

**ARISTOPHANES’  
“FROGS”**

First performed at Lenea in 405 BCE

TRANSLATED BY  
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**DRAMATIS PERSONAE:**

XANTHIAS

*(A slave)*

DIONYSUS

*(A god)*

HERACLES

*(A hero)*

CORPSE

CHARON

*(Ferryman for the dead)*

CHORUS OF FROGS

CHORUS OF INITIATES

AEACHUS

*(A Door Keeper)*

SERVANT

FIRST INN KEEPER

PLATHANE

*(SECOND INN KEEPER)*

SLAVE OF PLUTO

EURIPIDES

*(A tragedian)*

AESCHYLUS

*(Another Tragedian)*

PLUTO

*(Lord of the Underworld)*

**SILENT PARTS:**

BIER-BEARERS

SERVANTS OF AEACUS

3 POLICEMEN

A COMIC MUSE

2 GUARDS (TO PLUTO)

PLATHANE’S MAID

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**ACT ONE**

*Stage left. Enter two men, Dionysus and Xanthias, his slave. Xanthias is riding a donkey and is carrying a bundle of pots, pans a variety of small bundles tied to the edge of a long stick, resting on his shoulder. He is tired and uncomfortable and shifts his own weight on the donkey. Dionysus is walking beside him disguised as Heracles, ie, on top of his usual delicate bright yellow robe and beautiful, red lady boots (full of bows and ribbons) he has thrown a lion’s skin and he’s carrying -or more often than not, dragging on the ground – the huge club with which Heracles is usually identified. This club gives him also enormous discomfort and frequently lifts it up off the floor, puts it down again, drags it along, puts it on his shoulder, changes shoulders, giving a heartfelt grunt every time. He is a contradiction of effeminacy and misplaced bravado. He is rather rotund and carries a protruding and obvious belly.*

*Center Stage is a house which is used first as the house of Heracles and then of Plouto. The phalloi of the two men plus that of the donkey are truly obsequious to the demands of gravity. They walk around the stage a few times before Xanthias suddenly stops.*

Xanthias: *(Takes a deep sigh, scratches under his armpits and finally chuckles to himself)*

Master?

Dionysus: *(stops and looks up at Xanthias, dropping his club on his foot. Annoyed:)*

What?

Xanthias: *(looks around the audience, smacks his knee with laughter and, waving his hand over the auditorium.)*

Hey, boss! Should I tell this lot a joke? One of my famous ones. One of those they always laugh at. You know the one I mean! Shall I?

Dionysus:

Sure, yes, all right! Any joke you like except the one about how your bum is under pressure. It sickens my gallbladder that one!

Xanthias:

Then what about some other slick joke?

Dionysus:

Anything but the one about how miserable you feel!

Xanthias:

All right, then. I'll tell them that really funny one. *(Looks to the audience and chuckles. He's about to begin the joke when...)*

Dionysus:

Sure, sure... except... *(Xanthias frowns)*

Don't tell them the one about...

Xanthias:

Which one? *(He shifts his load from one shoulder to the next. The motion makes the donkey fart.)*

Dionysus:

*(Looks at the donkey and then at Xanthias suspiciously)*

The one where you say that... "every time I shift my bundle, I need to shift my shit bag!"

Don't say that one! Shit words are out!

**11**

Xanthias: *(Frowns. Shifts his load again and again the donkey farts)*

Well... what about – can't I even say the one about how... what about the one about how... "I'm carrying such a burden on my shoulders that if someone doesn't give me some relief I'll start farting?"

Dionysus:

No! I beg you! Please! Not that one either! At least not until I'm ready to puke.

Xanthias:

Then what's the point of carrying this huge burden if I can't do what all the others do? Your competitors, boss: Phrynicus and Lycis and Ameipsias! That's how they always win the comedy prize, by carrying burdens and...

Dionysus:

Not for us! These sorts of smart arsey tricks, these... low comedy tricks make me a year older when I'm sitting up there, *(Waves at the auditorium)* and watching it happen down here! One year older!

Xanthias: *(Shifts his load again, this time with greater pain)*

Oh my neck!

What a bastard, hey? So much pain and not a joke to be told!

**21**

Dionysus:

Oh, my precious little slave! Burdened with arrogance and sex! And here I am,

*(shouts loudly at him)* here I am, Dionysus, son of the wine jug, on foot and in agony while him, I have him riding so that he wouldn't get tired by carrying anything!

Xanthias: *(Shocked)*

Not carrying anything?

Dionysus:

How could you be carrying anything if you're riding something?

*(Donkey farts)*

Xanthias: *(Indicates his load)*

Well, I'm carrying this, aren't I?

Dionysus:

How are you carrying it?

Xanthias:*(Shifts load again and groans with pain)*

With quite some pain, really!

Dionysus:

But is not that weight born by the donkey?

Xanthias:*Indicates his own weight*

Not this stuff. Not my load it's not!

Dionysus:

But how could you be loaded when you're loaded onto something else?

**30**

Xanthias:*(Thinks a little, gives up. He loses the argument)*

I don't know but this shoulder is sure under pressure! *(As he whirls his shoulder around he makes an armpit fart)*

Dionysus:

All right! All right then! Since you think the donkey is of no use, exchange loads! You pick up the donkey and let him pick your pots and pans!

Xanthias:

Damn my stupid luck! Had I served in the navy, in that great battle of Arginousae, I'd be a free man now and I'd be telling you to take a hike! In no uncertain terms!

*They reach the house.*

Dionysus:

Get down you, you little shit! We are here!

*Xanthias gets down from the donkey. He was obviously the second half of the animal and so when he "gets down" the animal's bum falls to the ground and as it does so, it lets out a fart, more like the sound of a balloon let down.*

Dionysus:

Phew! All that walking! Here's the first door I need to knock.

*(Knocks at the door and yells:)*

Hey, boy!

*(No response, knocks again this time louder)*

Boy!

*(He turns around to the audience in frustration, then knocks at the door again)*

Oi! Boy!

*(Lifts his club and is about to knock on the door with it when Heracles' voice is heard from within)*

Heracles:

Who's banging at my door? Charging at it like a centaur!

*Dionysus lifts his club again and is about to bring it down onto the door but just then Heracles' massive body fills the door's frame and he grabs the club mid-air with one hand.*

Heracles:

*(Sees the group of wanderers and bursts into laughter)* Hahahaha! What... by Hades, what have we got here? Hahahahaha!

Dionysus:*(aside to Xanthias)*

Boy!

Xanthias:

Yes boss?

Dionysus:

See that?

**40**

Xanthias:

See what, boss?

Dionysus:

How shit-scared he was of me! Shit-scared! For I am Dionysus!

Xanthias:*(sarcastically)*

Ohhhhhhh Yes, Master! By Zeus! He sure was! Shit-scared that you've lost your marbles!

Heracles:*(Still laughing heartily)*

By Demeter! Hahahaha! I bite my lips but I still can't stop laughing! Hahahahaha!

Dionysus:*(Getting impatient with Heracles now.)*

Heracles, my good man, come here.

*(Heracles, still laughing, shows reluctance)*

Come, please, I beg you, a word, please.

Heracles:*(Tries to stop laughing but just can't do it)*

Hahahaha! Shoooh laughter, shoooh! Hahahaha! Shoooh! Go away now! Hahahaha!

*(Looks at Dionysus' clothes. Touches them in disbelief)*

What a sight! Lion skin and lady boots. Talk about "fashion victim!" In what part of Earth is this combination a fashion? Where are you coming from Dionysus, my little brother?

Dionysus:

I was riding Athens' darling little boat, you know, the one called Kleisthenes!

Heracles:

Kleisthenes, the little toy boy? And... did you... get to use your oar?

**50**

Dionysus:

Sure did! A dozen or so... thirteen maybe...

Heracles:*(indicating Xanthias as well)*

What, you two together? On Kleisthenes?

Dionysus:

Yup! Ask Apollo!

Xanthias:*(Aside, chuckling.)*

And then I got horny... eh, I mean woke up!

Dionysus:

Anyway, there I was, lying flat on my back, reading a lovely play, you know, "Andromeda" when suddenly... suddenly *(getting excited -shown by the erection of his phallus)* I got this huuuuge, painful yearning. Slammed itself deep into my heart! *(Erection slapping his chest)* Wow! Was that a hard slam!

Heracles:

A yearning, ey? A big one was it?

Dionysus:

Yeah, as big as... Shortie. Molon!

*(Indicates that Molon is a huge man)*

Heracles:

For what, a woman?

Dionysus:

Nup!

Heracles:

A boy?

Dionysus:

Nup!

Heracles:

A man?

Dionysus:

Nup!

Heracles:

Hang on! Did you really fuck with Kleisthenes, or not?

Dionysus:

Please, big brother. Stop adding insult to my injury. I've got it real bad! It was a hard slam, that one. Straight into my heart. It's a serious business when one cops something like that... straight into his precious heart!

Heracles:

The yearning? Well what was it for, little brother?

**60**

Dionysus:*(Finds difficulty in expressing himself)*

I... I... I haven't got the words for it... I'll give it to you sideways... Have you ever longed for fasoulada?

*Donkey farts loudly. Then Xanthias farts.*

Heracles:

Bean stew? Oh suuuure! My whole life is one huge longing for bean stew! Millions and zillions of times!

Dionysus:

Have I made it clear for you? I mean, have made it quite clear to you just how big this longing is? Or do you want me to give it to you straight up?

65

Heracles:

Absolutely not. Bean stew is very clear to me! I understand it totally! Love it! Yearn for it all the time. Fasoulada, yum, yum!

Dionysus:

Well, that's it! That's exactly the sort of longing and passion I suddenly got, and it was for...

Euripides!

Heracles:

But he's carked it! Dead! Deceased! No longer upon our world! He's down there! Down below!

Passed down!

Dionysus:

I know, I know, but I must go! I must go after him! Down below and no one, not even you can stop me, big brother!

Heracles:

But... where? He's down with Hades, I tell you!

*Xanthias shakes with fear, kicks the donkey and farts.*

70

Dionysus:

To Hades and below that even! That is if there is a "below" Hades!

Heracles:

But... what on earth for? What are you after, little brother?

Dionysus:*(Stares forlornly, romantically at the sky.)*

Oh... I need... I need a good poet, Heracles. Ah! Euripides! Remember what he said? He's the one who said, "some poets have died and those who are still around are shocking!" What a clever poet our Euripides was!

Heracles:

But, what about Iophon, Sophocles' son. He's still around isn't he?

75

Dionysus:

He and only he, unfortunately! And I'm not that certain that he's that crash hot either!

Heracles:

Well, if you must bring someone back from the dead, why not Sophocles who's far better than Euripides?

Dionysus:

No, first I'll grab Iophon all by himself, take him away from his pappy and see what he can do on his own. In any case, Euripides is a sly and crafty, sharp old bugger and he could most probably think up of some way of us getting out of Hade's clutches; whereas Sophocles, well, you know Sophocles: he was a woos up here and he'd be a woos down there. No spunk, no love for adventure!

Heracles:

And our little Agathon?

Dionysus:*(Forlornly again)*

Ahhhhh our beautiful, beautiful Agathon!

Heracles:

Where is he?

Dionysus:*(Absent mindedly)*

Ey? Oh! That lovely handsome boy has gone and left me! Tsoof! Took off with his lover Pausanias.

What a waste! He's most sorely missed by all of his friends around here.

Heracles:

Where did the little beauty go?

85

Dionysus:

Went off to slurp with the Blessed!

Heracles:

And Xenocles?

Dionysus:

Carcinus' son? Him and his "Trojan Trilogy"? Curse the turd!

*(Spits)*

Heracles:

Pythangelus?

*Xanthias farts, shifts his load and shows loss of patience.*

Xanthias:*(To them both)*

Oi! What about me? Not a bloody word about me! Look! My bloody shoulder is killing me!

*Neither Heracles nor Dionysus notice.*

Heracles:

But what about all the others? A million and more young boys, writing a million and more tragedies, spitting out more words than Euripides could ever spit!

**90**

Dionysus:

Heracles, I'm looking for a real craftsman. One whose words are lofty, poetic. You won't find them here any more, I tell you. Those kids you're talking about are just loud mouths, producing scraps for the dogs, idle crappings of crapping birds who, as soon as someone gives them a cast of actors, they piss and shit on Tragedy and then leave. Nah, there's no virile poet to be found anywhere. *(Shouts at the audience)* Find me a poet who knows the noble word!

**95**

Heracles:

Virile? What do you mean, virile?

Dionysus:

Virile! Fructiferous! Juicy! One who can glue syllables together to produce the most delightful thought. Like "Oh, Ether, Zeus' Bedchamber!" *(Donkey farts)* or "Foot of Time" or "Oh heart, that won't swear upon the sacrifices, Oh, tongue that swears so falsely, so distant from the heart!"

**100**

*Xanthias farts*

Heracles:*(mocking)*

You like that sort of stuff?

Dionysus:

Ohhhhh! It's beautiful! It drives me crazy!

Heracles:

It's pure crap and you know it!

**105**

Dionysus:

Like Andromeda said, big brother, "you keep your thoughts in your skull and I'll keep mine in my skull!"

Heracles:

They seem painfully "undelightful" to me! Totally artless!

Dionysus:

The only art you'll ever know is the art of the gut! I'll let you teach me about that later if you want but leave poetry to me!

Xanthias:

Still not a word!*(To the audience, pleading)*

Not one single word about me! Oh, my shoulder! *(Stretches and whirls it around. Kicks the donkey.)*

Dionysus:

Now listen! The reason I've come to you wearing this get-up of yours is so that I'll get to look like you and then you can tell me all about those friends of yours who looked after you when you went after that three-headed monster, Cerberus... Hades' bouncer... Just in case I need those friends of yours when I get down there...

**115**

Xanthias:*(Exasperated, his shoulder aching, he stretches and whirls his arm around again. Yells to the audience.)*

Oi! What about my shoulder?

*(He makes an armpit fart. A second later his donkey farts in support).*

Heracles:*(He shakes his head violently)*

You're mad, you silly little bastard, you're mad! You wouldn't wanna go down there too! You couldn't!

Dionysus:

Drop the arguing. Just tell me the quick way I could get down there! To Hades! And I mean the quick way... just skip all those roads that are too hot or too cold!

Heracles:

All right then... let me see... which one should I suggest first? There's the one where you'll need a bench and a rope.... you... hang yourself and... tsoof, you're there!

Dionysus:*(is repulsed by the thought)*

Nanananananahhh! Toooo.... toooo hangy!

Heracles:

Well... there's the shortcut... well worn, this one. The mortar and pestle.

Dionysus:*(He's frightened by this one)*

Ouch! You mean the hemlock?

Heracles:

Exactly.

**125**

Dionysus:

Brrrrrr! Nananananananah! Too chilly! Freezey weezy! Chills your shins all the way up to your...

*(caresses his phallus)*

Heracles:*Finds the perfect way!*

Ah, huh! You want to know the fastest way down?

Dionysus:

By Zeus, yes! I hate walking around for ever.

Heracles:

Then you just walk a little bit. Just up to Keramicos.

Dionysus:

Yes?

Heracles:

Climb the high tower...

Dionysus:

Yes?

Heracles:

And wait for the torch race to begin.

Dionysus:

Yes, yes?

Heracles:

Well, as soon as you hear the crowd yell, "and they're off" you get off, too!

Dionysus:

Get off? Get off to where?

Heracles:

What do you mean where? Down, of course! You jump!

Dionysus:

Oh, nonononononononoh! Boof! Two brain omelettes splattered everywhere! Wasteful! No, oh, no! I don't think I want to take that little walk.

**135**

Heracles:

So what will you do then?

Dionysus:

I'll go the way you went!

Heracles:

Woooooow! That's the longest way! It's a huge trip that one.

*(Sees that Dionysus looks determined and gives up.)*

All right, then. Look: First you'll come to a huuuuuge lake. An abyss, it is!

*(sees that Dionysus doesn't know the word)*

That means Bottomless!

*Donkey farts*

Dionysus:

*(Shifts in discomfort. Stretches and whirls his arm about like Xanthias did moments earlier.)*

Sooooo... how do I get to the other side of that lake?

**140**

Heracles:

On a tiny boat, by a very old sailor. He'll take a two-obol fare. Same as the fare to the theatre.

Dionysus:

Well, will you look at that! The power of two obols hey? Everywhere you go: two obols please, two obols please. But how did they get down there?

Heracles:

Theseus took them down there with him.*(Dionysus still doesn't understand)*

When he went down to bring Persephone up.... (*Dionysus nods understanding and Heracles gets back to the directions.*)

After you cross that lake, you'll see millions of snakes and beasts and things that are too horrible to contemplate.

Dionysus:(*Shaking and stuttering with fear*)

Now, now, big brother, don't try to frighten me, or put me off, or anything! I'm not that easily shhhhscared!

*Alternate farts from Xanthias and the Donkey.*

Heracles:

All right then.

Then, let's see. What's next? Ah! Then you'll see a huge swamp. Mud and shit everywhere; but everywhere! That's where they drown all the nasty people. You know, the ones who've wronged a stranger, say, or ran off without paying the boy they screwed, or beaten his parents. Those who swore a false oath, or got someone to plagiarise Aeschylus' grand-nephew, Morsimus.

(*pinches his nose*)

Talk about bad poetry! Pooh!

Dionysus:(*In agreement about Morsimus*)

And, by the gods, we should also throw in there anyone who's learnt that awful war dance by Kinesias! Awful! Awful! Totally awful! Crap!

(*Spits in disgust*)

Heracles:

The next thing that'll happen is that you'll hear a lovely breath of pipes floating all around your ears and then the most delightful sunlight will flood your eyeballs... just like here, on earth and there'll be myrtles and groups of happy men and women, all clapping their hands together.

Dionysus:

And who are these people?

Heracles:

The Initiates.

Xanthias:(*Angry*)

Huh! The Initiates! The sacred mysteries! The only part played by the donkey and where the slave plays the part of the carrying of the burdens! The mysteries! Here's what I think of them! Never again!

(*Throws down the luggage, making a loud noise.*)

**160**

Heracles:(*Takes no notice of Xanthias' tantrum*)

Well, these Initiates will tell you all you need to know about your journey. They live very close by the road you'll be taking. They're next to Pluto's palace gates... Oh well, all the best, little brother! Good Luck!

*Heracles waves good bye and goes inside.*

Dionysus:(*responds to Heracles*)

Thanks, big brother. You, too!

(*Turns to Xanthias and shouts angrily:*)

Pick up that luggage!

**165**

Xanthias:

But I've barely put it down!

Dionysus:

Quickly!

Xanthias:

Boss, please, no! Please go and find someone else to hire. Someone who's already carked it. He'd be heading in your direction anyway! Please? I beg you!

Dionysus:

Suuuuure! And if I don't find anyone?

Xanthias:

Then you can come back and take me if you want!

*Stage right enter a funeral procession. Pall bearers are carrying a bier with a corpse on it. Its phallus is hanging limp over the side of the bier.*

Dionysus:(*To Xanthias*).

You're right! And look, speak of the corpse, here's one now.



*(Approaches the bier and calls out at the corpse)*

Hey, you, corpsey! Corpseycums!

Corpse:*(Corpse raises his head from the bier)*

Yeaaaaa?

Dionysus:

You wanna carry some luggage down to Hades?

Corpse:

What sort of luggage?

Dionysus:*(Indicates his luggage)*

This stuff here.

Corpse:

Got two drachmas?

Dionysus:

Two drachs? Certainly not! By Zeus! The cheek!

Corpse:*(Corpse lies down again. To his bearers)*

On our way boys!

**175**

Dionysus:

All right. All right! Hang on a minute! Hang on, damn it! Maybe we can come to some agreement.

Corpse:*(Corpse raises his head again)*

Two drachs! Put up or shut up!

Dionysus:

One and a half drachmas! Nine obols!

Corpse:*(Indicates earth)*

I'd rather go back up!

*(Corpse lies down again and is carried away.)*

Xanthias:*(Annoyed)*

Ooooooh how very stern, how solemn, how very tightarsed our little corpsey is! Very grave indeed!

Curses and piss upon your grave you arrogant bundle of bones

*(Picks up the luggage)*

All right then I'll come down with you, boss!

Dionysus:

Ahhhh, but you're such a good boy, my little Xanthias! So useful, so... nobly born! Let's go to the boat.

SCENE TWO

**180**

Charon:*(Off stage)*

Woaaaaah, there! Pull her by the side, boy!

Dionysus:*(Turning about trying to identify the voice.)*

What's that?

Xanthias:*(Walks to the side of the stage and looks deep into off stage. Comes back)*

That? Oh, that's a lake.

Dionysus:

By Zeus! It is, too. The very lake Heracles told us about! And I can see a little boat too!

Xanthias:

By the great Poseidon! And there's Charon himself, as well! Woaaaaaaah!

Dionysus:

Hi, Charon!

Xanthias:

Hi, Charonicums!

Dionysus and Xanthias:*(together, louder)*

Hi, Charon! Charicums!

*Charon enters with his boat, a young boy at the tiller (optional)*

**185**

Charon:

Hurry, hurry, hurry! Who's for the "Coast of No Cares and Concerns?" "The Plain of Eternal Sleep?"

The "Ropes of Ocnos," anyone? "Cerberos' Palace?" "The Crows of Taenaron?"

Dionysus:

Me! Me! Me!

Charon:  
 Come on, then! Hurry aboard! Come on!

Dionysus:  
 Errrr, hold on! Where are you off to? “Perdition?”

Charon:  
 “Perdition” it is!

Dionysus:  
 Really?

Charon:  
 Yeah, sure. Just for you. Come on, get in!

Dionysus:(*To Xanthias*)  
 Come on my boy!

Charon:  
 Oh no you don’t! I don’t take slaves aboard. Not unless they fought for their carcass and the carcass of Athens – at sea! Not unless they died in Arginousa. But on the land. No drownies! What a waste of fares that was!

Xanthias:  
 But... by Zeus, I would have gone you know, I volunteered, but...  
*(quickly lifts one eyelid above his eye to make it look as if it’s diseased, or looks cross-eyed)* but I had problems with my eyes! They wouldn’t take me!

Charon:  
 Can you run around the lake, then?

Xanthias:  
 Sure. Where shall I wait for you?

Charon:  
 Near the Withering Stone, at the benches. You can rest there.

Dionysus:(*To Xanthias*)  
 Got that?

Xanthias:  
 Totally! Damn my luck! Who crossed my path when I got out of house this morning?  
*Exit Xanthias dragging his donkey stage left. A final fart from the donkey as it disappears behind the curtains.*

Charon:(*To Dionysus*)  
 On the oar with you!  
*(Dionysus takes his club, gets aboard and sits down. Charon looks around for more customers)*  
 Hurry, hurry, hurry! Who’s sailing? Hurry, hurry, hurry!  
*(To Dionysus)*  
 Oi, you! What are you up to? What are you doing?

Dionysus:  
 What do you mean? What else could I be doing? I’m doing what you told me to be doing: Sitting on the oar is what I’m doing! Isn’t that what you’ve asked me to be doing?

**200**

Charon:  
 Not the oar, fatso! Here! Could you just sit right here?

Dionysus:(*Shifts*)  
 Done!

Charon:  
 Now can you stretch out these arms of yours? Like so?

Dionysus:(*Whirls them as he did earlier. Arm pit fart ensues.*)  
 Done!

Charon:  
 Stop mucking about!  
*Places the oar in his hands*  
 There! Push your feet against that bit there and pull at the oar! Hard now! Pull!

Dionysus:  
 Pull, he says! How on earth can I do that? What experience do I have of such things? None in the open seas none in the tight sea battles. Do you think I’m one of those who fought at Salamis? What does one do with this oar thing?

Charon:

Stop winging; it's easy. Come on, and the moment your oar hits the water you'll hear some real nice songs. They'll guide you.

Dionysus:

Songs? Whose songs are they?

Charon:

The songs of the Frog Swans... errr Swan Frogs... Swans that look like frogs. Most charming!

Dionysus:

All right then, give me the word!

Charon:

Ooooooooo-opah! Ooooooooo-opah!

*From both sides of the stage enter a group of Frogs and, while the boat is being pulled around the stage, they dance around it singing: (Lines are sung or declaimed individually and alternately by single frogs)*

Frogs:

Vrekekekex koax koax,

vrekekekex koax koax!

We, the children of the lakes and the bubbly springs

In harmony!

Let's sing,

Vrekekekex koax koax,

vrekekekex koax koax!

Oh, let's lift our voices to a hymn

loud and clear our own sweet song koax koax

in honour of Zeus' son Dionysus

of the Nysos Mountains and of the marshes

the song we once sang

when the slosh-heads drunk-heads

rolled by on the day-after parade

of the sacred wine jug day.

Vrekekekex koax koax,

vrekekekex koax koax!

Dionysus:

koax, koax yourselves! My bum is getting sore!

Frogs:

Vrekekekex koax koax,

vrekekekex koax koax!

Dionysus:

No, that's right! You wouldn't care, would you?

Frogs:

Vrekekekex koax koax,

vrekekekex koax koax!

Dionysus:*(Tries to shoo them away with his oar)*

Koax, koax, koax! That's all you know! Ahhhh, to Hades with the lot of you!

Frogs:

Ohhhhh, and you're a doer of many things, are you?

Listen!

The Muses, the players of the charming lyre, love us.

Pan, with the horned feet and his delightful reeds and

Apollo who loves the harp... they love us because they build their instruments with the stalks that we grow in our ponds!

So....

Vrekekekex koax koax,

vrekekekex koax koax!

Dionysus:

Sure, sure! I've got a bumful of blisters, a bumhole about to burst and any minute now it'll get out of there and say...

Frogs:

Vrekekekex koax koax,

vrekekekex koax koax!

Dionysus:  
What a damned croak-loving race this lot is! Shut up, I tell you!

Frogs:

Oh, nonononono! Not us we won't!  
We'll yell even louder!  
We love to wonder about on a sunny day,  
through the marsh and the reed,  
in love with our sounds,  
in love with the ever-plunging tunes  
and  
we love to escape Zeus' rains by diving  
into the deep water,  
singing all along,  
singing all along  
blurpy blurpy, gurgly songs!

**250**

Dionysus and frogs together:

Vrekekekex koax koax,  
vrekekekex koax koax!

Dionysus: *(Spits in disgust and regret)*

I got that from you!

Frogs:

Oh, yes! Dreadful, dreadful! What dreadful things we do!

Dionysus:

It'll be a hell of a lot more dreadful for me if I keep rowing like this. My bum will split asunder! Oh me, oh, my!

Dionysus and Frogs together:

Vrekekekex koax koax,  
vrekekekex koax koax!

Dionysus:

Scream, yell, squeal! Go on, as loudly as you will. See if I care!

Frogs:

Oh, yes! Koax, koax koax!

We'll go on, as loud as our throat will let us.

The whole day long!

Dionysus and Frogs together:

Vrekekekex koax koax,  
vrekekekex koax koax!

Dionysus:

Come on, then! I'm better at this than you!

Frogs:

No, we're much better than you!

*(At this, one by one the frogs leave)*

Dionysus: *(Has not realised the frogs have gone)*

No, I'm the better one! Much the better one and if I need to, I'll scream and yell and squeal all day long until my koax will beat yours!

*(Turns around and discovers frogs have gone)*

Huh! I knew I'd shut you lot up with your bloody koax koax crap!

*The journey has ended.*

Charon:

All right! That's it now! Pull your oar this way. Bring her around. That's it. Now give me the fare and get off!

**270**

Dionysus:

Here you are. One, two obols!

*Charon exits stage right.*

Dionysus: *(Calls out)*

Xanthias! Xanthias! Hey Xanthias! Where is my darling Xanthias?

Xanthias: *(off stage, Right)*

Here! Here I am!

Dionysus: *(Yells in the direction of Xanthias)*

Get here quick!

*A trick is played upon the audience: Whilst his voice came from Stage Right Xanthias, in fact enters from the opposite side (Stage Left). He has walked all around the lake to "the other side".*

Xanthias:

Hello boss!

Dionysus:

How was the walk?

Xanthias: *(shivers)*

Ohhhhhh! Death-darkness and belching mud, boss! HUUUUUGE belches! Belch, belch, belch. Dark, shitful mud.

Dionysus:

So... and did you see all those bastards who beat their parents and all those others who swear false oaths, like Heracles told us?

**275**

Xanthias: *(Nods vigourously)*

What about you? Didn't you see them?

Dionysus:

Oh, suuuuuure! I sure did by Poseidon!

*(Indicating the audience)*

Even now I can see them!

*(Rubs his hands. Slight pause)*

Right! What do we do now?

Xanthias: *(Looks around him anxiously)*

I think we'd better hurry on, boss, 'cause this is where Heracles said all those beasties come out.

Dionysus:

He'll cop his, that bloated boaster. Nothing as bloated as Heracles, nothing! Blew this story up just to frighten me. Jealous bastard! Pure jealousy that's all! He knew what a tough and well-honoured fighter I am.

*(Puffing himself up)*

Well... I just wish we'd meet up with one of those beasts, get into a tackle worthy of our journey!

**285**

Xanthias:

I know you would, boss, I know you would.

*(From now on Xanthias plays with his master, pretending that there are things he can alone can see)*

As a matter of fact, boss... Hear this?

Dionysus: *(Trembling with fear)*

What? What is it? Where?

Xanthias:

Right here, boss, right behind you, get him!

Dionysus:

No YOU get behind me!

*(They both turn)*

Xanthias:

Oh, no, he's gone around to the front now!

Dionysus: *(Screams)* Ahhhh! Get there, quick!

Xanthias: *(In mock horror)*

By ZEUS! Now I see a gigantic monster! Wow!

Dionysus:

Wwwwwhat sort of monster?

**290**

Xanthias:

Fearsome! Brrrrrr! It's a... it's a – I don't know: It's one of those that are everything, all at once... it's bull now... no, a mule... ahhhh.... now a woman... oh, what a cutie!

Dionysus:

Is she? Where? Let me at her?

Xanthias:

Ah, nope, too late! Not a woman any more... looks like a dog, a bitch... Yes a bitch! Ugh!

Dionysus:

Bitch? It must be Empousa! She's the shape-changer.

Xanthias:  
It must be! Look, her whole face is a huge ball of fire!

Dionysus:  
Can you see if she has a leg of bronze?

**295**

Xanthias:  
Sure does... Hang on – another one is made of... By Poseidon, it's made of... cow poo! Yup, cow plop!

Dionysus:*(He's looking all around him in trepidation)*

Wwwwere can I hide? Who can I run to?

*(Sees the priest of Dionysus in the front row of the theatre and turns to him)*

Priest, priest, please save me! Save me so I can come to the "after party"!

*(Knowingly)*

Have no fear, we'll win this comedy competition!

Xanthias:*(Spinning around with mock fear)*

We're gone! We're dead! We're stuffed! Oh, no! Lord, Lord... my Lord, Heracles we're gone now for sure, we've had it!

Dionysus:*(Anger plus fear. Indicating his lion skin and club)*

Don't yell my name like that!

*(Xanthias pulls back)*

Don't call on Heracles, man!

Xanthias:

Ah, all right! We're gone, we're gone, Lord Dionysus!

**300**

Dionysus:

Stop it! *(He indicates his yellow robe)* That's even worse!

Xanthias:*(To the imaginary ghost of Empousa, ritually)*

Oh, ghost, be thee gone to thy normal paths!

*(To Dionysus, tenderly)*

Master, come over here. Come here, boss!

Dionysus:*(terrified)*

Wwwwwhat?

Xanthias:

It's all right, boss. Be brave! Empousa is gone now and we can say -like, our funny little actor with the speech impediment, Hegelochus- "after the thtorm, I chunder!"

Dionysus:

Do you swear?

Xanthias:*(Solemnly)*

I thwear – I mean I swear by Zeus Almighty!

Dionysus:

Again!

Xanthias:

By Zeus Almighty, I swear!

Dionysus:

Again!

Xanthias:

By...

Dionysus:

How pale that bitch made me! One look and... I'm yellow!

Xanthias:*(Picks up the back of Dionysus' robe and examines it, then laughs.)*

And how... errrr, shit-red this thing became in sympathy!

**310**

Dionysus:

Damn! Where did these things come from? Which God is trying to destroy me? The "Aether" one? "Bedchamber of Zeus"? or the "Foot of Time"? The...

Xanthias:*(Interrupts)*

Shhhhhhhh-

Dionysus:

What? What is it?

Xanthias:(Cups his ear with his hand)

Shhhhhhh!

(Pause)

Do you hear it?

Dionysus:

Hear what?

Xanthias:

The breath of reeds.

*Off stage, a soft whispering sound, only barely forming the word Bacchus sung by the Chorus*

Dionysus:(still shaking with fear)

Oh, yeah! And then the smell of a burning torch rolled all over me... as if from a very solemn mystery! Let's hide down here and listen.

*They walk to the Stage right end and after putting their "loads" down, sit down and watch.*

**316**

Chorus:(Still off stage, approaching)

Iacchus, Iacchus!

Iacchus, Iacchus!

Xanthias:

That's it, master! They're singing your song! It's the initiates. The ones Heracles told us about.

They're playing around here somewhere.

*(Listens a bit longer to the song)*

Yup! It's the "Iacchus song" all right! The one Diagoras, the atheist wrote, you know, Diagoras, the outlaw with the huge price on his head! Bastard had the audacity to question our mysteries!

Dionysus:(Cups his ear, too)

Yeah, it's them all right! The initiates. Shhhh. We'll sit quietly here until we see that it's them for sure.

*Stage lights dim to almost total darkness. Enter the chorus of initiates.*

*Their yellow robes (same as Dionysus') are in tatters and cover very little. Their number depends upon the producer's budget (up to 24) but they should be equally divided in gender. Some are carrying torches others are playing the pan pipes. Around their head and scattered about their body are wreaths of ivy or berries.*

*It must be remembered that this is a chorus for a comedy and not for a tragedy, and that the chorus is one initiates to the "Religious" syllabus of Dionysus so all efforts should be made to make sure that their behaviour is comedic and "mindless lasciviousness" -drunken, revelry, or wild orgy might be two other terms for what should take place- rather than somber and graceful. The phalloi are most defiant to the laws of gravity this time and they should be put to use at every opportunity. Words like "valleys" for example might give the females the opportunity to indicate their inguinal area.*

**325**

Chorus:(Lines alternately uttered, or sung, so that all members have the opportunity for a 'solo' piece of revelry and song)

Oh, Iacchus, Iacchus, most blessed Iacchus!

You who lives in our valleys,

Iacchus! Iacchus come to us!

Come play and dance with us in this valley.

Dance with your devout lovers.

Iacchus, Iacchus, around your head

you carry a virile garland of fully grown myrtle,

a head you throw and toss about with youthful vigour!

Iacchus, Iacchus,

come join us

and

with your wild and merry foot

hit hard the ground with us

as we dance together

this lusty dance so full

of all the charms and all the graces

**346**

Xanthias:

Mmmmm! Sizzling pork souvlakis! Smell that beautiful aroma?

Dionysus:

Shhhh! If you be quiet they just might throw a sausage your way!

Chorus:

Oh, Iacchus help our glowing torches, erupt!

Erupt!

Lift up their flames,  
shake them in our hands,

Iacchus, Iacchus!

Chorus:

The brightest star in our night ritual.

From dazzling flame

to dazzling flame our valley below.

The old mens' knees unwind

and

cast away their aged knots

their cares and the weight of their many-seasoned years

because of their sacred love for you.

Brighten our path with the torch and lead us,

lead this dancing youth!

Chorus:

Oh, blessed Iacchus! Lead it into the blossoming valley!

Chorus:

Silence! From this moment on, utter no words that carries ill omens! Now, stand away all you who don't know our sacred phrases or has a dirty mind or has never witnessed or participated in our lusty dances, in the orgies of the noble Muses, or was not initiated into the language of the Bacchic rites of that bull-eater, Cratinus or enjoys using swear words at the most inopportune time.

Chorus:

Stand away also those who will not help end rebellious strikes against our government or he who does not behave in a civil manner towards his neighbours.

Chorus:

Stand away he who, instead, blows hard at the flames of these insurrections for the sake of his own, personal benefit.

Chorus:

Stay apart from us you who, when our city is the grips of a huge storm, you, as a leader, receive bribes to betray her, betray a stronghold or a ship or get money from smuggling goods to countries against whom we have trade embargoes like Epidauros, and, like the tax collector Thorycion, you collect 5% duties for such things as oar pads or flax or pitch to be sent there from Aegina.

**365**

Chorus:

Stand back if you've ever convinced anyone to finance enemy navies and stand right back if you've ever shat upon Hekate's offerings while leading her chorus... like Cinesias did once! Stand back if you're a politician who, like Archinus, ran off with the money awarded to poets, just because he was made fun off by that poet during the ancient rites of Dionysus.

Chorus:

To all you people I say and say again and for a third time I say: Stand well away from the dances of the Initiates!

Chorus: *(To the Initiates)*

Come now, you Initiates, raises your voices and lift your feet, dance a dance that fits the occasion! It's a night-long festival!

Chorus:

Right then, lads! Into the lovely, flowery meadows you go! Stamp that ground well, with fun, with joy with laughter.

Chorus:

Give yourselves a full breakfast.

Chorus:

Give our saviour your full respect! Please her as best you can! Come on she has vowed to protect our place forever, no matter what Thorycion is after!

Chorus:

Give strength to your voice. Sing her praise!



Chorus:

Come, Demetra, goddess of pure rites, come to us now and save your children.

Let us play and dance without a care all day long.

Let us say many funny things as well as serious and let us play and make fun and finally gain the garlands of the victor.

Let our song make your young god Iacchus our dance partner.

Chorus:

Come Iacchus! You've invented this, most wonderful of festive songs, join us and show us how long you can go without the slightest pain. Show us Iacchus, show us our way, lover of choruses!

**405**

Chorus:

Lover of choruses who, as a joke, let us dance and run about in fun with sandals and clothes torn to bits, Iacchos come dance with us.

Chorus:

Ah ha! Just now I've seen a young girl's titty, a really pretty one, one of our playmates. Her dress was torn just here and out popped her little booby.

Chorus:

Come, Iacchus, chorus lover, come dance with me!

Dionysus:

Ohhhhh! I'd love to play with her!

I was always a devout follower of this religion.

**415**

Xanthias:

Oh, yeahhhh!

Chorus:

So, then should we throw a few jokes at the expense of our great commander of our navy, Archedemus?

Dionysus and Xanthias:

Oh, yahhhhh!

Chorus:

Here he is, seven years old and still wearing nappies yet, there he is, amongst the living dead, their leader with crookery the length of your arm!

Dionysus and Xanthias:

Oh, yeahhhh!

Chorus:

And what about Cleisthenes, the old devil! I hear he hangs around the cemeteries and there plucks and plugs his bum all day long!

Dionysus and Xanthias:

Oh, yeahhhhh!

**425**

Chorus:

There he is, bent over, beating his head and crying and yelling for mercy, "Fuuuuuuuck me! Blowwwwwww me!"

Dionysus and Xanthias:

Oh, yeahhhhhh!

Chorus:

And I hear also that the son of Hippo-coitus otherwise known as Mr Screw, goes off to sea battles wearing a lion skin made of... made of... the hair of a whore's cunt!

Dionysus and Xanthias:

Oh yeahhhhhh!

Dionysus: (*Jumps up in front of the chorus which at first is a little startled. To the chorus*) Well now!

Could you please tell us strangers, new arrivals, where does Pluto live? He lives around here somewhere, right?

Chorus:

Quite right. Not far to go now. No need to ask me or anyone again. You're here. Right in front of his door!

Dionysus:

Right! Thank you!

*To Xanthias*

Boy! Up with the luggage!

Xanthias:*(To the luggage)*

Come on my little bugs. I've got to disturb you again!

**440**

Chorus:

Off you go then! You lovers of the god's festivals! Go and play in her sacred circle and inside her flower-filled forest. I'll take these young girls and the women and the sacred flame with me and go where they play all night long.

Chorus:*(To the girls and women initiates)*

Come on then girls! Let's go off to that lovely meadow where flowers abound, where we can dance as we love to dance, our dance which the happy Fates lead.

Chorus:

The sun and the light is there for us only because we are initiated and we behaved kindly towards strangers and others.

*Chorus exits*

SCENE THREE

**460**

Dionysus:*(They approach the gate. It's a huge one. Next to it is a wooden ladder. Dionysus lifts his hand up to knock but withdraws it. To Xanthias)*

I... How should I knock at this huge gate? I mean what do the locals do?

Xanthias:

Stop wasting time! Show them you're not Heracles only by clothes but by guts as well! Come, on! Just knock on it!

Dionysus:*(Yells and knocks at the door with his club)*

Ahoy, there! Boy! Hey Boy!

Aeacus:*(within)*

Who's that?

Dionysus:

Who are you?

Aeacus:*(Within)*

Aeacus the gate keeper! Who are you?

Dionysus:

Heracles the Great!

**465**

Aeacus:*(Opens the gate. He is the great "Gate keeper" carrying lots of iron keys. He's full of anger. When he emerges through the gate the two travelers are shocked with horror. While he speaks, Dionysus farts. Slowly first then with quick repetition and louder. To Dionysus:)*

You! You rotten bastard! You insolent bag of stench! You huge bag of stench! You huge, huge bag of stench! The biggest bag of stench there is! You're the shit-bag who untied my guard dog Cerberus, MY guard dog, the dog of this house, and grabbing him by the neck, ran off with him! Ah, but now you're surrounded! The black hearted rock of the Styx on one side, the blood-dripping sheer cliff on the other, lock you in as if in a dungeon and the hundred-headed dogs of Cocytus, everhunting, who'll get to your gizzards and tear them to bits. Hell's snakes will rip into your lungs and the whores from Teithras will crush your balls and smash your entrails. I'll run and get them right now!

*Aeacus runs off and thunderously, ominously shuts the gate behind him. We hear farts emanating from Dionysus' bum, followed by the sounds of him defecating in his clothes. He looks horrified for a minute and then collapses to the ground.*

Dionysus:

Aaaaaaach!

Xanthias:

Hey, whatsamatter, boss?

Dionysus:*(awkwardly)*

I... I... shat myself! Ahhhh! Call the god, quick!

Xanthias:

What a joke you are, boss! Come on, get up quick before someone else sees you!

Dionysus:

But I'm... I'm losing my senses! Quick, go and bring me a sponge for my...

*(first indicates his bottom but then changes his mind)* my heart!

Xanthias:*(digs into the luggage and finds a rag. Hands it to him)*

Here! Sponge yourself with this.

*Dionysus inserts the cloth into the back of his pants and wipes his bum*

Xanthias:*(Shocked)*

Ohhhhhh, my! Ohhhhhhhh my! Ohhhhhh, my good, golden gods! Is that where you keep your heart?

Dionysus:

Yes, the poor thing got a little scared and dropped down there through my stomach.

Xanthias:

By the gods and the humans! I've never seen a worse coward!

Dionysus:

Who's a coward? Me? I'm the one who asked you for a sponge remember?

*(Hands it back to him)*

Would another man have done that? No! He wouldn't have dared!

**490**

Xanthias:

Yeah? So what would that other man have done instead?

Dionysus:

Cowards don't get up and wipe themselves like I do. They lie there in their own stinky pool!

Xanthias:

Poseidon take note: What bravery!

Dionysus:

That's for sure! Errr, tell me, Xanthias. All that noise... that yelling and carrying on... the threats and stuff. Didn't they frighten you?

Xanthias:

Nup. Never even crossed my mind to be frightened.

Dionysus:

Arrogant, little shit! All right then! If you're that bloody brave, take this club and this lion skin and you be me and I'll be you.

*(Gives Xanthias his club and skin)*

Here you are. I'll be your luggage boy.

Xanthias:

Fine then. Give them to me. Hurry up!

*(Takes the skin and club)*

Right! I'm always faithful to my master. Now get back and watch me. Xanthio-Heracles does not lack guts, like you!

**500**

Dionysus:

No, of course not! You're a real whip-hardened slave.

*(Lifts the luggage. Almost falls from the weight.)*

Ohoopa! Got them!

*(farts again. This time he looks surprised)*

*Door opens and a house maid appears. Sexy, provocative, alluring.*

Maid:*(To Xanthias, the new Heracles)*

Heracles! Dahhhhhling! Surely not! Let me look at you!

*(she tries his muscles)*

Oh, yes! It's you all right! Come in, dahhhling, come in! The goddess is waiting for you. When she heard you're here, she started baking loaves of bread, stewing the fasoulada, roasting a huge ox and clogging the oven with pies and sweet rolls! Come on, then!

*(She offers him her hand)*

Xanthias:*(Moving as if reluctant. Still holding her hand.)*

Thanks but...

Maid:*(grabs his phalus)*

Oh, no, no, no, no, no! By Apollo, I'm not letting you run off like that. Come on, she was also cooking birds and frying all sorts of sweet delicacies... And, she got ready some very sweet wine! Come on, then!

Xanthias:*(Pretending to push her hand away)*

No thanks, I'm quite fine at the moment!

Maid:*(Pulling him towards her again)*

Don't be silly! Come on! There's also a young girl, a flautist, in there, ready for you. Very, very pretty! Not to mention the dancing girls... Two or three of them!

Xanthias:

Did you say "dancing girls?"

Maid: *(Her hand around his neck)*

Absolutely! Cunts in their first flush of youth, freshly plucked. Now come on in, dahling, the fish will get cold. The cook is about to pull it out of the grill and the tables are being brought in.

**520**

Xanthias:

Well, then! Let's not waste any time. Run in and tell those chorus girls that I'm coming in right now. In person.

*(Maid runs in. To Dionysus)*

Boy! Come along now, boy and bring that stuff with you!

Dionysus: *(drops the luggage)*

Oh, come on now! Hang on a tick! You didn't take this little game of dress-ups seriously, did you?

Come on, cut the crap and pick up the luggage!

**525**

Xanthias:

What's that? You're not thinking of taking your gift back, are you?

Dionysus:

No "ifs" about it. Come on, off with that skin!

Xanthias: *(shouts at the audience)*

Witnesses! Look at this! Look at what he's doing! May the gods see this! Witness!

**530**

Dionysus: *(has ripped the skin and club off Xanthias)*

What gods? What a stupid little shit you are! Idiot, arrogant, little slave! Fancy thinking you're

Heracles, Alcmene's son! What next!

Xanthias:

Never mind. There, take them! The time will come when, god willing, you'll be begging me again!

Chorus:

These are the attributes of a man of mind and sense:

When the rough seas come he always rolls over to the comfortable side of the ship, rather than stay on the one spot like some picture drawn motionless on a wall.

The smart man, the real cushion lover, like Theramenes, will always move to the softer side of the boat.

**540**

Dionysus: *(Dances around sarcastically, showing his lion skin and club, enjoying his good luck)*

What a joke it would be if my little slave here, Xanthias was lying on his back inside some comfortable fleecy blankets, whore-kissing some cute little dancer... until it was time for him to pee. Would that not be a funny sight if I were there, watching him from above and he, seeing me, sees a fellow bum and I end up with no front teeth! Ouuuuuch! Ouchey me!

*A woman appears at the door, just as fearsome as Aeacus. She's the innkeeper. At her first sight, both men fart.*

Innkeeper: *(Takes one look at the men, then a closer one at Dionysus. Yells to Plathane inside.)*

Plathane! Plathane come and have a look at who we've got here!

Plathane: *(Within)*

Yeh? Who is it?

Innkeeper:

It's that crafty bastard! The one who came here once and gobbled up all our bread! Sixteen loaves of them! Down his huge gullet!

*Enter Plathane with a maid.*

Plathane:

Ah, yes! By Zeus, that's the bastard, all right!

*Farts from Dionysus*

Xanthias:

Oh oh! I can see hurties for someone!

Innkeeper:

And the stewed meat! Twenty half obols of it!

*(Dionysus farts again. Xanthias looks closely at Dionysus' bum.)*

Xanthias:

Oh, oh! I can see brownies!

Innkeeper:

With all that garlic on top!

**555**

Dionysus:

Are you mad, woman? You don't know what you're talking about!

Innkeeper:

Didn't you think I'd recognize you with those boots and this ridiculous get up? Oh, yeah! And there's also all that dried fish you had!

Plathane:

And all that fresh cheese, darling! Scoffed it all down, baskets and all!

Innkeeper:

And when I made up the bill for him he started glaring at me and yelling...

Xanthias:

Oh, that's him all right. That's how he behaves everywhere!

Innkeeper:

Then, like a madman, he goes and pulls his sword out!

Plathane:*(Hugs the innkeeper comfortingly)*

Yes, my poor sweetie.

**565**

Innkeeper:*(needs more sympathy)*

And... and... and we were so scared, we jumped up to the loft and he ran off without paying and he took our sleeping mats with him!

Xanthias:*(nods his head violently.)*

Oh yeahhh! That's the boss all right!

Innkeeper:

We ought to do something about this.

*(to her maid)*

Go and bring my hero Cleon out here. He loves suing you scumbags!

*Dionysus trembles with fear again and farts.*

**570**

Plathane:*(To the maid also)*

And, if you come across my hero, Hyperbolos bring my hero out here too. Let's really rub this guy down!

Innkeeper:*(To Dionysus)*

You disgusting endless gullet you! I ought to get a rock and smash those huge teeth of yours for having gobbled up all my goods!

Plathane:

And I'd just love to throw you over the dead man's cliff!

Innkeeper:

Come on Plathane! We'll go and get Cleon ourselves. He'll have this guy in court by the end of the day and roll the stuffing out of him. I wish I had a sickle! I'd rip that throat of yours that ate all my lovely sausages! Come on, old girl!

*Innkeeper, Plathane and the maid exit.*

Dionysus:*(In terror)*

Ohhhhhhhh, how I love my darling Xanthias! May I die a most horrible death if I don't!

Xanthias:

I know what's in your head! I know your brain! Say no more! I'm not turning into a Heracles again!

Dionysus:

Ohhhhh, come on, my little Xanthias, don't be like that!

Xanthias:*(Sarcastically, throwing Dionysus' words back to him)*

So... How could I, a mere slave, a mortal at that, ever hope to turn into the great Heracles, Alcmenes' little boy?

**585**

Dionysus:

I know, I know! You're angry now and, of course you're quite right to be angry. See, you could even smack me one and I wouldn't say a thing but... if I ever -I swear- if I ever take these clothes away from you again, may my death be a dreadful one, a most final one -roots and all: wife, children and Archedemus of the slimy eyes. The lot of us!

Xanthias:*(They start exchanging clothes again)*

All right, then. I accept your oath and I'll wear those clothes.

**590**

Chorus:

Your job now, Xanthias!

You've taken back the uniform you wore before, renew then that spirit of bravery and look fierce once more, just like the god whose likeness you took on.

It'll be back with your old slaves clothes if you start babbling or being a whimp.

Xanthias:

Quite right, gentlemen, quite right! Happen to be my thoughts exactly, in fact. Yes, I know, if anything good suddenly turns up, he'll be ripping these clothes off me again. But I'll still have that brave heart in my chest and that sharp and spicy look in my eye!

*Noise within*

I better have because I hear noises behind the gate.

*Aeacus opens the gate violently and looks fierce. He has two gigantic slaves with him.*

Aeacus:*(To his slaves)*

Tie this thief of dogs up immediately so that he can meet with justice. Hurry up!

Dionysus:

I can see hurties!

Xanthias:

You come anywhere near me, you two and you'd be sent to the crows!

Aeacus:

What? You want to fight, do you? Right!

*(He calls inside.)*

Archers! Archers! Ditylas, Scevyas, Pardocas! Archers! Come out here for a minute. There's someone out here I want you to fight.

*The three archers come out and they, along with the two slaves, beat Xanthias. They have a tight hold on him.*

**610**

Dionysus:*(To Aeacus)*

Terrible stuff this, isn't it? First he steals from people then assaults them!

Aeacus:

Dreadful!

Dionysus:

Terrible AND dreadful!

Xanthias:

Ahhh! By Zeus! Listen here! If I've ever been here or stolen anything from you, even a strand of hair, may Zeus strike me dead! Look! I'll make you a great offer: Take my slave here and torture him and if you catch me doing anything unjust, take me off and chop my head off. All right?

Aeacus:

Torture him? How?

**620**

Xanthias:

How? Every way you can. *Points behind the curtain, stage right* Tie him up on the ladder there. Hang him upside down, skin him with a porcupine whip. Tear him to bits. Pull him apart at the rack. Pour vinegar into his nostrils. Put hot bricks on his body. Give him all the torture you want except...

*(uses a limp wrist)*

...don't beat him with a stalk of fresh leek or onion!

Aeacus:

That sounds fair. And if in the process, maim your boy then I'll be paying you the appropriate compensation.

Xanthias:

Forget about compensation. Just take him and torture him!

*Dionysus farts violently.*

Aeacus:

Oh, no. I'll do it right here, before your very eyes.

*(To Dionysus)*

You! Put the luggage down immediately. Now, no lies from you, right?

Dionysus:

I'm warning someone... someone better not torture me because I'm immortal... Otherwise, look out!

You'll get hurties!

Aeacus:

What? What are you talking about?

Dionysus:  
What I'm saying is that I'm immortal and he's a slave. I'm Zeus' son, Dionysus.

Aeacus:(*To Xanthias*)  
Did you hear that?

Xanthias:  
Sure did. No better reason than that to whip him! How could he feel anything if he's a god, hey?

Dionysus:(*Suddenly the idea descends upon him! To Xanthias*)  
Well, then! You say you're a god too, right? Why don't you cop the whip like me? Same number of strokes as me?

Xanthias:  
Quite correct.  
(*To Aeacus*)  
And whoever cries out first or first shirks from the beating, he's the mortal one.

Aeacus:(*To Xanthias*)  
No question about it. You're a true man, the way you look for justice. All right, strip off!

*Dionysus and Xanthias strip off.*

Xanthias:(*To Aeacus*)  
Now, how are you going to test us fairly, then?

Aeacus:  
That's easy. A stroke each, first one of you then the other!

Xanthias:  
Good.(*offers his back to Aeacus*)  
Now, see if I twitch. Have you hit me yet?

Aeacus:  
No.(*He whips Xanthias*)

**645**

Xanthias:(*grits his teeth*)  
I thought so.

Aeacus:(*surprised*)  
All right. I'll go hit the other one then.  
(*Whips Dionysus*)

Dionysus:(*Greater gritting of teeth but farts.*)  
Tell me when you're ready exactly...

Aeacus:(*Surprised again*)  
But I've just hit you!

Dionysus:  
Did you? Why didn't I sneeze then?

Aeacus:  
How would I know? I'll try that one again.

Xanthias:  
Hurry up then!(*Aeacus whips him harder this time*)  
Ouuuuuuch!

Aeacus:  
What's with the "ouuuuuuch?" You didn't feel pain, did you?

Xanthias:(*teeth are chattering*)  
Nooooo! By Zeus, no! I was just wondering when Heracles' festival is on at Diomeia.

Aeacus:  
This man is holy! Let's get back to the other one.  
(*Strikes Dionysus even harder*)

Dionysus:  
Woooooooooohahaha!

Aeacus:  
What is it?

Dionysus:(*hops up and down with pain and farts*)  
I... I... see a horseman!

Aeacus:  
So what's with the tears then?

Dionysus:  
I can smell onions. It's what horsemen carry with them all the time.

Aeacus:  
Sooo, no pain?

**655**

Dionysus:  
Not a bit!

Aeacus: *(Thoroughly surprised now)*  
Then I'd better try that one again!  
*(Strikes Xanthias)*

Xanthias:  
Woooooolalalala!

Aeacus:  
What is it now?

Xanthias:  
Can you pluck that thorn out of my back?

Aeacus:  
What an odd thing this is! I'd better get back to this again.  
*(Strikes Dionysus, savagely this time)*

Dionysus:  
Oh! Apolloooooo! Are you from Delos or Pytho?

Xanthias:  
Hey, that hurt him! Didn't you hear how he screamed?

Dionysus:  
No it didn't! No it didn't! No it didn't! It didn't really! A line from the poet Hipponax just dropped in my head.

Xanthias: *(To Aeacus)*  
Look, Aeacus. You're going nowhere like this. Hit him in the guts.

Aeacus:  
That's true. *(To Dionysus)*  
Stick your guts out you!

*Dionysus does so and Aeacus strikes him with all his might*

Dionysus: *Farts*  
Ppppppposeidon!

Xanthias:  
Did someone feel hurties?

**665**

Dionysus:  
... who rules the Aegean promontory and the depths of the dark blue sea.

Aeacus:  
By Demeter! I've no idea which of you is the god and which the mortal. All right then, both of you go inside. It'll be left to the master himself and to Persephone. They'll recognize you. They're gods too.

Dionysus:  
That's right. I just wish you had thought of that before you gave me all that beating!  
*All except the chorus go through the gates.*

INTERMEZZO

**675**

Chorus:  
Come, Muse! Come to our sacred dances!  
Come to bring delight to our songs!  
See there where the great clutter of the wise millions sit.  
Greater lovers of honour than the two-tongued Kleophon  
On whose lips a Thracian swallow makes fearful noise,  
a swallow sitting on a foreign leaf!  
And so the sad nightingale, our dreadful demagogue,  
our mindless general Kleophon cries since he'll die  
Even if the jury comes out tied!

**686**

Chorus:  
It's good and mighty proper for a sacred chorus like us  
To teach its citizens well!  
So here is what we think:



Firstly, get rid of all the fears the citizens have of whatever it is they've done through the tricky holds of Phrynichus one of the heads of the 400 who tried to rule us.

Let them apologise and let them free. And thus make all citizens equal.

Chorus:

And it's a bad joke to have the slaves who fought only once for you, to have them become citizens of Platea, and thus have the slaves turned into masters.

Chorus:

Not that I think badly of that decision – it's probably the only decent one you've ever made!

Chorus:

But so should you award the others their freedom too, the four generals whom you condemned to death just because after the great sea battle of Arginousae they didn't dive in the turbulent waters of the sea to gather the corpses of their fighters.

Chorus:

You should pardon this one error of theirs since they are people who have been by your side on many battles and who are your relatives.

Chorus:

So, you, who by nature are wise, let go of your anger, and let's decide to make equal citizens and free all those who fought with us at sea.

Chorus:

Because, if we make too much of this, feel too proud and unwilling to give them equality, when our city in the future falls against heavy seas again, this pride will then seem stupid.

**706**

Chorus:

If I'm any good at all at judging people and tell which judgment should fall upon whom, then this tiny chimp Cleigenes who loves the courts so much

Chorus:

–hates us all much more–

He's the slyest of all the crooked bath-house owners,

all those who wrestle with ash and chalk and useless, dirty soaps.

That's why when he's out walking and he's wobbling on his drunken legs, he carries that staff of his.

Chorus:

He carries that staff, that sign of his grand office, for one reason and one reason only:

He's afraid in case one of his angry customers appears before him and gives him a beating.

He knows he won't be around much longer!

It's a wondrous thing to me how this city treats its fine folk in the same way as it treats its rot: just like we treat the old and trusted coin along with the new gold.

Chorus:

Both are pure metal and used all over Greece and by the rest of the world, but we don't use them at all and, instead, we work with these useless copper coins, which we've only just minted a day or two ago with the worse possible stamp! That's what we do with our citizens, too.

Chorus:

Here we have good men and true, just and honourable and good, all raised in the wrestling schools and choruses and the arts and yet we treat them like crap, yet, for our every need, we only use these... these coppers, these red-headed foreigners, the slyest of the sly, the very last migrants, those which this city would never before stoop to use even as vermin poison!

Chorus:

Such idiots!

Chorus:

Come on, even now, you can mend your ways!

Bring back the true blues! Give the ruling positions back to them! If you succeed, then the smart folk will think you've done well, but if you fail, well, they'll say, "Well, you failed honourably!" Worthy of you is the wood from which you're hanged!

**ACT TWO**

**SCENE ONE**

*From Pluto's palace enters one of his slaves and Xanthias*

**738**

Slave:

By Zeus the Saviour! That's a real tough man that master of yours! A real toughie!

Xanthias:

Of course he is! Of course he is! Tops at fucking and drinking! The toughest of them all!

Slave:

Yet he still didn't beat the crap out of you once you were caught out to be the slave and not the master!

Xanthias:

Beat ME? He would've regretted it if he had!

Slave:

That's the way! That's how slaves should behave! That's how I love behaving towards them too!

Xanthias:

You do, huh? Tell me, why is that?

Slave:

Why? Because it's an absolutely wonderful thing to curse and swear at the old bastard behind his back! It's like... like I'm the master of Mysteries! Way up among the gods!

Xanthias:

Yeah, and what about when you're groaning as you shut the door behind you after a good belting?

Slave:

Yum!

Xanthias:

Me too. And how do you feel about stickybeaking?

Slave:

By Zeus, I know of nothing better!

**750**

Xanthias:

By Zeus, you're truly one of us! And how do you feel when you're eavesdropping on the conversations of your masters?

Slave:

Oooh, I go whacky about that!

Xanthias:

And... what about spreading rumours about them, out in the streets?

Slave:

Rumours? Ahhhh! When I do that sort of thing, I'm... I'm... I'm in sexual ecstasy! Pure orgasmic sensation!

Xanthias:

Oh, Phoebus Apollo! Give me your right hand! *They shake hands* And now let us kiss each other!  
*They kiss.*

*Suddenly very loud, thunderous and adamant noises of people arguing emanate from within the walls.*

*Xanthias is petrified.*

Xanthias: *(stuttering)*

Achhh! What's all that noise? By Zeus, god of the flogged! Listen to all that noise, ooooooh, the swearing, the yelling! By Zeus the...

Slave:

Oh, that's nothing. That's just Aeschylus and Euripides at it again!

Xanthias:

Oh yeah?

Slave:

Dreadful mess in there! Dreadful! A revolution among the dead! Absolutely horrible stuff this!

Xanthias:

Yeah, why is that?

Slave:

Well, we've got a law down here which is, he who's the best in all the major arts, intellectual, athletic, military, political, that is to say best among his peers, he'll receive all the high privileges afforded by the Prytaneum: food, wine, women, bed, front row seats at all major public events, wine, women, bed... oh, and a throne right beside Pluto's right hand!

Xanthias:

Wine, women, bed... Gotsa!

Slave:

And this winner stays there, keeps getting all those goodies until someone else arrives who's cleverer at his art than him and then the old one hands all these privileges to the new one.

*More noises from within. It'll eventually become obvious that the loudest of them is Aeschylus' voice.*

Xanthias: *Indicating the voice.*

Is that what got Aeschylus so noisy?

Slave:

Yes. He was the anointed one for the throne of "Tragedy." He was the best at it.

**771**

Xanthias:

And now?

Slave:

Well, Euripides came down here and as soon as he arrived, off he goes giving us all huge exhibitions about sly crooks, purse snatchers and patricides, burglars and such like. Well, there sure are a lot of them down here and as soon as they heard all his queer logic and twisted and bent words they fell in love with him! They called him the best and that gave him such a big enough head that he insisted Aeschylus should give him the throne.

Xanthias:

And didn't they run after him with rotten fruit?

Slave:

Nah! In fact, the folk here made a whole lot of noise, asking for a re-trial. They wanted to see who's the better of the two.

Xanthias:

You mean, all the crims? They all came shouting for a re-trial?

Slave:

Yeap! Shouted the heavens down!

Xanthias:

And Aeschylus? Didn't he have anyone on his side?

Slave:

Alas, my dear Xanthias, the good are always in the minority. Down here as well as up there. *Indicating the audience. They both stop for a minute to gaze at the audience and then nod in agreement.*

Xanthias:

So... what's Pluto preparing himself for?

**785**

Slave:

What else? He's preparing to hold a re-trial. Check out once again who's the best in Tragedy.

Xanthias:

But what about old Sophocles? Why isn't he having a go at the throne?

Slave:

Sophocles? Nah, Not Sophocles! Sophocles is a good man! As soon as he arrived down here, he kissed Aeschylus, gave him his right hand and moved away from this throne stuff. He'll sit on the fence, as Cleidemides, his son once said, until after the trial and if Aeschylus wins, Sophocles will be happy for him. If not, then he'll challenge Euripides himself. For the sake of Tragedy, of course!

**795**

Xanthias:

So it's really on then, ey?

Slave:

Sure, any minute now. Then you'll see momentous things, my friend Xanthias! Momentous! Music and poetry will be put upon the balance. *He waves his hands indicating a weighing balance.*

Xanthias:

You mean like they do at the festival in Apaturia? All the fathers weighing their chunks of meat for sacrifice at their son's coming of age?

Slave:

And they'll be bringing their tape measures and yard sticks for words and moulding boxes for...

**801**

Xanthias:

Moulding boxes? What, are they going to be making bricks?

Slave:

...as well as set squares and wedges. See, Euripides said he's going to check all the tragedies very, very closely. Syllable by syllable, word by word, verse by verse.

Xanthias:

Ho! No wonder Aeschylus is so angry!

Slave:

Sure he is. The old bloke lowered his head and threw out a fearsome, bull-like glare! Grrrr! He's got these huge eyes! Fearsome stuff.

Xanthias:

And who's going to be the judge?

Slave:

Ah! Now there, they struck trouble. You see, Aeschylus would have nothing to do with any Athenians...

Xanthias:

Did he think there were too many crooks among them?

Slave: *They stare at the audience again for a few seconds and then nod.*

Possibly... And then, he thought all the others were nothing short of useless when it comes to judging poets and their lofty deeds. So then they looked around and saw your master and they decided to give the job to him because, after all, he has some experience in the field. *More shouts from within.* Let's go and watch them now because whenever there's serious business between our masters, it means tears for us!

*Xanthias and the Slave enter Pluto's house.*

*Outside, all the abovementioned tools as well as a bucket with pebbles and four chairs are brought and left neatly and ceremoniously around the stage.*

*The chairs are a reflection of status:*

*Two thrones, one for Pluto and one for Dionysus, a lesser throne for Aeschylus and another, a modest chair, for Sophocles, which is placed just behind that of Aeschylus.*

*On the back of Pluto's chair we see the word KING*

*On the back of Aeschylus' chair we see the word TRAGEDY*

*On the back of Dionysus' chair, we see the word JUDGE*

*On the back of Sophocles' chair we see the word GUEST*

**815**

Chorus:

What a dreadful anger would have filled the thunderous heart of the old bull, Aeschylus, ey? When he sees that his opponent will be sharpening his cutting tongue on his old bull's horn, that's when you'll see the real whirling of fearsome eyes!

Chorus:

We'll see such a fight, huge feathers upon huge helmets, charging at one another, clashing words that give out sparks and flames. Glittering chariots, with their axels cutting arty words out of each other.

Clash, bang, glitter and spark!

Chorus:

That head of his, that hair, a mane that will stand upright and eyebrows tightening around his bull-eyes. There, Aeschylus will roar his thundering, titanic words, uprooting the timbers of a whole forest! That's our Aeschylus!

Chorus:

Then will come out the delicately crafted words of Euripides! Oh, Euripides, he'll roll out his smooth tongue and the tester and re-tester of words, his literary opponent and casting aside all those shackles of hatred they threw on him and bit by tiny bit will grind away at those phrases which are too hard a job for the lungs. That's our Euripides!

SCENE TWO

*From Pluto's house enter Pluto, Dionysus (in his usual costume) carrying a cup of wine, and in his early drunken staggering. Euripides, Aeschylus and Sophocles his friend, close by. Two big guards come and stand by the gate. Aeschylus and Sophocles are talking amicably but inaudibly; nodding agreement to each other.*

*As soon as Dionysus sees Xanthias, he waves at him pleasantly and gestures for him to approach.*

*Xanthias approaches with a jug of wine with which he tops up Dionysus' cup.*

*Finally they all sit at their respective seats.*

*Euripides realises he has no seat and shows some anger and discomfort.*

*Xanthias goes and stands behind Dionysus' chair and for a few moments exchange inaudible niceties.*

*During the whole scene, while Sophocles may make gestures of approval whenever Aeschylus speaks,*

*Pluto will be totally neutral. Xanthias will respond as he pleases and will constantly top up his master's cup.*

*Pluto's slave stands behind Pluto's throne.*

**830**

Euripides: *(To Dionysus)*

I'll have no lectures from you! I'll not give away the Chair of Tragedy. I have not the slightest doubt that I am far better in this art than he *(indicating Aeschylus)* is!

Dionysus:*Looks at solemn Aeschylus who's obviously gathering his anger and, for the moment is silent.*

Aeschylus? Speak up! You heard what he just said!

Euripides:

Ha! He'll puff up his chest first, make us all believe he's got something important to say. That's the sort of crap he gives us in his tragedies, too! Bizarre stuff!

Dionysus:

Careful there, Euripides, mate. Don't be so cocky!

Euripides:

I know this man! I know him very well and for a long time now! Oh, I know him all right! He's not a poet! He's a creator of huge, wild beasts and he has a mouth... a mouth so arrogant so... ill-disciplined, so... ill-controlled, with its gates wide open, it's logic completely escaped, its temper completely given away to splatter-puff and knotted bombastology!

**840**

Aeschylus:

Is that a fact? Is that right, you... you son of veggie vendor! Is that what YOU think of ME? You... you collector of idle chatter, creator of paupers! You... you gatherer of rags! You say such things about me! You'll be sorry you've ever uttered these words!

Dionysus:

Enough, Aeschylus! Why do you need to cook your innards with such a burning anger?

Aeschylus:*Thoroughly infuriated. Loud.*

No, Dionysus! I shall not stop! I shall not stop until I've shown this... this poet of decrepit bodies the insolent idiot that he is!

Dionysus:*Wheeling around in his throne and yelling at the servants.*

Oh no! Here we go! Bring in a black lamb boys! A black lamb for the sacrifice! I can feel a real typhoon charging our way!

**849**

Aeschylus:

To Euripides.

You! You gatherer of disgusting, sacrilegious, Cretan solos, of wailing, of mourning monotones! You brought these grotesque marriages on our stage!

Dionysus:

Control yourself there, Aeschylus, my most honourable and lofty poet! Hold it a minute!

Euripides! Oh wise one! I think you better move back a bit if you know what's good for you. Back away a bit from this hailstorm he's brewing inside his feverish skull and in his blind anger gongs you on the head with some vicious words about that play of yours, "Telephus." And you, Aeschylus, ease off on the anger. Debate calmly, CALMLY! Don't scream and shout like women bakers. Remember, you're poets! Hold your dignity! You've already started roaring like Pine burning in a forest fire!

**860**

Euripides:

I'm ready! I'm ready! I'm ready and I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid to take bites, or, if he's up to it, he can start the biting first. Go on! He can have a go at my dialogues, at my lyrics – the very nerve centre of my tragedies including, INDEED including, my Peleus, Aeolus, my Meleager and even my Telephus, if he wants!

Dionysus:

So, Aeschylus, do tell us now! What do YOU want to do?

Aeschylus:

For one thing, I'd rather not get into loud disputations out here. This contest between us isn't fair out here.

Dionysus:

Why? What's the problem, Aeschylus?

Aeschylus:

Because MY poetry hasn't carked it like his has. My poetry is still staged up there. There are laws enacted to permit them enter more live competitions. His however, it's right here with us, it came down with his carcass... he's got it with him and he can recite from it all he wants. Anyhow, if that's what YOU want... you're the judge and I won't argue.

**871**

Dionysus:

Right then! *Shouts at Xanthias and the Slave:* Fire! Bring me fire! And incense! Bring me incense! I shall need to pray before the wise cracks begin, that I will judge this contest with the utmost musical

care!

*To the Chorus:*

And while I'm at it, you lot call the Muses! Beg them come!

*Fire and incense is brought to Dionysus and he performs the ritual of his prayers, ie, he waves the censor around the stage (close to the faces of those seated on the thrones and the chair) and murmurs religious words. He takes the task seriously but his behaviour must be highly comical.*

Chorus:

Oh, daughters of Zeus, nine immaculate virgins true! You who can look down from high up there and see the wise wits of poets, down here! These the creators of lofty ideas, come down and watch them as they twist, turn and wrestle against each other! Come, Muses and oversee these two gigantic mouths, equal in might, equal in trite sentences and rhymes and saw dust for verses.

Chorus:*Loudly*

Let the wise wits take their places!

*Aeschylus and Euripides take up antagonistic positions. Dionysus sits at his throne, Xanthias takes his place behind him. Sophocles sends gestures of encouragement to Aeschylus and the slave goes and stands behind Pluto. Once he is satisfied everyone has taken up their position:*

*Let the contest begin!*

**885**

Dionysus:*He hands the censor to Aeschylus.*

You two, say a prayer as well, come on!

Aeschylus:*Loudly, with exaggerated histrionics:*

Oh, Demeter! You who has nurtured my wit! Let me be worthy of your mysteries!

Dionysus:

Now you, too Euripides. Take the censor!

Euripides:

Nope! I'm right, thanks. No need! The gods to whom I pray are... different.

Dionysus:*Disturbed*

Oh? Special, are they? Your own gods? New ones?

Euripides:

Exactly!

Dionysus:*Hurt.Sarcastically:*

Well, go ahead then! Do pray to these... unofficial gods of yours!

Euripides:*Loudly, Pompously, gloatingly:*

Oh Ether! You who feeds my wit! Who spins my tongue, who makes curves with my mind, who helps my nostrils to bring forth my voice! Let sprout from me words strong and true!

**896**

Chorus:

Oh yea, oh yeah, oh yeah! So we too desire! To hear from wise men some words that dance the dance of marching to war!

Pride and the wild have taken hold of their tongue, their wits whirled and wheeled and so what else can one expect from this one but something sharp and well thought out and from that one there an attack with words torn straight out from the floor of the wrestling ring.

Chorus:

Come then, begin with your words and both say elegant, witty, original things, without copies of the stuff one hears every day.

*Aeschylus retreats to his throne with confidence. Henceforth, he may show anger or frustration, as the occasion demands, by jumping out of the throne or twisting and turning within it.*

**907**

Euripides:

I shall talk about my qualities as a poet later. First though I shall expose my opponent. He's an imposter, a pretentious crook! A rip off merchant! Let me tell you how he ripped off his poor audience. An audience which, I might add he took over from his own colleague, another idiot, Phrynichus, who had them all well trained and prepared for him: trained to be nothing but morons! And so, Aeschylus would begin with some single character, standing alone on the stage –say an Achilles or a Niobe, wrap them up from top to toe so that we see nothing of their face (what a low device for a tragedy!) nor hear anything of their voice; not even as much as a little peep!

Dionysus:

Quite right, not even a peep from them!

Euripides:

And then his chorus will let loose four long chains of interminable songs, one after another, on and on without even the slightest break, while all the others stood there interminably mute!

**916**

Dionysus:

Ahhhh, silence! How I enjoyed those moments! Better than all the idle chatter that fills our stage these days!

Euripides:

That's because you were an idiot! Interminably dumb!

Dionysus:*In sad agreement*

Mmmm, most probably! But, why would he do that? All those songs, all that muteness?

Euripides:

Why? Because he's a rip off merchant, I tell you, that's why! A pure crook! He just wanted his audience to sit there quietly and wait and wait and wait till his dear Niobe would utter a little syllable, any syllable! And in the meantime, of course, the tragedy would drag on and on!

*Aeschylus is getting impatient*

Dionysus:

The sly rotter! He really had me hooked! *To Aeschylus:* Hey, you! What's up? What's with all the fidgeting and squirming?

Euripides:

Because I'm revealing his fraud... So! After he waffles on till the play is half over, he'd grunt out a dozen huge words, as huge as an ox, complete with crests and awesome eyebrows, horrible, dreadful things! Frightening things, which the audience had never seen before!

*Aeschylus: Jumping out of his throne with frustration*

Oh, my God!

Dionysus:*To Aeschylus, loudly!*

Quiet!

Euripides:

And did any of it make sense? Nope! You couldn't understand a word!

Dionysus:*To Aeschylus:*

Will you stop sawing your teeth!

Euripides:

You'd just pick up words like Scamanders, or ditches, or huge shields and hooked nosed eagles and enormous cliff hanging words that you just couldn't understand!

**931**

Dionysus:

Yes, by Zeus! And I stayed up many times, all through the long nights, wondering what sort of bird this "melodious half-horse half-rooster!"

*Aeschylus: Uncontrollably*

You stupid, ignoramus! It was an emblem, carved on the ships! A figurehead! Grrrr!

Dionysus:*Laughs*

And there I was, thinking all the time that it was our cocky- horsey friend, Eryxis, Philoxenus' son!

Euripides:

So why on Earth would anyone want to write about roosters in a Tragedy?

*Aeschylus: No longer sitting*

Huh! What about you? You... you enemy of the gods! What sort of stuff did you write about, huh?

Euripides:

Not horsey roosters or goaty deer like you! All that stuff that one sees in Persian carpets! Not me! No, as soon as I took Tragedy over from you –full of puffed up, boastful, fatty words, I straightaway went about slimming her. I took off all that excess weight by feeding it tiny, cute little verses and little white beetroots, took her out for healthy strolls, gave her a soup made up of chatter squeezed out of books and then built her strength up with a huge dose of my dear friend's arias, those of Kephisophon. Also, I didn't jump into the art with any old song I chanced upon and make a dreadful mess of her but I had the very first character who came upon the stage, explain to the audience the very origins of that story

*Aeschylus:*

Better the origins of that story than those of your own story, ey?

Euripides:

And straight after that, I'd have no actors hanging around doing nothing. They'd all be out there talking: the wife, the slave, who'd say just as many words, the master, the virgin and the old lady.

**950**

Aeschylus:

And for such a crass exhibition you should have been murdered!

Euripides:

Absolutely not, by Apollo! I behaved most democratically!

Dionysus:

Ahem! You... you better change your little stroll, my dear friend. This path about democracy is not the best for you right now!

Euripides:*Indicating the audience*

And after that, I taught that lot how to talk properly...

Aeschylus:*Angry at that achievement by Euripides. Turns to the audience and frowns at them.*

And I wish you'd had carked it before you did that! Somebody ought to cut you to bits!

Euripides:*Ignoring Aeschylus' anger.*

...and I also taught them how to make use of all the subtle little rules of speech, how to twist words and thoughts, how to feel, to see, to fuck, to love, to concoct schemes, to be good crooks, to suspect everyone, to know everything!

**955**

Aeschylus:

That's for sure!

Euripides:

I've placed on the stage things that are common, well known by all of us, the things we use every day, things we see before us so that anyone can easily judge my talent. I've never clogged up a play with bloated words and force my audience to watch it by using gigantic swans and characters like your Memnon, heroes with great horses their heads covered with dangling bells! It's easy to judge us: just compare his followers with mine. On his side, we see Phormisius and Megaenetus the Stoooge. And what are they like? They're all trumpet and bum and beard! Pine benders and slashers! Great smart arses! And on my side? I have Kleitophon (the retard) and the sweet Theramenes!

Dionysus:

Theramenes, ey? Hehehe! That man is the wisest and sharpest of them all! If he ever gets anywhere near a bit of strife, he turns his threes into sixes. Slides himself out of trouble all the time!

**971**

Euripides:

And that's how I've managed to teach these people how to think: I've placed a lot of thought and consideration in my art and so now, they feel everything and are able to judge all things: They can run their household better and can easily ask questions such as, "How does this go?" or "Who got this?" or "Where is such and such?"

Dionysus:

By Zeus! That's quite right! Every Athenian these days as soon as he gets home he begins shouting at his poor slaves, "Where's the potty?" or "who nibbled the head off my sprat?" or "Where's the bowl I bought last year? Is it dead?" or "Where's yesterday's bit of garlic?" or "Who's nibbled at my olive?" In the olden days they used to stand around like retards! Stupid retards! Idiotic retards! Dumb retards! Retarded retards!

**992**

Chorus:*To Aeschylus*

Oh, glorious Aeschylus! Our brave Achilles! Can you see all this? What's your answer going to be? Just be careful though, Achilles! Don't let your anger spin you out of your olive grove! He has thrown a lot of insults at you, young brave, but you keep your calm when you come to give your counter. Come into these seas with the sails low and the wind fall a bit, calm a bit.

Chorus:

Now then Aeschylus! You, who first of all the Greeks built great awesome towers of speech and gave words the tragic shape!

Turn your taps on full!

Aeschylus:

Ohhhhh! How very angry this is making me! It turns my stomach to think that I've got to compete with him! Anyhow! Just so that he won't think I'm stuck for words... tell me Euripides, why should anyone admire a poet? And how does a poet earn this admiration?

Euripides:

Why, for the strength and skill of our minds. Because we give good advice to the people and thus make them better citizens, of course!



**1010**

Aeschylus:

Yes... so, if you didn't do all that and instead, you've turned brave and useful citizens into dreadful bastards, what then do you deserve to suffer?

Dionysus:

Why ask him? The reward should be death! No doubt about it!

Aeschylus:

Well then, let us examine what these *Indicates the audience* were really like before he took them over, after me. Why, they were real men! Brave and grand, huge, tree-like. Not like those idlers who's mind is always scheming ways of escaping their civic duty! Sly, stinking, dreadful little rodents of the marketplace.

No, my men exuded an air of heroism! You could smell the intoxicating air of the battlefield, lances, spears, great white, high-crested helmets, greaves up to here *indicating his knees*, weighty headgear and hearts? Hearts like the solid seven-oxskinned shields!

Euripides:

Och! I can't cope with this!

Dionysus:

Yeah, he's going to screw us with those high-crested helmets!

Euripides:*To Aeschylus*

Oh yeah? And how exactly did you contribute to this... bravery, you're talking about? How did you teach them to do and be all that?

**1020**

Dionysus:

Come on, Aeschylus, tell us! Don't be such an arrogant little haughty snub-nose!

Aeschylus:*Haughtily*

I have created a Tragedy full of the god Ares! The Glory of War!

Dionysus:

Which play is that?

Aeschylus:

"Seven Against Thebes," for example. All these citizens here, *waves his arms about encompassing the whole auditorium* have seen this play and the all wanted to be like the god: Furious, brave, war-loving!

Dionysus:

Now that really was a bad move! The Thebans came out the braver and won the war! You ought to get your skull smashed for that!

Aeschylus:*Indicating those on the stage*

See? You should have all followed their way then you, too, would be as brave. But it didn't happen.

Same with my "Persians." An excellent piece of work! In that one I taught every one how to always seek out Victory! What a fantastic embellishment to Tragedy!

Dionysus:

Oh yes! I sure loved it when I watched the Persians hearing of Darius' death! The Chorus jumped out of its skin and shouted:

Chorus:

Yeaeaeaeaeae!

**1030**

Aeschylus:

That's the sort of plays, tragedians should write! Just think how much the brave and lofty poets have helped the people going way back ever since the olden days! There, amongst these poets, you see grand Orpheus who revealed to us all sorts of mystic ways, taught us all how not to kill, to be peaceful!

Then there was Museus who taught us how to read oracles and how to cure all sorts of diseases.

Hesiod gave us lessons of Agriculture –how to pick the proper season for the different crops and how to do the ploughing. Homer, too, divine old Homer! Where does he owe his fame and glory? He got them because he taught us all about tactics on the battlefield and about bravery, about military weapons!

Aeschylus:

Dionysus:*Laughing*

Yeah but he taught nothing to that clumsy idiot, Pantakles who, the other day, when he had to take part in a parade, the stupid man, put the helmet on his head first –good and tight- and then, afterwards, tried to attach the crest on it!

Aeschylus:

Yes but Homer did succeed with a whole lot of other men, brave men, like Lamachus, for example! It's from this mold that I've made men who are real heroes, brave and lionhearted: Teucres being one and

Patroclus! And I did this so that every citizen can gain the desire to raise to their level as soon as he hears his country's bugle calling him. And my females? Heroes too, not like the whores he's filled the stage with! Stheneboea and Phaedra! No sex loving woman on my stage!

Euripides:

Of course not! How could you since Aphrodite rejected you so blatantly!

**1045**

Aeschylus:

And I hope she continues to do so! Look at what she's done to you and your family! Screwed it up completely... two marriages and your second one's seen all around Athens... she's screwed you completely, boy! Hahaha!

Dionysus:*To Euripides*

That's true, isn't it Euripides? You got hit pretty badly yourself by this lusty goddess. Admit it! All those things you said about other women, you've suffered yourself, right? Flattened you right down!

Euripides:

And what harm did my Stheneboeas cause the city, you scum bag?

Aeschylus:

Those Bellerophons of yours made many of our esteemed women –wives of honourable men- so ashamed that they committed suicide by taking hemlock!

Euripides:

But that myth about Phaedra which I've added in the play was already widely known!

Aeschylus:

Sure it was! Sure it was! But what's our duty? What the duty of a poet? It is to conceal the rot, not to put it up on the stage, to exhibit it and to teach it! Children have their teacher to instruct them but the adults have us, the poets! That's why it's important for us to tell them things that are good!

Euripides:*Mockingly*

So, by singing the praises of huuuuuuge things like the mountains Parnassus and Lycabytus, you think you're instructing them about human virtue? People need simple, common words not all these high mountainous ones.

Aeschylus:

You... you common idiot! Great thoughts, great ideas need great words, great language. Demigods love these lofty words of mine - To suit their lofty clothing! And that's where your corrupting influence is!

Euripides:

What are you talking about?

Aeschylus:

Well, you got your audiences to pour their hearts out in sympathy for their kings by dragging them out on the stage dressed in rags!

Euripides:

So? Where's the harm in that?

**1065**

Aeschylus:

Where's the harm? You've given the excuse to every rich man to avoid his duty as a commander of our ships by dressing himself up in rags and claiming poverty!

Dionysus:

That's right! That's right, by Demetre! He wears all those rags on top but beneath them all he wears a lovely soft woollen shirt! Then, once he gets out of the service, you see him pop up at the market!

Aeschylus:

Then you taught all our youth how to be idle chatterers and crap on about nonsense all day. You've emptied our wrestling schools and destroyed the wonderful bums of our young men. All they do is stand around these days, chattering and chattering and encouraged the crew of our public ship, Paralus, to talk back to their commanders. Not like the olden days when all these men knew was how to pull hard at the oar and shout, "heavvvvvve hooooo!" That's how they'd earn their food!

Dionysus:

By Apollo, how true is that, ey? Hehehe! Those on the upper rows would fart straight into the mouth of the rowers below, drop shit into his mess mate's food bowl and when they're out on the shore for their leave, they steal everyone's clothes... They were the days! Now? Now they talk back to their captains, refuse to row and the ship wobbles its way everywhere.

**1078**

Aeschylus:

And what other dreadful things has he caused? He's the one who brought on our stage pimps and

bawds, dealers in whores! He's the one who has women giving birth in our temples! He's got them sleeping with their brothers! Then he goes about claiming that "life is NOT life!" The result? Well, our community is now clogged with assistants of the assistants of the assistant secretaries, swearing bureaucratic monkeys, ripping off our public. Not a fit man among them all! Not even one who can run with a torch, in the torch race! Not a one!

Dionysus:*Bursts into laughter*

That's right! Hahahaha! That's right! Last year at the Panathenea, I almost died laughing when some broad-bummed slack arse was running –trying to run, rather! There he was face white as chalk, head between his fat tits, losing ground all the time, struggling just to keep up. Then when he reached the Gates of Ceramis, the people fell upon him, whacking him everywhere: his bum, his ribs, stomach, legs, everywhere! Poor bum! Hahahaha! And then they started giving him some flat handers. The poor sod started farted like a donkey and then blew his torch off and ran away! Hahahaha!

**1098**

Chorus:

What a fearsome exhibition this is! What a dire battle! Here we have folks a war that's bulging by the minute! It's a tough game trying to work out who's winning when one charges like a bull and the other spins away and takes his turn with the attack.

*Loudly to the combatants:*

Right you two! No need for any control! Get on with it, bring it all on! There are plenty of jabs and witticism yet! Whatever your area of expertise, argue upon it, attack with it, spread out for us the old and the new and... it's about time someone said something subtle, something wise!

Chorus: *Looking at the audience and shaking his head sarcastically.*

And don't worry about these folk here. They're not ignorant and they'll certain appreciate all the subtleties you use when you're putting your case to them. No, those days are gone! Now, these are real veterans of the art! They've seen plenty of Tragedy and Comedy and each of them has a book of his own and has learnt all the subtle and fine witticisms. And you can see for yourselves, their... natural endowments are also very... very... powerful and these days very well honed.

So have no fear, lads. Bring it all on and don't worry, our audience is are very wise!

SCENE THREE

**1119**

Euripides:*To Aeschylus*

So... let me now turn to your prologues! Because this clever little dramatist has made a mess of explaining his plots in those prologues of his.

Dionysus:

Is that right? So which of his prologues will you begin with?

Euripides:

Oh, a great many of them! First though, recite for me the one from your *Oresteia*!

*Chorus makes a racket of disapproval*

**1125**

Dionysius:

Come on folks! Be quiet a little. Let's hear him! Go on, Aeschylus. Recite!

Aeschylus:*Recites*

"Oh Hermes, lord of the Underworld! You who takes care of the lands of our fathers! I pray to you! Come to my side and save me, for I have walked back and returned to my land."

Dionysus:

What complaint do you have about this one?

Euripides:

I've got more than a dozen complaints about it!

Dionysus:

But the whole thing is only three lines!

Euripides:

And each one of them hides some twenty mistakes!

*Aeschylus is gripped by fury! He mumbles inaudable grunts.*

Dionysus:

Aeschylus, please. My advice is, keep quiet or else you'll be blamed for stuffing up more than three iambs!

*Aeschylus:Fury bursts through his control.*

Me? Me keep quiet for him?

Dionysus:

Yes! That is, if you'd take my advice.

Euripides:*Smugly.*

In fact I'd say his mistake was of cosmic proportions!

Aeschylus:*Wheeling around looking for sympathy.*

Have you any idea what you're on about?

Dionysus:*Resigned. To Aeschylus.*

All right then, go ahead. No skin off my nose!

Aeschylus:*To Euripides:*

Well? What mistake are you talking about?

Euripides:

Once more from the beginning!

Aeschylus:

"Oh Hermes of the underworld! You who takes care of the lands of our fathers!"

Euripides:

Right! Here we have Orestes uttering these words at his father's tomb, right?

**1140**

Aeschylus:

Exactly my thoughts and words!

Euripides:

So, let me get this clear now, Orestes was saying all this to Hermes, even though his father was violently slaughtered by his wife's hand – in a secret plot! And Orestes was saying that Hermes "oversaw" all this?

Aeschylus:

No! You've got it wrong! He wasn't referring to the Earthly Hermes but to the Hermes, the god of the Underworld. He said it clearly that this was a role he was handed by his father! He inherited the underworld from his father!

Euripides:

Huh! There! That's an even worse mistake than the one I wanted to point out to you! Because if Hermes had inherited the Underworld...

Dionysus:

That, in effect would make Hermes a grave robber... on his father's side! Hahahha!

**1150**

Aeschylus:

Dionysus, the wine you're guzzling has a bad smell about it!

Dionysus:

All right, then, you recite another one for him and watch out you don't make more mistakes.

Aeschylus:

"I pray to you! Come to my side and save me, for I have walked back and returned to this land."

Euripides:*Laughs loudly*

He's telling us the same thing twice! What a wise man our Aeschylus is!

Dionysus:*Now quite drunk*

Huh? Twice?

*Lifts his fingers to see if he's drunk.*

Where twice?

**1155**

Euripides:

Well, I'll show you: check out the phrase, "...for I have walked back and returned to this land." Surely you can see that "walked back" and "returned" mean the same thing!

Dionysus:

Yeah, of course it is! It's like... it's like saying to your neighbour, "please neighbour, lend me your bread kneading trough... or, if you don't have a bread-kneading trough, then just lend me your trough to knead my bread in!" Of course it is!

Aeschylus:

You great fool of a man! That phrase is absolutely perfect!

Dionysus:

Eh? What do you mean? How can it be perfect?

Aeschylus:

Because, simply coming back to your own country is easy. Anyone can do it. No need for ceremonies, hassles or anything. You just... get there, arrive! But when you've been exiled from that land, you have not only come back but you've also returned!

Dionysus:

By Apollo! That's excellent! Euripides? How do you respond?

Euripides:

Me? I deny it! I deny that Orestes was "coming" home! He simply "arrived." Secretly and without discussing it with the authorities!

Dionysus:

By Hermes! That's excellent! That's... excellent! Ehhhh what do you mean?

Euripides:*To Aeschylus:*

All right then! Give us another one of your verses

**1170**

Dionysus:

*To Aeschylus*

Yes, Aeschylus! Hurry up! And... watch out for the mistake again!

Aeschylus:*Reciting*

"And by the side of this grave I call upon my father to listen and to hear..."

Euripides:

There we go again! Same thing twice! He said the same thing twice! What's the difference between "listen" and "hear?"

Dionysus:

Because, you silly boy, he was talking to the dead and the dead... well, even you talk to them three times they still can't hear... or listen! Now what about your prologues? What did you do there?

Euripides:

I'll tell you! Right, now you listen and if you hear me say anything twice or I make use of any irrelevant but of padding, spit all over me!

**1180**

Dionysus:

Ohh! All right then, go ahead. Say something. I'm all ears and very keen to hear this highly grammatical correctness of your prologues!

Euripides:

"In the beginning, Oedipus was a lucky man..."

Aeschylus:*Loudly*

By Zeus! He most definitely was not! How could he be fortunate? The gods were against him even before he was born! Even before he was born, Apollo told him that he'll kill his own father! So how on earth can you say he was "a lucky man?"

Euripides:

"... but later he became the most wretched of all mortals."

Aeschylus:

By Zeus! He had never stopped being one! How could it happen? As soon as he was born, they put him into a little crockpot –dreadful winter now- and left him out to die so that when he grew up he wouldn't have killed his father! Then, there he was, two swollen feet, the poor chappy and off he marches to Polybus' territory. Then, finally, he goes and marries an old woman and then –if that's not enough, he goes and blinds himself!

**1195**

Dionysus:

Sure he was lucky! Lucky he wasn't put to death along with Erasinides and all those admirals who came back after the sea battle of...

Euripides:

You're babbling! I write perfect prologues!

Aeschylus:

By Zeus! I won't start picking at your work word for word. Rather, if the gods will help, I'll destroy all those prologues of yours with a prick.

Euripides:

With a prick? All of my prologues?

Aeschylus:

I only need one! *Lifts his phallus and waves it around.* Just this one little ol' cock, that's all! Or anything else, for that matter, because the way you put these prologues together, anyone can shove anything he likes in between those verses: pricks, pubes, sacks... anything, really! I can show you right now, if you like.

Euripides:

You?*Examines Aeschylus prick. With disdain:*

You'll show me all this, huh? With this?

*Aeschylus nods*

Huh!

Aeschylus:

Yes, me! I can show you all that! Pubes, sacks, dicks, anything you like!

**1205**

*Euripides: Bursts out in laughter at the ridiculous suggestion.*

Go for it, Aeski! All right, try this one: "Aegyptus, as the well spread word says, went off with his fifty sons across the sea by a sailor's oar and..."

Aeschylus:

And lost his prick! *Chuckles and waves his phallus about, pleased with himself.*

*Xanthias farts*

Dionysus:

Ey? What? How the hell did that get in there?

*Moves closer to Euripides and cups his ear.*

Tell us another prologue, Euripides, so that I can listen closely.

Euripides: *Recites*

"Dionysus, all dressed up in his woolly spectre and his fawn skins was hopping and dancing among the trees of Parnassus..."

Aeschylus:

When he lost his prick!

*Shows similar joy as above.*

*Xanthias farts*

Dionysus:

Ouch! Hit again by that prick!

**1215**

Euripides:

Well, no problem. See what he can shove his prick into this one: "There is no man alive whom the gods have blessed in all respects. Even if he was born in nobility, he still may lack a living. Or if he's born of a lower class and..."

Aeschylus:

Lost his prick!

*Again the laughter and waving of the phallus.*

*Xanthias farts*

Dionysus:

Euripides?

Euripides:

What is it?

Dionysus:

I think you should lower your sails. This prick is going to puff up a great storm!

Euripides:

By Demeter! No, quite the contrary, I'm not going to worry one bit. This time I'll have that prick blown right out of his hand!

Dionysus:

All right then, tell us another but for goodness' sake stay away from that prick of his!

**1225**

Euripides:

"Agenor's son, Cadmus, left Sidon't city and..."

Aeschylus:

Lost his prick!

*Xanthias farts*

*As Aeschylus is running around the stage waving his phallus about, Dionysus approaches Euripides and speaks close to his ear.*

Dionysus:

Mate, I think you should... cut off that prick of his.

Euripides:

What? Me, cut that prick of his?

Dionysus:

Take my advice, Euripides, chop it off!

Euripides:

Nah, not necessary! I've got lots more prologues in which he can't shove that prick of his.

*Moves away from Dionysus and shouts to make Aeschylus pay attention.*

Ahem! "Pelops, Tantalus' son, entering Pisa on his speedy steed..."

Aeschylus:

Lost his prick!

*Xanthias farts*

Dionysus:

See? He shoved that prick of his in there again!

*To Aeschylus*

Aeschylus, give Pelops back his prick, please, while there's still time!

*Aeschylus shakes his head*

I'm sure he'll give you an obol for it. It still like all right to me.

Euripides:

No way, by Zeus! Absolutely not! I have inside my head a whole lot of them yet... Ahem! "Once time, Oeneus from his land..."

Aeschylus:

Lost his prick!

*Xanthias farts*

Euripides:

Please! Let me say the whole line first! "One time, Oeneus, from his land had reaped a great harvest and while he was sacrificing the first fruits..."

Aeschylus:

He lost his prick!

*Xanthias and the slave fart one seconds after the other.*

Dionysus:

What? In the middle of the ceremony? Who pinched it?

Euripides:

Forget it, mate! Let him check this out: "Zeus, as we really know..."

**1245**

Dionysus:

You're killing me, Euripides, because he's just going to say, "he lost his prick," again! Because this prick of his jumps into your prologues like sties in your eyes! For the gods' sake, turn to your songs now!

Euripides:

Why not? I can prove him to be a bad song writer, too; and one who repeats himself even in his songs!

Chorus:

Where is this going? I just have no idea what he could possibly find to say against Aeschylus, a man whose songs are the finest of all so far. I wonder how he's going to try and criticise this King of the Bacchic song! I sure am afraid for Euripides!

**1261**

Euripides:

All his songs are wonderful! Huh! I'll show you! I'll grab them all and squeeze them into one!

Dionysus:

Wait, I'll just go and get a few pebbles to count them.

*Goes over to the bucket and picks up a number of pebbles.*

Euripides:*Uttered most monotonously and solemnly. The "Ahhhh" is to be said as in deep grief.*

Oh, Achilles! Oh man from Phthia!

You hear the screams of the slughtered heroes

Ahhhh, my woe! And yet you stay from the rescue!

We the people from around the lake honour our ancestor Hermes

Ahhhh, my woe! And yet you stay from the rescue!

Dionysus:*Throws two pebbles into the bucket.*

That's two against you Aeschylus!

Euripides:*Recited as above*

Noblest of all the Acheans, mighty son of Atreus

Know that I am here, child:

Ahhhh, my woe! And yet you stay from the rescue!

Dionysus:*Throws another pebble in the bucket*

That's three, Aeschylus!

Euripides:*Recited as above*

Silence! The Priestesses of Artemis, protector of the bees are near and ready to open the gates of the temple.

Ahhhh, my woe! And yet you stay from the rescue!

I have authority to utter the propitious command to the heroes of the expedition!

Ahhhh, my woe! And yet you stay from the rescue!

Dionysus:*Throws effusively all the remaining pebbles in the bucket.*

Oh, Zeus, my Looooord! What a lot of woes, Euripides! *Burps.*

I... I'd like to go to the toilet because all these... woes gave me kidney pains!

**1281**

Euripides:

No, no, don't go! Wait till you hear the next lot of verses. These are composed especially for the lyre.

Dionysus:

All right then, but no more woes!

Euripides:

How the youth of two-throned government of Greece

Flatto thrat, flatto thrat, flatto thrat, thrat, thrat,

Sphinx, bitch leader from evil days sends

Flatto thrat, flatto thrat, flatto thrat, thrat, thrat,

With a spear and an avenging hand the warloving ominous bird,

Flatto thrat, flatto thrat, flatto thrat, thrat, thrat

Gave her to the dreadful dogs that wonder the sky with Ajax,

Flatto thrat, flatto thrat, flatto thrat, thrat, thrat!

*Xanthias and the slave fart.*

*Pause*

Dionysus:

Whhhhhat, what was all that flatto, flatto stuff? Where did you get that from? Did you get that from Marathon? Is that the song they sing as they pull up the rope from the well? Flatto, flatto, flatto?

*Xanthias farts again.*

*Pause*

Aeschylus:

Forget all that. I've got mine from the best of sources for the best of causes. Not like him (*contemptuously indicating Euripides*) who's been harvesting the same fields of the sacred Muses as Phrynicus. He grabs stuff from all sorts of unflattering places: songs for whores, for drunks like Meletus, lusty Carian flute tunes, dirges and all sorts of lustful dances.

*Looks around him.*

Could someone bring me my lyre? Nah! This job doesn't need a lyre. Now where's that woman who played the castanettes?

*He looks behind the curtain stage left and sees the Female singer. He addresses her.*

Oh, Muse of Euripides' songs! Come out here! Come!

*Enter the Muse of Euripides. She is particularly ugly.*

You... you are the most appropriate accompanist for these songs.

Dionysus:*Takes a good look at her. Inspects her thoroughly.*

Ehhh... this one... well, once... ah... she never really gave throat to a Lesbian tune, has she?

**1309**

Aeschylus:

Oh, Halcyons!

You who sing aside the constant wives and

Give life to your bodies with the drops

That drip from your wings

And you, Oh spiders

Who beneath the ceilings, in every corner,

With the your fingers as looms

Wind and wind and wind and wind and wiiiiiiind

Taut cloth, work of the singing shuttle.

Round the sea-blue prows

Leaped a muse-loving dolphin

His leaps and jumps

For oracles and race tracks

Like the vine's most beautiful flowery branch



Snippets of a bunch of grapes which softens the pain  
Come hug tightly my body with your arms  
*Lifts his leg up and shows it to Dionysus:*  
See this foot?

Dionysus:

Yes, I can see your foot.

*Aeschylus: Turns to Euripides and prepares to kick him*

And you. Do you see it, too?

Euripides:

I do.

**1325**

*Aeschylus: Referring to the lyrics he had just recited.*

You, you criticize my lyrics while you write this sort of dreadful whore's scores, the twelve tricks that Cyrene turns in her bed! That's what your lyrics are about. Now me show you an example of your arias.

"Oh, moonlessly-lit darkness of the Night

What dire dream you send me through the gates of the  
Of invisible Hades!

A dream whose soul is soul-less

Child of a grotesque Night

Wild ghost that spreads tremour

A cadaver shrouded in black

With glances that drip blood – oh, blood!

Ghost, Oh ghost with tallons black,

Pass me a lit torch, my girls

Bring me the coolness of the river with your urns

And heat up water to wash away this god-sent dream!

Oh, god of the sea you see them!

Hurry neighbours and see a most horrible, most dire thing!

Glyke has snatched my cock

Oh, Nymphs of the woods and you young virgin, Mania,

run after her and catch her

Oh me oh my woe! I had my mind on my job

I was winding, winding, winding, winding the flax

On my spindle with my two hands

To go and sell it at dawn in the market

Then suddenly my cock, flew, flew and flew into the Ether

With the lightest of wings

Woes and woes and woes he left for me

And from my eyes tears and tears and tears

I let run, let run, let run, wretched me!

Ohhhhhhhh!

Oh, children of Ida, Cretans

Take up your bows and help

Move quickly and save the house, the whole house

Artemis, too, most beautiful and the virgin Dichtynna

Let her pick up her puppies and let wonder here and there

The whole house through.

Hekate, daughter of Zeus

In your two hands you hold high

Torches double-flamed

Give me light to enter Glyke's... abode

And to do a thorough search!"

Dionysus:

Now that's enough of lyrics from both of you.

**1365**

Aeschylus:

That's what I say, too!

I'd rather we went to the scales. There we'll find out what the poetry of each of us is really worth! By determining the weight of our words.

Dionysus:

All right, then! If I must! I shall weigh poetry like a cheese seller weighs his cheese.

*Xanthias brings the scales in the centre of the stage.*

Chorus:

Artists are a patient lot

And here's another wonder.

An unheard of wonder, a wondrous wonder.

Who else could have thought of such a thing?

Had some passer by told me about this,

Chorus:

I wouldn't have believed him!

Chorus:

I would have thought he was babbling!

Dionysus:

Right! Now approach the scales both of you!

*Aeschylus and Euripides stand on either side.*

Aeschylus and Euripides:

Here we are!

Dionysus:

Each take a hold of a pan and speak one of your lines into it and don't let it go until I say koo-koo!

Aeschylus and Euripides:

Done!

Dionysus:

Come on, say a line into it!

Euripides:

"Oh, if only the winged Argo didn't pass!"

Aeschylus:

"Oh river Sperhios and oh, you grazing fields!"

Dionysus:

Koo-koo!

Aeschylus and Eurypides:

We've released them!

Dionysus:*Indicating Aeschylus' side*

Here we are! This verse drops much lower than the other!

**1385**

Euripides:

Why is that?

Dionysus:

You're asking why? It's because he dropped in a river. Soaked up the whole verse, just like the wool sellers soak their wool to make it heavier; whereas you dropped a verse in there with wings in it!

Euripides:

All right then, let him toss in another verse and weigh it against mine again.

Dionysus:

Take the pans again then.

Euripides and Aeschylus:

Done.

Dionysus:

Euripides, speak!

Euripides:

"The only temple of the goddess Persuasion is the word."

Aeschylus:

"The only thing Death does not seek is Gifts!"

Dionysus:

Koo-koo! Let go!

Aeschylus and Euripides:

Done!

Dionysus:

It's Aeschylus again! He dropped Death in there!

Euripides:

But I put in the goddess Persuasion! It's a brilliant verse!

Dionysus:

Persuasion is very light. She is meaningless. Find something else. Something heavy. Powerful, huge, to drag the pan down!

Euripides:

Where am I going to find such a thing? Where?

Dionysus:*First to Euripides, confidentially.*

I suggest, "Achilles threw two aces and a four."

*Euripides contemplates this.*

Dionysus:

Right, this is your last weighing. Say your lines!

Euripides:

"He lifted the iron heavy wood."

Aeschylus:

"Corpses and chariots, the one atop the other."

Dionysus:

He's beaten you again!

Euripides:

How could he?

**1405**

Dionysus:

He threw in two chariots and two corpses! Even a hundred Egyptians could lift that!

Aeschylus:

Stuff this line-by-line stuff. If he wants, he can get into the pan himself AND bring with him his wife, his kids along with Cephisophon, his books and I'll just say TWO verses, that's all, two!

*Dionysus drops his head, shakes it despondently and nods Xanthias to come and take the scales away.*

*Xanthias does so, taking them out, stage right.*

Dionysus:

I'm not going to judge these two.. Both are friends of mine I don't want to end up making an enemy out of either of them. One is an absolute whiz in Tragedy, the other I love.

*Pluto gets up and approaches.*

Pluto:

But then what would be the point of you coming all the way down here?

Dionysus:

But if I judge the wrong one?

**1415**

Pluto:

Choose one of them and you can take him back with you, to the upper world. That way your trip won't be totally wasted!

Dionysus:

My blessings to you Pluto!

*To the contestants*

Now, listen to me, men. I've made this trip down here to take with me up there, a poet.

Euripides:

What for?

Dionysus:

So that he'd save our city, Athens, and organise again, her Festivals, her plays, choruses. So, now, whichever of you gives the best advice to her, to our city, he'll come up with me. All right?

*The contestants nod.*

Right. So what do you say about Alcibiades? He's been an absolute pain back up there: A brilliant man, enthusiastic, great general, helped us enormously but then he goes and defects to the other side, to the Spartans! Tell me both of you, what thoughts do you have about him?

Euripides:

What does Athens think of him?

Dionysus:

Athens? Highly ambivalent: Loves him AND hates him; wants AND wants him not. What do YOU think of him?

Euripides:

I hate a citizen who is slow to help his city, quick to cause her harm, who's got his eyes wide open to anything that helps himself but completely shut when it comes to helping the city.

Dionysus:

By Poseidon! That was well put! Now you, Aeschylus. What do you say?

Aeschylus:

It's a better idea not to rear a lion in a city but if you do, you better obey his every whim.

Dionysus:

By Zeus the Saviour! It's so hard for me to decide! One of you spoke wisely the other clearly. So, let me then ask you to give me yet another advice for saving our city.

**1437**

Euripides:

If, let's say, someone were to make a wing out of fatso Cleonicus and then attached him to Cinesias and then the sea breezes send him high above the broad blue slate...

Dionysus:

Hahaha! Now that would be something funny to see, but is there any meaning to it?

Euripides:

During sea battles, what they should do is carry vinegar with them and spray it at the eyes of their enemy!

*Dionysus shows a bit of discomfort at Euripides' suggestions.*

I know, I know! I've got an idea and I want to tell it now.

Dionysus:

Go ahead then!

Euripides:

Reverse our leaders! What we should do is, we should have faith in the untrustworthy and distrust the faithful!

Dionysus:

All of which means?

Euripides:

We should swap sides. Get rid of those we've been trusting so far and bring in those we've been rejecting!

Dionysus:

And this will save our beloved Athens?

Euripides:

Well, if it's all disastrous with the present bunch how could we not find a solution with the others?

Dionysus:

Hmmm! *Turning to Aeschylus* And what do you say?

**1454**

Aeschylus:

Tell me whom the city is using now. Anyone of some use?

Dionysus:

Of use? Now where would poor Athens find anyone of any use?

She hates them all!

Aeschylus:

So she loves the sleazy, sneaky, corrupt, con artists?

Dionysus:

No, she doesn't really love them. She just makes use of them because she has to!

Aeschylus:

Not one and not the other! So how could anyone save a city which wear neither a cloak of fine wool nor a goatskin?

Dionysus:

By Zeus! If you want to see the Upper World find the answer to that question!

Aeschylus:

No, I don't want to tell you the answer down here. I'll tell you when we get up there.

Dionysus:

Absolutely not. Send your wisdom from down here.

Aeschylus:

They'll save themselves when they consider the land of the enemy as their land and their land as that of the enemy; when they consider their ships as their wealth and their wealth as their poverty.

**1466**

Dionysus:

Yes but our jurymen gobble all our wealth up. Cleophon rose their salaries to two obols!

Pluto:*Impatiently, to Dionysus:*

Decide!

Dionysus:

I decided that I'll choose according to my soul!

Euripides:

Hey! You've sworn to the gods that you'd take me back home with you! Remember that and choose your friends!

Dionysus:

My tongue swore to the gods! I choose Sophocles!

Euripides:*Very angry.*

Most odious man! What have you done?

Dionysus:

Who, me? All I've done was to choose a winner and that winner is Aeschylus. Why not?

Euripides:*Brings his face close to that of Dionysus. Dionysus' winey breath pulls Euripides back.*

You dare look me in the eye after a disgusting act like that?

**1474**

Dionysus:

How can it be disgusting if the audiences judge as I do?

Euripides:

You rotten bastard. You'll stand by and watch me stay down here?

Dionysus:

Ahhhh! To live! Who knows what that is? Perhaps it's death! Who knows if breathing is not supper and sleep but just a woolen rug?

*The two guards come and grab Euripides by each arm and they force him out –stage right.*

Pluto:*To Dionysus and Aeschylus:*

You two! Come on, come with me!

Dionysus:

Where to? Why?

Pluto:

So that we can give you a going away party!

Dionysus:

By Zeus! What a grand idea! Nothing against that one!

*Pluto guides them all through the gate of his palace. Xanthias enters last letting out a final fart.*

**1482**

Chorus:

Blessed is the man with lots of brains and learning.

Now this is now highly obvious.

Chorus:

Aeschylus, this man who's going back home will be a great joy for his family and for his friends!

Chorus:

Because of his abundant intelligence!

Chorus:

So what gives one a deal of happiness is not to park next to Socrates and waffle all day long, ignoring all great culture and the best of the tragedian's works. It's sheer madness to waste your time with lofty but idle words with words for idle speculation! That's the sign of a man who's lost his mind!

*Pause*

*A fart is heard from behind the gate.*

*Pause*

*Enter Pluto, Aeschylus, Dionysus and Xanthias. Pluto is carrying two sacks.*

*Pause*

Pluto:

Well then, Aeschylus! Fare well! Go and give the Athenians the benefit of your good advice. Educate the idiots –there sure are many of them!

*Hands one bag to Aeschylus*

Give this bag to Cleophon and to the Tax collectors, Myrmex and Nicomachus and this *Hands him the other sack* to Archenomus.

*Aeschylus takes the bags but feel uncertain about them.*

They are instruments of death. Tell these men up there, that if they don't hurry up and come down here, I swear by Apollo, I will grab some hot irons and brand their asses. Then I'll chain up their feet and drag them down here quick and smart. As well as Leucolophus, son Adeimantus –Alcibiades' cousin!

**1515**

Aeschylus:

I'll do that! And you, Pluto hand the Chair of Tragedy to Sophocles because I think he's second to me in this art. And never let that Euripides, that liar and monkey, that crook, never gets anywhere near that chair –not even by accident!

Pluto:*To the Chorus:*

Come now, Chorus! Show your torches in honour of this man and guide him to the upper world, singing, as you go along, his praises with his own words, his own music.

Chorus:

Oh, gods of the Underworld! Grant, firstly, that this poet has a good journey to the sunlit world above and then grant that the city will receive this poet's fine ideas which will result in great blessings.

Chorus:

Only this way we'll see the end of all the suffering and terrible wars. By all means, let Cleophon and all those non-Athenians do their own fighting in their own land!

**END OF ARISTOPHANES'**

***"FROGS"***