

BATPAXOI

FROGS

CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

XANTHIAS, *servant to Dionysus.*

DIONYSUS.

HERACLES.

A CORPSE *being carried to the grave.*

CHARON.

FROGS *of the Acherusian Lake.*

CHORUS *of blessed initiates of the Eleusinian Mysteries, men and women.*

AEACUS, *doorkeeper to Pluto.*

MAID *to Persephone.*

A WOMAN INNKEEPER.

PLATHANE, *another woman innkeeper.*

A SLAVE *of Pluto.*

PLUTO.

EURIPIDES.

AESCHYLUS.

Silent Characters

DONKEY *belonging to Dionysus.*

BEARERS *carrying the Corpse.*

TWO MAIDSERVANTS *belonging to the innkeepers.*

SLAVES *of Pluto.*

DITYLAS, SCEBLYAS, PARDOCAS, *Scythian archers.*

MUSE *of Euripides, an old woman castanet-player.*

PERSEPHONE.

[*Dionysus and Xanthias enter from the side. Dionysus, who is on foot, is disguised as Heracles: over his long saffron robe he is wearing a lion-skin, and he is carrying a club. Xanthias is riding on a donkey, but he himself is carrying a heavy bundle of luggage hanging from a pole which he is holding resting on his shoulder.*]

XANTHIAS: Shall I say one of the usual things, master, that the audience always laugh at?

DIONYSUS: Yes, indeed, whatever you like, only not "*What a weight!*". Mind out for that, because I'm thoroughly sick of it by now.

5 XANTHIAS: Then some other witty saying?

DIONYSUS: Anything bar "*It's really chafing my shoulder*".

XANTHIAS: Well then, can I say the *really* funny one?

DIONYSUS: Certainly, no problem; only make sure you don't say that one—

XANTHIAS: Which one?

DIONYSUS: The one where you shift the pole to your other side and say you need a crap.

10 XANTHIAS: Can't I even say that I'm carrying such a load on me, if someone doesn't take it off me I'll have an arse-burst?

DIONYSUS: No, I beg you, no, except when I'm just about to puke up anyway.

15 XANTHIAS: Then what was the point of my carrying this luggage, if I'm not to be allowed to do any of the things that Phrynichus is always doing? Lycis and Ameipsias, too — they have luggage-carrying scenes every time in their comedies!

DIONYSUS: Well, don't do it, because when I'm watching them and see one of these *clever* routines, I go away at least a year older.

20 XANTHIAS: Wretched hard luck on this neck of mine, in that case, that it's getting chafed and yet can't make a joke about it!

DIONYSUS: Now isn't this outrageous, the behaviour of an utterly spoilt brat, when I, Dionysus, son of Decanter, have gone to the trouble of walking myself and let this fellow ride, so he wouldn't have to toil or carry a load?

25 XANTHIAS: I *am* carrying one, aren't I?

DIONYSUS: How can you be carrying anything, when you're riding?

XANTHIAS [*pointing to his luggage*]: Because I'm carrying *this*, that's how.

DIONYSUS: In what way?

XANTHIAS: Very unwillingly!

DIONYSUS: Well then, this load you're carrying, the *donkey's* carrying that, innit?

XANTHIAS: Not the one that *I've* got here and *I'm* carrying, by Zeus it isn't!

DIONYSUS: Why, how can you be carrying it when something else is carrying *you*?

30 XANTHIAS: I don't know, but — *what* a weight on this shoulder!

DIONYSUS: All right, since you say the *donkey's* doing you no good, *you* take your turn picking up the *donkey* and carrying it.

XANTHIAS [*half to himself*]: Dash it all, why wasn't I in that naval battle? *Then* I could really and truly tell you to go to blazes!

35 DIONYSUS: Get down, you rogue; I'm now near the door which was supposed to be the first stop on my journey. [*Xanthias dismounts; he remains standing holding the luggage. The donkey will soon wander, or be led, off. Dionysus goes up to the stage-house door and knocks.*] Boy! [*There being no answer, he knocks again, thunderously, with his club, and calls with all his might.*] Boy, I say, boy!!

HERACLES [*within*]: Who knocked on the door? He charged at it just like a centaur, whoever— . [*He opens the door and is amazed to see his own double; then he recognizes the disguised Dionysus. He just manages to get out the following words.*] Tell me, what's this meant to be? [*He then goes into helpless convulsions of mirth.*]

40 DIONYSUS [*turning towards Xanthias*]: Hey, boy!

XANTHIAS: What's the matter?

DIONYSUS: Didn't you notice?

XANTHIAS: What?

DIONYSUS: How terribly afraid he was of me.

XANTHIAS [*aside*]: Yes, indeed — afraid you might be barmy.

HERACLES [*who has moved away from Dionysus and turned his back on him to avoid laughing in his face, while desperately trying to get himself under control*]: I can't, by Demeter, I just can't stop laughing! And I'm biting my lips too, but I keep laughing just the same!

DIONYSUS [*to Heracles*]: Come over here, my dear chap; I've got something I want to ask you.

45 HERACLES [*joining him; still not fully recovered*]: I just can't

banish laughter, seeing a lion-skin worn on top of a saffron gown like that. What's the idea? Why has a club joined forces with a pair of lady's boots? Where on earth have you been travelling to?

DIONYSUS: I was a marine on board Cleisthenes' ship.

HERACLES: And were you in the battle?

50 DIONYSUS: Yes, and we sank twelve or thirteen enemy ships.

HERACLES: What, just the two of you?

DIONYSUS: Yes, by Apollo.

XANTHIAS [*aside*]: "And then I woke up."

DIONYSUS: And, anyway, on the ship I was reading *Andromeda* to myself, and suddenly my heart was struck with a longing, you can't imagine how hard.

55 HERACLES: A longing? How big a longing?

DIONYSUS: Only a little one — the size of Molon.

HERACLES: For a woman?

DIONYSUS: No, it wasn't.

HERACLES: Then for a boy?

DIONYSUS: No, by no means.

HERACLES: You mean it was for a *man*?

DIONYSUS [*reeling in distress*]: Aaaaah!

HERACLES [*matter-of-factly*]: So you had it off with Cleisthenes, did you?

DIONYSUS: Don't make fun of me, brother; I really am in a bad way, such is the passion that's ravaging me.

60 HERACLES: What kind of passion, brother dear?

DIONYSUS: I can't describe it; but none the less I'll explain it to you by analogy. Have you, before now, ever felt a sudden desire for pea-soup?

HERACLES: Pea-soup? Whew [*it is almost a sigh*], thousands of times in my life!

DIONYSUS: "Do I make clear my sense", or shall I explain it some other way?

65 HERACLES: Not about pea-soup you needn't; I understand perfectly.

DIONYSUS: Well, that is the kind of yearning that is devouring me for — Euripides.

HERACLES: You mean even though he's *dead*?

DIONYSUS: Yes, and no man on earth will be able to dissuade me from going in quest of him.

HERACLES: What, down to Hades?

70 DIONYSUS: And lower down still, by Zeus, if there *is* anywhere
lower.

HERACLES: What is it you want?

DIONYSUS: I'm in need of a talented poet; "for some are gone, and those that live are bad".

HERACLES: What, isn't Iophon still alive?

75 DIONYSUS: Yes, that's the only bright spot still remaining, if indeed it really is one; I don't know for sure just what the truth is about that either.

HERACLES: Then aren't you going to bring up Sophocles, who's better than Euripides, if you *must* bring one from down there?

80 DIONYSUS: No, not till I get Iophon alone by himself and test what he can do without Sophocles. Besides, Euripides, being a rogue as he is, will probably actually try to escape back here with me; whereas Sophocles was contented here and will be contented there.

HERACLES: And where's Agathon?

DIONYSUS: He's deserted me and gone away; a good poet, and much missed by his *friends*.

85 HERACLES: Where on earth to, poor fellow?

DIONYSUS: To the banquets of the ... blest.

HERACLES: And what about Xenocles?

DIONYSUS: May hell take him!

HERACLES: And Pythangelus? [*Dionysus' only response is a gesture of contempt.*]

XANTHIAS [*aside*]: Not a word about *me*, while I'm getting my shoulder thoroughly crushed like this.

90 HERACLES: Well, aren't there absolutely myriads of other young lads here writing tragedies, whose verbal gush beats Euripides by miles?

95 DIONYSUS: Those are left-overs, mere chatterboxes, "quires of swallows", debauchers of their art, who, if they so much as get a chorus, disappear again pretty rapidly after pissing over Tragedy just once.

If you looked for a really *potent* poet, one who can give voice to a pedigree phrase, you couldn't find one any more.

HERACLES: How do you mean, potent?

100 DIONYSUS: Potent in the sense of one that can say daring things like this — "the sky, the dossing-place of Zeus" or "the foot of time", or about a heart that doesn't want to take an oath over sacrificial victims and a tongue that perjures itself separately from the heart.

HERACLES: And you *like* that kind of thing?

DIONYSUS: Like it? I'm absolutely *mad* on it.

HERACLES: It's sheer humbug, I tell you — and that's what you think too.

105 DIONYSUS: "Let my mind be master in its house"; you've got a house of your own.

HERACLES: And what's more, it's plainly, absolutely, utterly rotten stuff.

DIONYSUS: Stick to teaching me about food!

XANTHIAS [*aside*]: Not a word about *me*.

110 DIONYSUS: But the reason I've come, wearing this get-up in imitation of you, was so that you could tell me about those friends of yours whose hospitality you enjoyed when you went for Cerberus, in case I might need them. Tell me about them, about the harbours, bakeries, brothels, resting-places, turnings, springs, roads, towns, places to stay, the landladies
115 who have the fewest bedbugs.

XANTHIAS [*aside*]: Not a word about *me*.

HERACLES [*to Dionysus*]: You daredevil! you mean *you* too are going to venture to go there?

DIONYSUS: No more about that now; tell me about the routes, which way I can get down to Hades the fastest; and don't tell me one that's too hot or too cold.

120 HERACLES [*half to himself*]: Let me see now, which of them shall I tell you first, which one? [*To Dionysus*] Well, there's one that goes via rope and bench; you hang yourself.

DIONYSUS: Stop; that's absolutely *suffocating*!

HERACLES: Then there's a short cut, a well-pounded track by way of pestle and mortar.

DIONYSUS: Do you mean hemlock?

125 HERACLES: Exactly.

DIONYSUS: A cold and wintry route! It freezes your shins to death right away.

HERACLES: Would you like me to tell you one that's quick and all downhill?

DIONYSUS: Yes, indeed, because I'm no great pedestrian.

HERACLES: Well then, toddle down to Potters' Town.

DIONYSUS: And what then?

130 HERACLES: Climb to the top of the tall tower there—

DIONYSUS: And do what?

HERACLES: Watch the start of the torch-race there, and then, when the crowd say "They're off!" — then off *you* go too.

DIONYSUS: Where to?

HERACLES: Down!

135 DIONYSUS: That would mean spoiling two good rissoles of brain. I'm not going to go that way.

HERACLES: Then which way *will* you go?

DIONYSUS: The way you went before.

HERACLES: Ah, that's a long journey. Right away you'll come to an enormous, bottomless lake.

DIONYSUS: Then how am I going to get across?

139-40 HERACLES: There's an old sailor man who will take you over, in a little boat no bigger than this [*holding two fingers close together*], for a fare of two obols.

DIONYSUS [*with an expansive gesture towards the audience*]: Ah, the vast, the universal power of the two obols! How did they get right down there to Hades?

HERACLES: Theseus brought them there. After that you will see innumerable serpents and other terrifying beasts—

145 DIONYSUS [*his teeth chattering*]: Don't try to frighten or scare me; you won't put me off.

HERACLES: And then a vast sea of mud and ever-flowing dung, in which there lies anyone who has ever, say, broken the laws of hospitality, or slyly grabbed back a rent-boy's money while having it off with him, or struck his mother, or given his father a sock in the jaw, or sworn a perjured oath, or had someone copy out a speech by Morsimus.

DIONYSUS: They ought to add to those, by the gods, anyone who's learnt that war-dance by Cinesias!

HERACLES: Then the music of the pipes will waft around you, and you will see glorious light just like we have up here, and groves of myrtle, and happy companies of men and women, and much clapping of hands.

DIONYSUS: And who might those people be?

HERACLES: They're the Mystic initiates—

XANTHIAS [*aside*]: By Zeus, what *I* am here is the *donkey* at the Mysteries! I am not going to hang on to this stuff any longer. [*He begins to put down his burdens.*]

HERACLES: —who will tell you absolutely everything you need to know. They live very close, actually by the road, at Pluto's palace door. So goodbye, brother, and good luck.

DIONYSUS: And the very best of health to you too. [*Heracles goes inside; Dionysus turns to Xanthias, who has almost finished divesting himself of his load.*] And you, pick up the luggage again.

XANTHIAS: What, before I've even laid it down?

DIONYSUS: Yes, and bloody quick too.

XANTHIAS: No, please, I beg you! Hire someone instead — someone being carried to the grave, who's going to the same destination.

DIONYSUS: And if I can't find one?

XANTHIAS: Then take me.

[*A simple funeral cortège is seen approaching, the corpse lying, covered except for the head, on a bier carried on the shoulders of three or four bearers.*]

170 DIONYSUS: Good idea; why, here *comes* a corpse they're carrying to the grave. [*He advances towards the cortège and addresses the corpse.*] Here, you – you, I say – you, the dead bloke! [*The corpse sits up.*] Are you willing, my man, to carry some bits of luggage to Hades?

CORPSE: About how many?

DIONYSUS [*indicating the luggage on the ground*]: These here.

CORPSE: Will you pay two drachmas wages?

DIONYSUS: No way, not as much as that.

CORPSE [*to his bearers*]: Get moving along the road!

175 DIONYSUS [*holding up his hand to stop them*]: Wait a bit, my good man, in case we can come to some agreement.

CORPSE: If you're not going to pay two drachmas down, we've nothing to talk about.

DIONYSUS [*offering money*]: Take nine obols.

CORPSE: May I live again if I do! [*He lies down and is carried off.*]

DIONYSUS [*looking after him*]: Swollen-headed, isn't he, the blasted fellow!

XANTHIAS: Oh, let him rot. I'll go. [*He begins to pick up the luggage.*]

180 DIONYSUS: A fine thoroughbred fellow you are. Let's go to the boat.

[*As they move away from the vicinity of Heracles' door a wheeled "boat" pulls into view, seen by the audience but at first not by Dionysus and Xanthias. It is occupied only by an old man, the ferryman Charon, who is standing in the stern, propelling the boat with a pole, but calling orders to non-existent rowers.*]

CHARON: Awww-op! Bring her alongside!

[*The boat is now at the foot of the steps leading to the stage-platform, and Dionysus and Xanthias have reached the top of the same steps.*]

DIONYSUS [*surveying the expanse separating him from the audience*]: What's this?

XANTHIAS: What's this? A lake.

DIONYSUS: Of course, it's the very one he mentioned – and I can see a boat, too.

XANTHIAS: By Poseidon, yes, and that's Charon there.

DIONYSUS: Hello, Charon! [*No answer.*]

XANTHIAS: Hello, Charon!! [*No answer.*]

DIONYSUS *and* XANTHIAS: Hello, Charon!!!

185

CHARON [*still ignoring them, and addressing all and sundry*]: Who's for a rest from all toil and trouble? Who's for the Plain of Oblivion, or for Ocnus' rope factory, or for the land of the Cerberians, or for Damnation, or for Taenarum?

DIONYSUS [*descending the steps*]: Me.

CHARON: Hurry up and get on board.

DIONYSUS [*hesitating*]: Where do you expect to put in?

CHARON [*annoyed by this superfluous question*]: Bloody hell!

DIONYSUS [*taking this for an answer*]: You're sure?

190

CHARON: I am so far as *you're* concerned! Come on, get in.

DIONYSUS [*calling up to Xanthias*]: Come here, boy!

CHARON [*raising his hand*]: I don't take slaves, unless they fought in the life-or-death naval battle.

XANTHIAS: Oh, I didn't, as a matter of fact — I happened to be down with an eye complaint.

CHARON: Well then, you'd better run round the lake, hadn't you, on the double?

XANTHIAS: Well, where shall I stop to wait?

195

CHARON: At the resting-place by the Withering Stone.

DIONYSUS [*to Xanthias*]: You understand that?

XANTHIAS [*as he reluctantly sets off*]: I understand it all right. Oh, dash it all, *what* was it I met when I came out of the house? [*Exit. Dionysus climbs into the boat.*]

CHARON [*to Dionysus*]: Sit to the oar. [*Calling up to the "quay"*] Anyone else who's crossing, hurry along! [*To Dionysus, who has sat down on an oar*] Here, you, what are you doing?

DIONYSUS: What am I doing? Sitting on the oar, of course, where you told me to.

200

CHARON [*pointing to a thwart*]: Look, Big-belly, sit down *here*, will you?

DIONYSUS [*sitting down as directed*]: There you are.

CHARON: Well, put out your hands and *stretch*, will you?

DIONYSUS [*stretching out his arms in front of him*]: There you are.

CHARON: Will you stop this ridiculous behaviour, thrust your feet against the stretcher, and row with a will?

203-5 DIONYSUS: And how am I supposed to be able to *row*, unexperienced, unseamanlike, unSalaminian as I am?

CHARON: It'll be easy. You'll hear some most beautiful singing as soon as you bend to the oar.

DIONYSUS: Who from?

CHARON: From the Frog Swans. Marvellous stuff.

DIONYSUS: All right, give me the stroke.

CHARON: Awww-op-op! Awww-op-op!

[*As Dionysus begins to row to this rhythm, and the boat slowly begins to move, the Frogs begin to leap into view from the opposite side; they always remain ahead of the boat, so that Dionysus never sees them. Their song cuts right across the rhythm set by Charon, and Dionysus has the utmost difficulty keeping in time with them.*]

210 FROGS: Brekekekéx kowáax kowáax,
brekekekex kowaax kowaax!
Marsh-dwelling children of the streams,
let us utter a harmonious sound
of song, that sweet-voiced melody
of ours — kowaax, kowaax! —
215-7 which once we sang in honour
of the Nysean son of Zeus,
Dionysus, in the Marshes,
at that time when the throng of people,
of revellers with hangovers on the holy Pot Feast,
passes through my precinct.
220 Brekekekex kowaax kowaax!

DIONYSUS [*temporarily exhausted, resting on his oar*]:
I can tell you, Kowaax-kowaax, I'm starting
to get a very sore bum!

FROGS: Brekekekex kowaax kowaax!

DIONYSUS: But I don't suppose you care.

225 FROGS: Brekekekex kowaax kowaax!

DIONYSUS: Oh, blast you all, you and your kowaax!

You're nothing *but* a load of kowaax!

FROGS [*faster and louder, as Dionysus reluctantly resumes rowing*]:

And rightly so, you interfering pest!

For I have been cherished by the Muses, masters of
the lyre,

230

and by horn-footed Pan, the player of reed-notes;

and Apollo the lyre-god delights in us also

because of the water-reeds that I grow

in the marshes to serve in the making of the lyre.

235

Brekekekex kowaax kowaax!

DIONYSUS [*exhausted again*]:

Well, I've got blisters, I have,

and my arsehole has been oozing for a long time,

and any moment it'll pop out and say—

FROGS:

Brekekekex kowaax kowaax!

240

DIONYSUS [*pleadingly*]:

You song-loving tribe,

please do stop!

FROGS [*even faster and even louder*]:

No, no, we'll raise

our voices *more*, if ever

on fine sunny days

we leapt through the galingale

and the tufted reed, rejoicing

245

in our diver-sified song-melodies,

or if, escaping Zeus' showers,

we sang underwater in the depths

a choral song enlivened

by bubbly splashy plops!

250

FROGS and DIONYSUS [*who unexpectedly joins powerfully in the refrain, but at his own, slower tempo, and simultaneously begins to row with a regular, purposeful beat*]:

Brekekekex kowaax kowaax!

DIONYSUS: I'm taking this over from you!

FROGS: Hey, that won't be *fair* on us!

DIONYSUS [*aside*]:

It'll be *more* unfair on *me*

255

if I burst from the effort of rowing!

FROGS [*alarmed*] and DIONYSUS [*confident*]:

Brekekekex kowaax kowaax!

DIONYSUS: Squeal away, I don't care!

FROGS [*less loud*]:

Very well, we'll shout
as loud as our throat is gape-able
all day long—

260 FROGS and DIONYSUS [*who by now is easily outshouting them*]:

Brekekekex kowaax kowaax!

DIONYSUS: You're not going to beat me at this!

FROGS [*their voices fading*]:

And you won't beat us either, no way!

DIONYSUS [*fortissimo*]:

And nor will you beat me,
never — because I'll shout,
if need be, all day long, until
I've conquered you at kowaax.
Brekekekex kowaax kowaax!!

265

[*There is no answer; the Frogs have vanished. Dionysus' next words are spoken, not sung.*] I thought I was going to put a stop to your kowaax, sooner or later!

[*The boat has now reached the steps at the other end of the stage-platform.*]

CHARON [*to Dionysus*]: Hey, stop, stop! [*Dionysus stops rowing.*]

270 Use a bit of oar to bring her alongside. [*Dionysus manoeuvres the boat with small strokes until Charon is satisfied.*] Out you get. [*Dionysus disembarks and begins to climb the steps.*] Pay your fare!

DIONYSUS [*returning and handing over money*]: Here are your two obols. [*Charon punts the boat away. Dionysus climbs the steps and looks around.*] Xanthias! Where's Xanthias? Hey, Xanthias!!

XANTHIAS [*off*]: Ahoy!

DIONYSUS: Come here!

XANTHIAS [*entering from the wings*]: Hello, master.

DIONYSUS: What are things like down that way?

XANTHIAS [*joining him*]: All darkness and mud.

275 DIONYSUS: So I suppose you saw those father-beaters and perjurers there that he spoke to us about?

XANTHIAS: Why, didn't you?

DIONYSUS: Yes, by Poseidon, I did, and [*indicating the audience*] I can still see them now! Come on then, what shall we do?

XANTHIAS: The best thing we can do is get a move on, because this is the place where he was talking about those terrifying beasts.

280 DIONYSUS: He'll rue it, he will! He was just talking big to make me afraid; he knew I was a fighting type, and he was concerned for his reputation. Nothing on earth's as vain as Heracles! Myself, I would very much want to meet one of them, and to earn a trophy worthy of the journey I'm making.

285 XANTHIAS: Yes, indeed. And listen, I can hear a noise.

DIONYSUS [*terrified*]: Where is it, where is it?

XANTHIAS: Behind you.

DIONYSUS: Then go behind me.

XANTHIAS [*as he does so*]: No, it's in front.

DIONYSUS: Then go in front of me.

XANTHIAS [*as he does so; looking into the wings*]: And now, by Zeus, I can see an enormous beast.

DIONYSUS: What kind of beast?

290 XANTHIAS: A fearsome creature. The thing is, it's taking all sorts of different shapes. Now it's a cow, now it's a mule, and *now* it's an extremely attractive woman—

DIONYSUS [*eagerly*]: Where is she? Here, let me go after her.

XANTHIAS: No, she isn't a woman now any more, she's turned into a dog.

DIONYSUS [*trembling*]: Then she's Empusa.

XANTHIAS: Certainly her whole face is blazing with fire.

DIONYSUS: And has she got a leg made of bronze?

295 XANTHIAS: Yes, by Poseidon, and the other one, I can tell you, is made of cowpats.

DIONYSUS: Oh, which way can I turn? [*He looks wildly about him, and finally flees down the steps and across the orchestra towards the audience.*]

XANTHIAS: And which way can I? [*He retreats before the monster, but continues to face in the direction from which it is coming.*]

DIONYSUS [*falling at the feet of his priest, who is sitting in the centre of the front row of the audience*]: Priest, keep me safe, so I can come to your party!

XANTHIAS: Lord Heracles, we're going to die!

DIONYSUS [*thinking himself addressed*]: I implore you, man, will you please *not* call me or mention my name?

300 XANTHIAS: Dionysus, then.

DIONYSUS: Avoid that one even more than the other!

XANTHIAS [*to the apparition*]: Go on your way. [*Calling to Dionysus*] Come here, come here, master!

DIONYSUS [*coming a short way towards him*]: What is it?

XANTHIAS: Take courage. We're absolutely all right, and we can now say, like Hegelochus, "After the stormy waves I see 'tis clam again".

305 Empusa's gone.

DIONYSUS: Swear it.

XANTHIAS: I swear it by Zeus.

DIONYSUS: And swear again.

XANTHIAS: I swear by Zeus.

DIONYSUS: Swear.

XANTHIAS: I swear by Zeus.

[*Satisfied, Dionysus returns and joins Xanthias.*]

DIONYSUS: Dear me, how pale I went when I saw her!

XANTHIAS [*pointing to the lower rear of Dionysus' robe*]: Well, *this* was so frightened for you that it turned *brown*!

310 DIONYSUS [*striking an attitude*]: Ah me, from whence have these troubles fallen upon me? Which of the gods shall I hold guilty of being my ruin? The Sky, the dossing-place of Zeus? Or the foot of Time?

[*The sound of the pipes is heard from the wings.*]

XANTHIAS: I say!

DIONYSUS: What's the matter?

XANTHIAS: Didn't you hear?

DIONYSUS: Hear what?

XANTHIAS: The sound of pipes.

315 DIONYSUS: I did indeed, and what's more, a most mystic whiff of torches has come to my nostrils. Let's lie low, stay quiet and listen. [*Dionysus and Xanthias conceal themselves; Xanthias begins to put the luggage down.*]

CHORUS [*off*]: Iacchus, O Iacchus!
Iacchus, O Iacchus!

320 XANTHIAS: That's what it is, master: the initiates are disporting themselves somewhere here, the ones he spoke to us about. At any rate they're singing the Iacchus hymn, the one by Diagoras.

DIONYSUS: That's what I think too, so the best thing is to keep quiet so we can know for sure.

[Enter Chorus of male and female Initiates. They wear old, torn clothes, and carry torches. The two stanzas of the ensuing hymn to Iacchus are sung as they move from the wing-entrance to the centre of the orchestra.]

CHORUS: O most glorious Iacchus, dwelling here in thine
abode,

325 Iacchus, O Iacchus,
come to this meadow to dance
and join thy company of pious devotees,
tossing on thine head
the swelling fruit-laden
330 myrtle garland, and beating the ground
with resolute foot in the uninhibited
sport and delight of worship,
335 which has a full share of the Graces' gifts, dancing
in purity
among the pious initiates.

XANTHIAS [*to Dionysus*]: O most glorious Lady, O maiden daughter of Demeter, what a lovely smell of pork has wafted its way to me!

DIONYSUS: Well, keep still, won't you, and you might get some sausage too!

340 CHORUS: Thou hast come, brandishing flaming torches in
thine hands,
Iacchus, O Iacchus,
brilliant star of our nocturnal rites!
The meadow is lit up with flame:
345 old men's knees leap in the dance,
and they shake off their griefs
and the weary years of advancing age
thanks to thy holy worship.

350

Do thou give us light with thy torch
and lead forth our youth as it dances, O blest one,
forward to the flowery expanse of the water-
meadow!

[*The leader of the chorus comes forward and makes a proclamation to the audience.*]

355 CHORUS-LEADER: Let all speak fair, and let these stand out of
the way of our dances: whoever is unfamiliar with words such as these – or
has thoughts that are not clean – or has not seen or danced in the secret rites
of the true-bred Muses nor been initiated in the Bacchic verbal mysteries of
bull-devouring Cratinus – or delights in words of buffoonery from men who
choose the wrong time to behave thus – or does not endeavour to resolve
360 the internal strife that threatens us and is not peaceable towards other
citizens, but stirs it up and fans its flame out of a desire for private
advantage – or is an office-holder who takes bribes to harm the city when
it's struggling in heavy seas – or betrays a fort or a fleet – or is a damnable
365 five-per-cent-collector like Thorycion who exports contraband from Aegina,
sending oarport-leathers, flax and pitch across to Epidaurus – or induces
anyone to supply money for our adversaries' navy – or is a soloist in cyclic
choral performances who shits on the offerings to Hecate – or is a politician
who goes and nibbles away at the fees of poets after having been satirized in
the course of the ancestral rites of Dionysus. To these I proclaim, and again
370 I proclaim the ban, and again a third time do I proclaim the ban, that they
stand out of the way of the initiates' dances; but [*to the chorus*] do you
awaken the voice of song and begin the all-night revels which befit this our
festival.

CHORUS [*marching round the orchestra*]:

Move now boldly, everyone,
to the flowery meadows
of the vale; put your foot down
and jest
375 and sport and mock
(you've had a very satisfying lunch).

So step out, and see you handsomely
exalt the Saviouress
380-1 and adore her with your voices,
she who affirms
that she will keep our land safe for all time to come
(even if Thorycion would rather have it otherwise).

CHORUS-LEADER: Come now, honour in another form of song
the Queen who makes the land fruitful, the goddess Demeter, and hymn her
in holy melodies.

385 CHORUS: Demeter, mistress
of our pure and secret rites, be with us
and keep your chorus safe;
and may I sport and dance
all the day without mishap.

390 And may I say many funny things
and many serious things,
may I sport and jest
in a manner befitting your festival,
and may my head be bound with the ribbon of
victory!

CHORUS-LEADER:

395 Come now, hey!
summon with your song the god in youthful bloom,
our partner in this pilgrims' dance, to join us here
too.

CHORUS:

[Men]

O most glorious Iacchus, inventor
of this delightful festive song, come hither,
accompany us

400

to meet the goddess,
and show us how you complete
a long journey without fatigue.

[All] Iacchus, friend of choral dancers, be with me as escort.

[Women]

For it was you that brought to pass, for laughter
and for cheapness, the splitting of this poor sandal
and the rents in these rags,
and who found a way for us
to sport and dance and not be out of pocket.

405

[All] Iacchus, friend of choral dancers, be with me as escort.

[Men]

And indeed just now I stole a little glance
at a girl, and a real good looker too,
a playmate,
and where her dress was torn I saw
a little titty peeping out!

410

[All] Iacchus, friend of choral dancers, be with me as escort.

414-5

DIONYSUS:

I find I'm always fond
of good company, and I want
to dance and play with her.

XANTHIAS:

And so do I!

*[They come out of hiding and attach themselves to the chorus,
dancing with them during the following song.]*

CHORUS:

Would you like us then, all together,
to make fun of Archedemus?
At seven years old he still had no guild-teeth,
but now he's a politician
up among the dead men,
and he's number one for villainy in those parts.

420

And I hear that Cleisthenes' arsehole
was in the cemetery,
plucking and tearing at its cheeks;

425

and he was bending over and beating his head,
and weeping and howling
for Phucus of Dickeleia, whoever he actually is.

And they say, too, that that Callias,
the son of Hippopenis,
was banging beaver dressed in a lion-skin—

430

DIONYSUS [*quitting the dance, and recalling his mission*]:
So could you please tell us,
where hereabouts does Pluto live?
We're two visitors who have just arrived.

CHORUS-LEADER: You don't need to go at all far,
and you don't need to ask me a second time;
be informed that you've come right to his door.

435

DIONYSUS [*pointing to the luggage*]:
Pick it up again, boy.

XANTHIAS: What can you say about this
except "Same old grind! Bugger this bedding!"

[*Xanthias slowly and reluctantly picks up his load during the following song.*]

440

CHORUS-LEADER: Go now
to the sacred enclosure of the goddess and disport
yourselves
in her flowery grove, you who are sharers in the
festival that she loves;
and I will go with the girls and the women,
to carry the sacred flame where they revel all
night in her honour.

445

[*The men and women move to opposite sides of the orchestra, singing as they go.*]

CHORUS: Let us go to the flowery
meadows full of roses
and sport in our special way
with beautiful dances
in which the blessed Fates

450-2

have caused us to join.

455 For on us alone do the sun
and the divine daylight shine,
all of us who are initiated
and who led a righteous
way of life towards strangers
and towards ordinary folk.

460 DIONYSUS [*approaching the door, then hesitating*]: Well now,
how should I knock on the door? how now? How do the natives knock
hereabouts, I wonder?

XANTHIAS: Won't you stop wasting time and have a go at the
door, in Heracles' style and with Heracles' spirit?

DIONYSUS [*thumping the door with his club*]: Boy, boy!

AEACUS [*within*]: Who's that?

DIONYSUS [*as the door is opened*]: The mighty Heracles.

465 AEACUS: You loathsome, shameless, audacious creature! You
villain, you arch-villain, you utter villain, who drove away our dog
Cerberus, that I used to look after — throttled him and took him and dashed
off and made a bolt and were gone! But there's no escape for you now —
[*breaking into melodramatic declamation*]

470 Such is the sable-hearted rock of Styx
And the blood-dripping crag of Acheron
That ward thee, such Cocytus' roaming hounds
And the Echidna hundred-headed, who
Will rend apart thine offals, while thy lungs
475 Are gripped by the Tartessian murry-eel,
And while thy bloodied kidneys, guts and all,
The Gorgons out of Teithras tear asunder,
Whom I with swift-foot haste will now go seek.

[*He goes back inside. Meanwhile Dionysus has collapsed to the ground.*]

XANTHIAS: Hey, what's happened to you?

DIONYSUS: "The *bowel* is empty: call upon the god!"

480 XANTHIAS: Get up, won't you, quickly, you ridiculous fool,
before anyone else sees you!

DIONYSUS [*rising*]: I feel I might faint. Give me a sponge for my
heart.

XANTHIAS [*producing a sponge from the luggage-bundle and offering it to Dionysus*]: Here, take it. [*Dionysus does so, then hesitates for a moment.*] Apply it to yourself. [*Dionysus lifts his clothes with his left hand; his right hand, holding the sponge, disappears behind his back.*] Where is it? [*Moving round behind Dionysus, and seeing that he is in fact using the sponge to wipe his bottom.*] Ye golden gods! is that where you keep your heart?

485 DIONYSUS: Yes, it was frightened and slunk down into my lower abdomen.

XANTHIAS: You're the most cowardly god or man alive!

DIONYSUS: *Me?* What do you mean, cowardly, when I actually asked you for a sponge? No other man would have done it!

XANTHIAS: What would he have done?

DIONYSUS: If he was really a coward, he'd have just stayed on the
490 ground smelling his own stink. Whereas I, I stood up, and what's more, I wiped myself clean!

XANTHIAS [*sarcastically*]: Poseidon, how brave!

DIONYSUS [*not detecting the sarcasm*]: I certainly think it is. Weren't *you* afraid of the bombast of his words and all the threats he made?

XANTHIAS: No, I didn't even give it a thought.

DIONYSUS: Come on then, since you're brave and full of spirit,
495 you take this club and lion-skin and become me, if you're really gutsy and fearless, while I take a turn being your luggage-carrier.

XANTHIAS [*resignedly*]: Hand them over quickly, then; nothing for it but to obey. [*He puts down the luggage, dons the lion-skin and takes the club.*] And now look at Xanthias acting Heracles, and see if I'm going to
500 be a coward and have a spirit like yours.

DIONYSUS: Not a bit of it; you really are the ... whipped rogue from Melite! Here now, let me pick up this luggage.

[*As he is doing so, a maidservant comes out of the palace and rushes to Xanthias.*]

MAID: Heracles, darling, have you really come? Come inside
505 here! When the goddess heard you'd come, right away she was baking loaves, boiling two or three pots of crushed-pea soup, barbecuing a whole ox, baking flat-cakes and bread-rolls. [*Tugging at his arm*] Come inside!

XANTHIAS [*with a gesture of courteous refusal*]: Thank you very much, but I'm quite all right.

MAID: By Apollo, there's no way I'm going to stand by and see
510 you go off. Because, you know, she was also stewing fowl and roasting
sweetmeats and mixing some super-sweet wine. Do come inside with me!

XANTHIAS [*as before*]: I really am all right, thanks.

MAID: Nonsense, nonsense! I'm not going to let you go. Why,
514-5 there's a very attractive girl piper already waiting for you in there, and two
or three dancing-girls besides—

XANTHIAS [*with a complete change of tone*]: What's that you say?
Dancing-girls?

MAID: In the bloom of youth, and freshly plucked. Now *come
inside*, because the cook was on the point just now of taking the fish-slices
off the fire, and the table was being brought in.

520 XANTHIAS: Please go and, before anything else, tell the dancing-
girls in there that the man himself will be making his entry. [*To Dionysus*]
Here, boy, follow me, this way, and bring the stuff. [*He makes to go
inside.*]

DIONYSUS: Hold it, you! You don't mean to say you're taking it
seriously, my little joke of dressing you up as Heracles? Will you stop this
525 ridiculous behaviour, and pick up the luggage again and carry it?

XANTHIAS: What's this? You're not thinking, are you, of taking
away from me the things that you yourself gave me?

DIONYSUS: No, I'm not thinking of doing it — I'm doing it right
now. Put down that skin you've got on. [*He takes hold of the lion-skin.*]

XANTHIAS [*resisting*]: Witness this, everyone! Let the gods be
my judges!

530 DIONYSUS: Gods? What gods? And how vain and stupid of you,
to suppose that you, a slave and a mortal, could be the son of Alcmena!

XANTHIAS [*handing over the lion-skin and club*]: All right, never
mind; have them. Some time, maybe, I tell you, god willing, you might
need me again!

CHORUS [*as Xanthias picks up the luggage*]:

535 That's the mark of a man
 who has brains and intellect
 and has been around a lot,
 to be always shifting over
 to the safer side of the ship
 rather than just standing
 in one position like a painted
 image: to turn over
 540 to the softer side of the mattress
 is the act of a clever man,
 a born Theramenes!

DIONYSUS: Well, it would be ludicrous, wouldn't it,
 if Xanthias, a slave,
 was lying on his back
 on a Milesian coverlet and kissing
 a dancing-girl, and then asked for a jerry,
 and I was gazing at him
 545 and clutching my bean, and he
 (being a rogue himself as well)
 saw me, and then punched me
 in the jaw and knocked out
 the front men of my chorus?

[*Enter, from the side, a woman innkeeper with her maidservant. On seeing "Heracles", she becomes very excited and calls out in the direction from which she has come.*]

550 INNKEEPER: Plathane, Plathane, come here! [*Another woman enters, also accompanied by her maidservant.*] Here's the villain who came into our inn one time and ate up sixteen of our loaves—

PLATHANE: Yes, by Zeus, it's the very man.

XANTHIAS [*aside, gleefully*]: Someone's in trouble!

INNKEEPER: *And*, on top of that, stewed meat to the tune of twenty half-obol portions a time—

XANTHIAS [*as before*]: Someone's got it coming to him!

555 INNKEEPER: And all that garlic too!

DIONYSUS: You're drivelling, my good woman; you've no idea what you're talking about.

INNKEEPER: You mean you never expected I'd recognize you again, because you had those soft boots on. Oh yes, I haven't mentioned yet all that salted fish.

560 PLATHANE: No, indeed, my dear, nor yet the fresh cheese that he ate up, baskets and all.

INNKEEPER: And then, when I asked him for payment, he gave me a furious look *and* he started bellowing—

XANTHIAS: That's just the sort of thing he'd do; it's the way he behaves everywhere.

INNKEEPER: *And* he was drawing his sword too — I thought he'd gone mad!

565 PLATHANE: That's right, poor dear.

INNKEEPER: And the two of us must have been so *frightened*, we jumped straight up on to the cross-beam; and he just *rocketed* out of the house and off he went, taking the mattresses with him!

XANTHIAS: That's just like him, too.

INNKEEPER: Well, we ought to do something about it. [*To her maid*] Go now and call my patron Cleon here.

570 PLATHANE [*to her maid*]: And you call mine, Hyperbolus, if you meet him, so we can really crush the fellow. [*The two maids depart on their errand.*]

INNKEEPER [*to Dionysus*]: You filthy guzzler! How I'd love to bash those back teeth of yours with a stone, the ones you used to eat up my stock!

575 PLATHANE: And how *I'd* love to throw you into the Barathron!

INNKEEPER: And I'd like to take a sickle and cut out the throat down which you swallowed those sausages! Now I'm going for Cleon, who'll summons him today and wind all the stuff out of him. [*She goes, followed by Plathane.*]

DIONYSUS [*beseechingly*]: May I perish most miserably if I don't truly love Xanthias!

580 XANTHIAS: I know very well what you're after. Stop talking, stop talking. I am *not* going to become Heracles.

DIONYSUS: Oh, don't say that, Xanthias, my pet!

XANTHIAS [*mimicking his master*]: How on earth could I become the son of Alcmene, me that's both a slave and a mortal?

585 DIONYSUS: I know you're angry, I know, and you've every right to be; even if you were to hit me, I wouldn't complain. And if I ever take it away from you from this time on, then may I perish most miserably and be utterly annihilated – myself, my wife, my children, and bleary-eyed Archedemus too!

XANTHIAS: I accept your oath, and I'm taking the gear on these terms. [*He again exchanges the luggage for the lion-skin and club.*]

CHORUS [*to Xanthias*]:

590 It's up to you now,
now that you've taken the gear you had
before, to display a renewed vigour
<in your spirit> all over again,
and give once more those fearsome glances,
mindful of the god
whose semblance you are adopting.
If you're shown up as a blatherer, or even
95 let fall any hint of weakness,
595 you'll be given no option
but to pick up the luggage once again!

XANTHIAS: That's good advice you've given, men,
and in fact I was just thinking
the same thing myself;
and well I know that if
300 there's something good to be had,
599- he'll try and take this gear from me again!
601 But all the same I'll show myself
one who's brave in spirit
with a really biting look in his eye;
and it seems I'll need to, because listen,
I hear the door creaking.

[*Aeacus comes out, accompanied by two powerful slaves.*]

605 AEACUS [*pointing to Xanthias*]: Tie up this dog-thief quickly, so that he can pay for his crime. Hurry up about it!

DIONYSUS [*aside, gleefully*]: Someone's in trouble!

XANTHIAS [*hitting the slaves with his club as they try to arrest him*]: Don't you bloody well dare come near me!

AEACUS: Very well, you're *fighting*, are you? [*Calling within*] Ditylas, Scebylas, Pardocas! come here and fight with this fellow. [*Three Scythian archer-policemen come out of the house and, together with the two slaves already present, overpower and disarm Xanthias.*]

610 DIONYSUS: Well, isn't it disgraceful that this fellow should commit an assault as well as stealing other people's property?

AEACUS: An absolute enormity.

DIONYSUS: More than that, an outrage and a ... disgrace.

615 XANTHIAS: Now look here! If I've ever come here before, by Zeus, I'm ready to die, or if I've stolen so much as a hair's worth of your property. And I'll make you a really splendid offer. Take my boy here and torture him, and if you find I've ever been guilty of anything, you can take me and put me to death.

AEACUS: And how am I to torture him?

620 XANTHIAS: Any way you like. You can tie him on the ladder-frame, hang him up, flog him with a bristle-whip, flay him alive, rack him, you can also pour vinegar into his nostrils, pile bricks on him, anything else, only don't hit him with a stalk of leek or young onion.

[*Aeacus, impressed, signals to the archers to withdraw, and takes a whip from one of them as they leave.*]

AEACUS: That's a very fair offer. And, of course, if my beating causes your boy any permanent injury, the money will be there for you.

625 XANTHIAS: No need for that as far as I'm concerned; just take him off and torture him.

AEACUS: No, I'll do it here, so that he can testify in your presence. [*To Dionysus*] Put down your things, quick, and see you tell no lies here. [*Dionysus puts down the luggage; Aeacus, whip in hand, waits impatiently for him to strip, but he does not. Instead...*]

630 DIONYSUS [*raising a prohibitive hand*]: I declare to whoever that I must not be tortured because I am an immortal. If you disobey, blame only yourself for the consequences.

AEACUS: What is it you're saying?

DIONYSUS: I say that I'm an immortal, Dionysus, son of Zeus, and that *this* fellow is a slave.

AEACUS [*to Xanthias*]: Do you hear that?

XANTHIAS: I do. And he ought all the *more* to be flogged; if he really is a god, he won't feel it.

635 DIONYSUS: Well, seeing that you also say you're a god, why shouldn't you be beaten along with me, stroke for stroke?

XANTHIAS: That's a very fair offer. And [*to Aeacus*] whichever of us you find cries out first, or takes any notice of the fact that he's being beaten, you can take it he's not a god.

640 AEACUS: There's no doubt about it, you're a gentleman: you take the road of fairness. Now strip off, both of you.

[*Xanthias takes off the lion-skin, and he and Dionysus both take down their inner garments, leaving their backs bare.*]

XANTHIAS: So how are you going to test us fairly?

AEACUS: That's easy: one stroke at a time alternately.

645 XANTHIAS: That's fine. [*Turning his back on Aeacus*] There you are. Look now, and see if you see me flinch. Have you struck me yet?

AEACUS: No, by Zeus, I haven't. [*He strikes Xanthias with the whip.*]

XANTHIAS [*giving no sign that he has felt anything*]: That's what I thought too.

AEACUS: Now I'll go over to this one and strike him. [*He strikes Dionysus.*]

DIONYSUS: When are you going to do it?

AEACUS: I already have!

DIONYSUS: Then how come I didn't sneeze?

AEACUS: I've no idea. I'll try this one again.

XANTHIAS: Well, hurry up, won't you? [*Aeacus strikes him.*]
Aaah!

650 AEACUS: What does that "aaah" mean? Were you hurt, by any chance?

XANTHIAS: Not at all; I was just thinking of when the Heracles festival at Diomeia is due to happen.

AEACUS: The man's got divine protection! I'd better go back over this side. [*He goes over and strikes Dionysus.*]

DIONYSUS: Ow-wow!

AEACUS: What's the matter?

DIONYSUS [*pointing off*]: I can see horsemen!

AEACUS: So what are you crying about?

DIONYSUS: I can smell onions.

655 AEACUS: You mean you don't notice the lashes?

DIONYSUS: I couldn't care less about them!

AEACUS: I can see, then, I'll have to go back over to this one again. [*He goes over and strikes Xanthias.*]

XANTHIAS: Help!

AEACUS: What's the matter?

XANTHIAS [*lifting his foot*]: Please take out this thorn.

AEACUS: What is going on? I'll have to go back over this side. [*He goes over and strikes Dionysus.*]

DIONYSUS [*in pain*]: Apollo! — [*mellifluously*] who perchance dost dwell in Delos or in Pytho.

660 XANTHIAS [*to Aeacus*]: It hurt him, didn't you hear?

DIONYSUS: No, it didn't; I was just recollecting a verse of Hipponax.

XANTHIAS: The thing is, you're not really doing anything to him. Thrash him on the flanks.

AEACUS: No, by Zeus; [*to Dionysus*] turn your belly to me. [*He strikes Dionysus, harder than ever, in the abdomen.*]

DIONYSUS: Poseidon!!

XANTHIAS [*gleefully*]: Someone's been hurt!

665 DIONYSUS [*singing*]: — who holdest sway
over the cape of Aegae
or in the depths of the blue-grey sea!

AEACUS: By Demeter, I still just can't make out which of you is a
670 god. Come inside, will you both? The master himself, and Pherrephatta, will know who you are, because they're gods too.

DIONYSUS: Good idea. I could have wished you'd thought of that earlier, before I got all those lashes!

[*Aeacus leads Dionysus and Xanthias into the palace; the two slaves follow with the luggage.*]

675 CHORUS: Commence the sacred dance, O Muse,
and come hither, for the delightfulness of my song,
to behold the great throng of the people, where there sit

ten thousand intellects
 more honourable than Cleophon, him on whose
 duplicitous lips
 a Thracian swallow
 fearsomely roars,
 perched on an alien leaf,
 and sounds forth a tearful nightingale-song, saying
 he will perish
 even if it's a tie.

CHORUS-LEADER: It is right and proper for the sacred chorus to
 take part in giving good advice and instruction to the community. In the
 first place, accordingly, we think that all citizens should be made equal and
 their fears removed; and if someone went wrong at all through being tripped
 up by the wiles of Phrynichus, I say that those who slipped up at that time
 should be given the right to clear themselves of any charge and wipe out
 their previous errors. Secondly, I say that there ought to be no one in the
 city who is deprived of his rights as a citizen. It is really disgraceful that
 men who have fought in just one naval battle should straight away be
 Plataeans and change from slaves into masters – and even that I couldn't in
 any way say was a bad thing; on the contrary, I congratulate you on it, it's
 the only sensible thing you've done; but in addition to that it's only fair,
 when there are men who have fought alongside you, and whose fathers have
 fought, in a great *many* naval battles, and who are your kith and kin, that
 you should pardon them this one misfortune when they beg you to. So, you
 men of innate wisdom, let us tone down our anger, let us readily accept as
 our kinsmen, and as citizens with full rights, every man who fights in our
 fleet. If we puff ourselves up about this and are too proud to do it, and that
 too when our city finds itself "in the arms of the waves", there will come a
 time hereafter when men will think we were not wise.

CHORUS: "If I can see aright the life or character
 of a man" who will really catch it one of these days,

neither will that monkey who's so bothersome at
present,

710 pint-sized Cleigenes,
the vilest bathman among all
the ash-stirrers who hold sway
over adulterated washing soda
and over the fuller's earth,
spend much more time among us; and it's because
715 he sees this
that he is bellicose, for fear that some night when
drunk he may be stripped of his clothes
if he walks without a stick!

CHORUS-LEADER: Very often we've thought that the city is
720 behaving in the same way towards its good upstanding citizens as it is
towards the old coinage and the new gold. Those were no counterfeit stuff
but, as all agree, the finest coins of all, the only ones that were honestly
struck, tested and proved everywhere among Greeks and barbarians alike —
725 but we don't make any use of them; instead we use these wretched coppers,
struck only yesterday or the day before, the vilest coinage ever. Similarly
with regard to our citizens: those whom we know to be well-born, virtuous,
honest, fine, upstanding men, reared in wrestling-schools and choruses and
730 culture, we spurn with contempt, and in all our affairs we make use of those
men of base metal, aliens, redheads, low fellows of low ancestry, johnny-
come-very-latelys, whom formerly the city wouldn't have used lightly in a
hurry even as scapegoats. But even at this late time, you foolish folk,
735 change your ways and honour the honest again. That will be creditable for
you if you are successful, and if you trip up at all, well, even if something
does happen to you, at least discerning people will think it's happening "on a
respectable tree"!

[Xanthias and a slave of Pluto's come out of the palace.]

SLAVE: By Zeus the Saviour, your master's a fine gentleman.

740 XANTHIAS: Of course he's a fine gentleman! Must be, seeing he knows about nothing except boozing and bonking.

SLAVE: But to think that he didn't give you a beating the moment you were found out, for pretending to be the master when you were really the slave!

XANTHIAS: He'd have caught it all right if he'd tried!

SLAVE: Now *that's* something really slavelike that you've done right away, the very thing I enjoy doing.

745 XANTHIAS: I really want to know – you enjoy it?

SLAVE: Enjoy it? I feel I'm in the seventh heaven when I curse my master behind his back!

XANTHIAS: What about grumbling when you go out of the house after getting a long flogging?

SLAVE: That gives me pleasure too.

XANTHIAS: What about meddling in other people's business?

SLAVE: Why, I know nothing that's like it!

750 XANTHIAS: My blood brother! And eavesdropping on masters' conversations?

SLAVE: I really am absolutely *mad* about that!

XANTHIAS: And what about blabbing what you've heard to outsiders?

SLAVE: What, me? I tell you, by Zeus, when I do that, I have an orgasm!

755 XANTHIAS [*deeply moved*]: Phoebus Apollo! Put your right hand in mine, and let me kiss you, and you kiss me. [*As they embrace, loud noises of quarrelling are heard within.*] And tell me, in the name of Zeus, god of our common whip-scars, what's that noise and shouting inside, and all the quarrelling?

SLAVE: It's Aeschylus and Euripides.

XANTHIAS [*with great surprise and interest*]: Hey-ee!

760 SLAVE [*portentously*]: There's a great business, a great business been stirred up among the dead, and a most formidable internal dispute.

XANTHIAS: What does it arise out of?

765 SLAVE: There's a law in force here that from each of the professions, those of them that are lofty and intellectual, the person who is the best among all his fellow-professionals, that he should have official

maintenance in the Prytaneum and a chair next to Pluto—

XANTHIAS: I understand.

SLAVE: —until someone else should come here more expert in the craft than he is, and then he was supposed to give place.

XANTHIAS: Well, in what way has that upset Aeschylus?

770 SLAVE: He held the chair of Tragedy, because he was supreme in that art.

XANTHIAS: And who holds it now?

775 SLAVE: When Euripides came down here, he began giving display performances to the clothes-snatchers and cutpurses and father-beaters and burglars who abound in Hades, and when they heard his argumentative speeches and his twistings and weavings, they went quite mad over him and thought he was the greatest; and then he got so fired up that he laid claim to the chair where Aeschylus was sitting.

XANTHIAS: And didn't he get stoned for doing that?

780 SLAVE: Not at all; the public clamoured for a trial to be held to decide which of the two was the better artist.

XANTHIAS: You mean the *criminal* public?

SLAVE: Yes, indeed; they shouted as high as heaven.

XANTHIAS: But weren't there others who sided with Aeschylus?

SLAVE: The decent sort are thin on the ground — just like they are up here [*indicating the audience*].

XANTHIAS: So what's Pluto planning to do?

'85 SLAVE: To hold, straight away, a contest, a trial, a test of the artistic quality of the two of them.

XANTHIAS: Then how come Sophocles didn't also lay claim to the chair?

90 SLAVE: Not he, by Zeus! When he came down here, he kissed Aeschylus and put his right hand in his, and *he* withdrew any claim against him to the chair. Just now, though, his intention was (as Cleidemides put it) to take a bye and sit it out; then, if Aeschylus wins, he'll stay where he is, but if not, he said that against *Euripides* he'd fight to the end for supremacy in his art.

795 XANTHIAS: So the thing is really going to happen?

795 SLAVE: Indeed it is, and very soon. And *then* something really awesome will be set in motion. Art will be weighed in the balance—

XANTHIAS: What do you mean? Will they be treating tragedy like an Apaturia sacrifice?

00 SLAVE: —and they'll bring out word-rulers and word-measures, and folding frames—

800 XANTHIAS: What, are they going to be making bricks?

SLAVE: —and set-squares and wedges; because Euripides says he's going to put plays to the proof word by word.

XANTHIAS: Aeschylus must surely, I fancy, have found that distasteful.

805 SLAVE: Well, he certainly lowered his head and glowered like a bull.

05 XANTHIAS: And who's actually going to judge this contest?

SLAVE: That was difficult. The pair of them found there was a shortage of qualified people. Aeschylus wouldn't agree to the Athenians as judges—

810 XANTHIAS: Perhaps he thought too many of them were villains.

10 SLAVE: —and he reckoned that all the others were rubbish when it came to deciding on the quality of poets. In the end they asked your master to be the judge, because of his long experience of the art. But let's go inside — because when our masters have important business is when we tend to get beaten! [*They both go inside.*]

815 [*During the following choral song an enormous pair of scales is brought out and placed in front of the stage-house, somewhat to one side; near it are placed a ruler, a set-square and other geometrical instruments.*]

CHORUS: Surely the mighty thunderer will have a terrible
 15 wrath within him,
 then when he sees the sharp-talking tusk of his rival
 artist
 being whetted: then indeed with formidable fury
 his eyes will whirl about!

There will be flashing-helmeted struggles of lofty-
 crested speech,

820 there will be slivers of linchpins and shavings from
the chisel,
825 as the man fights off the galloping words
of a master craftsman of the intellect.
Making the shaggy neck-hair bristle on his hirsute
chine,
830 contracting a fearsome brow, with a roar he will
utter
words coupled together with rivets, tearing them off
like ship-timbers
325 with his gigantic gusting.
Then will the mouthworker, the word-inquisitor, the
smooth tongue,
835 uncurl itself, shake the reins of envy,
divide those words asunder and quibble away to
nothing
all that labour of the lungs!

835 *[A platform is wheeled out of the stage-house door, on which stand three chairs in a row. Pluto, in royal robes, is sitting in the middle chair, with Dionysus (now at last dressed as himself) sitting on one side of him and Aeschylus on the other. Euripides is laying hold on Aeschylus' chair; Dionysus is urging him by gesture to desist; Aeschylus is sitting silent and impassive.]*

840 330 EURIPIDES: I won't let go of the chair; don't try and give me instructions. I say that I'm a better artist than he is.

DIONYSUS: Why are you keeping so quiet, Aeschylus? You hear what he says.

EURIPIDES: He'll be all disdainful and aloof to begin with, the same hocus-pocus act he always used to put on in his tragedies.

335 DIONYSUS [*deprecatingly*]: Don't go over the top, my dear fellow.

EURIPIDES: Oh, I know the man, I had him thoroughly analysed long ago: a man of self-indulgent language and uncivilized composition, with an unbridled, incontinent, unbuttonable mouth, unskilled in discursive waffle, a spouter of bundles of empty brag.

40 AESCHYLUS [*rising and turning threateningly on Euripides*]: How dare you, you son of that goddess of the vegetable-plot? You say that of me, you scraper-together of idle chatter, you creator of beggars, you

stitcher of rags? You're going to be sorry you did! [*Shaking his fist at Euripides, who backs away.*]

845 DIONYSUS [*rising, and interposing himself between the two rivals*]: Stop now, Aeschylus; "heat not thine inward parts with wrathful ire".

845 AESCHYLUS: No, I *won't* stop, not till I've thoroughly shown up this creator of cripples for what he is, in spite of all his effrontery.

DIONYSUS [*moving a little towards the stage-house, and pretending to call to those within*]: A lamb, boys, bring out a black lamb! There's a hurricane getting ready to burst!

850 AESCHYLUS [*again advancing on Euripides*]: You collector of Cretan arias, who defiled our art with sexual monstrosities—

855 DIONYSUS [*intervening again*]: Hey, hold it, my most honourable Aeschylus! [*He shepherds Aeschylus away from Euripides.*] And you, my poor Euripides, move yourself back out of the way of the hailstones, if 854-5 you've any sense, for fear he may get so angry that he hits you in the temple with a massive block of lexicon and makes your ... *Telephus* spill out. [*Euripides backs away further, so that the two rivals are now on opposite sides of the acting area, with Dionysus between them.*] And, Aeschylus, not so angry, please; just argue and be argued with in a mild-mannered way. It's not right for poetic gentlemen to rail at each other as if they were baking-women, and yet *you* just start roaring on the instant, like a holm-oak when it's set on fire.

860 EURIPIDES: *I'm* ready — I'm not backing out — to peck and be 865 pecked before him, if that's what he wants, in my words, my tunes, the sinews of my tragedies, and, yes, my *Peleus* as well, and my *Aeolus*, and my *Meleager*, and yes, even my *Telephus*.

865 DIONYSUS: And what are *you* intending to do, tell me, Aeschylus?

870 AESCHYLUS: I wasn't wanting to compete here, because we aren't fighting on level terms.

DIONYSUS: Why not, pray?

870 AESCHYLUS: Because my poetry hasn't died with me, whereas his *has*, so he'll have it here to recite. All the same, if that's what you want, that's what we must do.

DIONYSUS [*calling into the stage-house*]: Hey, someone, fetch me

incense and fire out here, so that before the intellectual proceedings begin I can pray that I may judge this contest with the greatest possible artistic expertise; and [*to the chorus*] will you meanwhile sing a bit of a song to the Muses.

[*Incense and a brazier are brought out for Dionysus, who proceeds to kindle the incense on the stage-altar and then prays, unheard, while the chorus sing the following song.*]

875 CHORUS: Ye nine pure virgin daughters of Zeus,
 O Muses, who look down on the astute subtle-
 reasoning minds
 of men who mint new ideas, when they advance into
 conflict
 arguing against each other with intricate, acutely-
 cogitated ploys,
 come and behold the power
 880 of two mouths that are formidable at purveying
 great words and verbal offcuts.
 For now the great intellectual contest
 is at last coming to fruition.

885 DIONYSUS [*offering the censer to Aeschylus*]: Now you two also
 make a little prayer, before you say your pieces.

AESCHYLUS [*dropping some incense on the fire*]: Demeter, who
 didst nurture my mind, may I be worthy of thy Mysteries!

DIONYSUS [*offering the censer to Euripides*]: You as well please
 take some incense and put it on the fire.

EURIPIDES: Thank you very much, but the gods I pray to are
 different ones.

890 DIONYSUS: Some private gods of your own? Novel coinages?

EURIPIDES: Exactly.

DIONYSUS: Go on then, pray to your unofficial gods.

EURIPIDES: O Sky on which I feed, O Swivel of the Tongue, O
 Sagacity, O sharp-scented Nostrils, may I find the right refutation for any
 argument that I attack!

895 CHORUS: And now we ourselves are eager
 to hear from two great minds
 a stately verbal dance.
 Forward on the path of battle!
 The tongues of both are ferocious,

there is no lack of daring in their spirits,
 no sluggishness in their minds.
 So we have every right to expect
 that one of them will have some elegant
 and well-honed things to say,
 while the other will tear up words by the roots,
 fall upon his foe with them,
 and scatter whole paddocksful of word-dust to the
 winds.

905 905 CHORUS-LEADER [*to the contestants*]: Now let's have you
 speaking straight away, and make sure that you give us the right kind of
 speeches — proper sophisticated stuff, no party-game comparisons, none of
 the sort of thing that any fool could produce.

910 910 EURIPIDES: My account of myself, of the kind of poet that I am, I
 shall leave for the last, and begin by unmasking my opponent. I shall show
 what a charlatan and quack he was, and by what devices he hoodwinked his
 audiences, whom he took over after they had been brought up to be stupid in
 the school of Phrynichus. He would begin by making some solitary figure,
 say Achilles or Niobe, sit down with their head covered, not letting them
 show their face — a mere pretence of a drama — and [*holding two fingers*
 915 *close together*] not making even *this* much of a sound.

DIONYSUS: That's right, they didn't.

914-5 EURIPIDES: Meanwhile the chorus would fire off four strings of
 lyrics, one after the other, without a break, while the characters stayed mute.

DIONYSUS: Myself, I enjoyed those silences; they gave me at
 least as much pleasure as the chatterboxes do now.

EURIPIDES: I'll tell you why: because you were a simpleton.

920 DIONYSUS: That's what I think too. Why did he do that, the so-
 and-so?

EURIPIDES: Sheer hocus-pocus! The idea was that the public
 would sit waiting in expectation, as the play went on and on, for the moment
 920 when Niobe would actually say something.

DIONYSUS: Oh, the wicked villain! How he fooled me, now I see
 it! [*To Aeschylus*] Why are you fidgeting and fretting like that? [*Aeschylus*
does not reply.]

EURIPIDES: Because I'm exposing him for what he is. And then, when he'd finished with that drivel and the play was already half over, he'd
 925 utter a dozen oxbite words with crests and beetling brows, fearsome boggy-
 925 faced things that the audience had never heard of.

AESCHYLUS [*unable to control himself*]: Goddammit—

DIONYSUS: Be quiet.

EURIPIDES [*continuing*]: And he wouldn't say a single word that was intelligible—

DIONYSUS [*to Aeschylus*]: Stop gnashing your teeth!

EURIPIDES: —nothing but Scamanders, and moats, and shields
 930 with griffin-eagles of beaten bronze on them, and sheer massive mountains
 930 of words that it was very hard to work out the meaning of.

DIONYSUS: Yes, by the gods; I for one have certainly before now lain awake through the long watches of the night trying to fathom what sort of bird a tawny horsecock was!

AESCHYLUS: It was an emblem painted on the ships, you idiot!

DIONYSUS: And *I* thought it was Eryxis, the son of Philoxenus!

EURIPIDES: But really, in tragedy, was it proper to actually write
 935 about *poultry*?

AESCHYLUS: And what about *you*, you god-detested scum? What sorts of things did *you* write about?

EURIPIDES: Not horsecocks, anyway, by Zeus, nor goatstags, like you — things that they embroider on Persian tapestries. No, as soon as I first
 940 took over the art from you, swollen as it was with bombast and overweight
 940 vocabulary, I began by reducing its swelling and removing its excess weight with a course of bite-size phrases, walking exercise and small white beets,
 945 while dosing it with chatter-juice strained off from books; then I fed it up again on a diet of arias, mixing in some Cephisophon. Then again, I didn't
 945 talk wildly about anything that came into my head, or charge blindly in and jumble everything up; rather, right at the beginning, the character I made enter would immediately explain the antecedents of my play.

AESCHYLUS: Because they were a hell of a lot better than your own were!

EURIPIDES: Again, from the very first words, I wouldn't leave any character idle: I would make the wife speak, and the slave just as much, and
 50 the master, and the maiden, and the old crone.

950 AESCHYLUS: Well, really, you surely deserved to be put to *death* for such audacity!

EURIPIDES: Not at all, by Apollo; I did it in the name of democracy.

DIONYSUS: I should give that topic a miss, old chap. It's not exactly the ideal theme for *you* to dilate on.

EURIPIDES: Then I taught these people here [*indicating the audience*] how to talk—

955 55 AESCHYLUS: Indeed you did! I only wish that *before* doing that, you had burst in pieces!

EURIPIDES: —and how to introduce subtle rules, and how to check that words were rightly angled; perception, vision, comprehension; twisting the hip, contriving schemes, suspecting foul dealing, thinking all round everything—

960 AESCHYLUS: Indeed you did!

EURIPIDES: —by bringing *everyday* matters on stage, things we're
50 used to, things we're familiar with, things about which I was open to *refutation*, because these people knew all about them and could have exposed any flaws in my art. I didn't distract them from serious thinking with bluster and bombast, nor did I try to terrify them by creating characters like Cynus and Memnon with bells on the cheek-plates of their horses.
965 55 You can see by looking at the disciples of both of us, his and mine. His are Phormisius and that dummy Megaenetus – beard-lance-and-trumpet types, tree-bending flesh-rippers; whereas mine are Cleitophon and that astute fellow Theramenes.
970

DIONYSUS: Theramenes? A really formidable intellect in every field! If by any chance he falls into trouble or even finds himself close by it
70 – hey presto, he's fallen *out* of trouble again, and instead of a one-spot from Chios he's a six-spot from ... Ceos!

975 EURIPIDES: *That* is the sort of thinking that I taught these people to do, by putting a rational, critical spirit into my drama. The result is that
75 now they're perceptive about everything, and understand things thoroughly; in particular, they manage their homes better than they used to, always

checking up — "how's this doing? where do I find that? who's taken this?"

980 DIONYSUS: Yes, by the gods; these days, at all events, every
Athenian, when he comes home, shouts to the servants and asks "Where's
the pot? Who's bitten off this sprat head? That year-old plate has died on
985 me! Where's yesterday's garlic head? Who's been nibbling at the olive?"
Whereas previously they used to sit there like sheer gawping dunces,
990 boobies, as daft as Melitides!

CHORUS [*to Aeschylus*]:

"These things thou seest, glorious Achilles";
and what, pray, will you say in reply to them? Only take

care

995 that your anger does not grab hold of you
and drive you off the track;
for he has made formidable accusations.
So make sure, noble one,
that you do not reply in wrath,
but first shorten sail and use
1000 only the edge of the canvas,
then, bit by bit, get more way on her,
and watch for when
you get the wind smooth and steady.

1005 CHORUS-LEADER: Now, you who were first of the Greeks
to build towering structures of majestic words and to give elegance to tragic
balderdash, have no fear, let your fountain spout!

AESCHYLUS: I am incensed at this turn of events, and vexed to
the marrow at having to engage in debate with this man. But lest he should

pretend that I am cornered and helpless — [*to Euripides*] answer me this: for what qualities ought a poet to be admired?

EURIPIDES: For skilfulness and for good counsel, and because
1010 we make people better members of their communities.

AESCHYLUS: And if you have *not* done this, but, on the contrary, have found them upright and noble and made them manifestly *worse*, what will you say you deserve to suffer?

DIONYSUS: Death; don't ask *him*!

AESCHYLUS: Well then, consider what they were like when he first took them over from me: whether they were noble six-footers, and not
1015 duty-dodging citizens, nor vulgar tricksters like they are now, nor rascals and rogues, but men who breathed spears and lances and white-crested casques and helms and greaves and fighting spirits seven oxhides thick.

DIONYSUS: This is really getting worse and worse. Making helmets now — he'll be the death of me!

EURIPIDES: And what did you *do* to teach them to be so very "noble"? [*Aeschylus remains silent.*]

1020 DIONYSUS: Answer, Aeschylus; don't be self-indulgently haughty and difficult.

AESCHYLUS: I wrote a play that was full of the spirit of war.

EURIPIDES: *What* play?

AESCHYLUS: *Seven against Thebes*. Any man who watched that would have been seized with desire to play the warrior.

DIONYSUS: Well, *that* for one is a *bad* thing you've done; you've made the Thebans more valiant in war, and for *that* you should have a beating! [*He gestures as if to strike Aeschylus.*]

1025 AESCHYLUS: Well, you had the chance to cultivate those qualities too, only you didn't set yourselves to do it. — Then after that I produced *The Persians*, and taught them always to be eager to defeat their opponents, thereby adding lustre to a splendid achievement.

DIONYSUS: I certainly enjoyed it when <they listened to> the dead Darius, and straight away the chorus clapped its hands together, like this [*doing so*], and went "iaow-oy!"

1030 AESCHYLUS: That's the sort of thing that poets should make a practice of doing. Look at how, from the very beginning, the noblest of poets have conferred benefits on us. Orpheus revealed mystic rites to us and

taught us to refrain from killings; Musaeus about oracles and cures for
 1035 sicknesses; Hesiod about working the land, the seasons for crops, times for
 ploughing; and the divine Homer, what did he get his honour and renown
 from if not from the fact that he gave good instruction about the tactics and
 virtues and arming of soldiers?

DIONYSUS: Well, whatever you say, he certainly didn't instruct
 that clumsy clot Pantacles! The other day, at any rate, when he was in a
 procession, he was trying to fasten the crest to his helmet *after* first putting
 the helmet on his head!

AESCHYLUS: Plenty of other brave men, though, I can tell you;
 1040 one of them was the heroic Lamachus. — Using that as a model, my art
 created many portraits of courage — of men like Patroclus or the lion-hearted
 Teucer — in the hope of inspiring every man in the citizen body to measure
 up to their standard every time he hears the sound of the trumpet. But by
 Zeus, I never used to create trollops like Phaedra or Stheneboea; in fact no
 one can point to any instance, in any of my compositions, of a woman in
 love.

EURIPIDES: Well, of course not; the spell of Aphrodite never ever
 1045 rested upon you!

AESCHYLUS: And never may it! She certainly sat down hard and
 heavy on you and yours, and the end of it was that she absolutely knocked
you flat!

DIONYSUS: By Zeus, you know, *that's* true all right! You wrote
 those things about other people's wives, and then you were struck with the
 same affliction yourself!

EURIPIDES [*to Aeschylus*]: And what harm, you shameless rogue,
 do my Stheneboeas do to the community?

AESCHYLUS: Because you've induced women of quality, the
 1050 spouses of men of quality, to drink hemlock, because they were seized with
 shame on account of your Bellerophons.

EURIPIDES: But that story about Phaedra was already in existence,
 wasn't it? I didn't just concoct it, did I?

AESCHYLUS: Of course it was in existence. But it's the duty of a

poet, of all people, to conceal what is wicked, and not to bring it on stage or
1055 teach it. Young children have a teacher who guides them, adults have poets.
So it's vitally necessary for us to tell them things that are good.

EURIPIDES: So if you spout words the size of Lycabettus or
mighty Parnassus, that's giving them good teaching, is it? Shouldn't your
guidance have been given in the language of human beings?

AESCHYLUS: It's absolutely imperative, you wretched fool, when
expressing great thoughts and ideas, to create words that measure up to
1060 them. And anyway, it's only natural that the demigods should use words
bigger than ours, just as they wear much more splendid clothes than we do —
something in which I set a good example that you utterly perverted.

EURIPIDES: By doing what?

AESCHYLUS: In the first place by dressing men of kingly station
in rags, so as to make people see them as objects of pity.

EURIPIDES: So did I do any harm by that?

1065 AESCHYLUS: Well, for a start, thanks to that, there isn't one rich
man who's willing to take charge of a warship. Instead he wraps himself in
rags and wails and claims to be poor.

DIONYSUS: When all the time, by Demeter, he's got a fleecy
woollen tunic underneath! And if he hoodwinks them successfully with that
tale, up he pops next moment around the fishmongers' stalls!

1070 AESCHYLUS: Then again, you've taught people the habit of chatter
and babble, which has emptied the wrestling-schools and worn down young
men's buttocks as they sit blabbering — and has encouraged the crew of the
Paralus to talk back to their officers. Why, in the old days, when I was
alive, all they knew how to do was call for their grub and shout "yo-ho"!

DIONYSUS: Yes, by Apollo — and also to fart in the face of the
1075 bottom-bench charlie, to smear a messmate with shit, and to go ashore and
nick someone's clothes. Now they dispute their orders and won't row any
more; they sail first this way and then back that way.

AESCHYLUS: And what evils is he *not* responsible for? Has he

1080 not displayed women playing the bawd, giving birth in sanctuaries of the
gods, having sex with their brothers, saying that life is not life? And then,
because of all that, our city has become filled with under-secretaries and
1085 with buffooning monkeys of politicians who are for ever deceiving the
public; and physical training is so neglected that no one's capable of running
with a torch any more.

DIONYSUS: By Zeus, no, they're not. I positively shrivelled up
1090 laughing at it at the Panathenaea, when there was this slow fellow running,
head down, pale-faced and fat, getting left behind, puffing and panting; and
1095 then at the gates the Potters' Town people hit him on the stomach, the ribs,
the flanks, the bum; and under the force of all those flat-of-the-hand blows
he burst out farting and ran away from them, blowing on his torch!

1100 CHORUS: Great is the issue, intense is the quarrel,
stern is the war that progresses!
And it's a difficult job to decide between them,
when one of them strives with great force
while the other is well able to wheel round
and make a sharp counter-thrust.
Now don't sit tight, you two,
because there are plenty more
clever ideas still to be brought into play.
1105 So whatever you've got to argue about,
say it, attack it, and dissect
both the old and the new,
and take a gamble on saying

something subtle and clever.

1110 If what you're frightened of is
that there may be some slow-wittedness
in the audience, so that they may not
understand the subtle things you say,
don't be apprehensive, because
things aren't like that any more.
They're old campaigners,
and every one of them has a book
and understands intellectual ideas;
1115 and being already well endowed by nature,
they have now been honed to the utmost acuteness.
So have no fear, but explore
everything, so far as the audience
are concerned; they're smart!

1120 EURIPIDES: Now I'm going to turn right to your openings, so that
I can begin by putting the first component of this "great" tragedian's drama
to the test. I say he was obscure in the exposition of his situations.

DIONYSUS: And which one of his openings are you going to put
to the test?

EURIPIDES: A great many of them. First of all [*to Aeschylus*]
recite me the one from the *Oresteia*.

1125 DIONYSUS: Now then, keep quiet, everyone! Recite it,
Aeschylus.

AESCHYLUS: "Underworld Hermes, watching with auspicious eye
O'er the paternal realm, be my ally and saviour,
I pray, as to this land I remigrant return."

DIONYSUS [*to Euripides*]: Have you got anything in that you can
criticize?

EURIPIDES: More than a dozen things.

1130 DIONYSUS: But the whole piece is only three lines long!

EURIPIDES: Yes, but each one of them has a score of errors.

DIONYSUS [*to Aeschylus, who is visibly fuming*]: Aeschylus, I
recommend you to keep quiet. If you don't, you'll find you stand to lose
more than just three iambic verses!

AESCHYLUS: *Me* keep quiet for *him*?

DIONYSUS: If you take my advice.

1135 EURIPIDES: For instance, he's made a blunder right at the start, of Olympian proportions.

AESCHYLUS [*to Dionysus*]: Do you see what nonsense you were talking? [*As Dionysus desperately tries to gesture him into silence*] No, I couldn't care less. [*To Euripides*] In what way do you say I blundered?

EURIPIDES: Recite it again from the beginning.

AESCHYLUS: "Underworld Hermes, watching with auspicious eye
O'er the paternal realm—"

EURIPIDES: Now it's correct, isn't it, that Orestes says this at the
1140 tomb of his dead father?

AESCHYLUS: That's quite right.

EURIPIDES: Was he saying, then, that Hermes, when his father perished "violently at a woman's hand by secret guile", was *watching with auspicious eye*?

1144-5 AESCHYLUS: No, he wasn't. He had addressed Hermes Eriounios as "underworld Hermes", and he was meaning to say that Hermes possesses this function as an inheritance from his father.

EURIPIDES: You've made an even bigger blunder than I'd envisaged; because if he's inherited his underworld function from his father—

DIONYSUS: That would make him a hereditary tomb-robber!

1150 AESCHYLUS: Dionysus, the wine you drink does not have the best of bouquets.

DIONYSUS: Recite him another bit; and [*to Euripides*] you watch out for the flaw.

AESCHYLUS: "—Be my ally and saviour,
I pray, as to this land I remigrant return."

EURIPIDES: The great Aeschylus has told us the same thing twice.

1155 DIONYSUS: How do you mean, twice?

EURIPIDES: Examine the expression, and I'll show you. "To this land," he says, "I remigrant return"; but returning is the same thing as "remigrant".

DIONYSUS: Why, yes, by Zeus; it's as if someone said to a neighbour "Lend me a kneading-trough — or, if you prefer, a hollow receptacle for making dough".

1160 AESCHYLUS: You mental bunkrapt! It isn't "the same thing" at all; it's a perfect piece of language.

DIONYSUS: How so? Explain to me how you justify that statement.

AESCHYLUS: "Returning" to a land is something a person can do who has part and lot in his native soil; he's just come back, without any
 1165 further untoward circumstance. A man who is an *exile*, on the other hand, both "returns" and "remigrates".

DIONYSUS: Very good, by Apollo! What do you say, Euripides?

EURIPIDES: I say that Orestes did not come home "remigrant", because he came secretly, without the consent of the authorities.

DIONYSUS: Very good, by Hermes! Can't say I understand what you mean, though.

1170 EURIPIDES [*to Aeschylus*]: All right, carry on with another bit. [*Aeschylus remains silent.*]

DIONYSUS: Go on, Aeschylus, hurry up and continue; and [*to Euripides*] you look out for the fault.

AESCHYLUS: "And at this burial-mound I invoke my father
 To hear and hearken."

EURIPIDES: That's *another* thing he's said twice: "to hear and hearken" — patently the same thing.

1175 DIONYSUS: He was speaking to the dead, you poor fool, and we can't get through to *them* even when we call them *three* times! Anyway, how did *you* compose your openings?

EURIPIDES: I'll show you. And if at any point I say the same thing twice, or if you detect the presence of any irrelevant padding, you're welcome to spit on me.

1180 DIONYSUS: Go on then, recite one. I absolutely *must* listen to the phraseological exactitude of your openings.

EURIPIDES: "Oedipus was a fortunate man at first—"

AESCHYLUS: No, by Zeus, he was *not*! He was born to misery.
 1185 For a start he was the man who, before his birth, Apollo said would kill his father — before he was even conceived! How can you say he was "a fortunate man at first"?

EURIPIDES: "— but then
 Became, contrariwise, the wretchedest of mortals."

AESCHYLUS: Not "became", by Zeus; why, he never *stopped* being that! How can you say he did? When as soon as he was born, they
 1190 put him in a broken pot and left him in the open in winter-time, to make sure he never grew up to become his father's murderer; then he went traipsing, on

two swollen feet, to Polybus; then, when he was a young man, he married an
 1195 old woman, and on top of that she was his own mother; then he blinded
 himself.

DIONYSUS: A happy man indeed — that is *if* he also held a
 command together with Erasinides!

EURIPIDES: You're talking nonsense. I write *good* openings.

AESCHYLUS: Now look here, I'm not going to scratch and scrape
 at every single expression of yours, word by word; instead, with the gods'
 1200 help, I'll destroy all your openings by means of an oil-flask.

EURIPIDES: *You'll* destroy *my* openings with an *oil-flask*?

AESCHYLUS: Just one of them. You see, the way you compose,
 one can fit anything like that into your iambs — it can be "bit of fleece" or
 "oil-flask" or "little bag". I'll prove it right away.

1205 EURIPIDES: Oh, you'll prove it, will you?

AESCHYLUS: Yes, I will.

EURIPIDES: All right then, I'd better recite one.

"Aegyptus, as the story is most widely told,
 Together with his fifty sons, by sailor's oar
 To Argos voyaged, and——"

AESCHYLUS: —mislaid his oil-flask.

DIONYSUS: What *is* this "oil-flask"? I wish it would go to blazes!
 1210 Recite him another opening, so I can see again.

EURIPIDES: "Dionysus, who arrayed with ritual wands and
 fawnskins
 Amid the pine-torch flames on Mount Parnassus'
 heights
 Leaps in the sacred dance——"

AESCHYLUS: —mislaid his oil-flask.

DIONYSUS: Alack, we are struck again by that oil-flask!

1215 EURIPIDES: It's not going to bother me. *This* is an opening that he
 won't be able to attach an oil-flask to.

"There is no man possessed of perfect happiness:
 Either he's nobly born but lacks the means to live,
 Or low-born, though he has——"

AESCHYLUS: —mislaid his oil-flask.

1220 DIONYSUS: Euripides!

EURIPIDES: Yes, what is it?

DIONYSUS: I recommend you to lower your yard; this oil-flask is going to blow up pretty strong!

EURIPIDES: On the contrary, by Demeter, I'm not going to worry about it at all. This time it's going to be knocked right out of his hand!

DIONYSUS: Go on then, recite another, and keep away from the flask.

1225 EURIPIDES: "Cadmus, the offspring of Agenor, long ago
Left Sidon's city, and—"

AESCHYLUS: —mislaid his oil-flask.

DIONYSUS: My dear fellow, do buy the oil-flask off him, to stop him chewing up all our openings.

EURIPIDES: You what? *Me* buy it off *him*?

DIONYSUS: If you take my advice.

1230 EURIPIDES: No, I won't, because I've got plenty of openings to recite where he won't be able to attach an oil-flask.

"Pelops, the son of Tantalus, to Pisa came
With his swift horses, and—"

AESCHYLUS: —mislaid his oil-flask.

1235 DIONYSUS: You see? he's attached that oil-flask yet again. Even now, old chap, I implore you, shell out for it; you'll get it for an obol, and it's a really first-class article.

EURIPIDES: No, no, I won't just yet; I've still got lots.
"Once Oeneus from his land—"

AESCHYLUS: —mislaid his oil-flask.

1240 EURIPIDES: Let me at least finish a whole line first!
"Once Oeneus from his land a plenteous harvest

reaped,
And, offering the first-fruits—"

AESCHYLUS: —mislaid his oil-flask.

DIONYSUS: When he was in the middle of sacrificing? Who can have nicked it?

EURIPIDES: Never mind that, my good fellow. Let him find an answer to *this*!

"Zeus, as by Truth the tale is told—"

1245 DIONYSUS: You'll be the death of me! He'll just come in with "mis-laid his oil-flask". That oil-flask just grows on your openings the way styes grow on people's eyes. For heaven's sake turn your attention to his lyrics.

1250 EURIPIDES: All right then, I've got material with which I shall prove that he's a bad lyric writer and that what he composed was always the same thing.

CHORUS: Whatever is going to happen now?

[*Revised script*]

For I just can't work out
what criticism he can be
 going to make
 1254-6 of the man who has composed
 more and finer lyrics
 than anyone else to this day.

[*Original script*]

For I wonder how
 on earth he is going to
 criticize
 this Bacchic lord,
 1260 and I am afraid for him.

1261 EURIPIDES [*sarcastically*]: Oh, *very* marvellous lyrics *indeed!* We shall see presently. I'm going to cut down all his lyrics to a single measure.

DIONYSUS: All right, and *I'm* going to take some pebbles and count them. [*He picks up a few pebbles from the ground.*]

[*The piper plays a short introduction to Euripides' song.*]

EURIPIDES [*to pipe accompaniment*]:

Phthian Achilles, O why, when thou hearest the sound of
 men dying —

1265 Ai, ai — stricken, advancest thou not to their succour?

We, the folk of the lake-shore, do honour to Hermes our
 forebear —

Ai, ai — stricken, advancest thou not to their succour?

DIONYSUS [*setting two pebbles aside*]: That's two strikes against you, Aeschylus.

1270 EURIPIDES:

O most glorious of the Achaeans, great ruler and son of
 Atreus, mark what I tell thee —

Ai, ai — stricken, advancest thou not to their succour?

DIONYSUS [*setting aside a third pebble*]: Aeschylus, that's your third strike.

EURIPIDES:

Keep ye silence: the Bee-wards approach, to open Artemis' temple —

1275

Ai, ai — stricken, advancest thou not to their succour?

Strong am I yet to declare that sign that sped men on their journey —

Ai, ai — stricken, advancest thou not to their succour?

1280

DIONYSUS: Lord Zeus, what an orgy of striking! [*Making as if to depart*] As far as I'm concerned, I want to go to the bath-house; all these strokes have given me swellings in the ... kidneys.

EURIPIDES: Not before you've heard another series of songs, made out of lyre tunes.

DIONYSUS: All right then, carry on, but don't insert any strikes.

EURIPIDES [*strumming an imaginary accompaniment on an imaginary lyre*]:

1285

How two Achaean kings united in power, of Hellas' young manhood

(phlattohrattophlattohrat)

Sphinx, the bitch that presided o'er days of ill-fortune, were sped with

(phlattohrattophlattohrat)

spear and avenging hand by a bird of martial omen

1290

(phlattohrattophlattohrat)

which handed them over to be the brutal air-roaming hounds' prey

(phlattohrattophlattohrat)

and those who gathered around Ajax

1295

(phlattohrattophlattohrat).

DIONYSUS [*to Aeschylus*]: What's all this "phlattohrat"? Did you pick up these rope-winders' ditties from Marathon, or where?

1300

AESCHYLUS: What matters is that *I* took them from a good source for a good purpose — namely so as not to be seen to be culling the same "sacred meads of the Muses" as Phrynichus did. But *this* fellow collects his honey from any old source — prostitutes' songs, drinking-songs by Meletus, pipe-tunes and dirges and dances from Caria. I'll very soon make it plain. [*Turning towards the stage-house*] Bring me my lyre, someone — but on second thoughts, who needs a lyre for this job? Where's

1305

that girl who plays percussion with broken bits of pot? [*Calling within*]
Come here, Muse of Euripides; you're the proper accompaniment for these
songs to be sung to.

[*The "Muse of Euripides" comes out; she is an old and ugly woman, heavily made up, and dressed like a prostitute. She holds a pair of potsherds, which she will clash together to provide an accompaniment to the ensuing songs.*]

DIONYSUS: This Muse used to be — well, she certainly wasn't part
of the Lesbian tradition!

AESCHYLUS [*singing to potsherd accompaniment*]:

1309 Ye halcyons who jabber
-10 amid the ever-flowing waves of the sea,
 moistening and bedewing the skin
 of your wings with its watery drops—
 and ye spiders in the nooks under the roof
 who wi-i-i-i-ind with your fingers
1315 the loomstretched bobbinthread
 whereon the tuneful shuttle plies its art—
 where the pipe-loving dolphin leaped
 at the prows with their deep-blue rams
 to the oracle and the race-track,
1320 bright joy of the vine's blossom,
 tendril of the grape that banishes toil and trouble—
 fling your arms around me, baby!

[*The "Muse" rushes to Dionysus and embraces him.*]

AESCHYLUS [*didactically*]:

Do you observe that foot?

DIONYSUS [*looking down at the "Muse's" feet*]:

I do.

AESCHYLUS [*as before*]:

And how about that one? Do you see it?

DIONYSUS [*as before*]:

I do.

1325

AESCHYLUS [*rounding on Euripides*]:

When *that's* the sort of stuff you compose,
you have the audacity to criticize *my* lyrics,
you who manoeuvre your parts
in the Twelve Tricks of Cyrene?

[*As Aeschylus finishes singing, the "Muse of Euripides" departs.*]

1330 So much for your choral lyrics. Now I also want to examine the style of
your solo arias.

[*Singing again*]

O black-lit darkness of Night,
what direful dream is this
thou sendest me, come forth from obscure Hades
with a life that is no life,
1335 a child of black Night,
a fearsome sight to make one shudder,
in black corpse-vestment,
with murderous murderous gaze
and with big claws?

Ye, my attendants, kindle a lamp,
fetch river-dew in buckets and heat the water,
1340 that I may wash away the god-sent dream.

O god of the sea!

It's happened! Ho, my housemates,
behold these wonders! My cockerel—

Glyce has snatched it and made off with it!

Ye Nymphs of the mountains,

1345 and you, Mania, help me!

I, wretched me,

was just busy with my work,

wi-i-i-inding with my hands

a spindle full of flax

1350 to make a skein, in order

to take it before dawn

to the Agora and sell it—

and he flew, he flew, up to the empyrean on the ever-so-

light tips of his wings,

leaving to me grief, O grief,

and tears, O tears, from my eyes

1355 I shed, I shed, miserable that I am.
 Now, ye Cretans, children of Ida,
 take your bows and come to my aid,
 foot it featly and surround her house;
 and together with you let the fair maid Dictynna
 with her bitch-pups
 1360 traverse every part of her halls;
 and thou, O Hecate, daughter of Zeus,
 brandishing in thy hands the piercing flame
 of thy twin torches, light my way to Glyce's,
 so I can go in and mount a search of the place!

DIONYSUS: Stop the songs now, both of you.

1365 AESCHYLUS: I've had enough too. I want to take him to the
 weighing scales; that's the only thing that will really put our poetry to the
 proof. The weight of our words will be the decisive test between us.

DIONYSUS [*going over to the scales*]: Come here then — if, that is,
 I've really got to go as far as this, weighing the art of poets as if I were
 selling cheese.

1370 CHORUS: These great masters spare no pains!
 Here is yet another marvel,
 novel and utterly extraordinary;
 who else could have thought of the idea?
 1374-5 Why, gosh, even if I'd been told about it
 by some Tom, Dick or Harry,
 I wouldn't have believed him — I'd have thought
 that what he was saying was poppycock!

DIONYSUS: Come on then, you two, stand beside the two scale-
 pans—

AESCHYLUS and EURIPIDES [*taking their positions as
 instructed*]: There you are.

1380 DIONYSUS: And take hold of them, and each of you speak his
 words, and don't let go till I tell you by saying "cuckoo".

AESCHYLUS and EURIPIDES [*taking hold of the scale-pans*]:
 Holding!

DIONYSUS: Now speak your lines into the scales.

EURIPIDES: "Would that the vessel *Argo* ne'er had flown
between—"

AESCHYLUS: "Spercheius river, and ye haunts where cattle
graze—"

DIONYSUS: Cuckoo!

AESCHYLUS and EURIPIDES [*letting go of the pans*]: Released!

[*Aeschylus' pan goes down.*]

1385

DIONYSUS: Why, this one's side is going *right* down!

EURIPIDES: What on earth's the reason for that?

DIONYSUS: What's the reason? He put in a river, making his line wet like a wool-seller wetting his wool, while *you* put in a line that flew like a bird.

EURIPIDES: Well, let him say another one, and put it in the scales against me:

1390

DIONYSUS: All right, take hold again.

AESCHYLUS and EURIPIDES [*doing so*]: There you are.

DIONYSUS [*to Euripides*]: Speak.

EURIPIDES: "Persuasion hath no temple but the spoken word."

AESCHYLUS: "For Death, alone of all the gods, desires no gifts."

DIONYSUS: Let go!

AESCHYLUS and EURIPIDES: Released!

DIONYSUS: Why, his is going down *again*! It's because he put in Death, a most weighty evil.

1395

EURIPIDES: But I put in Persuasion, and employed the word with perfect aptness.

DIONYSUS: Persuasion is "a lightweight thing that lacks good sense". Look for something else this time, a heavyweight sort of thing, something that'll pull your scale down, something big and strong.

EURIPIDES [*to himself*]: Now where have I got something of that kind? where now?

1400

DIONYSUS: I'll tell you: "Achilles cast" — a pair of one-spots and a four. Now speak, please, both of you, because this is your last weighing.
[*Euripides and Aeschylus take hold of the scales again.*]

EURIPIDES: "He took in his right hand his iron-weighted haft—"

AESCHYLUS: "For chariot upon chariot and dead corpse on
corpse—"

[*For the third time Aeschylus' pan goes down.*]

DIONYSUS [*to Euripides*]: He's outwitted you yet again!

EURIPIDES: How did he manage it?

1405 DIONYSUS: He put in *two* chariots and *two* corpses, too much even for a hundred Egyptians to lift up.

AESCHYLUS: Yes, and I'll have no more line-by-line stuff now! Let *him* climb on to the scales and sit there — himself, his children, his wife,
1410 Cephisophon, and he can take his books with him too — and all I need do is recite just two lines of my verse!

DIONYSUS [*turning to Pluto*]: The two men are my friends, and I'm not going to judge between them, because I don't want to incur the enmity of either. One of them I consider to be a really great poet, and the other — I enjoy!

PLUTO [*rising and coming forward*]: In that case you'll have completely failed to achieve what you came here for.

1415 DIONYSUS: And if I do make a decision?

PLUTO: Then you can leave with one of them, whichever one you choose, so you won't have come here for nothing.

DIONYSUS: Blessings on you! Now then [*turning to the two poets*], let me explain to you. I came down here for a poet; and why? So
1420 that the City may survive and go on holding her choral festivals. So whichever of you is going to give some good advice to the City, that is the one that I think I'll be taking back with me. First of all, then, what opinion does each of you have about Alcibiades? The City is in travail about him.

AESCHYLUS: And what's the state of *its* opinion about him?

1425 DIONYSUS: What's its state? It yearns for him — it hates him — and it wants to have him. So tell me, both of you, what you think of him.

EURIPIDES: I hate the kind of citizen who'll prove to be
Slow to assist his country, swift to harm her greatly,
For his own good astute, but useless for the City's.

1430 DIONYSUS: Very good, by Poseidon! [*To Aeschylus*] And what view do *you* hold?

AESCHYLUS:

[*Revised script?*]

It is not good to rear a
lion's whelp within

Your city's bounds; but if you do, and he attains
Maturity, then to his humours minister!

[*Original script?*]

'Tis best by far to nurture up
no lion within

1435 DIONYSUS: By Zeus the Saviour, I can't make up my mind. One of them
has spoken intelligently and the other intelligibly! Just give me one more
suggestion each about a way you can see for the City to secure her survival.

[*Original script*]

1437 EURIPIDES: If someone equipped Cleocritus with a pair of wings
in the shape of Cinesias, and made him rise aloft on the breezes over the
sea's flat expanses—

DIONYSUS: It would look ridiculous. What's the point of it?

1440 EURIPIDES: If they carried vinegar-cruets, and then when they
1441 were fighting a naval battle, they sprayed it in the enemy's eyes.

1451 DIONYSUS: Splendid, you Palamedes, you intellectual genius!
Did you think of that yourself, or was it Cephisophon?

1453 EURIPIDES: Myself entirely, but the vinegar-cruets were
Cephisophon's idea.

[*Revised script*]

1442 EURIPIDES: I know one, and I want to tell you it.

DIONYSUS: Go on.

EURIPIDES: When we regard as trustworthy what is now
untrusted, and as untrustworthy what is presently trusted.

1445 DIONYSUS: How do you mean? I don't understand. Try to speak
less cleverly and more clearly.

EURIPIDES: If we were to withdraw our trust from those among
the citizens whom we currently trust, and make use of those whom we make
no use of now—

DIONYSUS: Then we'd get through safely?

EURIPIDES: Yes, if we're having no luck now with the present lot,
1450 how could we possibly *not* be all right if we did the opposite?

1454 DIONYSUS [*to Aeschylus*]: And what about you? What do you say?

1455 AESCHYLUS: Well, first tell me about the City, who does she honour? Is it the honest?

DIONYSUS: What on earth do you mean?! She hates them most bitterly.

AESCHYLUS: Then she takes pleasure in the villains?

DIONYSUS: No, she doesn't; she makes use of them because she has no choice.

AESCHYLUS: So how can one save a city like that, which won't accept either a smart cloak or a goatskin mantle?

1460 DIONYSUS: You'd better find a way, if you want to rise to earth again.

AESCHYLUS: I'll tell you up there, but I don't want to do so down here.

DIONYSUS: Oh, no, you don't; you'll send up your blessings from *here*.

AESCHYLUS: When they regard the enemy's land as their own;
1465 their own as the enemy's; the fleet as their wealth; and their wealth as poverty.

DIONYSUS: That's fine, except that Mr. Juryman gobbles it all up all by himself!

PLUTO: Make a decision, please.

DIONYSUS [*to the contestants*]: This shall be my decision between you: "him whom my soul doth wish to choose, him will I choose."

1469-70 EURIPIDES: Remember the gods when you choose your friends — the gods by whom you swore that you would take me back home!

DIONYSUS: "'Twas but my tongue that swore"; I'm choosing Aeschylus.

EURIPIDES: What ever have you done, you filthy villain?

DIONYSUS: Me? I've judged Aeschylus the winner. Why shouldn't I?

EURIPIDES: How can you look me in the face after doing such an utterly shameful thing?

1475 DIONYSUS: "What's shameful, if it seem not so to those" out there
[*indicating the audience*]?

EURIPIDES: You heartless rogue, will you really stand by and let me ... stay dead?

DIONYSUS: "Who knows if life is truly death" – and dying is dining, and sleep is a fleecy blanket?

[*At this, Euripides collapses on to the wheeled platform (from which the chairs have already been removed); the platform is then withdrawn into the stage-house.*]

PLUTO: Well, Dionysus, come inside now, both of you.

DIONYSUS: Why?

1480 PLUTO: So that I can entertain you before your departure.

DIONYSUS: That's a very good idea; I'm certainly not complaining about it!

[*Pluto leads Dionysus and Aeschylus inside. During the ensuing song the scales are taken away.*]

CHORUS: Happy is the man who has
an astute precision mind.

1485 One can learn this truth by many examples:
thus this man, who has been judged to have good
sense,

will be going back home again,
bringing blessings to his fellow-citizens
and blessings to his own
friends and relations
because he is a man of sagacity.

1490 So it isn't stylish to sit
beside Socrates and blabber away,
discarding artistry
and ignoring the most important things
about the tragedian's craft.

1495 To spend one's time fecklessly
on pretentious talk
and nit-picking humbug
is to act like a lunatic.

[*Pluto comes out again, accompanied by Persephone, Aeschylus, Dionysus and Xanthias; all are wearing festive garlands.*]

1500 PLUTO: All right then, Aeschylus, off you go, and good luck to you. Save our City with your good counsels, and educate the foolish folk there, many as they are; and take this [*handing a sword to Xanthias, who is*
1505 *acting as Aeschylus' attendant*] and give it to Cleophon, and these [*several halters*] to the Revenue Board and also to Myrmex and Nicomachus, and this [*a pestle and mortar*] to Archenomus, and tell them to come quickly
1510 here to me and not waste time about it; because if they *don't* come quickly, then, by Apollo, *I'll* tattoo them, put them in fetters, and send them down under ground, pronto, along with Adeimantus son of Leucolophus!

1515 AESCHYLUS: I'll do as you ask. And would you hand over my chair to Sophocles to look after and keep safe, in case I ever come back
1520 here; because I consider him to rank second to me in the art. And remember to make sure that that rogue, that liar, that buffoon, *never* sits down on my chair, not even by accident.

PLUTO [*to the chorus, as attendants distribute torches to them*]:
1525 Now will you please display your sacred torches in this man's honour, and also escort him on his way, hymning his praises with his own lyrics and melodies.

[*Aeschylus, Dionysus and Xanthias begin to move off, followed by the chorus, and watched from near the stage-house door by Pluto and Persephone. As they go, the chorus sing the following lines.*]

1530 CHORUS: First of all, grant a good and safe journey to the
departing poet
as he rises to the light, you gods beneath the earth,
and to the City give good ideas that will bring great
blessings.
For thus we may truly be rid of great sufferings
and of terrible encounters in arms; and let Cleophon,
and any other of that lot who wants to, fight on their
native soil!