

Aristophanes  
ACHARNIANS  
425 BC

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Introductory Note

In numbering the lines in the following English text, the translator has normally included a short indented line with the short line immediately above it, so that two or three partial lines count as a single line in the reckoning. The line numbers in square brackets refer to the Greek text; line numbers without brackets refer to the English text.

During the play the characters at times use quotations from lost plays (of Euripides). These quotations are between single quotation marks (e.g., 'Quotation from lost play').

*Acharnians* was first performed in Athens in 425 BC. The production won first prize at the Lenaian festival in honour of the god Dionysus. At that time Athens and its allies had been at war with Sparta and its allies for five years.

# ACHARNIANS

## Dramatis Personae

### Speaking Roles

DICAEOPOLIS, a middle-aged Athenian farmer.  
HERALD.  
AMPHITHEUS, an immortal.  
AMBASSADORS, Athenians returning from Persia.  
PSEUDOARTABAS, the Persian King's Eye.  
THEORUS, a politician.  
CHORUS, elderly Athenians from Acharnae.  
DAUGHTER OF DICAEOPOLIS.  
SLAVE, servant of Euripides.  
EURIPIDES, a writer of tragedies.  
LAMACHUS, an army general.  
A MEGARIAN, a citizen of Megara.  
TWO YOUNG GIRLS, daughters of the Megarian.  
AN INFORMER.  
A BOEOTIAN, a man from Boeotia.  
NICARCHUS, an informer.  
HERALD A.  
HERALD B.  
SLAVE OF LAMACHUS.  
DERCETES, an unfortunate farmer.  
A WEDDING GUEST.

### Non-Speaking Roles

ASSEMBLY OF MAGISTRATES.  
SCYTHIAN ARCHERS.  
AMBASSADORS.  
EUNUCHS.  
ODOMANTIAN SOLDIERS.  
WIFE OF DICAEOPOLIS.  
PIPE MUSICIANS.  
ISMENIAS, slave of the Boeotian.  
DANCING GIRLS, SLAVES, ATTENDANTS.

*[The scene is the Pnyx hill in Athens, where Athenians meet for political discussions and decisions. In the background are the front doors of three houses belonging to Euripides, Dicaeopolis, and Lamachus. The foreground, below the stage is the meeting place for the governing assembly of Athenian citizens. There are some benches where the Magistrates will sit. Dicaeopolis is alone on stage, restlessly waiting for the Assembly to begin.]*

## ACHARNIANS

### DICAEOPOLIS<sup>1</sup>

So many things are chewing at my heart!  
I have few pleasures in my life—just four,  
to be precise. My troubles are numberless,  
like grains of sand lying piled up in heaps.  
Let me see now . . . which of these pleasures  
has been a real delight? Ah yes, I know—  
my heart was truly happy when Cleon  
was forced to cough up that five-talent fine.  
How joyful I felt then, and I love the Knights  
for making that man pay.<sup>2</sup> What a grand day  
that was for Greece! But then there was that time  
I had to suffer tragic disappointment—  
I was eager for a play by Aeschylus, [10]  
when I heard a herald shout “Theognis,  
lead out your chorus!”<sup>3</sup> You can imagine  
how this change made me sick at heart. But then,  
after Moschus played, what delight I felt  
when Dexitheus entered the competition,  
playing and singing Boeotian melodies!<sup>4</sup>  
Then this year, I twisted my neck around 20  
and almost killed myself watching Chaeris  
sneaking in to play shrill music on his flute.<sup>5</sup>  
But since the time I first began to wash,  
never has the dust stung my eyes so much,  
as it does now, whenever Athens holds  
a regular assembly, which should begin  
early in the morning. But now the Pnyx,  
the place where we all meet, is deserted. [20]  
The city folk are in the marketplace,  
gossiping as they wander here and there, 30  
avoiding the red-ochre-covered rope.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The name Dicaeopolis means “a citizen who is just.”

<sup>2</sup>Cleon was an important pro-war political figure in Athens (though no favourite of Aristophanes). He had accepted a bribe of five talents from some of Athens’s allies, on condition that he would get the tribute they had to pay to Athens reduced. The Knights, a group of aristocratic young men, forced him to pay back the money. One talent was a considerable sum of money.

<sup>3</sup>Aeschylus was a major Athenian tragic dramatist, whose plays continued to be performed after his death (in 455 BC). Theognis was, by contrast, an inferior poet. Dicaeopolis’s approval of Aeschylus is an indication of his traditional conservative values.

<sup>4</sup>Moschus was a musician whom Aristophanes frequently ridicules.

<sup>5</sup>Chaeris was an inferior musician, often satirized by Aristophanes.

<sup>6</sup>The Pnyx was a hill where the assemblies were held. In the staging of the play that would be the orchestra, the area in front of and below the main stage, which Dicaeopolis is looking at and perhaps pointing to. A rope covered with red ocre dye was used to round up citizens who were late for the assembly. The dye on their clothes would indicate their tardiness and lead to a fine.

## ACHARNIANS

The magistrates are not even here yet—  
 they will be late, and when they do arrive,  
 they'll start pushing and punching one another  
 for a front row seat. You have no idea—  
 they tumble down like a cascading river!  
 They have no wish to think about a truce.  
 O this city, this Athens! I am always  
 the very first to get to the assembly  
 and find a seat. But then, feeling alone, 40  
 with not a thing to do, I groan and yawn, [30]  
 stretch, and fart. I draw figures in the dust,  
 pull out my nose hairs, add up all my debts.  
 I dream of countryside and long for peace.<sup>7</sup>  
 I hate city life and yearn for my own farm,  
 which never said I had to purchase charcoal,  
 or vinegar or olive oil. In fact,  
 the verb “to purchase” was quite unknown there—  
 I could produce whatever I might want,  
 without the need to purchase anything. 50  
 So now my mind's made up—I've come here  
 fully prepared to shout and interrupt  
 and criticize the speakers if they talk  
 of anything except the need for peace.  
 But here come the magistrates . . .

*[Enter the Magistrates in confused mass, just as Dicaeopolis describes them in line 33 ff above, with a great deal of physical commotion, as they seek to get the best front seats in the orchestra.]*

About time, too— [40]

right on midday! Did I not predict this?  
 It's just as I said—each man is scrambling,  
 pushing and punching for a front-row seat.

*[A Herald tries to sort out the confusion.]*

HERALD

Come on, move along to the front . . . that's it!  
 To the front where you can find yourself a seat— 60  
 right here, in the consecrated section!<sup>8</sup>

*[Enter Amphytheus, in a hurry.]*

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<sup>7</sup>Because the Spartan army periodically invaded Athenian territory, the country people had moved into Athens, where they were safely behind the city walls.

<sup>8</sup>The “consecrated section” was an area of the best seating, which had previously been sprinkled with pig's blood in honour of the goddess Ceres.

## ACHARNIANS

AMPHITHEUS [*to Dicaeopolis*]  
Has anyone spoken yet?

HERALD  
Who is it  
that wishes to address the assembly?

AMPHITHEUS  
I do.

HERALD  
Who might you be?

AMPHITHEUS  
I am godly Amphitheus!<sup>9</sup>

HERALD  
You are not a man?

AMPHITHEUS  
No! I am an immortal.  
Amphitheus was the son of Demeter  
and Triptolemos; from him was born  
Celeus who married Phaenerete,  
my grandmother, who gave birth to Lucinus, [50]  
and I was born from him, and that makes me 70  
immortal.<sup>10</sup> And to me alone the gods  
have assigned the task of making a truce  
with the Lacedaemonians.<sup>11</sup> But, gentlemen,  
though I'm immortal, I have no money  
for the trip, and the city magistrates  
will not give me any.

HERALD [*shouting*]  
Guards!<sup>12</sup>

[*Two guards come to get Amphitheus out of the assembly.*]

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<sup>9</sup>I have added the word "godly" in order to clarify the dialogue which follows. The name Amphitheus means "from gods on both sides." That hint provokes the Herald to ask if he is a mortal man. Some translators change Amphitheus's name to make that clear (e.g., Godson, or Godly, and so on). Alternatively, Amphitheus could be so oddly dressed that the Herald does not know whether he is looking at a man or woman and thus asks "Are you not a man?" In that case, the word "godly" would be unnecessary.

<sup>10</sup>Phaenerete was the name of Socrates's mother; she was said to be a midwife. Paley suggests that Aristophanes may be making fun of Socrates here (especially his low birth).

<sup>11</sup>Lacedaimonian is an alternative word for Spartan.

<sup>12</sup>The guards, who serve as the city police in Athens, were called "Archers."

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AMPHITHEUS

O Triptolemos and Celeus,  
are you abandoning me?

DICAEOPOLIS [*protesting*]

                    You magistrates,  
you are violating this assembly  
by having this man hauled forcibly away.  
He wishes to arrange a truce for us  
and do away with war.

80

HERALD

Sit down and shut up!

DICAEOPOLIS

No, by Apollo, I will not sit down—  
not unless you are prepared to move  
a motion about brokering a peace.

[60]

HERALD [*announcing a new arrival*]

The ambassadors from the Great King!<sup>13</sup>

*[Enter the Ambassadors returning from the Persian court. They and their group are dressed very exotically.]*

DICAEOPOLIS

What kind of Great King? I am so fed up  
with these ambassadors and their peacocks  
and pretentious mumbo-jumbo!

HERALD

Silence!

DICAEOPOLIS

Good heavens! . . . By Ecbatana, what costumes!<sup>14</sup>

AMBASSADOR

You sent us to the Great King on a wage  
of two drachmas per day. And that took place  
when Euthymenes was chief magistrate.<sup>15</sup>

90

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<sup>13</sup>The Great King was the emperor of Persia. The Greek does not have the word “Great” here, but it does a few lines further on.

<sup>14</sup>Ecbatana, a city in western Persia, was the summer residence of the Great King.

<sup>15</sup>Paley notes that a wage of two drachmas a day was not very much money. However, Euthymenes was the chief magistrate (or Archon) eleven years earlier. Thus the amount of money the Ambassador is claiming is significant.

## ACHARNIANS

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah yes, those poor drachmas.

AMBASSADOR

I can tell you  
it was exhausting work roaming around  
the plains of Cayster, sheltered from the sun,  
lying on soft cushions in our carriages— [70]  
soul-destroying work!

DICAEOPOLIS [*aside*]

While I had it easy  
lying in the straw on our battlements.<sup>16</sup>

AMBASSADOR

When we were entertained as welcome guests,  
they compelled us to drink sweet unmixed wine 100  
out of crystal goblets inlaid with gold.<sup>17</sup>

DICAEOPOLIS [*aside*]

O city of Cranaus, do you not see  
how these ambassadors are mocking you?<sup>18</sup>

AMBASSADOR

The only people these barbarians  
consider men are those ones strong enough  
to eat enormous meals and drink like fish.

DICAEOPOLIS [*aside*]

Here in Athens we only value men  
who suck our cocks or take it up the bum.

AMBASSADOR

In the fourth year we reached the Great King's court. [80]  
But he had left, taking his army with him, 110  
searching for somewhere he could ease his bowels.  
He spent eight months in the golden mountains,  
shitting himself to his royal heart's content.

DICAEOPOLIS

How long did it take to heal his arse hole?

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<sup>16</sup>Dicaeopolis is referring to his military service defending Athens when the Spartan army invaded Attica (the area around Athens).

<sup>17</sup>The ancient Greeks normally drank wine mixed with water. Unmixed wine would be an uncommon luxury.

<sup>18</sup>Cranaus, a legendary figure, was traditionally the second king of Athens.

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AMBASSADOR

One full moon. Then he returned to his palace,  
where he entertained us. He served an ox  
roasted in an oven—the whole thing!

DICAEOPOLIS

What rubbish!  
Whoever saw an ox baked in an oven!

AMBASSADOR

It's true! I swear by the gods! He also served  
a bird three times larger than Cleonymus—  
it was called a blowhard.<sup>19</sup>

120

DICAEOPOLIS

To think we pay you  
two drachmas a day for all this horseshit!

[90]

AMBASSADOR

We have come back, this time bringing with us  
Pseudartabas, the Great King's Eye.<sup>20</sup>

DICAEOPOLIS

If only  
a crow would peck out his eye—and yours, too,  
you amb-ASS-ador!

HERALD [*announcing the arrival of Pseudartabas*]  
The Great King's Eye!

[*Enter Pseudartabas.*]<sup>21</sup>

DICAEOPOLIS [*amazed at Pseudartabas's appearance*]  
O lord Herakles!

[*Dicaeopolis comes closer to Pseudartabas in order to inspect the single eye in the mask.*]

By the gods, with that eye  
you look like the prow on a ship of war!<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Cleonymus was an Athenian general who was apparently very tall. He is a frequent satiric target of Arisophanes.

<sup>20</sup>The Great King's Eye was a senior Persian official who reported back to the king anything he thought was important for the well being of the Persian empire.

<sup>21</sup>It is clear that this actor wears a distinctive comic mask with one huge (and distorted?) eye in the middle of his face, like a cyclops.

<sup>22</sup>Ships often had eyes painted on the sides near the front of the vessel.



## ACHARNIANS

Are you rounding a headland, seeking port?  
You have a leather flap around your eye  
and hanging down below it . . .<sup>23</sup> 130

AMBASSADOR [*interrupting*]  
Come on then,  
Pseudartabas, tell him the message  
the Great King told you to deliver  
to the Athenians, when he sent you back.

PSEUDARTABAS [*speaking gibberish, pretending to be Persian*]  
Jartaman exarxan apissona satra. [100]

AMBASSADOR  
Do you understand what he is saying?

DICAEOPOLIS  
No, by Apollo, I haven't a clue.

AMBASSADOR [*to the Magistrates*]  
He says that the Great King will send you gold.

[*Turning to Pseudartabas*]  
Speak louder and more clearly about the gold.

PSEUDARTABAS  
Gold for loose-arsed Ionian? No way! 140

DICAEOPOLIS  
Ah the damned wretch! That was clear enough.

AMBASSADOR  
Why? What is he saying?

DICAEOPOLIS  
He says Ionians  
are all loose-arsed buggers if they expect  
to get gifts of gold from the barbarians.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>This detail is continuing the comparison of the King's Eye to a ship. The leather flap covered the holes where the oars were situated in order to keep water out of the ship.

<sup>24</sup>The term "barbarian" refers to those peoples who do not speak Greek. The word *Ionians* refers to the Athenians here. The Persians called all Greeks *Ionians*.

## ACHARNIANS

AMBASSADOR

No, no! He talks of bars of gold!<sup>25</sup>

DICAEOPOLIS

What bars?

You're a complete bullshitter! Go away!

Let me question this fellow by myself.

[110]

*[Dicaeopolis turns towards Pseudartabas.]*

Come now, answer my questions clearly,

with your master here as witness, or else

I'll dip you in purple dye from Sardis.<sup>26</sup>

150

Will the Great King be sending us some gold?

*[Pseudartabas shakes his head to indicate a negative answer.]*

So these ambassadors are lying to us?

*[Pseudartabas nods his head in an affirmative answer.]*

The gestures these men make are very Greek.

I'll bet they turn out to be Athenians.

Hang on, I recognize one of these eunuchs—

it's that son of Silyrtius, Cleisthenes,

the man who shaves his hot, hairy arse hole.<sup>27</sup>

You monkey, did you come here all dressed up,

[120]

trying to convince us you were a eunuch,

with a great beard like that?<sup>28</sup> And who is this?

160

It's Straton, I presume.

HERALD

Silence! Be seated!

The Council invites the Great King's Eye

to a welcome in the Prytaneum.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>The Greek text uses the term *medimni* (a Persian measure with no exact equivalent in English) to indicate the amount of gold. I have substituted the word *bars*.

<sup>26</sup>This threat presumably means that he will beat Pseudartabas so badly that his entire body will be purple with bruises. Sardis, a town in Asia Minor, was famous for its purple dyes.

<sup>27</sup>Cleisthenes was a very effeminate Athenian. He is one of Aristophanes's favourite satiric targets. Straton was an effeminate contemporary of Cleisthenes.

<sup>28</sup>Eunuchs by reputation were clean shaven. Hence, having a beard would defeat the purpose of pretending to be one.

<sup>29</sup>The Prytaneum was the building in which the governing Council entertained important dignitaries at public expense.

## ACHARNIANS

*[The Ambassadors, Pseudartabas, Cleisthenes, Straton, and their attendants leave for the Prytaneum, so that Dicaeopolis, Amphitheus, and the Magistrates are the only ones left.]*

DICAEOPOLIS *[to the audience]*

This is enough to make one kill oneself!  
I have to hang around here, wasting time,  
while the Council always throws open the doors  
of the Prytaneum for scoundrels like that.  
But I am going to act—to carry out  
something grand and dangerous. Where is he,  
that man Amphitheus?

AMPHITHEUS

I'm over here!

170

DICAEOPOLIS

Take these eight drachmas and go to Sparta—  
draw up a peace treaty with the Lacedaemonians  
just for me, my children, and my wife.

[130]

*[Amphitheus takes the money and leaves.]*

And you,  
my gaping fools, can send out more ambassadors.

*[Herald enters.]*

HERALD

Bring in Theorus, returning envoy  
from the court of king Sitalces.<sup>30</sup>

*[Enter Theorus.]*

THEORUS

I am here.

DICAEOPOLIS

He's announcing yet another charlatan!

THEORUS

We would not have remained in Thrace so long . . .

DICAEOPOLIS *[aside]*

No by god, if you'd not been paid so much!

---

<sup>30</sup>Sitalces was king of Thrace, to the north of Greece.

## ACHARNIANS

THEORUS

. . . if all Thrace had not been covered in snow. 180  
Rivers were frozen, too. That was when  
Theognis produced his play in Athens.<sup>31</sup> [140]  
I spent the time drinking with Sitalces,  
who was hopelessly in love with Athens.  
In fact, he adored your citizens so much  
he scrawled on his own walls: “O Athenians,  
how beautiful you are!” We made his son  
an honorary Athenian. He was keen  
to eat blood sausages at our feast  
of Apaturia, and he begged his father 190  
to send assistance to his new native land.<sup>32</sup>  
Sitalces poured a libation and swore  
he would help us with an army so huge  
that the Athenians would all exclaim,  
“A massive swarm of locusts is flying here!” [150]

DICAEOPOLIS [*aside*]

May I die really badly if I believe  
a word of what you’re saying—apart from  
that bit about the locusts.

THEORUS

What’s more,  
he has sent you the finest fighting men  
in all of Thrace.

DICAEOPOLIS

What’s going on here 200  
is becoming clear.<sup>33</sup>

HERALD

You warriors from Thrace  
brought here by Theorus, come forward!

*[Enter the Thracian soldiers, a very ragged and strange looking military outfit.  
Each man’s costume includes a phallus.]*

DICAEOPOLIS

Who is this wretched group?

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<sup>31</sup>Theognis was an inferior playwright. The suggestion here is that his plays were so lacking emotion (i.e. so cold) that they affected the weather in Thrace.

<sup>32</sup>Apaturia was a three-day Athenian feast held late in the year (November).

<sup>33</sup>Dicaeopolis senses that Theorus is out to swindle the Athenians.

## ACHARNIANS

THEORUS

These warriors  
are the Odomanti.

DICAEOPOLIS

The Odomanti?  
Tell me what that means.

*[Dicaeopolis moves to inspect the phalluses on the soldiers.]*

Who sliced the foreskins  
off these penises?

THEORUS

If you pay these men  
two drachmas a day, they will overrun  
and pillage all Boeotia.<sup>34</sup>

[160]

DICAEOPOLIS

Two drachmas  
for a bunch of men without a foreskin!  
You may well grumble, you top-tier oarsmen,  
you saviours of our city!<sup>35</sup>

210

*[The Odomanti troops cluster around Dicaeopolis and start picking his pockets]*

Bloody hell!  
I'm done for! These Odomanti riff-raff  
are trying to steal my garlic! Give it back!

THEORUS

You idiot, don't go near those men.  
They're like fighting cocks—full of garlic.<sup>36</sup>

DICAEOPOLIS

You magistrates, are you going to let  
these barbarians treat me in this way  
in my own country? I oppose holding  
an assembly about paying wages

---

<sup>34</sup>Boeotia, a region closer to Athens than Thrace, was an ally of Sparta during the war. A wage of two drachmas a day would be considerably more generous than what most of the sailors in the Athenian warships earned.

<sup>35</sup>The "top tier oarsmen" rowed on the top row of three (usually). Walsh suggests that they were paid more because their work was more difficult than on the lower tiers. The point is that even the best paid oarsmen in the Athenian fleet would grumble if they heard other troops were getting two drachmas a day.

<sup>36</sup>Athenians fed garlic to their fighting cocks in the belief that it made them fight more fiercely.

## ACHARNIANS

to these Thracians. And I declare to you  
an omen has just reached me from the sky—  
a drop of rain has hit me in the eye.<sup>37</sup>

220 [170]

HERALD

Let the Thracians now withdraw and return  
the day after tomorrow. The magistrates  
declare that this assembly is dissolved.

*[The Magistrates, Thracians, and Herald all leave.]*

DICAEOPOLIS

I'm in a bad way. I've lost all my lunch.  
But here comes Amphytheus back from Sparta.

*[Enter Amphytheus out of breath from running.]*

Welcome Amphytheus!

AMPHITHEUS *[catches his breath]*

No welcome yet . . .  
not till I stop running . . . the Acharnians . . .  
they're after me . . . I have to get away!<sup>38</sup>

230

DICAEOPOLIS

What's the matter?

AMPHITHEUS

I was on my way back here,  
in a hurry to bring you your treaties,  
when some Acharnian old men got wind  
of what I was up to—they're veterans  
of Marathon, tough as oak or maple.<sup>39</sup>  
They all started shouting at me, "You wretch,  
you are bringing wines to make a truce  
when our vines have just been cut to pieces."<sup>40</sup>

[180]

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<sup>37</sup>The drop of rain is either an bad omen (as Dicaeopolis suggests) or else a sign of bad weather approaching or both. In any case, it is a sign that the assembly must end.

<sup>38</sup>Acharnae in this play is a political subdivision of Athens. Most of the people who lived there were charcoal burners who supplied the city with the fuel necessary for domestic, manufacturing and medical needs.

<sup>39</sup>Marathon was the site of the famous battle near Athens in which the combined forces of the Greeks under Athenian leadership defeated the Persian army (490 BC). The men must be very old to be veterans of that battle.

<sup>40</sup>Making a truce or treaty involved pouring a libation of wine. Hence in the Greek the words for *drink offering* and *truce* are the same. That is the reason Amphytheus has brought back different samples of wine to indicate different truce options (as we soon discover).

## ACHARNIANS

They started putting pebbles in their pockets,  
so I ran. They came yelling after me.

240

DICAEOPOLIS

Let them shout. Have you brought me a treaty?

AMPHITHEOS

Yes I have. There are three for you to sample.  
This is a truce for five years. Take it and sip.

*[Dicaeopolis takes the flask and samples the contents.]*

DICAEOPOLIS *[spitting out the sample]*

Bah!

AMPHITHEUS

How is it?

DICAEOPOLIS

I can't stand the taste!  
It stinks of pitch and refitted warships.

[190]

AMPHITHEUS *[offering a second sample]*

Then take this sample—it's a ten-year truce.  
Taste it.

DICAEOPOLIS

This has a very pungent smell—  
like the ambassadors who travel round  
to the allied cities to yell at them  
for being so slow.

AMPHITHEUS *[offering a new sample]*

This third truce here  
is for thirty years, by land and sea.

250

*[Dicaeopolis tastes the third sample.]*

DICAEOPOLIS

Holy Dionysus! This smells of nectar  
and ambrosia! It is telling us  
not to watch for orders that every man  
collect his own provisions for three days.<sup>41</sup>  
It says to me "Go wherever you wish."

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<sup>41</sup>When the Athenians needed citizens for the army or navy the men were ordered to assemble, each one bringing three days of provisions for himself.

## ACHARNIANS

This one I welcome. I'll ratify it,  
drink it down, and tell the Acharnians, [200]  
all of them, to bugger off. I am now  
rid of war and all its troubles. I'm off 260  
to my country home to honour Dionysus.

### AMPHITHEUS

And I'll keep running from those Acharnians.

*[Dicaeopolis and Amphitheus leave. The Chorus of Acharnian charcoal burners enters. They are still chasing Amphitheus, intending to throw stones they are carrying at him. They stop when they see no one is present.]*<sup>42</sup>

### CHORUS LEADER<sup>43</sup>

This way everybody—keep following  
that man. Ask everyone we come across.  
It's our civic duty to capture him.

*[Calling out to anyone within hearing.]*

Hey, can anyone tell me where on earth  
that man carrying the truce has gone!  
He got away from us—he disappeared!  
Damn this miserable old age of mine! [210]  
When I was a younger man, I could run 270  
with a sack of charcoal across my back  
and match the pace of great Phayllus.<sup>44</sup>  
Back then this treaty-proposing fellow  
would not have easily eluded us,  
no matter how swift his feet may be.  
Now my legs are stiff. Old Lacratides [220]  
feels heavy in his legs, and the young wretch  
outpaces us.<sup>45</sup>

### CHORUS MEMBER A

We have to follow him.  
We must never let him make fools of us,

---

<sup>42</sup>Charcoal is made by a process of burning wood slowly, so that the wood turns black. Charcoal was very much in demand for a number of reasons (forging metals, like bronze, cooking, and certain medical treatments, for example).

<sup>43</sup>The speeches assigned to the Chorus may be spoken by the entire Chorus, or by part of the Chorus, or by the Chorus Leader, or by an individual member of the Chorus, as the director of a production of the play decides. However, to clarify matters for the reader, in this English text I have indicated a particular speaker or speakers.

<sup>44</sup>A well-known Olympian athlete.

<sup>45</sup>Lachratides had been Archon (Chief Magistrate) in Athens at the time of the battle at Marathon, many years earlier (i.e., he must now be extremely old).



## ACHARNIANS

and he will, if he manages to escape,  
even though we Acharnians are old. 280

### CHORUS MEMBER B

O Father Zeus and you gods in heaven,  
he has made a truce with our enemies,  
men against whom I wish to keep on fighting  
this hateful war, because of what they've done  
to our farmlands.<sup>46</sup> I will not give up [230]  
till I take revenge by piercing their flesh,  
like a sharp, painful thorn, driven right in,  
up to the hilt, so that they never dare  
to trample on my vineyards any more.<sup>47</sup> 290

### CHORUS LEADER

Come on, we have to find this wretched man.  
Look everywhere—we'll chase him from one place  
to another until we corner him. And then  
I'll never tire of throwing stones at him.

### DICAEOPOLIS [*calling from inside his house*]

Be silent! Due reverence from all!

### CHORUS LEADER

Be quiet—all of you! Did you men hear  
that ritual call for silence? That voice  
belongs to the very man we're chasing.  
All of you, get out of his way. Hide!  
He has surely come to make an offering. 300 [240]

*[The Chorus crouch down behind the benches in the assembly space, trying to hide themselves. Dicaeopolis, his young daughter, and the slave Xanthias emerge from the front door of his house. The daughter is carrying a flat tray on her head (on the tray is a bowl); Xanthias is holding a giant phallus. Dicaeopolis starts organizing the group into a small procession. Dicaeopolis's wife comes out to observe them (she is not part of the procession).]*

### DICAEOPOLIS

Peace! Be silent! Due reverence from all!  
The basket girl should move up just a bit.  
Xanthias, hold the phallus fully erect.

---

<sup>46</sup>The Spartan armies routinely invaded Attica (the area around Athens) and drove the farming communities into Athens where they were safer within the city walls. The Spartans would pillage the farms and destroy the crops.

<sup>47</sup>The thorn is a form of bulrush identified by T. E. Page, E. Capps, and W.H. D. Rouse as *Schoenus mucronatus*, the *Dagger-pointed Bulrush* "common on all the coast of the Mediterranean."

## ACHARNIANS

Daughter, put the basket down and we'll begin.

DAUGHTER

Mother, pass me the ladle so I can drip  
the sauce across the flat-cake.

*[Dicaeopolis's wife hands the young girl a ladle. The girl sets down the tray, takes the ladle (which, according to Paley, has a very phallic shape), uses it to take some sauce from the container on the tray, carefully drips the sauce on the flat-cake, and sets the ladle down on the tray beside the container.]*

DICAEOPOLIS

That is good!

*[He starts to recite the ritual prayer to Dionysus.]*

O lord Dionysus, may you find  
the procession and the sacrifice  
I and my household offer you  
acceptable, so I may celebrate  
the rural Dionysia peacefully,  
now that I have no need to fight.  
And grant my truce of thirty years  
will be good for us and bring success.

310

[250]

*[He addresses his daughter as she is placing the tray back on her head.]*

Come, my girl, bear the basket gracefully  
and with a demure face. Happy the man  
who will wed you and beget a litter  
of weasel pups, who at the break of dawn  
fart just as much as you do. Let's be off—  
but take care that someone in the crowd  
does not grab your jewels and bite them off.<sup>48</sup>  
Xanthias, hold the phallus fully upright  
behind the basket carrier. I'll follow,  
singing the Phallic hymn. And you, my wife,  
you can watch us from the roof. Off we go!

320

[260]

*[The procession marches slowly around the orchestra. Dicaeopolis sings, chants, or recites the Phallic hymn. The wife watches from the house.]*

O Phales, my partner in ecstatic joys  
honouring Bacchus with drink all night long,

---

<sup>48</sup>The "jewels" would be trinkets which are attached to the young girl's clothing or which she is wearing on her arms. There could be a bawdy innuendo and meaning in this remark. Some translators and commentators assign these seven lines to Dicaeopolis's wife.

## ACHARNIANS

you seducer of wives and tender young boys,  
six years have passed since I last sang your song!<sup>49</sup>

How happy I am to be home at my farm, 330  
now free from all worries or going to fight,  
and Lamachus, too, with his call to arms, [270]  
thanks to that treaty that made all things right.<sup>50</sup>

O Phales, dear Phales, what bliss if I could  
creep up on Thratta, that beautiful maid,  
Strymodorus's girl, who works in his wood,  
as she's stealing boughs from a Phelleus glade.<sup>51</sup>  
I'd grab her two arms, throw her down double quick,  
and harvest her cherry with my throbbing prick.

O Phales, dear Phales, come drinking tonight. 340  
Tomorrow at dawn if our heads feel all right,  
with a goblet of wine my truce you'll invoke,  
and my shield I will hang by the hearth in the smoke.

*[The Chorus Leader emerges from hiding and calls to the other chorus members.]*

CHORUS LEADER

That's him—the man we're after. He's the one! [280]  
Stone him! Stone him! Stone the wretched fellow!  
Throw your rocks! Why aren't you throwing something?

*[At this commotion, Xanthias and the daughter rush back into the house.  
Dicaeopolis retreats to the doorway of his house, then turns to face his attackers.  
On his way he retrieves the pot of sauce from the daughter's tray.]*

DICAEOPOLIS *[holding the pot]*

By Herakles, what's this? You'll crack my pot!

CHORUS LEADER

We're throwing stones at you, you filthy pig!

DICAEOPOLIS

But why are you Acharnian old men  
stoning me? What's the reason?

---

<sup>49</sup>Phales was a god of procreation, symbolized by the phallus. This song is apparently improvised on the spot. Some editors observe that the phallus is so large it requires two slaves to hold it properly.

<sup>50</sup>Lamachus was an Athenian general. The name is also made up, in part, of the word meaning "fight."

<sup>51</sup>The name Phelleus evidently refers to a wooded spur of mount Parnes.

# ACHARNIANS

CHORUS LEADER

You ask me that?

350

You stupid fool, betraying your native land,  
you're the only one of all the citizens  
to have made a peace, and now you dare  
confront me face to face?

[290]

# DICAEOPOLIS

But you have no idea

why I made a truce. Listen to my reasons!

CHORUS LEADER

Listen to you? No! You're going to die!  
We'll bury you with our stones!

# DICAEOPOLIS

All right—

but not until you have heard me out.  
My good man, wait!

CHORUS LEADER

No. I'm not going to stop.

Don't even speak to me. I despise you—even more than I hate Cleon. Someday I'm going to cut him into leather strips to make sandals for the Knights.<sup>52</sup> So no, I'm not listening to your long speeches, now you've made peace with the Laonians. Instead I'm going to punish you.<sup>53</sup>

360

[300]

# DICAEOPOLIS

My good man,

set the Laconians aside, and consider whether that truce I made was beneficial.

CHORUS LEADER

How can you use the word *beneficial* when the people you have made a truce with do not respect gods, or faith, or promises?

370

# DICAEOPOLIS

We are too suspicious of Laonians.  
They are not the cause of all our problems.

[310]

<sup>52</sup>Cleon (see footnote 2 above) was a currier (a tanner of leather) by trade.

<sup>53</sup>The term Laconian refers to the Lacedaimonians (or Spartans).

## ACHARNIANS

CHORUS LEADER

Not the cause of all our problems?  
You criminal, you dare speak like that  
quite openly to me and then want me  
to spare you?

DICAEOPOLIS

They are not responsible  
for all our problems. Not all of them.  
And I'm telling you this: I can prove  
how in many ways we have done them wrong.

380

CHORUS LEADER

You're uttering blasphemy! What you claim  
is tearing at my heart. You dare speak to us  
on our enemy's behalf?

DICAEOPOLIS

Yes I do!  
And what is more, if I don't speak justly  
and the people disapprove, I'm prepared  
to set my head atop a butcher's block  
and speak from there.

CHORUS MEMBER

Tell me, my Acharnian mates,  
why are we not throwing our rocks at him  
and covering the man with his own blood,  
till he looks like a scarlet Spartan cloak.

[320]

390

DICAEOPOLIS

What black fiery log has scalded your heart?  
You won't listen to me? You Acharnians  
really will not give me a hearing?

CHORUS LEADER

No.  
We really really will not listen to you.

DICAEOPOLIS

Then I am being treated most unfairly!

CHORUS MEMBER

Let me die, if I grant you a hearing!

DICAEOPOLIS

Please don't say that, my dear Acharnians.

## ACHARNIANS

CHORUS LEADER

You will die—and very soon!

DICAEOPOLIS

Well, for that

I'll turn against you and get my revenge  
by killing some of your dearest friends.

400

I have inside here Acharnian hostages—  
I'm going to grab them and then cut their throats.

*[Dicaeopolis goes quickly back into his house.]*

CHORUS MEMBER

Fellow Acharnians, what does he mean  
by threatening us like this? Does he have  
one of our children inside his house?  
What's made him so bold?

[330]

*[Dicaeopolis comes out of the house carrying a old battered bucket (or a large shabby basket) with a cloth over the top concealing the contents. In one hand he is holding a large kitchen knife. He sets the bucket down between himself and the Chorus Leader.]*

DICAEOPOLIS

Throw stones at me,  
if that is what you want. But if you do  
I'll take my revenge on these . . .

*[Dicaeopolis whisks the covering from the top of his bucket to reveal lumps of charcoal inside.]*

We'll soon know  
if any of you old Acharnians  
still has some compassion for his charcoal.

410

CHORUS LEADER *[peering into the bucket]*

We're done for! This bucket of charcoal  
comes from my own district! Don't carry out  
what you have in mind—please don't do it!

DICAEOPOLIS

I am going to kill it. Scream all you like—  
I won't be listening.

CHORUS LEADER

But that bucket

## ACHARNIANS

is the same age as me. Surely you won't kill it,  
my dear friend of all the charcoal burners?

DICAEOPOLIS

Just now you would not listen to me  
if I spoke to you.

CHORUS LEADER

Well, you can speak now,  
if that's what you want. Tell us the reason 420  
you and the Spartans are such close allies.  
I don't mind. For I'll never abandon [340]  
this little bucket.

DICAEOPOLIS

All right. But first,  
take all the stones out of your pockets.  
Dump them on the ground.

*[The Chorus empty their pockets.]*

CHORUS LEADER

There you go. It's done.  
Now it's your turn—put your sword away.

DICAEOPOLIS

There still could be stone  
s hidden in your clothes.

CHORUS LEADER

No—they are in the dirt. Can you not see  
how I'm shaking my clothes? Don't play with me—  
put your weapon down, now we've danced around 430  
and twitched our rocks out—they're on the ground.

DICAEOPOLIS

I thought that all of you would soon give in—  
although these lumps of charcoal from mount Parnes  
nearly died, thanks to the sheer stupidity  
of their Acharnian friends. This bucket  
was so afraid it dumped a stream of coal dust [350]  
all over me, just like a cuttle fish.<sup>54</sup>  
It's a nasty business when the hearts of men  
swim in vinegar and they throw stones, shout,  
and do not wish to hear of compromise, 440

---

<sup>54</sup>The cuttle fish, a sea creature related to the octopus, squirts dark ink.

## ACHARNIANS

an equal blending of two points of view,  
not even when I volunteer to place  
my head upon a butcher's block and state  
all I have to say in defence of Sparta,  
even though I truly cherish my own life.

### CHORUS

All right, you fool, drag out a block  
and place it there by your front walk.  
Then you can give your grand review.  
We're keen to learn your point of view.

### CHORUS LEADER

Now follow the form of justice you proposed: 450  
set your head on the chopping block and speak.

### DICAEOPOLIS

Here is the block. I am little gifted  
as a speaker, but I intend, by Zeus,  
to talk about the Lacedaemonians  
quite freely and without the protection  
of my shield.<sup>55</sup> Nonetheless, I am afraid.  
There are many reasons for my fear. [370]  
I know the way our country folk behave:  
they are overjoyed if some fast-talker comes  
and pours out over them and their city 460  
his lavish praises—whether true or false.  
They are not aware that in the process  
they are being deceived—bought and sold.  
I understand how old men think, as well—  
the only thing they want to do in juries  
is bite the poor defendant with their votes.  
I well recall what I went through last year  
from Cleon, because of the play I wrote.<sup>56</sup>  
He had me hauled up before the Senate  
and shouted countless slanders against me— 470 [380]  
a torrent of abuse, a parade of lies,  
dragging me through so many muddy fights  
I almost died. So please allow me now,  
before I speak to you, to dress myself  
in a style most likely to draw pity.

---

<sup>55</sup>This speech, for obvious reasons is often interpreted as the voice of Aristophanes expressing his own opinions of the Athenians. Some have suggested that he may have been the actor playing the role.

<sup>56</sup>The comic play mentioned is *The Babylonians* (now lost). Cleon complained about the play to the civic authorities on the ground that it held Athens up to ridicule.



## ACHARNIANS

CHORUS LEADER

Why these evasions and such long delays?

CHORUS MEMBERS

Put on Hades' helmet—its black plume [390]  
made of shaggy hair is a fine costume.  
This you can borrow from Hieronymus.  
And open with the tricks of Sisyphus.<sup>57</sup> 480  
But do it quickly and without delay,  
for our discussion must take place today.

DICAEOPOLIS

'It's time for me to show my strength of heart'  
by paying a visit to Euripides.

*[Dicaeopolis walks over to Euripides's house. He knocks on the door and calls out.]*<sup>58</sup>

Boy! Boy!

SLAVE *[opening the door]*<sup>59</sup>

Who is it?

DICAEOPOLIS

Is Euripides at home?

SLAVE

No, he's not at home, and yes, he is inside!  
You'll understand if you have sufficient wit.

DICAEOPOLIS

How can he be and not be inside?

SLAVE

Old man, it's all quite logical. His mind  
is not in the house but outside, collecting 490  
scraps of poetry. He himself is inside  
with his feet up, writing a tragedy. [400]

---

<sup>57</sup>Hades was the god of the underworld (i.e. the dead), His helmet conferred the gift of invisibility on the wearer. Hieronymus was a writer of tragedies, often mocked by Aristophanes. Sisyphus was a legendary king of Corinth, famous for his trickery. He was eternally punished in Hades for repeatedly tricking the gods.

<sup>58</sup>The scene which follows is in large part a satire on Euripides' tragic style (especially his use of chop logic). The text between single quotation marks are quotations from Euripides's lost plays.

<sup>59</sup>In some Greek texts the role of the Slave is assigned to a character called Cephisophon. He was a resident of Euripides's home and, it seems, a lover of Euripides's wife and a collaborator in writing the plays.

## ACHARNIANS

DICAEOPOLIS

O thrice blessed Euripides, to possess  
a slave with such sophisticated wits.  
Summon him here.

SLAVE

That is impossible.

*[The Slave shuts the door in Dicaeopolis's face.]*

DICAEOPOLIS *[parodying the tragic style]*

No matter. For I shall not leave this place.  
No! Instead I shall knock upon the door.

*[Dicaeopolis knocks on the door and calls out.]*

Euripides . . . my dear little Euripides . . .  
Answer me, if ever thou didst reply  
to any mortal being. I'm summoning you.  
I, Dicaeopolis from Cholleidae.<sup>60</sup>

500

EURIPIDES *[from inside]*

I have no time for you.

DICAEOPOLIS

All right, then.  
Let the stage machinery wheel you out.<sup>61</sup>

EURIPIDES *[from inside]*

No, no! Impossible!

DICAEOPOLIS

But nonetheless . . . please.

EURIPIDES *[from inside]*

All right then, let them roll me outside.  
I am too busy to come down below.

*[Euripides is pushed into view up high in the house by the stage machinery (the eccyclema). He lying down on a couch, like an invalid or someone with a physical disability.]*

---

<sup>60</sup>Cholleidae was a political district in Athens (like Archarniae).

<sup>61</sup>The stage machinery was a device that enabled an actor to be revealed suddenly, usually high up above the other actors. Euripides is very fond of using such machinery near the end of his tragedies to reveal the sudden entry of a god or goddess, who will then help to resolve the action (the *deus ex machina*). This whole scene is, in part, a satire on Euripides' dramatic and poetic style.

## ACHARNIANS

DICAEOPOLIS

Euripides . . .

EURIPIDES [*in a tragic tone*]

Why dost thou cry out?

DICAEOPOLIS

You compose your tragedies lying prone, [410]

when you could keep your feet upon the ground.

I'm not surprised you like to portray cripples 510

on the stage. And why are you dressed like that—

in those tragic rags? You look pitiful.

No wonder you like to write of beggars.<sup>62</sup>

But on my knees I beg you, Euripides,  
give me some tattered rags from an old play.

I have to give a long speech to the Chorus,  
and if I am not successful, then I die.

EURIPIDES

What sort of rags? The ones Oeneus wore  
when he competed for the drama prize,  
that pitiful, miserable old man? 520

DICAEOPOLIS

No, not Oeneus. Someone still more wretched. [420]

EURIPIDES

What about blind Phoenix?

DICAEOPOLIS

No, not Phoenix.

Someone else more miserable than him.

EURIPIDES

What kind of ragged clothing do you want?

Do you mean the costume of Philoctetes,  
the beggarman?

DICAEOPOLIS

No no. I mean someone  
much more impoverished than him.

---

<sup>62</sup>Euripides was frequently criticized for writing tragedies about much meaner and more common persons (often in miserable circumstances) than the older tradition's noble characters. Further in this scene Euripides and Dicaeopolis discuss various Euripidean heroes. The plays in which these characters appear have all been lost (other than some fragments).

## ACHARNIANS

EURIPIDES

What about that cripple Bellerophon?  
Do you want his filthy tattered costume?

DICAEOPOLIS

No, not Bellerophon, but a hero  
who was a crippled beggar and also  
very talkative and a glib speaker. 530

EURIPIDES

I know the man! It must be Telephus.  
a man from Mysia. [430]

DICAEOPOLIS

Yes, Telephus.  
Can you please give me his swaddling clothes?

EURIPIDES [*to the Slave*]

Boy! Give him Telephus's tattered costume!  
It's lying on top of Thyestes' rags  
under those of Ino.<sup>63</sup>

SLAVE

Here they are. Catch!

[*The Slave tosses the clothes to Dicaeopolis, who opens up the bundle and holds up the remnants of a cloak.*]

DICAEOPOLIS

'O Zeus, whose all-piercing eye roams everywhere,'  
permit me to dress myself in these rags,  
the most miserable costume I could find! 540

[*Turning his attention to Euripides.*]

Euripides, since you have been so kind,  
could you give me the little Mysian cap  
to cover my head. It's such a grand match  
for these tattered clothes. 'Today I must look  
just like a beggar—I must act what I am,  
yet appear to be someone else.' The audience  
will know the real me, but the Chorus  
will stand there like fools, while I dupe them  
with some subtle, fast-talking rhetoric. [440] 550

---

<sup>63</sup>Thyestes and Ino were characters in lost plays by Euripides.

## ACHARNIANS

EURIPIDES

I'll let you have the cap, for your mind  
is shrewd and full of subtle tricks.

DICAEOPOLIS

'Fare thee well—and good luck to Telephus.'  
I feel already full of clever talk.  
but I still need to have a beggar's staff.

EURIPIDES [*using a grand poetic style*]

Have that one. Now take your leave—depart  
from my front porch of polished stone.

DICAEOPOLIS [*adopting the same tone*]

O my heart, [450]  
you see how I am driven from this house,  
when I am still in need of so much more.  
But now I must persevere, importune, 560  
and whine. O Euripides, please give me  
a basket with a hole burnt through its base.

EURIPIDES

Why does a wretch like you need wickerwork?

DICAEOPOLIS

I don't need it, but I want it anyway.

EURIPIDES

You're such a nuisance. Get out of my house!

DICAEOPOLIS

'Alas! May you enjoy good fortune,  
just as your mother used to do.'<sup>64</sup>

EURIPIDES

It's time you took your leave of me.

DICAEOPOLIS

But I need you to give me one thing more—  
a little cup with the lip broken off. 570

EURIPIDES [*handing over the cup*]

Take it and be damned! You must realize [460]  
you're making trouble in my house!

---

<sup>64</sup>This is a satiric jibe at Euripides' family origins: his mother (according to one tradition) sold herbs in the marketplace. Paley observes that the story was probably untrue.

## ACHARNIANS

DICAEOPOLIS [*aside, in a tragic tone*]

By Zeus,  
you are not yet cognizant of the harm  
you are doing to yourself.<sup>65</sup>

[*To Euripides*]

My sweetest Euripides,  
I need one thing more. Please let me have  
a tiny pot plugged with a sponge.

EURIPIDES [*handing over the pot and sponge*]

You are stealing my entire tragedy!  
Take it, and get out of here.

DICAEOPOLIS

I'm leaving.  
But what am I doing? I need one thing more.  
If I don't have it, I will be destroyed!  
Listen to me, my dear Euripides,  
if I can take it, I will go away,  
and I will not return. Give me a few herbs,  
to put in my wicker basket.

580

EURIPIDES

You'll be the death of me!  
You have gutted my entire play!

[470]

DICAEOPOLIS

That's it! No more. I'll be on my way.  
I am too annoying, 'though I did not think  
the royal master hated me.'

[*Dicaeopolis turns and walks away but stops after a few paces.*]

O damn and blast!  
I'm done for. I've forgotten something—  
one item essential to this business.  
O my dearest and sweetest Euripides,  
may I die a nasty death if I ever  
ask you again—except for this one thing—

590

---

<sup>65</sup>In this sentence Dicaeopolis observes that Euripides (the character in the play), by complying with all the requests for various objects, is enabling the scene to be a continuing satire on Euripides (the playwright). Much of the humour here arises from the audience's familiarity with Euripides's plays and their style.

## ACHARNIANS

just this one and then nothing more—  
give me some parsley from your mother's cart.

EURIPIDES

The man is insolent! Lock up the house!

*[The stage machinery removes Euripides from sight.]*

DICAEOPOLIS *[in grand tragic style]*

O my heart, I must leave without the parsley. [480]  
Are you aware of the mighty battle  
we must soon contest by speaking out  
in defence of Lacedaemonians? 600  
This is the moment, my heart, to march ahead—  
we stand at the line where the race begins.  
Do you pause? Did you not feed on Euripides?

*[Dicaeopolis takes a few steps down into the orchestra towards the chopping block.]*

That's good! Come on, my palpitating heart,  
go there and lay your head down on the block,  
and tell them the truth as you perceive it.  
Be brave! March on! How I admire my courage!

*[Dicaeopolis moves over to the chopping block. The Chorus gathers to confront him.]*

CHORUS LEADER

What are you doing? What will you say? [490]  
You are a truly impudent rascal  
with a heart of steel—to offer your neck 610  
to the city and deliver a speech  
attacking what all Athenians think.  
But the man is not trembling at the task.  
Come on then, you're the one who wanted this.  
So speak!

DICAEOPOLIA

You men witnessing my speech,  
do not be angry if I, a poor beggar,  
intend to speak before Athenians  
about the city and, as I do that,  
I will be producing a comic play.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Here Aristophanes is deliberately blurring the line between Dicaeopolis (the fictional character giving the speech) and Aristophanes (the poet and author of this play).

## ACHARNIANS

For comic drama can illuminate  
 what is just and right. The things I'll say  
 will shock you, but they will be the truth.  
 And this time, at least, Cleon will not bring  
 slanderous charges against me, alleging  
 I attack Athens in front of foreigners.  
 For we are by ourselves at the festival  
 of the Lenaea. In this crowd there are  
 no strangers. The tribute and the soldiers  
 from the federated states are not yet here.<sup>67</sup>  
 Nor are our allies. Here we are pure wheat—  
 winnowed, free of chaff. As for the aliens  
 settled here, I consider them mere bran.<sup>68</sup>  
 I truly detest Lacedaemonians—  
 I wish Poseidon, god of Taenarus,  
 would shake the earth and bring their houses  
 crashing down.<sup>69</sup> For I, too, have had my vines  
 vandalized by Spartans. But since those present  
 and listening to me are friends, I ask  
 why blame the Spartans for all our troubles?  
 For some men among us—I do not mean  
 the city; please remember this point:  
 I am not speaking of our city state—  
 some pitiful rascals, with no sense of honour,  
 cheap swindlers, and counterfeit foreigners  
 falsely accused people from Megara  
 of smuggling goods inside their clothing.  
 If they saw a cucumber or young hare,  
 a suckling pig, garlic clove, or rock salt,  
 they cried out "These goods come from Megara,"  
 then grabbed the stuff, and sold it on the spot.  
 Now, at first this trouble was merely local.  
 But then some young men playing cottabus  
 got very drunk, set out for Megara,  
 and carried off the courtesan Simaetha.<sup>70</sup>  
 So the Megarians, angered by this act,

620 [500]

630

[510]

640

[520]

650

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<sup>67</sup>The federated states were a group of city states allied with Athens. They paid tribute money to Athens and provided troops and ships to a common cause.

<sup>68</sup>Resident aliens in Athens (called *metics*) made up roughly half the free population. They had no political rights but had to fulfil the duties of citizens (e.g., pay taxes). The children of metics born in Athens retained the citizenship of their family origin.

<sup>69</sup>Poseidon was god of earthquakes. Taenarus is a headland in the Peloponnese, close to Sparta.

<sup>70</sup>Cottabus was a drinking game involving (in some forms) throwing wine dregs into a container without spilling any on the floor.



## ACHARNIANS

got revenge by kidnapping two prostitutes  
 belonging to Aspasia.<sup>71</sup> War broke out  
 over these three strumpets, inundating  
 all of Greece. Then Olympian Pericles, [530]  
 in his anger, hurled lightning and thunder, 660  
 and confounded Greece, by passing edicts  
 written like a doggerel drinking song:<sup>72</sup>

“Megarians are forthwith banned  
 from the sea and from the land  
 from the markets where we trade  
 from any place where deals are made.”

As a result of this, Megarians  
 gradually began to die of hunger.  
 So they begged the Lacedaemonians  
 to repeal the edict we had voted for 670  
 after that business with the prostitutes.  
 The Spartans petitioned us many times,  
 but we refused. And that led to warfare.  
 You may say the Spartans were to blame,  
 but what should they have done? Tell me that.<sup>73</sup> [540]  
 Suppose a Lacedaemonian sailed his ship  
 to Seriphos, started a false rumour,  
 then seized and sold a little puppy dog.<sup>74</sup>  
 Would you have remained quietly at home?  
 No, of course not. Instead you would have sent 680  
 three hundred warships out immediately,  
 and the city would have been filled with  
 the confused din of soldiers and loud shouts  
 around the captains. Men would be getting paid,  
 Pallas figureheads regilded on the ships,  
 with huge crowds of people milling about,  
 measuring grain in the colonades, inspecting  
 wine skins and oar loops, purchasing jars,  
 garlic, olives, net bags of onions, chaplets, [550]  
 anchovies, flute girls with bloody noses 690  
 and black eyes. The dock would have resounded

---

<sup>71</sup>Aspasia was the mistress of Pericles, the political leader in Athens in the first year of the war. He died of the plague in the second year of the war.

<sup>72</sup>The title Olympian Pericles pays tribute to the power and prestige of Pericles, the political leader of the Athenians at the start of the war with Sparta.

<sup>73</sup>Megara was an ally of Sparta, but economically dependent on Athens and cities in the Athenian Empire. The economic blockade Athens imposed on Megara was a major source of friction in the years before the outbreak of hostilities.

<sup>74</sup>Seriphos is a small, insignificant island allied to Athens. The triviality of this hypothetical example is an important part of Dicaeopolis's argument.

## ACHARNIANS

to the noise of spars being sculpted into oars,  
ships' pegs being driven into place, oars  
being fitted with leather—and music, too,  
the sound of flutes, bosuns' whistles, and pipes.  
I know that that is what you would have done.  
Do we think Spartans would not do the same?<sup>75</sup>  
If we do, then we have no common sense.

*[In the response to Dicaeopolis's speech, the Chorus forms two equal groups: those supporting his remarks and those who remain unconvinced. Each of these sections of the Chorus has a leader.]*

### SEMI-CHORUS LEADER A

You wretch! You truly despicable rogue,  
you are a beggar and you have the gall  
to address us in this way! If there are  
one or two informers, why insult us?<sup>76</sup>

700

### SEMI-CHORUS LEADER B

By Poseidon, what he has said is just.  
No word of what he spoke to us was false.

[560]

### CHORUS LEADER A

Even if everything he said was true,  
did he have a right to say it? He'll get  
no pleasure from such foolhardy speech!

*[Chorus Leader A moves to attack Dicaeopolis.]*

### SEMI-CHORUS LEADER B

Where are you running? Stay where you are!  
If you hit this man, you'll soon be hit yourself.

*[There is a brief tussle in which members of Semi-Chorus B catch and hold the leader of Semi-Chorus A.]*

### SEMI-CHORUS LEADER A

O Lamachus with your lightning glance  
and terrifying Gorgon crest, help me!  
O Lamachus, friend and fellow tribesman,  
and any of you officers, generals,  
or men who storm the walls, come with all speed.

710

---

<sup>75</sup>The Greek text has "Do we think Telaphus . . ." I have replaced the name *Telephus* and written *the Spartan* to make better sense of the question. Telephus was a Spartan.

<sup>76</sup>An informer in ancient Athens was a private citizen who laid charges against someone else for breaking a law. Every Athenian citizen enjoyed this privilege, which was often abused. The Athenians were notorious for their love of lawsuits.

## ACHARNIANS

These men have grabbed me by my private parts!

*[Enter Lamachus, looking like a parody of a military officer.]*<sup>77</sup>

LAMACHUS *[in a grandiose manner]*

Whence comes that warlike cry I have just heard?  
Where must I provide my aid? Where direct  
my martial power? Who has roused the Gorgon  
from her canvas carrying bag.<sup>78</sup>

DICAEOPOLIS

O Lamachus,  
hero of helmet plumes and ambushes!

720

SEMI-CHORUS LEADER A

O Lamachus, not long ago this man  
was saying foul things about our city.

LAMACHUS

You are a mere beggar, and yet you dare  
to use insulting words?

DICAEOPOLIS

O Lamachus,  
you hero, have mercy on a beggar  
who has been chattering.

LAMACHUS

So inform me.  
What have you been saying?

DICAEOPOLIS

I'm not quite sure.  
Fear of your weapons has made me dizzy.

*[Dicæopolis points to the Gorgon on the shield.]*

I beg you please remove that hideous monster.

LAMACHUS *[placing the shield behind him]*

There you go.

---

<sup>77</sup>Lamachus was an Athenian general in the Peloponnesian War. He may well have been in the audience for the first performance of the play in Athens.

<sup>78</sup>The Gorgon crest is on the shield which is carried in a canvas bag. The Gorgon was a fearful creature whose gaze turned people to stone.

## ACHARNIANS

DICAEOPOLIS

Now place it on the ground face down.

730

LAMACHUS [*turning the shield over*]

All right. There. It's done.

DICAEOPOLIS

Give me a feather—  
one from your helmet.

LAMACHUS

Here is a feather.

DICAEOPOLIS

Now hold my head while I throw up—the feather  
has made my stomach very queasy.

LAMACHUS

How are you going to use this feather—  
force yourself to vomit?

DICAEOPOLIS

You call this a feather?  
What kind of bird struts around in this? I know—  
the chirping yellow-bellied cock sucker!

LAMACHUS [*instantly infuriated*]

What! I'm going to kill you.

[590]

DICAEOPOLIS

No, no, Lamachus,  
no need for violence. If you've the strength,  
why not massage my prick?

740

[*Dicaeopolis pulls aside Lamachus's cloak to examine his phallus.*]

Whoa, I'd say  
you're very well equipped down here.

LAMACHUS

Is this the way a beggar should address  
a general?

DICAEOPOLIS

You think I'm a beggar?

## ACHARNIANS

LAMACHUS

If not, what are you then?

DICAEOPOLIS

Who am I?

A useful citizen, unambitious,  
and, since the war began, a soldier.  
You, on the other hand, once war started,  
became a wretched well-paid mercenary.

LAMACHUS

I was elected by a show of hands . . . 750

DICAEOPOLIS

Yes, by three cuckoos! This is what disgusts me  
and drove me to negotiate a peace.  
I see bald heads in among the ranks of men [600]  
and young men like you evading service.  
Some are in Thrace acting as envoys  
and getting three drachmas in daily pay<sup>79</sup>—  
men like Tisamenophoenippus  
and Panurgipparchides. The others  
are with Chares or in Chaonia,  
young men like Geretothedorus 760  
and Diomialazon; still others  
at Camarina, Gela, or Katagela.<sup>80</sup>

LAMACHUS

They were elected!

DICAEOPOLIS

But what's the reason  
all you envoys, one way or another,  
always get paid, while working men like these  
never get assigned?

*[Dicaeopolis turns to members of the Chorus.]*

You, Marilades,  
you have gray hair and are an older man.

---

<sup>79</sup>Paley points out that young men from wealthy families could arrange to get themselves appointed as envoys in various diplomatic missions and thus receive more pay than the soldiers and sailors (who received two drachmas a day). Such envoys were exempt from military service.

<sup>80</sup>The names of people and places in this passage (made up by the poet) undoubtedly contain comic references to people and politics. The word *Gela*, for example, means *ridiculous*. Some translators hazard attempts to render them in English, but their results do not prompt me to offer my own.

## ACHARNIANS

So tell us: Have you ever been assigned  
to serve on a mission or an embassy? [610]  
See, he shakes his head. Yet he's a prudent, 770  
hard-working man. And you, Dracyllus,  
Euphorides, and Prinides, do you  
have any knowledge of Ecbatana  
or Chaonia? . . . All of them say no.  
Such appointments are deemed quite suitable  
for sons of Caesyra and Lamachus,  
who yesterday were loaded down with debts,  
and friends were telling them to stand aside,  
as people do when tossing out their slops.<sup>81</sup>

LAMACHUS

In the name of our democratic ways, 780  
do we have to bear this nonsense?

DICAEOPOLIS

No, of course not—  
not unless Lamachus wishes to get paid.<sup>82</sup>

LAMACHUS

But I will always keep on fighting wars  
against all cities of the Peloponnese.<sup>83</sup> [620]  
I will stir up trouble for them everywhere—  
with ships and soldiers and all my power.

*[Lamachus exits.]*

DICAEOPOLIS

I am announcing to all the cities  
in the Peloponnese, Megara,  
and Boeotia that they can buy and sell  
in my market—but not with Lamachus. 790

SEMI-CHORUS LEADER A

This man here has prevailed in our debate.  
The people's view of him has been transformed,

---

<sup>81</sup>Coesyra was a well-known member of a leading family in Athens. Paley remarks, “. . . we can hardly doubt that Alcibiades is meant . . .”

<sup>82</sup>This exchange means something like “Do we, as members of a democracy, have to listen to this satiric treatment of Athenians: “No you don't, unless you still want to be paid.” The satiric suggestion is that Athenian democracy would be intolerable if Lamachus did not get paid.

<sup>83</sup>The Peloponnese is the large peninsula in southern Greece, joined to the mainland by the Isthmus of Corinth. Sparta is located there. Many Peloponnesian cities were allied with Sparta.

## ACHARNIANS

and all of us will now endorse his peace.  
But let us change and hear the parabasis.<sup>84</sup>

*[Dicaeopolis exits into his house. The members of the Chorus take off their cloaks and sit facing the audience. The Chorus Leader moves to take centre stage.]*

### CHORUS LEADER

Since the time our master has been presenting  
comic dramas he has never stepped forward  
on the stage to praise himself. However,  
because he has been slandered by enemies  
among Athenians who judge too rashly  
and charge him with ridiculing our state  
and demeaning its citizens, he now wishes  
to defend himself before those Athenians  
who can be persuaded to change their minds.  
Our worthy poet claims that he has done  
many admirable things on your behalf:  
he has stopped you being so easily deceived  
by foreigner swindlers or finding joy  
in flattery and becoming gaping fools.  
Earlier, if a foreign ambassador  
wanted to mislead you, first he would call you  
“a people crowned with violets.” Right away,  
as soon as he said that, you all sat up  
on the tips of your buttocks. If someone,  
appealing to your vanity, said the words  
“sleek and shining Athens,” with those words  
“sleek” and “shining” he would get what he desired,  
because he’d described you as he would sardines.  
In doing this, our poet has conferred  
many benefits on Athens, like showing  
our allied city states how government  
in a democracy ought to function.  
That is why nowadays, when people come  
bringing you tribute from those allied cities,  
they are eager to see that great poet  
who dared to speak to the Athenians  
of truth and justice. Stories of his courage  
have spread far and wide. The Great King himself,  
when questioning the Spartan embassy,  
first asked them which of the two rivals  
was the greater force at sea. Then he asked  
which of the two cities was the target

800 [630]

810

[640]

820

830

---

<sup>84</sup>In Old Comedy, the parabasis is a speech delivered by the Chorus leader, who adopts the role of the poet and usually raises a number of moral or political issues.

## ACHARNIANS

of our comic poet's frequent satire.  
 "If they have this man as their counsellor,"  
 he said, "these men will become much better [650]  
 and will win a triumphant victory."  
 That's the reason the Lacedaemonians  
 are offering you peace and demanding  
 you return Aegina—not that they care  
 about the island, but they wish to steal  
 your poet.<sup>85</sup> You must never let him leave, 840  
 for in his plays he writes of what is just.  
 He says the many things he teaches you  
 will make you happy, though he will not use  
 flattery, bribes, or devious deceit.  
 He will not be a rogue or sprinkle you  
 with hyperbolic praise. Instead of that,  
 he will teach you what is just and right.

### CHORUS

So let Cleon scheme and hatch his plots [660]  
 against me, for my allies—right and justice—  
 will fight my cause, and in our politics 850  
 you will never see me behave like him—  
 a poltroon and a sexual deviant.

Come, my glowing Acharnian Muse,  
 with ardent force of all-powerful fire,  
 like a spark spit from an oak wood coal  
 stirred by the bellow's encouraging wind.  
 Sprats lie there to be broiled on embers, [670]  
 slaves shake olive oil and Thasian pickles  
 and knead the dough for the barley cakes.<sup>86</sup>  
 O Muse, inspire a fellow countryman 860  
 with a lusty, tuneful, and rustic song.

### CHORUS

We old men, now well advanced in years,  
 have a complaint to lodge against the city.  
 We gained so many victories at sea,  
 we well deserve your care in our old age,  
 but we are treated in a shameful way,  
 old men hurled into lawsuits, forced to deal  
 with stripling orators who laugh at us— [680]

<sup>85</sup>Aristophanes had some connection to the Aegina, an island close to Athens. Athens attacked Aegina in 459 BC, tore down its walls, and commandeered its fleet.

<sup>86</sup>"[*Epanthrakides*.] Small fish to be broiled over the embers were first dipped in pickle of salt and oil. . . . It is called [*liparapux*] from the oil that rises to the top; hence it was shaken before use" (Paley).



## ACHARNIANS

mere nothings, dim-witted, worn out husks.  
Poseidon should look after us, but now  
our only succour is this staff I hold.<sup>87</sup> 870  
When we stand at the dock, thanks to our age  
we mutter indistinctly, seeing nothing  
in the fog but a faint outline of justice.  
The accuser, once he has taken care  
to have the younger men support his side,  
quickly launches an attack, pleading his case  
with glib, well rounded, ready rhetoric.  
He hauls us before the judge, questions us,  
and sets verbal traps for us, tormenting, 880  
confusing, and agitating the defendant,  
a man as ancient as Tithonus, so crushed  
with years that he can only mumble.<sup>88</sup>  
Convicted and sentenced to pay a fine,  
he totters away, sobs, and through his tears [690]  
tells his friends "I leave the court condemned  
to spend the cash I need to buy my coffin."

*[Dicaeopolis exits, leaving the Chorus on stage.]*

### CHORUS

How can this be reasonable? To destroy  
an old white-haired man in court proceedings  
beside the water clock—a man who often 890  
shared our labour and wiped off rivulets  
of manly sweat, a man whose excellence  
at Marathon saved our city.<sup>89</sup> Back then,  
we were the ones who chased our enemies,  
and now we are the ones being pursued [700]  
and conquered. What would a young advocate  
like Marpsias declaim to counter this?<sup>90</sup>

Is it fair that a man bowed down with age,  
like Thucydides, should be overwhelmed  
by having to grapple with Cephisodemus, 900  
the prattling public advocate and lout

---

<sup>87</sup>Poseidon was god of the sea and an important deity in Athens.

<sup>88</sup>Tithonus was a legendary figure who was promised eternal life by the goddess of dawn. But the promise did not protect him from growing old. As a result he was condemned to an eternity of increasing decrepitude.

<sup>89</sup>Marathon was the site of the battle in which a force of men from the Greek states under Athenian command defeated the Persians in 480 BC. It was the highlight of Athenian military history.

<sup>90</sup>The identity of Marpsias is unknown. Presumably he was a young prosecutor in the courts.

## ACHARNIANS

from the desert wilderness of Scythia.<sup>91</sup>  
 I shed tears of pity when I beheld  
 this old man mistreated by an Archer.  
 O Demeter, back when Thucydides  
 was young, he would not have taken lightly  
 any abuse, even from the goddess Ceres.  
 No, he would have thrown down ten advocates, [710]  
 terrified three thousand archers with his shouts.  
 and with his arrows killed the relatives 910  
 of the prosecutor's father. However,  
 if you cannot let the old sleep in peace,  
 at least make it a rule that their cases  
 be treated separately. Let the old man  
 face a prosecutor who is like himself—  
 old and toothless. Let the younger men  
 confront that advocate with a loose arse  
 and a glib tongue, the son of Clinias.<sup>92</sup>  
 So in future, if there's a case of banishment  
 or penalties, let the old defendants 920  
 be dealt with by old public advocates,  
 and younger orators charge younger men.

*[Dicaeopolis enters bringing on some stones which he sets in place to demarcate the market place he is setting up. He also brings on a stand to display the merchandise and three leather straps.]*

DICAEOPOLIS *[setting up the stones]*

This spot here is my market place. These stones  
 define its limits. All Megarians,  
 all Peloponnesians and Boeotians [720]  
 may do business here, as long as they sell  
 their goods to me and not to Lamachus.  
 To serve as market clerks I now appoint  
 these three thick leather straps from Lepreum  
 selected by a lottery.<sup>93</sup> No informers 930  
 or men of Phasis may do business here.  
 The pillar on which the treaty is inscribed  
 I will have brought here. I shall erect it  
 in the market place in full public view.

*[Exit Dicaeopolis. Enter a Magarian and his two small children. They are all in great distress from lack of food.]*

---

<sup>91</sup>Thucydides was the son of Melesias and led an anti-war faction in Athens. He should not be confused with the famous historian of the Peloponnesian War. Cephisodemus was an Athenian born in Scythia.

<sup>92</sup>The son of Clineas is Alcibiades.

<sup>93</sup>Market clerks are hired to keep order in the marketplace.

## ACHARNIANS

### MAGARIAN

Greetings to this Athenian market,  
which all Megarians love!<sup>94</sup> By lord Zeus, [730]  
god of friendship, I have yearned for you  
as I yearn for my own mother.

*[He addresses his two children.]*

Come children,  
poor daughters of an unlucky father,  
scramble up there and get us food to eat, 940  
if you can find any. Listen to me:  
I want you to think about your bellies.  
Which of these choices do you two prefer—  
to be sold or to be sick from hunger?

### CHILDREN

To be sold, to be sold!

### MEGARIAN

That's my view, as well.  
But who would be fool enough to buy you—  
on the face of it a poor investment.  
But I do have a Megarian trick.  
I'll disguise you both as little piglets  
and say I'm bringing you to market. 950

*[The Megarian gets false pig feet out of a bag he is carrying.]*

Put these pigs feet over your hands. Pretend [740]  
you're from the litter of a well-bred sow.  
I tell you, by Hermes, if I am compelled  
to take you home unsold, you will suffer  
from savage hunger. So put on these snouts  
and stuff yourselves inside this sack. Remember  
to grunt and to make little piggy sounds—  
like sacrificial piglets at the Mysteries.  
I'll announce that you're for sale. But hang on!  
Where's Dicaeopolis?

*[He calls out.]*

---

<sup>94</sup>Megara was a city state quite close to Athens. At the opening of the war it was allied with Sparta. In c. 432 BC, Athens issued the Megarian Decree, which banned all Megarian merchants from territory controlled by Athens. As a result, the Megarian economy was severely damaged.

## ACHARNIANS

Hey, Dicaeopolis! 960  
Do you want to buy some little piglets?

*[Enter Dicaeopolis.]*

DICAEOPOLIS  
What's this? A man from Megara? [750]

MEGARIAN  
I have come to trade in the marketplace

DIKAEOPOLIS  
How are things in Megara?

MEGARIAN  
We sit by our fires  
and starve.

DICAEOPOLIS  
By Zeus, to sit by a fire  
is pleasant with a flute player present.  
But what else is happening nowadays  
in Megara?

MEGARIAN  
Things are what they are.  
When I was leaving to come to market,  
the city council were trying to find 970  
a way of killing us off as quickly  
and brutally as possible.

DICAEOPOLIS  
If that's the case,  
you'll soon be rid of all your troubles.

MEGARIAN  
That's true.

DICAEOPOLIS  
What else is new in Megara?  
How's the price of grain?

MEGARIAN  
We value it  
as highly as we do the gods themselves.

## ACHARNIANS

DICAEOPOLIS

Are you bringing salt?

MEGARIAN

Don't you Athenians  
control supplies of salt?

[760]

DICAEOPOLIS

What about garlic?

MEGARIAN

What do you mean garlic? You Athenians,  
when you attack us, you're just like field mice.  
You use your weapons to dig up the ground  
and then root out every clove of garlic.

980

DICAEOPOLIS

What do you bring, then?

MEGARIAN

I'm bringing sows  
like those they offer at the mysteries.<sup>95</sup>

DICAEOPOLIS

Good! Show them to me.

MEGARIAN

They're real beauties.

*[The Megarian takes the children out of the sack.]*

Look at them—so fat and healthy.

DICAEOPOLIS

What is this?

MEGARIAN

It's clearly a sow.

DICAEOPOLIS

A pig?  
Where does this "pig" come from?

---

<sup>95</sup>The Eleusinian Mysteries were a secret religious initiation rite based on the worship of Persephone and her mother, Demeter. The celebrations were held annually.

## ACHARNIANS

MEGARIAN

From Megara.

Is this not a pig?

DICAEOPOLIS

No, I don't think so.

MEGARIAN [*aside to the audience*]

Well, isn't this strange? You have to wonder  
at this man's incredulity!

990 [770]

[*The Megarian turns back to Dicaeopolis.*]

All right then,  
if you're willing, I'll make a bet with you  
for a measure of garlic-flavoured salt  
that this here in proper Greek is called  
a sow and nothing else.

DICAEOPOLIS

But one that belongs  
to the human species.

MEGARIAN

Yes, naturally,  
by Diocles, it belongs to me.  
Whose do you think it is? Would you like  
to hear them squeal?

DICAEOPOLIS

Yes, by the gods, I would.

MEGARIAN [*to one of the children*]

Make a sound, little piggy, and quickly.  
You don't want to make a sound? Are you dumb,  
you disgusting, good-for-nothing little sow?  
By Hermes, I'm going to take you home.

1000

GIRL

Wee. wee. wee!

[780]

MEGARIAN

Is that a little sow, or not?

## ACHARNIANS

DICAEOPOLIS

Well, it seems to be a piglet. But in time  
it will grow into a fine breeding sow.<sup>96</sup>

MEGARA

You know that in five years it will look  
just like its mother.

DICAEOPOLIS

But this little piggy  
is not suitable for sacrifice.

MEGARIAN

Why not? Why unsuitable?

DICAEOPOLIS

Because it has no tail.<sup>97</sup>

1010

MEGARIAN

That's because it is too young. When it grows  
into full piggyhood it will have a tail—  
long, thick, and red.

*[The Megarian picks up the second child.]*

If you want a little pig  
for fattening, this one here's a good one.

DICAEOPOLIS

This sow looks just like the other one.

MEGARIAN

They come from the same father and mother.  
Let them fatten up and grow their bristles,  
and they'll be the finest sows you could offer  
in a sacrifice to goddess Aphrodite.

[790]

DICAEOPOLIS

But we don't offer sows to Aphrodite.

1020

MEGARIAN

No sows for Aphrodite! That goddess  
is the only one they're offered up to!

<sup>96</sup>In the Greek this conversation contains strong sexual innuendo because the word for sow also means *cunt*. One recent translator of this play changed the young girls from pigs into cats so that he could use the word *pussy* and thus retain the sexual reference of the original Greek.

<sup>97</sup>The young pig is unsuitable for sacrifice because without a tail it is incomplete.

## ACHARNIANS

The flesh of these sows will taste its finest  
once they have been skewered on a spit.

DICAEOPOLIS

Are they old enough to suck things on their own?  
Do they still need their mother?

MEGARIAN

Not at all.

For that they no longer need their mother—  
or their father.

DICAEOPOLIS

What are their favourite foods?

MEGARIAN

They eat whatever is given to them.  
Ask them yourself.

DICAEOPOLIS

Hey, little piggy wiggie.

1030

DAUGHTER

Wee, wee, wee.

[800]

DICAEOPOLIS

Do you like to eat chick peas?<sup>98</sup>

DAUGHTER

Wee, wee, wee.

DICAEOPOLIS

What about early figs?

DAUGHTER [*excitedly*]

Wee, wee, wee, wee, wee!

DICAEOPOLIS

Their squealing is so keen  
at the very mention of the word “figs.”

[*Dicaeopolis shouts back into the house.*]

Bring some figs out here for these little porkers!

---

<sup>98</sup>The Greek word for *chick peas* also refers to the *human penis* (as does the word for *fig* in Dicaeopolis’s next question).



## ACHARNIANS

*[Xanthias brings out a bowl of figs, hands it to Dicaeopolis, and returns into the house.]*

DICAEOPOLIS

Will they eat them? Good heavens, what a noise  
their munching makes. Almighty Herakles,  
what country do these little piggies come from?  
They look as if they come from Hungary.<sup>99</sup>

MEGARIAN

They didn't gobble down all the figs—  
I managed to snatch up one of them.

1040

[810]

DICAEOPOLIS

By Zeus, they make a very pretty pair.  
How much do you want for both of them?  
Tell me.

MEGARIAN

I will give you one of them  
for a rope of garlic, and the other,  
if you want her, for a pound of salt.

DICAEOPOLIS

I'll buy them both from you. Wait right here.

*[Dicaeopolis exits into his house.]*

MEGARIAN

It's a deal. O Hermes, god of trading,  
grant that I may sell my wife and mother  
on the same generous terms as these!

1050

*[Enter an Informer who moves up to the Megarian.]*

INFORMER

Hey fellow, what country do you come from?

MEGARIAN

I am a pig merchant from Megara.

---

<sup>99</sup>The word in the Greek text is the name of a Greek city, but also can mean (according to Paley) "eat-onians." A number of translators use the English word Hungary.

## ACHARNIANS

INFORMER

All right then, I am denouncing your pigs  
as illegal goods—and you, as well.

MEGARIAN

Here we go again.  
the decree that's caused us all our troubles!

INFORMER

It's that Megarian dialect of yours—  
that's what you should blame. Let go the sack!

MEGARIAN

Dicaeopolis!  
Dicaeopolis! I am being denounced!!

*[Enter Dicaeopolis.]*

DICAEOPOLIS

By whom? Who has been informing on you?  
Clerks of the market, get these informers  
out of here!

1060

*[Dicaeopolis picks up a leather strap and confronts the Informer.]*

You want to enlighten us  
without a source of light?

INFORMER

Am I not allowed  
to denounce our enemies?

DICAEOPOLIS

You should watch out!  
Why don't you piss off out of here right now  
and do your informing somewhere else!

*[Dicaeopolis beats the Informer and chases him away.]*

MEGARIAN

What a plague these informers are in Athens!

DICAEOPOLIS

Not to worry, my Megarian friend.  
Here's payment for your two little piggies—  
garlic and salt. Farewell and happy times!

[830]

## ACHARNIANS

MEGARIAN

Ah, we don't have happy times in Megara.

1070

DICAEOPOLIS

Well then, may that inappropriate wish  
apply to me!

MEGARIAN

My dear little sows,  
with your father far away, you must try  
to munch your bread with salt, if anyone  
will give you some.

*[The Megarian and Dicaeopolis depart with the young children, leaving the  
Chorus on stage.]*

CHORUS GROUP A

Dicaeopolis  
is living a truly rich man's dream.  
Did you notice how every original scheme  
works out as he wishes? Seated at his ease,  
he earns good money from his market fees.  
If informers like Ctesias should come,  
they'll shriek from the pain far up the bum.<sup>100</sup>

1080

CHORUS GROUP B

You will not be swindled in bargaining here  
or observe filthy Prepis wiping his rear.  
Cleonymus never will bump into you,  
as you stroll around in a tunic brand new,  
and foolish Hyperbolus you'll never see,  
polluting all justice with his sophistry.<sup>101</sup>

CHORUS GROUP C

In this market square you won't have to greet  
those unwelcome rascals you see on the street—  
that Cratinus fool with his hair razor cut  
like faithless husbands who're screwing a slut,  
or maestro Artemo, a man whose arm pit,  
just like his father's, always stinks of goat shit.<sup>102</sup>

1090

---

<sup>100</sup>Ctesias was an informer about whom very little is known.

<sup>101</sup>It is not clear whom the name Prepis refers to. Cleonymus was a follower of Creon. He was a coward by reputation because he allegedly threw away his shield in a battle and ran. Hyperbolus was a prominent politician aligned with Creon.

<sup>102</sup>Cratinus may refer to the comic poet or to a younger man. Artemo was a painter well known for being constantly hungry.

## ACHARNIANS

### CHORUS GROUP D

That rascal Pauson won't slander your name  
attempting to make you feel outrage and shame,  
nor that wretch Lysistratus, Cholargos's curse  
in this market show off his corruption and worse,  
always hungry and cold, with blasphemous ways  
he mooches each month for a mere thirty days.<sup>103</sup>

*[Enter a man from Boeotia with his slave. They are both loaded down heavily with stuff to sell at the market. Behind them comes a small group of bagpipe players, playing very badly. They stop playing as soon as the Boeotian starts to speak. The Boeotian stops and unloads the stuff he has been carrying.]*

### BOEOTIAN

By Hercules, my shoulder is really sore. 1100 [860]  
Ismenias, take care with that penny-royal,  
set it down gently. And you musicians,  
men of Thebes, stick those bone flutes of yours  
into the dog's arse and play us a tune.<sup>104</sup>

*[The musicians start playing very badly. Dicaeopolis comes out of his house.]*

### DICAEOPOLIS *[yelling at the musicians]*

Stop this! To the crows with you! You wasps,  
piss off from my home! Where did they come from,  
these wretched scoundrel sons of Chaeris,  
playing their droning bagpipes outside my door.

### BOEOTIAN

Ah, by Iolaus, drive those fellows off,  
my dear host.<sup>105</sup> That would truly please me. 1110  
They've been playing behind me all the way  
from Thebes and have stripped the blossoms  
from my penny-royal. But if you're in the mood, [870]  
would you like to buy anything from me?  
I have chickens and locusts and . . .

### DICAEOPOLIS *[interrupting]*

Ah, welcome,  
Boeotian friend, eater of griddle cakes,  
What have you brought?

---

<sup>103</sup>Pauson was a painter about whom little is known. Lysistratus was a member of the socially elite. Cholargos is a political division of Athenian citizens (like Acharnia).

<sup>104</sup>The pipers' instruments are like a small bagpipe with a flute (made of bone) and a bellows (made of the skins of dogs). Starkie suggests that the phrase "The Dogs Arse" was the title of a popular tune.

<sup>105</sup>Iolaus was a legendary Theban hero, the charioteer for Hercules.

## ACHARNIANS

BOEOTIAN

All the finest goods  
Boeotia offers: marjoram, penny-royal,  
rush mats, wicks, ducks, jays, francolins,  
coots, wrens, divers . . .

DICAEOPOLIS [*interrupting*]

A winter storm of birds—  
fowl weather blowing them to market.

1120

BOEOTIAN

. . . geese, hares, foxes, moles, hedgehogs, cats,  
martens, otters, and eels from lake Copais.

[880]

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah, you bring the tastiest of all fish  
known to mortal men. Let me pay tribute  
to those eels of yours, if you have any.

*[The Boeotian rummages through his pile of goods and produces an eel.]*

BOEOTIAN

O you, the eldest of my fifty maidens—  
virgin nymphs from lake Copais—come out  
and make our host a happy man.

DICAEOPOLIS [*peering at the eel*]

O my dearest love, I have long yearned for you.  
How you make the comic chorus sigh,  
you, who are true love of Morychus.<sup>106</sup>  
Slaves, bring the stove out here and the bellows.  
Look at this, my children, the finest eel,  
who has come to us after six long years  
of waiting. Children, you should speak to it.  
To honour our guest, I will provide the coal.  
Take it inside.

1130

[890]

*[He speaks directly to the eel.]*

If you are to be stewed with beets  
then death shall never come between us.

BOEOTIAN

What do I receive in return as payment?

1140

---

<sup>106</sup>Morychus was a tragic poet noted for his gluttony and effeminacy.

## ACHARNIANS

DICAEOPOLIS

It will pay the market dues you owe me.  
But if you wish to sell some of the rest,  
then speak up.

BOEOTIAN

I wish to sell everything.

DICAEOPOLIS

Tell me how much you want? Or do you wish  
to take some goods from here back home?

BOEOTIAN

I do.  
I'd take some Athenian goods—those things  
we in Boeotia do not produce ourselves.

[900]

DICAEOPOLIS

Then you should purchase some Phaleric sprats  
or pottery or . . .

BOEOTIAN

Sprats or pottery?  
We have these things. What I am looking for  
are things we lack but you have in abundance.

1150

DICAEOPOLIS

I have just what you want. Why not take back  
an informer, packed up like crockery.

BOEOTIAN

By the twin gods, if I took one back home  
I could earn a tidy profit from a man  
full of mischief and lots of monkey tricks.<sup>107</sup>

*[Enter Nicarchus, an informer.]*

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah ha! Here comes Nicarchus to denounce you.

BOEOTIAN

He's not very tall.

---

<sup>107</sup>The twin gods are Amphion and Zethes, sons of Zeus, who built the walls of Thebes.

## ACHARNIANS

DICAEOPOLIS

Every inch is nasty.

NICARCHUS

This merchandise—who does it belong to?

[910]

BOEOTIAN

It's mine—from Thebes, as Zeus is my witness.

1160

NICARCHUS

I denounce it as enemy contraband.

BOEOTIAN

What's wrong with you? Why are you waging war  
and fighting against my birds?

NICARCHUS

I'll denounce you as well.

BOEOTIAN

How have I harmed you?

NICARCHUS

For the sake of our audience,  
I'll explain: you are importing lamp wicks  
from an enemy state.

DICAEOPOLIS

You're denouncing him  
for a candle wick?

NICARCHUS

It only takes one wick  
to burn the dockyard down.

DICAEOPOLIS

Destroy the dockyard  
with a single wick?

NICARCHUS

That's right.

DICAEOPOLIS

But how?

## ACHARNIANS

NICARCHUS

Well, a Boeotian could attach the wick  
to a beetle's wing, light it, and send it  
into the dockyard through a water pipe  
when a strong north wind is blowing.  
If fire reached the ships, it would quickly  
incinerate the dockyard.

1170 [920]

DICAEOPOLIS *[attacking Nicarchus]*

You idiot!  
Everything destroyed by a beetle and a wick?

*[Dicaeopolis starts hitting Nicarchus with his strips of leather.]*

NICARCHUS *[appealing to the Chorus]*

You are witnesses how he's abusing me!

DICAEOPOLIS

Gag his mouth and give me some straw. I need  
to pack him like a piece of pottery,  
so he does not get broken up in transit.

1180

*[Dicaeopolis begins to package Nicarchus for his trip to Boeotia, by wrapping tape all around him, so that he looks like a mummy.]*

CHORUS

Take the greatest of care as you wrap up this gnome,  
so the contents don't crack as our friend travels home.

DICAEOPOLIS

I'll take plenty of care—he's already so flawed  
his note rings quite false and offends every god.

CHORUS LEADER

What sort of use will he find for this crock?  
Its constant chatter fills the house with its squawk.

[940]

DICAEOPOLIS

It's an all-purpose vessel for mixing foul acts,  
mortar for law suits, a lamp to spy traps,  
and a cup where one poisons all relevant facts.  
And my excellent friend, this vessel won't wear,  
it never will break, if you hang it with care—  
the feet at the top, the head swinging in air.

1190

CHORUS LEADER *[to the Boeotian]*

You're all set now—things are looking good!



## ACHARNIANS

BOEOTIAN

Well, I intend to reap a splendid harvest.

CHORUS LEADER

Farewell my fine friend. Take this informer  
with you, and hurl him wherever you wish— [950]  
where you pile all the other sycophants.

DICAEOPOLIS

Preparing this rascal was bloody hard work.  
Here, my Boeotian friend, load up your vessel.

*[Dicaeopolis hands the bound up Nicarchus over to the Boeotian, who passes the bundle onto his slave.]*

BOEOTIAN

Hey Ismenias, bend down and take this 1200  
on your shoulder. Carry it back like this.

*[The Boeotian arranges the bound-up Nicarchus on the back of his slave Ismenius.]*

Be sure to carry it the right way up.

DICAEOPOLIS

What you're taking is not worth very much,  
but this freight will make you a fine profit.  
Dealing with informers will bring you luck.

*[The Boeotian and Ismenias leave, returning to Boeotia with the 'packaged' Nicarchus.]*

A SERVANT OF LAMACHUS *[calling out as he enters]*

Dicaeopolis!

DICAEOPOLIS

What is it?

Why are you calling me?

SERVANT OF LAMACHUS

It's Lamachus—  
he wishes to observe the Feast of Cups [960]  
and ordered me to offer you one drachma  
for some thrushes and three drachmas 1210  
for an eel from lake Copais.<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup>The Feast of Cups was part of the Dionysia, a celebration of Dionysus, held in February.

## ACHARNIANS

DICAEOPOLIS

Who is he,  
this Lamachus who wants to buy an eel?

SERVANT OF LAMACHUS

The terrible bearer of a bull's eye shield,  
who likes to brandish his Gorgon's head  
and the three plumes covering his helmet.

DICAEOPOLIS

No, he'll not get anything, not even  
if he offers me his shield. Let him shake  
those plumes of his above some salted fish.  
If he comes here and starts to make a fuss,  
I'll appeal to the clerks of the marketplace. 1220  
But now, I'll take these goods for myself  
and go back home, 'flying on the wings [970]  
of a blackbird and a thrush.'

*[Dicaeopolis returns to his house, and the Servant of Lamachus leaves to go back to Lamachus. Dicaeopolis reappears and spreads feathers across his doorway.]*

CHORUS

You see, all you citizens of Athens,  
you see how prudent and intelligent  
this man is. Thanks to a truce he made,  
he has imported all these goods we find  
useful in the home and pleasant to eat hot.  
All the finest things come to him on their own.

I will never welcome into my house 1230  
the god of war, nor will he ever sing  
that song "Harmodius" in my presence, [980]  
as he lies blind drunk across the table.  
He's an abusive sot, who rushes in  
with a company of happy revellers  
enjoying all sorts of pleasurable things,  
and brings with him nothing but disaster—  
he knocks stuff over, spills wine, and fights.  
I often called on him to settle down:  
"Why not sit here, and take this cup of wine 1240  
as a mark of friendship." But he still burned  
our vineyard poles and, what is much worse,  
forcibly poured out all the wine we had.

This man, on the other hand, takes good care  
to serve a sumptuous dinner and then,

## ACHARNIANS

proud of what he's done, scatters these feathers  
before his door to show us how he lives.

*[The naked figure of the goddess of Peace and Reconciliation appears from on high and descends to the top of Dicaeopolis's house.]*

O peaceful Reconciliation, companion  
of fair Aphrodite and the loving Graces  
we little knew the beauty of your face! 1250 [990]  
Would that Eros, with flowers in his hair,  
the way he is depicted in that painting,  
might seize the two of us, you and me,  
and bring us into a happy union.  
Perhaps you think I am too old for you  
but I fancy I could still embrace you  
and tumble you three times—first, I would plant  
a long row of vines, and then, beside them,  
some fresh tender shoots of fig, and third, 1260  
a row of cultivated grapes. Old as I am,  
there will be olive trees in every field,  
so that we'll always have supplies of oil  
to rub across our skin at each new moon.

*[The naked goddess departs. Enter a Herald.]*

HERALD

Listen, you people! As was the custom 1000  
with your ancestors, when the trumpet sounds,  
drink down a pitcher full of wine. The man  
who drains his first will receive a wine skin  
as plump and full as fat Ctesiphon.

*[Enter Dicaeopolis and two slaves, bringing out the food for dinner, which they start to prepare.]*

DICAEOPOLIS

You slaves and women, are you not listening?  
What are you doing? Did you not hear 1270  
the herald? Hop to it! Let the hares braise  
and roast! Keep them turning, and then remove  
them from the spit! Get the garlands ready!  
Bring me the skewers to impale the birds.

CHORUS LEADER

I envy your fine judgment, my good man,  
and especially this feast you set before us. 1010

## ACHARNIANS

DICAEOPOLIS

What about when you see the birds roasting?

CHORUS

Ah yes, you are so right about the birds!

DICAEOPOLIS *[to a slave]*

Stir up the fire!

CHORUS

What a fine cook he is!

He understands well how to prepare  
a delicious feast in his own home.

1280

*[Enter Dercetes, a poor farmer in great distress.]*

DERCETES

Alas! Alas! I am so unfortunate!

DICAEOPOLIS

By Herakles, who is this?

DERCETES

A most unhappy man!

DICAEOPOLIS

Keep your miserable feelings to yourself.

DERCETES

Ah, my dear friend, you alone are at peace.  
Give me a portion of your truce, even if  
it's only for five years.

[1020]

DICAEOPOLIS

What's wrong with you?

DERCETES

I'm done for. I've lost a pair of oxen.

DICAEOPOLIS

How did you do that?

DERCETES

The Boeotians—

## ACHARNIANS

they took them from me at Phyle.<sup>109</sup>

1290

DICAEOPOLIS

O you poor miserable wretch of triple sorrow!  
But in those white clothes, you're not in mourning.

DERCETES

By Zeus, all their cowshit was my source of cash.

DICAEOPOLIS

What do you need me to do?

DERCETES

Weeping for my oxen has ruined my eyes.  
If you have any sympathy for me,  
Dercetes of Phyle, then spread your peace  
like an ointment under both my eyelids.

DICAEOPOLIS

But my poor fellow, I'm not a healer.

[1030]

DERCETES

Come, I implore you. Perhaps there's a chance  
I can get my two oxen back.

1300

DICAEOPOLIS

It's not possible.  
You should go and tell your troubles  
to the followers of healer Pittalus.

DERCETES

Just one drop of peace—poured into this reed!

DICAEOPOLIS

No. Not even the tiniest drop. Go away!  
Do your weeping somewhere else.

DERCETES

O dear! Alas for my two little oxen.

*[Dercetes exits.]*

CHORUS

This man has found enjoyment in sweet peace.  
I do not think he'll share with anyone.

---

<sup>109</sup>Phyle was a small political community in Attica, often raided by the Boeotians.

## ACHARNIANS

DICAEOPOLIS

Pour some honey over the sausages,  
and fry the cuttle fish.

1310 [1040]

CHORUS

Did you hear his voice?  
Such a loud commanding tone!

DICAEOPOLIS

And broil the eels.

CHORUS

You are killing me with hunger, and your smoke  
and shouting are destroying our neighbours.

DICAEOPOLIS

Fry this and make sure it's nicely browned.

*[Enter the Best Man from a wedding party. He is holding a plate with some meat and a jar on it.]*

BEST MAN *[calling]*

Dicaeopolis!

DICAEOPOLIS

Who are you? What's your name?

BEST MAN

A bridegroom at his marriage banquet  
sends you this plate of meat.

[1050]

DICAEOPOLIS

Whoever he is,  
he has my thanks.

BEST MAN

And in return for the meat  
he asks you to pour into this jar  
a dram of peace, so he will not have to fight  
but can stay at home screwing his young wife.

1320

DICAEOPOLIS

Take back the meat. Do not give it to me.  
Take it back. I would not pour out a dram,  
not for a thousand drachmas.

*[Enter a Bridesmaid.]*

## ACHARNIANS

Who is this?

BEST MAN

She is the bridesmaid. She has to speak to you  
in private. It's a message from the bride.

DICAEOPOLIS

Come then. What do you have to say to me?

*[The Bridesmaid whispers the message in Dicaeopolis's ear.]*

O by the gods, that makes me really laugh!  
The bride wishes to stay at home holding  
her husband's cock. Come, fetch my peace treaty.  
To her alone I will give some, for she  
is a woman and did not cause this war.  
Here, my dear, hold out your vial.

1330 [1060]

*[Dicaeopolis pours some peace into the vial.]*

There you go.  
Do you know how to apply the ointment?  
Tell the bride this: whenever they draw up  
a list of soldiers, she should rub some of this  
at night on her husband's cock. And now, slave,  
take away the truce. Fetch the jugs of wine,  
so I can fill up all the drinking bowls.

1340

CHORUS LEADER

Someone's coming. He looks very worried—  
as if he's weighed down with terrible news.

[1070]

*[Enter HERALD A.]*

HERALD A

O more toil and fighting!

*[Herald A goes up to Lamachus's house and shouts.]*

Lamachus!

LAMACHUS *[from within]*

Who is making such noise around my home  
and its brass ornaments?

## ACHARNIANS

HERALD A

Our generals  
have ordered you to take your troops and plumes  
with all speed today and march through the snow  
to guard the passes. For they have just learned  
that some Boeotian bandits will invade  
around the time of the Feast of Cups.

1350

LAMACHUS

Ah, the generals. They are more numerous  
than useful. Is it not monstrous that I  
cannot stay to enjoy the celebrations?

DICAEOPOLIS

An army with the spirit of Lamachus!

[1080]

LAMACHUS

You wretch! Are you still laughing at me?

DICAEOPOLIS

Are you keen to fight this four-winged Geryon?<sup>110</sup>

LAMACHUS

Alas! What a message that herald brought!

DICAEOPOLIS

Ah ha! There is another herald running here.  
What message has he got for me?

*[Enter Herald B out of breath from running.]*

HERALD B

Dicaeopolis!

DICAEOPOLIS

What is it?

HERALD

Grab your basket and your cup  
as quick as you can, and come to the feast.  
The priest of Dionysus has sent for you.  
But you have to get a move on. Hurry!  
They have been waiting a long while to eat.  
Everything is ready—couches, tables, cushions,  
coverings, garlands, perfume, prostitutes,

1360

[1090]

---

<sup>110</sup>Geryon was a mythical monster.



## ACHARNIANS

finely baked flat cakes, muffins, layer cakes,  
and dancing girls who are so beautiful  
in that “Dearest Harmodius” song and dance.  
So come on—as quickly as you can!

LAMACHUS

Damn it—1370  
it’s just my bad luck!

DICAEOPOLIS

That’s because you chose  
as your patron the giant Gorgon’s head.  
Slave, shut the door, and get someone  
to set out our dinner.

LAMACHUS

Slave! Slave! Bring out  
the sack for my provisions.

DICAEOPOLIS

Slave! Slave! Bring out  
a hamper for my dinner.

*[The Slaves appear with the sack and the hamper, and they continue through this scene to bring what their masters demand.]*

LAMACUS *[to his Slave]*

Get salt, my lad,  
and thyme . . . and an onion.

DICAEOPOLIS *[to his Slave]*

A slice of fish for me.[1100]  
I’m not fond of onions.

LAMACHUS

Boy, fetch me  
some dried fish wrapped in stale fig leaves.

DICAEOPOLIS

Fetch me some fatty meat wrapped in a fig leaf.1380  
I’ll cook it here.

LAMACHUS

Bring me two plumes from my helmet.

DICAEOPOLIS

Bring me some thrushes and wild pigeon.

## ACHARNIANS

LAMACHUS

These ostrich plumes—so white and beautiful.

DICAEOPOLIS

The flesh from this pigeon is so well cooked—  
it's delicious.

LAMACHUS [*to Dicaeopolis*]

Listen to me, old man,  
stop trying to make fun of my weapons.

DICAEOPOLIS

My dear fellow, please cease watching my birds.

LAMACHUS

Bring me the case for my triple plumes.

DICAEOPOLIS

Bring me the small bowl full of rabbit stew. [110]

LAMACHUS

The moths have been eating my helmet plumes. 1390

DICAEOPOLIS

And I have been eating my stew before dinner.

LAMACHUS

My dear fellow, would you please refrain  
from speaking to me?

DICAEOPOLIS

I'm not speaking to you.  
I am arguing with my slave.

[*Dicaeopolis turns to the Slave*]

Well then,  
do you want to make a bet? We'll leave it  
to Lamachus to resolve: which of these two—  
a locust or a thrush—is the best to eat?

LAMACHUS

You impudent rascal!

DICAEOPOLIS

He much prefers the locust.

## ACHARNIANS

LAMACHUS

Slave, take down my spear and bring it here.

DICAEOPOLIS

Slave, pick up the sausage and bring it here.

1400

LAMACHUS

Come, let me pull my spear from its cover.

Now, my boy, hold this spear firmly.

[1120]

DICAEOPOLIS

And you, my lad, hang onto this skewer.

LAMACHUS

Boy, bring out the stand for my shield.

DICAEOPOLIS [*to his Slave*]

That loaf of bread—  
bring it out here, hot from the oven.

LAMACHUS

Bring my round shield with the Gorgon's head.

DICAEOPOLIS

Bring me some of my circular cheese cake.

LAMACHUS

Is this not what men consider sheer insolence?

DICAEOPOLIS

Is this not what men consider sweet cheese cake?

LAMACHUS

Pour some oil on the shield. In the bronze  
I can see an old man who will be charged  
for shirking his military duties.

1410

DICAEOPOLIS

Pour out some honey. In here one can see  
an old man telling Lamachus—the man  
with the Gorgon's head—to weep with sorrow.

[1130]

LAMACHUS

Slave, bring out my full body armour.

DICAEOPOLIS

Slave, fetch my armour—a full drinking cup.

## ACHARNIANS

LAMACHUS [*putting on his breastplate*]  
With this I am armed against my enemies.

DICAEOPOLIS [*waving his drinking cup*]  
With this I am armed against my fellow drinkers.

LAMACHUS  
Slave, strap the mattress onto the shield. 1420

DICAEOPOLIS  
Slave, strap the dinner into the basket.

LAMACHUS  
I'll carry my knapsack of stuff myself.

DICAEOPOLIS  
I'll get my cloak and then we'll be off.

LAMACHUS  
Slave, pick up the shield and take it outside. [1140]  
Let's get going. Good heavens, it's snowing.  
This is going to be a wintry business.

DICAEOPOLIS  
Pick up the food. We have a party to attend.

*[Dicaeopolis and Lamachus and their Slaves exit in opposite direction.]*

CHORUS [*to Lamachus*]  
Good luck to you both in your campaigns,  
as you leave on your differing journeys—  
one to stand guard and freeze in the snow, 1430  
the other to carouse in a flowery crown,  
and lie down to sleep with a tender young maid,  
who'll massage his cock and make sure he gets laid.

To speak from the heart, may Zeus do away [1150]  
with Antimachus, who spits and splutters  
and writes useless verse. As chorus leader,  
last year at the Lenaea he dismissed me  
without my dinner. Let me observe him  
craving a squid already cooked and hot,  
as it is set out on a tray and moves, 1440  
like a ship approaching shore, towards him,  
he stretches his hand to reach for the tray, [1160]  
a dog seizes the squid and scampers away.

## ACHARNIANS

That's one disaster I hope he will face  
but I also hope he has trouble at night.  
As he comes home sweating from riding his horse  
may he meet an Orestes crazy from drink,  
who bashes his head, so that he has to stoop  
to pick up a stone, but confused in the dark  
he scoops up a turd, just recently dumped, 1450 [1170]  
runs at Orestes, lets fly with the shit  
but misses—and it's Cratinus who's hit!<sup>111</sup>

SLAVE OF LAMACHUS [*rushing to Lamachus's house*]

You slaves of Lamachus inside the house,  
we need water—some water warmed up  
in a little pot! Get lint and ointment,  
some greasy wool, and an ankle splint.<sup>112</sup>  
The man was hurt trying to leap a ditch—  
he hit a pointed stake, twisted his foot,  
strained the joint, and then fell on a stone, [1180]  
cracking his head. His Gorgon roused herself, 1460  
flew off his shield, and his splendid plumage  
rolled down onto the rocks. As he saw this  
the hero gave out a dismal groan and said,

“O radiant eye of heaven, I am now  
gazing upon thee for the very last time.  
I am losing my light. I now cease to be.”

That said, he falls back into the water,  
gets up again, meets some runaway slaves,  
and chases some robbers with his spear.  
But here he is. Open up the doors. 1470

[*Enter Lamachus, walking with difficulty and assisted by two slaves.*]

LAMACHUS

O careful, careful! Ahhh, this dreadful pain! [1190]  
What wretched suffering! That enemy spear  
has wounded me, and I am done for.  
But what would be even more disastrous  
is Dicaeopolis seeing me wounded  
and making fun of my misfortunes.

[*Enter Dicaeopolis with two Courtesans. He is inebriated.*]

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<sup>111</sup>Orestes is a general name for a thief, particular one who is a bit crazy and operates a night.

<sup>112</sup>Paley notes that unwashed woolen fleece was thought to have healing properties.

## ACHARNIANS

DICAEOPOLIS

O careful, careful! What splendid breasts!  
As firm as a quince! O my golden treasures,  
give me some of your spit-swapping kisses,  
for I was the first to drain my wine cup!

1480

LAMACHUS

What miserable luck! All my suffering.  
Ah, these painful wounds.

DICAEOPOLIS

Ha, ha! Greetings,  
little horseman Lamachus!

LAMACHUS

I am cursed!  
Why do you irritate me so much.<sup>113</sup>

DICAEOPOLIS [*to one of the courtesans*]

Why are you kissing me so much?

LAMACHUS

I am a wretched mess—in a bad way.  
That charge of mine came at a heavy cost.

[1210]

DICAEOPOLIS

You mean you were charged for the Feast of Jars?

1490

LAMACHUS

O Apollo, a healer! a healer—please.

DICAEOPOLIS

Today is not the feast of Apollo.

LAMACHUS

Hold onto my legs . . . that hurts. My friends,  
help support me.

DICAEOPOLIS

My dears, why don't you both  
grab hold of my cock, here in the middle,

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<sup>113</sup>I follow F. A. Paley's suggestion of assigning this line to Lamachus in order to make better sense of a couple of confusing lines.

## ACHARNIANS

LAMACHUS

That blow from the stone has made me dizzy—  
I'm blacking out.

DICAEOPOLIS

And I'm dying to go to bed [1220]  
My balls are full, and I am ready to unload!

LAMACHUS

Carry me off to the healer Pittalus.

DICAEOPOLIS

Take me to the judges! Where is he—  
the king of the feast? Give me the wineskin!

LAMACHUS

A spear has pierced me to the very bone. 1500  
It's agony!

DICAEOPOLIS

You see this empty jug—  
I am victorious!

CHORUS LEADER

Hurrah for you, old man.  
I answer your call—Hurrah for the victor!

DICAEOPOLIS

I filled up my cup with unmixed wine  
and drained it—all in one gulp!

CHORUS

You are now victorious,  
a worthy champion! Take the wineskin! [1230]

DICAEOPOLIS

Follow me and sing 'Hurrah for the Victor!'

CHORUS

Yes, we will follow, all singing in honour of you  
and your wineskin, "Hail, Hail to the Victor!"

*[They all exit, singing and dancing.]*