

Wasps: Cast of Characters

SOSIAS	a slave in the house of Contracleon
XANTHIAS	a slave in the house of Contracleon
CONTRACLEON	a wealthy young Athenian
PROCLEON	his elderly father
WASP CHORUS	twenty-four elderly impoverished Athenian jurors
BOY	the poor young son of the chorus leader
BOYS	three poor young boys who accompany the chorus (mute)
MIDAS	a slave in the house of Contracleon (mute)
PHRYX	a slave in the house of Contracleon (mute)
MASYNTIAS	a slave in the house of Contracleon (mute)
CLEONHOUND	a household dog
LABES	a household dog (mute)
DARDANIS	a flute girl (mute)
MYRTIA	a baking woman
CHAEREPHON	a well-known philosopher (mute)
INJURED MAN	an Athenian assaulted by Procleon
WITNESS	his witness (mute)
CRAB DANCERS	the three sons of Carcinus (mute)
CARCINUS	an Athenian sea captain (mute)

Wasps was first produced by Aristophanes in 422 B.C.E., at the Lenaia festival in the city of Athens. An adapted stage version of this translation received its first public performance by the Aquila Theatre Company at the Place Theatre, London, England, in November 1993, directed by Peter Meineck and Robert Richmond.

Wasps

SCENE: *A house in Athens.*

(Two slaves, Sosias and Xanthias, are asleep on stage. Sosias wakes up, walks over to Xanthias, and kicks him.)

SOSIAS:

Xanthias, you idiot! What are you doing?*

XANTHIAS:

I'm learning how to relieve the night watch.

SOSIAS:

You'll be learning how to take a beating if the master catches you! Don't you realize what kind of monstrosity we're guarding?

XANTHIAS:

I just want to "send my cares away, afore the break of day." 5

SOSIAS:

Then "venture forth," I won't stop you (*yawning*),
But I must admit, I feel like taking a sweet little nap myself.

*: (An asterisk refers to an endnote, found at the end of the play.)

5: The high style of this line suggests a parody of an unknown quote from tragedy or poetry.

(Sosias falls asleep, but soon begins to toss, turn, and babble, waking Xanthias.)

XANTHIAS:

What is wrong with you? Are you having a seizure, is it the Corybantic frenzies?

(Sosias wakes with a start.)

SOSIAS:

Huh! No, no, the spirit of sleep came to me, it was a visitation from Sabazius.

XANTHIAS:

The only visitation you had, mate, was to the one you made to the tavern!

But then, I have been known to participate in the worship of the grape myself.

And while we're on the subject of "Eastern influences" *(he tips his wine flask)*,

I just had an amazing dream sneak up on me like a Persian invasion.

SOSIAS:

I don't believe it! Me too, it's unbelievable!

Go on, tell me your dream first.

XANTHIAS:

I saw a massive eagle swoop down into the marketplace and snatch a poor defenseless chicken in its fierce talons.

Up, up into the sky went the eagle, soaring high.

And then it turned into Cleonymus and dropped its load!

8: A cult sacred to Cybele with rites that involved wild ecstatic dancing (*8 Corybants).

9: A god of wine and/or sleep, originally from Phrygia, a region of modern day Turkey (*9 Sabazius).

13: The Persians were regarded as an aggressive and deceitful enemy.

19: A politician known as the "Shield Dropper" because of his alleged cowardice in battle (*19 Cleonymus).

SOSIAS:

Ha, ha! That's a good one. I know a great little riddle about Cleonymus.

XANTHIAS:

Let's hear it then.

SOSIAS:

It's perfect for a drinking party.

Name me a creature that shrieks, shakes, shits, sheds, and shoos, on land and sea, all at the same time!

XANTHIAS:

What a thought! I hope my dream doesn't spell bad luck.

SOSIAS:

Don't worry, it's perfectly harmless.

XANTHIAS:

Harmless? A dream about a man shedding his weapon!

SOSIAS AND XANTHIAS:

(Clutching their private parts) Owwww!

XANTHIAS:

Anyway, tell me about your dream.

SOSIAS:

It was huge and political. It will really rock the boat.

XANTHIAS:

Well don't go overboard. Just tell me what you saw.

SOSIAS:

The night had just begun and I was dreaming away.

I saw a flock of sheep huddled together in the assembly up on Pnyx hill,

32: The meeting ground of the Athenian citizen assembly.

they all had walking-sticks and were wearing threadbare and filthy old cloaks.*

35 And these poor sheep were shaking with fear and being shouted at by an enormous, gluttonous whale with a voice like the squeal of an aggravated pig!

XANTHIAS:
(Pinching his nose) Phooey!

SOSIAS:
What's wrong?

XANTHIAS:
Stop! Stop! Please Stop!
Your dream stinks . . . like a tannery!

40 SOSIAS:
And this revolting whale had a set of scales and was weighing meat.

XANTHIAS:
By the gods! He's butchering the state and living off the fat of the land!*

45 SOSIAS:
And I saw Theorus sitting underneath the whale, except he had the crest of a rook! Then young Alcibiades turned to me and said, in his own lisp little way, "What a thight, can you thee? Theorus has a wook's cwest!"

39: This is a reference to Cleon, the most prominent politician at this time. He was said to have risen from the lower classes, and his family may have run a tannery, an operation that produced a terrible smell (*39 Cleon).

42: A minor politician in the circle of Cleon. Aristophanes portrays him as a fraud, a liar, and a braggart.

43: A young aristocrat who was beginning to make his mark in the Assembly. He went on to become a general and a prominent politician.

45: Alcibiades had a lisp and pronounced his "R's" as "L's." In Greek the word "crow" (*korakos*) spoken with this lisp would sound like the word "flatterer" (*kolakos*).

XANTHIAS:
More like a "crook's quest," if you're talking about Theorus!

SOSIAS:
Don't you think that's bizarre, Theorus turning into a rook?

XANTHIAS:
No, not at all, in fact it's a very good sign.

SOSIAS:
How come?

50 XANTHIAS:
Because your dream showed Theorus turning from man to bird, so there can only be one interpretation of your vision; Theorus is going to "foul his own nest," "be given the bird," and "croak!"

SOSIAS:
Brilliant! You should go into business interpreting messages from "the other side."
I could keep you on a retainer of two obols a day, then hire you out.

55 XANTHIAS:
It's time I told the audience what's going on.
I need to introduce the show.
Now you shouldn't expect anything too highbrow from us, but you're not going to get any of that disgusting stuff lifted off the Megarians either. We haven't got a pair of slaves wandering around handing out nuts, and you won't see Heracles

51: The Greek has "Go to the crows!" a proverbial phrase meaning "Go to hell!"

54: Two obols was the daily fee paid to the poorest citizens when they served as rowers in the Athenian navy.

58: The city of Megara lay to the west of Athens. Megarian comedy seems to have been regarded as cheap and vulgar.

59: The hero who became a demigod after completing his famous labors. Heracles was often a figure of fun in comedy and lampooned for his gluttony.

60 getting robbed of his dinner. We will not be taking the piss
out of that great tragic dramatist, Euripides—well, not this time
anyway,
and we are certainly not going to be having another go
at that most beloved of political figures, Cleon.
No, what we've got here is just a little story, but with a moral,
something we can all understand. Don't worry, it won't go over
65 your heads,
but it will be on a higher level than those other disgusting, obscene
farces.*

(Xanthias points to Contractleon, who is asleep on the roof.)

See him, that big chap, sleeping up there on the roof?
That's our lord and master, and he has ordered us to keep guard
70 over his old dad, who he's locked up inside the house.
The old man is suffering from a very rare and strange illness,
in fact it so rare that you would never be able to guess it
unless we were to reveal it to you.

(Xanthias challenges the audience.)

Go on, guess, I dare you.

*(Sosias has descended from the stage and crossed the orchestra, and
is now roaming in the audience.)*

SOSIAS:

75 Amynias here thinks that he's a compulsive gambler, a "philocubist!"

XANTHIAS:

By Zeus! you'd better throw again. He must be thinking of his own
addiction!

But he's right about one thing, the name of this malady does have
a "philo" in it.

(Sosias moves to another member of the audience)

61: Euripides (485/4?-407/6) was a famous Athenian tragic playwright
(*61 Euripides).

75: A general and politician. Comedy portrayed him as a corrupt effemi-
nate braggart, a freeloader, and a gambler.

SOSIAS:

Dercylus thinks that he's a wine-lover, a "Philotippler!"

XANTHIAS:

I don't think so. That's a very noble ailment, and only the very
best people suffer from it!

(Sosias seeks out another audience member.)

SOSIAS:

Nicostratus reckons he's addicted to making offerings and being a
compulsive xenophile.

XANTHIAS:

If Nicostratus wants to offer himself and love his guests, that's his
business,
but it's not what's wrong with our chap. You are all clutching at
straws.

You'll never get it, so I suppose I'll just have to tell you myself.

(Shouting to the audience) Quiet there at the back, please!

Our master has been stricken with a terrible affliction,
namely he is a "trialophile"—addicted to litigation, serving on a jury
and passing judgment! He absolutely loves it, can't get enough of it!
You should hear him moaning if he doesn't get a seat on the front
bench!

He doesn't get a wink of sleep at night, and even if he does nod off
for a little, his mind takes wing and goes on its own flight of fancy
hovering around the court water clock. He's so used to clutching*
a voting pebble that he wakes up in the morning with his fingers

79: Dercylus is unknown.

81: A general during the Peloponnesian War.

88: The various Athenian courts were served by large citizen juries, chosen
by lot from volunteers and numbering anywhere from two hundred to five
hundred. See the introduction, pp. 127-28.

94: Jurors registered their verdicts by dropping a pebble or mussel shell
into one of two large urns, designated "guilty" and "not guilty."

stuck together as if he's sprinkling his incense in honor of the new moon.

95 If he's out and about and sees some graffiti, you know the sort of thing,
 "Demos the son of Pylilampes has a sexy little bot,"
 he writes underneath, "Not half as sexy as the voting urn's slot."

One morning the cock crowed a little later than usual, and he went around claiming that the councilors had bribed it so he would miss their audit!*

100 What's even worse, every single night he gobbles down his dinner, puts his shoes on, and runs off down to the courtroom so he can sleep right outside the door, clinging to the notice board like a limpet.

That way he's one of the first in line when they select the jury. Mind you, he's a mean old bastard, this one, every time they get a

105 conviction and the jury are asked to set damages, he always goes for the maximum, scratching the longest line in his wax tablet. He comes home each day

with enough wax under his fingernails to fill a beehive. He's so paranoid that he'll run out of voting pebbles to drop in the guilty

110 urn that he's got his own private beach piled up in his room. "Such is his infatuation, but when his love is chided, he judges all the more."

95: Athenians marked the start of the month by making small offerings on their household altars.

97: Pylilampes was Plato's great uncle and stepfather. His son Demos was renowned for his good looks (*97 Pylilampes and Demos).

98: Voting urns were covered with a wicker lid with a hand-sized slot to keep the ballot secret.

107: The longer the line a juror drew in the wax, the more severe he assessed the penalty.

111: A parody of a line from Euripides' *Stheneboea* (*111 *Stheneboea*).

So in desperation we've locked him in the house, and we slaves are standing

guard to make sure he doesn't try and make a break for it.

It's the son I feel sorry for, he's taking all this very badly.

At first he tried to persuade his old dad to stop wearing that filthy old peasant cloak and stay indoors, but to no avail.

Then he gave him a ritual bathing and had him purified, but it was still no good.

Next, he took him to visit the priests of Dionysus who whipped him up into a Corybantic frenzy. But that didn't cure him either; he just ran off to the court, chanting away, banging his little drum, and joined a jury at the courthouse hearing a case!

Nothing seemed to work, so out of desperation he sailed his father across

to Aegina Island and had him spend the night in the temple of Asclepius.

But come first light, there he was, back in Athens, standing outside the courthouse!

Well, since then we decided to keep him shut up in the house, but he kept escaping,

crawling through the water pipes or nipping out a little hole, so we have stopped

up all the chinks with rags and filled in all the gaps. Then we discovered

him knocking pegs into the courtyard wall and scuttling up onto the roof

like a pet jackdaw. So, we've put nets right across the yard.

It's our job to patrol the perimeter of the house to make sure he stays put!*

You'll never believe what the old codger is called—Procleon, I swear it's true! And his son here is named Contractoleon.

117: The short coarse woolen cloak is a badge of class pride for Procleon and a hideous social embarrassment for his son (*33 Cloaks).

118: The Greeks believed that madness was a kind of religious pollution (*118 Purification).

125: A healing deity with a sanctuary on Aegina, off the coast of Attica in the Saronic Gulf (*125 Asclepius).

135 He's a bit stuck up, likes to live the good life and . . .
(Contracleon wakes up and calls down from the roof.)

CONTRACLEON:
 Xanthias! Sosias! Are you two asleep?

XANTHIAS:
 Oh no!
(Xanthias kicks Sosias.)

SOSIAS:
 What! What!

XANTHIAS:
 Contracleon's woken up.

CONTRACLEON:
 Quickly, one of you run around to the back!
 Father's gone into the kitchen, and he's scurrying around like a
 mouse.
 140 Make sure he doesn't try and disappear down the plug hole in the
 sink!

(Exit Sosias running around the back of the scene building.)

(To Xanthias) You keep watch on the door.

XANTHIAS:
 Yes, master.
(A rumbling is heard from inside the house.)

CONTRACLEON:
 By Poseidon! Whatever is that noise coming from the chimney?
*(Enter Procleon, emerging from the chimney pipe on the roof of the
 scene building.)*

(To Procleon) What are you doing? Who are you?

PROCLEON:
 I'm just a little puff of smoke.

CONTRACLEON:
 Smoke? From what kind of wood? 145

PROCLEON:
 Sycamore.

CONTRACLEON:
 More like Sycophant! That's a load of hot air, and it would choke
 anyone.
 You get back inside this minute! Where's that chimney cover gone
 to?

*(Contracleon forces Procleon back down the chimney and puts the
 cover over.)*

You get back inside, blast you! I'll make sure you never try this
 one again
 by putting a block of wood over the cover. *(He does so.)* 150
 I'd like to see you try and get out of there. That idea of yours
 went up in smoke. To be known as the son of a puff, what a drag!*

PROCLEON:
(Banging on the door from inside) Boy!

XANTHIAS:
 He's banging away at the door! *(He leans up against it.)*

CONTRACLEON:
 You'll have to take the force of his thrusts!
 I'm on my way down to help.
 Keep your eye on the lock and watch the bolt,
 make sure he doesn't try to chew my knob.* 155

(Procleon appears at the window.)

PROCLEON:
 What the hell are you doing? Can't you see? I'm trying to get to court.

143: God of the sea and the most important patron of Athens after Athena.

147: A man who sought to profit by collecting incriminating information
 for use in prosecutions.

Let me out, you bastard, otherwise Dracontides will get off!

XANTHIAS:

Oh bloody hell! What does it matter?

PROCLEON:

You don't understand! I had my fortune told at Delphi, and it said that if I acquitted anybody I would shrivel up and wither away to nothing.

160

XANTHIAS:

(Clutching his private parts) OOHHH! Apollo save us! What a prophecy!

PROCLEON:

Come on, you've got to let me out, I'm bursting!

XANTHIAS:

Not for all the fish in Poseidon's sea.

PROCLEON:

Right, you asked for it! I'll just have to chew through the net with my teeth.

XANTHIAS:

165 But you haven't got any teeth.

PROCLEON:

By all the gods! I'll kill you! You little bastard, someone get me a sword, quickly!

No, better still, bring me my juryman's wax tablet.

(Contracleon has now come down from the roof and joins Xanthias.)

157: There are four men known as Dracontides. All of them held political offices (*157 Dracontides).

159: The sanctuary to Apollo and seat of his priestess, the Pythia, who pronounced sacred oracles (*159 Delphi).

161: Apollo was the god of prophecy and healing.

CONTRACLEON:

He'll do himself a mischief if he's not careful.

PROCLEON:

No, no I won't, I just want to take the donkey to the market and sell him

as an all-inclusive deal, including panniers, it's market day today. 170

CONTRACLEON:

Couldn't I sell it for you?

PROCLEON:

Not half as well as I could.

CONTRACLEON:

Exactly! I could do it twice as well.

PROCLEON:

What? All right, then, if you insist, bring the donkey out.

XANTHIAS:

That was a good one, he's fishing to get out. He's a slippery customer, this one. 175

CONTRACLEON:

Well, I didn't take the bait, I can see just what he's up to. I think I'll get

the donkey myself just in case the old man tries to nose his way out.

*(He goes in and leads out the donkey, which refuses to move and brays loudly.)**

Come on, Neddy, move! What's the matter? Are you sad that you're going

to be sold today? Come on. What are you groaning for?

Anyone would think that you had Odysseus hanging down there. 180

180: Homer's hero, who blinded the Cyclops and escaped from his cave by hiding under a sheep (*Odyssey* 9.424-63).

XANTHIAS:

By Zeus! He has got someone down there!

CONTRACLEON:

Nonsense, let me see.

XANTHIAS:

It's not nonsense. Come here and have a look.

(Contracleon examines the donkey.)

CONTRACLEON:

What's going on, who's down there?

PROCLEON:

185 No one, by Zeus!

CONTRACLEON:

No one? And where are you from, "Mr. No one"?

PROCLEON:

I'm from Ithaca, the son of Flee-on-an-ass.

CONTRACLEON:

Well "Mr. No one," there's no way you're getting away with this.
*(To Xanthias) Pull him out from under there!**(Xanthias pulls Procleon out from under the donkey.)*

Ugghhh! You disgusting old man. Just look where he's stuffed himself! This must surely be the first time a donkey has ever given birth to a complete ass!

185: Odysseus had told the Cyclops that "no one" was his name. When he blinded the creature, the other Cyclopes came running to his aid and shouted into his cave demanding to know who was hurting him. The Cyclops gave the famous reply "No one," and his neighbors went away, leaving the path clear for Odysseus to escape.

187: Ithaca was the island home of Odysseus, off the northwest coast of Greece.

189: The Greek *klêtêr* could mean both "donkey" and "server of a summons."

PROCLEON:

I'm warning you, I won't go without a fight!

190

CONTRACLEON:

You'd be flogging a dead horse.

PROCLEON:

It'll be donkey's years before you ever stop me!

CONTRACLEON:

You're as stubborn as an old mule and twice as rotten.

PROCLEON:

Rotten, me! I am certainly not, by Zeus! I'll have you know that I am regarded by some as quite a dish, and very tasty. Perhaps you would like to sample a prime upper cut of matured juryman!

195

(Procleon takes a hopeless swing at Contracleon, misses, and falls on the floor.)

CONTRACLEON:

Get back inside, and take this stupid "donkey" with you!

(Xanthias pushes Procleon and the donkey back inside.)

PROCLEON:

Help! Help me! Fellow jurors, Cleon, help!

(Xanthias slams the door shut.)

CONTRACLEON:

You can shout as much as you like, but the door stays shut.
*(To Xanthias) Pile up a heap of stones against the door!**(Xanthias runs stage left.)*

Put the knob back in the hole!

200

(Xanthias runs stage right.)

192: The Greek has "a donkey's shadow," an expression meaning something not worth fighting for (*192 Donkey's shadow).

Wedge that plank of wood against the door!

(Xanthias runs stage left.)

Roll that big grinding stone . . .

(Something falls on Xanthias' head.)

XANTHIAS:

Oww! By all the gods! A clod of earth just fell on me!

CONTRACLEON:

Perhaps there's a mouse scuttling about in the eaves.

(Procleon pokes his head out of a hole between the wall and the roof.)

XANTHIAS:

205 That's no mouse, that's a house-juror, and he's trying to squeeze out from under the roof tiles!

CONTRACLEON:

By the gods! He thinks that he's a sparrow!
He's going to take flight any minute! Where's my net?

(Contracleon shoos his father back inside.)

210 Shoo! Shoo! Get back! Shoo! By Zeus, I'd sooner join the army and freeze on the frontier, than keep watch on my father.*

XANTHIAS:

Look, we've shooed him back inside; he's not going to get out again.
Can't we have some rest and relaxation time?
We need some time off for a little nap. Please.

CONTRACLEON:

215 Don't be stupid! The other jurors will be here any minute now to call on father and take him off to court with them.

XANTHIAS:

But it's only just starting to get light!

CONTRACLEON:

Then they must be running late this morning.

They usually get here just after midnight,
carrying lamps and warbling those sickly old
Phoenician-Phrynichus-phrases!

220

XANTHIAS:

I'll go and get some stones to throw at them. That should keep them away.

CONTRACLEON:

No, you idiot! You can't provoke these old fellows,
it would be like stirring up a wasps' nest. Every single one
of them has a sharp sting poking out of his backside,
and they're not afraid to give you a damn good poking either.
They bumble and buzz and come at you like sparks from a fire.

225

XANTHIAS:

Don't worry about it boss, I've got enough stones
to scatter any old swarm of jurors (*yawns*).

*(Xanthias and Contracleon sit down by the door and soon fall asleep. Enter into the orchestra the chorus of old men walking with sticks and being led by a group of boys carrying lamps.)**

CHORUS:

Come on! Step lively, keep up, Comias, you're too damned slow,
you used to be as tough as old boots in the old days,
now even old Chariades is overtaking you,
and he's about as slow as one of my bowel movements.
Ah, Strymodorus of Conthyle, my fellow jurymen,
is Euergides here? Have you seen Chabes of Phyla?
Here we all are then, all that's left of the old battalion.

230

235

220: A tragic dramatist active in the late sixth and early fifth century. He had produced a play called *Phoenician Women* (*220 Phrynichus).

230: These names are not identifiable contemporary characters but suitable titles for a chorus of old men.

234: A rural *deme* (small district) in the east of Attica.

235: A *deme* a few miles to the northeast of Athens.

Those were the days standing side by side on guard at Byzantium. Do you lads remember the night we "liberated" that baking woman's bread-board and used it for firewood? I can still taste the porridge that we made that night. Ah, those were the days!

240

Come on! Hurry up! Laches is up in court today, and he's got plenty of money stashed away. Cleon, our glorious leader, told us to arrive in plenty of time with three days' rations of mean spirit, so we can really punish him for his crimes.

245

Let's get going, brother jurors, it'll be daybreak soon. Keep those lamps burning and an eye out for stones, we don't want anyone having a nasty accident.

BOY:

Careful daddy, watch out for the mud.

CHORUS:

Pick an old stick up off the ground and have a fiddle with the wick.

BOY:

250

It's all right. I'll give the wick a pull with my finger that'll get it up.

CHORUS:

Who taught you to do that? Don't jostle the wick!
You know full well that oil is in short supply, stupid!
You're not the one who gets stung with the high price of the stuff!

BOY:

255

I'm telling you, by Zeus, if you don't stop shaking your fists and moaning on at us, we'll pinch your wicks and you can find your

237: Byzantium (modern day Istanbul) was captured in 476 by the Athenians after a short siege. This would make the chorus around seventy-five to eighty years old (*237 Byzantium).

241: A general and political rival of Cleon's (*242 Laches).

244: Athenian servicemen called up for active duty were required to bring three days' field rations with them.

252: A common euphemism for sexual impotency, but also a serious comment. The Spartans had recently destroyed valuable Attic olive groves, causing an acute oil shortage (*246 Lamps).

own way home. You can fumble around helpless in the dark, sloshing along in the mud with your tails between your legs!

CHORUS:

I'll have you know that I frequently punish bigger men than you, my lad . . .

(As he brandishes his walking stick at the boy, he slips and falls over.)

Argh! Now I really am "muckraking."*

(As the other chorus members help him up)

I'll give it four days at the most, then the god will send us some rain, he's bound to. 260

Our wicks are moldy, and that proves that there's a shower on the way. It'll soon be fertile again, and make everything nice and fruity. We should get some north wind, and there's nothing like a good hard blow! 265

(They arrive at Procleon's house.)

That's strange, this is Procleon's house and he's not here yet. It's not like him to miss a trial. He's usually first to join our little swarm, singing his little heart out, with a touch of Phrynichus. I know, let's give him a tune, he'll get all excited when he hears us singing sweetly to him. That's bound to get the old geezer outdoors. 270

(The chorus breaks into song.)

*Can you hear us calling? Join us now.
It's time you made an exit.
Did you lose your shoes in the dark,
Have you sprained your little digit?
Can you hear us calling? Come on down.
We're all outside your door.
Have your ancient joints all seized up?
Are your bollocks big and sore?* 275

*For he is the firmest of us all,
They'll never make him bend.
Try as they may to talk him round,*

He'll beat them in the end!

*And when they beg for mercy, he stands alone,
He lowers his head as if in pity, and says:*

280 *"You'd have more luck getting blood out of a stone!"*

*Could it be what happened yesterday
Has made him somewhat sick,
When we sat and heard the testimony
Of that slippery little snitch?
He told that Samos was revolting
And so he nearly got away.*

285 *Perhaps that's why Procleon's sulking
And not coming out today?*

*Come on then, we've a case from Thrace,
We mustn't let him loose.
There's a greedy traitor on the docket,
Let's go and cook his goose!*

Come on, boy! Keep moving.

(The music changes.)

BOY:

290 *Dear father, dear, dear father
Will you buy me something nice?*

CHORUS:

*Of course I will, my boy,
Some lovely knucklebone dice,*
Hours of boyhood pleasure
At a very reasonable price.*

295

283: An island off the coast of modern day Turkey. Samos rebelled against the Athenian-led Delian League in 440 (*283 Samos).

288: A region to the north of Greece and the site of recent military and diplomatic action (*288 Thrace).

BOY:

*No, father, no, by Zeus
I would love to taste a fig.**

CHORUS:

*Go hang, you little bastard!
You're a greedy, selfish pig.*

BOY:

If you take that tone, I'm going home!

CHORUS:

*Fuel, food, and grain I have to buy
On the little that they distribute.
A family of three needs to be fed,
While you're enjoying forbidden fruit!*

300

BOY:

*But father, how will we buy lunch?
For I've had a horrible thought:
what if the Archon decides today
Not to convene the civil court?**

305

*What will we do if you don't get paid,
Cast adrift on the waters of hell?*

CHORUS:

*You can moan and you can groan,
because you'll get no dinner as well!*

310

BOY:

*"Oh why, oh why was I ever born!
Mother, poor mother, what did you do!"**

CHORUS:

*She brought you into this old world
To give me the pain of feeding you!*

BOY:

Oh, my poor little, useless sack,
A dangling testament to forced cutbacks!*

315

(Procleon appears at the window of the house.)

PROCLEON:

*Friends, it's been so long,
I heard you through my cranny,
But I cannot join your song
For a slave acts as my nanny.*

320 *Please get me out of here,
I want to go to court with you.
I miss my jury so dear
I've got some serious harm to do!*

*Oh, Zeus of mighty thunder,
Make me a puff of smoke,
325 Like Proxenides the boaster
As hot air always floats.*

*Or turn me to a creeping vine,
Like the son of verbal shite,
I'll lie and crawl and then I'll climb,
Take pity on my plight.*

330 *Or fry me with your thunder-flash
And set the heat to broil,
Pick me up, blow off the ash,
And dip me in boiling oil.*

*But forget all that and be a rebel,
Turn me to stone—a voting pebble!*

(The chorus calls out to Procleon.)

CHORUS:

335 *Who is keeping you shut up in there?*

324: "Smoke" was used to denote someone who was boastful, rather like the English "windbag" or "hot air."

325: Also called a boaster in *Birds* (line 1126). His position in Athenian society is unknown.

328: Amyntias (note on line 74) is called this at line 1267, as is Aeschines (note on 458) at lines 1459 and 1243.

Tell us! We're your friends.

PROCLEON:

Shhh! It's my son. But keep your voices down,
he's just over there, asleep.

CHORUS:

You silly old fool!
Why is he doing this to you?
What's he trying to do?

PROCLEON:

He won't let me be a juror any more; he says I'm not allowed to do
any harm 340
to anyone. He says that he'll wine and dine me if I give it all up,
but I don't want to!

CHORUS:

How dare he do that to you! The bastard!
Who does he think he is—this damn Demagogocleon!
He just can't bear to hear the truth.*
It's a conspiracy! A plan to overthrow the democracy! 345
You need to find a way of getting down
from there without him knowing.

PROCLEON:

There's no way out, you try and think of one, I've tried everything.
I'm desperate
to get to court and go round the back of the notice boards holding
my voting pebble.

CHORUS:

Couldn't you find a little hole that you could squeeze through? 350
Then, you could slip away dressed in rags like wily Odysseus.

PROCLEON:

They've bunged up all the holes. That would be like trying to
crawl up a gnat's ass,

349: Jurors passed behind the court notice boards to cast their votes.

what do you think I'm made of, feta cheese? You'll have to think of something else.

CHORUS:

Do you remember back in the old days, the army, the Naxos campaign?

355

You pilfered those kebab skewers and shimmied down the side of the wall.

PROCLEON:

Yes, I remember, but so what? I was a young man in those days, fast on my feet with sticky fingers. I was at my peak, and there were no guards prowling around so I could get away really easily. I'm under siege here, surrounded by hordes of soldiers, drawn up ready for battle, armed to the teeth. They're watching all the escape routes, and there are two of them right by my back door who can't wait to give me a damn good skewering!

360

There's no way I can weasel my way out of here.

CHORUS:

365

You've got to come up with something soon, my poor little bee, it's starting to get light.

PROCLEON:

I suppose I'll just have to try and nibble my way through this net. May Dictynna forgive me for making a mess of her mesh!

CHORUS:

370

That's what I like to hear, fighting talk! Commence nibbling!

PROCLEON:

Sshhh, keep quiet! We don't want Contractleon to catch us at it.

354: Naxos is an island of the Cyclades in the Aegean Sea. It tried to secede from the Delian League around 469 and was forced into subjugation by an Athenian blockade (*354 Naxos).

368: A goddess of wild animals and hunting, often identified with Artemis.

(He chews through the net.)

I'm through! Keep an eye out for Contractleon.

CHORUS:

Don't you worry about him, old son, if he so much as farts we'll make him wish that he'd never been born. That man will rue the day he tried to trample on the sacred decrees of the two goddesses!

375

CHORUS:

Tie a rope around your middle and lower yourself out the window. Now, do as Diopeithes, trust in Zeus, and, Procleon, come on down!

380

*(The stage crane line is lowered in front of the window, and Procleon puts the harness around his waist.)**

PROCLEON:

All right, all right. But hang on, what'll I do if one of those two idiots spots me on the way down and tries to reel me back inside?

CHORUS:

Stop worrying! We'll rescue you, won't we lads? They'll never be able to keep you in against your will, not up against our "hearts of oak."

PROCLEON:

Right, I'll do it. But if anything should happen to me on the way down, then recover my body, mourn for me, and bury me . . . outside the law court.

385

CHORUS:

Nothing's going to happen to you, I promise, it'll be easy.

378: Demeter and Kore, the deities that presided over the sacred Eleusinian Mysteries (*1363 The Mysteries).

380: A politician and oracle interpreter. His name can mean "believe in Zeus" (*380 Diopeithes).

Now pray to your ancestral gods and lower away!

PROCLEON:

Great Lycus of the law courts; it is to you I cry.
 390 You are my neighbor and my hero and love the same as I.
 You cherish the sound of defendants wailing at their fates.
 And, hence, you set up home just by the courthouse gates.
 Take pity on your servant here as he prepares to make his fall.
 And I promise never to shit or piss against your sacred wall.

(Procleon lowers himself out of the window.)

CONTRACLEON:

Xanthias! Wake up!

XANTHIAS:

395 What, what is it?

CONTRACLEON:

I thought I heard voices floating around.
 Make sure father's not trying to crawl out again, will you?

(Xanthias sees Procleon suspended above him, on the rope.)

XANTHIAS:

He's not crawling, he's falling! He's climbing down a rope!

CONTRACLEON:

You crooked old codger! What are you doing! You stay right there!
 Xanthias, climb up after him and beat him with the harvest wreath.*
 He might ease his oars when he feels the stroke of a birch branch.

(Xanthias takes the harvest decoration from the door, climbs up the rope, and starts to swipe at Procleon. Meanwhile, Contracleon runs in the house and climbs to the window, where he tries to pull his father in.)

388: The patron gods of an individual family. Procleon prefers gods associated with the law courts.

389: An Athenian cult hero who evidently had a shrine overlooking one of the law courts (*389 Lycus).

PROCLEON:

Help! Help! Anyone prosecuting a case this year, Help!
 Smicythion! Teisiades! Needanobol! Keepsmefed!
 I need you now! Help! Stop them pulling me back inside!

400

CHORUS:

*Delay no more, let your anger rise,
 This man has disturbed our wasps' hive.
 Our stinging passion has been provoked,
 Thrust on in, stand by to poke!
 Stick it to them hard and fierce,
 Have your pricks all poised to pierce!*

405

(The chorus addresses the boys.)

*Hold our coats boys and run to town,
 And go fetch Cleon to our showdown.
 Tell him there's a man who hates the state,
 And he's going to suffer an ugly fate.
 For he has had a despicable thought,
 That we should never go to court!*

410

(During the choral song, Xanthias climbs up the stage crane line and beats Procleon while Contracleon pulls him back inside the house. Xanthias follows, climbing in through the window. At the end of the song, they appear at the door with Procleon in the clutches of Xanthias.)

CONTRACLEON:

My dear fellows, will you kindly stop droning on and listen to the facts?

415

CHORUS:

We'll keep droning on all the way up to high heaven, by Zeus!

CONTRACLEON:

I can assure you, gentlemen, on no account will I release this man.

401: Probably comic distortions of the names of real prosecutors or sycophants.

CHORUS:

This is outrageous! Appalling! Bare-faced dictatorship!
Oh Athens, my city! The sites that fear us! The shites like Theorus!
And any other brown-nosed creep that crawls for the cause!

*(The chorus has thrown off its cloaks to reveal wasplike costumes consisting of yellow and black striped tunics and large stingers protruding from the choristers' backsides.)**

XANTHIAS:

420 Heracles! They've got stingers! Look, master!

CONTRACLEON:

The same ones that shafted Philippus, the son of Gorgias, at his trial.

CHORUS:

And you're next in line for a damn good shafting! *(Shouting to the Wasps)*

ATEEEN SHUNNN! Left wheel! By the center, forward march!*
Present stingers! Close ranks there! Hold the line! Wait for it!
425 Let your passion swell. Stand by to swarm into the attack!

(The chorus forms up in military ranks and points stingers at Contracleon and Xanthias.)

XANTHIAS:

It's not looking so good, master, I don't rate our chances in a fight with this lot, and I don't like the look of those great big pricks!

CHORUS:

Let that man go free. Otherwise, you'll wish you were a tortoise with a solid shell for a hide!

PROCLEON:

430 Come on then, my old jurymates, my lovely little angry wasps!

418: For Theorus see note on line 42.

421: Philippus was probably a sycophant or prosecutor and an imitator of the oratorical techniques of Gorgias, a famous teacher of rhetoric from Leontini in Sicily.

Poke your points up their arses! Give their fingers a nasty jabbing!
Stick your stingers right in their eyes!

(Contracleon calls on his house slaves to help.)

CONTRACLEON:

Midas, Phryx, come out and help us! And bring fat Masyntias too!

*(The three slaves come charging out of the house.)**

You keep hold of him, otherwise I'll put you back in chains and stop your meals. Don't worry about this lot, they may make a lot of noise, but it's all just fizz and splutter. There's no lead in their pencils!*

435

(Contracleon, Xanthias, and Masyntias run into the house, leaving Procleon in the clutches of the two remaining slaves.)

CHORUS:

Let him go or I'll stick my prick in you!

PROCLEON:

Oh Lord Cecrops, human above the waist but all snake below, how can you bear to watch me being manhandled by these barbarians,
When I've worked my fingers to the bone, beating their blasted arses!

440

CHORUS:

Oh, there's nothing worse than old age! How miserable it is to be elderly.

Just look at those slaves laying in to their poor old master.

To think of all he's done for them, how quickly they forget his generosity;

the lovely secondhand donkey jackets he bought them, those nice sackcloth tunics, with all those holes for ventilation. How thoughtful!

445

Those dashing dog-skin hats, and all the care he lavished on their feet to keep

433: The three slaves all have Phrygian or Eastern names, from areas under Persian control. The ensuing scuffle is a comic reenactment of the battle of Marathon (*711 Marathon).

438: A mythical ancient king of Athens, often depicted as half man, half snake, and viewed as one of the original Athenians (*438 Cecrops).

them warm in winter.*

(As the slaves kick Procleon)

Look at them, no respect for old . . . shoes. Disgraceful!

PROCLEON:

Let me go, you thug! You've got a short memory, you ungrateful bastard.

Don't you remember when I caught you pilfering those grapes? I tied you

450 to the olive tree and gave you a man-sized seeing-to. The whole district

was jealous of you, and you never showed the slightest bit of appreciation.

Come on you two, quickly, let me just slip away before my son comes out again.

CHORUS:

Just you wait! You two will pay dearly for this.

455 You'll soon find out about the consequences of messing with sour-faced, sharp-tempered old geezers like us!

(Contracleon, Xanthias, and Masyntias reemerge from the house.)

CONTRACLEON:

Pound them, Xanthias! Beat those wasps away from the house!

(Xanthias starts swatting the wasps with a broom.)

XANTHIAS:

Here I go!

CONTRACLEON:

(To Masyntias) You there! Give them something to choke on! Smoke them out!

(Masyntias brandishes a smoking firebrand.)

458: Portrayed as a boaster who made frequent false claims regarding his financial standing (see *Birds* line 822).

XANTHIAS:

Buzz off! Get away! Shoo! Shoo! Piss off!

CONTRACLEON:

Smack them! Swat them! If only we had Aeschines the boaster to stink them out with some of his bullshit.

(The wasps fall back.)

XANTHIAS:

I knew smoke would work! They're retreating.

460

CONTRACLEON:

Lucky for us they know only those sickly sweet songs by Phrynichus. Those pointed tunes and sharp chords of Philocles would have finished us!

CHORUS:

It's very obvious to the working class

That a dictatorship has come to pass.

Examine him closely and you will find

465 That tyranny has taken us from behind!

From our city's laws he shuts us out,

But we'll not heed this long-haired lout!

He flouts the law without explaining facts,

470 He's a treacherous, oppressive autocrat!

CONTRACLEON:

Listen, let's stop fighting. Can't we have a sensible, civilized dialogue without all this screaming and shouting?

CHORUS:

A dialogue? With you? An enemy of the people's democracy!

475 A royalist! A consorter with Brasidas the Spartan!

461: For Phrynichus, see note on line 220.

462: The nephew of Aeschylus and a tragic dramatist.

475: A leading Spartan general, who was active in Thrace at the time *Wasps* was performed (*288 Thrace).

You must be joking! You woolly-tasseled, unkempt radical.

CONTRACLEON:

I'd be better off without a father than having to launch an armada against this lot each and every day.

CHORUS:

480 You don't know your onions, mate! We haven't even started yet.
Just you wait until the prosecutor gets you in court,
then we'll be using words like "CONSPIRACY!"
(The whole chorus chants.) CONSPIRACY! CONSPIRACY!
CONSPIRACY!

CONTRACLEON:

485 In the name of heaven! Why can't you lot just go away and leave
me alone,
or am I doomed to stand here arguing for the rest of the day?

CHORUS:

You won't budge me, mate! Not while there's still a breath in my
body.
I can spot a conspiracy to establish a "TYRANNY" when I see one!

TYRANNY! TYRANNY! TYRANNY!

CONTRACLEON:

490 Oh for goodness, sake! Everything's a "conspiracy" or a "tyranny"
with you lot. If anyone disagrees with you over even the slightest
little thing, then it's a "tyranny." That particular coinage hasn't
been used
in Athens for the last fifty years, and now it's cheaper than a tin of
fish!*

476: Long hair, unkempt beards, and fringes on clothing were all regarded as Spartan fashions and became popular among the upper-class youth of Athens. The working-class chorus sees these traits as marks of pro-Spartan and antidemocratic political views.

483: This and the following "chanting lines" are my own additions from performance.

CHORUS:

TIN O' FISH! TIN O' FISH! TIN O' FISH!

You can't make a move in the market without having it flung at you. If you should happen to buy some perch from a fishmonger's stall, the chap next door, selling cut-price whitebait, accuses you of wanting
495 to eat like a king and calls you a monarchist! Then if you ask
the fishmonger to throw in a couple of free onions, the grocer
pipes up and accuses you of charging the Athenians imperial tribute!
Before you know it, the whole market is calling you a tyrant. It's
ridiculous!

XANTHIAS:

500 You're right. I had the same treatment from a callgirl yesterday.
I went down to the brothel at noon and asked her to get on top for
a ride,
and she accused me of trying to jockey the tyrants back into power!*

CONTRACLEON:

I think these people positively enjoy hearing these words.
All because I want my father to give up his early morning-
gallivanting-judging-trumped-up-court cases-and-unsociable-habits,
505 and live like a gentleman, leading a classy life, just like Morychus.
For this they call me a conspirator and a tyrant-lover!

PROCLEON:

Well, that's exactly what you are, by Zeus! I'm not interested in all
your
fancy living. You could offer me a lifetime supply of bird's milk,
510 but it wouldn't make me give up my juries. You can keep your caviar

497: Persian client kingdoms paid tribute to the Great King in the form of a portion of their produce. Athens also received tribute from the allied states of the Delian League (*1102 An empire made).

506: A wealthy, high-living, effeminate Athenian, the very opposite of Procleon.

509: A proverbial expression for expensive and rare luxuries (see *Birds* lines 734 and 1673).

and salmon; just give me a nice juicy lawsuit, stewed and seasoned.

CONTRACLEON:

515 Yes, I know, it's obvious, you're used to that way of life now.
But, father, just control yourself for a while, keep quiet, and listen to me. I think you'll agree that you really are quite mistaken.

PROCLEON:

Mistaken, to be a juror?

CONTRACLEON:

More than mistaken, those men that you revere so highly are laughing
at you behind your back. You're a slave and you don't even know it!

PROCLEON:

Me, a slave? I don't think so. I am the master of all I survey.

CONTRACLEON:

520 You think you are, but in reality you are just a servant. Athens profits from the entire Greek world, but tell me, father, just what do you get out of it?

PROCLEON:

All right, I'll tell you, but I want these gentlemen (*pointing to the chorus*)
to judge between us.

CONTRACLEON:

I agree. (*To the slaves*) Let him go.

PROCLEON:

Somebody get me a sword, because if you beat me in this debate, I'm going to fall on my blade and end it all.*

CONTRACLEON:

Really? But what if you should lose and then break your promise?

PROCLEON:

Then I will never toast good fortune and drink neat jury pay again. 525

CHORUS:

Now, you represent the old school,
Your duty's clear—to beat this fool.
Use skill and cunning like a sly old fox.

PROCLEON:

Someone run and fetch my large lunchbox!
But what kind of opponent will I face? 530

CHORUS:

A youthful upstart, a hotshot ace!
It's artful arguments you must make
So concentrate, for all's at stake.
In your own hands you hold your fate,
By heaven, you must win this debate!
He'll never beat you, have no fear. 535

CONTRACLEON:

I'll keep notes of everything I hear!

PROCLEON:

But what if he does win this contest?

CHORUS:

Then he'd have proved that his way's the best,
And all us elders will have no more use.
They'll put us out to grass, by Zeus!
And when we walk by huffing and puffing,
They'll say "Old farts!—Good for nothing!"
In the old folks' march as an afterthought,
Like useless statements, thrown out of court. 540

525: At a symposium a draft of unmixed wine was drunk after the toast to good fortune. This was one of the most savored parts of the entire evening. Procleon's "unmixed wine" is his jury pay.

544: Older Athenians marched in special group as part of the Panathenaea festival (*544 The old folks' march).

It's up to you, Procleon. You must defend our majestic power.
Summon every oratorical skill you possess and take heart.

PROCLEON:

Right then, let's get started. I will prove to you that our powers
are equal

550 to those of any king. Name me a single living creature that is happier,
more envied, pampered, and feared than a juror? You can't.

As soon as I jump out of my bed in the morning, I find a line of
great big men

waiting for me outside the court. As I walk past, one of them
places his soft

hand in mine, a hand fresh from being dipped into the public funds!

Then they all bow and scrape and plead with me like a bunch of
suppliants;*

555 "Honorable father, I beg you, if ever you yourself pilfered a bit of
petty cash

or stole some of the change when you were out shopping for the
office, I beg you,

show some mercy!" All this from a man who would have never
had known of my

existence, if I hadn't acquitted him the last time he was up on a
charge!

CONTRACLEON:

I'll note that down: "suppliants at the bar," very interesting.

PROCLEON:

560 Then after all their fawning and crawling, and their feeble attempts
to curtail

my anger, I enter the courtroom. Once I'm inside, I forget all the
promises

I've just made, and I sit there listening to their pathetic excuses.

Any excuse to get off! There's nothing they won't say or do to win
a jury over.

Some of them moan on and on about being poverty-stricken and
pile on the misery

565 to the point where they actually say that they're as poor as us
jurors. Unbelievable!

Others tell us stories or a funny little fable from Aesop, and then
there are those

who deliver a few gags to get us laughing and on their side. "Ha,
ha, ha!"

If all that doesn't work and we're still not persuaded, out come
the damn kids,

up on the stand beating their heads in unison, and crying their
little hearts out.

What an awful row! Then their father approaches the bench,
shaking in fear

570 as if I were a god! He pleads with me to pass his audit, and says,
"If you like

the sound of a little bit of lamb, pray, take pity on the cries of my
poor son."

But if he thinks that I prefer a nice cut of pork, then he begs me to
be persuaded*

by his daughter! Well, after that, I might relent a little bit—but not
that damn much!

Now that's what I call real power, it makes mere wealth seem
worthless!

570

575

CONTRACLEON:

(Writing) "Makes mere wealth seem worthless." Now, tell me,
father,

what benefits do you receive from your so-called "Sovereignty
over Greece."

PROCLEON:

We get to check the manhood of the naked boys when they're up
for registration!

If we have, say, the actor Oeagrus up before us on a charge, then
we don't let him off

566: Aesop was a former slave famous for his animal fables, which he composed in the early sixth century B.C.E.

578: Disputes over the citizen registration of eighteen-year-olds were settled in court. This involved a naked inspection to determine maturity.

579: Oeagrus is known only from this reference.

580 unless he recites the best bits of *Niobe*. If a musician wins a case,
 then we get
 him to put on his strap and play us a lovely little tune as we're
 leaving the court.
 Then there are those cases where a man dies leaving only a virgin
 daughter. We don't worry
 about whether his will names a husband to inherit his wealth. No,
 we just break the
 seal open and give her to the suitor who puts up the best
 585 performance in court.*
 Of course you mustn't forget the fact that we can't be held
 accountable afterward,
 if something goes wrong, not like the magistrates and other public
 officials!

CONTRACLEON:

Well, I have to agree that it is quite an achievement not to be held
 accountable.
 But you really shouldn't be fiddling with a virgin's will at your age.

PROCLEON:

590 There's something else! When the Council or the People's Assembly
 can't come
 to a decision on an important case, they hand the miscreants over
 to the jurors.*
 Then we get that poofy Scythian prosecutor, Euathlus or even
 kiss-arse-onymus,
 "the shield-dropper," saying they will always be loyal to the
 people and fight

580: Niobe boasted that she was a better mother than the goddess Leto, who then sent her son Apollo to kill her children. Both Aeschylus and Sophocles had produced a tragedy based on this myth.

581: The player of the *aulos*, a twin-piped reed instrument, wore a strap to hold his cheeks in place (*581 *Aulos*).

587: The position of juror was not an elected public office and therefore not accountable to any kind of official scrutiny.

592: Euathlus was known to have prosecuted Protagoras the sophist for heresy.

for our democratic rights. Also, no one would ever dare to try and
 pass a motion
 in the People's Assembly unless they've made provisions to have
 an early recess 595
 in the courts. Then we get dismissed nice and early after just one
 case.
 Then there's Cleon, the great bellower himself, he loves us, we're
 the only
 people he doesn't bite chunks out of. He protects us, holds us in
 his arms,
 keeps the flies off us. Which is more than you've ever done for
 your poor old dad!*

600 What about Theorus, what a man! Is he a man? Anyway, he is always
 crawling on in to give our boots a good licking, or scratch our backs.
 Just think of all these wonderful things you're depriving me of,
 and you said
 that you were going to prove that I was a slave!

CONTRACLEON:

You can go on talking about it as much as you like, but I'll prove
 that you're
 just a dirty old arse, and no amount of your so-called power will
 wipe you clean!

PROCLEON:

605 I know! I know! I'd forgotten something. What about my pay, eh?
 That's the best thing of all. When I get home with my money, they
 can't get enough
 of me. First of all, my daughter washes my feet and gives them a
 massage.
 Then, she kisses me and whispers sweet nothings into my ear,
 "Daddy, dear daddy."
 All the time she's using her tongue to try and fish my three obols
 out of my mouth! 610

597: Cleon was said to have possessed an incredibly loud voice which he used to great effect in the assembly.

600: For Theorus, see note on line 42.

610: Greeks often carried small coins in their mouths.

Then the wife comes running out of the house and offers me all manner of delicacies and sweet things, telling me to "have a little nibble of this my dear" I love all that. And, I don't have to rely on you and that damned slave of yours to feed me either, miserable bastard. When he eventually deigns to bring me my supper, all he does is mutter rude remarks under his breath, I've heard him!

615 If I get hungry, I've got my own defense against a sudden attack of hunger.

(He produces a squashed cake from under his cloak.)

If I don't get a drink, I've got my own little "donkey," and when I pour myself a tot, it even brays.

(Procleon takes his wine flask and squeezes some wine out of it, which makes a farting sound.)

So (*faaaart*) to your fancy wine basin!

(Procleon takes a drink of wine and bursts into song.)

620 Zeus-like power is in my grasp,
And I am viewed in equal wonder.
A noisy courtroom people pass,
And say, "By Zeus! What a thunder!"

625 Verdicts flash like a lightning zap,
Defendants quake at what I'll do.
Great men shudder and rich men crap.
630 So I am not at all afraid of you!

617: A small flask with large handles that resembled donkey ears, or a small wineskin (*617 Little donkey).

618: Either the gurgling of the wine pouring from the clay spout or the noise made when the wineskin was squeezed.

619: This was a *dinos*, used for mixing wine at a symposium, the intellectual drinking parties frequented by Contractleon.

630: Procleon compares his power as a juror to that of Zeus, king of the gods, who controls thunder and lightning.

(The chorus joins in singing Procleon's song.)

CHORUS:

*A beautiful speech, so much grace,
Superb words put him in his place.
A better argument he won't find,*

PROCLEON:

*And he thought he would strip my vines!
Now he knows that he's beat for sure.*

635

CHORUS:

*You said it all, there is nothing more!
Such forceful language and fine debate,
As a public speaker you are first rate!
I swell up with pride at your conquest,
I feel like a juror on the Isle of the Blessed.
And now the score stands at one to nil.*

640

PROCLEON:

*He's nervous now, he can't stand still!
He has the look of a beaten man.*

CHORUS:

*It's obvious you've wrecked his plan.
He can only weave a web of lies,
because his ways we all despise.
He'll not be able to soothe our rage,
our terrible anger will last for days!*

645

(The chorus addresses Contractleon.)

CHORUS:

*You've got a huge millstone around your neck, my lad.
Perhaps you think it will grind down our anger?*

634: A rustic expression that means an easy victory.

640: The legendary place where heroes live in happiness and luxury for all eternity.

CONTRACLEON:

650 Gentlemen, I hope you will understand what a difficult task it is
for me to stand
before you and attempt to cure the city of one of her most vile
afflictions.
It will require a degree of skill and intelligence far beyond the
ability of, say,
the average comic poet. Nonetheless: "Our father who art the son
of Cronus . . ."

PROCLEON:

Stop! There's enough "Old fathers" here already. You have to
prove that I'm a slave.
Get on with it, otherwise I'll damn well kill you myself right
where you stand!
I suppose I'll be barred from the sacrificial feasts after that. Never
mind.

CONTRACLEON:

655 All right, daddy, listen, and please stop frowning at me. I want
you to quickly add up,
not with your counters, by hand, how much tribute Athens receives
from the allied states.

(Procleon starts to calculate.)

Then add all the tax revenue, the one percent sales tax, the legal
fees and fines, the revenue
from the mines,

(Procleon works feverishly to keep up.)

the market tax, harbor duties, state rents, and
government confiscations.*

What's the grand total?

(Procleon looks up, completely confused.)

652: An old invocation found in Homer. Cronus ruled heaven before being
usurped by his son Zeus.

653: A murderer was polluted by the blood of his or her victim until ritually
purified.

Nearly two thousand talents a year!*

Now take out of that the amount of pay given to the jurors each
year, let's see, six thousand jurors* . . .

(Procleon goes back to calculating.)

"This Athens, this teeming womb of jurors,"* 660
. . . that makes about one hundred and fifty talents.*

(Procleon looks up, astounded.)

PROCLEON:

What? Do you mean to tell me that our pay doesn't even amount
to ten percent of the state revenue!

CONTRACLEON:

That's correct.

PROCLEON:

665 So where the hell does the rest of the cash go?

CONTRACLEON:

You know, the "I-will-never-betray-the-Athenian-rabble-and-I'll-
always-
fight-for-the-plebs" people. The very same people you choose to
rule over you!

But you've been had, hoodwinked with all their clever talk. They
go around

threatening the allies, saying that they will unleash their
thunderous speeches and
move to have them overthrown, if they don't pay them a bribe
worth fifty talents.* 670

Meanwhile, you lot seem quite content to gnaw at the bones of
your own empire!

The allies take one look at you and see a common rabble feeding
on the swill,
slopping out of a voting urn. You're nothing to them, just slaves to
the system.

But you should see the gifts they give to these other fellows,
caviar, fine wines,
cheese, expensive carpets, honey, sesame cakes, lovely soft
pillows, libation bowls, 675

superb clothes, jewelry, and drinking cups. Everything a man could possibly need to stay healthy and be wealthy! And what do they give you? You who won it all in the first place battling on land and sweating at the oar. I doubt that they would even give you a clove of garlic to season a measly bowl of fish stew!

PROCLEON:

680 You're right! Only yesterday I had to send for three garlic bulbs from Eucharides.
But where's all this leading? I'm getting fed up with you!
You said that you were going to prove that I am a slave.

CONTRACLEON:

685 Surely it is complete slavery for all these men and their lackeys to have prime government posts and get huge fat salaries, while you lot roll over with pleasure at your paltry three obol dole? Which, I might add, is money that you earned in the first place, rowing, battling, and scrapping for the state. You go running from pillar to post whenever they snap their fingers! What really gets my goat is when I see some dimwitted young pooffer, like the son of Chaereas, come mincing up, wiggling his little arse, and start bossing you around, telling you when
690 to be in court and saying, "If any of you are late, then you won't get your three obols."

678: The luxurious lifestyle of the demagogues conflicts with the poverty of the elderly jurors, who fought for the empire in the first place.

680: Garlic was a cure for a sore anus. Procleon quips that he was forced to get his garlic from Eucharides, a known homosexual playboy (*680 Eucharides).

688: This character is unknown.

He still gets his prosecutor's fee, a whole drachma, whatever time of day he decides to swan in. They're all in it together, defenders and prosecutors. If the accused offers a bribe, they split it fifty-fifty, and rig the whole thing. Just like a couple of lumberjacks sawing down a tree, one pulling the case his way, the other yielding and letting it go, and you lot are so enamored by the court cashier that you can't see what's going on right under your noses!

PROCLEON:

I cannot believe they'd do that to me. You're really rocking the boat and churning things up. I'm all at sea!

CONTRACLEON:

700 Just imagine how wealthy you and all the people would be, if it wasn't for these rabble-rousing politicians herding you about like cattle. The Athenians control a huge amount of cities, reaching from the Black Sea, all the way to Sardinia,* but you get absolutely nothing, except that pitiful jury pay that you draw. Even that they feed to you in little drips, a day at a time, just barely enough to live on, because they want you poor and hungry. Why? So you'll never bite the hand that feeds you, and come running whenever they need to savage one of their enemies. It's a dog's life! If they really cared about the people, they could easily provide every citizen with a good living. There must be at least a thousand states that pay* us tribute, all they would have to do is make each one care for twenty Athenians,

691: There were six obols in a drachma.

and you'd have twenty thousand of the working class feasting
like kings.*

710 Just think, the finest meats, fresh cream, herbs and spices. You'd
enjoy a life
worthy of this land and her victory of Marathon. Instead, you get
in line
for the man with the obols, like a bunch of olive-picking field hands!

(Procleon starts to wither.)

PROCLEON:

Good gods! What's coming over me? I'm starting to feel numb.
I can't keep my sword up. I feel all limp!*

CONTRACLEON:

715 But look what happens when they get frightened that they're
exploiting you too far.
What do they do? They offer you the lands of Euboea and promise
to hand out fifty
bushels of wheat per man. But it never turned up, did it? All you
got was five bushels,
and you had to suffer the indignity of proving that you were a
true citizen. What's more,
they gave you only a handful a day, and to cap it all, it wasn't
even wheat, it was barley.
720 Don't you understand now? That's why I've been locking you up,
I want to look after you.
It should be me who feeds you. I don't want those politicians
taking advantage
of my father, and making a fool out of you with their overblown
oratory.
I'll give you anything your heart desires, you only have to ask for
it.

711: The battle of Marathon in 490 was a stunning victory by the Athenian infantry over the vastly superior Persian invaders (*711 Marathon).

716: The long island which lay to the northeast of Attica and was a major grain producer. In 446 it revolted from Athenian control and was reconquered by Pericles, who parceled out the land to Athenian citizens (*716 Euboea).

But no more milk of courtroom blindness!

CHORUS:

725 It was a wise man who once said, "you should never decide until
you have heard
both sides of the argument." We have made up our minds that
Contracleon*
is the clear winner. We will lower our shafts. Our anger has
abated!

(The chorus breaks into song and addresses Procleon.)

CHORUS:

*Be persuaded by his words,
Don't be a stubborn old fool.
Bend your stiffened manhood,
He's giving good advice to you.*

730

*He's been blessed by some god,
I wish that I had such a boy.
It is your welfare he has at heart,
His loving care you will enjoy.*

735

CONTRACLEON:

*I'll give him everything he needs,
All the pleasures of the old;
Warming porridge, leather coats,
Soft blankets to keep away the cold.*

*He looks so down, he makes no sound.
This behavior is very silly,
For I'll bring him ladies of the night,
To stroke and rub his willy!**

740

CHORUS:

*It's no surprise he has just lost
What once was his obsession.*

724: The Greek has "Paymaster's milk to drink." An ironic variation on the expression "bird's milk" (see note on line 509).

745 *He's heard good sense, was he wrong
To enjoy a legal profession?*

*Was he persuaded by your speech?
Did the truth seem very strange?
Either way, we heard him say,
That if defeated, he would change.*

PROCLEON:
750 *(In a high tragic style) "Woe is me! Woe is me!"*

CONTRACLEON:
What are you shouting about now?

PROCLEON:
755 *"Your promises mean naught to me,
for there, there is where I long to be.
The only place to which I am devoted,
where the herald cries who has not voted!
At the voting urns where the jurors stop,
I am the last to let my pebble drop!"*

(Procleon prepares to fall on his sword.)

*"Jurors, thy soul's flight,
If it find heaven, must find it out tonight."**

(He botches his "suicide" attempt.)

I am the "soul" survivor!

(He tries again.)

*"Make way thou shady thickets, let me pass!"**

(He falls flat on his back.)

I've come a cropper and fallen on my arse!

Oh Heracles let me never be forced to serve on the jury
that finds my beloved Cleon guilty of theft!*

757: Procleon responds in the manner of a Euripidean tragic actor.

CONTRACLEON:
Come, father, by all the gods, please, will you take my advice? 760

PROCLEON:
What advice? You can say whatever you like, except just one thing.

CONTRACLEON:
And what might that be?

PROCLEON:
I won't ever give up my jury work, never! Over my dead body!

CONTRACLEON:
All right, all right, if you won't give it up, why not stay at home
and judge,
at least then you won't have to walk all the way to the courthouse
every day. 765

PROCLEON:
Judge cases at home? What cases? What are you talking about?

CONTRACLEON:
You can do exactly the same here as you do in court. For example,
say one of the
housemaids has been secretly going "in and out," you could seize
her "assets,"
that'd be nice, wouldn't it? That's all you lot think about in court
anyway. 770

If it's a nice day, you can sit out in the sun and fine the accused in
"fine" weather.

If it's snowing, you can sit by the fire and listen to "heated"
debates, and if it rains,
you can stay inside and put the defendants in "deep water." Best
of all, if you happen
to sleep in one morning, then there won't be any court clerk to
stop you getting
to the bench, it will be entirely up to you when to convene the
court. 775

PROCLEON:
Now that I like!

CONTRACLEON:

If you get one of those boring old defense speeches droning on and on,
you won't have to go hungry, chewing up your tongue and the poor old defendant.

PROCLEON:

780 Eh? How will I decide cases properly if I'm eating food all the time?

CONTRACLEON:

Oh, you would be a far better judge. After all, you must have heard the saying,
"the proof of the pudding is in the eating." You can "chew the facts" and then make them "eat their words!"

PROCLEON:

You know, this is starting to sound pretty good. But tell me one thing,
785 where will I get my pay from? Eh?

CONTRACLEON:

From me.

PROCLEON:

Fine, that means I might get the full amount for once and not have to share it with anyone else. Do you have any idea what that tight old bastard Lysistratus did to me one time? The court paid us, but they didn't have the right change, so they gave us a one drachma coin to split. Well, we went down to the fish market
790 to get change, but that cheating old shit put three fish scales in my mouth, instead of the obols I should have had. Well, I didn't realize until I caught a whiff

788: Lysistratus appears in a number of Aristophanes' plays, where he is portrayed as a pauper and a practical joker.

of them, damn things stank, I nearly puked! So I had a right go at him.

CONTRACLEON:

Oh yes, so what did he say?

PROCLEON:

"You must have the guts of a goat to have eaten away your cash so fast." 795

CONTRACLEON:

Can't you see what a great idea this is?

PROCLEON:

Yes, it's beginning to make a lot of sense. All right, I'll do it!

CONTRACLEON:

Wait here, and I'll go and get everything ready.

(Contracleon runs inside.)

PROCLEON:

Do you see that! Who'd have thought it! I had heard that the Athenians were given an oracle that said one day they would judge their cases at home, and now it's come true!* Everyone will soon have their own little law courts in the yard, just like those little shrines of Hecate we have out front! 800

*(Contracleon returns with the slaves carrying various household articles.)**

CONTRACLEON:

Right then, what do you think about this? I've brought everything I promised and a few little extras to make you really comfortable. 805

(Contracleon hangs up a small jug.)

804: An underworld goddess of witchcraft, curses, and transformation. Her shrines stood on boundaries, usually where a smaller road joined a larger one or at the end of a path leading to a house (*804 Hecate).

First things first, let me hang a jug on this little knob so that you can relieve yourself during the proceedings.

PROCLEON:

810 That's good thinking, that is, son! You've discovered the perfect cure for a full bladder. Just what an old man like me needs.

*(Contractleon sets down a brazier and sets a pot on it.)**

CONTRACLEON:

Here's a nice warm fire and some lovely lentil soup to keep you going.

PROCLEON:

815 Brilliant! Now if I'm sick, I can still get paid, and all the time I'll be here at home, slurping down lentil soup!

(Contractleon puts the cock up on a perch.)

What's the cock for?*

CONTRACLEON:

He's here to wake you up in case you nod off during a defense speech.

He'll be the first to spot a cockeyed defense!

PROCLEON:

There's something still not quite right.

CONTRACLEON:

What! What!

PROCLEON:

We need the shrine of Lycus, the jurymen's patron hero.

CONTRACLEON:

Eh . . .

*(He takes a large amphora, turns it upside down, and places it on the ground.)**

819: For Lycus, see note on line 389.

Look! There he is!

(Procleon gets up to inspect the upturned amphora, which looks decidedly phallic.)

PROCLEON:

Lord Lycus! Firmest of all the heroes. How hard you look today!

CONTRACLEON:

I think he looks like Cleonymus, personally.

PROCLEON:

Another dickhead. Hey, Cleonymus, we've found where you dropped your weapon!

CONTRACLEON:

Come on, daddy, sit down so we can call the first case.

(Procleon rushes back to his seat.)

PROCLEON:

Our first sitting! I'm ready, come on, come on!

CONTRACLEON:

Well now, let's see, who can I call first? Who has been misbehaving lately?

I know! Thratta didn't polish my valuables very well the other day . . .*

PROCLEON:

STOP! You'll be the death of me, you will! How can anyone charged with an offense

possibly make a defense if we haven't got a fence in the first place? It's the first

of all the sacred objects that are revealed to us as we enter the court.

822: For Cleonymus, see note on line 19.

831: Procleon treats the courthouse as if it were the site of a sacred mystery cult. At Eleusis, the rites involved having a number of sacred objects revealed during the course of initiation (*831 Sacred objects revealed).

CONTRACLEON:

By the gods! You're right, it's not here.

PROCLEON:

It's all right, I will fix it!

(Procleon runs inside the house.)

CONTRACLEON:

He's really hooked on this whole courtroom thing.

(Enter Xanthias.)

XANTHIAS:

835 That bloody dog! I'm sick of it!

CONTRACLEON:

Whatever is the matter now?

XANTHIAS:

It's that dog of ours, Labes! He's just stormed into the kitchen, grabbed a great big piece of Sicilian cheese, shoved it in his huge hungry chops, then ran off, and scoffed the lot!

CONTRACLEON:

Wonderful! We have our first case, The Household versus Labes the Dog.

840 Xanthias, you'll have to act as the prosecuting counsel.

XANTHIAS:

We've already got a prosecutor. The other dog involved in this affair, is on record as stating that he will pursue legal proceedings personally, should it go to trial.

837: Labes means "grabber" and is a play on the name Laches, the general who was accused by Cleon of embezzling from the Sicilian cities (see note on line 241).

842: This dog will actually resemble Cleon, who had made his intention to bring charges against Laches widely known (see note on line 241).

CONTRACLEON:

Excellent! Have them both brought before the court.

XANTHIAS:

I'm on my way.

(Procleon comes dashing out of the house carrying a small wicker fence.)

CONTRACLEON:

What have you got there?

PROCLEON:

It's the pigpen for the swine we sacrifice to Hestia.

CONTRACLEON:

But you can't use that! It's sacrilege!

845

PROCLEON:

Oh, don't be so pigheaded, I just wanted to go the whole hog. Come on, let's get started. I'm dying to fine someone!

CONTRACLEON:

I'll just go inside and fetch the charge sheets to post on the board.

(Contracleon goes into the house.)

PROCLEON:

Well, hurry up! You're wasting the court's time, you are! I can't wait to run my fingers through that lovely soft wax!

850

(Contracleon dashes out of the house with some wooden chopping boards.)

844: The goddess of the hearth and home.

845: The pig was a common sacrifice, and, when butchered for household consumption, would presumably be first offered to Hestia. Contracleon assumes that the pigpen also belongs to Hestia and that it is sacrilege to use it for any other purpose.

CONTRACLEON:

Here we are, notice boards!

PROCLEON:

Right! Call the first case!

CONTRACLEON:

Call the first case!

PROCLEON:

Who's up first, then?

CONTRACLEON:

Shit! I've forgotten the voting urns.

(Contracleon starts running toward the door.)

PROCLEON:

Shit! But hang on. Where are you off to now?

CONTRACLEON:

To get the voting urns.

PROCLEON:

855 Don't worry, I've got a pair of beakers that will do nicely.

(He gives the two beakers to Contracleon.)

CONTRACLEON:

Right, we've got everything we need, we can start the proceedings.
No, wait! What about the court water clock?

PROCLEON:

(Pointing to his chamber pot) Well, what do you think that is, then?
It's a perfect water clock. When I've filled it up, the case is over!

CONTRACLEON:

860 I have to admire your resourcefulness, like a true Athenian.
Quickly, someone bring out the sacred fire, and the myrtle

857: See (*93 Water clock).

wreaths. Make sure you remember to fetch the incense.
Let us pray to the gods before we begin.*

(The chorus accompanies the rites with a hymn as Contracleon performs the sacred rites.)

CHORUS:

*Say your prayers, bless the peace,
The fighting's over, the war has ceased.
You've made a treaty good and strong,
We'll sing its praises with this song.*

865

CONTRACLEON:

Let no ill words be spoken here.

CHORUS:

Oh, Lord Apollo have Good Fortune guard
This makeshift court in this front yard.
May we discover much to commend,
And may our wanderings come to an end.*

870

Praise Apollo!

CONTRACLEON:

Our master who art in heaven,
Apollo be thy name,
thy courtyard come
to this father's son.
Give us this day new holy rites,
and forgive dad his hardheartedness,
as we give his soul some sweetness from us.
Lead him not into litigation
and deliver him from malice.
Find him some kind wisdom
to tolerate the sad stories,
and never sting ever again.

875

880

CHORUS:

Let us join together in asking that this new institution
founded here receive all blessings from on high.

885

All of us endorse your plan,

*It's clear you love the common man.
A better democrat we've never met
At least among the younger set.*

890

CONTRACLEON:

All jurors are requested to be seated in the courtroom. Latecomers will not be admitted once the speeches have commenced.

PROCLEON:

Who is the accused? I can't wait to convict him!

CONTRACLEON:

Order! Order in the court of the reading of the charges! The dog from Cydathenaeum hereby brings a suit against one Labes of Aexone for the illegal and solitary consumption of one Sicilian cheese. The prosecution proposes that the maximum penalty should be imposed, namely the sycamore collar.*

895

PROCLEON:

No! No! A dog's death if he's found guilty.

CONTRACLEON:

The defendant, Labes, will stand before the court.

*(Enter the first dog, Labes, from the house.)**

PROCLEON:

This one's a villain if ever I saw one. He looks like a right thug. And he won't get around me with that stupid grin of his. Where's the hound from Cydathenaeum? Call the other dog.

900

*(Enter the second dog, Cleonhound.)**

895: Aristophanes plays on the similarity between *kleôn* ("Cleon") and *kuôn* ("dog"). Furthermore, Cleon was from the *deme* (district) of Cydathenaeum (as was Aristophanes).

896: Laches was a member of the *deme* of Aexone.

CLEONHOUND:

Ruff! Ruff!

CONTRACLEON:

Present!

XANTHIAS:

This one's just as rough as Labes, all he's good for is barking at people and licking plates clean!

CONTRACLEON:

Silence in the court! *(to Cleonhound)* Be seated! Proceed with the charges.

905

PROCLEON:

Now seems a good time to have a little slurp of soup.

(Procleon takes a gulp of soup, but when Cleonhound starts shouting, he spits it out in shock.)

CLEONHOUND:

MEMBERS OF THE JURY. YOU WILL NOW BE FULLY AWARE OF THE CHARGES I AM BRINGING AGAINST THE DEFENDANT SEATED BEFORE YOU. HE HAS WILLFULLY COMMITTED THE MOST HEINOUS OF CRIMES NOT JUST AGAINST ME, BUT IN SO DOING, AGAINST THE ENTIRE HOI POLLOI! FOR THIS VERY DOG DID "SICILICIZE" AN ENORMOUS QUANTITY OF CHEESE, THEN SCURRIED OFF TO A DARK CORNER WHERE HE WOLFED IT ALL DOWN!

910

PROCLEON:

By Zeus, he's plainly guilty! Just a minute ago the dirty dog belched at me, and there was a disgusting smell of cheese!

911: The Greek has *katesikelize*, a comic invention derived from the name Sicily.

CLEONHOUND:

AND WHAT'S MORE, THE SAID DOG FAILED TO SUPPLY MY
GOOD SELF
WITH AN APPROPRIATE SHARE OF THE AFOREMENTIONED
CHEESE!
MEMBERS OF THE JURY, I PUT IT TO YOU, WHO IS GOING TO
LOOK AFTER
YOUR INTERESTS UNLESS A PROPER SHARE IS FIRST GIVEN
TO ME,
YOUR WATCHDOG?*

PROCLEON:

I certainly didn't get any, neither did the people.
This defendant is really in the soup now!

(Procleon tries to take a slurp of soup, but Contraceleon grabs his arm.)

CONTRACLEON:

For god's sake, father, don't prejudice the poor fellow.
Wait until you've heard both arguments and then decide.

PROCLEON:

My dear boy, it's an open-and-shut case, the facts are positively
screaming at you.

CLEONHOUND:

YOU MUSTN'T ACQUIT HIM! YOU CAN'T! HE'S A
MONOGUZZLER,
HE MAKES A DOG'S DINNER OUT OF EVERYTHING! HE
CRUISED
AROUND THE KITCHEN ISLAND BITING CHUNKS OUT OF
THE RIND.

PROCLEON:

And I haven't even got a pot to piss in!

925: A large mortar for grinding and food preparation. In profile it would have resembled the triangular shape of Sicily (*925 Mortar).

CONTRACLEON:

Yes you have, I gave you one.

CLEONHOUND:

CONVICT HIM! THIS HOUSE IS NOT BIG ENOUGH FOR TWO
THIEVES!
I'M NOT GOING TO WASTE MY DOG BREATH BARKING
OVER NOTHING!
IF I DON'T GET A CONVICTION, YOU'RE NEVER GOING
TO HEAR ANOTHER DAMN WOOF OUT OF ME!

PROCLEON:

Bravo! Bravo! That's quite a lot of felonies you've charged him
with.
He's obviously an absolute scoundrel, there's no doubt about that!
(to the cock)
What do you think, Rooster? Look, by Zeus! He's winking at me.*
I've a willing cock! Bailiff! Get me the court water clock.

CONTRACLEON:

You're quite capable of doing that yourself. I'm calling the witnesses.

(Procleon takes the chamberpot, walks upstage, turns around, and urinates into the pot.)

The defense for Labes calls the following witnesses:
Big Dish! Grinder! Cheese grater! Griddle! Honey pot!
And any other little pieces with burnished bottoms!*

(to Procleon) Have you finished? Good, now sit down and stop
running about.

(Procleon runs back to his seat.)

PROCLEON:

(Pointing at Labes) I know someone else who'll have the runs
before long.

CONTRACLEON:

Will you stop being so bad tempered and strict with the poor
defendants?

You just can't wait to get your teeth into them, can you?
Labes, take the stand and make your defense.

(Labes takes the stand but remains silent.)

Why don't you speak? Come on, get on with it!

PROCLEON:

945 He's obviously got nothing to say.

CONTRACLEON:

I've seen this kind of thing before. It happened to Thucydides at his trial, sudden acute paralysis of the jaw, quite painful really. *(To Labes)* Get out of the way, I'll conduct the defense.

(Labes steps aside.)

950 Ahem! Members of the jury, it is a difficult task to defend the honor of a slandered dog. However, I must remind you of his previous good character and extreme bravery demonstrated while chasing away hostile wolves.

PROCLEON:

That's a load of old bollocks! He's a thief and a conspirator!

CONTRACLEON:

955 Not at all, he is a dog of the highest pedigree. He is quite skilled at rounding up great multitudes of sheep.

PROCLEON:

That's no use at all if he goes and keeps the all the cheese to himself.

CONTRACLEON:

No use? But he stands and fights for you, and guards the door. He's a top dog, his character is quite unblemished. If he did commit one small indiscretion, then I ask the court to show leniency. He never had the opportunities that others were

946: Not the historian, but a political enemy of Pericles who was ostracized (banished by popular vote) for ten years in 443 (*946 Thucydides).

given, he comes from a deprived kennel, he never even learned to play the lyre.

PROCLEON:

As far as I'm concerned, I think it was a great pity that he learned to read and write, then he wouldn't have been able to submit false accounts to the court!*

960

CONTRACLEON:

Sir, please hear the testimony of my first witness. Cheese grater, take the stand.

*(The cheese grater takes the stand.)**

Please answer clearly. I understand that you acted for my client in the position of treasurer, is that correct?

(The cheese grater nods.)

And am I correct in assuming that your gratings were properly distributed to the troops?

965

(He nods again.)

He says they were.

PROCLEON:

He's lying! I'm sure of it. Step down!

(The cheese grater leaves the stand.)

CONTRACLEON:

Members of the jury, I ask you to show compassion for those afflicted by misfortune. While Labes leads a dog's life, out on active service, living off old bones and rotten fish, this lapdog *(pointing to Cleonhound)*, this horrendous hound, skulks at home and snatches a hefty share of whatever anyone

970

959: The education of a refined young Athenian gentleman included music tuition.

else brings into the house. And if he doesn't get what he wants, he bites!

PROCLEON:

Oh No! This can't be happening! I'm starting to go all soft! This is terrible!

It's the sickness dreaded by all jurors: I'm actually being persuaded!

CONTRACLEON:

I beg you, show mercy on this poor dog, please, dear father, don't order

him to be put down. Where are his children? *(Some puppies are brought out.)*

PROCLEON:

No! Not the damn kids!

CONTRACLEON:

Come here, you poor little puppies, and plead to the jury, come on, beg!

Pray to him, let him see your tears and hear your whimpers.

(The puppies surround Procleon and whimper pathetically.)

PROCLEON:

(In tears) Step down, step down, step down, step down.

CONTRACLEON:

I'll step down, though I hope I will not join the ranks of the many men who have heard those words before me. For they rested their cases sure of an acquittal only to be deceived and handed a conviction.

PROCLEON:

(Still sobbing) It's that damn soup! It's so hot that it has brought tears to my eyes. It's not good for an old man like me to fill up on piping hot lentil soup, it makes everything all mushy.

972: Cleon had recently served as a general in 424-23 and had spent most of this time in Athens (*39 Cleon).

977: See lines 568-69.

CONTRACLEON:

So are you going to let him off, then?

PROCLEON:

That's a hard one, that is.

CONTRACLEON:

Come on father, this is a golden opportunity to turn to better ways. Here, just take this little pebble in your hand, close your eyes, nip over to the second urn, and acquit him. It's that easy!

(Procleon makes his way downstage to where the two beakers are standing and then suddenly reels back.)

PROCLEON:

NOOOO! I can't! He's not the only one who never learned to play the lyre!

(Contracleon takes his arm and leads him. Meanwhile, Xanthias switches the beakers.)

CONTRACLEON:

Come on then, I'll help you. I know a nice shortcut to the voting urns.

PROCLEON:

(Arriving at the urns) Is this the guilty urn?

CONTRACLEON:

That's right.

PROCLEON:

In it goes then. *(He drops the pebble into the acquittal urn.)*

(Procleon returns to his seat.)

CONTRACLEON:

(Aside) Got him! He's voted "not guilty." At last!

PROCLEON:

Well, what's the result?

CONTRACLEON:

Hang on, we've got to wait for the vote count.

(Contracleon tips out the beakers.)

995 Labes, you are hereby acquitted of all charges!

(Procleon faints, and Cleonhound storms off in disgust.)

Father! Father! What's wrong! Oh my gods! Get some water!

*(Xanthias throws the contents of the chamber pot in Procleon's face, and he comes around.)**

PROCLEON:

Blughhh! Tell me the truth, son, he wasn't really acquitted, was he?

CONTRACLEON:

Yes he was.

(During the next few lines the slaves clear the court props, and Labes is led off.)

PROCLEON:

Then I'm finished!

CONTRACLEON:

Don't worry, father, here stand up.

(Contracleon helps his father to his feet.)

PROCLEON:

I can't bear it, to have such a thing on my conscience, I had a man brought

up before me on a charge and . . . and . . . I let him go! How did this happen to me?

1000

Oh great gods above, you must forgive me, I didn't know what I was doing. It was just a momentary lapse of character. Ohhh!

CONTRACLEON:

Don't be upset, father, I'll look after you now. There's a great big world out

there just waiting for you, and I'm going to be your guide, I'll take you everywhere; high-class parties, dinners, the theatre. It'll be nothing but pleasure from now on, and just think, you won't ever be tricked and laughed at by Hyperbolus again. Come on, what are you waiting for? Let's go!

1005

PROCLEON:

All right, son, if you say so.

CHORUS:

Good luck, wherever your journey may take you.

(Exit Procleon and Contracleon.)

[Parabasis]*

(The chorus addresses the audience.)

CHORUS:

Now hear this message loud and clear,

You many thousands gathered here.

We only hope you'll recognize

That the coming words are very wise:

A stupid crowd might not heed our call,

But we know that's not like you at all!

1010

CHORUS:

Now heed me, all you people, it's high time you heard the simple truth.

The author of this magnificent play needs to speak to you, to tell you his message.

He speaks directly to you, through me, and he tells me that you have been bad, really,

really bad! You've done him an awful wrong, especially after all the wonderful things

1015

1007: At this time a prosecutor in the courts and still fairly young. He went on to succeed Cleon as the most prominent politician in the assembly and was often vilified in comedy.

he has given you. Yes, I know in his early days he had to work in secret, unseen, playing second fiddle to other dramatists. Just like the prophet Eurycles, who speaks through others, he too got under their skin, and true comic genius was heard.

1020 Then on that great day he ventured forth, alone into the fray, riding his own chariot of comedy and holding the reins of his personal team of thoroughbred muses.

And he won great honor, the likes of which had never before been awarded to any one man.

And when he reached this pinnacle of greatness, was he arrogant?

1025 No. Did you see him mincing around the gymnasium, making passes at all and sundry? No. Did this man ever take a bribe from a spurned lover, to send up his little fancy boy on this very stage? No!*

He would never stoop so low as to prostitute the muse! And when he produced his own

1030 great plays, did he attack mere men? Of course not! Like the mighty Heracles, he challenged the greatest monsters in our land. Alone he stood his ground against the saber-toothed beast, whose eyes shot terrible rays like those of the searing doggie-style star.

Yes, the beast, with the hundred-headed serpent of flattery crawling in its hair,

1019: A spirit that spoke prophecies through men rather like a medium at a séance. He was said to inhabit men's bellies (*1019 Eurycles).

1020: Aristophanes' first three plays, *Banqueters* (427), *Babylonians* (426), and *Acharnians* (425), were all produced by Callistratus. For Aristophanes' early career under Callistratus' patronage, see General Introduction.

1031: This monster is Cleon, who appears to have tried to sue Aristophanes over his play *Babylonians* (426). Aristophanes likens himself to the hero Heracles fighting for his satirical rights (*39 Cleon).

1032: This is Sirius, the dog star. It was said to bring the fierce heat of summer. However, the word *kunos* (of the dog) is replaced by *kuriñēs*, the name of a well-known Athenian prostitute.

licking its arse with those slithery, forked tongues. Yes, the beast, with it's heinous roar, the stench of a rotten seal, the arse of a camel, the looks of a Lamia, and huge, dirty, great, unwashed . . . BALLS! 1035

Yet he defied all these terrors and resisted all temptation. He fought the good fight for you and still does so today. Last year he attacked the demons, plagues, fevers, and nightmares that came by night to throttle your fathers and choke your grandfathers, with their subpoenas and writs, their affidavits and summonses. Yes, they preyed on you! 1040

You poor harmless, peace-loving people, until you could take no more and you begged the state for protection! But it was he who delivered you from those curses and purged* this land of ours from evil, and what did you do in return? You shunned him! Denied him!

YOU LET HIM DOWN WHEN HE NEEDED YOU THE MOST!

Last year he tried to sow a crop of new ideas, 1045

BUT YOU JUST DIDN'T GET THE MESSAGE, DID YOU?

He himself will swear by Dionysus and pour countless libations that no one had ever seen a better comedy. You should feel shame! Shame on you!

Let's face it, people, no intelligent person will think badly of our author

for being so far ahead of his field that his new concept crashed! 1050

(The whole chorus sings.)

1035: This child-devouring hermaphrodite was originally a mortal woman who was punished by Hera for an affair with Zeus.

1038: In 423 Aristophanes produced *Clouds* at the City Dionysia.

1046: *Clouds* placed third at the City Dionysia in 423.

*So in future my friends
You should open your minds
And accept the poet's ideas.*

1055 *You should listen and learn
And perhaps you might find
Wisdom can last many years,*

*Just like clothes in a trunk
Packed with a fresh lime.
New concepts will wear
For a very long time!*

(The music changes and the chorus sings again.)

1060 *In days of old, way back when
We danced with pride and fought like men,
Women ached, virgins quaked,
And wondered when we'd come again!*

(Each chorus man thrusts his phallus.)

1065 *Though our joints are knackered our bones are old
Our virile spirit has not gone cold.
Back in our prime, we'd win every time,
But we're still strong, still manly, still bold!*

1070 *The youth of today don't carry spears,
They're poofsters, pansies, and queers!
They haven't a care and wear rings in their hair,
We'd still whip 'em in spite of our years!*

LEADER:

I'm sure that some of you have been sitting there wondering why I am dressed in this wasp costume. I am sure you would also love to know the reason why we have these stings.
"For I can easily school him, even if he had no skill before."

1057: Athenians stored clothes away with citrus fruit to keep them fresh and the moths away.

1074: A parody of a quote from Euripides' *Stheneboea* (Fr. 663), "A poet in fact is schooled by love, even if he had no skill before."

Those of us who sport this handy little addition to our backsides are very proud to be called native Athenians, a hardy breed that has time and time again come to its country's rescue whenever trouble is on the horizon. When those Persian barbarians came to sack and burn our beautiful city and to smoke us from our nests, we flew into angry action and swarmed to get our weapons. We were there to meet them at Marathon! "Shield and spear in hand,"

standing fast in line, buzzing with rage and swelling with manly pride!

Their arrows blotted out the sun from the sky, but we were helped by our patron goddess, Athena, who sent her sacred owl to fly over our ranks and bring us luck. By nightfall we'd forced them back. Then we made a beeline for them, jabbing them up their baggy Persian

fancy pants, stinging their cheeks, their eyebrows, and their arses! And to this day the barbarians to the East still say,

"Osh kallucj jeratshup ugraxzumthrum sheetarpus nuk!"

Which means, "There is nothing more manly than an Attic wasp!"

(The chorus sings again.)

*When I was still a strapping male,
The fiercest foes I would assail.
To foreign shores we'd pull our oars,
To every place our ships would sail.*

1079: The Persians had fought the Athenians on two notable occasions: the battle of Marathon in 490 (*711 **Marathon**) and the battle of Salamis in 480.

1081: A quote from the tragedy *Momus* (fr. 29) by Achaëus.

1085: The owl was the patron bird of Athena and symbol of Athens. At the battle of Salamis against the Persian navy in 480 an owl had appeared just prior to the Athenian's successful attack.

1087: Trousers or britches were not worn by the Greeks, who ridiculed their Eastern neighbors for their ostentatious clothes (*1087 **Fancy pants**).

1089: An additional line from performance used for comic clarity and credited to Robert Richmond.

1095 We never paid honors to a clever speech,
We rewarded the man with the best oar-reach.
We heard no denials, sat through no trials,
Just wondered where our ship would beach!

1100 And all the Persians we chased and fought,
Taking enemy towns and foreign ports.
An empire made, the tribute paid,
Then stolen by the young in court!*

LEADER:

Whichever way you look at it, we are just like wasps.

1105 For a start, no living creature is more angry and savage once
provoked, or harder to pacify than we are. We are a lot like
wasps in other ways too, we all swarm together in groups as
if we were going to our different nests, buzzing to the Archon's jury,
swarming to the fraud trials, or nesting in the Odeon courtroom,
packed around the walls like grubs in their cells.

1110 Our economy is resourceful, too; we sting everybody to make
a living! It's true, like all wasps colonies, we too have our drones.
Some of them are sitting out there now. They don't have a sting,
they just lounge at home eating their way through our hard-won
tribute

1115 without working for it. And that's what makes us really angry!
To think that there are some people among us who shirk their duties
to the state, and avoid joining the service. They're just guzzling up
our pay, when they've never even lifted an oar, raised a spear,
or suffered a single blister to defend our city.

1120 I think it's high time we had a new ruling:
"Any citizen found not to possess a sting in full working order will
no longer receive the daily dole of three obols in state benefits!"

1107: The Archon's court was primarily concerned with cases involving orphans, inheritance, and family disputes.

1108: The fraud trials were presided over by eleven officials and held in a smaller roofed building in the Agora. The Odeon was the large roofed auditorium built by Pericles and situated next to the Theatre of Dionysus at the foot of the Acropolis. It is not known which court convened there.

(Enter Procleon and Contraceleon from the house. Procleon is clutching his old motheaten cloak as Contraceleon is carrying a bundle.)*

PROCLEON:

I will not take it off! Not as long as I've breath in my body!
We served, side by side, it virtually saved my life protecting
me from the northern onslaught of the invading . . . wind!

CONTRACLEON:

I'm just trying to do something special for you.

1125

PROCLEON:

No, by Zeus, I don't want anything special! Last time we had
"something special" it was that fancy grilled fish you served me,
cost me an entire day's jury pay to get the puke stains out!

CONTRACLEON:

Oh, come on, you said you were in my hands now, I'll look after you.
Just try it. You never know, you might like it.

1130

PROCLEON:

Well, what do you want me to do then?

CONTRACLEON:

Just throw away that filthy old cloak . . .

(Contraceleon manages to remove his father's cloak.)

. . . and put on this nice new robe!

(Contraceleon puts the old cloak aside and unwraps the bundle.)

PROCLEON:

Damn kids, you raise them, feed them, educate them,
then as soon as they're old enough, they try and smother you!

CONTRACLEON:

Oh, stop babbling and just put it on.

1135

(Contraceleon holds up a huge woolen cloak with large tassels.)

PROCLEON:

In the name of all the gods! What is this terrible thing?

CONTRACLEON:

It's a Persian robe.

PROCLEON:

It looks more like a Persian rug!

CONTRACLEON:

1140 Well, you've obviously never been to Sardis, have you? It's the latest thing there, but of course you'd know that if you bothered to keep up with the latest fashions.

PROCLEON:

Fashion! I don't know anything about that. I'll tell you this much, it looks like the kind of thing that poof Morychus would use to cover his "equipment!"*

CONTRACLEON:

Oh father, this was woven in Ecbactana!

PROCLEON:

Exactly! We all know the Persians like fuzzy sausages!

CONTRACLEON:

1145 Really! Father, you're impossible. This is a quality garment,

1137: Contracleon is holding a *kaunakes*, a long heavy winter coat covered with woolen tassels and worn in the East.

1140: A city in Lydia (western Turkey), a major commercial and political center. Athenian ambassadors had recently visited the city to negotiate with the Persians.

1143: The capital city of the Median kingdom and a royal residence of the Persian king. It was located on the Iranian plateau near modern day Hamadan.

1144: The woolen tassels hanging from the coat resemble sausages.

handmade by the locals, a very expensive Persian weave. This coat alone must have used a talent's worth of wool, easily.

PROCLEON:

Then they should've called it a "waste-coat," shouldn't they? Not a Persian robe, the amount of perfectly good wool thrown away to make this damn monstrosity!

CONTRACLEON:

Stand still and let's just put it on.

1150

(Contracleon puts the coat on Procleon, who runs off, throwing it down.)

PROCLEON:

I'm not wearing that, the blasted thing stinks!

CONTRACLEON:

Please, father, just put it on!

PROCLEON:

No I won't! I'm not going to be accused of being a turncoat!

CONTRACLEON:

Please, father, please, please please PLEASE!

(Procleon finally relents and petulantly holds out his arm.)

PROCLEON:

I'll be roasted alive in that thing, it's like an oven!

CONTRACLEON:

Come on, Daddy. (Contracleon puts the coat back on his father.) There we are.

1147: A wild exaggeration, as a talent was an enormous amount of money equivalent to 36,000 obols. A talent was also a unit of weight, but this would still be an enormous amount.

PROCLEON:

1155 Make sure you've got a fork.

CONTRACLEON:

What for?

PROCLEON:

So you can serve me up when I'm poached.

CONTRACLEON:

Right, let's get these awful shoes off you, and get your feet into these lovely Spartan booties.

(Contracleon takes a pair of tall boots out of the bundle.)

PROCLEON:

1160 What! Are you seriously expecting me to put on "enemy footwear"?

CONTRACLEON:

Just stop moaning and put this on.

PROCLEON:

(He does so.) To think that I will be standing on Spartan territory!

CONTRACLEON:

Now the other one.

PROCLEON:

1165 No! You can't! Not this foot! One of its toes is particularly anti-Spartan.

CONTRACLEON:

Can't be helped now *(he puts the boot on)*.

PROCLEON:

Oh woe is me! Now I won't have a single blister to show the lads and keep me company in my old age.

1159: High leather boots tied with straps (*1159 Spartan booties).

CONTRACLEON:

There, now let's see "The Walk."

(Procleon performs a ridiculous walk.)

No! No! No! Put a little panache into it: some style, sophistication, sensuality!

(Contracleon demonstrates an affected walk across the stage.)

PROCLEON:

I'll give it a go.

*(He mimics Contracleon's movements, but without any subtle grace.)*Oh yeah, a man could get used to used to this.
Who do I remind you of? 1170

CONTRACLEON:

Someone who's having hemorrhoid treatment!*

PROCLEON:

I really am trying to get the arse wiggle right.

CONTRACLEON:

Right then, to work! Now if you're going to be socializing with wealthy, educated people, you'll have to learn a few witty anecdotes. 1175

PROCLEON:

That's all right, I know loads.

CONTRACLEON:

Like what?

PROCLEON:

I know, the one about the farting Lamia!
And the one about what Cardopion did to his old mother with his . . .

1177: For the Lamia see note on line 1035 (*1177 Farting Lamia).

1178: Cardopion is not known.

CONTRACLEON:

No! Please not that kind of stuff, all those legends are very passé
now,
I mean something contemporary, a story about your family, nice
and homely.

1180

PROCLEON:

I know some nice homely stories. What did the ferret say to the
mouse when . . .*

CONTRACLEON:

(Enraged) NO! You stupid, uneducated shit! (checking himself)
Eh . . . said Theogenes, rudely rebuking the manure gatherer.
You can't talk about rodents in the company of great men!

1185

PROCLEON:

Well, what sort of stories should I tell, then?

CONTRACLEON:

Impressive stories, you know the sort of thing, "When I was on
diplomatic duty with Androcles and Cleisthenes . . ."

PROCLEON:

(Laughing) Diplomatic duty! Me? The only diplomatic duty I've
ever been on
was to Paros . . . rowing the galley for my two obols navy pay.

1184: A leading political figure and opponent of Cleon who was satirized for his excessive boasting, overindulgence, and obesity (*1184 Theogenes).

1187: A politician who was satirized as being an ex-slave and a vicious prosecutor. Cleisthenes was frequently portrayed in Aristophanes' plays as a beardless, effeminate man.

1189: An island of the Cyclades in the Aegean Sea which paid tribute to Athens (*1102 An empire made). Lower-class Athenians served as rowers in the navy and were paid two obols per day.

CONTRACLEON:

Well, tell them how you once saw that great old wrestling champion,
Ephudion, beat Ascondas at unarmed combat.
Tell them what a fine figure of a man he was with his shock of
white hair,
his superb muscles, powerful glistening thighs, a chest like armor.

1190

PROCLEON:

Steady on, son! You're letting your emotions run away with you.
How could he possibly compete in the unarmed combat if he was
wearing armor?

1195

CONTRACLEON:

It was a poetic metaphor, that's the kind of talk these clever fellows
like to hear. Tell me this then, if you were out at a society party
and you
were drinking with a group of complete strangers, what would
you tell
them was the most daring and bravest exploit of your youth?

PROCLEON:

My bravest exploit? I know! That time when I went out alone on a
dangerous midnight
raid and "liberated" several important implements from old
farmer Ergasion's vineyard.

1200

CONTRACLEON:

So that's where you got those vine-props from! No, something
heroic, like how you once
hunted down a ferocious boar, or won a hare-coursing tournament,
or when you ran in
the torch-race. Try to think of the most outstanding moment of
your entire youth.

1191: A champion fighter in the *pankration*, a fight where virtually every manner of unarmed combat was allowed. Nothing is known of Ascondas.

1201: Ergasion means "farmworker." Procleon is talking about vine props which he stole from a vineyard.

1204: All gentlemanly pursuits. The torch-race was an event at a number of Athenian festivals including the Panathenaea.

PROCLEON:

1205 An outstanding moment? Let me think, I know! When I was a big young lad, I took on Phayllus, the famous runner, and I beat him too.

CONTRACLEON:

You beat Phayllus?

PROCLEON:

Only just though, by two votes. I sued him on obscenity charges!

CONTRACLEON:

I give up! Come over here and practice your recline, let's see if you can learn how to behave at a symposium and engage in refined intercourse.

PROCLEON:

1210 Recline? How am I supposed to do that?

CONTRACLEON:

Gracefully.

PROCLEON:

Like this?

*(Procleon throws himself onto the couch.)**

CONTRACLEON:

Absolutely not!

PROCLEON:

Show me then.

CONTRACLEON:

Bend gracefully at the knees and pour yourself elegantly and gently onto the cushions.

1207: A famous Athlete from Croton in south Italy. His name became a by-word for speed. Aristophanes puns his name with "phallus" (*1207 Phayllus).

(Procleon tries to copy Contracleon's movements.)

Now look around the room and compliment the host on the ornaments . . . 1215

PROCLEON:

Your wife has a lovely set of jugs!

CONTRACLEON:

. . . Then gaze up at the ceiling, admire the tapestries on the walls.

(Procleon swings around upside down at an impossible angle and looks up.)

Bring out water for our hands!

(Xanthias comes out of the house with two water bowls.)

Now we dine, now we wash our hands again, and now we toast the gods.

(He demonstrates.)

PROCLEON:

Was it my imagination, or did we just eat dinner?

CONTRACLEON:

The flute girl begins to play, you are drinking with Theorus, Aeschines, Phanus, Cleon, and a funny little foreign chappy sitting next to Acestor. Now in all this distinguished company, do you think that you are capable of joining in the singing? 1220

1207: An extra line from performance to help with Procleon's punchline.

1216: An added line from performance. Procleon is making a complete hash of his attempts to behave in the appropriate manner.

1220: Cronies of Cleon. For Theorus see note on line 42. For Aeschines see note on line 459. Phanus was a supporter of Cleon and assisted in his prosecutions.

1221: Acestor was a dramatist. He is described as a social parasite, a crawler, and of foreign descent (see *Birds* line 30).

1222: This was the *skolia*, a symposium game where guests would sing one or two lines on a theme and then pass to another guest who would add another line or two and so on.

PROCLEON:

Oh yes, I like a good drinking song.*

CONTRACLEON:

Right then, pretend I'm Cleon and I start off with *Harmodius*.
Do you know it?

PROCLEON:

I do.

CONTRACLEON:

1225 Right, you pick it up from me:

"Never did an Athenian deserve so much credit . . ."

PROCLEON:

"Nor was there ever such a thieving little shit!"

CONTRACLEON:

1230 You can't sing that! You'd be killed in the uproar.
Cleon would threaten to ruin you, destroy your property
and have you kicked out of Attica.*

PROCLEON:

Well, if he threatens me, I'll just give him another little song,

1235 *"Don't you try to unbalance our city.
Absolute power corrupts absolutely!"**

CONTRACLEON:

Well, what are you going to do if Theorus, lying at Cleon's feet,
takes hold of his right hand and sings,

"My friend, you should remember the fable of Admetus

1224: The famous "Tyrant Killer." He and Aristogeiton assassinated Hipparchus, the brother of the Athenian tyrant Hippias in 514 (*1224 *Harmodius*).
1238: Admetus was the mythological king of Pherae in Thessaly. His wife, Alcestis, was rescued from the underworld by Heracles, who was repaying him a debt of guest-friendship.

*And try to show respect to worthy men like us."**

PROCLEON:

I'll just give him a bit of this,

1240

*"Those who try to straddle the classes
Usually end up falling right on their arses!"**

CONTRACLEON:

What about Aeschines, he's regarded, mainly by himself, as an
extremely
talented musician and a very learned man, he'll sing:

*"I journeyed far to Thessaly
The wealth is hard to surmise,
And Cleitagora came with me . . ."*

1245

PROCLEON:

"I wish he'd stop telling those lies!"

CONTRACLEON:

I suppose you're as ready as you'll ever be. Right then, we're off
to Philoctemon's house for a dinner party tonight.
Xanthias, pack some party snacks. We're going to need plenty of
food in us if we're going to be spending the night drinking.

1250

PROCLEON:

No, no, I don't approve of drinking. We all know what guzzling
wine leads to:
nighttime disturbances, fighting, smashing up people's property,
and to top it all,
a hefty fine to pay in the morning, and I'm not just talking about
the hangover!

1255

1247: The name of a female poet either from Thessaly or Sparta and the title of a drinking song. There seems to have been a courtesan of the same name, and Aristophanes may be exploiting this (*1247 *Cleitagora*).

1250: The name means something like "lovemystuff." But it may also have been the name of a wealthy Athenian.

CONTRACLEON:

Not if you're drinking with real gentlemen. These men can placate anybody.

Either you learn how to say just the right words to calm them down, or you tell them a witty story, one of Aesop's fables for example, or a story

from Sybaris, some witty little anecdote you picked up at the party.

All you have to do is make a joke out of the whole episode and the victim

will forget all about it, go on his way, and leave you in peace.

1260

PROCLEON:

I'll have to learn a lot of these anecdotes, then, if I want to get off my fines

when I do some serious damage to something. What are we waiting for? Let's go!

(Exit Procleon, Contracleon, and Xanthias offstage.)

[Second Parabasis]

*I always thought that I was wise
In full possession of every wit,
I never dreamed I would eulogize
Amynias and his bullshit!*

1265

*But I have to say he takes the cake,
When it comes to devil may care,
He has Leogoras serve him steak,
And he wears a bow in his long hair!*

1259: A Greek city in south Italy that became a byword for the corrupting influence of wealth and overindulgence. Hence "Sybarite stories" were fables about foolish and indulgent human acts.

1267: For Amynias, see note on line 75.

1268: A distinguished Athenian of great wealth who served as a naval commander and ambassador, known for extravagant hospitality and a perfect host for the freeloading Amynias (*1268 Leogoras).

*He eats like Antiphon, it's plain to see,
But his noble front's a farce.*

1270

*He let us down in Thessaly
Because he's really working class!*

*For we cannot have the Athenian presence
Represented by men who eat like peasants!*

*It is Automenes we should congratulate
For fathering sons who are all first rate.*

1275

*The eldest could not have climbed any higher
With those beautiful tunes he strums on his lyre.*

*The middle boy is a genius for his age,
What a wealth of talent he brings to the stage.*

1280

*But the best is Aripgrades, the last you bore,
For this boy really knows how to treat a whore!*

(The chorus leader addresses the audience.)

LEADER:

I would like very much to take this opportunity to set the record straight.

Some of you apparently believe that I reached an out-of-court settlement

1285

with Cleon after the pre-trial hearing, when he viciously attacked me and showered me with abuse. Some of you out there, actually thought that it was

funny to see him banging away at me, huffing and puffing and shouting

1270: The wealthy orator and speech writer, executed in 411 for his involvement in the antidemocratic coup.

1273: It seems that Amynias managed to get himself appointed to an important embassy to Pharsalos, a major city in Thessaly.

1275: Automenes is not known.

1278: This is a man named Arignotus.

1282: Possibly a comic dramatist. Described in comedy as a man with a fondness for cunnilingus (*1282 Aripgrades).

1284: Here Aristophanes uses the parabasis to address the audience via the chorus leader.

his mouth off. Perhaps you think that he successfully managed to
 put the squeeze
 on me and wring out my best gags. Well today I've had the last
 1290 laugh, the comic's
 revenge. I've pulled the rug from right under him. How's that for
 sour grapes!

(Enter Xanthias, running from offstage.)

XANTHIAS:

I wish I was a tortoise, with a nice hard shell for a skin,
 bloody clever bastards those tortoises are, they have the sense
 1295 to wear protective clothing to deflect the blows. I've been beaten
 black and blue with that damned walking stick of his!

CHORUS:

What's up, laddie?
 Did you get a beating for being a naughty boy?

XANTHIAS:

It's the old man, he's completely out of control! He's getting
 1300 himself into all kinds of trouble. He's turned into the biggest old
 soak in the whole city. He drunk them all under the table, and that's
 quite a feat considering the company he was keeping, Hippyllus,
 Antiphon, Lycon, Lysistratus, Thuphrastus, and all those mates
 of Phrynichus! Complete hooligans! But he was the most depraved
 1305 of the lot. They served a wonderfully refined dinner with some
 delicious wine, but he just guzzled it all down. Then he jumped up
 and started prancing around, laughing, burping, and farting at
 everybody
 like there was no tomorrow! He made a complete ass of himself.
 Then he started beating me with his damn stick, shouting, "Come
 here,

1291: Cleon may have sued Aristophanes after *Knights* in 424, where he was portrayed as a slave. If, as this passage implies, some sort of agreement was reached where Aristophanes would refrain from attacking Cleon, it is gleefully and artfully broken with *Wasps* (*39 Cleon).

1302: For the guests at Philoctemon's party, see *1302 Company he was

boy! Boy! Boy!" At that point Lysistratus piped up and told him
 that he
 1310 looked like a Phrygian who had found his fortune, or a pig in
 clover.*

Well, the old man made his own comparison and replied that
 Lysistratus
 resembled a locust who had just lost his wings or the actor
 Sthenelus
 pruned of his props. Would you believe it, everyone applauded in
 approval,
 all except Thuphrastus who made a face like a bulldog chewing a
 bee.

So Procleon rounded on him and said, "Who the blazes do you
 think you are!

You babbling buffoon, arse-licking whoever happens to be flavor
 of the month!" And so he went on and on, insulting all and
 sundry, telling
 1320 rude stories, making sick jokes, it was really embarrassing I can
 tell you!

Then, when he was so drunk he could hardly see, he decides to set
 off
 for home, knocking over anyone he happened to meet on the way.
 (Seeing Procleon coming) No! Here he is now! I'm off before
 1325 I get another beating!

(Enter a drunken Procleon holding a torch and accompanied by
 Dardanis, the dancing girl. He is being pursued, and there is a
 great deal of shouting and crashing coming from offstage.)*

PROCLEON:

Get out of the way!
 Get back!
 Clear off!

1312: A favorite entertainment at a symposium was the comparison game, where each guest would try to outdo the others with witty and acute observations.

1313: Sthenelus was a tragic dramatist and actor. Aristotle described his work as "lucid but ordinary" (*Poetics* 1458a.18-21).

1330 I'll barbecue the lot of you like a load of whitebait!
Piss off!
Bugger off!

PURSUER:

You just wait, I'll have you in court I will,
and I won't be the only one round here
tomorrow with a summons!

PROCLEON:

1335 Bollocks to your summonses!
You're so old-fashioned!
You can stuff your summonses where the sun don't shine!
I can't stand even to hear the word "courthouse."

(He nestles his head on the girl's breasts.)

1340 These are the only kind of jugs that get my vote.
Juryman? What's a juryman? Never heard of it.
Now piss off and leave me alone!

(He leads the girl toward the house.)

Come on, my little love-toy, this way. Hold onto this bit of rope.

(Procleon holds out his phallus for Dardanis and leads her to the house.)

Careful, it's a bit old and frayed, but it can still take a good hard pull.

(They arrive at the door.)

You see how much I care about you, stealing you away from those horrible men at the party just as they were about to stick their—HIC!
BURP!

1345 Well anyway, I think it's time I was given a nice little thank you present for my trouble don't you? Come on darling, I'm getting old, I need a hand every now and then. Come on, give it a little kiss, it won't bite.

(Dardanis laughs.)

Oh, you promised! Don't let me down now, that would be a really low blow, although I'm sure you're quite the expert when it comes to "low blows!"

I'm a respectable upright man. You're making this very hard for me, my dear.

I'm obviously going to have to be very firm. I tell you what, my little honey-pot, you be nice to me, and as soon as my son dies, I'll buy your freedom, then we can be together forever. I'm really quite well endowed, but I'm not in full control of my assets, they haven't fully matured yet, neither have I really!

I'm so young at heart that I'm under constant supervision. It's my son, you see, he's a bit of a short-tempered-tight-arsed-parsimonious-prick.

He's got my best interests at heart, really, I mean I am an only daddy, and he doesn't want me turning into a senior delinquent.*

(He sees Contraceleon heading toward him.)

Here he comes now! Here, grab hold of this torch and stand really still, and

keep your mouth shut. I know that's difficult in your profession, but please! I'm going to play a little joke on him, just some harmless boyish banter. The same kind of thing he did to me when I went off to be initiated in the Mysteries.

(Dardanis takes the torch and strikes a pose as Contraceleon enters.)

CONTRACLEON:

You dirty old pervert! Well, you've really done it now, haven't you? You might as well nail down the lid of your own coffin!

1354: It was customary for elderly Athenians to pass their estates on to their oldest son and put themselves in their care.

1363: Masked characters set on the initiates journeying to Eleusis and performed acts of comic buffoonery (*1363 The Mysteries).

As Apollo is my witness, you'll never get away with this!

PROCLEON:

Oh, I can just see you prosecuting a nice court-case with such relish.

CONTRACLEON:

I'll give you a dressing-down! You can't go around stealing dancing girls from parties!

PROCLEON:

1370 Dancing girl? What dancing girl? You're off your damn donkey, you are, talking rubbish like that. And don't look so grave.

CONTRACLEON:

Well, who's this then? It's Dardanis from the party.

PROCLEON:

No it's not. It's a lamp stand. I found it in the marketplace.

CONTRACLEON:

A lamp stand?

PROCLEON:

Yes, latest model, beautiful, isn't it?

(Contracleon points to Dardanis' vagina.)

CONTRACLEON:

Well, what's this black patch in the middle, then?

PROCLEON:

1375 It's the resin, leaves a terrible stain, you know.

(Contracleon feels Dardanis' backside.)

CONTRACLEON:

And what's this lump at the back? Feels like a bottom to me.

1372: The procession of the initiates to Eleusis was accompanied by torch-bearers (*1372 Lamp stand).

PROCLEON:

Is that all you ever think about! It's just a knot in the wood.

CONTRACLEON:

Knot, my arse! *(To Dardanis)* You come with me.

(Contracleon grabs Dardanis and starts to lead her off.)

PROCLEON:

Oi! What are you doing?

CONTRACLEON:

I'm confiscating this girl, you silly old fool, you wouldn't remember how to do it anyway, you're past it.

1380

(Dardanis frees herself and runs offstage.)

PROCLEON:

Oh really? Well let me tell you about the time I was on a state mission to the Olympic Games. I saw Ephudion wrestle Ascondas, and do you know that old fighter had some lovely moves. He pulled his arm back like that . . .

(He puts Contracleon into a half-nelson.)

turned him round like that . . .

(He spins Contracleon around.)

and smacked him in the nose like that!

1385

(He punches Contracleon, who falls down.)

And the moral of the story is, never underestimate the old, or you just might end up with a black eye!

CONTRACLEON:

(Dazed) Well, you certainly know your Olympic Games, that's quite clear.

1383: See note on line 1191.

(Enter Myrtia, the baking woman, with Chaerephon.)

MYRTIA:

1390 You must help me! That's him *(pointing to Procleon)*,
that's the man who attacked me and poked me with his torch!
He knocked all the bread off my tray. Ten obols worth,
and four more in damages, at least!

(Contraceleon picks himself up from the floor and confronts Procleon.)

CONTRACLEON:

That's marvelous, that is! Now we're going to have all kinds of
trouble,
not to mention the lawsuits, all because of you and your damned
drinking!

PROCLEON:

1395 Don't worry about it, there's no problem, remember, I can "pacify
the victim with a few choice words, or a witty story." I'll sort her out.

MYRTIA:

By the two goddesses, you won't get away with it,
I'm from a respectable citizen family,*
and I'm going to sue you for ruining my stock!*

PROCLEON:

Madam, I would like, if I may, to tell you an amusing little
anecdote.

MYRTIA:

1400 Don't you try any funny business with me, old man.

PROCLEON:

Ahem. One fine evening Aesop was on his way home
from a dinner party when he was barked at
by an annoying female mad dog.

(Procleon draws Myrtia towards him in order to shout in her ear.)

"BITCH!"

*(Myrtia, stunned, jumps backward and knocks Chaerephon to the
ground.)*

—Said Aesop . . .

"Bitch, why don't you stop yapping at me and just go,"
just go and buy some more flour and bake some more damn bread!" 1405

(Procleon falls about laughing, as Chaerephon picks himself up.)

MYRTIA:

How dare you laugh at me, on top of everything else you've done.
Right, you asked for it, I summon you to appear before the market
inspectors for causing criminal damage to my stock,*
and I've got the philosopher Chaerephon to act as a witness.

(She grabs Chaerephon and pushes him toward Procleon.)

PROCLEON:

No, wait! I've got another one for you. Once the great poet
Simonides was competing against that young upstart Lasus. 1410
And do you know what Lasus said to that? "I'm not in the least bit
interested."

(Procleon pushes Chaerephon, who falls once more to the ground.)

MYRTIA:

Right, that's it!

(Myrtia storms offstage, dragging Chaerephon with her.)

PROCLEON:

And you can tell that great poofter Chaerephon to piss off as well,
witnessing a summons for women! Don't you go dragging him
into it,

1408: Chaerephon was a philosopher and colleague of Socrates, frequently lampooned for his deathly pale appearance.

1409: Simonides (c. 556–468) was the famous dithyrambic poet from Ceos (*1409 Simonides).

1410: Lasus was a dithyrambic poet from Hermione and a younger contemporary of Simonides. Both men were invited to Athens by the tyrant Hipparchus, and it is likely that they would have been competitors.

he reminds me of a white-faced Euripidean heroine, like Ino.

CONTRACLEON:

1415 Oh no! Now there's someone else coming,

(Enter an injured man wearing a bloody bandage on his head and clutching the wound. He is accompanied by a silent witness.)

and he's brought a witness!

INJURED MAN:

Oh my bloody head. Old man, I summon you to appear in court on a charge of common assault.

CONTRACLEON:

1420 Assault? That's a criminal charge. *(To the man)* Oh no, please don't summon him! By all the gods don't! I'll pay you compensation, name your price.

PROCLEON:

No, I'll settle this with him myself. I admit I may have had a bit of a go at him.

1425 *(To the man)* Come over here, I'll tell you what, if you let me tell you how much I should pay in settlement, we can be friends in the future, or would you rather set the damages yourself?

INJURED MAN:

You make the offer, I don't want all the palaver of legal proceedings.

PROCLEON:

Ahem. A man from Sybaris happened to fall from his chariot and hurt his head really badly. You see the thing was that this man wasn't a very good driver. Well, his mate saw him lying there and said, "Men should stick to their own trades."

1414: The daughter of King Cadmus of Thebes. Hera turned Ino into a sea monster, and she was connected with initiation rites. She was a frequent character in drama.

1427: See note on line 1259.

So piss off to doctor Pittalus and stop bothering me!

1430

CONTRACLEON:

(To Procleon) I just can't believe you!

INJURED MAN:

(To the witness) Did you hear what he just said to me?

(The man and the witness start to exit.)

PROCLEON:

Hang on! A woman from Sybaris was once sold a chipped bowl* —a punch bowl!

1435

(Procleon punches the Injured Man.)

INJURED MAN:

Owww! *(To the witness)* Did you witness that?

PROCLEON:

A witness, exactly! That's just what this woman needed, so she went running around trying to find one. But she was wasting her time because

the bowl seller just said, "You're a crackpot and that's a crock of crap!"

And here's a chip off the old block . . .

1440

(Procleon delivers a swift head butt to the man, who falls over onto the witness.)

INJURED MAN:

(Picking himself up off the floor) I'll see you in court!

(Exit Injured Man and Witness.)

CONTRACLEON:

By Demeter! I've just about had all I can take from you! I'm taking you back inside.

(He picks up Procleon.)

1430: Pittalus was one of the physicians employed by the state to treat citizens.

PROCLEON:

(Struggling) What are you doing!

CONTRACLEON:

You're going back inside! At the rate you're going, there won't be
 1445 enough
 people left in Athens to serve as witnesses in all your court cases.

(Contracleon starts to exit carrying Procleon.)

PROCLEON:

Aesop was once accused by the Delphinians . . .

CONTRACLEON:

I'm not in the least bit interested!

PROCLEON:

Of stealing a sacred libation bowl belonging to a god,
 and he told them this story about how a beetle . . .

CONTRACLEON:

Sod you and your damn beetles!

(Exit Contracleon and Procleon into the house.)

(The chorus sings.)

CHORUS:

1450 *A miraculous reversal of fortune—
 I can only envy Procleon's fate,
 He's abandoned those crusty old habits
 And is thoroughly bang up to date!*

1455 *A new leaf the old man's turned over,
 Modern ways of refinement and taste,*

1446: According to legend, Aesop was sentenced to death in Delphi. He told the Delphinians a fable of an eagle who devoured the young of a beetle. Zeus was protecting the eagle's eggs on his lap, but the beetle flew around the god's head, until, exasperated, he jumped up to swat the pest and the eggs were dropped and smashed—the moral of the story being that the weak can always wreak their revenge on the strong.

*I hope he'll adopt this fresh lifestyle,
 Let it not have all been just a waste.*

*For old folks are always set in their ways,
 It is often just too hard to change,
 Though many have come to see better days
 By accepting what's novel and strange.* 1460

*But it is Contracleon we must applaud.
 It was he who had the foresight,
 Such sense, passion, and fortitude—
 His gentle heart proved a real delight.* 1465

*It's true we're completely converted,
 In our eyes he's a wonderful son,
 Wise, loving, and tender,
 The most dutiful child bar none!* 1470

*He successfully argued and criticized,
 His point of view he did justify,
 For he wanted his father civilized
 To become a social butterfly!**

(Enter Xanthias from the house.)

XANTHIAS:

Dionysus! It's a bloody madhouse in there! I think someone must
 have wheeled
 in a demon when no one was looking. All Hades has broken loose! 1475
 It's that old man, he got his first sniff of wine for years and got so
 excited, cavorting
 around to all that piped party music, that he's been up all night
 singing and
 dancing, if you can call it that. What a godawful row! He's been
 doing those ancient
 dance routines, you know, the ones Thespis used to do back in the
 old days.

1479: According to tradition Thespis was the father of Athenian tragedy and the first winner of the City Dionysia in 534.

1480

He reckons he's better than any of the modern tragic performers,
says they're a
load of old farts, and what's more, he's threatened to come out here
and prove it!

PROCLEON:

(From within) "Who guards the courtyard gate?"

XANTHIAS:

This is rapidly going from bad to worse.

PROCLEON:

"Get thee hence and unbar thy doors!"

*(Enter Procleon from the house, dressed in a lurid costume and
gyrating to ridiculous dance movements.)*

1485

Watch, as I dazzle you with my bump and grind!

XANTHIAS:

Not likely mate! You've lost your mind!

PROCLEON:

*I twist my frame to a surging swing,
My backbone coiled into a spring,
The nostrils flare, my body's in motion . . .*

XANTHIAS:

I think you need a medicinal potion!*

PROCLEON:

1490

Phrynichus quivers like a frightened cock . . .

XANTHIAS:

Let's throw some stones to make him stop!

PROCLEON:

I kick, do the splits, and kick again!

XANTHIAS:

He'll give himself a nasty sprain!

PROCLEON:

I gyrate my hips to a feverish peak!

XANTHIAS:

Just listen to those old joints creak!

PROCLEON:

Hence I dance to overwhelming acclaim . . .

1495

XANTHIAS:

Now I'm certain, he's quite insane!

PROCLEON:

Now then, I need to make an announcement:
Are there any performers of tragedy in the audience today
who seriously believe they could better my own stunning
performance?
If so, let them take the stage for a dancing match with me! Any
takers?

XANTHIAS:

Here's someone now.

1500

*(Enter a dancer dressed in a crab costume from offstage.)**

PROCLEON:

What in the name of the gods is that?

XANTHIAS:

It's the son of Carcinus, the crabby old seadog.

PROCLEON:

He won't take long to crack. A little twist and a couple
of right hooks will have him out of his shell in no time!

(Enter a second crab dancer.)

1502: A tragic dramatist who also served as a naval commander. He was nicknamed "Sealord" because of his naval exploits, and his name meant "crab." He had at least three sons who were said to be small men.

XANTHIAS:

1505 Hold on, what's this! Another damn crustacean! His brother.

PROCLEON:

I'll make a meal of him!

(Enter a third crab dancer.)

XANTHIAS:

We've really got crabs now! That's three to stuff.

PROCLEON:

Who's this crawler? Crab or creepy-crawly?

XANTHIAS:

1510 It's the little shrimp of the family. The small fry
who thinks he's a dramatist.

PROCLEON:

Now that is a tragedy. We must thank Admiral Carcinus for
sharing
his fine little nippers with us. He is surely the most "un-shellfish"
of men.

And now I will take to the dance floor and show them my moves.
Xanthias! Get the pot boiling with plenty of salt water for my

1515 victory feast.

CHORUS:

Move back! Stand clear! Let us give them some ground.
Let's keep well out the way when they start whirling around!

*(Procleon and the three crab dancers perform their frenetic dance
as the chorus sings.)**

*Come on then, children of Admiral Crab,
Swirl through the sand and leap high with a jab!*

1505: One of Carcinus' sons, Xenotimus, became a shipowner. Another was named either Xenarchus or Xenocleitus.

1511: This is Xenocles, who followed in his father's footsteps and became a dramatist.

*Shimmy the shore with your crabby gyrations,
Show us your moves, you brother crustaceans!*

1520

*The crab legs rotate and the circle is formed,
And the Phrynichus high kick is deftly performed.
Flailing limbs whizzing upwards so fast,
Force our dear audience to let out a gasp!*

1525

*So dance round in a circle and give us a twirl,
Give your belly a good slap and make yourselves swirl!
For the king crab is coming, the lord of the sea,
To dance with his sons and sing a shanty!*

1530

*But now it is time to finish our play,
With an ending that's never been done in this way.
I am sure this theatre has seen every outrage
Except a chorus dance right off the stage!**

1535

-END-