLUS

And how do you make your prologues?

EURIPIDES

You shall hear;

And if you find one single thing said twice,

Or any useless padding, spit upon me.

DIONYSUS

Well, fire away: I'm all agog to hear  
Your very accurate and faultless prologues.

EURIPIDES

"A happy man was Oedipus at first-"

AESCHYLUS

Not so, by Zeus; a most unhappy man.  
Who, not yet born nor yet conceived, Apollo  
Foretold would be his father's murderer.  
How could he be a happy man at first?

EURIPIDES

"Then he became the wretchedest of men."

AESCHYLUS

Not so, by Zeus; he never ceased to be.  
No sooner born, than they exposed the babe,  
(And that in winter), in an earthen crock,  
Lest he should grow a man, and slay his father.  
Then with both ankles pierced and swoln, he limped  
Away to Polybus: still young, he married  
An ancient crone, and her his mother too.  
Then scratched out both his eyes.

DIONYSUS

Happy indeed

Had he been Erasinides's colleague!

EURIPIDES

Nonsense; I say my prologues are firstrate.

AESCHYLUS

Nay then, by Zeus, no longer line by line  
I'll maul your phrases: but with heaven to aid  
I'll smash your prologues with a bottle of oil.

EURIPIDES

You mine with a bottle of oil?

AESCHYLUS

With only one.

You frame your prologues so that each and all  
Fit in with a "bottle of oil," or "coverlet-skin,"  
Or "reticule-bag." I'll prove it here, and now.

EURIPIDES

You'll prove it? You?

AESCHYLUS

I will.

DIONYSUS

Well then, begin.

EURIPIDES

"Aegyptus, sailing with his fifty sons,  
As ancient legends mostly tell the tale,  
Touching at Argos"

AESCHYLUS

Lost his bottle of oil.

EURIPIDES

Hang it, what's that? Confound that bottle of oil!

DIONYSUS

Give him another: let him try again.

EURIPIDES

"Bacchus, who, clad in fawnskins, leaps and bounds

With torch and thyrsus in the choral dance

Along Parnassus"

AESCHYLUS

Lost his bottle of oil.

DIONYSUS

Ah me, we are stricken- with that bottle again!

EURIPIDES

Pooh, pooh, that's nothing. I've a prologue here,

He'll never tack his bottle of oil to this:

"No man is blest in every single thing.

One is of noble birth, but lacking means.

Another, baseborn,"

AESCHYLUS

Lost his bottle of oil.

DIONYSUS

Euripides!

EURIPIDES

Well?

DIONYSUS

Lower your sails, my boy;

This bottle of is going to blow a gale.

EURIPIDES

O, by Demeter, I don't care one bit;

Now from his hands I'll strike that bottle of oil.

DIONYSUS

Go on then, go: but ware the bottle of oil.

EURIPIDES

"Once Cadmus, quitting the Sidonian town,

Agenor's offspring"

AESCHYLUS

Lost his bottle of oil.

DIONYSUS

O pray, my man, buy off that bottle of oil,

Or else he'll smash our prologues all to bits.

EURIPIDES

I buy of him?

DIONYSUS

If my advice you'll take.

EURIPIDES

No, no, I've many a prologue yet to say,

To which he can't tack on his bottle of oil.

"Pelops, the son of Tantalus, while driving

His mares to Pisa"

AESCHYLUS



Lost his bottle of oil.

DIONYSUS

There! he tacked on the bottle of oil again.  
O for heaven's sake, pay him its price, dear boy;  
You'll get it for an obol, spick and span.

EURIPIDES

Not yet, by Zeus; I've plenty of prologues left.  
"Oeneus once reaping"

AESCHYLUS

Lost his bottle of oil.

EURIPIDES

Pray let me finish one entire line first.  
"Oeneus once reaping an abundant harvest,  
Offering the firstfruits"

AESCHYLUS

Lost his bottle of oil.

DIONYSUS

What, in the act of offering? Fie! Who stole it?

EURIPIDES

O don't keep bothering! Let him try with this!  
"Zeus, as by Truth's own voice the tale is told,"

DIONYSUS

No, he'll cut in with "Lost his bottle of oil!"  
Those bottles of oil on all your prologues seem  
To gather and grow, like styes upon the eye.  
Turn to his melodies now for goodness' sake.

EURIPIDES

O I can easily show that he's a poor  
Melody-maker; makes them all alike.

CHORUS

What, O what will be done!  
Strange to think that he dare  
Blame the bard who has won,  
More than all in our days,  
Fame and praise for his lays,  
Lays so many and fair.  
Much I marvel to hear  
What the charge he will bring  
'Gainst our tragedy king;  
Yea for himself do I fear.

EURIPIDES

Wonderful lays! O yes, you'll see directly.  
I'll cut down all his metrical strains to one.

DIONYSUS

And I, I'll take some pebbles, and keep count.

A slight pause, during which the music of a flute is heard. The  
music continues to the end of line ~~~~ as an accompaniment to the  
recitative.

EURIPIDES

"Lord of Phthia, Achilles, why hearing the voice of the  
hero-dividing

Hah! smiting! approachest thou not to the rescue?

We, by the lake who abide, are adoring our ancestor Hermes.

Hah! smiting! approachest thou not to the rescue?"

DIONYSUS

O Aeschylus, twice art thou smitten!

EURIPIDES

"Hearken to me, great king; yea, hearken

Atreides, thou noblest of the Achaeans.

Hah! smiting! approachest thou not to the rescue?"

DIONYSUS

Thrice, Aeschylus, thrice art thou smitten!

EURIPIDES

"Hush! the bee-wardens are here: they will quickly the  
Temple of Artemis open.

Hah! smiting! approachest thou not to the rescue?

I will expound (for I know it) the omen the chieftains  
encountered.

Hah! smiting! approachest thou not to the rescue?"

DIONYSUS

O Zeus and King, the terrible lot of smittings!

I'll to the bath: I'm very sure my kidneys

Are quite inflamed and swoln with all these smittings.

EURIPIDES

Wait till you've heard another batch of lays

Culled from his lyre-accompanied melodies.

DIONYSUS

Go on then, go: but no more smittings, please.

EURIPIDES

"How the twin-throned powers of Achaea, the lords of the  
mighty Hellenes.

O phlattothrattophlattothrat!

Sendeth the Sphinx, the unchancy, the chieftainness bloodhound.

O phlattothrattophlattothrat!

Launcheth fierce with brand and hand the avengers the terrible  
eagle.

O phlattothrattophlattothrat!

So for the swift-winged hounds of the air he provided a booty.

O phlattothrattophlattothrat!

The throng down-bearing on Aias.

O phlattothrattophlattothrat!"

DIONYSUS

Whence comes that phlattothrat? From Marathon, or

Where picked you up these cable-twister's strains?

AESCHYLUS

From noblest source for noblest ends I brought them,

Unwilling in the Muses' holy field

The self-same flowers as Phrynichus to cull.

But he from all things rotten draws his lays,  
From Carian flutings, catches of Meletus,  
Dance-music, dirges. You shall hear directly.  
Bring me the lyre. Yet wherefore need a lyre  
For songs like these? Where's she that bangs and jangles  
Her castanets? Euripides's Muse,  
Present yourself: fit goddess for fit verse.

DIONYSUS

The Muse herself can't be a wanton? No!

AESCHYLUS

Halycons, who by the ever-rippling  
Waves of the sea are babbling,  
Dewing your plumes with the drops that fall  
From wings in the salt spray dabbling.  
Spiders, ever with twir-r-r-r-ling fingers  
Weaving the warp and the woof,  
Little, brittle, network, fretwork,  
Under the coigns of the roof.  
The minstrel shuttle's care.  
Where in the front of the dark-prowed ships  
Yarely the flute-loving dolphin skips.  
Races here and oracles there.  
And the joy of the young vines smiling,  
And the tendril of grapes, care-beguiling.  
O embrace me, my child, O embrace me.  
(To DIONYSUS) You see this foot?

DIONYSUS

I do.

AESCHYLUS

And this?

DIONYSUS

And that one too.

AESCHYLUS (to EURIPIDES)

You, such stuff who compile,  
Dare my songs to upbraid;  
You, whose songs in the style  
Of Cyrene's embraces are made.  
So much for them: but still I'd like to show  
The way in which your monodies are framed  
"O darkly-light mysterious Night,  
What may this Vision mean,  
Sent from the world unseen  
With baleful omens rife;  
A thing of lifeless life,  
A child of sable night,  
A ghastly curdling sight,  
In black funereal veils,  
With murder, murder in its eyes,  
And great enormous nails?

Light ye the lanterns, my maidens,  
and dipping your jugs in the stream,  
Draw me the dew of the water,  
and heat it to boiling and steam;  
So will I wash me away the ill effects of my dream.

God of the sea!

My dream's come true.

Ho, lodgers, ho,

This portent view.

Glyce has vanished, carrying off my cock,

My cock that crew!

O Mania, help! O Oreads of the rock

Pursue! pursue!

For I, poor girl, was working within,

Holding my distaff heavy and full,

Twir-r-r-r-rling my hand as the threads I spin,

Weaving an excellent bobbin of wool;

Thinking 'To-morrow I'll go to the fair,

In the dusk of the morn, and be selling it there.'

But he to the blue upflew, upflew,

On the lightliest tips of his wings outspread;

To me he bequeathed but woe, but woe,

And tears, sad tears, from my eyes o'erflow,

Which I, the bereaved, must shed, must shed.

O children of Ida, sons of Crete,

Grasping your bows to the rescue come;

Twinkle about on your restless feet,

Stand in a circle around her home.

O Artemis, thou maid divine,

Dictynna, huntress, fair to see,

O bring that keen-nosed pack of thine,

And hunt through all the house with me.

O Hecate, with flameful brands,

O Zeus's daughter, arm thine hands,

Those swiftest hands, both right and left;

Thy rays on Glyce's cottage throw

That I serenely there may go,

And search by moonlight for the theft."

DIONYSUS

Enough of both your odes.

AESCHYLUS

Enough for me.

Now would I bring the fellow to the scales.

That, that alone, shall test our poetry now,

And prove whose words are weightiest, his or mine.

DIONYSUS

Then both come hither, since I needs must weigh

The art poetic like a pound of cheese.

(Here a large balance is brought out and placed upon the stage.)

CHORUS

O the labour these wits go through!  
O the wild, extravagant, new,  
Wonderful things they are going to do!  
Who but they would ever have thought of it?  
Why, if a man had happened to meet me  
Out in the street, and intelligence brought of it,  
I should have thought he was trying to cheat me;  
Thought that his story was false and deceiving.  
That were a tale I could never believe in.

DIONYSUS

Each of you stand beside his scale.

AESCHYLUS and EURIPIDES

We're here.

DIONYSUS

And grasp it firmly whilst ye speak your lines,  
(Each holds his own scale steady while he speaks his line into  
it.)

And don't let go until I cry "Cuckoo."

AESCHYLUS and EURIPIDES

Ready!

DIONYSUS

Now speak your lines into the scale.

EURIPIDES

"O that the Argo had not winged her way-"

AESCHYLUS

"River Spercheius, cattle-grazing haunts-"

DIONYSUS

Cuckoo! let go. O look, by far the lowest  
His scale sinks down.

EURIPIDES

Why, how came that about?

DIONYSUS

He threw a river in, like some wool-seller  
Wetting his wool, to make it weigh the more.  
But you threw in a light and winged word.

EURIPIDES

Come, let him match another verse with mine.

DIONYSUS

Each to his scale.

AESCHYLUS and EURIPIDES

We're ready.

DIONYSUS

Speak your lines.

EURIPIDES

"Persuasion's only shrine is eloquent speech."

AESCHYLUS

"Death loves not gifts, alone amongst the gods."

DIONYSUS

Let go, let go. Down goes his scale again.  
He threw in Death, the heaviest ill of all.

EURIPIDES

And I Persuasion, the most lovely word.

DIONYSUS

A vain and empty sound, devoid of sense.  
Think of some heavier-weighted line of yours,  
To drag your scale down: something strong and big.

EURIPIDES

Where have I got one? Where? Let's see.

DIONYSUS

I'll tell you.

"Achilles threw two singles and a four."  
Come, speak your lines: this is your last set-to.

EURIPIDES

"In his right hand he grasped an iron-clamped mace."

AESCHYLUS

"Chariot on chariot, corpse on corpse was hurled."

DIONYSUS

There now! again he has done you.

EURIPIDES

Done me? How?

DIONYSUS

He threw two chariots and two corpses in;  
Five-score Egyptians could not lift that weight.

AESCHYLUS

No more of "line for line"; let him- himself,  
His children, wife, Cephisophon- get in,  
With all his books collected in his arms,  
Two lines of mine shall outweigh the lot.

DIONYSUS

Both are my friends; I can't decide between them:  
I don't desire to be at odds with either:  
One is so clever, one delights me so.

PLUTO (coming forward)

Then you'll effect nothing for which you came?

DIONYSUS

And how, if I decide?

PLUTO

Then take the winner;

So will your journey not be made in vain.

DIONYSUS

Heaven bless your Highness! Listen, I came down  
After a poet.

EURIPIDES

To what end?

DIONYSUS

That so

The city, saved, may keep her choral games.

Now then, whichever of you two shall best  
Advise the city, he shall come with me.  
And first of Alcibiades, let each  
Say what he thinks; the city travails sore.

EURIPIDES

What does she think herself about him?

DIONYSUS

What?

She loves, and hates, and longs to have him back.  
But give me your advice about the man.

EURIPIDES

I loathe a townsman who is slow to aid,  
And swift to hurt, his town: who ways and means  
Finds for himself, but finds not for the state.

DIONYSUS

Poseidon, but that's smart! (to AESCHYLUS)  
And what say you?

AESCHYLUS

'Twere best to rear no lion in the state:  
But having reared, 'tis best to humour him.

DIONYSUS

By Zeus the Saviour, still I can't decide.  
One is so clever, and so clear the other.  
But once again. Let each in turn declare  
What plan of safety for the state ye've got.

EURIPIDES

[First with Cinesias wing Cleocritus,  
Then zephyrs waft them o'er the watery plain.

DIONYSUS

A funny sight, I own: but where's the sense?

EURIPIDES

If, when the fleets engage, they holding cruets  
Should rain down vinegar in the foemen's eyes,]  
I know, and I can tell you.

DIONYSUS

Tell away.

EURIPIDES

When things, mistrusted now, shall trusted be,  
And trusted things, mistrusted.

DIONYSUS

How! I don't

Quite comprehend. Be clear, and not so clever.

EURIPIDES

If we mistrust those citizens of ours  
Whom now we trust, and those employ whom now  
We don't employ, the city will be saved.  
If on our present tack we fail, we surely  
Shall find salvation in the opposite course.

DIONYSUS

Good, O Palamedes! Good, you genius you.  
Is this your cleverness or Cephisophon's?

EURIPIDES

This is my own: the cruel-plan was his.

DIONYSUS (to AESCHYLUS)

Now, you.

AESCHYLUS

But tell me whom the city uses.

The good and useful?

DIONYSUS

What are you dreaming of?

She hates and loathes them.

AESCHYLUS

Does she love the bad?

DIONYSUS

Not love them, no: she uses them perforce.

AESCHYLUS

How can one save a city such as this,  
Whom neither frieze nor woollen tunic suits?

DIONYSUS

O, if to earth you rise, find out some way.

AESCHYLUS

There will I speak: I cannot answer here.

DIONYSUS

Nay, nay; send up your guerdon from below.

AESCHYLUS

When they shall count the enemy's soil their own,  
And theirs the enemy's: when they know that ships  
Are their true wealth, their so-called wealth delusion.

DIONYSUS

Aye, but the justices suck that down, you know.

PLUTO

Now then, decide.

DIONYSUS

I will; and thus I'll do it.

I'll choose the man in whom my soul delights.

EURIPIDES

O, recollect the gods by whom you swore  
You'd take me home again; and choose your friends.

DIONYSUS

'Twas my tongue swore; my choice is-  
Aeschylus.

EURIPIDES

Hah! what have you done?

DIONYSUS

Done? Given the victor's prize  
To Aeschylus; why not?

EURIPIDES

And do you dare



Look in my face, after that shameful deed?

DIONYSUS

What's shameful, if the audience think not so?

EURIPIDES

Have you no heart? Wretch, would you leave me dead?

DIONYSUS

Who knows if death be life, and life be death,  
And breath be mutton broth, and sleep a sheepskin?

PLUTO

Now, Dionysus, come ye in,

DIONYSUS

What for?

PLUTO

And sup before ye go.

DIONYSUS

A bright idea.

I'faith, I'm nowise indisposed for that.

Exeunt AESCHYLUS, EURIPIDES, PLUTO, and DIONYSUS.

CHORUS

Blest the man who possesses a  
Keen intelligent mind.

This full often we find.

He, the bard of renown,

Now to earth reascends,

Goes, a joy to his town,

Goes, a joy to his friends,

Just because he possesses a

Keen intelligent mind.

Right it is and befitting,

Not, by Socrates sitting,

Idle talk to pursue,

Stripping tragedy-art of

All things noble and true.

Surely the mind to school

Fine-drawn quibbles to seek,

Fine-set phrases to speak,

Is but the part of a fool!

Re-enter PLUTO and AESCHYLUS.

PLUTO

Farewell then Aeschylus, great and wise,

Go, save our state by the maxims rare

Of thy noble thought; and the fools chastise,

For many a fool dwells there.

And this (handing him a rope) to Cleophon give, my friend,

And this to the revenue-raising crew,

Nichomachus, Myrmex, next I send,

And this to Archenomus too.

And bid them all that without delay,

To my realm of the dead they hasten away.

For if they loiter above, I swear  
I'll come myself and arrest them there.  
And branded and fettered the slaves shall go  
With the vilest rascal in all the town,  
Adeimantus, son of Leucolophus, down,  
Down, down to the darkness below.

AESCHYLUS

I take the mission. This chair of mine  
Meanwhile to Sophocles here commit,  
(For I count him next in our craft divine,  
Till I come once more by thy side to sit.  
But as for that rascally scoundrel there,  
That low buffoon, that worker of ill,  
O let him not sit in my vacant chair,  
Not even against his will.

PLUTO (to the CHORUS)

Escort him up with your mystic throngs,  
While the holy torches quiver and blaze.  
Escort him up with his own sweet songs,  
And his noble festival lays.

CHORUS

First, as the poet triumphant  
is passing away to the light,  
Grant him success on his journey,  
ye powers that are ruling below.  
Grant that he find for the city  
good counsels to guide her aright;  
So we at last shall be freed  
from the anguish, the fear, and the woe,  
Freed from the onsets of war.  
Let Cleophon now and his band  
Battle, if battle they must,  
far away in their own fatherland.

THE END

