

## Aristophanes' *Frogs*

### Dramatis Personae

Xanthias, human slave of the god Dionysus

Dionysus

Heracles

Talking corpse

Charon, ferryman of the Underworld

Empousa (female monster, mute)

Aeacus, gatekeeper of Hades, presented as the slave of Pluto.

Female servant, inhabitant of Hades

A Landlady of Hades

Plathane, the Landlady's friend in Hades.

Three Scythian archers under the command of Aeacus in Hades.

Ghost of Euripides

Ghost of Aeschylus

Muse of Euripides (mute)

Pluto, King of the Underworld

Chorus of Frogs

Chorus of Initiates into the Mysteries, apparently deceased and still singing in the Underworld

*The opening scene shows a street outside the Athenian house of Heracles.<sup>1</sup> Enter the god Dionysus, dressed in his normal attire of yellow tunic and soft felt boots, but equipped with the lionskin and club associated with Heracles. He is followed by his human slave Xanthias, who is riding on an ass and carrying a large piece of luggage.*

**Xanthias** O master, shall I tell one of the usual jokes  
that the audience always laughs at?

**Dionysus** By Zeus yes. Whichever you want, except 'I'm under pressure'.<sup>2</sup>  
Guard against that one; it makes me really sick.

**Xanthias** Nor any other witticism?

**Dionysos** Anything except 'I'm feeling crushed'. 5

**Xanthias** Which one then? Shall I tell the *really* funny one?

**Dionysos** Certainly,  
feel free—but there's just that one thing to avoid saying.

**Xanthias** Which one?

**Dionysos** That you need to shift your baggage to take a shit.

**Xanthias** Not even the joke where I say that I'm carrying such a heavy burden  
that if someone doesn't remove it, I'll break wind? 10

**Dionysos** Just don't, I beg you, unless you want to make me vomit.

**Xanthias** So why should I have to cart all this equipment around  
if I'm not going to do anything that Phrynichus  
and Lycis and Ameipsias make their porters do?<sup>3</sup>

**Dionysos** You're not going to. When I'm a spectator 15  
and witness any of those kind of gags  
I age more than a year by the time I leave.

**Xanthias** O thrice-unhappy me! This neck of mine  
is constricted, but can't give voice to the joke!<sup>4</sup> 20

**Dionysos** Well isn't it an outrage and an extreme indulgence,  
that I, despite being Dionysus son of Wine-Jug,<sup>5</sup>  
go on foot and suffer, while letting this man take a ride,  
to prevent *him* suffering hardship and carrying a burden?

**Xanthias** Aren't I carrying one?

**Dionysos** How can you be carrying one if you're taking a ride?

**Xanthias** I'm carrying *this* one!

**Dionysos** How?

**Xanthias** Quite unbearably!

**Dionysos** But doesn't the ass actually carry the weight of your burden?

**Xanthias** Absolutely not the one that *I'm* supporting—by Zeus, no!

**Dionysus** But how can you be carrying anything when you're being carried by something else yourself?

**Xanthias** I don't know! But this shoulder of mine is weighed down. 30

**Dionysus** So since you say that the ass isn't helping you, take your turn by picking him up and carrying him.

**Xanthias** Alas, poor me! Why didn't I fight in the sea-battle?<sup>6</sup>  
If I had, *I'd* be giving *you* orders that would make you scream for ages.

**Dionysus** Dismount, you scoundrel. I'm already near this door here 35  
that was meant to be my first stop.  
[*He knocks*] Boy! Boy, I say! Boy!

**Heracles** [*Appearing at the door in lieu of the slave whom Dionysus expects*]  
Who banged the door? Whoever it was  
leapt on it like a centaur.<sup>7</sup> Tell, me what is this meant to be?

**Dionysus** Boy?

**Xanthias** What?

**Dionysus** Didn't you notice?

**Xanthias** No, what? 40

**Dionysus** How much he was terrified of me.

**Xanthias** Yes, by god—that you'd gone insane.

**Heracles** By Demeter, it's impossible not to laugh!  
Even though I'm biting my tongue, I'm still laughing.

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

**Heracles** I just can't stop laughing 45  
at the sight of the lionskin over the yellow gown.  
What's the idea? Why has a wooden club allied with soft bootees?  
Where on earth have you been?

**Dionysus** I was boarding Cleisthenes.<sup>8</sup>

**Heracles** Were you in the sea-battle?

**Dionysus** Yes, and we sank  
some enemy ships—twelve or thirteen of them. 50

**Heracles** The two of you?

**Dionysus** Yes, by Apollo.

**Xanthias** And then I woke up.<sup>9</sup>

**Dionysus** Well anyhow, I was on board reading *Andromeda*,<sup>10</sup>  
when a sudden yearning battered my heart, you've no idea how hard.

**Heracles** A yearning? How big?

**Dionysus** Small, Molon's size.<sup>11</sup>

**Heracles** For a woman?

**Dionysus** No way.

**Heracles** For a boy?

**Dionysus** Not at all. 55

**Heracles** For a man then?

**Dionysus** Ah! Ah!

**Heracles** *Did you 'do it' with Cleisthenes?*

**Dionysus** Don't mock me, brother. I'm in a really bad way.  
That's how much my desire is wrecking me.

**Heracles** What is it, baby brother?

**Dionysus** I can't express it. 60

But still, I'll tell you via a riddle.  
Have you ever felt a sudden craving for soup?

**Heracles** For soup! Yummy! Over my lifetime at least a thousand times.

**Dionysus** Have I got the message across or shall I express it another way?

**Heracles** Not about the soup, because I totally understand. 65

**Dionysus** Well that's the scale of the longing that I feel now  
for Euripides.

**Heracles** Even though he's dead?<sup>12</sup>

**Dionysus** And no man alive can persuade me  
not to go to find him.

**Heracles** Even down to Hades?

**Dionysus** Yes by Zeus, even if there's somewhere lower down than that. 70

**Heracles** What do you actually want?



**Heracles** What do you mean by productive?

**Dionysus** As in taking the risk  
to produce some great phrase like this:  
'air, Zeus's bedroom' or 'foot of Time', 100  
Or 'mind unwilling to swear by all that's holy,  
but tongue that has sworn independently of mind'.<sup>20</sup>

**Heracles** Do you like these?

**Dionysus** Like them? I'm crazy about them.

**Heracles** Well, they're scams, as I'm sure you agree.

**Dionysus** Don't tell me what I think. Mind your own business 105

**Heracles** Well, I honestly do think they're utterly depraved.

**Dionysus** Eating's the only thing you're an expert in.

**Xanthias** But no mention of me!

**Dionysus** So the reason I've come wearing this outfit,  
copying you, is so that you'll tell me about those  
friends of yours who took you in and hosted you when you went 110  
after Cerberus, in case I need them.<sup>21</sup>  
Tell me about the harbours, bakers,  
brothels, rest areas, detours, springs, routes,  
townships, ways of life, and the hotels where  
there are fewest bedbugs.

**Xanthias** No mention of me! 115

**Heracles** [*To Xanthias*] Foolhardy one, do you really dare to go as well?

**Dionysus** That's enough of that. Tell me the route  
by which we'll most quickly get down to Hades.  
And tell me one that's neither too hot nor cold.

**Heracles** Well, come now, which of them shall I speak of first? Which? 120  
There's one route via a rope and a plank.  
You hang yourself.

**Dionysus** Stop. What you say would choke me.

**Heracles** There's a nifty shortcut that is well pounded —







Dionysus Well said.

And sure enough, they're bringing a corpse out here.<sup>34</sup> 170

You—you I mean, you the dead person;  
my man, do you want to carry my little bit of stuff to Hades?

Corpse How much is there?

Dionysus This here.

Corpse Will you pay two drachmas?

Dionysus By Zeus no—less than that.

Corpse So get out of the way, you!

Dionysus Wait, my fine fellow; perhaps I can offer you a deal. 175

Corpse If you don't put down two drachmas, don't propose a deal.

Dionysus How about nine obols?<sup>35</sup>

Corpse I might as well go back to life again.

Xanthias How big-headed this cursed man is. I hope he suffers.  
I'll go myself.

Dionysus You are a perfect gentleman.  
Let's go to the boat.

[Exit the funeral cortege and, as a stretch of water is revealed, enter Charon, rowing his ferry to the Underworld]

Charon *Ōop*, bring her alongside!<sup>36</sup> 180

Xanthias What's this?

Dionysus This? By Zeus,  
it's the very lake he was telling us about, and I see the boat.

Xanthias Yes, and here's Charon too, by Poseidon.

Dionysus Hello, O Charon, hello, O Charon, hello, O Charon!<sup>37</sup>

Charon Who's for respite from problems and being busy? 185  
Who's for the plain of Lethe or a place where asses are shorn?<sup>38</sup>  
Who's for the Cerberians, or the crows, or Taenarus?<sup>39</sup>

Dionysus I am.

Charon So jump on quickly.

Dionysus Where do you think we'll stop?





it's going to pop soon and let flow...

Chorus Brekekekex koax koax.

Dionysus O song-loving brood, 240  
stop!

Chorus No, I shall sing  
even more, if we ever  
on a sunny day  
leapt through the sedge  
and reeds, rejoicing in the song's  
melodies while we made dives, 245  
and escaped Zeus' rain at the riverbed  
to croak our wet changeful chorus  
amongst the popping bubbles.<sup>50</sup>

Dionysus Brekekekex koax koax.  
I'll just sing what you do. 250

Chorus Then we'll suffer terribly.

Dionysus But I'll suffer worse if I burst  
while I'm rowing.

Chorus Brekekekex koax koax.

Dionysus Carry on croaking; I don't care. 255

Chorus I'll have you know I'll keep on croaking,  
as much as my throat is capable of,  
all day long. 260

Dionysus Brekekekex koax koax.  
You won't defeat me with that.

Chorus Nor's there any way you'll defeat *us*!

Dionysus Nor you me, never! For I'll  
croak if necessary  
all day long— 265  
Brekekekex koax koax—  
Until I beat you at koaxing.



Get behind me!

**Xanthias** But now it's in front.

**Dionysus** So get in front then.

Xanthias And now by Zeus I see a huge monster.

Dionysus What type?

Xanthias Horrendous. It can change into anything.

Now it's a bull, now a mule, and now  
a gorgeous woman

Dionysus Where is she? How about I go and meet her?

Xanthias But she's not a woman now — she's a dog.

Dionysus So it must be Empousa.<sup>51</sup>

Xanthias Yes, her whole face  
is gleaming.

Dionysus Has she got a bronze leg?

Xanthias Yes, by Poseidon, and the other one is made of cow dung,  
you can be sure.

Dionysus Whither then shall I turn?

Xanthias What about me?

Dionysus O priest, protect me, so that I can be your fellow drinker.<sup>52</sup>

Xanthias We are destroyed, O Lord Heracles!

Dionysus Don't ever call me that,  
my man, I entreat you, never utter that name.

**Xanthias** Dionysus then.

**Dionysus** That's worse than the other one.<sup>53</sup> 300

**Xanthias** Be on your way! Come here, master.

[*The female monster disappears*]

**Dionysus** What is it?

**Xanthias** Courage! Everything is fine for us.  
Now we can say, as Hegelochus did,  
'Out of the waves I see once more a weasel'.<sup>54</sup>  
Empousa has gone!

**Dionysus** Swear to it.

**Xanthias** I swear by Zeus 305

**Dionysus** Swear again.

**Xanthias** Yes by Zeus

**Dionysus** Swear to it.

**Xanthias** By Zeus!<sup>55</sup>

**Dionysus** Alas, woe is me, how pallid I became when I caught sight of her.

**Xanthias** [*pointing to Dionysus' rear*]  
 But *this* thing of yours got scared and stained brown.

**Dionysus** Alas, whence do these evils befall me?  
 Which of the gods shall I blame for destroying me? 310

**Xanthias** The 'ether, home of Zeus', or the 'foot of time'?<sup>56</sup>

[*A pipe sound is heard from offstage*]

**Dionysus**  
 Listen!

**Xanthias** What is it?

**Dionysus** Didn't you hear?

**Xanthias** Hear what?

**Dionysus** The sound of pipes

**Xanthias** Yes I do, and the smell of torches  
 wafted over me in the most mystical way.

**Dionysus** So let's crouch down quietly and listen. 315

[*Enter a dancing chorus of initiates*]

**Chorus** [*sings*] Iacchus, O Iacchus.  
 Iacchus, O Iacchus.<sup>57</sup>

**Xanthias** This is what it is, O master. The mystic initiates  
 are revelling here — the ones he told us about.  
 In fact they're singing the Iacchus hymn as they pass through the agora.<sup>58</sup> 320

**Dionysus** I can see them too. We'd better keep quiet  
 until we can see them clearly.

**Chorus** [sings] Iacchus, O you who live here in your honoured seats,  
Iacchus, O Iacchus, 325  
Come now to dance in this meadow,  
come to your sacred thiasos-members,  
shake the fruitful crown on your head,  
overflowing with myrtle, stamp your feet boldly 330  
in time with the uninhibited,  
fun-loving ritual,  
shared fully with the Graces, the sacred dance, 335  
consecrated to your holy initiates.<sup>59</sup>

**Xanthias** O Lady, much-revered daughter of Demeter,  
how sweetly the smell of roast pork has wafted over me!<sup>60</sup>

**Dionysus** You need to keep still if you want a bit of sausage.

**Chorus** [sings] Wake up! For it has come, shaking fiery torches in its hands— 340  
Iacchus, O Iacchus—  
the star that brings light to our night-time rite:<sup>61</sup>  
old men’s knees begin to sway. 345  
they shake away their aches and pains  
and the lengthy years since their ancient days,  
by means of the sacred rituals. 350  
So blaze with your torch, blessed one,  
and lead forwards, to the flowery marsh land,  
the young people that perform the dance.  
Let anyone who is unversed in these words or whose mind is not pure, 355  
keep holy silence and stand apart from my choruses,  
or anyone who has neither witnessed the noble Muses’ rites, nor danced the chorus,  
nor been initiated in the Bacchic mysteries of beef-eating Cratinus,<sup>62</sup>  
or enjoys coarse talk when it is not appropriate,  
or who doesn’t oppose hateful factionalism or isn’t nice to citizens,  
but stirs up and fans strife out of desire for personal gain 360  
or who takes bribes when serving as magistrate at a stormy time for the city,



or betrays a fort or ships, or smuggles illegal goods from Aegina,  
 like that wretched tax-collector Thorycion,<sup>63</sup>  
 sending oarsmen's pads and sails and pitch across to Epidauros,  
 or persuades anyone to supply money to the ships of the enemy, 365  
 or soils the shrine of Hecate while singing cyclic choruses,  
 or any politician who cuts off pay to the dramatists  
 because he's been attacked in a comedy in the ancestral rites of Dionysus—  
 these people I tell, and tell again and indeed tell a third time  
 to keep out of the mystics' choruses.<sup>64</sup> But as for you, 370  
 start singing and celebrating the all-night rites that belong to this festival.  
 Everyone, march manfully  
 to the flowery slopes of the meadows  
 stamping and mocking, 375  
 playing and scoffing;  
 we've had enough breakfast.

Move forward, nobly to extol  
 the Saviour goddess,<sup>65</sup>  
 giving voice to the song, 380  
 the goddess who they say looks after  
 the land as the seasons change,  
 even if Thorycion doesn't want it.

So come on, sing a different type of hymn to divine Demeter,  
 queen of the harvest, celebrating her with sacred refrains. 385

Demeter, queen of the holy rites,  
 come to stand in our presence  
 and tend the chorus in your honour  
 and keep me safe to play, and perform the chorus,  
 all day long; 390

	and to say much that is funny	
	and much that is serious,	
	and worthy of your festival,	
	playing and mocking and winning the victory	
	and wearing the crown. <sup>66</sup>	395
	So come on now	
	and summon here with your songs	
	the god of the hour, the colleague in this chorus.	
	Much honoured Iacchus, inventor	
	of the sweetest festival song, accompany us	400
	here to the goddess	
	and show us how you make	
	a great journey effortlessly.	
	Iacchus, dance-lover, join me in the procession.	
	To crack a joke and for the sake of economy	405
	you split my sandals	
	and my rags, <sup>67</sup>	
	and figured out a way for me	
	to play and dance with impunity.	
	Iacchus, dance-lover, join me in the procession.	410
	I looked aside now and caught a glimpse	
	of a really gorgeous girl,	
	a fellow reveller,	
	with her titty sticking out	
	where her tunic was torn.	415
	Iacchus, dance-lover, join me in the procession.	
Dionysus	I always love to join in	
	and want to play	
	with her in the chorus.	
Xanthias		Me too.
Chorus	So do you want to join us	420

in mocking Archedemus?  
 At seven years old he hadn't cut his citizen teeth.<sup>68</sup>  
 Now he's a leader of the people  
 amongst the corpses above,  
 and comes first in bad behaviour there. 425  
 And I hear that Cleisthenes  
 depilates his anus amongst the tombstones  
 and gouges his face.  
 And beats his chest and bends over  
 and weeps and wails 430  
 for Sebinus the Anaphlystian.<sup>69</sup>  
 And they say that Callias,  
 that son of Horse-shag  
 fights sea battles wearing a pussy-pelt.<sup>70</sup>  
 Dionysus So might you be able to tell us two 435  
 whereabouts Pluto resides here?  
 For we're strangers and recently arrived.  
 Chorus You're not far away.  
 Don't ask me again.  
 You can be sure that you've come to his very door.  
 Chorus Let's move to the flower meadows  
 abounding in roses 450  
 revelling in our very own way  
 in the most beautiful chorus,  
 which the blessed Fates convene.  
 For to us alone the sun 455  
 and light bring good cheer,  
 to us, the initiates who  
 conduct ourselves with piety  
 to strangers  
 and lay people.

But be sure you've arrived at the very door.

460

[*Dionysus and Xanthias arrive at the external doors of Hades proper*]

**Dionysus** So how should I knock on the door? How?

How do the locals here do their knocking?

**Xanthias** What are you waiting for? Why not eat the door,  
since you look and behave like Heracles'?

**Dionysus** [*Knocking*] Boy! boy?

**Xanthias** Who's this?

**Dionysus** Heracles the bold! 465

[*Enter Aeacus through the external gate of Hades*]

**Aeacus** O you disgusting, shameless, brazen one,  
foul and befouled and completely foul,  
you're the one who drove out our dog Cerberus--  
you stuck a gag on him, grabbed him and ran away  
when I was guarding him. But now I've got you!  
This is how the black-hearted Stygian rock  
and Acheron's gore-dripping crag  
will guard you, and the dogs of Cocytus who charge around  
and the hundred-headed Echidna, who'll rip up  
your innards, and the Tartesian eel will assault 475  
your lungs, while your kidneys will bleed  
along with your entrails,  
which the Tithrasian Gorgons will tear apart.<sup>71</sup>  
Towards them I'll move my sprinting foot!

[*Exit Aeacus*]

**Xanthias** Hey you, what have you done?

**Dionysus** Shat myself. Call the god.

**Xanthias** O ridiculous one, get up quickly 480  
before anyone else sees you.

**Dionysus** But I'm passing out.

So put a sponge near my heart.<sup>72</sup>

**Xanthias** There—take it and apply it.

**Dionysus** Where is it?

**Xanthias** Ye golden gods,  
you have your heart *there*?

**Dionysus** Yes, it got scared  
and crept down into my intestines. 485

**Xanthias** O most cowardly of gods and mortals!

**Dionysus** Me?  
How can I be a coward when I asked you for a sponge?  
No other man would have done that.

**Xanthias** So what would he do?

**Dionysus** If he were a coward, he'd lie flat and stink.  
I not only stood up but wiped myself as well. 490

**Xanthias** An act of courage, by Poseidon.

**Dionysus** By Zeus I'd say so.  
But weren't you scared of the din of words  
and threats?

**Xanthias** No by Zeus, I didn't even notice them.

**Dionysus** So you go since you're so spirited and brave.  
You turn into me and take this club 495  
and the lionskin, since your guts are fearless;  
I'll take my turn and be your baggage carrier.

**Xanthias** Take them quickly then; I can only oblige.  
And behold this Heracleo-Xanthias—  
do I look like a coward with your attitude? 500

**Dionysus** No by Zeus, you really look like Melite's whipping-boy.<sup>73</sup>  
Let's be off—I'll pick up these things.

[After Dionysus and Xanthias have finished exchanging costume and equipment, enter a female servant through the external gate of Hades]

**Female servant** O darling Heracles, have you come back? Come on in.

When the goddess learned you were coming, she straightaway  
began baking loaves of bread, and sieving two or three pans 505  
of lentil soup, and roasting an ox whole,  
and broiling flat cakes. So go in.

**Xanthias** Excellent, I approve.

**Female servant** By Apollo, I'm not going to disregard it  
if you leave, since she also began boiling  
poultry meat, and drying out fruit 510  
for sweetmeats, and mixing the sweetest wine.  
So come in with me.

**Xanthias** All very well, but...

**Female servant** You're talking rot.

I won't let you go. There's also this stunning  
girl piper inside for you and two or three  
other girl dancers.

**Xanthias** What do you mean? Girl dancers? 515

**Female servant** In the bloom of youth and recently depilated.  
So enter, because the cook was just about to start carving  
and the table was being brought in.

**Xanthias** So first of all go and tell the dancers,  
the ones inside, that I'll enter myself. 520  
The boy is following us there with the baggage.

*[Exit female servant]*

**Dionysus** Hold on, you. Not quite so fast,  
since it was only a game when I dressed you up as Heracles.  
Stop talking nonsense, O Xanthias,  
but pick up our things again and carry them 525

**Xanthias** What? Surely you don't intend me to take off the outfit  
which you gave me yourself?

**Dionysus** No dawdling—I'll do it myself.  
Take off the lionskin.

Xanthias I'm calling for witnesses to this  
and turning to the gods for help!

**Dionysus** To which gods?  
Isn't it stupid and vacuous of you to expect that they'll help you 530  
as if you were Alcmena's son, when you are a slave and a mortal?<sup>74</sup>

Xanthias Okay, never mind. Take them. But maybe you'll need me  
at some point, god willing.

**Chorus** [*sings*] This is the right thing for a man to do  
who has good sense and understanding  
and has sailed around a great deal, 535  
always to roll himself toward  
the side of success  
rather than standing like  
a painted image, with only  
one appearance. Being able to change  
into a softer self  
is the mark of a clever man 540  
and the nature of Theramenes.<sup>75</sup>

**Dionysus** [*sings*] Wouldn't it be hilarious  
if Xanthias, who is a slave,  
was upside-down on Milesian bed-covers,<sup>76</sup>  
kissing a dancing girl,  
then demanded the chamber-pot,  
and I looked at him  
and grabbed him by his 'chickpea',<sup>77</sup> 545  
and he, because he's a villain himself,  
saw me, and punched me on the jaw  
with his fist, and knocked out  
my front row of teeth?

[*Enter a landlady from Hades*]

**Landlady** Plathane, Plathane, come here. Here's that villain

who once came to the hotel 550  
and devoured sixteen of our loaves.

[Enter *Plathane with a mute slave*]

**Plathane** Yes by Zeus  
it's that man indeed.

**Xanthias** [*aside*] Someone's in trouble!

Landlady And twenty boiled joints of meat in addition,  
each worth half an obol.

Xanthias Someone will be punished.

Landlady And masses of garlic.

Dionysus O woman, you're talking rubbish, 555  
and have no idea what you're saying.

Landlady So did you really expect  
that because you are wearing high boots, I wouldn't recognise you?<sup>78</sup>  
What else? I didn't yet mention all that smoked fish.

Plathane No, by Zeus, nor the fresh cheese, the wretch,  
which he devoured baskets and all! 560

Landlady And when I was sorting out the finances  
he stared at me fiercely and bellowed.

Xanthias That's exactly what he does. That's how he is everywhere.

Landlady And he unsheathed his sword with a crazy look.

Plathane By Zeus he did, you poor woman.

Landlady We were both petrified 565  
and dashed upstairs straightaway.  
But he charged off after seizing our sleeping-mats.

Xanthias That too is exactly what he does.

Plathane We must do something.

Landlady So go and call my spokesman Cleon.

Plathane [*To mute slave*] And get Hyperbolus for me if you run into him, 570  
so that we can wipe him out.<sup>79</sup>

Landlady O how I hate your throat!



I'd be delighted to knock out your molars  
which you ate my merchandise with.

Plathane Yes, and I'd throw you into the execution pit.

Landlady I'd take a sickle and cut out the larynx 575  
which you sucked my tripe down with.

**Plathane** So I'll go to get Cleon, who'll get a summons  
today and pull the tripe back out of him.

*[Exeunt Landlady, Plathane and Mute Slave into Hades]*

Dionysus May I die the worst of deaths if I don't adore Xanthias.

Xanthias I know exactly what you're thinking. But stop, stop talking. 580  
There's no way I'd become Heracles again.

Dionysus Don't be like that  
O darling little Xanthias.

Xanthias And how can I become  
Alcmena's son when I'm both a slave and a mortal?<sup>80</sup>

Dionysus I know that you're angry, I do know, and you have the right to be.  
And even if you hit me, I wouldn't oppose you. 585  
But if in time to come I ever take anything from you  
may I be wiped out root and branch—myself, my wife,  
my children, and bleary-eyed Archedemus as well.<sup>81</sup>

**Xanthias** I accept your oath and the deal on these terms.

**Chorus** Now your task, since you've taken back 590  
the costume which you wore from the start,  
is to become young again,  
and put on that terrifying expression,  
keeping in mind the god  
you're imitating.  
But if you're caught talking nonsense  
and say anything timorous, 595  
you'll be compelled  
to pick up the things again.



hang him, flog him with a whip, skin him, 620  
 put screws on him and pour vinegar in his nostrils,  
 pile bricks on him—do everything else, except  
 hit him with a tender leek or baby onion.

**Aeacus** What you say is right. And if I maim  
 your boy in the assault, you'll be financially compensated.

**Xanthias** I don't want it. Just take him off and torture him. 625

**Aeacus** No, I'll do it here so that he confesses where you can see him.  
 [*To Dionysus*]. Quick, put down the baggage, so that from now on  
 you won't tell me any lies.

**Dionysus** I proclaim that nobody  
 can torture me because I'm immortal. If they do,  
 they'll have themselves to blame.

**Aeacus** Are you saying something? 630

**Dionysus** I say that I'm Dionysus, son of Zeus  
 and he's the slave.

**Aeacus** Do you hear that?

**Xanthias** I do.  
 And that makes him deserve a whipping much more,  
 since if he is a god, he won't feel anything.

**Dionysus** Well then, since you say you are a god too, 635  
 why not be struck the same number of lashes as me?

**Xanthias** You're right. And which ever one of us  
 you see crying first, or even noticing  
 being struck at all, then you'll know that he's no god.

**Aeacus** You're clearly a well-bred man, 640  
 for your intention is a just one. So both of you get undressed.

**Xanthias** So how will you torture us in a fair way?

**Aeacus** Easily.  
 Each one will receive blow for blow.

**Xanthias** Good.

Check to see if I flinch. [*Aeacus whacks Xanthias*]  
Have you hit me yet?

**Aeacus** By Zeus no.<sup>85</sup>

**Xanthias** . I thought not. 645

Aeacus` So I'll go and whack this one. [*He whacks Dionysus*]  
Dionysus When?  
Aeacus I already whacked you.  
Dionysus So how come I didn't even sneeze?  
Aeacus I don't know. I will try again with this one.  
Xanthias Why don't you hurry up! [*Aeacus whacks Xanthias*]. Owowow!  
Aeacus What's this 'owowow'?

Did you feel pain?

Xanthias No, by Zeus, I just had a thought 650  
about the feast of Heracles at the Diomeia.<sup>86</sup>

**Aeacus** A devout person. Now I've got to walk back over there. [*He whacks Dionysus*].  
Dionysus Ouch! Ouch!  
Aeacus What is it?  
Dionysus I see cavalry!<sup>87</sup>  
Aeacus So why are you crying?  
Dionysus Because I smell onions.  
Aeacus So you didn't feel anything?  
Dionysus It doesn't bother me. 655  
Aeacus Now I have to walk back over to that one. [*He whacks Xanthias*].  
Xanthias Ouch!  
Aeacus What is it?  
Xanthias Take the thorn out.  
Aeacus What's going on? Now I must walk back over there. [*He whacks Dionysus*].  
Dionysus Apollo! – resident of Delos or Pytho!<sup>88</sup>  
Xanthias He felt pain: didn't you hear?  
Dionysus No way,  
I was just reminded of an iambic poem by Hipponax!<sup>89</sup> 660



to plead their case and get their former mistakes expunged.<sup>95</sup>  
 And that nobody in the city should be deprived of their civic rights.  
 For it's shameful that men who've fought at sea just once  
 should immediately become Plataeans and masters instead of slaves.<sup>96</sup>  
 It's not that I'd maintain that that this wasn't a good thing— 695  
 on the contrary, I applaud it. That's the one sensible thing you did.  
 But it's also right, in the case of people who've *often* fought  
 at sea with you, as their fathers did, and are related to you ethnically,  
 that you overlook their sole mishap, as they request,  
 by relinquishing your anger, O naturally wisest of men. 700  
 Let's make everybody our kinsmen  
 and citizens with full rights too—everyone who's fought with us at sea.  
 If we act conceitedly and give the city solemn airs  
 in these matters, when we are in the grip of the waves,  
 later on we'll be thought to have acted senselessly. 705  
 If I assess correctly the life and habits of a man<sup>97</sup>  
 who'll yet have cause to lament,  
 it won't be long before that aggravating ape,  
 Cleigenes the small,  
 —the most worthless bathhouse man of all those whose domain 710  
 is adulterated ash, impure soda  
 and cleansing clay—  
 he won't last long.<sup>98</sup> But because he knows this,  
 he's belligerent, fearing that he'll be stripped  
 if he ever goes out walking drunk without his club.<sup>99</sup> 715  
 We've often thought that the city has experienced  
 the same thing regarding the brightest and best of its citizens  
 as it did with the old coinage and the new gold currency.<sup>100</sup>  
 For these citizens are not counterfeit,  
 but the finest of all our coins, as it seems, 720  
 the only ones who are correctly minted and ring true,

everywhere, amongst both Greeks and barbarians.

But we don't make use of them—we use these worthless bronze ones,  
minted only yesterday or the day before, with the least valuable stamp.

And the citizens we know are men of good breeding 725

and self-restraint, decent and the best and brightest,  
raised in the palaestras and the choruses and culture,

these men we mistreat.<sup>101</sup> But the brazen ones and the outsiders

and redheads,<sup>102</sup> worthless men with worthless fathers, we use them for everything,  
though they're the most recent newcomers, and the city 730

wouldn't before previously used them lightly, even as randomly chosen scapegoats.<sup>103</sup>

So now, you morons, change your ways.

Utilise the good ones again. If you succeed, it'll be to your credit, 735

and even if you slip up a bit, it will be a worthy tree to hang yourself from;

even if you suffer somewhat, your suffering will be seen by the wise.

[Enter Aeacus and Xanthias]

**Aeacus** [speaks] By Zeus the Saviour, your master  
is a gentleman!

**Xanthias** Why wouldn't he be a gentleman,  
when he only knows how to drink booze and fuck? 740

**Aeacus** But he didn't hit you directly when you were proven  
to be the slave, despite claiming to be the master.

Xanthias It would give him grief if he did.

Aeacus That's real slave behaviour  
you showed right now—the sort of thing I enjoy doing.

Xanthias Excuse me—you *enjoy* it?

Aeacus No, I actually think I'm in heaven 745  
when I secretly curse my master.

Xanthias What about having a good whinge, when you get outside  
after a long beating?

Aeacus I relish that too.

Xanthias And what about interfering in his affairs?

Aeacus By Zeus, it's the best thing I know.

Xanthias O Zeus of the Family!<sup>104</sup> And eavesdropping on the masters 750





to see which of the two was cleverer at the art. 780

Xanthias The mob of reprobates?

Aeacus. By Zeus yes, their shouts reached the sky.

Xanthias Didn't Aeschylus have other allies?

Aeacus The best kind of people are in short supply here.

Xanthias So what's Pluto planning to do then?

Aeacus Hold a competitive contest straightaway, 785  
and make trial of their skill.

Xanthias And so why  
didn't Sophocles take over the Chair then?

Aeacus No way did he, but he kissed Aeschylus  
when he descended, and offered his hand,  
and personally conceded the Chair to him. 790  
And now, according to Cleidemides,<sup>107</sup>  
he'll sit it out in reserve. If Aeschylus wins,  
he'll stay put. If he doesn't win, Sophocles  
was saying that he'd compete against Euripides.

Xanthias So this is actually going to happen?

Aeacus Yes, by Zeus, very soon. 795  
And then there's going to be some dreadful commotion,  
because culture is going to be weighed out in the scales.

Xanthias What do you mean? They're going to weigh tragedy like a sacrificial beast?<sup>108</sup>

Aeacus They're going to bring out rulers and word-measures  
and moulding frames.<sup>109</sup>

Xanthias Because they're going to make bricks? 800

Aeacus And diagonals and wedges. For Euripides  
says he'll test the tragedies word by word.

Xanthias I suppose that Aeschylus is depressed about this.

Aeacus Well he certainly stooped down and glowered like a bull.

Xanthias So who's going to judge this?

Aeacus That was hard. 805  
You'd find a dearth of intelligent men,  
because Aeschylus didn't rub along well with the Athenians.<sup>110</sup>

Xanthias Perhaps he used to think most of them were scoundrels.

Aeacus And the remainder he thought was rubbish at knowing about  
the nature of the poets. And then they turned 810  
to your master, because he was experienced in the art.<sup>111</sup>

So let's go in, because whenever the masters  
are intent on something, it causes us grief.

[*Xanthias and Aeacus enter Hades. Measuring instruments are brought out*]

Chorus [*sings and dances*]

The dread thunderer will surely feel inner rage  
when he notices his rival artist sharpening 815  
his shrill, babbling fangs, then he'll roll his eyes,  
dreadful in his madness.

There'll be helmet-flashing struggles between horse-crested words.  
splinterings of axels and carving out of deeds,  
and horseback-mounted talk from the mind-crafting man 820  
as he speaks in his own defence.

Bristling with the woolly mane of his crest of natural hair,  
knitting his dreadful brows and bellowing, he'll emit  
bolt-fastened language, ripping its planks apart  
with the breath of an earth-born giant. 825

And then the mouth-crafting polished tongue,  
torturer of phrases, rolling itself out and setting envious reins  
in motion, shredding words, will linguistically pulverise  
the great labour of lungs.<sup>112</sup>

[*Enter Euripides, Aeschylus and Dionysus from Hades*]

Euripides I'd never relinquish the Chair; no more advice, 830  
for I say that I'm his superior in this art. You see what he says?

Dionysus Aeschylus, why are you silent?

Euripides First he'll put on airs, like he always used to when he  
pulled off monstrous tricks in his tragedies.

Dionysus My good man, don't talk so big. 835

Euripides But I know this man and have examined him for a long time —  
he's a creator of savagery, arrogant of speech,  
with an unbridled undisciplined unguarded mouth  
un-circumlocutory, pompous-bundle-spoken.<sup>113</sup>

Aeschylus Is that right, O child of the rustic goddess? 840

You say this to *me*, O gossip-harvester,  
beggar-maker and rag-stitcher?<sup>114</sup>

	You'll regret saying those things.	
Dionysus	Stop it, Aeschylus, and don't heat up your guts with rage and ire.	
Aeschylus	Not until I clearly reveal this man as the lame-making boaster that he is.	845
Dionysus	A sheep, a black sheep—bring one out, boys; a whirlwind is preparing itself for release. <sup>115</sup>	
Aeschylus	O composer of Cretan monodies, introducer of profane sexual relationships into the art! <sup>116</sup>	850
Dionysus	You restrain yourself, O most honourable Aeschylus. And you, O degenerate Euripides, get yourself out of the way of this hailstorm, if you have any sense, to avoid him cracking you angrily on the temple with a head-word so that you pour forth your <i>Telephus</i> . <sup>117</sup>	855
	And you, Aeschylus, not in anger but with a gentle mind, test him and be tested. It's not appropriate for men who are poets to insult one another like women bread-vendors. But your shouting sounds like an oak tree on fire.	
Euripides	Well I'm certainly ready, and not trying to avoid being first to bite and be bitten, if he agrees, with regard to the words, the songs and the sinews of the tragedy. I swear by Zeus and by Peleus and by Aeolus and Meleager and by Telephus. <sup>118</sup>	860
Dionysus	So tell us what you want to do, Aeschylus.	865
Aeschylus	I didn't want to compete here; our contest isn't on equal terms.	
Dionysus	How so?	
Aeschylus	Because my dramatic poetry didn't die when I did, <sup>119</sup> but his died with him, so he's got it with him to recite. Nevertheless, since you propose it, we ought to do it.	870
Dionysus	Come on then, let someone bring incense and fire	

so I can pray, before the quibbles begin,  
that I'll adjudicate this contest with supreme cultural sophistication.  
And you, sing some hymn to the Muses.

Chorus [*sings and dances*]

O nine holy maidens, daughters of Zeus, 875  
  
you Muses, who gaze down on slick words and intelligent minds  
  
of men who forge sayings, whenever they join combat,  
  
refuting one another with sharply observed, crooked wrestling holds,  
  
come to scrutinise the power  
  
of two mouths most tremendous at furnishing 880  
  
phrases and filings of words.

For the great contest of skill is already getting started now.

**Dionysus** [*speaks to the tragedians*] So you two, make some prayer before uttering quotations. 885

**Aeschylus** Demeter, who nursed my intellect,  
may I be worthy of your Mysteries.<sup>120</sup>

**Dionysus** And you too, take the incense and make an offering

**Euripides** Very well.

The gods to whom I pray are different.

**Dionysus** Are they your private ones, freshly minted? 890

**Euripides** Absolutely.

**Dionysus** Come on then, make your prayer to these private gods.

**Euripides** Air, nutrient and pivot of my tongue,  
and Intellect and Olfactory Nostrils,<sup>121</sup>  
may I correctly refute the speeches I'm going to deal with. 895

Chorus [*sings and dances*]

And what we really want  
is to hear from you two clever men  
what the steps are in the  
tragic war dance you're starting.  
For both your tongues are savage  
and your spirits are not undaring,  
nor are your minds undisturbed.  
So it's plausible to expect  
that one will say something urbane  
and sharply chiselled,  
while the other will attack  
with speeches dragged up by their roots  
and scatter many rolling words  
to the winds.<sup>122</sup>

900

905

Dionysus [*speaks*] So you must speak straightaway. Make sure that you both talk tastefully  
and don't use imagery or talk like anyone else.

Euripides Well, I'll speak at the end about myself  
and the poetry I'm capable of. First, I'll put this man to the test,  
showing that he was a fraud and a cheat, who took the  
moronic spectators raised with Phrynichus and deceived them.  
For first he'd wrap someone up and sit them down,  
an Achilles or Niobe, and not show their face,  
a fraudulent tragedy, and they wouldn't even murmur this much.<sup>123</sup>

910

Dionysus By Zeus, quite right, they didn't.

Euripides But the chorus pushed out  
four strings of lyrics in turn without stopping, while they kept quiet.<sup>124</sup>

915

Dionysus Well I enjoyed the silence, and this delighted me  
no less than the babbling poets now.

Euripides You were silly,  
you can be sure.

Dionysus I agree. Why did the shocker do it?

Euripides Out of fraudulence, so that the spectator would sit anticipating  
Niobe uttering anything. And the drama continued. 920

Dionysus Oh what an utter reprobate, how I was tricked by him!  
[*To Aeschylus*] Why are you yawning and looking annoyed?

Euripides [*To Dionysus*] Because I am convicting him.  
And then, when he'd done this stupid thing, and the drama  
was halfway through, they'd speak a dozen bull-words  
with eyebrows and crests, some monstrous-seeming things 925  
the spectators were ignorant of.<sup>125</sup>

Aeschylus Alas, woe is me!

Dionysus Be quiet.

Euripides Not one thing was clear.

Dionysus Don't grind your teeth.

Euripides But Scamanders, or trenches, or bronze-beaten  
griffin-eagles on shields and shield-adorning  
bronze-beaten griffon-eagles and horse-craggy phrases,  
which it wasn't easy to put together. 930

Dionysus By the gods yes, and in my case,  
'I was aroused the long night through',  
wondering what sort of bird an 'auburn horse-cock' was.<sup>126</sup>

Aeschylus It's an ensign engraved onto ships, O most unlearned one.

Dionysus I thought it was Eryxis, son of Philoxenos.<sup>127</sup>

Euripides So why should one put a horse-cock in tragedies? 935

Aeschylus But you, most hated by the gods—what kind of thing did you use to compose?

Euripides Well, by Zeus, not horse-cocks nor goat-deer, like you,  
the sort they depict on Persian awnings.<sup>128</sup>  
No, when I first took the art over from you,  
swollen with bombast and burdensome words, 940  
I immediately slimmed her down and took off her weight  
by small poeticisms and walks and white root-powder,



but mine are Cleitophon and Theramenes the Smart.<sup>136</sup>

Dionysus Theramenes? A clever man, awfully good at everything;  
 if he gets into trouble, or even close to it,  
 he gets right away from it—he's from Kios not Chios.<sup>137</sup> 970

Euripides [*intones*]  
 Well, I introduced these people  
 to how to think,  
 inserting reasoning into the art  
 and speculation, so that they already  
 apprehend and know every everything thoroughly, 975  
 especially how to run their household  
 better than before,  
 and to make enquiries: 'What's the situation?  
 Where's the thing I need? Who took this?'

Dionysus [*intones*]  
 Yes, by the gods, every Athenian indeed 980  
 now enters and yells at his slaves  
 when he's on a search, 'Where's the pot?  
 Who chew off the head  
 of my sprat? Has the bowl 985  
 I used last year expired?  
 Where's yesterday's garlic?  
 Who's been nibbling at my olive tree?'  
 Previously the more stupid ones,  
 had sat, slack-jawed, with their faces in 990  
 their mothers' laps, like morons from Melite.<sup>138</sup>

Chorus [*sings and dances as they address Aeschylus*]  
 Do you behold this, radiant Achilles?<sup>139</sup>  
 You, come now, what will you answer to this?  
 Just be careful  
 that anger doesn't seize you



and carry you off the racetrack, 995  
for he has made dreadful allegations.  
Don't refute him in anger,  
but draw in your sails,  
using only the very tips, 1000  
for that way you'll sail stage by stage  
and be on the lookout  
for when you can harness  
a steady and settled breeze.<sup>140</sup>

**Dionysus** [*speaks*] So you, O first Greek to build towers of solemn words  
and to ornament tragic humbug, take heart and release your torrent. 1005

**Aeschylus** I'm angered by this incident, and my guts are giving me grief,  
because I have to speak against him. But so that he can't say that I'm in the lurch—  
[*to Euripides*] answer me, what should we admire in a poet?

**Euripides** Dexterity and the advice by which we make humans  
better members of their civic communities.

Aeschylus So if you haven't achieved this— 1010  
but instead have rendered the best and most noble people more dastardly—  
what will you say you deserve to suffer?

Dionysus Death. Don't ask this.<sup>141</sup>

Aeschylus [*To Dionysus*] So think about the men whom he first took over from me,  
whether they were noble and six-foot tall, and not shirkers of civic duty,  
nor market-place trash, nor rogues like today, nor troublemakers. 1015  
Or whether they breathed spears and javelins and white-crested helmets  
and helmets and greaves and seven-oxhide temperaments.<sup>142</sup>

Dionysus [*Aside*] This is going really wrong; his helmet-making will wreck me.

Euripides [*To Aeschylus*] So what did *you* do to teach them nobility?

Dionysus Tell us, Aeschylus. Don't be stubborn, self-important and difficult. 1020

Aeschylus I composed a drama full of Ares.

Dionysus Which one?

Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes*.<sup>143</sup>

- Every man who saw it became obsessed with being belligerent.
- Dionysus This was a bad thing you did, because it made the Thebans extremely brave in war, and for this—take a whack!<sup>144</sup>
- Aeschylus *You* could have trained for warfare too, but you didn't fancy it. 1025  
Then after this I put on *Persians*, and taught them always to yearn for victory against opponents, embellishing the finest of works.
- Dionysus Yes, I was delighted when I listened to the part about the deceased Darius, and the chorus straightaway clapped their hands together and said 'iauo!'.<sup>145</sup>
- Aeschylus That's what poets should practise. For consider from the outset 1030  
how useful the poets who are noble are.  
Orpheus on the one hand revealed to us the mystery rites and the renunciation of killing. Musaeus, on the other, revealed cures for diseases and oracles, while Hesiod told how to work the land, the seasons for harvesting and ploughing. And divine Homer, where did he get his honour and fame from if not from teaching useful things, 1035  
battle formations, courageous deeds and arming of men?<sup>146</sup>
- Dionysus** So he certainly didn't teach Pantacles,<sup>147</sup>  
the clumsiest of men; for the other day, when he was on parade,  
he put his helmet on first, and was trying to attach the crest afterwards.
- Aeschylus But there were many others who were brave, one of them being the hero Lamachus,<sup>148</sup>  
From Homer, my mind took impressions and created many deeds of valour— 1040  
done by Patrocluses, lion-hearted Teucers—so I could inspire the citizen  
to emulate them personally, whenever he heard the trumpet.  
But by Zeus I never created prostitute Phaedras nor Stheneboeas;<sup>149</sup>  
nobody has ever known me to stage a lustful woman.
- Euripides By Zeus no, since there is no Aphrodite in you. 1045
- Aeschylus And may she keep away!  
But she's mightily squatted on you and yours,  
to the extent that she's wrecked you personally.<sup>150</sup>
- Dionysus By Zeus that's right.  
What you wrote about other men's wives you smarted from yourself.
- Euripides And how, O abominable man, do my Stheneboeas harm the city?



Aeschylus [*intones*]

Of what offences is he *not* to blame?  
Did he not stage pimps  
and women giving birth in temples 1080  
and having sex with their brothers  
and stating that to exist was not to exist?<sup>157</sup>  
Because of this our city  
is crammed with minor officials  
and ribald ape-citizens 1085  
who always deceive the people,  
and nobody now can carry the torch in procession  
because of lack of exercise.

Dionysus [*intones*]

No by Zeus they can't. I laughed myself  
nearly to death at the Panathenaea, when 1090  
some sluggish fellow was running—hunched,  
pale, fat—and was left behind,  
in a terrible state. Then at the gates  
the people of the Kerameikos hit him  
in the stomach, ribs, flanks and backside. 1095  
He let out a fart at their hand-slapping  
blew out the torch-fire and ran away.<sup>158</sup>

Chorus [*sings and dances*]

The event's important, the dispute's great, the war taking place is imposing.<sup>159</sup>  
The task of distinguishing between them is hard, 1100  
when one struggles violently  
and the other can manoeuvre and apply piercing pressure.  
But the pair of you, don't just sit there.  
There are many and varied assault tricks available.  
So, the thing you two are quarrelling about, 1105  
speak, bring it on, and raise your cudgels,

use old things and new ones,  
and hazard some subtle and clever speech.  
And if you fear that there may be some ignorance  
amongst the spectators, so that they 1110  
won't recognise the subtle points when you speak,  
don't be afraid of that. That situation no longer applies.  
For they're experienced soldiers,  
each one has his book and is learning about the ingenious points.<sup>160</sup>  
By nature they're already superior, 1115  
but now they've sharpened up,  
so fear nothing. Go through every detail  
for the sake of the audience, because they're intellectuals.

Euripides [*speaks*]

Very well, then I'll turn to your prologues themselves,  
so that I first assess the very first section 1120  
of this smart man's tragedy.  
For he was unclear in his exposition of the circumstances.

Dionysus And which of his prologues will you examine?

Euripides Many indeed.

But first recite for me the one from the *Oresteia*.

**Dionysus** So come on, everyone be quiet. Speak, Aeschylus. 1125

**Aeschylus** 'Hermes of the Underworld, custodian of my ancestral realms,  
become my saviour and ally as I request.  
for I've come to this land and return'.<sup>161</sup>

**Dionysus** Is there anything you find fault with here?

**Euripides** More than twelve things.

**Dionysus** But this whole thing was only three lines long.

**Euripides** And each one had twenty errors. 1130

**Dionysus** Aeschylus, I suggest you keep quiet. If not,  
in addition to these three iambic lines, you'll be due more.

**Aeschylus** *I'm* supposed to be quiet for *him*?

<b>Dionysus</b>	If you take my advice.	
<b>Euripides</b>	He immediately fell into sky-high error.	1135
<b>Aeschylus</b>	You realise you're talking rot?	
<b>Euripides</b>	That doesn't bother me.	
<b>Aeschylus</b>	So what mistake are you saying I made?	
<b>Euripides</b>	Recite it again from the start.	
<b>Aeschylus</b>	'Hermes of the Underworld, custodian of my ancestral realms...'	
<b>Euripides</b>	Doesn't Orestes say this at the tomb of his deceased father?	1140
<b>Aeschylus</b>	That's what I say.	
<b>Euripides</b>	So given that his father was killed violently at his wife's hand in a secret scheme, how can he say that Hermes was custodian of anything? <sup>162</sup>	
<b>Aeschylus</b>	I don't mean that; he addressed the Hermes of good fortune as 'of the Underworld', and in saying so clarified that he obtained this title from his father.	1145
<b>Euripides</b>	So you made an even bigger mistake than I could have desired, for if he obtained the title 'of the Underworld' from his father...	
<b>Dionysus</b>	...he would thus be a grave-robbber on his father's side. <sup>163</sup>	
<b>Aeschylus</b>	Dionysus, the wine you're drinking doesn't have a floral fragrance.	1150
<b>Dionysus</b>	Recite the rest to him; and you, keep an eye out for way it's impaired.	
<b>Aeschylus</b>	'...become my saviour and ally as I request. For I've come to this land and return'.	
<b>Euripides</b>	The astute Aeschylus has said the same thing to us twice.	
<b>Dionysus</b>	What do you mean, 'twice'?	
<b>Euripides</b>	Consider the speech. I'll explain to you.	1155
	'For I've come to this land', says he, 'and return'.	
	But 'I've come' means the same thing as 'I return'.	
<b>Dionysus</b>	Yes, by Zeus, it's as if someone said to his neighbour, 'make use of the bowl, if you want—of the basin'.	
<b>Aeschylus</b>	It is not the same thing at all, you blethering fool,	1160

but consists of the finest words.

Euripides How do you mean? Give me the details of what you're saying.

Aeschylus 'To come' to a land is for someone who has a share in a fatherland;  
he's arrived without any other mishap befalling him.  
But a man who's an exile both 'has come' and 'returns'. 1165

Dionysus Well said, by Apollo. What do you say, Euripides?

Euripides I deny that Orestes 'returned' home,  
for he came in secret without invitation from the overlords.

Dionysus Well said, by Hermes. Not that I understand what you are saying.

Euripides Now continue with another quotation.

Dionysus Yes, come on, continue, 1170  
Aeschylus, get it over. And you, pay attention to faults.

Aeschylus 'At his tomb's mound I call upon my father  
to listen and to hear'.

Euripides He's repeating himself again:  
'to listen and to hear' are clearly the same thing.

Dionysus That's because he was addressing the dead, you fool— 1175  
we can't even reach them if we address them three times!<sup>164</sup>

Aeschylus So what about you—how do *you* write your prologues?

Euripides I'll explain.  
And if I say the same thing twice, or you spot some padding  
in the speech, take a spit at me.

Dionysus Come on then, speak. There's nothing for it but to hear 1180  
the correctness of the diction in your prologues.

Euripides 'Oedipus was initially a happy man...'<sup>165</sup>

Aeschylus By Zeus no he wasn't! He was innately miserable,  
since before he was born Apollo said  
he'd kill his father—even prior to his conception. 1185  
How could he have been initially a happy man?

Euripides 'But then in turn he became the most wretched of mortals'.

Aeschylus No way, by Zeus. He never stopped being so.









Euripides [*sings*]  
 ‘Achilles of Phthia, why, since you hear the man-massacring  
 thud—*iē*—do you not draw nigh in defence? 1265  
 As the race who live beside the lake we honour our ancestor Hermes—  
 thud—*iē*—do you not draw nigh in defence?’<sup>178</sup>

Dionysus [*speaks*]  
 That’s two thuds for you, Aeschylus

Euripides [*sings*]  
 ‘Most revered of the Achaeans, wide-ruling son of Atreus, learn from me— 1270  
 thud—*iē*—do you not draw nigh in defence?’

Dionysus [*speaks*]  
 That’s your third thud, Aeschylus.

Euripides [*sings*]  
 ‘Keep holy silence: Artemis’ bee-priestesses approach to open her hall—  
 thud—*iē*—do you not draw nigh in defence? 1275  
 I have the authority to speak out loud of the leaders’ omen of victory—  
 thud—*iē*—do you not draw nigh in defence?’

Dionysus [*speaks*]  
 ‘O Zeus my King’, what a glut of thuds!  
 I really want to go to the bathhouse  
 because my kidneys are swollen from all this thudding. 1280

Euripides [*speaks*]  
 Not before you listen to another song setting,  
 devised from his melodies to the lyre.

Dionysus [*speaks*]  
 Do it right through to the end then, and don’t add a thud.

Euripides [*sings*]  
 ‘The Achaean commanders, with their double throne, the youth of Hellas— 1285  
*twang and strum, twang and strum*—  
 send the Sphinx, wretched chief she-dog—  
*twang and strum, twang and strum*—

a furious bird-omen in arms and with an avenging hand —  
*twang and strum, twang and strum* — 1290  
allowing the precipitate airborne dogs to meet —  
*twang and strum, twang and strum* —  
the force united against Ajax —  
*twang and strum, twang and strum.*' 1295

Dionysus [*speaks*]

What is this '*twang and strum*'? Did you get these songs  
off someone drawing water from Marathon, or where else?<sup>179</sup>

Aeschylus [*speaks*]

Well, I moved them from a beautiful place  
to a beautiful one, so that I shouldn't appear to be harvesting them  
from the same sacred meadow of the Muses as Phrynichus.<sup>180</sup> 1300  
But this man gets them from all sorts of sources — from little prostitutes,  
the drinking-songs of Meletus, Carian pipe music,  
laments and choral dances. This will shortly be demonstrated.  
Let someone bring a lyre in. And yet, what need is  
there for a lyre in these matters? Where's the female 1305  
who plays the earthenware castanets? Come here, Muse of Euripides.  
You're the right one to sing these songs to.<sup>181</sup>

[*Enter a dancer costumed as the Muse of Euripides*]

Dionysus This Muse has never behaved like a Lesbian at all.<sup>182</sup>

Aeschylus [*sings*]

'Halcyon birds, who babble by the  
ever-flowing sea waves, 1310  
moistening the surface of your wings,  
bedewing them with watery drops,  
and you columns of spiders in the corners  
beneath the eaves, you wi-i-i-ind with your fingers  
the weft and warp of your handiwork at the loom, 1315

the task of the shuttle-bard.

where the dolphin who loves pipe music gambols

amidst the blue-black prows,

oracles and race-courses,

sheen of flowery wine from the vine,

1320

clustering grapes that bring relief from pain.

O child, put your arms around me.<sup>183</sup>

Do you see this leg?<sup>184</sup>

Dionysus I see.

Aeschylus What then, you see this one?

Dionysus I see.

Aeschylus When you make choral lyrics like this,

1325

you have the nerve to defame *my* songs,

when you compose with Cyrene's twelve tricks?<sup>185</sup>

[*speaks*]

So much for your choral lyrics. But I also want

to explicate the style of your monodies.<sup>186</sup>

1330

[*sings*] 'O darkness of dark-gleaming

night, what miserable

nightmare

are you sending me,

coming from unseen

regions of Hades,

in possession of a soul that is soulless,

child of black Night,

1335

a hair-raising, terrible vision

in the garb of a black corpse,

with a murderous, murderous stare,

and huge talons.

So attendants, light my lamp for me,  
draw dewy water from the rivers in your buckets and heat it up,  
so that I may wash off the godsent dream. 1340

Hail, ocean sprite,  
this is it! Hail, co-residents,  
do you see these portents?  
Glyce has taken my cockerel with her  
and departed!

Nymphs born in the mountains!  
O Mania, arrest her. 1345

I, poor thing, happened to be attending  
to my tasks,  
wi-i-i-inding in my hands  
the spindle, full of linen twine,  
making a skein  
so that in the early morning gloom 1350

I could take it to market and sell it.  
But it flew away, flew away into the air,  
on its lightest wing-tips,  
leaving woe, woe behind for me,  
and I poor thing poured, poured  
tears, tears, from my eyes. 1355

So Cretans, children of Ida,  
grab your weapons and come to our defence,  
brandish your limbs and surround the house.  
And Artemis' fair daughter Dictynna too,  
let her range through the house with her she-puppies, 1360  
and you, Zeus' daughter Hecate, lifting high  
in your hands the piercing double torches,

show me the way to Glyce's, so that

I can go in and apprehend her!

[Exit the Muse of Euripides]

Dionysus [*speaks*]

It's time to stop with the songs.

Aeschylus [*speaks*]

I've had enough too.

I want to refer him to the scales,<sup>187</sup>

1365

which alone can put our poetry on trial,

because it can put the weight of our phrases to the test.

Dionysus So now come here, since it seems I must

to deal even with poet's art as if I were selling cheese.

Chorus [*sings and dances while mute actors bring out a pair of huge balanced scales suspended from a beam*]

Clever men are painfully diligent.

1370

This is yet another marvel,

novel, full of absurdity,

Who else could have thought it up?

Even if I'd run into someone

1375

who told me about it, I swear

I'd not have believed it, but would have thought

he was talking nonsense.

Dionysus [*speaks*]

So come on, both of you come and stand beside the scales.

**Aeschylus & Euripides**

Here we are.

**Dionysus** And each of you take hold and speak,

and don't let go until I give you the signal 'cuckoo'.<sup>188</sup>

1380

**Aeschylus and Euripides**

We're holding it.

**Dionysus** Now say the verse into the scale-pan.

**Euripides** 'Would that the ship the Argo had never flown through...'<sup>189</sup>

**Aeschylus** 'O River Spercheos where grazing cattle wander...'<sup>190</sup>

**Dionysus** Cuckoo! Let go. [*Pointing to Aeschylus' scale-pan*] And his has gone much lower down.

<b>Euripides</b>	And whatever is the reason?	1385
<b>Dionysus</b>	Because he put in a river, making his verse wet like a wool-trader, but you put in words that were winged. <sup>191</sup>	
<b>Euripides</b>	Let him say something else to weigh against mine.	
<b>Dionysus</b>	So grab hold again.	
<b>Aeschylus and Euripides</b>	See, we have.	
<b>Dionysus</b>	Speak!	1390
<b>Euripides</b>	'There is no other shrine of Persuasion except for speech'. <sup>192</sup>	
<b>Aeschylus</b>	'The only god who doesn't love gifts is Death'. <sup>193</sup>	
<b>Dionysus</b>	Let go, let go! And again, it's his scale-pan that sinks, because he put in death, the weightiest of evils.	
<b>Euripides</b>	But I put in Persuasion, a line most beautifully uttered.	1395
<b>Dionysus</b>	But Persuasion is a lightweight thing and makes no sense. So this time look for a verse of heavy weight which will drag yours down, something powerful and big.	
<b>Euripides</b>	Come on, where am I going to get such a line from? Where?	
<b>Dionysus</b>	I'll tell you. 'Achilles threw his dice as two ones and a four'. <sup>194</sup>	1400
	Say something, since this is your last weigh-in.	
<b>Euripides</b>	'He grasped his iron-freighted club in his right hand'. <sup>195</sup>	
<b>Aeschylus</b>	'Chariot on top of chariot and corpse on corpse'. <sup>196</sup>	
<b>Dionysus</b>	He's caught you out again.	
<b>Euripides</b>	How?	
<b>Dionysus</b>	He put in two chariots and two corpses, which even a hundred Egyptians couldn't lift. <sup>197</sup>	1405
<b>Aeschylus</b>	I'm not doing it by words anymore, but let him get in the scales himself and sit there, along with his children and wife and Cephisophon, and take his books with him. <sup>198</sup>	
	I'm going to need just two or my verses.	1410
<b>Dionysus</b>	Gentlemen, friends, even I can't judge them.	



I don't want to make enemies of either of them.

One I regard as wise and the other I enjoy.<sup>199</sup>

[Enter Pluto]

**Pluto** So you aren't going to achieve anything you came for?

**Dionysus** And if I make a choice...

**Pluto** Take the other one and go, 1415  
whichever one you choose, so that you haven't come in vain.

**Dionysus** Bless you. Come, hear what I have to say.

I came down for a poet. Why?

So that the city might be saved to celebrate its choruses.

So whichever one gives the best bit of advice 1420  
to the city, he's the one I'll decide to take back up.

First, then, do you each have an opinion

about Alcibiades? The city is sorely in travail.<sup>200</sup>

**Euripides** What opinion does she hold of him?

**Dionysus** What opinion?

She longs for him, but loathes him, and wants to possess him.<sup>201</sup> 1425

But you two say what you think about him.

**Euripides** I hate the citizen who's slow to help his fatherland

but swift to do him great harm,

resourceful in his own interests but helpless in the city's.

**Dionysus** Well said, O Poseidon! But you, what's your view? 1430

**Aeschylus** One shouldn't raise a lion-cub in the city,

and certainly one shouldn't raise a lion in the city,<sup>202</sup>

but if one is raised, its behaviour must be accommodated.

**Dionysus** By Zeus the Saviour, it's hard for me to judge,

because one spoke cleverly and the other clearly.<sup>203</sup>

So let each one deliver one more opinion 1435

about how the city might be saved.

**Euripides** If someone were to feather Cleocritus with Cinesias,

the breezes would lift them up over the surface of the sea.<sup>204</sup>

**Dionysus** That would seem amusing, but does it mean anything?

**Euripides** If they were fighting at sea and then had bottled vinegar 1440  
they could sprinkle into the eyes of their opponents,  
I know it and want to explain.

**Dionysus** Speak.

**Euripides** When what's untrustworthy we think trustworthy,  
what is actually trustworthy is untrustworthy.

**Dionysus** How? I don't get it.  
Speak with less erudition and more clarity. 1445

**Euripides** If the citizens whom we now trust  
we distrust, and the ones we don't employ  
we do employ, perhaps we should be saved.  
Indeed, if we are faring ill under the present circumstances,  
would we not be saved if we did the opposite? 1450

**Dionysus** Well said, O Palamedes, O most wise by nature.<sup>205</sup>  
Did you think this up yourself or did Cephisophon?

**Euripides** I did, single-handed. But Cephisophon thought up the vinegar bottles.<sup>206</sup>  
But what about you? What do you say?

**Aeschylus** With regard to the city, first tell me now,  
whom do we make use of? Is it the good men? 1455

**Dionysus** You what?  
She hates them most of all.

**Aeschylus** And revels in the worthless ones?

**Dionysus** Not at all, but she's forced to make use of them.

**Aeschylus** So how could anyone save the kind of city  
that accommodates cloaks of neither goat-hair nor soft wool?<sup>207</sup>

**Dionysus** Think something up, by Zeus, if you want to ascend again. 1460

**Aeschylus** There I would speak, but here I don't want to.

**Dionysus** Don't you say that, but send up good things from here.

**Aeschylus** When they consider the enemies' land  
to be their own, and their own their enemies',

their ships a source of income and an income a shortage.<sup>208</sup> 1465

**Dionysus** Fine, except the jurors guzzle it singlehandedly.<sup>209</sup>

**Pluto** You need to choose.

Dionysus This will be my judgement on the pair.  
I'll pick the one whom my soul desires.

Euripides Then remember the gods by whom you swore  
to lead me home. Choose your friends. 1470

Dionysus 'My tongue swore', but I shall choose Aeschylus.<sup>210</sup>

Euripides What have you done, O lowest of mortal men?<sup>211</sup>

Dionysus Me?  
I judged Aeschylus to be the winner. And why not?

Euripides You do this most shameful deed and still look me in the face?

**Dionysus** What thing is shameful if it doesn't seem so to those who witness it?<sup>212</sup> 1475

Euripides O abominable one, you disregard me now I'm dead?  
[Exit Euripides into Hades]

**Dionysus** Who knows whether to live is not to die,  
to breathe to eat, and to sleep a sheepskin?<sup>213</sup>

**Pluto** You two go inside now, O Dionysus.

**Dionysus** What for?

**Pluto** So I can offer you hospitality before you sail away. 1480

**Dionysus** Well said,  
by Zeus. I have no problem with this arrangement.  
[Exeunt Pluto, Dionysus and Aeschylus into Hades]

**Chorus** [sings and dances]  
Blessed is the man possessed of  
acute intelligence.  
One can infer this from many things.  
For this man, having shown his good sense, 1485  
will return home again,  
benefitting his citizens,  
benefitting his kinfolk

and his friends  
because he is intelligent. 1490  
So it's not in good taste to sit  
chattering beside Socrates,<sup>214</sup>  
rejecting high culture,  
leaving the most important elements  
of the tragic art aside. 1495  
Spending time fruitlessly  
on pretentious words  
scratching together nonsense  
is the work of a demented man.

*[Re-enter Pluto, Dionysus and Aeschylus]*

**Pluto** Come then, farewell Aeschylus, 1500  
go and save our city  
with your noble opinions, and  
educate the thoughtless. They are many.  
And take this to give to Cleophon  
and this to the provision officers, 1505  
both Myrmex and Nikomachos,  
and this to Archenomos;<sup>215</sup>  
tell them to come quickly  
here to me and not to delay.  
And if they don't come fast,  
by Apollo I'll brand them  
and bind them by the ankles,  
and with Adeimantos son of Leukolophos  
I'll send them quickly underground.<sup>216</sup>

**Aeschylus** I'll do it. But you hand my seat 1515  
over to Sophocles to keep watch over  
and protect, in case I ever  
return here. For I judge him

to be second after me in expertise.  
And be mindful that that scoundrel, 1520  
Who's a liar and foulmouthed,  
must never get to sit on my seat  
even inadvertently.

**Pluto** [*to the chorus*] You, display for him your sacred torches, 1525  
at the same time as escorting him,  
singing in his honour  
his own songs and hymns.

Chorus You Underworld divinities, first grant a fair journey  
to the departing poet as he rises into the light.  
And let the city conceive fine plans for achieving many gains. 1530  
That's how we could end our great miseries and  
dire armed conflicts. Let Cleophon, and those who want to,  
fight in the fields of their ancestors.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There was a temple of Heracles in Cynosarges to the south of Athens. Aristophanes, however, enjoyed setting his plays in familiar city-centre locations, and it is perhaps more likely that the scenery in this opening sequence portrayed the Doric temple known as the Theseion, which was actually dedicated to Hephaestus. Heracles' life and labours were celebrated in and central to the iconography of this building, which was completed shortly before the Parthenon, in the 440s BCE.

<sup>2</sup> The 'comic porter scene' seems to have been a staple of Old Comedy, associated with Aristophanes' rival comedians who are about to be named; a slave labouring under a heavy burden would make a series of complaints to his master, as Xanthias does here and throughout the scene.

<sup>3</sup> These are the names of three of Aristophanes' rival comedians. Although none of their work survives except a few fragments, they are known to have won first prizes in Athenian drama scenes. Phrynichus was competing against Aristophanes in the competition when *Frogs* was first, with his *Muses*, which was runner-up.

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<sup>4</sup> Throughout the play, characters often use solemn diction that parodies the speeches in tragedy, to provide a humorous contrast with the regular comic interchanges. The translation attempts to reproduce the effect.

<sup>5</sup> Aristophanes invents a paternity for Dionysus (whose actual father was Zeus), and thus a new comic cult title, by creating a male proper name out of the neuter noun *stamnion*, ‘wine-jar’.

<sup>6</sup> In the naval battle of Arginusae east of the island of Lesbos in 406 BCE, the year before *Frogs* was first performed, Athenian slaves had served as oarsmen. Those that survived were given their freedom and there may well have been recently emancipated slaves in the audience of *Frogs* who will have appreciated jokes referring to Arginusae. Xanthias regrets that he did not serve in this battle, because he would then no longer be Dionysus’ slave, but instead a free man who could own slaves and give orders. There are further references to the battle and the emancipated slaves later in the play.

<sup>7</sup> With the exception of the wise Chiron, centaurs were regarded as not only large and powerful, but prone to lawless violence.

<sup>8</sup> The verb ‘boarding’ in Greek means both embark on a seagoing vessel as a hoplite and have penetrative sex with another male. Cleisthenes, who this joke implies had acted as a trireme commander at Arginusae, was a figure in Athenian public life whom Aristophanes targets for his effeminacy and sexual preferences in several plays including *Clouds*, *Lysistrata* and *Women at the Thesmophoria*, in which he appears as an honorary female at the women-only festival. The sexual innuendo may be continued in the next two lines (the ‘two’ meant by Heracles are Cleisthenes and Dionysus) since the major feature of naval warfare was using the phallically shaped ram to strike and pressurise the enemy ship.

<sup>9</sup> Xanthias implies that Dionysus’ claim to have fought at Arginusae is a dreamlike fantasy.

<sup>10</sup> *Andromeda* was one of Euripides’ most popular and influential tragedies, illustrated on many vases. Perseus rescued Andromeda from the rock where she had been bound as a sacrificial offering to the sea-monster threatening her father’s Ethiopian kingdom. It was first produced in 412 BCE in a group

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also containing *Helen*. It is parodied in *Women at the Thesmophoria* at some length, with Euripides himself playing Perseus and his kinsman impersonating Andromeda.

<sup>11</sup> Molon may have been an actor who played in Euripides' tragedies, and he may have been of noteworthy stature, whether large or small. On the other hand (or additionally), the name also sounds identical to a participle that means 'coming' or 'going' and may therefore have a sexual connotation.

<sup>12</sup> Euripides had died at some point in 406 BCE, possibly as a guest in Macedon of King Archelaus I.

<sup>13</sup> This line quotes Euripides' *Oineus*).

<sup>14</sup> Iophon was one of Sophocles' sons and a successful tragedian. He won first prize at the Dionysia in 435 BCE and came second to Euripides, who won with *Hippolytus*, in 428 BCE. None of his fifty plays survives except in fragments. Dionysus implies in his next lines that Iophon owed a great deal to his father's skill. The joke here may be that he was by now regarded as a shadowy figure, not often in the spotlight, or that he was perceived as extremely impassive.

<sup>15</sup> Sophocles had also died recently, sometime after Euripides.

<sup>16</sup> Agathon was a popular and successful tragedian, who must still have been alive when he is impersonated to hilarious effect in Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria* of 411 BCE. His victory at the Lenaea tragedy competition in 416 is the occasion of the drinking party he hosts at his house in Plato's *Symposium*. He had died recently, perhaps in Macedonia.

<sup>17</sup> An Athenian tragedian, and son of another tragedian, Carcinus. Aristophanes ridicules Xenocles in several plays for what he perceives as the dramatist's terrible poetry, which, it is implied, reflected an ugly appearance and boring personality. Xenocles did, however, win first prize with a trilogy in 415 BCE, defeating Euripides with his Trojan War plays including *Trojan Women*.

<sup>18</sup> Presumably another contemporary tragedian, although nothing else is known about him.

<sup>19</sup> Several months before the dramatic competitions, playwrights submitted texts to the archon (magistrate) in charge of the festival. By a selection procedure about which sadly little is known, the archon chose three tragedians to compete, and awarded them a chorus to go into training, funded by a

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rich citizen who had offered to undertake the financial benefaction (act as *chorēgos*). Dionysus implies that it was a familiar phenomenon for a tragedian to be chosen only once, and never again, because his group of plays were a failure. On swallows see below n.000. On the personification of Tragedy see below n.000.

<sup>20</sup> The phrase ‘air, Zeus’s bedroom’ is a comically mangled version of a line in Euripides’ lost *Melanippe*, where the untragic noun ‘bedroom’ replaces the more solemn ‘residence’. The idea of the ‘foot of time’ had been used in Euripides’ *Alexander*: see also line 311. The lines ‘mind unwilling to swear by all that’s holy, but tongue that has sworn independently of mind’ recall, although in a comically garbled way, what the hero of Euripides’ *Hippolytus* says when tempted to break his oath to Phaedra’s nurse (61), ‘my tongue has sworn but my mind is unsworn’. This was one of the most memorable and quoted lines in Euripides (see also below line 1471).

<sup>21</sup> Cerberus was the three-headed (or, in some versions, two-headed or fifty-headed) guard dog of Hades. He resided at either the mouth of the river Acheron or the gates of Hades, and ensured no shades ever escaped once they had arrived. Eurystheus, king of Tiryns, had required Heracles to bring Cerberus up from the Underworld as his twelfth and last labour. Dionysus would expect to be able to call on his half-brother Heracles’ hosts and friends for assistance.

<sup>22</sup> Hemlock is a highly toxic umbellifer which grew widely in ancient Greece. It was used at Athens to poison prisoners condemned to death, including Socrates, as described in Plato’s *Phaedo* (117 e–8 a). It causes muscular paralysis which makes the limbs feel extremely cold.

<sup>23</sup> This was the area in north-west Athens adjacent to the temple of Hephaestus or ‘Theseion’. It contained numerous potters’ workshops (the reason why, ultimately, our word ‘ceramics’ is derived from the name) and a large and splendid cemetery.

<sup>24</sup> We do not know exactly where this tower was, but the Greek travel writer Pausanias mentions a ‘tower of Timon’ north-west of the Kerameikos (1.30.4).



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<sup>25</sup> The Athenians held torch-races at several festivals, including the Panathenaea, the Hephaestia, the Promethia, and the route was often from the area of Academeia to the city wall in Kerameikos (Pausanias 1.30.2).

<sup>26</sup> The Greek says literally, ‘Then I would be destroyed in a way affecting two snacks’, the snacks consisting of lumps of paté made from animal brains wrapped in fig-leaves, like dolmades. The human brain consists of two hemispheres.

<sup>27</sup> Acheron, over which Charon rowed the souls of the dead to enter the Underworld. Charon is about to be described as an old man, an ancient mariner. Heracles attempts to scare Dionysus by contrasting an immeasurably large and deep lake with a miniscule boat.

<sup>28</sup> Two obols, scarcely a day’s wage, was a probably the amount paid by the state to support destitute citizens in wartime. Theseus was a legendary king of Athens who was usually presented as having introduced early proto-democratic civic measures. He had entered the Underworld in company with his friend Perithous.

<sup>29</sup> Heracles’ description of what Dionysus will see is a comic travesty of the ritual experiences which initiates into the Eleusinian Mysteries were believed to undergo: ancient authors speak of images of terrifying beasts, submersion in mud and then sudden bright lives and blissful music as their souls were symbolically ‘saved’.

<sup>30</sup> Morsimos was a dramatist lampooned for his inferior artistry elsewhere in Aristophanes. He may have been a son of the tragedian Philocles. The joke equates the crime of respecting his poetry with some of what the Greek regarded as the very worst of felonies.

<sup>31</sup> Cinesias was a poet and musician (see also below lines 266 and 1437) mocked for his physical weakness and poor health. Since the Pyrrhic dance was especially warlike and vigorous, he would not have been able to perform it impressively, although the joke may also involve a sexual innuendo.

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<sup>32</sup> A thiasos (plural thiasoi) is a group, often of nine, twelve or fifteen worshippers, usually forming an entourage of Dionysus, and associated with riotous music and dancing. Traditional translations such as ‘band’, ‘company’ or ‘troop’ do not convey the full religious inflection of the term.

<sup>33</sup> Athenian initiates celebrated the Eleusinian Mysteries every year in early autumn, after a procession that moved from the Kerameikos all the way to Eleusis, where they worshipped overnight and into the next day. The priests and priestesses wore crowns of myrtle leaves. The initiates will have needed pack animals to transport tents, food and equipment. Xanthias’ rueful joke is that, like a donkey at the Mysteries, he will do all the work without being allowed to win the Initiates’ reward of a blessed afterlife.

<sup>34</sup> The technical term used here denotes the procession in which a corpse is carried from its owner’s house to the place of burial.

<sup>35</sup> There were six obols in a drachma. Nine obols might represent about four days’ wages for a worker, but the corpse is not impressed.

<sup>36</sup> *Ōop* was a signal uttered by helmsmen to seamen. This may mean that there were extras on stage representing workers on the wharf of Acheron.

<sup>37</sup> The Greek sounds as much like a jingle as the translation. It may be a quotation from a lost satyr play. It was traditional to utter a triple salutation to the dead.

<sup>38</sup> Lethe, ‘Forgetfulness’, is a river of the Underworld, elsewhere said to run through a hot and barren plain. ‘To shear an ass’ seems to have been a proverbial expression for an impossible task, and so ‘the place where asses are shorn’ is equivalent to ‘nowhere’.

<sup>39</sup> The ‘Cerberians’ means people who live in the same place as the Underworld dog Cerberus, and the term had been used by Sophocles in a lost play. ‘Go to the crows’ was an abusive injunction which literally expresses the hope that the addressee will die and be eaten by predatory birds, but in practice means something like the English ‘go to Hell’. Taenarus is on one of the southern Peloponnesian headlands, and it was said that there was a passage down to the Underworld there; Heracles was

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supposed to have led Cerberus up by this route. But it may be more important that the place was in Spartan territory and regarded during the Peloponnesian War as particularly dangerous.

<sup>40</sup> This is probably a reference to the Spartan hoplite Eurytus and his comrade Aristodemus, who were afflicted with an eye disease before the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BCE and sent home as unfit for combat by King Leonidas.

<sup>41</sup> It is not clear what the Withering Stone was understood to be.

<sup>42</sup> Presumably Dionysus is doing something comical, other than sitting obediently ready to sail.

Perhaps he as sat on top of the oar rather than beneath it in the rower's seat.

<sup>43</sup> The men who rowed at the Battle of Salamis in which the Athenian fleet defeated the Persians in 480 BCE were proverbially fine oarsmen.

<sup>44</sup> Swans were believed to sing an outstandingly beautiful melody when flying in remote places or dying.

<sup>45</sup> This was the actual cry used to order oarsmen to start rowing, equivalent to the English 'heave ho'.

<sup>46</sup> Zoologists have identified the Marsh Frog, *Rana ridibunda*, as the species whose cries sound most like this refrain. It is not a British species but is familiar in Greece.

<sup>47</sup> Mount Nysa is a constant feature of myths about Dionysus, and especially his birth (see Euripides' *Bacchae* 566-7), but different sources locate it in different places, most commonly Thrace.

<sup>48</sup> The Feast of the Jars, when sacrifice was made to Hermes as the escort of souls to the Underworld, was held on the third and final day of the Anthesteria. This was a festival in the late winter, between the Lenaea and the Dionysia, celebrated in the sanctuary of Dionysus in the Marshes, which frogs could be imagined as regarding as their own territory. The second day involved a wine-drinking competition, which explains the reference here to hangovers.

<sup>49</sup> It is not clear from the Greek which component of the lyre was made out of reeds. The frogs suggest that they grow crops of reeds like human farmers.

<sup>50</sup> Zeus was the god of thunder, lightning, clouds, precipitation and rain.

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<sup>51</sup> This female monster seems to have been a versatile shapeshifter and may have been connected with Hecate, the goddess of black magic.

<sup>52</sup> Dionysus addresses an important member of the audience, the priest of Dionysus with the title Eleuthereus, who had an honorary seat in the front row. The actors did actually join this priest for a celebration after the festival was over.

<sup>53</sup> Xanthias calls on Heracles as the demigod who can avert evil when someone is in danger. But Dionysus thinks Xanthias is addressing him, and does not want Empousa to know his (currently assumed) name Heracles, since ancient superstition held that an enemy had more power over a person whose name they knew. But he thinks that his own real name, since he is not a warlike god, will have no effect against any malevolent spirit.

<sup>54</sup> In 408 BCE, so just three years earlier, the tragic actor Hegelochus had accidentally said ‘weasel’ instead of ‘calm’ in this line (the two words sounded almost but not quite identical) at the premiere of Euripides’ *Orestes* (line 279). Other comic poets made fun of this, too, especially as seeing a weasel was a sign of ill omen rather than a merciful relief like calm after a storm.

<sup>55</sup> The triple oath was thought to have more potency than a single one; the number three appears throughout ancient Greek magic and ritual.

<sup>56</sup> The phrase ‘foot of time’ is quoted from Euripides’ lost *Alexander*: see also line 100.

<sup>57</sup> Iacchus was originally a minor divinity important in the Eleusinian Mysteries, perhaps a personification of the ritual cry *Iacche* which was repeatedly uttered during the procession from Athens to Eleusis, but he became fused with Dionysus, who had the acoustically similar name Bacchus.

<sup>58</sup> The Underworld is modelled on the city of Athens. There seems to be an agora or market-place of sorts outside the gates of Hades proper.

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<sup>59</sup> The three Graces (Charites) were named Aglaea (Gleaming), Euphrosyne (Delight), and Thalia (Blooming). They attended other gods, especially at feasts, in choral dancing and in preparation for erotic encounters.

<sup>60</sup> Demeter's daughter was Persephone. Piglets were important in their joint cult. Every initiate at their great Athenian mysteries, held at Eleusis, sacrificed their own individual piglet. This passage is sometimes used to argue that the piglets were comprehensively charred on a large ritual barbecue before being eaten. The reference to the sausage in the next line probably has a sexual innuendo.

<sup>61</sup> Iacchus is elsewhere described as the leader of the stars when they dance in chorus, perhaps because many of the rituals in his honour were conducted at night.

<sup>62</sup> Cratinus was perhaps the greatest Athenian comedian older than Aristophanes; Cratinus' *Wine-Flask* defeated *Clouds* in 423 BCE. He was said to be a man of gargantuan appetites, and here is assimilated to Dionysus, god who received bull-sacrifices, as if a prerequisite of being initiated in the Mysteries was a knowledge of Cratinus' comedies.

<sup>63</sup> A complex set of topical references. The island of Aegina was occupied by Athens but well placed geographically to facilitate the illegal export of goods from Attica to Epidaurus in the Peloponnese, with which Athens was at war. The goods mentioned are essential for naval warfare. Thorycion (also mentioned below at 383) may have been employed as a tax collector on Aegina.

<sup>64</sup> The joke about the incontinent man is probably aimed at Cinesias (see note 000 above), who was said to have suffered a fit of diarrhoea in public. Choral songs were sung at shrines of Hecate at public crossroads. Unfortunately, we do not know which politician had tried to reduce the pay due to poets whose works were performed at the festival drama competitions

<sup>65</sup> Both Athena and Kore (Girl-child, i.e. Persephone) were worship in Athens under the title *Soteira*, 'Saviour'. Perhaps the reference to the way the land changes with the seasons is more appropriate to Kore. On the other hand, the danger the Athenians were in from invasion at this moment might make the martial Athena a more obvious saviour to invoke.

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<sup>66</sup> The chorus briefly come out of their role as Eleusinian worshippers to pray for victory in the drama competition.

<sup>67</sup> There is evidence, including Aristophanes' *Wealth* 842-6, that initiates kept the clothing they had worn when first initiated and re-used it every year for celebrating the Mysteries.

<sup>68</sup> Archedemos was a leader of the more radical democrats who had prosecuted one of Arginusae generals for embezzlement of public funds even before they were prosecuted for neglecting to recover casualties of the battle. Aristophanes' line of attack is to insinuate that Archedemos was illegitimate and therefore not eligible for the rights of a citizen. Boys were introduced as future citizens by their fathers to an organisation known as their phratry at about seven years old when their adult teeth began to come in, so saying that he had not got his 'phratry teeth' or 'citizen teeth' by the age of seven implies he had gained citizenship rights only subsequently and by corrupt means. The chorus call the Athenians 'the corpses above' because, from their perspective, people are corpses, but it may also imply that the Athenians are apathetic and lethargic when it comes to politics.

<sup>69</sup> The figure of Sebinos, a name containing the sound *bin-*, a crude Greek term for sexual intercourse, is probably a comic invention; Anaphlystus, however, was an Athenian deme. Its name was suggestive of the term for 'getting an erection', and no doubt real Anaphlystians were much teased on that account.

<sup>70</sup> Callias was son of Hipponikos, 'Horse Victory', but Aristophanes changes this to 'Hippobinos', 'Horse-Shag'; the Greek says he wears a lionskin-vagina; as a notorious womaniser said to have sex with both his wife and mother-in-law, the trophy of his particular heroic labours is best translated 'pussy-pelt' or 'fanny-skin'.

<sup>71</sup> Aeacus delivers a bombastic speech, which is almost a parody of tragic language, but made utterly ridiculous by the dense accumulation of clichéd and extreme images from the repertoire of descriptions of the Underworld. The rivers Styx and Kokytos flow into Acheron. Echidna is a monstrous female, mother of Cerberus, but she does not usually have a hundred heads. Eels were

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thought to be aggressive, especially females. ‘Tartesian’ indicates the far west, in Spain or Portugal, so is equivalent to ‘at the ends of the world’. ‘Tithrasian’, on the other hand, means from the local Attic deme of Teithras, which was perhaps reputed to contain formidable women.

<sup>72</sup> It is not quite clear what is going on here. Perhaps pre-moistened sponges were kept in waterproof containers for use in First Aid all over the body, but Dionysus uses one here to clean his bottom.

<sup>73</sup> Heracles had a sanctuary in the deme Melite, but instead of ‘Melite’s cult-hero’, Dionysus says ‘Melite’s slave who is whipped’, stressing that Xanthias remains his slave whatever costume he may assume.

<sup>74</sup> Heracles’ mother was Alcmena. She was a mortal, which may explain why in this context Heracles’ maternity rather than his divine paternity as son of Zeus is comically stressed.

<sup>75</sup> Theramenes was a statesman notorious for his ability to get out of trouble. He had taken a leading role in the oligarchic coup of 411 and the establishment of the Four Hundred oligarchs, but had identified himself with the less undemocratic faction among them when they started to fight amongst themselves. He had thus retained his popularity after the democracy was restored. He had extracted himself from trouble again after Arginusae. Despite being one of the admirals charged with recovering the dead and wounded, he claimed that bad weather had hampered his efforts, accused the generals of negligence and thus escaped being executed alongside them.

<sup>76</sup> Woollen textiles from Miletus in Asia Minor were prized luxury items.

<sup>77</sup> Euphemism for a penis, probably deriving from the way adults talk to small children.

<sup>78</sup> The landlady thinks that he is the real Heracles, who happens to be wearing boots associated with Dionysus.

<sup>79</sup> The demagogue Cleon had been dead since 422. But he is imagined as retaining his personality in the Underworld. He would be a suitable helper for the ladies since he was famously enthusiastic in prosecuting fellow citizens (which is why Plathane wants him to issue a ‘summons’ against Heracles

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below) as well as a byword for supporting underdog resident foreigners and freedmen. Hyperbolus, who had died in 411, had a similar reputation.

<sup>80</sup> Xanthias adapts what Dionysus had said at 530-1 to underscore his sarcasm.

<sup>81</sup> The same politician accused of being ineligible for citizenship above at 000 is here mocked for suffering from some eye complaint.

<sup>82</sup> Dionysus repeats what Xanthias had gleefully said about him at 552 to underline the role reversal.

<sup>83</sup> Order was kept at Athens by a squadron of slaves owned by the state under the jurisdiction of magistrates. They were acquired from Scythia in the northern Black Sea region and were archers. Their language was regarded as sounding rough and hilarious, and these names are typical of Scythian slave names in comedy. Pardokas is connected with the verb ‘fart’, Skeblyas fuses a real Scythian name, Spartakos, with the word for ‘baboon’, and Ditylos means having two humps like a camel.

<sup>84</sup> Athenian citizens being prosecuted for an alleged crime were permitted to offer his slaves for examination under torture. Xanthias gleefully claims this prerogative while disguised as his own master. If the slave was permanently injured under torture, the owner could claim financial compensation.

<sup>85</sup> Aeacus, perhaps ashamed that Xanthias claims not even to have noticed being struck, counterclaims that he has not yet even done so.

<sup>86</sup> Diomeia was a deme of Attica south of the Acropolis. It was the site of a sanctuary of Heracles with a gymnasium where a major festival called the Diomeia was held. Perhaps it was associated with particularly loud ritual shouting.

<sup>87</sup> The sight of horseback processions was traditionally held to bestow enormous gratification.

<sup>88</sup> Dionysus shouts in pain but pretends the noise is the beginning of a poem invoking Apollo at two of his most famous cult centres on the island of Delos and at the Delphic oracle.

<sup>89</sup> Hipponax was a poet of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE renowned for his caustic wit and vulgarity.

<sup>90</sup> This is an adaptation of a lyric passage in Sophocles’ *Antigone* (1118-19).



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<sup>91</sup> Pluto, Lord of the Dead in the Underworld, by this time a divine figure distinct from Hades.

<sup>92</sup> Cleophon was an ardent democrat known for his vigorous oratory who repeatedly urged the Athenians to refuse Spartan peace terms, most recently after the compromised Athenian victory at Arginusae in 406 BCE. He was consistently accused by the comic poets of being Thracian and of low birth, which would throw doubt on his rights to citizenship. Barbarian accents were often likened to the twittering of swallows. Cleophon's name will recur later (000).

<sup>93</sup> The mournful song of the nightingale was explained as the sound made by the grieving Procne who killed her own son Itys with the help of her sister Philomela. They were transformed into a nightingale and a swallow respectively in a famous tragedy called *Tereus* by Sophocles set in Thrace. Aristophanes is implying that Cleophon's mother was Thracian. Here the chorus promise that if Cleophon is put on trial, he will meet a bad end if the jurors' votes are equal, even though in reality a tie in a trial would mean acquittal.

<sup>94</sup> In lines 786-38, the chorus perform the parabasis, a type of choral performance conventional to Old Comedy in which they stepped out of role to address the audience in the voice of the dramatist and offer civic advice. This parabasis was highly admired, to the extent that the Athenians decreed that it should be performed again shortly after the play.

<sup>95</sup> The chorus calls for those who had been deprived of civic rights as a punishment for supporting the oligarchic coup of 411 should be reinstated as citizens. He presents them as hapless but argely innocent people who had simply made a mistake. After the production of *Frogs* and the battle of Aigospotamoi later that year, such a decree was indeed passed.

<sup>96</sup> The chorus call the slaves recently freed after Arginusae 'Plataeans' because they were like the men of Plataea who were given Athenian citizenship as a body after the Peloponnesians destroyed their city in 427 BCE.

<sup>97</sup> This is a quotation of a line from a lost play by the tragedian Ion.

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<sup>98</sup> We know nothing of this individual beyond what Aristophanes tells us here. The implication is that he meddled in politics. An ancient scholar commented on the passage that he was wealthy, and originally of non-Athenian extraction. The allegation that he was a corrupt owner or director of a bathhouse where the cleansing materials were adulterated with inferior substances may be a metaphor for political corruption.

<sup>99</sup> Stealing clothes from drunkards walking the streets of Athens was a regular occurrence. Cleigenes seems to have been known for carrying an intimidating club in contexts where it was regarded as an excessive precaution. He may have been associated with the aggressive policies advocated by Cleophon.

<sup>100</sup> The chorus urge that the Athenians put their trust in men whose families had standing in the city going back generations rather than very recently incorporated citizens of whose background they know little. To illustrate this argument, they draw a comparison with coinage. The Athenians had recently become unable to mint silver coins because of the Peloponnesian occupation. They had resorted first to melting down golden dedicatory objects on the Acropolis, and, in 406 BCE, to using bronze merely plated with silver.

<sup>101</sup> Elite education consisted dominantly of athletics and music. The rich hired private tutors to train their sons in these disciplines, and there was some prejudice amongst the poorer citizens against men who had been so educated.

<sup>102</sup> Red hair was associated with barbarian peoples to the north of Greece, especially Thrace and the rest of the Balkans; the Athenians procured many of their slaves from Thrace, so the terms ‘redhead’ might imply servile birth. Xanthias’ name, which means ‘man with red hair’, was a standard slave name in ancient comedy.

<sup>103</sup> At the Athenian Thargelia festival, a ‘scapegoat’, a person deemed lacking in value to the community, was selected to be driven out ritually (although probably not in reality outside the festival) from the community.

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<sup>104</sup> Xanthias addresses Zeus by a title that emphasises his role as guardian of the reciprocal obligations which family membership implies, the joke being that malicious interference with the master's affairs is presented as a solemn duty.

<sup>105</sup> Since Xanthias can hear loud voices from backstage, he assumes another slave is being flogged,

<sup>106</sup> Like so much else in Hades, civic practice is modelled closely on that in Athens amongst the living. The *prytaneion* was the common room of the *prytaneis*, or 'presidents' of the city. They were members of the council or *boulē*, and for one-tenth of a year one-tenths of the councillors took on this special role, taking over from a previous group in turn. They received ambassadors and letters addressed to the state, conferred honours, and offered hospitality in the dining room of the building. The invitation to a single honorific meal was regarded as a major honour; to be awarded permanent dining rights was an exceptionally rare privilege. The honour is increased in Hades for the Professor of Tragedy by the award of the right to sit next to the King of the Underworld, Pluto.

<sup>107</sup> Cleidemides was an actor who had performed in Sophocles' tragedies. He is now dead and understandably presented as a close friend of the poet.

<sup>108</sup> There is some evidence that when fathers supplied an animal to be sacrificed by phratry members when his son was initiated, there was an expectation that the beast should be large, and weighing was used to guarantee this.

<sup>109</sup> Aeacus catalogues various different tools used for measuring and shaping materials in crafts and geometry.

<sup>110</sup> The ancient biographical tradition offers several different grounds for Aeschylus' disgruntlement with his compatriots, including the allegation that he had revealed the secret rites of the Mysteries to the uninitiated, and claims that he felt so alienated he left for Sicily, where he died.

<sup>111</sup> The inhabitants of the Underworld have already asked Dionysus to help them solve the question of who the greatest tragedian amongst them is.

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<sup>112</sup> The chorus set up the heroic mood for the contest by using lofty poetic words typical of epic and tragedy. Although Aeschylus and Euripides are not named, the audience will recognise Aeschylus as the ‘dread thunderer’ with rolling eyes, a woolly mane, dreadful eyebrows and loud bellowing; Euripides is portrayed as having ‘shrill, babbling fangs’ and a ‘polished tongue’, who tortures phrases and shreds words.

<sup>113</sup> Euripides parodies Aeschylus’ fondness for adjectives beginning with an ‘a’ sound that has a negativizing effect (the ‘privative alpha’).

<sup>114</sup> The comic poets present Euripides’ mother as the owner of a market garden, and thus the child of the ‘rustic’ goddess. Euripides was also notorious for staging characters who were impoverished, lame and dressed in rags, for example in his *Telephus* see Aristophanes’ *Acharnians* 412-34) and Menelaus in his *Helen*.

<sup>115</sup> Dionysus comically proposes the sort of solution an epic hero would do in a crisis. Although he soon afterwards calls for incense and flames to burn it with as he prays, and he tells the competitors to make an offering (probably of grains), there is no suggestion in the text that any animal sacrifice actually takes place.

<sup>116</sup> Euripides was known both for the solo songs (‘monodies’) he gives to his characters, especially women (see below, 000), and for stories about sexually deviant women including the Cretan Pasiphae, who loved a bull, in his *Cretans*, and her grand-daughter, the Cretan Phaedra, who loved her stepson in *Hippolytus*.

<sup>117</sup> The word in the Greek implies both (literally) a massive stone used as a lintel or cornerstone and (metaphorically) the emphatic culmination of a speech or part of one. Euripides’ *Telephus*, which is sadly not extant, was one of his most popular plays, featuring in its protagonist a ragged and destitute hero.

<sup>118</sup> The four titles belong to four of Euripides’ most famous plays.

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<sup>119</sup> Aeschylus' plays were revived in performance after his death. Euripides has only just died, so the test of time cannot be applied.

<sup>120</sup> Aeschylus' home deme ('parish') of Attica was Eleusis, where Demeter's Eleusinian Mysteries were celebrated.

<sup>121</sup> Aristophanes is here making fun of the ideas circulating amongst the pre-Socratic philosophers, with whom Euripides was popularly associated, about the constituent elements of the universe and sense-perception.

<sup>122</sup> Euripides is the poet expected to 'say something urbane and sharply chiselled', while Aeschylus is associated with the violence, tree and weather imagery.

<sup>123</sup> This Phrynichus was the most important tragedian of the generation before Aeschylus. Aeschylus did exploit the dramatic effect of keeping significant characters onstage, veiled and in silence for extended periods before they spoke, such as Cassandra in *Agamemnon* and his Achilles and Niobe in lost plays.

<sup>124</sup> Aeschylean choral odes can be very long indeed. They are also repetitive and use refrains: see below 000

<sup>125</sup> Euripides' account of Aeschylean vocabulary makes it resemble the formidable visual appearance of the warlike characters in, for example, *Seven against Thebes*. The martial theme continues with the mention of the Trojan River Scamander, the Homeric word for the ditch around the Greek camp at Troy, the devices on bronze shields, horses and crags. If we had Aeschylus' lost trilogy based on the *Iliad*, the precise nature of these jokes would be clearer.

<sup>126</sup> 'I was aroused the long night through' is an adaptation of a line written by Euripides in *Hippolytus* (375). The phrase 'auburn horse-cock' is quoted from Aeschylus' *Myrmidons*, part of his lost *Iliad* trilogy. A monster combining features of a horse and a cock had been popular on vases in the late sixth century.

<sup>127</sup> Eryxis seems to have been an infamous glutton, but the point of the joke is now lost.

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<sup>128</sup> According to Plato, this hybrid goat-deer creature was a fantastic invention of myth. Persian textiles were often elaborately patterned and were considered luxury items at Athens. Awnings may have been shown on stage in productions of Aeschylus' *Persians*, a play which will feature in the tragedians' contest shortly.

<sup>129</sup> Euripides asks his audience to imagine a personified Tragedy who became overweight in the care of Aeschylus' fattening poetry; Euripides treated her with exercise and slimmed-down language and laxative roots and juices. We shall be introduced to Euripides' personal Tragic Muse below at 000.

<sup>130</sup> On monodies see nn. 000. Cephisophon is held by the ancient biographical tradition on Euripides to have been Euripides' slave, who had an affair with Euripides' wife.

<sup>131</sup> He is referring to his programmatic prologues, analysed and mocked by Aeschylus at length in lines 1182-47.

<sup>132</sup> Euripidean slave characters do indeed seem to have larger and more important parts in Euripides than in the other two tragedians, but given Aeschylus' *Clytemnestra* and Sophocles' *Electra* and *Antigone*, the same cannot fairly be said in the case of women characters.

<sup>133</sup> Dionysus implies that Euripides' commitment to the democracy had been questioned, perhaps on account of his friendly relationship with the un-democratic Macedonian monarchy or his association with Socrates, on which see lines 1491-2.

<sup>134</sup> Aeschylus wrote a lost play about Memnon, Achilles' adversary at Troy, and it is likely that he also mentioned the warrior Cynus or used him as a character, too.

<sup>135</sup> A man named Phormisius is elsewhere ridiculed for having a face that looks like a vagina and for taking bribes from Persia. We know nothing more of Megainetos, nor even whether he is described here as a Magnesian barbarian from Asia Minor or as a madman, or both. There was a notorious mythical 'pine-tree-bender, Sinis, who used to catapult travellers from a bent tree by releasing it until he was killed by Theseus.

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<sup>136</sup> Cleitophon is probably the man of that name who in Plato is associated with the sophist

Thrasymachus. On Theramenes see above, n. 000.

<sup>137</sup> There may have been a proverb which applied to men good at getting out of trouble, as was said of Theramenes at 538-41, or it may be that this is a stock imputation that he was ineligible for the privileges at Athens that the islanders of Chios were entitled to under the terms of the Delian League led by Athens after the Persian Wars.

<sup>138</sup> Dionysus treats Euripides' claim comically by attributing to the master of the house intense concern with details of kitchen activity. We do not know why the deme Melite was supposed to be the home of unintelligent individuals.

<sup>139</sup> These were the opening words of Aeschylus' lost *Myrmidons*, addressed to Achilles, probably by the chorus.

<sup>140</sup> The chorus shift from metaphors from athletics to sailing; Aeschylean drama is rich in naval imagery.

<sup>141</sup> The point of the joke is that Euripides is already dead. This raises the interesting question of what punishment for very serious crimes would be available in Hades, which so closely resembles Athenian society.

<sup>142</sup> The description of the supposedly martial warriors of Athens in Aeschylus' time is expressed in epic vocabulary culminating in a reference to the shield of the mighty Attic hero Ajax, whose shield in Homer is made of seven ox hides.

<sup>143</sup> For once the tragedy under discussion has survived. *Seven against Thebes* is indeed 'full of Ares' in that it is all about a battle, but Ares is also prominent in the oaths and prayers of the warriors of Thebes, where he had an important cult, in that tragedy.

<sup>144</sup> The Thebans led a group of Boeotian city-states who were the allies of Sparta and their infantry was difficult to defeat. They had won a humiliating victory over the Athenians at Delion in 424 BCE. Perhaps Dionysus thumps Aeschylus at this point.

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<sup>145</sup> Aeschylus' *Persians*, which survives, is a celebration of the Greeks' victory, under Athenian leadership, at the Battle of Salamis in 480 BCE. It was actually first performed five years before *Seven against Thebes*. It contains a memorable and spectacular scene in which the dead Persian monarch Darius is brought back from the dead by the chorus of Persian councillors who do indeed utter strange inarticulate ritual cries.

<sup>146</sup> In myth, Orpheus was a great harp-player and singer. The poems in Aristophanes' time collected under his name gave an account of the origins of the universe. There was also a mystery cult which held the promise of purification of the soul and a blissful life after death. The Orphic initiates overlapped and were conflated with members of sects who practised vegetarianism and apparently disapproved of humans killing one another under any circumstances. Musaeus was a mythical figure associated with Eleusis to whom some hymns, poems and verses for use at ritual purifications were ascribed, as well as a collection of oracles. Hesiod's agricultural advice is given in his *Works and Days*.

<sup>147</sup> Sadly, we know little more about this individual, except that Eupolis, another comic poet, also cracked a joke at the expense of his clumsiness in a play entitled *Golden Age*.

<sup>148</sup> Lamachus had been a high-achieving general during the Peloponnesian War. Although mocked in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* for his warlike nature, he died heroically in Sicily in 414 BCE and earned the admiration of Thucydides (6.101.6) and, later, Aristophanes (*Thesmophoriazusa* 841).

<sup>149</sup> Patroclus' death provided the material for Aeschylus' lost *Myrmidons* (see n.00 above); Teucer may have appeared in the Trojan War trilogy or in Aeschylus' lost *Men of Salamis*. Aeschylus prides himself on staging the masculine heroes of the *Iliad* rather than women who conceived inappropriate passions for young men. Phaedra lusted after her stepson Hippolytus, and Stheneboea was spurned by her husband's guest Bellerophon.

<sup>150</sup> See above n.000.



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<sup>151</sup> The assumption seems to be that women first imitated Stheneboea and Phaedra by wanting illicit sexual relationships and then killing themselves. Although few women seem to have attended the drama competitions at the Lenaea and Dionysia festivals, by 405 BCE there were deme theatres elsewhere in Attica where plays were revived and women were probably in the audience, but the preposterous nature of Aeschylus' line of argument does not require us to press the truth of his claims too far.

<sup>152</sup> Lycabettos is a hill in Athens east of the Acropolis; Parnassus is a high mountain on the frontier between Attica and the north and west, associated with Apollo and the Muses.

<sup>153</sup> On Euripides' heroes in rags see above n.000

<sup>154</sup> In Athens the navy was funded by annually appointed civic benefactors to be trierarchs, each of whom paid for equipping and maintaining a ship of war. The 'voluntary' tax on the rich was much resented by some of them, and they sometimes tried to evade it by showing that they did not possess enough money. Aeschylus blames Euripides' ragged heroes for encouraging them.

<sup>155</sup> The rich pretending to be poor wear expensive soft underwear beneath their assumed rags. Some of the rarer species of seafood were regarded as expensive luxuries.

<sup>156</sup> The Paralos ('Beside the Sea'), took its name from a mythical son of the sea-god Poseidon. It was an important Athenian trireme with ceremonial functions, regarded as sacred and manned exclusively by members of the Paraloi clan. It was used for religious missions and to transport important envoys and messengers. The crew were regarded as holding extreme democratic views, even for sailors, and played a crucial role in forestalling an oligarchic coup at Samos in 411 BCE; they had been major opponents of the successful coup at Athens. Here Euripides is associated with the rhetorical proficiency of these democratic sailors, whereas at other times there is a suggestion that he held anti-democratic views (see notes 0000)

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<sup>157</sup> The nurse in Euripides' surviving *Hippolytus*, who tried to arrange a sexual assignation between Phaedra and Hippolytus, is probably the type of character Aeschylus here has in mind as a pimp. Giving birth in sanctuaries was forbidden, but in Euripides' lost *Auge*, the heroine, a priestess of Athena, gave birth to Heracles' baby in her temple. In his lost *Aeolus*, Canace had a baby by her full brother Macareus. The obscure existential question about the nature of being was associated with the sophists who influenced Euripides; see also below line 1477.

<sup>158</sup> The Panathenaea, 'All-Athenian Festival', was the most important event in the city's religious calendar. It fell in high summer, in the month called Hekatombaion, which was approximately equivalent to late July and early August. One of the events was a torch race, when young male runners from different tribes competed with one another to carry a lit torch from the altar of Eros in the Academy outside the city gates, via the Kerameikos district, to the altar of Athena Polias on the Acropolis (see above 000).

<sup>159</sup> This line bears a resemblance to one in Euripides' lost *Phaethon*.

<sup>160</sup> This line is often taken as evidence that there was widespread literacy amongst Aristophanes' audience, and that possessing a book copy of a tragedy was not unusual.

<sup>161</sup> This is the prologue delivered by Orestes in the second play of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, his *Libation-Bearers*. It is fortunate that Aristophanes quotes it because these lines are missing from the manuscript in which the play has come down to us.

<sup>162</sup> Euripides quibbles that the land of Argos had ceased to be Orestes' 'ancestral realms', because he had been effectively disinherited when Agamemnon was murdered and Aegisthus and Clytemnestra had achieved their coup. Hermes was the Olympian who escorted the souls of the dead to the Underworld and sometimes allowed them up to visit the land of the living.

<sup>163</sup> Euripides' quibble rests on turning from Orestes' patrimony to the title Hermes had acquired from his father. Dionysus makes a joke suggesting that Hermes' father Zeus was therefore a grave-robber, which allows the further joke from Aeschylus about bad smells.

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<sup>164</sup> On the ritual number 3, see above n.000.

<sup>165</sup> This is from Euripides' lost *Antigone* (fr. 157). Oedipus was exposed as a baby because his parents were warned by an oracle that his father would be killed by his son. The comedy here assumes events as also dramatized in Sophocles' surviving *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

<sup>166</sup> Erasinides was one of the naval commanders at the battle of Arginusae and seems to have been in charge of the trireme which escaped to Athens. Sailors on his boat, who survived the Arginusae debacle, might have been thought to be especially fortunate; this seems to be the point of Dionysus' joke. But Erasinides was himself not so lucky. He was one of the generals put to death for failing to save the survivors of the wrecked triremes and for allegedly embezzling public money. See also line 000

<sup>167</sup> This sequence is one of the most difficult to understand or translate in the play. Line 1228 suggests that Aeschylus was waving around a small oil bottle as a prop. We are as bewildered as Euripides. The word for 'small bottle of oil' is *lēkuthion*, a commonplace piece of domestic pottery out of place in a heroic narrative of the type related in Euripidean prologues. Part of the joke lies simply in the repetition: we can imagine the audience shouting 'mis-laid his small bottle of oil' along with Aeschylus once they got the hang of his method. The word *lēkuthion* may have contained a sexual innuendo (some scholars think the shape of the jar often represented a penis), or refer to a type of vocal delivery typical of tragedy, or to the type of name adopted by unruly gangs of youths. But Aeschylus also seems to be making a point about Euripidean style. The younger tragedian composed many sentences, especially in his prologues, in which the male subject in the nominative case (here the examples are Aegyptus, Dionysus, no man, Cadmus, Pelops and Oeneus) is separated from his main verb by intervening subordinate clauses; this allows Aeschylus to 'hijack' the end of each quoted sentence with the substitute main verb 'destroyed' and its object 'small bottle of oil'. There seems also to be a metrical point, since Euripides favoured the small pause at the point in the iambic line where Aeschylus interrupts each time.

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- <sup>168</sup> This is probably the opening of Euripides' lost *Archelaus*.
- <sup>169</sup> This is from Euripides' lost *Hypsipyle*.
- <sup>170</sup> An allusion to Agamemnon's shout when he is struck in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 1345.
- <sup>171</sup> From Euripides' lost *Stheneboea*.
- <sup>172</sup> From a lost tragedy by Euripides entitled *Phrixus*.
- <sup>173</sup> The opening lines of Iphigenia's prologue in Euripides' surviving *Iphigenia in Tauris*.
- <sup>174</sup> From Euripides' lost *Meleager*.
- <sup>175</sup> From Euripides' lost *Melanippe the Wise*.
- <sup>176</sup> As a master tragedian, Aeschylus is regarded as a King of the realm of Dionysus, god of tragic theatre.
- <sup>177</sup> Euripides proposes to perform a song consisting of a hotchpotch of different lines from Aeschylus' plays; Dionysus says he will count them with the help of pebbles, which were often used in doing arithmetic. Several manuscripts say that after these two lines pipe music is heard, as would be appropriate to introduce a sung lyric passage from tragedy. There may also have been a percussion instrument to emphasise the insistently repeated thuds and ritual cry, 'thud—*iē*', and afterwards a lyre, the sound of which is comically imitated in the vocalised refrain 'twang and strum'.
- <sup>178</sup> Euripides' parody of Aeschylus' songs, from here until 1295, contains lines from his lost *Myrmidons*, *Psychagogoi*, perhaps *Telephus*, *Priestesses*, *Sphinx* and probably *Thracian Women*; line 1276 is a quotation of *Agamemnon* 104, lines 1284-5 are from *Agamemnon* 108-9 and line 1289 from *Agamemnon* 111-12.
- <sup>179</sup> Aeschylus probably fought at the Battle of Marathon, where his brother received an injury that turned out to be fatal. Water was drawn up from well by workers rhythmically winding rope as they repeatedly rotated a wheel, and we know that there were traditional work songs with refrains that they sang to mark time as they laboured.

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<sup>180</sup> Aeschylus stakes his claim to originality; on Phrynichus see above, n.000. Aeschylus' *Persians* was said to have borrowed extensively from a lost tragedy by Phrynichus.

<sup>181</sup> Aeschylus says that where he and Phrynichus gathered poetry from meadows (poetry was often associated with nectar from flowers), Euripides borrowed material for his songs from all kinds of disreputable genres. There was a composer of erotic songs called Meletus. The term 'Carian' is a slur because many Athenian slaves came from Caria, but it was also used to describe songs including songs for drinking parties and noisy funeral dirges. The Muse of Euripides is presumably slovenly in appearance. She is clacking castanets made of ceramics because, in Euripides' famous *Hypsipyle*, performed just a few years before in 409 BCE, the titular heroine had entertained the baby Opheltes by accompanying her song with castanets. She was employed as his nanny, despite being born royal, This may have been seen as a lower-class form of music-making, and it is not surprising that Aristophanes knew that his audience would find this reference amusing.

<sup>182</sup> Lesbos was famous for its beautiful women, prized as concubines in the *Iliad*, and for its lyric poets, including Arion, Terpander, Alcaeus and Sappho. Part of the joke is that this downmarket Muse seems incapable of equalling their musical achievements. Since Sappho wrote homoerotic poetry, it is just possible that the implication is that a female so obviously dressed to attract men does not seem equivalent to Sappho. But it is more likely that Aristophanes is implying that she is exactly the kind of female to 'behave like a Lesbian', since that verb in Greek can denote a sexual act performed by a female upon a man, fellatio or manual masturbation. Much would depend on her mask and costume.

<sup>183</sup> Aeschylus' parody of Euripidean choral songs, which extends until line 1322, satirises both their content and their form. The overall meaning is deliberately nonsensical, especially the juxtaposition of spiders, halcyon birds (a parody of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* 1089-90) and dolphins. The embrace at the end is reminiscent of the reunions of Iphigenia with her brother in *Iphigenia in Tauris* (796-7) and Menelaus with Helen in *Helen* (627-35), as well as a passage in the lost *Hypsipyle*. Lines 1317-18 quote Euripides' *Electra*. The poetic of vocabulary referring to dew, the shuttle and the sheen

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of the vine are all typical of Euripidean choruses, and the phrase about wetting in 1311-12 seems to parody Euripides' *Phoenician Women* (23), but Aeschylus also creates humour by contrasting these elevated images with more down-to-earth diction. Aeschylus mimics Euripides' musical style in hilariously prolonging the word 'wind', stretching it over several notes. Euripides was noted for the pathos of his use of small children in tragedy, which explains why the singer addresses a child.

<sup>184</sup> It is a great shame we do not know what movement Aeschylus, who has presumably been dancing during this choral song, executes here.

<sup>185</sup> A bizarre-looking woman called Cyrene is also mentioned in *Women at the Thesmophoria* 98, in reference to the tragedian Agathon's effeminate appearance. Her 'twelve tricks' here might refer to musical effects, or sexual moves or even bodily apertures.

<sup>186</sup> Euripides was noted for the long freeform solo songs ('monodies'), without formal verse structure, sung by emotional females and barbarians in his plays (see e.g. *Helen* 229-51). Aeschylus composes one on a thoroughly domestic theme, the loss of a cockerel, sung by a lower-class character, because Euripides was associated with putting ancient myths into a modern, everyday light (see above, line 959). The humour comes from the contrast of the solemn, tragic style with the commonplace content and the use of a familiar real-world rather than mythical names for the suspected cock-thief, Glyce, and the slave, Mania. There are distorted allusions to passages in Euripides' *Hecuba*, *Hippolytus*, *Andromache*, *Helen*, *Orestes*, and *Cretans*. Euripides' lyric technique of repeating words twice is mercilessly imitated.

<sup>187</sup> The motif of the weighing of souls was an ancient one, attested centuries before Aristophanes in Egyptian art and literature. In the *Iliad*, Zeus weighs the fates of Hector and Achilles one another before their final confrontation (000). Such a weighing scene was staged in Aeschylus' *Psychostasia*, 'Weighing of Souls', to decide the fates of Achilles and his adversary Memnon; the motif is common in Athenian art. Dionysus cuts this solemn image down to size by pointing out that cheese-sellers used scales, as well.

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- <sup>188</sup> The verb here is used in ancient Greek of cockerels and heralds as well as cuckoos.
- <sup>189</sup> Euripides quotes the opening line of his famous *Medea*, spoken by the nurse.
- <sup>190</sup> A quotation from Aeschylus' lost *Philoctetes*,
- <sup>191</sup> Wool-dealers used to make the fleeces wet to make them seem heavier in order to trick customers. Euripides' words were 'winged' because Euripides' nurse said that the Argo 'had flown through'.
- <sup>192</sup> A quotation from Euripides' lost *Antigone*.
- <sup>193</sup> A quotation from Aeschylus' lost *Niobe*.
- <sup>194</sup> The source of this quotation is not known. In this game, there were three throws of the dice, and the aim was to achieve the highest score, a triple six. Two ones and a four is a low score.
- <sup>195</sup> This is a quotation from Euripides' lost *Meleager*.
- <sup>196</sup> This is a quotation from Aeschylus' lost *Glaucus Potnieus*, the satyr play that concluded the group in which *Persians* was produced.
- <sup>197</sup> Egyptians were regarded as superb hauliers and construction workers on account of the size of their pyramids and monumental architecture.
- <sup>198</sup> On Euripides' wife and Cephisophon, see above n.000. Euripides was thought to have a large personal library, in which he is sitting when Dikaiopolis visits him in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*.
- <sup>199</sup> There has been endless scholarly debate about which of the two tragedians Dionysus at this point in the play means by 'wise' and which he enjoys. Has he already changed his mind to prefer Aeschylus, and if so, why?
- <sup>200</sup> It is a measure of the continuing high reputation enjoyed by Alcibiades that this is the first question Dionysus asks when it comes down to the issue of saving Athens. Alcibiades' career had been marked by scandal and controversy. He first ran away into exile in 415 when it was rumoured that he had profaned the Mysteries at parties. He then became advisor to the Peloponnesians, but made enemies in Sparta and transferred his allegiance to the Persians, until his friends in Athens engineered his return. He was officially elected general in 407, and was greeted with huge enthusiasm as the one man who

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could lead the Athenians to victory. He won great affection for leading the Eleusinian Procession to Eleusis (for the celebration of the Eleusinian Mysteries) by land for the first time since the Spartans had occupied the strategically crucial northern Attic deme of Decelea in 413 BCE. Yet, after a disastrous Athenian naval defeat in conflict with the brilliant Spartan admiral Lysander's fleet, even though Alcibades had been temporarily absent and not responsible, he was ousted once again and went into exile in his own estate on the northern shores of the Hellespont. But this passage in *Frogs* shows that many in Aristophanes' audience still believed the recall of this maverick general could save them.

<sup>201</sup> This seems to be an adaptation not of a line in Euripides, but in a work by the tragedian Ion.

<sup>202</sup> Aeschylus uses this image in *Agamemnon* 717-36, where it symbolises either Paris or Helen or both.

<sup>203</sup> Once again, it is debatable which poet Dionysus thinks spoke cleverly and which clearly.

<sup>204</sup> This is a difficult in-joke. Cleocritus is probably the Cleocritus who was herald of the Eleusinian cult with a beautiful voice and democratic beliefs. He seems to have been nicknamed 'son of the ostrich', which explains the reference to feathers. Perhaps he was heavily built, and the idea is that if he was combined with the notoriously slender Cinesias, he could be light enough to fly.

<sup>205</sup> In Euripides' lost *Palamedes*, this Greek at Troy was regarded as a sage who had invented writing. The line may be a quotation from that play.

<sup>206</sup> On Cephisophon see n.000. The point of the joke is that the vinegar bottles are the most significant element of this proposed tactic, which makes Cephisophon's contribution greater than that of Euripides.

<sup>207</sup> Aeschylus seems to mean that a city should accommodate the needs and views of poor and rich citizens alike.

<sup>208</sup> Aeschylus implies that the Athenians should give up all hope of fighting the Peloponnesians on land now that they had occupied Decelea, and concentrate on pouring all their resources into the navy,



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a strategy which Pericles had recommended. That way revenues would increase, and the Athenians should even then yearn for yet more revenue.

<sup>209</sup> Jurors were paid by the state to adjudicate in trials, and the level of the expenditure was often criticised.

<sup>210</sup> The first half of the line is a quotation from Euripides' *Hippolytus*. See above n.000.

<sup>211</sup> Dionysus is of course not a mortal.

<sup>212</sup> An adaptation of a notorious line in Euripides' lost *Aeolus*.

<sup>213</sup> The first line is a quotation from a lost Euripidean play, probably *Phrixus*; the second line comically expands the idea.

<sup>214</sup> Euripides was often said to have learned his unorthodox ideas from the sophists and from Socrates.

<sup>215</sup> On Cleophon see above n.000. Nothing is known of Myrmex and Archenomos. Nicomachus had held office as a legislator. The passage implies that all four men were unpopular, at least with a portion of the audience. The three things denoted by 'this' which Pluto hands over to Aeschylus are probably the instruments for killing oneself which were recommended early in the play by Heracles (000)—a sword, a noose, and hemlock.

<sup>216</sup> Adeimantos was Alcibiades' cousin and general in 406/5. He was clearly unpopular and was later regarded as a traitor.

<sup>217</sup> The closing chorus opens with an echo of Aeschylus' lost *Glacus Potnieus* (see above n.000) and is in the dactylic rhythm which has been associated with Aeschylus throughout. Aeschylus' *Eumenides* closes with a triumphal procession. On Cleophon see n.000