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Aristophanes' Acharnians

Acharnians: Comic Hero, Comic Poet and Society

Acharnians is a comedy about the ordinary farmer Dicaeopolis, evacuated from his land and pressed into service in the Peloponnesian War. Failing to interest his fellow Athenians in seeking peace, he arranges a magical private peace for himself. On the way back to the good life in the countryside, he is confronted by a crowd of patriotic charcoal-burners from Acharnae who want to stone him as a traitor. But by restaging himself as a tragic hero, Dicaeopolis convinces the Acharnians of the justice of his actions and proceeds to expose the corruption of the politicians and generals, especially General Lamachus. After establishing his own free-trade zone and collecting food for a sumptuous banquet, Dicaeopolis wins the national drinking contest, while General Lamachus suffers from ignominious wounds.

Acharnians was Aristophanes' third (and first extant) play, produced at the Lenaea festival in 425, and it won the first prize for comedy. Its plot is characteristic of Aristophanes' heroic plays (the others are *Peace*, *Birds*, *Lysistrata*, and *Assemblywomen*). By means of a fantastic scheme a hero(ine), who represents a class of citizens who feel frustrated or victimized by the operations of contemporary society, manages to evade or alter the situation of which (s)he initially complains and proceeds to effect a triumph of wish-fulfillment over reality. Those powers human, natural or divine which would obstruct the scheme are either converted by argument or overcome by guile, magic or force. At the end there is a restoration of normality (typically portrayed in terms of an idealized civic past) and a celebration (typically portrayed in terms of food, wine and sex). The celebration is reserved for the hero(ine) and the hero(ine)'s supporters, for the initial obstructors and those who would undeservedly benefit by the hero(ine)'s success have been expelled or disgraced.

Although the hero(ine) typically represents the views of a social or political

minority, and the scheme bypasses or undermines the powers currently enforcing the status quo, the hero(ine)'s goal is one likely to be shared by most spectators when in an idealistic mood, and the arguments (s)he uses to defend it are designed to appeal to their interests and sense of justice. The powers are portrayed entirely without sympathy as self-interested, corrupt and misguided, and the status quo as unnecessarily burdensome for ordinary, decent people. The status quo is shown to be as it is because ordinary people have been deceived by their leaders. Once the leaders are exposed, the hero(ine) can resume the comfortable and just life that (in comic myth) had existed before troublemakers disrupted it.

In this utopian scenario, the harsh and intractable realities of life, politics and international aggression are comically transformed so that an ordinary farmer can arrange a separate peace, discredit powerful politicians and generals, and alone enjoy the blessings of peace. The transformation seems quite plausible because Aristophanes appeals to the wishes of the spectators for a better world, the world as it presumably was before the war, where all would be happy and prosperous and where there would be no more violence. He also appeals to the feeling of the average citizens that their wishes would be more likely to come true were there no authorities in the way, constantly reminding them of unpleasant duties. After all, the god Dionysos, patron of the theatrical festivals, was emblematic of peace and freedom. This combination of regressive wish-fulfillment and oedipal rebellion allowed a communal release of tensions. Insofar as their release was motivated by acceptable civic ideals (peace and fairness) and achieved in humorous fantasy, it was safe: cohesive not disruptive. But insofar as it was a valid expression of people's real war-weariness, an expression of social discontent running beneath the surface of official public discourse, it was also fair warning to the people's leaders that public patience might not last indefinitely.

Like Aristophanes' preceding two plays, *Acharnians* was produced not by the poet himself, but by his friend Callistratus; not until the following year was the young poet (then in his early 20's) confident enough to produce plays on his own. But that does not mean that Callistratus was thought to be the author: entrusting production to others, as is the rule today, was not unusual in Aristophanes' day either, and Aristophanes would for various reasons occasionally do so throughout his career; moreover, in *Knights* 512-13 Aristophanes says that many people had for a long time been asking him why he had not yet produced one of his own plays. The issue of authorship is important in the case of *Acharnians* because of the play's unusual identification of its hero with the poet himself. In order to understand this identification, we must review the contemporary Athenian situation and Aristophanes' stance toward it, which had become a public issue.

Since 431 Athens and Sparta had been fighting what is now called the Peloponnesian War, a war that involved nearly all Greeks and even the Persian

Empire. The principal issue was the Athenians' growing imperial power. The alliance of Aegean states that had begun fifty years earlier as the Delian League, a panhellenic defensive alliance against future Persian invasions, had gradually been changed into a collection of tribute-paying allies subject to Athens. As a result Athens had become dominant at sea, very wealthy and aggressively expansionist. In addition, Athens used her empire to spread democracy at the expense of traditional ruling elites, sometimes by force. Sparta and her allies (the "Peloponnesians") considered democracy to be a dangerous idea and the Athenians to be imperial tyrants (a label that the Athenians did not wholly reject); Athenian strength, if unchecked, dangerously threatened the balance of power in the Greek world.

In 431 Pericles, Athens' leading general and statesman, convinced his countrymen to resist Peloponnesian demands that Athens abandon such aggressive policies as the economic blockade of Megara. He predicted that, if war was the result, Athenian wealth and naval power would quickly force the Peloponnesians to abandon their resistance and acquiesce to Athenian dominance. But his plan required that the Athenians not oppose the Spartans on land, where they were superior, so that the Attic countryside would have to be evacuated and its residents moved into fortified Athens for the duration. That meant extremely uncomfortable quarters for those without relatives or friends in the city. Thucydides (2.16) describes the reaction of the rural population of whom this sacrifice was asked:

For the better part of their history the Athenians had lived in independent country settlements. Even after the political unification of Attica, most Athenians, both in earlier generations and down to the time of this present war being born and raised in the country, retained their traditional rural character. So it was not easy for them to have to move with their entire households, especially since they had only recently re-established themselves after the Persian invasions. They felt oppressed and resentful at having to abandon their homes and their temples, venerable symbols of a patriotic past, and at having to change their whole way of life, each leaving behind what he regarded as his own polis.

In spite of these hardships, however, the rural Athenians supported the war: like all Athenians, they benefitted from the empire and would do their part to resist Spartan interference.

But by 425 it was clear that Pericles had overestimated Athenian superiority and underestimated the determination of the Peloponnesians; and there had been additional unforeseen difficulties. Most serious was the terrible plague that decimated the Athenians in 429 and would continue to break out, on and off, for the next five years; Pericles was one of its victims. By 428 the war-fund had run out, requiring the Athenians to levy emergency taxes and to raise the tribute quotas. Some members of the empire had begun to revolt or to contemplate revolt, thus requiring the Athenians to divert valuable energy policing their own allies. After six years of fighting, the Athenians had won important victories, but so had the enemy. No one could say when victory

could be expected, or even how it was to be defined. These conditions produced political unrest. In particular, the devastation of the Attic countryside and the suffering of the evacuees was very demoralizing. Many had begun to question the rationale for continued fighting and to consider whether a negotiated settlement might not be preferable.

But such views were still opposed by the majority, including the majority of evacuees, whose initial support of the war had indeed been fortified by a determination to get revenge on the Peloponnesians whatever the cost. The policy of continued war was championed and guided by Cleon, who had replaced Pericles as the leading politician of Athens. Cleon, a forceful orator and the first great populist (enemies said "demagogue"), strove to maintain unity and morale behind the war effort, to assure adequate finances and to enforce efficient civic, imperial and military administration. He ruthlessly attacked as unpatriotic, even treasonous, anyone he thought was undermining these goals: Athenian or allied rebels, dissidents, malingerers, hoarders, black-marketeers, Spartan sympathizers, advocates of negotiated peace.

Aristophanes himself was one of those attacked. After *Babylonians* (produced in 426), in which Aristophanes had criticized Athenian imperial rule and perhaps also the war, Cleon denounced him before the Council for having slandered the magistrates, Councillors and Athenian people before an audience that included foreign allies. He also seems to have called Aristophanes's Athenian birth (and therefore his citizenship) into question by citing the poet's ties to Aegina. Evidently the Council did not refer the charges to the Assembly or to a court for trial, but dismissed them. Nevertheless, Aristophanes thought that Cleon's attack had to be answered. In *Acharnians*, Aristophanes frontally challenges the rationale for the war and the motives of its political and military advocates, and defends both his own patriotism and the value to democracy of free comic expression.

The hero, Dicaeopolis ("Just City"), represents the displaced countrymen, who have sacrificed most for the war, and the common soldiers, who do the actual fighting. Tired of combat and the discomforts of urban life, he longs to return to his rural deme (local community) to resume the happy peacetime life that has been disrupted by the war. He has repeatedly gone to the Assembly to raise the issue of negotiations, but his effort is wasted. Dicaeopolis's fellow Athenians want only to gape at the politicians, ambassadors and their barbarian allies and mercenaries; no one has the least interest in talking about peace. Dicaeopolis himself is ruled out of order and roughed up by barbarians, while his fellow citizens turn a deaf ear to his cries.

At this point Dicaeopolis decides on a radical solution. With the help of a magical friend, he acquires a 30-year peace for himself and his family, which takes the form of bottle of 30-year-old wine. This peace enables Dicaeopolis to return to the country, where he will be able to live on his own produce, trade with whomever he likes (even enemy states), drink his own wine at the

local festivals and resume a life of ease and sexual gratification. He and his family celebrate by holding the festival of the Rural Dionysia.

But Dicaeopolis is soon confronted by a Chorus of outraged old men: veterans of the glorious Athenian struggle against the Persians, builders of the empire and supporters of the war. They are charcoal-burners from the deme Acharnae, the largest rural deme and one that had from the beginning of the war been especially hard-hit by Spartan incursions. The Acharnians as a result were perhaps the most fiercely pro-war and anti-Spartan of all Athenians, and they intend to stone Dicaeopolis to death as a traitor even before they hear what he has to say in his own defense. But by taking a coal-scuttle hostage, Dicaeopolis secures a hearing and bets his life on his ability to convince the Acharnians (and beyond them, the spectators) of the justice of his separate peace.

At this critical juncture the forward motion of the plot suddenly stops and the action onstage becomes invisible to the chorus. Dicaeopolis announces that, before he makes his speech, he must first go to the house of the tragic poet, Euripides, to borrow pitiful garb and persuasive eloquence. The audience, he says, will know him for who he truly is, while the Acharnians will be deceived. The scene with Euripides, where Dicaeopolis rummages through the tragedian's stock of costumes and props and reconstitutes himself as the tragic hero, Telephus, is a splendid example of metatheater (dramatist and performers calling attention to their own theatrical artifices), by which Aristophanes locates his play within comedy's wider theatrical and political contexts.

The myth of Telephus had most recently been dramatized by Euripides in 438. Although only fragments of the play survive, its main outlines are clear. Although he was the son of the great Greek hero Heracles and Auge, daughter of King Aleus of Arcadia, Telephus had become king of barbarian Mysia, a kingdom south of Troy. When the Greek expedition against Troy mistakenly attacked Mysia, Telephus was wounded by Achilles. When an oracle told him that his wound could be healed only by its inflictor, Telephus went to Argos, disguised as a Mysian beggar, to look for Achilles. In a speech, he defended himself and the Mysians by arguing that the Greeks would have acted the same way if they had suffered an unprovoked attack. He probably also questioned the Greeks' motive for the Trojan War (the abduction of Helen) and urged the Greeks to look at matters from a Trojan perspective. When Telephus' disguise was exposed and he was threatened with death, he took refuge at an altar, with the baby Orestes as hostage, and convinced the Greeks that he, too, was in fact a Greek. Achilles then agreed to provide a cure for his wound, and as the result of another oracle Telephus agreed to guide the Greeks to Troy.

Dicaeopolis adopts Telephus' stratagems of hostage-taking and disguise and adapts elements of Telephus' speech of self-defence to his own situation.

He tells the Acharnians that he has just as much reason to hate the Spartans as they do, but that they are wrong to blame everything on the Spartans, for it was certain Athenians who actually started the trouble. First, base-born informers profited by denouncing Megarian goods; then drunken young gamblers stole a Megarian whore. When the Megarians retaliated by stealing two whores from Pericles' mistress, Aspasia, Pericles turned all Greece upside-down in his wrath. Thus the Spartans had good reason to fight and the Athenians ought to re-examine their own reasons for continuing the war.

It is to be noted that, while Dicaeopolis offers reasons for his decision to make a separate peace, he does not defend the separate peace itself, nor does he ever suggest that anyone else follow his lead. Indeed, he refuses to share his peace with any of those who ask, with the sole exception of a bride (since women had no part in bringing on the war). Dicaeopolis's exposure of the war's inadequate motivation, its self-interested military and political leaders and its lack of rewards for everybody else—at best these arguments make his separate peace seem more understandable and more palatable; most people would agree that there was some truth to them. But however plausible Dicaeopolis's motivation may be, and however enviable his subsequent happiness, Aristophanes evidently had no wish directly to advocate desertion in time of war.

While the embattled Dicaeopolis impersonates Telephus in addressing the Chorus, he simultaneously represents the embattled Aristophanes in addressing the spectators: like Telephus, Aristophanes has been slandered and attacked because of a successful and justified previous attack on his countrymen (the criticisms he had made in Babylonians):

Do not be angry, you men who watch the play,
if, though a beggar, I speak before Athenians
of state affairs while making comedy.
For comedy too concerns itself with justice,
and what I will say will shock you but be just.
And this time Cleon won't make allegations
that I slander the polis in front of foreigners;
for we are alone, it's a Lenean competition,
the foreigners aren't yet here, nor tribute-money,
nor allied troops from the cities of our empire,
but now we are by ourselves. (497-507)

Later, in the play's Parabasis (629 n.), Aristophanes further adapts the Telephean defense. He claims that he deserves no anger but praise from the Athenians for having opened their eyes to the flatteries, deceptions, self-interest and general mismanagement of the empire (and also the war?) by Cleon and the other leading politicians. Now the allies gladly come with their tribute, eager to see the poet who alone had the courage to tell the truth, and the King of Persia has told the Spartans that they cannot prevail over a city that has such a poet for its adviser. That is why the Spartans are eager for peace,

and as for their demand for Aegina, they want it not for strategic reasons but to get this poet for themselves. For he alone talks justice and truth, and so selflessly and courageously champions the best interests of his people. Like Telephus, Aristophanes is discovered to be a true compatriot, his criticisms are justified, and he will lead his countrymen on to a just victory.

In so adapting Euripides' hero to his own purposes, Aristophanes used a technique, which he himself pioneered, called paratragedy: the usurpation of tragic style and elevation as vehicles to express comic ideas. (Paratragedy may thus be distinguished from parody of tragedy, which merely reproduces tragic style in order to deflate it.) By means of paratragedy Aristophanes could exploit the strengths of each genre. Tragedy could examine social and political problems with great pathos and intensity, but only through the veil of heroic myth, to whose distant world it restricted itself. Comedy was free to deal with such problems topically and directly, with unmediated reference to the spectators and their world, but only in a humorous fashion, since pathos and intensity were alien to the comic mode. As the Assembly scene that opens the play seems to suggest, comedy by itself, like Dicaeopolis by himself, was unable to muster the pathos and intensity needed to persuade the Athenians. Some way had to be found to intensify the comic appeal. Paratragedy was the answer: if the Athenians took Telephus so seriously, would they not listen more seriously to his paratragic counterpart?

Through the paratragic "borrowing" of Telephus from Euripides, Aristophanes creates a play within a play and a complex layering of dramatic disguises. He also, metatheatrically, calls attention to what he is doing as poet and playwright, thus educating the spectators about the role of theatrical illusion and persuasion. Dicaeopolis manages to deceive, and thus to persuade, the Chorus by means of his beggar's disguise, like Telephus before the Greeks. But the spectators have already been shown, in the dressing-scene with Euripides, what to expect and are thus taught to see through the disguise. Behind the beggar is the comic-as-tragic hero, just as behind him is the comic-as-tragic poet: as Dicaeopolis is comically threatened in the play for his courageous nonconformity, so is Aristophanes seriously threatened in the polis for his plays. Those who see through the disguise, who can understand the playful seriousness of comedy, are the clever ones; those who do not (the Chorus and the Cleons in the audience) are the fools.

In these ways Aristophanes, as dramatist and as citizen, challenges the audience to examine and engage with the theatrical event in which they are participants, so that by becoming more reflective and critical as a theatrical audience they might also become more reflective and critical about their role in assemblies, where they must judge the arguments of a Cleon.

Dicaeopolis's defense-speech convinces half of the Chorus but not the other half, who are worsted in a scuffle and invoke the aid of the military commander, Lamachus. In real life a competent soldier (after his death Aristophanes

Not to war / empire
but to language

would praise him without irony as a hero), Lamachus represents the high command generally and is caricatured as the Braggart Soldier. From the safety of his separate peace, Dicaeopolis voices the contempt and the complaints dear to the hearts of common soldiers in any era: we do all the fighting for meager pay and bad rations, while the officers live it up on embassies and high pay. More seriously, Dicaeopolis suggests that such profits, not a just cause, are the real reason for Lamachus' support of the war. In this regard, Lamachus was a good choice for Aristophanes' Braggart Soldier: his name aside (it means "Very Warlike"), Lamachus was the poorest of contemporary commanders and so most vulnerable to Dicaeopolis's accusations of featherbedding.

Dicaeopolis goes off to establish his market, where all traders are welcome—except Lamachus. The rest of the Chorus, now convinced that Dicaeopolis is no traitor, rejoin their fellow Choristers to perform the Parabasis. As is typical in Old Comedy, the episodes following the Parabasis illustrate the success of the hero's plan, leaving behind the conflicts and arguments by which it was achieved. Pointed debate gives way to slapstick. The Chorus henceforth plays the role of commentator, mediating between stage and audience and performing, between episodes, songs that mock individuals among the spectators and that are relatively detached from the plot.

Free to deal with Athens' enemies, Dicaeopolis demonstrates his shrewdness as a trader and his good fortune in being able freely to enjoy what was forbidden to other Athenians because of the war. A starving Megarian is willing to part with his two young daughters for a bunch of garlic and a quart of salt. From a Theban he gets a Copaic eel (a delicacy) in return for an informer, a type much feared by wartime Athenians but whom Dicaeopolis packs up like a piece of pottery. When the Pitcher Feast with its drinking-contest is announced, Dicaeopolis prepares a festive dinner that includes the sort of delicacies that would make most spectators' mouths water. To a farmer who has lost his oxen and a bridegroom who offers to trade a piece of meat Dicaeopolis refuses to share any of his peace, but he does send some to a bride, since women are not responsible for the war.

This exception helps us to understand and to sympathize with Dicaeopolis's refusal to share his peace, which some commentators regard as indefensible selfishness. As we saw in the prologue, Dicaeopolis decided to get his private treaty only after none of his fellow-citizens would heed his call for discussions about peace or come to his aid when he was roughed up by barbarians. They favored the war then; why should they now enjoy the hard-won blessings of Dicaeopolis's peace? Aristophanes seems to be saying to the spectators, "If you want to enjoy what Dicaeopolis has (and who would not?), then you had better stop ignoring or silencing people like him (and like me) and make peace for yourselves." As was argued above, Aristophanes does not want to hold Dicaeopolis's own method up as a model in real life.

The play ends with a memorable confrontation between Dicaeopolis, the

man at peace, and Lamachus, the man at war. As Lamachus prepares arms and field-rations to defend the border passes from Boeotian bandits in the dead of winter, Dicaeopolis prepares a sumptuous banquet for the pitcher feast, to which he has been invited by the Priest of Dionysus. Lamachus subsequently returns on a stretcher, wounded by a vine-prop as he leapt over a ditch—a symbolically apt wound for one who opposes Dionysus by rejecting peace and bringing war to the countryside. Lamachus' cries of woe are counterpointed by Dicaeopolis's cries of joy: he enters drunk, supported by a pair of amorous girls, to celebrate his victory in the drinking-contest.

Aristophanes invites the spectators to identify in fantasy with Dicaeopolis and thus indulge in some vicarious wish-fulfillment. For a while an escapist vision lets them forget the hardships of the war. But Aristophanes surely hoped that the urgings of the first part of the play—that the spectators re-examine the rationale for continued war and be more critical of their leaders—would not be forgotten when the spectators left the theater.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Readers interested in the Greek text are referred to the editions with commentary by W.J.M. Starkie (London 1909, repr. Amsterdam 1968); W. Rennie (London 1909); R.T. Elliott (Oxford 1914); A.H. Sommerstein (Warminster 1980), which has an excellent literal translation.

Good treatments of *Acharnians* are:

- De Ste. Croix, G.G.M. *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London/Ithaca 1972), see index and Appendix XXIX.
- Edmunds, L. "Aristophanes's *Acharnians*," in *Yale Classical Studies* 26 (1980)
- Foley, H.P. "Tragedy and Politics in Aristophanes's *Acharnians*," in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 108 (1988)
- Harriott, R.M. "Aristophanes and the Plays of Euripides," in the *Bulletin of the Institute for Classical Studies* 9 (1962)
- . "The Function of the Euripides-Scene in Aristophanes's *Acharnians*," in *Greece and Rome* 29 (1982)
- MacDowell, D.M. "The Nature of Aristophanes's *Acharnians*," in *Greece and Rome* 30 (1983)
- Newiger, H.-J. "War and Peace in the Comedy of Aristophanes," in *Yale Classical Studies* 26 (1980)
- Taplin, O. "Tragedy and Tragedy," in the *Classical Quarterly* 33 (1983)

Aristophanes' Acharnians

CHARACTERS

SPEAKING CHARACTERS

Dicaeopolis of Cholleidae, a rustic
 Herald
 Godson, son of Lycinus, an immortal
 Ambassador returned from the King of Persia
 Pseudo-Artabas, the Persian King's "Eye"
 Theorus, a politician
 Daughter of Dicaeopolis
 Slave of Euripides
 Euripides, the tragic poet
 Lamachus, a general
 Megarian
 Girls (two), daughters of the Megarian
 Informer
 Theban
 Nicarchus, another informer
 Slave of Lamachus
 Dercetes of Phyle, a farmer
 Best Man
 Messenger I (from the generals)
 Messenger II (from the priest of Dionysus)
 Messenger III (from the battlefield)

MUTE CHARACTERS

Officers of the Athenian Assembly	Wife of Dicaeopolis
Citizens attending the Assembly	Children of Dicaeopolis
Policemen policing the Assembly	Soldiers under Lamachus
Eunuchs, two	Ismenias, slave of the Theban
Thracian Mercenaries	Pipers from Thebes
Xanthias, slave of Dicaeopolis	Maid of Honor
Slaves of Dicaeopolis	Dancing-Girls, two
Ambassadors returned from the King of Persia	

CHORUS

Old Men of Acharnae, twenty-four

PROLOGUE

(*Dicaeopolis, Herald, Godson, Ambassador, Pseudo-Artabas, Theorus; Officers, Citizens, Policemen, Ambassadors, Eunuchs, Thracian Mercenaries*)

Dicaeopolis

How often have I chewed my heart with rage!
 My pleasures? Very few; in fact just four.
 My pains? The grains in a million heaps of sand.
 Let's try to recall a case of real euphoria.
 I know! It's something my heart rejoiced to see: 5
 that million-dollar fine coughed up by Cleon⁶
 That really gave me joy! I love the Knights
 for that indictment: a banner day for Greece!
 But then I had another pain, quite tragic:
 I was waiting for a play by Aeschylus,¹⁰ 10
 then heard, "Theognis, bring your chorus on."¹¹

6 What had pleased Aristophanes, a personal enemy of Cleon (see Introduction), also pleases his hero. But the precise nature of the incident referred to in these lines is obscure. Ancient commentaries explain that some island allies had bribed the demagogue Cleon to argue for a reduction of their property taxes or tribute and that the Knights, motivated by an old grudge, had made him "cough up" the money. If so, the case cannot have gone to trial: conviction for bribery would have resulted in a more severe penalty and at least some interruption of Cleon's political career. Cleon probably made restitution to avoid trial by the procedure known as *proboule*. Some scholars think that the incident is not historical at all but took place in a comedy, perhaps Aristophanes's *Babylonians* (see lines 377 ff.), but that is very unlikely, since the Knights do not seem to have played a role in any comedy before *Knights*: see 299 ff., *Knights* 507 ff..

10 The great tragic poet, who had died thirty years before, was a favorite of older men like Dicaeopolis, nostalgic for the empire-building years after the Persian wars. The patriotic and inspirational qualities of Aeschylus' plays are dramatized in Aristophanes's *Frogs*.

11 The comic poets nicknamed this "frigid" tragic poet "Snow".

Imagine how that shook up my poor heart!
 Another joy was after Moschus played:
 Dexitheus did some Theban country-tunes.^o
 But recently I died and went to hell,
 when Chaeris played the Anthem on his pipes.^o
 But never since I first began to wash
 with soap have I cried such tears as I cry now,
 whenever the Assembly holds a meeting
 and all the seats are empty, just like now,
 while everybody's gossiping in the market
 and trying to avoid the summoner.
 The Magistrates aren't even here; they're late,
 and when they come you can't imagine how
 they'll fight each other for the front-row seats,
 like a river in spate. But as for talk of peace,
 not a single moment's thought. My poor, poor Polis!
 And I'm the one who always gets here first.
 I come and sit, and in my solitude
 I sigh, I yawn, I stretch myself, I fart,
 I fiddle, draw, pick boogers, figure sums;
 I watch the countryside and yearn for peace,
 I hate the city and want to see my farm,
 my village where you never hear "Buy coal,
 buy vinegar, buy oil, buy this, buy that."
 I grow my own and need no Mister Buy.
 So now I'm here, all ready to make some noise,
 to shout and interrupt and give 'em hell
 if anyone speaks of anything but peace!
 Hey look, the Magistrates! They're hours late.^o
 What did I tell you? And just as I predicted,
 each one is pushing for a front-row seat.

Herald

Move on, move on!
 Inside the sacred precinct, all of you!

- 14 Two noted *kithara* (lyre) players; Dicaeopolis's preference was determined by Dexitheus' choice of song.
 16 The comic poets considered Chaeris a bad piper and lyre-player.
 40 The Herald, Officers, Policemen and Citizens enter, followed by Godson, in the Greek "Amphitheus," which means "divine on both sides of the family," so that this character's name may simply be a comic invention suitable to his fantastic plot-function. But there was a man by that name (its only attestation in Attica), a demesman of Aristophanes who is known to have belonged to a club whose members included one of Aristophanes's producers and the knight Simon, who is represented by one of the choristers in the following year's play, *Knights*.

Godson

Has anybody spoken?

Herald

Who wants to speak?

Godson

Me.

Herald

Who are you?

Godson

I'm Godson.

Herald

Mortal?

Godson

No,
 immortal. Godson was Demeter's child^o
 with Triptolemus, the father of Celeus,
 the husband of Phaenarete my grandma,
 of whom was born Lycinus. Being his son,
 I'm immortal. And to me the gods entrust
 the making of a treaty with the Spartans.
 But though immortal, I've got no travel-money;
 the Magistrates won't provide it.

Herald

Officers!

Godson

Triptolemus and Celeus, see my plight!

Dicaeopolis

Oh Magistrates, gentlemen, this is out of line,
 arresting the man who wanted to help us get
 a treaty of peace, a chance for an armistice!

Herald

Sit down, shut up!

Dicaeopolis

I certainly will *not*,
 unless you start a discussion about peace.

- 47 A genealogy derived from the Mysteries at Eleusis, the most august Attic cult, but so comically mangled as to suggest lunatic pretension.

Herald

Ambassadors from the King!^o

Dicaeopolis

You and the King! I'm sick of ambassadors
and all their fancy peacocks and their bragging.

Herald

Be quiet!

Dicaeopolis

Eldorado, what a get-up!^o

Ambassador

You sent us to the King of Persia's palace,
with a salary of a thousand bucks a day,
eleven years ago today—

Dicaeopolis

The waste!

Ambassador

We're tired out from riding on the plains,
meandering about beneath umbrellas,
reclining softly in our carriages.
What hell!

Dicaeopolis

I must have been in heaven, then,
reclining in the garbage by the ramparts.^o

Ambassador

And when we dined they forced us to drink wine
from crystal flutes inlaid with solid gold,
a vintage pure and fine.

Dicaeopolis

Ancestral polis!

You see how these ambassadors laugh at you?

Ambassador

Barbarians, you see, define a man
by how much food and wine he can consume.

61 The fabulously wealthy King of Persia. Both Athens and Sparta sought money for the war from the King, but old soldiers like Dicaeopolis hated and despised him as a barbarian and as their one-time enemy.

64 A group of sumptuously dressed Ambassadors enters; "Eldorado" translates "Ecbatana," the wealthy middle-eastern capital of Media.

72 Dicaeopolis represents either one of the common soldiers who stood watch at the walls (Thuc. 2.13) or one of the many refugees from the countryside who "took up quarters in the towers along the walls or indeed wherever they could find space to live in" (2.17), or both.

Dicaeopolis

For us it's sucking cocks and bending over.^o

Ambassador

So three years later we got to the Great King's palace,
but he'd gone off with his army to take a dump.
He shat for eight whole months in the Golden Hills.

Dicaeopolis

How long did he take to close his royal asshole?
From moon to moon?

Ambassador

And then the King came home,
and feasted us with whole oxen, baked
in giant ovens.

Dicaeopolis

And who has ever seen
an oven-baked ox? What absolute baloney!

Ambassador

And then, I swear, he gave us birds three times
the size of Cleonymus; he called them cons.^o

Dicaeopolis

That figures, since you're conning all of us.

Ambassador

And now we're back, with Pseudo-Artabas,^o
the Great King's Eye.

Dicaeopolis

May a crow peck it out with his beak,
and your eye too, you great Ambassador!

Herald

The Great King's Eye!^o

Dicaeopolis

O holy Heracles!
Ye gods, what's this? You look just like a warship.

79 Comic poets routinely assumed that successful politicians had prostituted themselves to higher-ranked men for advancement.

89 A political crony of Cleon's, ridiculed by comic poets as a glutton and a coward.

91 The comic "Pseudo-" suggests fraud; Aristophanes's caricature of such Persian officials was calculated to arouse both derisive laughter and indignation at the policy of seeking Persian help in the war.

94 Enter Pseudo-Artabas, accompanied by two eunuchs. He represents the Persian official who held the title, "King's Eye," here taken literally by having a great eye painted on his mask; Dicaeopolis is reminded of a warship's oarports (called "eyes").

You're rounding the point and looking for a berth?
Is that a porthole-flap there under your eye?

Ambassador

So tell us what the King sent you to tell
the Athenians, Oh my Pseudo-Artabas.

Pseudo-Artabas

Iartaman exarxas apisona satra.°

Ambassador

You all hear what he says?

Dicaeopolis

I surely didn't.

Ambassador

He says the King is going to send you gold!
Speak louder and more plainly about the gold.

Pseudo-Artabas

No gettum goldum, gapey arse Atheni-o.°

Dicaeopolis

Good Grief, that's pretty plain!

Ambassador

Why? What's he saying?

Dicaeopolis

Say what? He says we've all got gaping assholes
if we really expect to get the barbarian gold.

Ambassador

No no! He says, you'll get the gold, no hassle.

Dicaeopolis

What do you mean, no hassle? You're a liar!
Get lost! I'll do the questioning myself.
So come clean, Persian, in front of this witness here,
or else I'll dye you Middle Eastern purple:
does the King intend to send us any gold?
So we're being deceived by our ambassadors?
It's very Greek, the way these Persians nod.
I wonder if they're not a couple of homeboys.
One of these eunuchs, this one, looks familiar.
I know him! Cleisthànes son of Sibyrtius!°

100 Mock-Persian of doubtful meaning.

104 A "gaping asshole" indicated both unmanly submission and prostitution.

118 Comic poets mocked Cleisthenes as a beardless effeminate, and Strato is elsewhere mentioned as his lover. Sibyrtius, who ran a wrestling-school, may really have been Cleisthenes' father, but more likely Aristophanes mentions him as a joke. If so its

Oh you who shave thy hot and horny asshole,
do you, oh monkey, with a beard like yours,
show up at assembly decked out like a eunuch?
And who might this other be? It can't be Strato!

120

Herald

Be quiet! And sit down!
The council's pleased to ask the Great King's Eye
to dine at City Hall.°

Dicaeopolis

I'm ready to puke!

125

I guess I'm just supposed to hang around
while these guys get the royal welcome mat.
No, I'm going to do a great and awesome deed!
Where'd that Godson get to?

Godson

Over here.

Dicaeopolis

Look, here's a hundred bucks for you to arrange
a peace with the Spartans for me and me alone,
for my kiddies too, of course, and the little woman.
You jerks can keep on gaping at Ambassadors.

130

Herald

Theorus, lately come from Poohbah!°

Theorus

Present!

Dicaeopolis

And yet another phony is announced.

135

Theorus

We wouldn't have stayed in Thrace so very long—

110

115

meaning is unclear: perhaps the manly sport of wrestling was absurd in connection with the pansy Cleisthenes, or perhaps Aristophanes suggests that Sibyrtius had enjoyed Cleisthenes sexually: wrestling-schools were prime venues for homosexual relationships, and wrestling is a common Greek metaphor for sex.

125 The Prytaneum, in the Agora, which was used to entertain, at public expense, foreign ambassadors and Athenians returning from embassies. Individuals could be rewarded for especially great services to the state with meals there for life. Within a year Cleon was to be so rewarded for the great Athenian victory at Pylos, a victory Aristophanes disgustingly claimed (in *Knights*) should rightfully have been credited to Cleon's colleague, Demosthenes.

134 "from the court of Sitalces," the King of the Odrysae in Thrace, who had aided the Athenians in an abortive invasion of Macedonia four years earlier. Theorus is mentioned elsewhere as a crony of Cleon.

Strat. D.K. is
misses & seeing
through

Dicaeopolis

If you hadn't drawn some pretty hefty paychecks.

Theorus

but the whole of Thrace was shoulder-deep in snow,
and all the rivers froze at the very same time,
when Theognis' play was leaving you all cold.^o
I stayed on duty, drinking with the Poohbah,
and I must say he's very pro-Athenian.
He actually has the hots for you. His walls
are plastered over with Men of Athens pinups.
His son, the one we'd made a citizen,
kept pining to be a genuine Greek by blood,^o
and begged his dad to send us aid and succor.
Poohbah agreed, and swore he'd send an army
so big that all Athenians would have to say,
"What a giant swarm of locusts heads our way!"

Dicaeopolis

May lightning strike me if I believe a word
of what you've said here, except the locust part.

Theorus

May I present his gift: some mercenaries,
the nastiest tribe in Thrace.

Dicaeopolis

That's plain enough.

Theorus

Come forward, Thracians that the Poohbah sent.

Dicaeopolis

The hell is this?

Theorus

The army of Odomanti.

Dicaeopolis

Odomanti my ass. What's this supposed to be?
Who chopped the Odomantians' foreskins off?^o

Theorus

A hundred bucks a day for each of them,^o

140 See 11 n.

146 "yearned to eat blood-pudding at the Apaturia," a festival at which children and new citizens became members of Athenian kinship-groups.

158 The Greeks considered circumcision barbaric; these Odomanti were evidently equipped with the kind of large, red-tipped phalloi that Aristophanes in *Clouds* mentions in a list of trite ways to get a laugh.

159 "two drachmas": absurdly high pay for such mercenaries.

and they'll rape the whole of Boeotia with their spears.^o

160

Dicaeopolis

A hundred a day for guys without a foreskin?
The men who row our ships and guard our polis^o
would yell about that! Hey, dammit! Now I'm done for:
the Odomantians have swiped my lunch!
Hey, drop that sandwich!

Theorus

Wait, you idiot,

165

don't rush them when they're in a feeding frenzy!^o

Dicaeopolis

Oh Magistrates, do you let me suffer this
in my own polis, at the hands of barbarians?
I move that the Assembly be adjourned
and the subject of Thracian pay be tabled. I say
I felt a drop of rain, a sign from Zeus.^o

170

Herald

Depart, you Thracians, return in two days' time.
The Magistrates say this Assembly is adjourned.

Dicaeopolis

Alas, alas, what a tasty lunch I've lost!
But look, here's Godson coming back from Sparta.
Hey Godson, slow down.

175

Godson

Not til it's safe to stop.

The Acharnians are after me, gotta run!^o

Dicaeopolis

Say what?

Godson

I was on my way back with some treaties,
but they got wind of them, some tough old men,
Acharnians, as tough as hardwood, veterans

180

160 For Boeotia, a major enemy of Athens, see 624 n.

162 Rowers on an Athenian warship got one drachma per day.

166 "when they're garlic-primed," like fighting-cocks.

171 Although official business could be suspended by storms, earthquakes or other signs of divine displeasure, such a motion would have to be approved by religious authorities. Here Aristophanes motivates the exit of the assemblymen by making them only too willing to use such a flimsy excuse to adjourn.

177 For the Acharnians, represented in this play by the chorus, see Introduction.

of Marathon. They all started yelling, "Traitor,^o
do you bring treaties when our vines are slashed?"
They began to fill their pockets up with stones.
I ran away from there; they chased me, shouting.

Dicaeopolis

Well, let them shout. You've got the treaties with you?^o

Godson

I do indeed. Three samples for you to taste.
This here's a five-year treaty. Have a sip.

Dicaeopolis

Yuk.

Godson

What's the matter?

Dicaeopolis

I can't stomach this.
It smells of pitch and battleship construction.^o

Godson

OK then, here's a ten-year treaty. Try it.

Dicaeopolis

But this one smells like embassies to the allies,^o
a sour smell, like someone being bullied.

Godson

Well, this one's a treaty lasting thirty years^o
by land and sea.

Dicaeopolis

Sweet feast of Dionysus!

185

190

195

- 182 The battle of Marathon was fought in 490, which would make our Acharnians at least 82 years old. But we are not to calculate their claim literally: "Marathon-fighters" was a conventional comic way to refer to the oldest living generation—the generation that repulsed the Persians, established the democracy and acquired the empire—by way of contrasting it with the present generation, always portrayed in comedy as inferior and less successful.
- 186 The Greek for "treaty" is *spondai*, literally "libations" of wine, part of the ceremony by which a treaty was ratified. Here Aristophanes equates the wines themselves with the potential treaties, so that their vintage and character refer also to the length and provisions of the treaties.
- 190 Pitch was used to caulk ships and to flavor inferior wines; the pitchy *retsina* is still a common table-wine in Greece.
- 192 An official delegation from Athens would warn allies tempted to revolt from the empire of severe punishment, like that meted out to the people of Mytilene in 428 (Thucydides 3.1-50).
- 194 Athens and Sparta had agreed to a thirty-year treaty twenty years earlier; the fifty-year treaty agreed to in 421 actually lasted barely six years.

This treaty smells of nectar and ambrosia,
and never hearing "get your three days' rations."
It says to my palate "go wherever you like!"
I accept it; I pour it in libation; I drink it off.
I tell the Acharnians to go to hell.
For me it's no more hardships, no more war:
it's home to the farm and a feast for Dionysus!^o

200

Godson

For me it's getting clear of the Acharnians!

PARODOS I^o

Chorus Leader

This way, everybody, chase him,
question every passerby,
find out where the man has run to,
take him into custody!
Do our fatherland a favor.
Anybody out there know
where on earth this man is heading,
carrying the peace treaty?

205

Chorus (1¹)

He's gone, he's away,
his trail is cold.
It's our misfortune
to be so old!

210

When young we could tote
our coal by the ton
and still pace the lead^o
in a marathon.

- 202 The Country Dionysia, celebrated each winter by the demes (local communities) both urban and rural; because of the war, Dicaeopolis (like many spectators) has been unable to celebrate this festival in his own deme for six years.
- 204 "Parodos" was technically the word for the path taken by an entering chorus into the orchestra ("dancing-space"), but it came to be used also of the section of a play when this takes place. In *Acharnians*, the parodos is split into two parts by Dicaeopolis' hymn to Dionysus.
- The songs and dances performed by a Greek dramatic chorus were normally strophic: composed in two or more strophes (stanzas) that had the same rhythmical structure. In this translation, each chorus is numbered consecutively, and each strophe comprising a chorus is numbered by superscript: this is the first strophe of the first chorus (the parodos).
- 214 "we could have kept up with Phayllus in a race," referring to the famous runner and pentathlete who commanded a ship in the battle of Salamis in 480.

Were we in pursuit
when we were young men,
we'd never have lost
the treaty-man then.

Chorus Leader

Now it's different: now because my
shin's arthritic, now because
old man Lacratides' legs are
heavy with antiquity,^o
off he runs. But let's pursue him!
Never let him laugh to think
slipping us Acharnians is
easy, though we're very old.

Chorus (1²)

Not he, father Zeus
and gods on high,
who's made his peace
with our enemy.

For him and his like
our hatred demands
implacable war
because of our lands.

We'll never give up
until like a reed
we pierce them deep
and painfully,
right up to the hilt,
in vengeance so fine
that never again
will they trample our vines.

Chorus Leader

Now we've got to find this fellow.
Look for him in Stonington,^o
chase him up and down the country,
don't give up until he's caught.
I for one could never have my
fill of pelting him with stones.

215

220

225

230

235

220 One of the choristers, possibly the archon who had held office in the previous century and who was remembered for a record snowfall during his year in office.

234 A pun on Pallene, an Attic deme (202 n.), and *ballein*, "to hit" (here with stones).

Dicaeopolis

Silence, holy silence please!

Chorus Leader

Silence, silence, don't you hear the
call for holy silence, friends?
Here's the very man we're seeking.
Move aside and let him through.
Look, it seems the man intends to
hold a sacrificial rite.

240

LYRIC SCENE I

(*Dicaeopolis, Dicaeopolis' Daughter, Xanthias, Dicaeopolis' Slaves, Wife and Children*)

Dicaeopolis

Silence, holy silence please!
Please, basket-bearer, move ahead a bit.^o
Come, Xanthias, hold the phallos nice and straight.^o
Put down the basket, dear, and I'll begin.

Daughter

Oh mommy, hand me the ladle here,
so I can pour some soup on the sacred cake.

245

Dicaeopolis

You did that very well. Lord Dionysus,
please smile on this parade and sacrifice
that I and my household celebrate for you.
Good fortune attend our Rural Dionysia
and my release from battles. May my thirty
years' peace turn out to be a blessing.
Come, daughter, bear your basket prettily
but make a vinegar face. Ah, lucky the man^o
who marries you and begets a litter of pups
as good as you at farting in the morning!^o

250

255

242 Basket-bearers in festive processions were typically marriageable young girls; here Dicaeopolis's daughter. Being a basket-bearer was a great distinction and conferred honor on the whole family, so that Dicaeopolis already benefits from his sole possession of peace.

243 A large model of the penis (phallos) was a symbol of fertility and therefore appropriately carried in the procession of a country festival honoring Dionysus.

254 The daughter is told to look solemn in the procession, as if the crowd that would normally watch were present; actually, the watching crowd here are the spectators.

256 "farting" is a surprise substitution for "fucking," implying that the husband will not actually be so "lucky": farting in bed exemplified laziness. Dicaeopolis's jests at his daughter's expense may sound insulting, but jocular cynicism at the expense of brides and bridegrooms is normal in festive contexts.

Set forth, and in the crowd hold on to your jewels,
so no one tries to finger you for a snatch.^o
And Xanthias, you and your partner have to hold
the phallos erect, behind the basket-bearer.
I'll follow along and sing the phallic hymn.
Dear wife, you watch us from the roof. Let's go!

Phales, friend of good old Bacchus,^o
party-mate when evening nears,
lover of lads and lover of lasses,
greetings after six long years!

Glad am I to see my village,
glad at last to have my peace,
free at last from war and pillage,
from General Lamachus released!^o

It's far, far nicer, Phales, Phales,
to catch a slave-girl stealing coal,
that Thracian girl of Strymodorus,^o
to throw her down and give her a roll
and put her berry on my pole!

Phales, Phales,
if you drink with us and happen to get hung over,
in the morning you'll get a cup of peace to drink,
and over the fireplace I'll hang my shield.

PARODOS II

(*Dicaeopolis, Chorus Leader, Chorus*)

Chorus

It's him! It's him!^o
Pelt him, pelt him, pelt him, pelt him!
Hit him, hit the dirty bastard!
Can't you hit him with your stones?

- 258 Girls in a procession wore jewelry and so might be targets for thieves; Greek *khrysia* (jewelry) puns on *kysos* (vulva).
263 Phales is the personification of the processional phallos (243 n.) and this is the sort of song, called *phallikon*, that was typically sung in such a procession. Its uninhibited ribaldry was a traditional form of Dionysiac merriment.
270 "Lamachus" means "great warrior" and thus is emblematic of all warriors here. But Lamachus was also a real general who will later appear in this play (see 566).
273 Many Athenian slaves were Thracian; the name Strymodorus seems to be generic in comedy for old men. Although the activity described here may be mere bravado on the part of Dicaeopolis, in reality pretty young slave-girls may well have been at risk of being molested or raped by their owners and/or their owners' friends during a rowdy wine-festival, especially if caught stealing.

Dicaeopolis (2¹)^o
Holy Heracles, what's up?
Watch it, want to smash my cup?

Chorus Leader

No, you dirty scoundrel you!
You're the one we want to stone!

Dicaeopolis

Honored old Acharnians,
what's the cause of all this rage?

Chorus

What's the reason?
Shameless man!
Wretch who betrayed the
fatherland!
You alone have
made a peace;
now you flaunt it
in my face!

Dicaeopolis

Want to hear my reasoning?
want to know why I made peace?

Chorus Leader

Listen hell! You're dead, my man
buried under heaps of stones!

Dicaeopolis

Not until you hear my reasons!
Wait a bit, dear gentlemen!

Chorus

Nothing doing!
Save your breath!
Even Cleon
we hate less,
Cleon whom we
plan to slice
into shoeleather
for the Knights!^o

- 280 The Chorus rushes the procession, sending all but Dicaeopolis into the house.
284 This whole lyric interchange between Dicaeopolis and the Chorus Leader (284-302) responds rhythmically and structurally with its counterpart below (335-46).
302 Here the Chorus suddenly steps out of character (the Acharnians have no reason to hate Cleon) to speak as Aristophanes's own chorus, voicing his hatred of Cleon and advertising next year's play, *Knights*: for Aristophanes's hatred of Cleon, see Introduc-

Chorus Leader

I refuse to listen to you!
 I won't hear you speechify!
 You're the one who treats with Spartans.
 Now we're going to punish you!

Dicaeopolis

Gentlemen, forget the Spartans.
 Put that issue to the side.
 Think about the treaty question,
 whether what I did was right.

Chorus Leader

How can what you did be righteous,
 dealing first of all with *them*,
 Spartans who have no respect for
 gods or oaths or covenants?

Dicaeopolis

I'm convinced that even Spartans,
 whom we treat with too much spite,
 can't be held responsible for
 all the troubles that we have.

Chorus Leader

Not responsible? You scoundrel!
 Dare you say that openly,
 right to our face, and after that you
 think that we would let you off?

Dicaeopolis

Not for all our troubles, not for
all, I said, and in a speech
 I could show you how in some ways
 we're the party in the wrong.

Chorus Leader

Dreadful are the words you utter!
 How they shake me to the heart!
 Do you really dare defend our
 enemies in a speech to us?

Dicaeopolis

What is more, if I speak wrongly,
 and the people think I'm wrong,

tion. "Shoeleather" is a jibe at Cleon's connection with the tanning business, considered a low, even an immoral trade. Similarly, Dicaeopolis later steps out of character to speak as actor (416) or on behalf of Aristophanes (377 ff., 499).

I'm prepared to put my head
 upon a butcher's block and speak.^o

Chorus Leader

Fellow villagers, please tell me
 why we're hoarding up these stones,
 why we don't unravel him
 until he's red as a Spartan's coat?

Dicaeopolis

Black the embers of your anger,
 how they're flaring up anew!
 Won't you listen? Won't you really
 listen, dear Acharnians?

Chorus Leader

No we won't, we'll never listen.

Dicaeopolis

Then you do me grievous wrong.

Chorus Leader

I would die before I'd listen.

Dicaeopolis

Don't say that, Acharnians!

Chorus Leader

Rest assured that you're a dead man.

Dicaeopolis

Then I'll have to bite you back,
 killing in return the loved one
 who's the dearest of all to you.
 Some of yours I'm holding hostage;
 I intend to cut their throats!^o

Chorus Leader

Tell me, fellow villagers, the
 meaning of that speech of his,
 threatening us Acharnians? He

318 For the parody of Euripides' *Telephus* see Introduction. Here Dicaeopolis literalizes a metaphor from the play: in fragment 706 *Telephus* tells Agememnon that he will not withhold a just reply "even if a man with an axe were about to strike my neck."

Aristophanes's play *Thesmophoriazusae*, produced in 411, similarly parodies the plot of *Telephus*. The fact that Aristophanes could parody a play performed thirteen years earlier (twenty-seven in the case of *Thesmophoriazusae*) shows that it had been very memorable. But Aristophanes parodies the tragedy in such a way that even spectators who had not seen or read it could appreciate the humor; of course, those who did know the original would better understand the subtleties of Aristophanes's adaptation.

327 Dicaeopolis goes into the house to get his "hostage"; for the parody see Introduction.

hasn't got somebody's child,
one of ours, inside there, has he?
If he hasn't, why so bold?

Dicaeopolis

Stone me, if you've got a mind to!
If you do, I'll slaughter this!
Soon we'll know if any of you
feels compassion for his coals!

Chorus Leader

Now we're really done for! That's a
charcoal-bucket from my village!^o
Please don't do what you're intending,
please, oh please, oh please, oh please!

Dicaeopolis (2²)

I will kill it. Scream away.
I won't hear a word you say.

Chorus Leader

You'd destroy my friend, a mere
innocent philanthracist?

Dicaeopolis

You refused to hear what I
had to say a while ago.

Chorus

Very well, then,
say your say.
Tell us clearly
right away
why you hold the
Spartans dear.
Little bucket,
we're right here!

Dicaeopolis

First of all, then, please disgorge
all your stones upon the ground.

Chorus Leader

There they are, they're on the ground.
Now put down that sword of yours.

Dicaeopolis

Maybe there's a stone or two

333 Burning wood for charcoal was a significant industry in the Acharnians' deme.

lurking somewhere in your cloaks.

Chorus

Look, we've shaken
out our hoard.
No excuses:
now your sword.
Everything is
on the ground,
shaken out as I
dance around.

345

LYRIC SCENE II

(*Dicaeopolis, Chorus Leader, Chorus, Euripides' Slave, Euripides*)

Dicaeopolis

I knew that in the end you'd stop your shouting.
But some coals from Parnes very nearly died,^o
and all because their friends are acting manic.
And this bucket, out of fear, has squirted me
with a stream of coal-dust, like a cuttlefish!
A dreadful thing, that passions should become
so vinegary that men throw stones and shout
and are unwilling to listen to all sides,
when I'm prepared to say, upon a block,
in defence of the Spartans what I have to say.

350

quote?

355

Chorus (3¹)

Then get a block and bring it out
and say what this is all about,
what's so important as to be
the grounds for your audacity.
We'd dearly love to understand
the thought that lies behind your plan.

360

Chorus Leader

OK, since you're presiding at this trial,
set up the block and then begin your speech.^o

365

Dicaeopolis

All right, then, look: the butcher's block is here,
and here is little me who's going to speak.
Don't worry, I won't hide behind a shield,
but make my case in favor of the Spartans.

348 A spur of Parnes, a heavily forested mountain in northern Attica, extended into Acharnae and furnished the wood burned to make Acharnian charcoal.

365 Dicaeopolis goes into the house for a butcher's block.

And yet I'm very scared: I know the ways
 of farmers, how delightedly they listen
 to any phony speaker with eulogies
 of them and of the polis, true or false.
 They're unaware of being bought and sold.
 I know the minds of the elderly jurors, too:
 their only goal is biting with their ballots.^o
 And I know myself, what Cleon did to me
 because of the comedy I staged last year.^o
 He dragged me in before the Councilors
 and slandered me, tongue-lashing me with lies,
 a roaring rapids soaking me with abuse;^o
 I nearly drowned in a sewer of litigation.
 So first allow me, before I make my speech,
 to dress myself in a guise most piteous.

Chorus (3²)

Why twist and turn and scheme this way,
 why this contrivance of delay?
 Go ask that pansy sitting there^o
 if he would lend a shock of hair,
 a fright-wig shaggy, dark, unclean,
 and wear it so you can't be seen.^o

Chorus Leader

And they expose your trickster's machinations;^o
 for in *this* contest no one cops a plea.

Dicaeopolis

It's now the time to have a steadfast heart,
 and I must go to see Euripides.^o
 Boy, boy!

376 In democratic Athens, full popular sovereignty was rooted in the jury-system, where individuals brought lawsuits or prosecutions personally (there were no official prosecutors or advocates). Cases were heard by large juries that represented the whole people and whose verdict was unappealable. Any citizen 30 or older could be a juror and would be paid three obols a day. But this was much less than could be earned by work, so that jury-service attracted men unable to work and juries came to be composed largely of old men and the urban poor. This arrangement produced friction between the generations and social classes: many litigants were wealthy and powerful men who resented being at the mercy of a "mob", and jurors might indeed use their power vindictively against those they resented, especially when encouraged by demagogues like Cleon. Here Dicaeopolis is concerned with the jurors' support of the war. In *Wasps*, produced in 422, Aristophanes satirizes these and other problems of the Athenian jury-system.

378 For Cleon's attack on Aristophanes before the Council see Introduction.

381 "roared like the Cycloborus," an Attic stream known for its loudness in spate.

Slave

Who's there?

Dicaeopolis

Euripides at home?

395

Slave

He is and isn't, if you take my point.^o

Dicaeopolis

He is and isn't home?

Slave

That's right, old man.

His mind is out collecting choice conceits,
 while he himself is home, upon the couch,
 composing tragedy.

Dicaeopolis

Lucky Euripides,

whose very slave thinks up such clever bits!

400

Go get him.

Slave

Can't.

Dicaeopolis

Go get him anyway.^o

I won't go away, I'll knock on the door myself.

Euripides, dear Euripides, answer me,

if ever thou didst answer any mortal!

It's Dicaeopolis from Cholleidae here.^o

405

Euripides

I'm busy.

386 They refer to the tragic and dithyrambic poet, Hieronymus, whose long hair opened him to abuse as a pathic homosexual. Ancient commentaries note his fondness for using frightening masks in his plays.

390 The "cap of Hades" (the lord of the underworld whose name means "unseen") made its wearer invisible, just as Hieronymus' hair covers his face.

391 "your Sisyphcan stratagems": Sisyphus, a mythical king of Corinth, was legendary for his craftiness and reportedly had even cheated Death itself.

394 The central stage-door now represents Euripides' house, where Dicaeopolis hopes to get the costume and props necessary for his "performance." In Old Comedy, a fantastic rather than a naturalistic kind of drama, such miraculous changes of place and suspensions of action are common.

396 Among tragic poets, Euripides is especially fond of such paradoxical phrases, here comically aped by his slave.

Dicaeopolis

Please, have yourself wheeled out.^o

Euripides

No way.

Dicaeopolis

Please do.

Euripides

Oh, very well. Too busy to leave the couch.

Dicaeopolis

Euripides—

Euripides

Why criest thou?

Dicaeopolis

You compose

410

feet up, not down? No wonder you're fond of cripples!^o

And why are you dressed in all those tragic rags,

a raiment piteous? No wonder you like beggars!

Euripides, I beg on bended knee,

please give me a bit of rag from that old play.^o

415

I've got to make a long speech to the Chorus,

and if I fail, it means my certain death.

Euripides

Which ragged garb? Not that wherein this Oeneus,

the star-crossed ancient, trod upon the boards?^o

402 The slave shuts the door in Dicaeopolis's face.

406 Here the audience first learns the hero's name. The deme Cholleidae was not far from Acharnae; why Dicaeopolis is associated with Cholleidae is unclear. It may simply pun on cholos ("lame"), though the idea of lameness has yet to be introduced (411).

408 The *ekkyklema* was a platform that could be wheeled on stage to reveal indoor action; here Euripides' house is envisioned as having the same apparatus as a stage-house. The following action shows that Euripides was revealed reclining on a couch; near to hand were raggedy costumes and props, perhaps hanging on a plywood panel behind the couch.

411 Aristophanes often exploits the popular idea that what is true of an artist's creations must also be true of the artist himself. In his plays, Euripides often confounded conventional notions about the connection between outward status and inward virtue; one of his methods was to portray noble personages crippled or in rags; examples follow.

415 Dicaeopolis's inability to recall the name of Telephus, the hero he has in mind, allows Aristophanes both to create suspense (at least some spectators would not yet have recognized the parody) and to have fun with six other pitiable Euripidean characters.

419 Oeneus, aged king of Calydon, was deposed by his brother Agrius after the death of his only surviving son, Tydeus, and became an impoverished exile. Euripides' play told how Tydeus' son, Diomedes, expelled Agrius and restored Oeneus.

Dicaeopolis

No, not from Oeneus; someone still more wretched.

420

Euripides

From Phoenix, that was blind?^o

Dicaeopolis

Not Phoenix, no,

from someone even wretcheder than that.

Euripides

What tattered raggedness doth the fellow seek?

Then meanest thou the cripple Philoctetes?^o

Dicaeopolis

No, no, it's someone much, much cripplier.

425

Euripides

Then does thou wish the foul accoutrement

that this Bellerophon, the cripple, wore?^o

Dicaeopolis

No, not Bellerophon, though my man too

was lame, a beggar, glib, a forceful speaker.

Euripides

I know, 'twas Mysian Telephus.^o

Dicaeopolis

It was!

430

Ah, give me, I beg you, Telephus' swaddlings.

Euripides

Boy, give him the tattered rags of Telephus.

They're closeted above Thyestes' rags,^o

twixt them and Ino's.

421 Phoenix, prince of Hellas, was falsely accused by his father's concubine of trying to seduce her; his defense-speech was unconvincing, and he was blinded and exiled.

424 Philoctetes, who accompanied the Greeks to Troy, was cast ashore on the island of Lemnos because of a wound in his foot that stank and would not heal. Euripides had portrayed him as living for ten years on the charity of the Lemnians until he was recalled to Troy as the result of a prophecy. In Sophocles' extant play *Philoctetes*, by contrast, the island is deserted and the hero lives on what he can shoot with his bow.

427 The hero Bellerophon, who rode the winged horse Pegasus, tried to fly to heaven but was unhorsed by a gadfly sent by Zeus and ended his days as a cripple. Bellerophon's ride is parodied in Aristophanes's play *Peace*.

430 See 318 n.

433 Euripides' *Thyestes* evidently dramatized the hero's life as an exile after his brother Atreus had expelled him from Mycenae.

Slave

Here they are, they're yours.°

Dicaeopolis

O Lord that seest through and under all—
 [may I dress myself in guise most piteous.]°
 Euripides, since you've been so kind to me,
 I'd also like what goes along with these,
 the little Mysian beanie for my head.°
 The crippled beggar must I play today:
 be what I am, yet seem to be another.
 The audience will know me for who I am,
 while the Chorus stands there like a bunch of fools:
 with my pointed phrases I'll be giving them the finger.°

Euripides

Then take, for thy gross mind doth finely plan.

Dicaeopolis

God bless you, and my best to Telephus, too.
 That's good: I'm filling up with wit already!
 But I can't go on without a cripple's cane.

Euripides

Then take, and hie thee from these marble halls.

Dicaeopolis

My soul, thou seest how I'm driven from the halls
 while I still need lots of props, so now be whiny
 and wheedly and beggarly. Euripides,
 I need a basket burnt through by a lamp.

Euripides

What need, poor wretch, to have such wickerwork?

Dicaeopolis

No need to have it, I want it anyway.

Euripides

Know thou art irksome, and depart my halls.

434 Athamas, a Thessalian king, believing that his wife Ino (daughter of the Theban king, Cadmus) had died, remarried. When he found out that Ino was alive, he had her seized and imprisoned; Euripides had evidently staged her in ragged prison-clothes.

436 = 384, which however makes less sense in this context and must therefore have been mistakenly inserted by a scribe.

439 "Mysian": During Dicaeopolis's speech in disguise, this prop will keep the issues of identity and foreignness in the spectators' minds.

444 For Dicaeopolis's distinction between the Chorus, who will be fooled, and the spectators, who will not be, see Introduction.

Dicaeopolis

Ah!

Be fortunate, as once your mother was.°

Euripides

And now begone!

Dicaeopolis

I need just one thing more,
 a tiny goblet with a broken lip.

Euripides

Take it to blazes, thou troubler of my halls!

Dicaeopolis

You don't yet know how troublesome you are.
 Please, sweetest Euripides, give me one thing more,
 this little bottle cappered with a sponge.

Euripides

You'd rob me, creature, of all my tragedy!
 Take this and then depart.

Dicaeopolis

I'm on my way.

But wait! There's one thing more that, if I fail
 to get, I'm lost. My sweetest Euripides,
 if this I get I'm gone and won't be back:
 I want some withered lettuce for my basket.

Euripides

Thou killest me! Here you are! My plays are gone!]

Dicaeopolis

No more; I'm off. Indeed I've been a bother,
 though little knew I the kings mislike me so.
 Good heavens me, I'm ruined! I forgot
 the crucial thing on which my fate depends.
 My sweetest darling, dear Euripides,
 may lightening strike me if I ask again,
 save this one thing and this one thing alone:
 give me some chervil from thy mother's stall.°

Euripides

The man's insulting. Shoot the gated bolts!°

457 In reality, Euripides' mother was high-born, but Aristophanes often portrays her as an impoverished street-vendor of wild herbs (and therefore as conventionally disreputable). Whether this portrayal has any connection with reality is unknown.

478 See 457 n.

479 Euripides is wheeled inside on the ekkyklema (408 n.).

was angry striped
 Eur. of some nec
 in general for tragedy;
 namely
 deception
 Sim to what
 the little plot
 of does to his
 475
 prologues
 in song

some wish to have things
 just to have them

Dicaeopolis

My soul, sans chervil must we hit the road.^o
 Knowest what a contest you must soon contest,
 by speaking in defence of Spartan foes?
 Forward, my soul, get on the mark. Right here.
 You're standing still? Move out: you've had a shot
 of Euripides! That's it! Come, foolish heart,
 go over there and offer them your head
 when you've told them how you think the matter stands.
 Be bold. Go on. Move out. I applaud my heart!

LYRIC SCENE III

(Chorus, Dicaeopolis, Chorus Leaders, Lamachus, Lamachus' Soldiers)

Chorus (4¹)

What will you do? What will you say?
 You are a shameless, you are an iron man,
 you who offer your own neck to the city
 and plan to speak alone against us all.
 Steady he stays, facing his task.
 As you have chosen, so must you speak out now.

Dicaeopolis

* Do not be angry, you men who watch the play,
 if, though a beggar, I speak before Athenians^o
 of state affairs while making comedy.^o
 For comedy too concerns itself with justice, - in addition to tragedy
 and what I say will shock you but be just.
 And this time Cleon won't make allegations
 that I slander the polis in front of foreigners;
 for we're alone, it's a Lenaeon competition,
 the foreigners aren't yet here, nor tribute-money
 nor allied troops from the cities of our empire,^o

480 Epic and tragic heroes address their hearts or souls but never get a recalcitrant response!

498 The original lines from *Telephus* (fragment 703) are

Do not be angry, leaders of the Greeks,
 if, though a beggar, I speak before nobility.

499 The opening, and much of the rest, of this speech is modelled on the speech of Telephus to the Greeks, in which he had claimed that the Mysians were justified in defending themselves and so could not be called traitors. Dicaeopolis similarly defends himself against the Achaeans' charge of treason, as, behind him, the poet defends himself against Cleon's charges. See further Introduction.

506 Since the sea was dangerous in winter, few non-resident foreigners or allied troops would attend the Lenaea, as they did the City Dionysia (see Introduction), where tribute payments from Athens' subject allies were officially witnessed by the Athenians and when allied troops would be mustered for the campaign-season.

but now we're by ourselves, like grain that's hulled:
 I count the immigrants as civic bran.^o

Myself, I hate the Spartans with all my heart,
 and hope the god Poseidon once again
 will send a quake that shakes their houses down.^o
 I too have vines the Spartans have cut down.
 But friends—for there are only friends here listening—
 why blame these things entirely on the Spartans?
 It was men of ours—I do not say our polis;
 remember that, I do not say our polis—
 but some badly-minded troublemaking creeps,
 some worthless counterfeit foreign currency,^o
 who started denouncing shirts from Megara^o
 and if they spotted a cucumber or a bunny
 or piglets, cloves of garlic, lumps of salt,
 it was Megarian, grabbed, sold off that very day.
 Now that was merely local; small potatoes.
 But then some young crapshooters got to drinking^o
 and went to Megara and stole the whore Simaetha.^o
 And then the Megarians, garlic-stung with passion,
 got even by stealing two whores from Aspasia.^o

508 The citizens are compared to unsifted flour, in which some bran (immigrant non-citizens) would remain after the milling.

511 In 464 Sparta had been devastated by a great earthquake that many attributed to the anger of the god Poseidon following the Spartans' execution of some of their subject populace (helots), who had taken refuge in his temple at Cape Taenarum.

518 The metaphor from counterfeit coin amounts to an accusation that the men in question are not Athenian by birth and are therefore not entitled to citizen rights, such as prosecuting black-marketeers (next n.).

519 Goods from Megara were contraband in Athens by the provisions of a decree that the Spartans, on the eve of the war, had demanded the Athenians rescind as being provocative; the Athenians, on the urging of Pericles, had refused. Informers who prosecuted men in possession of contraband are denounced here as acting not from the acceptable motives of personal enmity or the public interest but as extortionists and blackmailers. Such an informer is portrayed later in the play (818 ff.).

524 In the party-game *kottabos*, drinkers would try to hit targets with wine-lees thrown from their cups.

525 Ancient commentators say that this prostitute counted among her lovers Alcibiades (716 n.), whose mother's cousin was Pericles, in whose house he was raised. At this time he was prominent among the ambitious young prosecutors later criticized by the Chorus (676 ff.). By tracing the origins of the present war to woman-stealing, Dicaeopolis parodies a mythological motif found in the *Iliad*, in tragedy and in Herodotus' *Histories*. In his speech (499 n.), Telephus may well have questioned the justice of the Trojan War, fought to recover Menelaus' wife Helen, who had absconded to Troy with Paris as his reward for judging in the goddess Aphrodite's favor in a beauty-contest.

527 Aspasia was a well-educated and free-born immigrant from Miletus who for many years lived with Pericles as his lover. Comic poets insinuated that she procured women for Pericles or even (as here) that she was a trainer of courtesans.

From this the origin of the war broke forth
 on all the Greeks: from three girls good at blow-jobs.
 And then in wrath Olympian Pericles^o
 did lighten and thunder and turn Greece upside-down,
 establishing laws that read like drinking-songs:
 "Megarians shall be banned from land and markets
 and banned from sea and also banned from shore."^o
 Whereupon the Megarians, starving inch by inch,^o
 appealed to Sparta to help make us repeal
 the decree we passed in the matter of the whores.
 But we refused although they repeatedly asked.
 And then it came to a clashing of the shields.
 You say they shouldn't have; but what instead?
 Come, what if a Spartan spotted a puppy imported
 from Seriphus, then denounced it and sold it off,^o
 would you have calmly sat at home? Far from it!
 Why, you'd have instantaneously despatched
 three hundred ships; the city would be filled
 with shouting soldiers, clamor for the skippers,
 with pay disbursed, with figureheads being gilded,
 with noisy markets, rations being rationed,
 with wallets, oarloops, people buying jars,
 with garlic, olives, onions packed in nets,
 with crowns, anchovies, dancing-girls, black eyes,
 with the dockyard full of oarspars being planed
 and dowelpins hammered, oarports being drilled,
 with pipes and bosuns, whistles and tootle-oo.
 I know that's what you'd do: and do we think
 that Telephus would not? Then we lack sense!^o

Leader of First Semichorus

Is that right, you damnable scurvy villain you?
 Do you, a beggar, dare say this of us,
 and, if there be the odd informer, blame us?

530 Because of Pericles' long career as the leading statesman of Athens, comic poets like to portray him as a Zeus-like ruler (or tyrant); here the war is attributed to personal (and sordid) motives.

534 For this decree see 519 n. Dicaeopolis's version of the decree is modelled on an actual drinking song (by Timocreon of Rhodes.).

535 A starving Megarian will later appear (730 ff.).

542 This small Cycladic island was one of the least important Athenian allies.

556 Dicaeopolis lays his head on the block; half the Chorus move toward him, the other half intervene.

Leader of Second Semichorus

He does, by god, and everything he says
 is just; in no particular does he lie.

560

Leader of First Semichorus

Well, even so, had he any right to say it?
 He won't be glad that he dared to say such things!

*Don't greet
 his with, but?
 is whether it
 to be said or no?*

Leader of Second Semichorus

Hey you, where are you running? Stop! Don't hit
 this man, for if you do you'll soon get yours!

565

First Semichorus (4²)

Yo, Lamachus, o lightning of eye,^o
 come to our aid, o thou of the fearsome crest!
 Yo, Lamachus, thou friend and fellow tribesman,
 or any other officer, general or
 stormer of walls, come to our aid,
 anyone, quickly: we're in a strangle hold!

570

Lamachus

Whence came this martial din upon mine ear?
 Where must I help? Where throw the hurly-burly?
 Who's roused my Gorgon from her carrying-case?^o

Dicaeopolis

Heroic Lamachus! What crests, what ambushes!

575

Leader of First Semichorus

O Lamachus, has this man not for hours
 been spewing slander on our entire polis?

Lamachus

How dare you, you mere beggar, say such things?

Dicaeopolis

Heroic Lamachus, please be merciful
 if I, a beggar, spoke and prattled some.

Lamachus

What did you say of me? Well?

Dicaeopolis

Can't recall:

580

566 In addition to having a warlike name (270 n.), Lamachus was a good choice to exemplify the military establishment because he was the least wealthy of the contemporary commanders and thus best suited Aristophanes's argument that the military leadership, like the politicians, favored the war not out of concern for the people's interest and safety but rather to line their own pockets.

574 Lamachus' shield, which he says he has just now uncased, bore the blazon of a Gorgon, a mythical female monster whose face literally petrified anyone who saw it.

your terrifying armor makes me dizzy.
I beg you, take away that bogymen!

Lamachus
There.

Dicaeopolis
Lay it upside-down in front of me.

Lamachus
OK.

Dicaeopolis
Now from your helmet take a feather.

Lamachus
So here's a feather.

Dicaeopolis
Now please hold my head,
so I can puke. Your crests are sickening!

Lamachus
Hey, what're you doing? Use my feather to puke?

Dicaeopolis
What feather is this? Tell me from what bird
this feather comes: perhaps the roaring boastard?

Lamachus
Oh! Now you die!

Dicaeopolis
Oh no no, Lamachus,
I don't doubt that you're strong. Though if you are,
why don't you skin my cock? You're well equipped.^o

Lamachus
Do you, a beggar, say this to a general?

Dicaeopolis
What, me a beggar?

Lamachus
Well, what are you then?

Dicaeopolis
What am I? A solid citizen, no placehunter,
and ever since the war began, a soldier;

592 An insulting double-meaning. In one sense "skin my cock" refers to circumcision, regarded by the Greeks as a barbaric mutilation, which Dicaeopolis invites Lamachus to perform with his sword. In the other it refers to retraction of the foreskin by stimulating an erection, and "well equipped" refers to Lamachus' stage-phallos, which Dicaeopolis (in double-meaning) professes to find arousing.

while you've become Lord Lofty Salary.

Lamachus
They elected me—

Dicaeopolis
A bunch of cuckoos did!
That sickened me and drove me to make peace,
the sight of greybeards fighting in the ranks
and strapping men like you avoiding battle:
those drawing mega-pay on the Thracian coast,
those General Puffers and slippery Sgt. Bilkos,
those guys with Chares, those in Suckerville,^o
those Captain Bullshots, Colonel Racketeers,
those way out west in Scamtown or in Jokeville.

Lamachus
They were elected.

Dicaeopolis
But what's the reason, then,
that you guys always get paid missions somewhere,
but these folks never do? Say, Mr. Coaldust,^o
you're pretty old: did you ever get a mission?
He hasn't, though he's solid and works hard.
And what of Coalson, Porter, or Oakwood there:
has any of you seen Ecbatana or Chaonia?^o
They haven't. Lamachus and the bluebloods go,^o
though yesterday their friends were warning them,
because they owe back-taxes and old debts,
to get out of the way, like people dumping slops.^o

604 Chares is otherwise unknown. "Suckerville" translates "Chaonians," a fierce people of Epirus with whom Athens was apparently negotiating. Their name is intended to remind us of the verb *haskein*, "to gape" (be gullible).

606 "in Camarina and Gela and Catagela": the first two are actual towns in Sicily, Camarina being presently among the towns allied with Athens against Syracuse and her allies (including Gela). Gela reminds us of *gelos* ("laughter"), and Catagela (literally "lower Gela") is an invented name modelled on *katagelos* ("derision").

609 The Acharnians, here addressed by Dicaeopolis, are given invented names appropriate to their chief local industry (333 n.).

613 For Ecbatana see 64 n.; for Chaonia 604.

614 "L. and the son of Coisyra": Megacles, like Pericles a member of the wealthy aristocratic family of the Alcmaeonidae, is identified this way to emphasize his non-Athenian ancestry on his mother's side: Coisyra was of Eretrian origin, having probably come to Athens as a small child in 490, when Eretria was occupied by the Persian invaders.

617 Lamachus' debts will have resulted from his poverty (566 n.), Megacles' from his extravagance.

Lamachus

[Democracy, can such talk be endured?]

Dicaeopolis

Hell no, unless our Lamachus draws his pay!

Lamachus

Well, I for one on all the Peloponnesians
will wage the war and harry them everywhere
with ships and troops to the utmost of my power.

Dicaeopolis

And I proclaim to all the Peloponnesians,
to the Megarians and to the Boeotians too,^o
that they can trade with me, but not with Lamachus.

PARABASIS^o

(Chorus Leader, Chorus)

Chorus Leader

The man has triumphed with his logic;
he's convinced the populace
about the treaty. Let's strip down, then,
let's essay the anapests.^o

In all the time since our producer's
been staging comic choruses,
he's never faced the audience
to claim superior cleverness.^o

624 Since both Megara and Boeotia were enemies of Athens, none of their goods could be imported or traded. But now that Dicaeopolis is at peace he will be free to trade with whomever he likes, and we will presently see him trading with a Megarian and a Boeotian.

626 Lamachus exits with his men, Dicaeopolis goes into his house. The Chorus then performs their parabasis (self-revelation), a traditional structural feature of Old Comedy that typically occurs when the initial plot-conflict is settled. It was the Chorus' big production-number; thereafter they no longer play an important role in the action, but merely sing songs to articulate episodes.

627 The Chorus removed items of clothing before dancing or other vigorous movement, such as was required in a parabasis.

629 This play, like Aristophanes's first two plays, was produced by Callistratus, but the Chorus Leader speaks of poet and producer interchangeably. *Knights* 512-13, where Aristophanes says that "many people" had long been asking him why he had not yet produced plays on his own, is evidence that he was known to be the author of the plays produced by Callistratus.

A parabasis usually (as here) consisted of a prelude (626-7) and a speech by the Chorus Leader typically written in (and thus referred to simply as the) anapests (628-64); and an epirrhematic syzygy: a strophe (204 n.) by the Chorus followed by an epirrhema (speech) by the Chorus Leader, then a responding antistrophe and antepirrhema ("syzygy" designates the ABAB structure). In the "anapests" the Chorus

But now his enemies have denounced him
before Athenians quick to judge,
as one who ridicules our city
and insults its citizens.^o

So now he asks to plead his case to
Athenians with open minds.
Our poet says that he deserves your
thanks for many benefits:
he's stopped you being taken in too
easily by foreigners
and taking joy in flattery and
being sucker-citizens.

When ambassadors from allied cities
used to come to hoodwink you,
they'd start by calling you "violet-crowned,"^o
and every time they called you that
at once that little word would get you
sitting on your buttock-tips.

And if in buttering you up some
speaker said that Athens "gleams,"
you'd give him anything he asked, for
honoring you like mere sardines.

For doing that our poet merits
thanks for many benefits,
for showing what democracy meant for
peoples of the allied states.^o

And that's why people from the allies
bearing tribute for you all
will come to Athens: just to see the
poet who's the best of all,
who took the risk of speaking to the
Athenians what is right and just.

So far, so wide has news of his great
courage spread already that
the Persian King himself, when testing

Leader typically speaks on behalf of the poet: praising his skill, denigrating his rivals and often offering the spectators good advice. In the syzygy the Chorus, in character, address their own complaints and advice to the spectators.

632 Referring to Cleon's denunciation (see Introduction).

637-9 These two terms of praise for Athens came from a poem by Pindar and had evidently become patriotic clichés.

642 Since we do not have *Babylonians*, in which Aristophanes had treated this subject, we cannot know whether he refers to poor democratic self-government in the allied states or to poor Athenian administration of them, or both.

out the Spartan embassy,^o
 first asked them which combatant was the
 stronger in her naval force,
 then asked them which combatant was the
 target of this poet's abuse;
 "for these," he said, "are people who've been
 turned into much better men,
 and they will be decisive victors,
 having him to give advice."

And that's the reason why the Spartans
 want you now to treat for peace
 and ask that you return Aegina:^o
 not to get the island back,
 they're not concerned with that, they only
 want this poet for themselves.^o

But don't you ever let him go,
 for in his plays he'll say what's right.
 He says he'll give you good instruction,
 bringing you true happiness,
 and never flatter, never tempt you,
 never diddle you around,
 deceive or soften you with praise, but
 always say what's best for you.
 That said, let Cleon hatch his plots
 against me, let him do his worst;
 for what is right and just shall be
 my ally, nor will I be found
 to be a citizen like him,
 a coward and a punk-ass.^o

Chorus (5¹)

This way come, blazing Muse;
 wield the force of fire,
 vehement, Acharnian!

647 The Spartans had in recent years sent embassies to Persia for financial help against Athens.

653 Early in the war Athens had expelled the people of this island (near Attica) and replaced them with Athenian colonists; the Spartans had given the exiles refuge and demanded their restoration.

654 Evidently Aristophanes had some connection with Aegina (family or property), but its nature is unknown. These lines strongly suggest that in his attack on Aristophanes (see Introduction) Cleon had questioned his Athenian citizenship.

664 Greek *katapygon*, designating a man who allows another man to penetrate him anally, need not be taken in its strict sense (though comic poets routinely assume that popular politicians had sold their bodies to get ahead, cf. 79 and 716 nn.), since it was conventionally applied to weak, shameless or meretricious behavior generally.

Like a spark that leaps aloft
 from oaken coals when roused
 by the bellows' favoring wind,
 and meat for the grill lies by,
 and cooks stir up fine relish
 agleam with pickle-jewels
 and knead the dough:

this way come, sing a song
 rousing, ardent, rustic,
 to us your deme compatriots!

Chorus Leader

We ancient geezers have a gripe to
 lodge against the city.
 Unworthily of all the naval
 battles we have fought in,
 we get no care as aged men but
 suffer dire treatment.

Although we're elderly you throw us
 into courtroom trials,
 allowing us to be the sport of
 stripling prosecutors,
 old men who're nothing now, as mute as
 broken worn-out trumpets,
 whose rod and staff that comfort us is
 just the cane we lean on,
 so old that when we stand in court we
 mutter only mumbles
 and see before us nothing but the
 foggy gloom of justice.

The stripling, who has cut a deal to
 make the case against him,
 attacks him quickly, pelting him with
 hard and rounded phrases;
 and then he drags him up for questions,
 setting verbal pitfalls,
 assaulting, pounding, shaking up a
 ghostly old Tithonus.^o
 The victim mumbles his reply and
 totters off convicted.

688 Tithonus, mortal husband of the goddess Dawn, asked Zeus for immortality but forgot to include agelessness, so that eventually he withered away to a mere squeaking voice.

And then he groans and then he weeps, and
says to his companions,
"The fine I owe must come from money
saved to buy my coffin."

Chorus (5²)

How is this fair or right,
ruining a greybeard
in court beside the water-clock?^o

He has borne his share of toil,
he has wiped off manly sweat
by the bucket when he fought
for the city at Marathon.^o
In our prime, at Marathon,
we pursued the enemy.
But nowadays

evil men eagerly
sue and pursue us.
What can the shysters say to this?^o

Chorus Leader

Yes, where's the fairness when a stooping
old Thucydides is
destroyed by being grappled by this
wilderness of Asia,
I mean Cephisodemus' son, that
smooth-tongued prosecutor?^o
I felt great pity, wiped away a
tear as I beheld the
old gentleman so hard beset by

693 In the lawcourts, the length of each litigant's speech was timed by allowing the same amount of water to run out of a container specially designed for that purpose.

697 See 182 n.

702 They mention Marpsias, ridiculed elsewhere in comedy as a troublesome orator and parasite. The name, otherwise unattested, means "Grappler" and so is probably a nickname.

705 Thucydides, son of Milesias, now nearly eighty years old, had twenty years earlier been the most important of Pericles' political rivals but was exiled in 443 for ten years. When he returned he tried to make a comeback by prosecuting Pericles' friend, Anaxagoras the philosopher. But his career came to an end in the trial mentioned here, when for some reason he became tongue-tied and was unable to make his defence speech. The son of Cephisodemus was Euathlus, mentioned elsewhere in comedy for his zeal for prosecution; another of his victims was the sophist Protagoras. The references here to Asian archers play upon gossip or accusations that Cephisodemus (and therefore his son) had Scythian blood. Scythians were barbarians and noted for their skill at archery; many Scythian slaves were used by the city of Athens as policemen.

nothing but an archer.
But when that old Thucydides was
younger, by Demeter,
he'd not have been as easy mark for
any adversary.
No, first he'd wrestle to the canvas
ten such prosecutors,^o
and then he'd lift his voice and bellow
down three thousand archers,
and then outshoot the kinsmen of the
prosecutor's father.
But since you won't allow the old a
peaceful night of sleeping,
at least you ought to change the law to
make indictments separate:
for old defendants, prosecutors
just as old and toothless,
for youths an Alcibiades, the
glib-tongued little pansy.^o
In future, if there's banishment or
someone owes the city,
let oldsters charge the oldsters, let the
youngsters charge the youngsters.

EPISODE I

(Dicaeopolis, Megarian, Girls, Informer)

Dicaeopolis

These stones will mark the boundary of my market.
It's open for trade to all the Peloponnesians,
to all Megarians and Boeotians too,^o
provided they trade with me, not Lamachus.
As trade commissioners I appoint these three
duly elected straps from Whippington.^o
And let no squealers try to enter here,

710 A metaphor appropriate to this family: Melesias (705 n.) had been a distinguished trainer of wrestlers, and Thucydides' own sons were the leading Athenian wrestlers of their time.

716 See 525 n. "Pansy" translates *euryproktos* ("having a wide ass-hole"), an insult often enough applied to popular politicians (79 and 664 nn.) but here especially appropriate for Alcibiades, who was notorious for both homosexual and heterosexual excess.

721 see 624 n.

724 "from Leproi," a fictitious place-name chosen for its connection with *lepein*, "peel," Athenian slang for "flog." Since Dicaeopolis's market is private he will have to enforce its laws himself rather than, as he would in reality, by appealing to the market-commissioners.

nor any other species of canary°
I'll fetch the pillar with my treaty inscribed
and display it clearly in my market-place.°

Megarian°

Hello, Athenian market, dear to Megara!
I need you—holy friendship!—like a mommy.
You dirty little brats, go get some chow
for your poor dad, if you can turn some up.
And listen! Give me your undivided bellies:
you wanna be sold or friggin starve to death?

Girls

Sold, sold!

Megarian

I'd say the same. But who'd be dumb enough
to pay a cent for merchandise like you?
So I've cooked up a real Megarian scam:°
I'll pass you off as pussycats for sale.°
Put on these collars with the little bells,
and look like kitties from a purebred cat.
'Cause, by the God of Traders, you get home
unsold, I'll starve you both to death myself!
Now put these whisker-patches on your mugs,
and then climb up here into this here sack,
and do a little yowling and meowing.
Make just like kitties at the kitty-show.°
I'll yell around for Dicaeopolis.
Hey Dicaeopolis, wanna buy some kittens?

726 For informers see 519 n. "Canary" (modern slang for informer) translates *phasianos*, "pheasant" or "man from Phasia" with a play on phasis, "denunciation."

728 Dicaeopolis goes inside; a shabbily dressed Megarian enters with his two young daughters.

729 For the decree that has impoverished Megara see 519 n. This Megarian speaks in his local dialect, a member of the Doric family of dialects that included Spartan Laconian. Since the Athenians considered Megarians stupid and crude ("Megarian jokes" occupying the same category as modern "Polish jokes"), I have given this Megarian a coarse sound.

738 The Megarians had a reputation for low trickery.

739 Throughout this scene Aristophanes plays on the double sense of Greek *khoiros* "pig" (a staple meat and sacrificial animal) and "female genitals" (specifically the hairless genitals of young girls). Unfortunately, the American slang usages "pork" and "meat" are unavailable for translation, since they refer to the penis. I have therefore decided to use "pussy" even though the jokes about hairiness and about cooking and eating pork do not quite fit it (the Greeks did not eat cats).

747 "at the Mysteries": initiates at the Eleusinian Mysteries (47 n.) brought pigs with them to sacrifice at the preliminary ceremonies.

Dicaeopolis
What's this? A Megarian?

Megarian

Yeah, I've come to trade.

750

Dicaeopolis
How goes it there?

Megarian

We sit in the bar and shrink.°

Dicaeopolis
That's nice, by god, if there's a live band there.
What else is new in Megara?

735

Megarian

Same old stuff.

When I hit the road to make the trip up here,
the government was doin' all they could
to see that we get totally destroyed.

755

Dicaeopolis
You'll soon be out of trouble, then!

740

Megarian

That's right.

Dicaeopolis
What else at Megara? How's the price of grain?

745

Megarian
As high as it can get, just like the gods.

Dicaeopolis
So what've you got, some salt?

Megarian

Don't you control it?

760

Dicaeopolis
Some garlic?

Megarian

Garlic? Every time you guys
invade our country, you're like a horde of mice,
you dig up all the garlic bulbs with hoes.

Dicaeopolis
What have you got?

751-2 The Megarian makes a grim joke about his country's miserable poverty; Dicaeopolis hears (or feigns to have heard) "drink" so that his pleasantry is inappropriate.

Megarian

I got some grade-A pussies.

Dicaeopolis

All right! Let's see them.

Megarian

You're gonna like this fine.

Go on and cop a feel. They're nice and soft.

Dicaeopolis

What's this supposed to be?

Megarian

I told you: pussies.

Dicaeopolis

Explain your meaning. Where's this from?

Megarian

From Megara.

You say it ain't no pussy?

Dicaeopolis

Doesn't look it.

Megarian

Well I'll be damned. Look, this guy don't trust nothin'.

He says this ain't no pussy. I tell you what.

You want, I'll bet you a pound of seasoned salt
that this here's pussy in the broad sense of the word.

Dicaeopolis

All right, but it's a human being's!

Megarian

Sure,

belongs to me. Whose else you think it is?

You wanna hear it squeal?

Dicaeopolis

Why certainly

I would.

Megarian

OK now, pussy, make a sound.

You won't? You're clamming up, you goddamned girl!

I swear to God I'll take you home again!

Girl

Meow meow!

Megarian

That ain't no pussy?

Dicaeopolis

Looks like pussy now,

but all grown up it's a beaver.

Megarian

In five years,

I tell you, it'll be just like its momma.

Dicaeopolis

But I can't even cook and eat it.

Megarian

No?

What's to stop you?

Dicaeopolis

Hasn't got the meat.

Megarian

Too young. But when it fleshes out a bit
it'll get the meat that's pink and long and hard.
And if you wanna rear one, here's another.

Dicaeopolis

Its pussy looks just like the other one's!

Megarian

Why sure: it's got the selfsame mom and dad.
And when it fattens up and grows some hair,
it'll be a nice pussy to offer up to Venus.

Dicaeopolis

But pussies don't get offered up to Venus.^o

Megarian

So pussy ain't for Venus? Who else then?
And look, the flesh of these here pussies is
delicious when it's skewered on a spit.

Dicaeopolis

So tell me, can they suck without their mother?

Megarian

Hell yes. They'll suck without their father, too.

Dicaeopolis

And what do they like to suck on?

⁷⁹³ At Athens Aphrodite (Roman Venus), the goddess of sexual enjoyment, did not receive pigs in sacrifice, reputedly because her lover Adonis had been killed by a boar.

Megarian

Anything.

Ask 'em yourself.

Dicaeopolis

Here pussy.

Girl A

Meow meow!

Dicaeopolis

Would you like to gnaw this hambone?^o

Girl A

Meow meow.

Dicaeopolis

Then how about a lollipop?^o

Girl A

Meow meow!

Dicaeopolis

And how about you? Want one?

Girl B

Meow meow!

Dicaeopolis

They mew so loud when I say lollipops!

Go inside, someone, get some lollipops

for the pussies. Will they eat them? Oh my god,
just look at them get down! Dear Heracles!

Where are these pussies from? From Hungary?^o

Megarian

They didn't gobble all the lollipops.

I managed to snag this lolly for myself.

Dicaeopolis

By god, a real delightful pair of pets.

How much will the pussies cost me? Name your price.

Megarian

I'll give you this one here for a bunch of garlic;
the other one, you want her, a pound of salt.

Dicaeopolis

I'll take them. Just a moment, please.

801 "Hambone" translates "chickpeas," Athenian slang for penis.

802 "dried Phibalian figs," a favorite childrens' sweet.

808 "from Tragasac," a city in Asia Minor, punning on *tragein*, "eat."

Megarian

All right!

815

O God of Traders, may I sell my wife
at such a price, and my dear mother, too!

Informer

Your identity, sir.

Megarian

Megarian pussy-seller.

Informer^o

Then I denounce these cats as contraband
and you as well!

Megarian

Ah, here we go again!

820

We're back to where our troubles first began.

Informer

No Megarian backtalk! Let me have the sack!

Megarian

Dicaeopolis! Dicaeopolis! I'm denounced!

Dicaeopolis

By whom? Denounced by whom? Commissioners,^o
aren't you supposed to keep informers out?

825

And you: you're pecking around without a pecker.^o

Informer

I'm not to denounce the enemy?

Dicaeopolis

You'll regret it,

unless you do your informing somewhere else.

Megarian

What a plague they are in Athens, these informers!

Dicaeopolis

Don't fret, Megarian. Here's the price you asked
for the pussies. Take the garlic and the salt,
and best of luck.

830

Megarian

Luck's alien to my land.

818 For informers see 519 n.

824 He refers to his straps (723-4).

826 "Why do you suppose you can shed light on anything without a lamp-wick?" The joke is best explained on the assumption that "wick" here means "penis": perhaps the Informer does not wear a phallos, which would mark him as unmanly.

Dicaeopolis

Is luck forbidden? If so I'll take the blame.

Megarian

Farewell, my pussies. Even without me try
to get jelly with the roll a man may give you.°

Chorus

Chorus (6)°

This man at least is truly blest!
You've seen his plan mature.
Just sitting in his market-place
he'll rake it in for sure.

And should some Ctesias appear°
or other stoolie clown,
he'll scream and cry in agony
whenever he sits down.

No man will aggravate you here
and cut into the queue,
no fag will bring his cooties here
and rub them off on you.°

You'll jostle no Cleonymus°
and have to wash your shirt;
you'll never bump Hyperbolus°
and touch his legal dirt.

Cratinus won't walk up to you,°
old fart with blow-dried curls,
as if that makes him look to be
a hand with married girls.

This Model T of poetry
composes in first gear,

835 The Megarian departs and Dicaeopolis takes the girls inside.

836 After the parabasis (626 n.) it was normal for the Chorus, between episodes, to abuse individual spectators.

839 Ctesias is otherwise unknown, but the name ('Grasper') is appropriate.

843 They mention Prepis, perhaps the man who a few years later served as Council Secretary.

844 See 89 n.

846 Hyperbolus, whose wealth was associated with lamp-making, was at this time a notorious prosecutor and an ambitious popular politician in the mold of Cleon, whose position as leading "demagogue" he in fact assumed after Cleon's death in 422.

848 Cratinus had been the leading comic poet in the generation before Aristophanes and a pioneer in the creation of political comedy. At this time he was elderly (he died some three years later), but he was still composing and therefore a rival; indeed he was to win his last victory in 423, over Aristophanes's *Clouds*.

and his exhaust-pipe smells so bad
you'd think a skunk's in there.

Nor yet will vile Pauson come°
to mock you to your face,
nor yet again Lysistratus,°
the same of all his race,

a man so deep in misery,
so hungry and so bleak,
he goes without a decent meal
eight days in every week.

855

EPISODE II

(*Theban, Dicaeopolis, Nicarchus, Theban's Slave, Pipers, Dicaeopolis' Slaves and Children*)

Theban°

By Heracles, my hump is really tired!
Now very carefully, slave, put down the lettuce.
You pipers that have made the trek from Thebes,
pick up your pipes and play "The Dog's Asshole."°

Dicaeopolis

Stop, damn you! Go away, you bumblebees!
From where did all these cursed buzzers come,
these sons of Chaeris, flying to my door?°

865

Theban

By Heracles' nephew, friend, I owe you one.
They've followed me blowing all the way from Thebes;
they've blown the leaves right off my lettuces.
But maybe you'd like to buy some goods from me?
I've got some game with two wings, some with four.°

870

Dicaeopolis

My greetings, dear Boeotian, eater of spam.°
What have you?

853 Pauson was an impoverished painter known for caricatures, jokes and riddles.

854 There were several men named Lysistratus in this period; this one seems to be the man ridiculed in Aristophanes's *Wasps* as a practical joker.

860 Like the Megarian earlier, this Theban speaks in his local dialect. Boeotia (often bracketed with Sparta as Athens' chief enemy) was, unlike Megara, a rich and fertile region.

863 The song in question, otherwise unknown, suggests rusticity and/or vulgarity.

866 See 16 n.

871 "four-winged" (a surprise for "four-footed") refers to locusts (a poor food).

872 "spam" translates *kollix*, a kind of rough barley bread.

Theban

All the goods Boeotia boasts.
Got marjoram, pennyroyal, rush-mats, wicks for lamps,
got ducks and jackdaws, francolins and coots,
got wrens and grebes—

Dicaeopolis

You've hit my market-place
just like an autumn storm with its fowl winds.

Theban

Got geese, got rabbits, got some foxes too,
got moles and hedgehogs, kitty-cats and badgers,
got martens, otters, eels from Lake Copais—°

Dicaeopolis

The most delectable morsel known to man?
If you've got eels, please introduce me to them!

Theban

Most venerable leader of these Copaic nymphs,
step forth from your sack and greet the gentleman.

Dicaeopolis

O dearest one and long my heart's desire,
you've come, the fondest of wish of comic dancers
and dear to Morychus! Attendants, bring me out°
a barbecue grill and something to fan it with.
Behold, my children, this noblest eel just come
in answer to our prayers of six long years.
Address her nicely, kids, and in her honor
I'll give you a gift of nice charcoal briquets.°
But take her hence, for never death itself
shall part me from her or her sauce tartare!

Theban

There's still the little matter of my payment.

Dicaeopolis

I thought you'd give me that as market-tax.
What else did you say you want to sell to me?

Theban

It's all for sale.

880 Copaic eels were a Boeotian delicacy much prized at Athens and used by Aristophanes elsewhere to exemplify the war's deprivations. Suitably to the moment, lines 881-94 parody tragic scenes of reunion.

887 Morychus was a noted lover of fine food.

892 Dicaeopolis apparently teases his children: instead of a real gift, they will get to set up the grill.

Dicaeopolis

Well, how much for the lot?
Or take some goods from here back home?

Theban

A swap?
Hmm, something from Athens that's not found in Boeotia.

900

Dicaeopolis

Your smartest buy would be Phalerian sprats,
or pottery.

Theban

Sprats or pots? We've got 'em there.
No, something you've got lots of but we've got none.

880

Dicaeopolis

I've got it. Why not take back an informer?
I'll pack him like a pot.

Theban

By the Twain Gods,
I'd make a handsome sum importing one,
one like a little monkey full of tricks.

905

885

Dicaeopolis

And look! Nicharchus on his way to snatch!°

Theban

He's very small.

890

Dicaeopolis

But not an ounce of quality.

Nicarchus

Whose packages are these?

Theban

Belong to me,
by god, from Thebes.

895

Nicarchus

In that case I, in person,
denounce them as contraband.

Theban

What's wrong with you,
declaring war and battle on my birdies?

Nicarchus

And I denounce you, too.

908 Otherwise unknown.

Theban

For doing what?

Nicarchus

I'll tell you, for the audience's benefit.

From enemy territory you've imported lamp-wicks.

Dicaeopolis

You mean you'd turn him in because of wicks?

Nicarchus

A man could torch the dockyard with this wick.

Dicaeopolis

The dockyard with a wick?

Nicarchus

That's right.

Dicaeopolis

And how?

Nicarchus

A Theban ties the wick to a beetle's back,
then lights it up and sends it to the docks
in a drain as soon as the north wind starts to blow.
The fire, once it started among the ships,
would quickly blaze.

Dicaeopolis

You wretched idiot!

A blaze begun by a beetle and a wick.

Nicarchus

A witness!

Dicaeopolis

Grab him, stuff something in his mouth.
Give me some sawdust, so I can pack him up
like a pot, so he won't be damaged during shipment.

LYRIC SCENE IV

Chorus Leader

Dear fellow, please take care
as you get the parcel packed;
we want our foreign friend
to bring it home intact.

Dicaeopolis

Don't worry! For, you know,
it makes a special sound,
a babble, fire-cracked,
for loathesomeness renowned.

Chorus Leader

Whatever use could it be to him?

935

Dicaeopolis

A vessel for every use!
A mixing-bowl for evil,
a mortar for lawsuits,
a lamp to expose officials,
a shaker to stir up trouble.

Chorus Leader

But wouldn't you be scared
to put among your toys
a vessel such as this,
that's always making noise?

940

Dicaeopolis

It's very strong, dear sir,
so even if I chose,
I'd never break it, though
I hang it by the toes.

945

Chorus Leader

You're set now, Theban!

Theban

Can't wait to use it!

Chorus Leader

Now then, dear Theban, use
this man as you see fit;
take him and sic him on
whatever foe you like:
an informer for every use!

950

Dicaeopolis

It wasn't easy packing the bastard up.
You may load your pot now, Theban, and take it home.

Theban

You there, my slaveling, put your shoulder to it.

Dicaeopolis

Make sure you're very careful carrying it,
although it's pretty rotten merchandise.
If you make a handsome profit on this shipment,
you won't run out of informers to import.^o

955

^o958 The Thebans leave, and Dicaeopolis is on his way inside with their goods when Lamachus' slave approaches on the run.

EPISODE III
(*Dicaeopolis, Lamachus' Slave*)

Slave

Dicaeopolis!

Dicaeopolis

Why all this yelling?

Slave

Why?

Lamachus gave me a drachma to pay you
to buy some thrushes for the Pitcher Feast,^o
and three more drachmas for a Copaic eel.^o

Dicaeopolis

Which Lamachus is this who seeks the eel?

Slave

The awesome, strong-armed Gorgon-brandisher
who shakes a triple shadow-casting crest!

Dicaeopolis

No deal, by god, not even for his shield!
He can shake his triple crest at the hotdog stand.
He makes a fuss, I'll call the commissioners.^o
I'll take this load of goodies for myself,
and fly inside on thrush and blackbird wings.^o

Chorus

Chorus (7¹)

O city, do you see how smart
this man is, and how wise,
how making peace enables him
to sell fine merchandise?
His store includes not only things
for use around the home,
but also things most fittingly

961 The Pitcher Feast (*Khoes*) was celebrated on the second day (of three) of the Anthesteria, a great mid-winter festival (around February) honoring Dionysus. The pitcher in question (the *khoos*) held about three quarts. Among the many religious and carnivalesque activities that took place on this day (and are reproduced by Dicaeopolis) were drinking contests and a state banquet to which guests were invited by the Priest of Dionysus. Also relevant to our play, with its hymeneal ending, was the Sacred Marriage between the wife of the King Archon, the official in charge of the state religion, and Dionysus (perhaps on this occasion impersonated by the King Archon himself).

962 See 880 n.

968 See 824 n.

970 The phrase parodies a lyric poem otherwise unattested. Dicaeopolis goes inside.

consumed when they're well-done.

Chorus Leader

With ease does he acquire whatever's fine and good.
We'll never ask the War-god to visit our neighborhood,
nor in his presence sing a patriotic tune,^o
for when the War-god drinks he acts the perfect goon.
When we were very prosperous he burst upon the scene,
committed crimes, upended and wasted everything.
He'd fight and when we said, "sit down and have a sip;
let's drink a friendly toast to our good fellowship,"
instead he'd turn more violent, set fire to our vines,
and tramp them till he'd squeezed out every drop of wine.

*culture praising
the democracy*
980

Chorus (7²)

To dinner he's prepared to fly,
his pride is very great;
to flaunt his feasting he has tossed
these feathers from his gate.

Of lovely Aphrodite and
the Graces her relations
we call upon the foster-child
sweet Reconciliation.^o

Chorus Leader

How fair a face you had I never understood!
I wish that Cupid might unite us two for good,
that Cupid in the painting with flowers in his hat,
unless perchance you think me too antique for that.
But should we grapple I'd still put you down three times.^o
I'd first shove in a long hard row of tender vines,^o
and then alongside that I'd lay some fresh fig-shoots
and finally some grapes—would I, the ancient coot!—
and all around the plot a stand of olive-trees,
so we could oil ourselves for every New Moon Feast.^o

990

995

980 The "Harmodius Song," a traditional patriotic drinking song that celebrated Harmodius and his friend Aristogeiton, who in 514 assassinated Hipparchus, brother of the last Athenian tyrant, Hippias. Several versions of the song are preserved.

989 The same personification is actually brought on stage, in the form of a naked girl, in Aristophanes's peace-play *Lysistrata*, produced in 411.

994 The ability to copulate three times in succession was a proverbial proof of virility.

995 In these lines, which celebrate the farmer's return to his fields and vineyards as a result of "reconciliation," the agricultural language is, by metaphor, simultaneously understood as sexual activity with "Reconciliation," personified as a young girl.

999 Each month at the new moon people had festive dinners, to which participants would come bathed and anointed with fragrant oil.

LYRIC SCENE V

*(Herald, Dicaeopolis, Chorus, Dercetes, Best Man, Maid of Honor)***Herald**

Hear this! As custom has it, drink your pitchers
at the trumpet call. The man who drinks up first
will win a wine-skin the size of Ctesiphon's!^o

Dicaeopolis

You slaves, you women, aren't you listening?
What are you doing? Don't you hear the Herald?
Now braise and roast and turn and then unskewer
the rabbits, quickly; string the garlands, too.
Bring me the spits, so I can fix the thrushes.

Chorus (8¹)

I envy you your plan so shrewd,
or rather this delicious food,
sir, here before us now.

Dicaeopolis

Just wait until you have a look
at the thrushes being cooked!

Chorus

I think you're quite correct again.

Dicaeopolis

Start poking up the flame.

Chorus

You hear how master chef-ily,
how subtly, how gourmettily
he does the job himself?

Dercetes

Oh dear, what sadness!

Dicaeopolis

Heracles! who's this?

Dercetes

A man with sorrows.

Dicaeopolis

Keep them to yourself.

1002 Evidently Ctesiphon (otherwise unknown) had a "beer belly" of impressive size. The *ekkyklema* (408 n.) is rolled out; on it are Dicaeopolis, some slaves, food, cooking utensils and a lighted brazier.

Dercetes

Dear sir, since you alone possess a treaty,
give me some peace, if only five years' worth.

1020

Dicaeopolis

What's wrong?

Dercetes

I've lost my oxen; now I'm ruined!

Dicaeopolis

Lost where?

Dercetes

Boeotians plundered them at Phyle.^o

Dicaeopolis

Thrice wretched man! And you're still wearing white?

Dercetes

And that, my god, when those oxen had kept
me rolling in manure!

1025

Dicaeopolis

So what do you want?

Dercetes

I've ruined my eyes with weeping for my oxen.
If you care at all about Dercetes of Phyle,
put some of your peace in both my eyes right now.

Dicaeopolis

But, foolish man, I'm not a public doctor.

1030

Dercetes

Go on, I beg you, so I can find my oxen!

Dicaeopolis

No way. Go take your tears to Medicare.^o

Dercetes

Oh please, just drip me one small drop of peace
into this fennel-stalk I've got with me.

Dicaeopolis

Not even a teeny drop. Cry somewhere else!

1035

Dercetes

Poor me, poor little beasts of burden lost!^o

1023 An Attic deme on Mt. Parnes (348 n.) near the Boeotian frontier.

1032 "to Pittalus' clinic;" a public doctor mentioned again in this play (1222) and elsewhere.

1036 Dercetes goes away wailing.

Chorus (8²)

The man's discovered something rare
in his treaty, but he wants to share
with no one, it would seem.

Dicaeopolis

Pour honey on the sausages,
and brown the cuttlefish!

Chorus

You hear his loud commanding peals?

Dicaeopolis

It's time to broil the eels!

Chorus

I'll die of hunger from the smell
and from your words, my friends as well,
if you keep shouting thus.

Dicaeopolis

Now roast these till they're delicately browned.

Best Man

Dicaeopolis!

Dicaeopolis

Who's this that's calling me?

Best Man

A bridegroom sends this piece of meat to you
from the wedding-feast.

Dicaeopolis

He's nice, whoever he is.

Best Man

And he asks you, in return for the piece of meat,
to pour a cup of peace into this flask,
so instead of fighting he can stay home fucking.

Dicaeopolis

Away with the meat, away, don't give it to me!
I wouldn't pour you any for a million bucks.
But who's this girl?

Best Man

The maid of honor, with
a secret message for you from the bride.

Dicaeopolis

Come, what have you got to say? My god, how funny
this request is from the bride! She asks me, please

arrange for her husband's cock to stay at home.^o
Bring me the treaty; with her alone I'll share:
as a woman she's not responsible for the war.
Now hold the flask up here, this way, my girl.
You know how this is used? You tell the bride:
whenever they call up troops, take some of this
and rub it on your husband's cock at night.^o
Now take away the treaty. Where's my ladle?
I want to decant my wine for the Pitcher Feast.

1060

1065

EPISODE IV

(*Chorus Leader, Messengers I and II, Lamachus, Dicaeopolis, Dicaeopolis' Slave, Lamachus' Slave*)

Chorus Leader

But look, here comes a man with furrowed brows,
in a hurry, as if he brings some dire news.

1070

Messenger I

Dear me! Oh hardships, battles, Lamachuses!^o

Lamachus

Who makes such racket round my bronze-bossed halls?

Messenger I

The generals command you leave today
and quickly, with your crests and your platoons,
to guard the winter passes in the snow.
They're informed that, on the Pot and Pitcher Feasts,
Boeotian bandits plan a plunder-raid.

1075

Lamachus

Oh generals more numerous than smart!
How awful that I can't attend the Feast.

Dicaeopolis

Hooray for the Lamachean expedition!

1080

Lamachus

Alas and damn, would you now mock at me?

Dicaeopolis

You want to fight, you four-feathered Godzilla?^o

1060 In actual life a maid of honor would probably not have used the obscene word
Dicaeopolis reports her as using.

1066 The best man and maid of honor leave.

1071 The Messenger runs up to Lamachus' door.

1082 Comparing Lamachus to the hideous monster Geryon, who was robbed and killed by
(the Boeotian native) Heracles, and giving him an epithet suggesting insects (tradition-
ally Geryon was triple-bodied).

1040

1045

1050

1055

Lamachus

Ah me!

What an order this messenger messages to me!

Dicaeopolis

Ah me! What's my message from this second runner?

Messenger II

Dicaeopolis!

Dicaeopolis

Yes?

Messenger II

To dinner on the double;
march. Bring your picnic basket and your Pitcher.

The Priest of Dionysus summons you.^o

But hurry: you've held up dinner far too long.

Except for you, all's set and ready to go:

the couches, tables, pillows, rugs and blankets,

the garlands, perfume, hors-d'oeuvres, prostitutes,

the cakes, the pastries, sesame-crackers, rolls,

the dancing-girls who'll pipe the anthem—cute!

Come on and hurry up!

Lamachus

Oh woe is me!

[Can flesh endure such grievous deprivation?]^o

Dicaeopolis

Well, blame your patron, that big Gorgon there.^o

Lock up the house and pack my dinner, boy.

Lamachus

Boy, fetch my mess-kit and bring it here to me.

Dicaeopolis

Boy, fetch my basket and bring it here to me.

Lamachus

My K-ration, boy, my flavored salt and onions.

Dicaeopolis

The salmon-steaks, no onion: I'm tired of that.^o

Lamachus

Bring me some hard salt-fish, boy, wrapped in leaves.

1087 See 961 n.

1094 Alan Sommerstein's suggestion for the lost line that must (because of the wording of line 1096) have originally stood here.

1095 Perhaps a cue to withdraw the *ekkyklema* (1002 n.; compare 479).

1100 Onions were staple field-rations.

Dicaeopolis

Bring me a juicy steak; I'll cook it there.

Lamachus

Bring me here the twin plumes from my helmet.

Dicaeopolis

Bring me here the pigeons and the thrushes.

Lamachus

So fair and gleaming is the ostrich-plume!

1105

Dicaeopolis

So fair and lovely brown the pigeon-meat!

1085

Lamachus

Old fellow, cease your laughter at my equipment.

Dicaeopolis

Old fellow, cease your leering at my thrushes.

1090

Lamachus

Bring out my crest-case and my triple crests.

Dicaeopolis

Bring out my casserole and my rabbit stew.

1110

Lamachus

What's this? Have moths been eating up my crests?

Dicaeopolis

What's this? Must I eat the rabbit before dinner?

Lamachus

Old fellow, please refrain from addressing me.

1095

Dicaeopolis

Not you; you see, my slave and I are arguing.

You want to bet, boy, with Lamachus as judge,

which makes the better eating, locust or thrush?

1115

Lamachus

Oh! What impudence!

Dicaeopolis

He's strongly for the locusts.

1100

Lamachus

Boy, boy, take down my spear and bring it hither.

Dicaeopolis

Boy, boy, take off the sausage and bring it here.

Lamachus

Come, let me draw the spear-case off my weapon.

1120

Here, hold on, boy.

Dicaeopolis

Boy, hold the skewer firmly.

Lamachus

Hand me the staves, boy, that support my shield.

Dicaeopolis

Hand me the loaves, boy, that support my belly.

Lamachus

Hand hither my buckler round and Gorgon-faced.^o

Dicaeopolis

Give me a pizza round and cheesy-faced.^o

Lamachus

Is not this insolence plain in the eyes of men?

Dicaeopolis

Isn't this great pizza in the eyes of men?

Lamachus

Pour on the oil, boy, for in this bronze
I see an old man indictable for cowardice.

Dicaeopolis

Pour honey; for in the cake an old man appears
telling Lamachus, son of Gorgon, to go to hell.

Lamachus

Hand hither, boy, my warlike coat of mail.

Dicaeopolis

Hand over, boy, my drinklike party-suit.

Lamachus

In this I bolster me to meet the foe.

Dicaeopolis

In this I bolster me to meet the drinkers.

Lamachus

My sleeping-bag fasten, boy, upon the shield.

Dicaeopolis

My dinner fasten, boy, upon the basket.

Lamachus

And I shall porter the mess-kit by myself.

1124 see 574 n.

1125 The *plakous* (flat-cake), when topped with cheese, was indeed pizza-like.

Dicaeopolis

And I will take my coat and be running off.

Lamachus

Enclasp and raise the shield, boy, and be off.
It snows, brr brr, we're in for serious weather.

Dicaeopolis

Pick up the dinner, we're off to serious drinking.^o

Chorus Leader

Fare well on your expeditions!
How different your conditions!
He'll wear a crown and drink at ease;
you'll stand your lonely watch and freeze,
while he has a whirl
with a fresh young girl
and gets his weenie squeezed.

Chorus (9¹)

Antimachus the bureaucrat,
composer of bad verse,
who spits while talking, may the Lord
destroy, as he deserves.

For as sponsor of a comedy
in this Lenaeon show,^o

at banquet-time he told us all
to pack our things and go!

I want to live to see the day
when squid is what he craves,
and there it is, well cooked and hot,
come safely through the waves

and making port at tableside,
and as he fills his tray,

I pray a dog will snap it up
and carry it away!

Chorus (9²)

That's one misfortune on his head;
and here's another curse:
one night, as he walks home alone
from riding on his horse,
encountering some drunken lout

1142 Lamachus exits to one side of the stage, Dicaeopolis to the other.

1154 Producers were expected to hold a banquet for the troupe after the competition was over (see Introduction); Antimachus' behavior on the occasion recalled here, otherwise undocumented, was perhaps motivated by the failure of his troupe to win.

who wants to break his bones
 (the lunatic Orestes!), may^o
 he fumble for a stone,
 but in the darkness may he put
 within his groping mitt
 a piece of hot manure that
 somebody freshly shit,
 and may he rush upon his foe
 with missile held aloft,
 and may he miss his shot and hit
 Cratinus in the chops!^o

EXODOS

(*Messenger III, Lamachus, Dicaeopolis, Dancing Girls*)

Messenger III

Ye vassals of the House of Lamachus,
 heat water, heat some water in a basin,
 prepare lint padding, ready liniments,
 some greasy wool, a bandage for his ankle!
 He's been wounded, jumping o'er a ditch, by a stake,
 his ankle's twisted back and out of joint,
 and, falling on a stone, he's cracked his head
 and waked the sleeping gorgon from her shield!
 When he saw his valiant boastard-feather fall
 upon the rocks, he howled this awful cry,
 "O brilliant visage, ne'er I'll see you more;
 I leave thee, light of mine; I am undone!"
 Thus having spoken, and falling in the ditch,
 he rose and faced his men in panic flight
 and chased and routed bandits with his spear.
 And here he is himself! Open the gates!

Lamachus

Ah me! Ah me!
 Hateful as hell
 my bloody pains, oh woe!
 I am no more,
 by foeman's spear struck down!
 But that would truly be an agony
 if Dicaeopolis laughed at my bad luck!

1168 Orestes (a nickname recalling the mythic son of Agememnon, who wandered insane to Athens after killing his own mother) is mentioned elsewhere in comedy as a notorious mugger.

Dicaeopolis

Ah me! Ah me!
 What gorgeous tits,
 as firm as little quinces!
 Tenderly kiss me,
 my little golden jewels!
 One suck my lips, the other plunge your tongue,
 for I'm the first to drain my pitcher dry!

1200

Lamachus

O direful conjunction of my woes!
 Oh, oh, the agony of my injuries!

1205

Dicaeopolis

Hey, hey, hello there, Lamachus m'lord!

Lamachus

Hateful am I, cursed am I!

1175

Dicaeopolis

Kissing again? Biting again?

Lamachus

Wretched me! Grievous cost!

1180

Dicaeopolis

You mean they made you pay for the Pitcher Feast?^o

Lamachus

Apollo Healer, Healer!

Dicaeopolis

But we're not feasting for Apollo now.

1185

Lamachus

Take hold of my leg, take hold. Ouch ouch!
 Hold tightly, comrades mine!

1215

Dicaeopolis

Take hold of my cock, both hold the middle!^o
 Hold tightly, darlings mine!

1190

Lamachus

I'm dizzy, I feel that rock on my head,
 I swoon as night comes on!

1195

1173 See 848 n. Might Antimachus' chorus have been performers in a play by Cratinus?

1211 Probably the usual custom that guests equally share the cost of a banquet was not observed at the Pitcher Feast; likely another dig at Lamachus' poverty as well.

1216 They grab his phallos (see Introduction).

Dicaeopolis

I'm sleepy, I feel a rock in my pants,
I'll fuck as night comes on!

Lamachus

Take me away to the hospital,^o
with gentle healing hands!

Dicaeopolis

Take me away to the judges and King,^o
I want my wine-skin prize!

Lamachus

A lance most woeful's pierced me to the bone!

Dicaeopolis

My pitcher's empty: hail the champion!

Chorus Leader

As you like, old man, we hail the champion!

Dicaeopolis

What's more, my wine was neat and gulped straight down.

Chorus Leader

Hooray then, noble hero, and take your wine-skin!

Dicaeopolis

Then follow me and sing "All Hail the Champion!"

Chorus (10)

We will follow
for your sake,
singing 'All Hail'
in your wake,
for you and for
your wine-skin!

1222 See 1032 n.

1224 The King Archon (961 n.).

1220

1225

1230

Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*

Lysistrata, and the Events of 411

The plot of *Lysistrata* is characteristic of Aristophanes' heroic plays (the others are *Acharnians*, *Peace*, *Birds* and *Assemblywomen*) as described in the introduction to *Acharnians*. An Athenian woman named Lysistrata ('Disbander of Armies') organizes and successfully prosecutes a panhellenic conspiracy of citizen wives that forces the chief combatants (Athens and Sparta) and their allies to negotiate a peaceful settlement of the war and promise never again to fight one another. Her conspiracy consists of two plots. One is a conjugal strike staged by young wives from the warring cities and designed to force their warrior-husbands to lay down their arms and come home. The other is the occupation of the Athenian citadel (Acropolis) and its treasures by the older wives of Athens, so that the politicians will no longer be able to finance the war. The strike-plot (described in the prologue and illustrated at 706-13) succeeds virtually unopposed. The occupation-plot (254-705) contains the agonistic component of the play: strife between choruses of old men and old women, and a contest between Lysistrata and an old Magistrate. When the occupation-plot has eliminated official opposition, and the strike-plot has made the husbands capitulate to their wives, Athenian and Spartan Ambassadors negotiate their differences and promise eternal friendship.

The Peloponnesian War between Athens and her island empire and Sparta and her allies had begun in 431 after several decades of tension. Sparta and Athens had emerged from the Persian Wars fifty years earlier as the two superpowers of Greece. Relying on her navy, Athens had turned a defensive island alliance against Persia into a tribute-paying empire composed of small subject states with democratic governments controlled by the Athenian demos. Sparta, the chief city of the Peloponnesus (lower half of mainland Greece) and the greatest land power in Greece, feared the growing power of this empire and