

The Complete Plays of Aristophanes

tr. M. Hadas, New York, 1962.

Aristophanes

## Wasps

Superficially, it is the Athenian propensity to litigiousness which is the theme of the *Wasps*; actually the play sets forth the permanent tensions between conservative and liberal politics. Bdelycleon or Cleon-hater, whom Aristophanes favors, maintains that pay for public service is a demagogue's device to purchase loyalty for himself; the opposition argues that without pay only the rich will be in position to direct policy, and that the population crowded into Athens during the war has somehow to be kept alive. Any attitude or behavior a man dislikes, Cleon charges, he castigates as subversion of democracy and invitation to tyranny. The scenes of Philocleon's attempted escapes when his son has shut him in are delightfully funny, as is the trial scene of the dog.

## CHARACTERS

PHILOCLEON	BAKING GIRL
BDELYCLEON, HIS SON	GUEST
SOSIAS AND XANTHIAS, SLAVES	COMPLAINANT
BOYS	CHORUS OF WASPS
DOGS	

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Translated by Moses Hadas

*(SOSIAS and XANTHIAS, slaves, are discovered keeping watch a little before dawn, before the house of BDELYCLEON and his father PHILOCLEON.)*

SOSIAS. How goes it with you, poor Xanthias?

XANTHIAS. I'm teaching myself to take this all-night stint easy.

SOSIAS. A debit for your ribs. You know what manner of beast we're guarding?

XANTHIAS. I do, but I'd just like to lull myself a little.

SOSIAS. Take your chance, then. My own eyes too are sweetly suffused with drowsiness.

XANTHIAS. You're crazy or a dervish.

SOSIAS. No, but it's a yogi sleep coming over me.

XANTHIAS. You worship the same foreign Bacchus I do. A Median host,

Irresistible, just now overwhelmed my eyelids. What a dream!

SOSIAS. I dreamt too, an extraordinary dream. But tell yours first.

XANTHIAS. A big eagle, I thought, flew down into the market place,

Grabbed a bronze shield in his talons, carried it to the sky—

Then I saw it was Cleonymus who'd thrown it away.

SOSIAS. Cleonymus is a perfect riddle.

XANTHIAS. How?

SOSIAS. A man asks at table, What beast is it throws its shield away

Alike on earth, in heaven, on sea?

XANTHIAS. Something terrible will happen to me—such a dream!

SOSIAS. Don't worry, nothing terrible, I swear it.

XANTHIAS. A man throwing his shield away is terrible. Tell your dream.

SOSIAS. Mine's big, about the whole ship of state.

XANTHIAS. Let's have the keel of the business, right away.

SOSIAS. In my first sleep I thought I saw sheep sitting in the crowded assembly,

With cloaks and staves. Haranguing them was a rapacious shark

Who sounded like a scalded pig.

XANTHIAS. Phew.

SOSIAS. What's the matter?

XANTHIAS. Stop! Enough! Your dream stinks of putrid leather.  
SOSIAS. Then the damned shark took scales and weighed out  
beef fat.

XANTHIAS. What a mess! It's the people he's going to weigh  
out.

SOSIAS. Near him I thought Theorus was sitting, with a  
crow's head.

Then Alcibiades lisped to me, *D'you thee? Theoruth  
Hath got a thycobird's head.*

XANTHIAS. Alcibiades' lisp, to the life.

SOSIAS. Strange, isn't it, for Theorus to turn crow?

XANTHIAS. Not at all; a fine thing.

SOSIAS. How so?

XANTHIAS. How? Man becomes crow—surely an omen he'll  
leave us

And go to the crows.

SOSIAS. So clever—an interpreter of dreams deserves my two  
obols.

XANTHIAS. I must tell the spectators the story—after a short  
preface.

Don't expect anything grand from us, no jokes stolen from  
Megara.

We've no pair of slaves to scatter nuts from a basket to  
the audience,

No Heracles cheated of his dinner, no stale jeering at  
Euripides.

Despite Cleon's rise by sheer luck we'll not belabor the  
man again.

Ours is a little tale, with a meaning, not too subtle for you,  
Yet more meaningful than ordinary farce. Up there asleep,

That big fellow on the tiles, is our master. His father he's  
shut up,

Inside; us he's ordered to keep him from getting out. The  
old man

Is sick—a strange disease none of you could know or guess  
If we didn't tell you. You would guess? Amynias there,

Pronapes' son, says the old man's a dice-lover. He's wrong.

SOSIAS. A deduction from his own affliction, by Zeus.

XANTHIAS. No, but the trouble is a something-lover. It's drink-  
lover

Says Sosias to Dercylus.

SOSIAS. Not at all; that's a gentleman's failing.

XANTHIAS. Nicostratus the Scambonian says it's sacrifice-lover  
or stranger-lover.

SOSIAS. By the dog, no, Nicostratus; he's not like Stranger-  
lover the fairy.

XANTHIAS. All foolishness; you'll never find it. If you want to  
know, keep quiet.

I'll tell you master's disease. He's a lawcourt-lover, like no  
one else.

He loves judging, and groans if he's not in the front row.  
Not a wink

Of sleep does he get at night, and if he dozes ever so  
little his mind

Flutters round the lawyers' time clock the night through.  
So used is he to holding the ballot pebble that he awakes

With three fingers pinched, as if offering incense at new  
moon.

If he sees scribbled on a doorway *I love Demos, Pyrilamp's  
son,*

He scribbles beside it, *I love ballot box.* Once the cock  
crowed

In the evening. *He's been bribed by officials under scru-  
tiny,* says he,

*To wake me late.* He shouts for his shoes immediately  
supper is over,

And he goes to court to sleep, glued to a post like a limpet.  
He's so strict he draws the long line to condemn everyone,

And comes home with nails full of wax like a bee. To make  
sure

He'll never be short of voting pebbles he keeps a beach  
at home.

He's psychopathic; the more he's admonished the more he  
judges.

That's the man we are keeping bolted in. His son takes  
it hard.

First he used soft words to persuade him not to wear the  
cloak

Or go outdoors: no use. Then ablutions and purges. Still  
no use.

Next he put him in the Salvation Army, but he burst into  
New Court,

Tambourine and all and sat there judging. When this  
initiation

Proved futile he took him to Asclepius' hospital at Aegina  
For the dormition cure, but before dawn he was at the  
court railing.

After that we never let him out, but he elopes through drains  
 And light-holes. We calked every chink with rags; he drove pegs  
 Into the wall and scampered out like a magpie. Now we've circled  
 The yard with nets to keep him in. The old man's name is Philocleon,  
 And the son's Bdelycleon—a high-tempered character.  
 (BDELYCLEON *appears on the roof, and PHILOCLEON emerges from the chimney.*)  
 BDELYCLEON. Xanthias! Sosias! Are you asleep?  
 XANTHIAS. Oh my!  
 SOSIAS. What's the matter?  
 XANTHIAS. Bdelycleon is up.  
 BDELYCLEON. One of you run up here quick! Father's got into the oven  
 And is runmaging like a mouse. See he doesn't duck out  
 The drain. And you put your weight on the door.  
 SOSIAS. At once, master.  
 BDELYCLEON. Poseidon! What's the noise in the chimney? Who are you?  
 PHILOCLEON. I'm smoke escaping.  
 BDELYCLEON. Smoke? Of what wood?  
 PHILOCLEON. Fig.  
 BDELYCLEON. That is the most acrid. Down-draft, won't you? Where's the lid?  
 Down with you. I'll put this log on to weigh the lid down.  
 He's down there thinking up some new trick. Worse luck,  
 They'll be calling me Old Smoky's daddy.  
 SOSIAS. He's pushing at the door!  
 BDELYCLEON. Push back like a man; I'm coming. Mind the bars.  
 Take care he doesn't chew the peg off.  
 PHILOCLEON (*within*). What are you at, villains? Let me go do my judging!  
 Dracontides might be acquitted!  
 BDELYCLEON. What harm is that to you?  
 PHILOCLEON. I was informed by the god, when I consulted the oracle  
 At Delphi, that I'd shrivel if a defendant escaped me.  
 BDELYCLEON. Averter Apollo! What a prophecy!  
 PHILOCLEON. Do let me out I implore you, else I'll burst.  
 BDELYCLEON. Never, Philocleon, by Poseidon.

PHILOCLEON. Then I'll chew through the net.  
 BDELYCLEON. But you've got no teeth.  
 PHILOCLEON. What a fix! How can I slay you, how? Give me a sword,  
 Quick, or a "guilty" ticket.  
 BDELYCLEON. Our man may do something drastic.  
 PHILOCLEON. Really not. I only want to sell the draft donkey  
 And panniers; it's the new-moon market.  
 BDELYCLEON. Can't I sell them?  
 PHILOCLEON. Not so well as I can.  
 BDELYCLEON. Better, by Zeus. Bring the donkey out.  
 XANTHIAS. How disingenuous! What a bait for you to let him go!  
 BDELYCLEON. But no haul; I'm up to the trick. But I think I'll go  
 And bring the donkey out; the old man won't dodge again.  
 —Why are you crying, ass? At being sold? Giddyap!  
 Why the grunts, unless you've got an Odysseus there?  
 XANTHIAS. He has got one—hanging on there underneath.  
 BDELYCLEON. Who? Let's see!  
 XANTHIAS. Him.  
 BDELYCLEON. What's this? Who are you, mister?  
 PHILOCLEON. Noman, by Zeus.  
 BDELYCLEON. Noman? Where from?  
 PHILOCLEON. Ithaca, son of Levanter.  
 BDELYCLEON. You'll be very sorry, Mr. Noman. Quick, drag him out!  
 Oh, the villain! Where he crept to! Looks to me exactly like A summoner's foal.  
 PHILOCLEON. If you don't let me go quietly I'll fight.  
 BDELYCLEON. About what?  
 PHILOCLEON. The ass's shadow.  
 BDELYCLEON. You're rotten bad and slippery.  
 PHILOCLEON. Me bad? You don't realize how much the best I am;  
 You will when you taste elderly judge paunch.  
 BDELYCLEON. Into the house, you and your donkey!  
 PHILOCLEON. Help, fellow judges! Help, Cleon!  
 BDELYCLEON. Bawl inside, behind locked doors. —Pile stones up  
 To bolster the door, shoot the bolt home, roll up the big mortar  
 To hold the bar in place.  
 SOSIAS. Ouch! Where did that brickbat fall from?

XANTHIAS. Maybe a rat loosened it up there.

SOSIAS. Rat? No, by Zeus, a judge on the rafters under the tiles.

BDELYCLEON. Worse luck, the man's turned into a sparrow and will flit off.

Where's the net? Shoo, shoo there, shoo! Scione is easier to guard

Than such a father.

SOSIAS. Come now, we've scared him inside and there's no way for him

To give us the slip; can't we take a snooze, the tiniest bit?

BDELYCLEON. You rascal, in a little while his colleagues will be calling him out.

SOSIAS. What do you mean? It's barely dawn.

BDELYCLEON. Then they must have risen late, by Zeus. After midnight usually

They come by, carrying lanterns and warbling dear old songs

Out of Phrynichus. That's how they call him.

SOSIAS. If need be we can throw stones at them.

BDELYCLEON. Provoking that species of old men, you rascal, is stirring

A wasps' nest. At the waist each carries a sharp sting.

They sting and buzz and prick like coal sparks.

SOSIAS. Don't worry. Stones in hand, I'll chase a wasp nest full of judges.

(Enter CHORUS—old men dressed as wasps.)

CHORUS. March, step smartly out! Comias, your feet are dragging:

You used to be tough as a dog-hide strap; now I find you lagging

Behind Charinades. Hi, Strymodorus of Conthyle, far the best of us!

But where's Chabes, where's Euergetes? Here we are, what's left of us,

The recruits who at Byzantium served—hep, two, three, four—

Pacing our posts, you and I. Remember how we slipped into the door

Of the bakery woman, stole her trough, and split it for kindling

To stew our greens? Forward, men! Laches' case they'll be calling.

He's a pot of money, everyone says, and to punish him for his crimes,

Cleon our patron yesterday bade us to be sure to appear betimes

With three days' rations of peppery temper. Hurry, veterans, and as you go

Beware of stumbling upon stones; all about cast your lanterns' glow.

BOY. Take care, father, watch your step, look out for the mud-hole there.

CHORUS. Take a stick up off the ground and poke the wick to make it flare,

BOY. No need whatever for a stick; with my finger I'll fix it in a trice.

CHORUS. Why pull the wick so high, you fool, do you know lamp oil's price?

Of extravagant costs I have to pay you never feel the rub.

BOY. By Zeus, if to admonish us again you take your club, We'll douse the lights and skip off home; in the dark, your worse luck,

You'll slosh around in the swampy ground like a poor benighted duck.

CHORUS. I've beaten better men than you. —But it's in mud I'm treading;

And within four days at most rain will Zeus be shedding.

The fungus on these lamps of ours betoken heavy rains;

The crops need a wetting down, and winds from northerly plains.

—Our fellow judge who here resides, what's come over him, think you?

Slack he never was before: why hasn't he joined our crew? First of all he used to be, singing the Phrynichus song.

He's fond of music. Gentlemen, we'd better halt; it can't be very long.

We'll call him with a serenade, then he'll have no choice;

He needs must come by pleasure drawn when he hears our voice.

Why now is our elderly friend

Not at his door ready to go?

Why does he not to our call attend?

Has he lost his shoe, stubbed his toe?

Is his ankle inflamed, in his groin a tumor?

Toughest of all he used to be when any for mercy sued

His head he'd bend and remark with humor:

*Go cook a stone; it'll do as much good.*

Perhaps what happened yesterday gave our friend a fever:

A culprit got off by claiming in his brief  
 That he'd informed on Samians and was an Athens-lover.  
 'Twas this acquittal plunged our friend in grief.  
 Up, dear friend, do not eat your heart,  
 Do not seethe with indignation.  
 Today a case of treason will start—  
 A Thracian fat who harmed our nation.  
 In such a trial you must take part;  
 Vote with us for condemnation.  
 On, boy, get going!

BOY. There's something, Father, for which I pine:  
 Would you grant a request of mine?

CHORUS. Certainly, child, tell me what's the pretty thing  
 That you'd like for me to bring.  
 Knucklebones is it, eh my laddie?

BOY. No knucklebones; figs, please, Daddy.

CHORUS. No figs; be hanged, say I.  
 From my paltry pay I have to try  
 Flour, wood, and groceries to buy.  
 Figs indeed—up in the sky!

BOY. If the magistrate should now say  
 No court will be sitting today,  
 Tell me, Father, have we yet  
 Other means dinner to get,  
 Or must we *cross Helle's strait*?

CHORUS. Alack, alas, insoluble riddles!  
 I don't know where we'd get our victuals.

BOY. Why bring me, Mother, into this mortal coil  
 Where livelihood requires such toil?

CHORUS. My food bag's empty decoration.

BOY. All we've got is lamentation.

PHILOCLEON (*appearing above*). Beloved friends, I pine for  
 you—  
 Your voice through crannies I hear—  
 Sing I may not: what can I do?  
 Yearn as I may voting urns to near  
 These hold me back. Zeus lord of thunder's fire  
 Turn me into smoke like Proxinides  
 Son of Sellus, a most consummate liar.  
 Sovereign Zeus be gracious to me,  
 Take pity on sorrow and pain  
 Or with thy blazing bolt speedily  
 Singe me to ashes. Then again  
 Inflate me and steep me in steaming brine,

Then make of me the slab of stone  
 On which votes are tallied line by line  
 Until the reckoning is done.

CHORUS. Who bars your door, who entreats you ill?  
 To us speak freely; we're men of good will.

PHILOCLEON. My son it is, but don't you shout. He's asleep  
 Out in front; your voices lower keep.

CHORUS. What's the object, silly man, of treatment so un-  
 seemly,  
 What excuse does he prefer for using you with contumely?

PHILOCLEON. Well enough he'll feast me, gentlemen, that I  
 won't deny;  
 But my wonted mischief I may not wreak, I may no cases  
 try.

CHORUS. Did that political reprobate  
 Venture so his sire to handle  
 Just because the truth you state  
 About the sorry naval scandal?  
 To bawl so loud he'd never dare  
 Unless himself a conspirator.  
 Some new dodge now must you contrive  
 Here below to join us, despite your guards alive.

PHILOCLEON. What'll it be? You point the way. I'll follow any  
 plan:  
 So hot I itch to go to court and defendants gloomy to scan.

CHORUS. Is there within no way for you to excavate a shaft?  
 Can't you dress yourself in rags, copy Odysseus' craft?

PHILOCLEON. Everything is sealed up tight, there's no exit  
 for a fly  
 You must think of another way; I can't liquefy.

CHORUS. Long ago, in the Naxos campaign, when the city was  
 going to fall,  
 You stole, remember, a bunch of spits and shinnied down  
 the wall.

PHILOCLEON. Yes I know, but what of that? Nothing's now  
 the same.  
 There was none to guard me, I could fly as I lusted.  
 Men-at-arms gimlet-eyed are at every exit now posted.  
 At the door, armed with spits, two of this great host  
 In ambush lie, as for a cat that's eloped with the roast.

CHORUS. Some contrivance for escape quick as you can con-  
 ceive:  
 Dawn is breaking, my honey bee; it's high time to leave.

PHILOCLEON. To masticate the trammeling net is my only course I fear:

May Dictynna forgive me now for spoiling hunting gear.

CHORUS. Spoken like a man of spirit bent upon salvation!

Ply your jaws with right good will, on with mastication!

PHILOCLEON. Gnawed through it is, but withhold your cheer;

We must watch our step, Bdelycleon might hear.

CHORUS. Away with all fear! If he utter a syllable

I'll make him eat his heart and fly

For his very life over hill and dale.

He'll learn not to trample the mysteries high

Of the voting pebbles' holy thurible.

Now tie a rope to the window, wind it your body round,

Work up a frenzy Diopeithean, and lower yourself to the ground.

PHILOCLEON. But if those two should see me and fish me up on my line,

In the same old creel then stow me, how would you then incline?

CHORUS. Our hearts of oak we will summon, protect you with might and main;

Of this let us assure you; no one will pen you again.

PHILOCLEON. Trusting in you I'll venture, but if anything befall,

Take me up and bewail me, and bury me by the court-house wall.

CHORUS. Courage, man, you've nothing to fear. Fill your heart with hope,

Offer prayer to your father's gods and then slide down that rope.

PHILOCLEON. O Lord Lycus, neighbor, hero, whose tastes resemble mine,

Who takes delight in groans and tears when a culprit pays his fine;

By the prisoners' box you fix your abode better to hear the wails,

Alone of heroes by the mourner you sit for the pleasure grief entails:

Pity and preserve me now, who of your fun partakes;

Never again, I promise you, will I make your shrine my jakes.

(BDELYCLEON awakes as PHILOCLEON descends.)

BDELYCLEON. Wake up, you!

SOSIAS. What's the matter?

BDELYCLEON. There's a noise hereabouts.

SOSIAS. Has the old man found a loophole?

BDELYCLEON. He's lowering himself by a rope!

SOSIAS. Damn you, what are you about? Don't come down!

BDELYCLEON. Up the other window, and hit him with the door wreath:

He'll back water when he feels the harvest-home trimmings.

PHILOCLEON. Help, all who have suits this year! Smicythion,

Chremon, Pheredeipnos, help me now if ever, before

I'm locked up again.

CHORUS. Why wait longer your rage to vent;

On spoiling our nest the fellow's bent.

Out now with the lethal sting

Sharpened fine for punishing.

These cloaks, children, quickly take,

Run and shout Cleon awake.

Bid him answer the alarm;

Here's a wretch who means to harm

Our dear city, who in future would deny

Our cherished privilege lawsuits to try.

BDELYCLEON. Hear my case, good friends, don't yell.

CHORUS. High as heaven our wrongs we'll tell.

BDELYCLEON. This man, I say, I'll never free.

CHORUS. What wicked, brazen tyranny!

O my city, O Theorus,

And any other fawning boss,

If we perish yours the loss.

XANTHIAS. Heracles! What stings they have! Do you see them, Master?

BDELYCLEON. Sharp enough, well I know, to bring Philip to disaster.

CHORUS. You too we'll ruin. --Wheel about now, stings raised higher.

Buzz in fury, draw, aim, fire!

He'll learn to his sorrow, before we part,

Never hostilities with a wasp swarm to start.

XANTHIAS. With stalwarts like these to fight is a most fearsome thing;

When I see them buzz, by Zeus, I shudder at their sting.

CHORUS. Let go our man then. If you don't and we attack,

You'll be envying the tortoise for the shell upon his back.

PHILOCLEON. To the charge, fellow judges, wasps of spirit fierce!

Their fingers, eyes, rumps, and sides now pierce.

PHILOCLEON. Midas, Phryx, Masyntias, help! Stick to him like barnacles!

You get no dinner if you let him go. I'll put you all in manacles.

Their buzzing threats are nothing more than burning fig-leaves' crackle.

CHORUS. If you don't release our man you'll feel our prickly hackle.

PHILOCLEON. Cecrops my lord, thou dragon-seed hero, will you see me mauled

By these oafs I've oft made weep when before the judges they're hauled?

CHORUS. Evils how many does old age bring! These two rogues most vilely

Their aged master manhandle, his benevolence forgetting entirely.

Coats and caps of hide he's bought them, also fleecy ponchos,

And in the freezing winter weather he even took care of their toes.

Now without shame are their eyes before the elderly jackanapes.

PHILOCLEON. Won't you let me go, you beast! Recall when you stole the grapes?

I tied you to an olive tree and manfully plied your rear.

Envied of all were you then; now you wear an ingrate leer.

Unhand me now, you and you, before my son rejoins us.

CHORUS. For this the two of you shall pay a penalty most glorious.

The righteous wrath of acrid men you'll quickly learn, you dastard;

Their spirits are bold, their flavor sharp, their very glance is mustard.

BDELYCLEON. Strike, Xanthias, strike! From the house those wasps keep shoving!

XANTHIAS. Exactly what I'm doing.

BDELYCLEON. Smoke them out, you! —Shoo, shoo! Get the devil out! —Seize

A stick to bat them down with. Ply them with Aeschines!

XANTHIAS. We were bound to extinguish them before so very long.

BDELYCLEON. You'd never escape them had they not been chewing Philocles' song.

CHORUS. Clear it is to the humble all

How stealthily does tyranny crawl!

You'd make legal safeguards nugatory,

You reactionary long-haired Tory.

Our city shields the proletariat;

But you choose to be an aristocrat.

BDELYCLEON. Can we not without melee and without unseemly billingsgate

Calmly our differences discuss and our grievances negotiate?

CHORUS. We negotiate with you, you hater of the masses,

Fringed and curled and mustachioed, friend of Brasidas?

BDELYCLEON. Better it were, so help me Zeus, to disown my father

Than repeated shipwrecks to undergo in ever-stormy weather.

CHORUS. Only rue and cummin yet, of our argument only a sample.

You're unscathed now but when you hear the presentation ample

Delivered by our advocate, you'll be galled and sore.

The very same crimes he'll lay to you; he'll call you conspirator.

BDELYCLEON. Will you never, in heaven's name, leave me and go away?

Is it some vote of yours to flay and be flayed all day?

CHORUS. So long as we're not laid in hearses

You can never to tyranny coerce us.

BDELYCLEON. Whatever issue is discussed, be it small or great, Of tyranny and conspiracy incessantly you prate.

Never before have these words been heard, not for half a century;

Like herrings in the market stalls, now they're common currency.

If a trout is what you're after and refuse to purchase anchovy,

Grumbles the disgruntled anchovite, *The gourmet favors tyranny.*

If an onion you wish to buy, for your fish a savory,

The offended cabbage seller cries, *Aha, you favor tyranny.*

Must Athens then be taxed, think you, to maintain your luxury?

XANTHIAS. Yesterday noon I called on a doxy, and asked her to play the jockey;



Up she flounced and scolded me: *You're after Hippias' tyranny!*

BDELYCLEON. Such charges please the mob. Because I'd give my father redemption

From time-consuming, back-biting, tedious litigation,

A gentleman's life assure him, without enmity or calumny,

A conspiratorial wretch they call me, a favorer of tyranny.

PHILOCLEON. And they're right, by Zeus! I'd not exchange for pigeon's milk the

Agreeable life of which you seek to bilk me.

In mullet and eels and suchlike fare I take little pleasure;

The delicate aroma of lawsuit-stew is what I most treasure.

BDELYCLEON. A taste you've cultivated. Hold your tongue and lend an ear,

And I think that I can show that you're wrong, my daddy dear.

PHILOCLEON. Wrong for me to serve as judge?

BDELYCLEON. Actually you're slave and drudge.

I'll show you've been the ridiculous pawn

Of the very men on whom you fawn.

PHILOCLEON. Don't speak of slavery! I'm master, you fool.

BDELYCLEON. You think you are; in fact you're a tool.

When all are plucked, how do you profit?

PHILOCLEON. Much. Let these men judge if I should stop it.

BDELYCLEON. I too their verdict will accept. —Turn him loose, you!

PHILOCLEON. A sword please! —If I lose I'll stick myself through.

BDELYCLEON. But suppose you reject their arbitration?

PHILOCLEON. Never again may I enjoy juridical compensation.

CHORUS. The alumnus of our school

To do credit to his teaching

Must employ some novel tool—

BDELYCLEON. Bring me, someone, my writing slate—

I'll see what's what in this debate.

CHORUS. —The callow youth overreaching.

He might fight through thick and thin,

Perished else is all our preaching,

If, heaven forbid, the young man win.

BDELYCLEON. I'll jot down here all he has to say.

PHILOCLEON. And what would you say if he wins today?

CHORUS. Old men are useless muddlers,

Jeered at out of habit.

Men would call us olive-cane toddlers,

Brief cases for an affidavit.

Upon you it now devolves our sovereign power to vindicate.

Show us now your hardihood; your sinews flex, your tongue dilate.

PHILOCLEON. Directly from the starting line I shall proceed to demonstrate

That higher than any sovereignty is our own blessed estate.

What other happy and blessed life can with the judge's compare?

Powerful is he and luxurious, even with hoary hair.

Directly from bed to the court I go, where to solicit my grace

Great six-footers, obsequiously, show me to my place.

A hand that's picked the public purse gives me a caress;

Humbly they scrape and bow and whine with sham distress:

*Pity me, father, I beg of you; you must know what temptations*

*Assail the keepers of public funds and buyers of soldiers' rations.*

My very existence he'd never have known, except for a former investigation.

BDELYCLEON. Of this I must make a note: *Judges profit from solicitation.*

PHILOCLEON. When they've soft-soldered me and softened my mood

I do none of the things I promised I would.

I listen to exculpations of every imaginable sort—

The cajolery one hears in a magistrate's court!

Some cry up their poverty and credits as debits count

Until they make their total wealth equal mine in amount.

Some Aesopic fables tell; some an amusing anecdote

All calculated to make me laugh and my charity promote.

And if I'm not persuaded yet, he'll appeal to sentiment,

Dragging his children by the hand to make me hear their lament.

They grovel and whimper, the boys and girls, and the father, all aquiver,

Implores me with pleading voice from their plight to deliver

His bleating ramkins and his pussykins mewling,

Then a little we relent, our anger's pitch unscrewing.

Is this not power? Am I not well off?

At pelf and prestige I can freely scoff.

**BDELYCLEON.** Derision of wealth: for my notes point two.

—Your dominion of Hellas: What's the profit to you?

**PHILOCLEON.** When adolescents enter the rolls, we enjoy a private inspection.

If actor Aeagrus stands in the dock we demand a recitation

Of his famous Niobe role. His most elaborate aria

The piper plays in gratitude before the judge's barrier.

The dying father names his friends to care for his orphaned heiresses.

We flout the will with its solemn seal for men who'll sweetly caress us.

We give the girl, and with no accounting. Our acts enjoy immunity.

Judges alone, of surrogates, are from investigation free.

**BDELYCLEON.** For this alone, of all you said, I offer felicitation.

But still,

Is it not high-handed to subvert the heiress' will?

**PHILOCLEON.** If senate and people ever are stumped in deciding some great case,

They vote that the defendants must the judges' panel face.

Evathlus and Colaonymus, the great loser of his shield,

Declare they'll never the people betray; for the people, their power they'll wield.

No bill can the assembly pass without this rider appended:

Judges get the whole day off after their first case is ended.

Cleon himself, the master bawler, us alone his badgering spares.

Tenderly he fondles us, brushes flies from our scanty hairs.

For *your* father you've never done as much. Theorus the glorious

Carried sponge and bottle—he, the peer of Euphemius—

Our shoes to clean and polish. See of what great privilege

You would deprive me and bar me: yet slavery you do allegel

**BDELYCLEON.** Talk your fill. Like a man an anus washing, at the end you'll see,

Scrub and scour as you will, immaculate it cannot be.

**PHILOCLEON.** Sweetest thing of all is this, which I forgot to mention.

When I come home with my judge's pay, what welcoming attention!

My daughter washes and salves my feet and then stoops for a kiss,

Calling me her daddykins; soon from my cheek I miss

The obols I'd hid there, which she, with caressing tongue fishes.

Affectionately my little wife brings on my special dishes.

*Eat this*, she insists, as she sits by my side, *Have a taste of that.*

I bask in the glow. I need not look to your butler, saucy and fat,

Wondering when to serve me he'll deign. If too long he dallies

I've got me now a mighty shield, impregnable to fortune's sallies.

If your pour me out no wine, I tilt this donkey jug of mine;

It gurgles like an army corps. I have no need of thee and thine.

My own dominion, I maintain,

Is precisely Zeus' sort.

On hearing our din, passers-by exclaim

How thunderous, Zeus, the court!

When my lightning I let fly

And my thundering bellow,

The rich and stately I terrify;

They stain their garments yellow.

*You fear me*, it's very clear,

Though you think you're clever.

By Demeter I swear it's me you fear.

But I fear you? Never!

**CHORUS.** Never before so shrewd a word,

Never such eloquence have I heard.

**PHILOCLEON.** He thought my undefended vines he'd gobble by surprise,

But that, as now he learns, is where my own strength lies.

**CHORUS.** No point he omitted, but covered them all.

As I heard him I could fancy

That I myself was growing tall.

The charm of his facility

Left me quite possessed.

A judge myself I dreamed I'd be

In the Islands of the Blessed.

**PHILOCLEON.** How he fidgets, how hangdog he looks!

Today I'll hang him on tenterhooks.

CHORUS. Every dodge must you insinuate  
 Yourself from his grip to extricate.  
 Hard it is for the young to assuage  
 An elderly man's burning rage.  
 —A heavy millstone go and seek  
 Wherewith to crush my manly spirit.  
 Otherwise your outlook's bleak—  
 Your words alone will never do it.

BDELYCLEON. To cure the city of its disease, inveterate and chronic—

That is an assignment grave, too demanding for poetry comic.

And yet old Cronus, daddy mine—

PHILOCLEON. Daddy me no daddies. If you cannot prove me a slave in a trice;

I will have to kill you dead—and be excluded from sacrifice.

BDELYCLEON. Then listen to me, Papa my pet, your frown for a little relax.

On your fingers roughly reckon, not with abacus, just how much the tax

Paid in by our subject states, plus our assorted revenues,  
 Fees and imports, mining rights, interest and rents and harbor dues;

Some two thousand talents, I believe, you'll find the total sum.

Now count the salaries of our judges—six thousand is the minimum—

One hundred and fifty talents, you see, is the total cost per year.

PHILOCLEON. Then hardly a tithe of the income to our salary goes I fear.

BDELYCLEON. By Zeus, it doesn't.

PHILOCLEON. And where does the rest of the money go? Inform me, pray.

BDELYCLEON. To the politicians whose stock in trade it is to say:

*Athenian masses I'll never betray! For the common people's sake*

*Forever will I fight!* Lulled by such mouthings, Father, you make

Such fellows to be your kings. Then by threatening every city

Fifty talents at a clip they extort, and they show no pity:

*I'll aim my thunder at your city if you don't fork up.*

You meanwhile are quite content on dominion's crumbs to sup.

When the allies perceive the populace, clinging to their franchise,

Thin and supine, waste and pine with starvation in their eyes,

You they ignore and lavish their gifts on the powerful politicians—

Fish and wine, sesame and honey, and soft embroidered cushions,

Clothing and plate and all that affords either health or pleasure,

And you who've toiled by land and sea and your dominion treasure—

For you not even a garlic clove; nothing comes to you free.

PHILOCLEON. True enough: I've had to send to Eucharides for money to purchase three.

But time's awasting. Tell me now: Why do you think we're slaves?

BDELYCLEON. Is it not the worst of slavery to have as masters such greedy knaves?

They and all their parasites, all feeding at the public trough;

Three meager obols you receive you are pleased to think are quite enough.

You earned those obols by your sweat, rowing, besieging, fighting.

Most of all I choke with spleen at an adolescent's bidding,

A fat-rumped son of Chaireas, straddling, swaying, mincing,

Ordering you to report at dawn for your daily stint of judging:

*Whoever is tardy forfeits his pay.* Himself however late he arrive

Pockets his drachma as advocate of the court. If a culprit offer a bribe,

He splits with his colleague. They manage the manner like two men at a saw—

One pushes, one pulls, and there goes the law.

All these tricks you never notice, only at the pay clerk stare.

PHILOCLEON. You don't say! Is that what they do? It's enough to raise my hair.

Your words are having an effect: I feel I'm giving ground.

BDELYCLEON. You and the others might wealthy be, and yet  
you're talked around

By the people's patron. From Pontus unto Sardis extends  
your domination:

What profit to you? Hardly enough to stave off starvation.  
They dribble out, drop by drop, like oil squeezed from  
wool.

They *intend* you to be poor, as I'll explain: if life were  
bountiful

You might not know your master's voice. Now at a whistle  
you leap

Savagely an enemy to maul. If in opulence they wished  
to keep

The people they could do so. A thousand cities are our  
domain;

If each were allotted twenty Athenians to maintain,  
Twenty thousand citizens could live on sumptuous fare,  
Creams and crowns and pasties and ragout of dainty hare.

As befits the heirs of Marathon ourselves we'd be regaling—  
Not like migrant pickers of fruit after a paymaster trailing.

PHILOCLEON. Alas for me, my hand is numb, I cannot hold  
my sword aloft.

An enfeebling languor suffuses me; I fear me I am growing  
soft.

BDELYCLEON. But if ever *they* grow panicky, *Divide Euboea*,  
they cry!

And promise, per man, fifty bushels of wheat. What they  
actually supply

Is five bushels of barley stingily doled out quart by quart,  
And only on evidence of citizenship certified by a court.

To prevent your being bamboozled

We've kept you incommunicado

From those by whom you're dazzled.

I have fed and will feed you even so,

But not on funds embezzled.

CHORUS. Wise the saying: no judgment pass until you have  
heard either side.

All our doubts are dissipated; with you victory will abide.

Now our staves we'll cast away, now our passion will  
subside.

Fraternity brother and classmate,

Accept this prudent admonition:

Be not stubborn and obdurate.

I wish that I had some relation

To guide my inexperience;

Some god, 'tis plain, is your salvation:

Do not reject his benevolence.

BDELYCLEON. I'll nurture him and see he's snug

With what an old man can require,

Porridge, dressing gown, a rug,

A wench to stir his ebbing fire.—

But he stands mute with stony face,

An omen unfavorable for my case.

CHORUS. It's himself now he is chiding,

Now he sees where he transgressed.

To himself his error he's confiding

In not heeding your behest.

Now perhaps he is persuaded

To turn over a new leaf.

Now the folly old has faded;

He will lend your views belief.

PHILOCLEON. Ah me, ahl

BDELYCLEON. Why the groans?

PHILOCLEON. Promise me no promises!

There's my heart, there fain I'd sit

Where the court crier calls *Oyez*,

*Vote, everyone who's not voted yet.*

I'd linger till they'd voted, every one.

Hasten, my soul! where *is* my soul?

Wait, dark shadows, till our day is done;

Among the judges to sit is all my goal.

I may catch at his thieving—Cleon!

BDELYCLEON. Come, Father, in heaven's name, take my  
advice.

PHILOCLEON. About what? Whatever you like, except one  
thing.

BDELYCLEON. And what is that?

PHILOCLEON. Not to judge. Hades will do the judging before  
I yield.

BDELYCLEON. If that is what you like don't go *there*.

Stay here and judge your household.

PHILOCLEON. About what? This is nonsense.

BDELYCLEON. Same as there. If a maid opens a door surrepti-  
tiously

Fine her one drachma—what you used to do there. All in  
order.

On a fine morning you'll be sitting in the sun. If it snows  
Then inside by the fire. If you sleep till noon

There's no official to shut you out.

PHILOCLEON. That's satisfactory.

BDELYCLEON. If a pleader is long-winded, moreover, you won't go hungry

And chafe yourself—and the defendant.

PHILOCLEON. Could I draw distinctions equally fine while masticating?

BDELYCLEON. Much finer. When testimony is false, people say The judges have a hard problem to chew over.

PHILOCLEON. You convince me. But one thing you haven't mentioned.

Where will I get my pay?

BDELYCLEON. From me.

PHILOCLEON. That way it'll be all mine and not shared.

Lysistratus the jester played me a dirty trick. He got a drachma

For the two of us, went to the fishmonger to change it, Brought back three mullet scales, which I thought obols And put in my mouth. The taste was disgusting; I spat them out

And brought suit.

BDELYCLEON. His defense?

PHILOCLEON. He said I had a rooster's gizzard and could digest silver.

BDELYCLEON. Well, that's another advantage.

PHILOCLEON. And a considerable one. Do what you were going to.

BDELYCLEON. One minute; I'll bring the things here.

PHILOCLEON. See how oracles are fulfilled! I have heard it said

The Athenians would judge suits at home. Every man

Would build a miniature court at his front door,

Like a Hecate shrine.

BDELYCLEON. What do you say now? I've brought the things I mentioned

And more too. Here's a potty, at your need; I'll hang it on this peg.

PHILOCLEON. Clever. Useful relief for an old man's bladder.

BDELYCLEON. And here's fire and beans to munch if you feel the need.

PHILOCLEON. Good again. If I have a fever I can collect my pay;

I can sit here and eat my beans. But what's the bird for?

BDELYCLEON. To wake you by crowing up there if you doze off during a case.

PHILOCLEON. One thing I miss; the rest is satisfactory.

BDELYCLEON. What is it?

PHILOCLEON. Could you bring me the shrine of Ibycus?

BDELYCLEON. Here it is, and the hero himself.

PHILOCLEON. Master hero, how austere to see!

BDELYCLEON. To me he looks like Cleonymus.

XANTHIAS. That's why he's got no shield.

BDELYCLEON. The sooner you take your seat the sooner I can call a case.

PHILOCLEON. Call ahead. I'm on the bench.

BDELYCLEON. Let's see, what's first on the calendar? Any inmate

At fault here? Thratta has scorched the pot.

PHILOCLEON. Wait! It's murderous! Call a case with no railing?

That's the first of our sanctities.

BDELYCLEON. I have none, by Zeus.

PHILOCLEON. I'll run myself and fetch whatever's at hand.

BDELYCLEON. What a hold old habit keeps!

XANTHIAS. The devil with you! —To give such a dog house room!

BDELYCLEON. What's the matter now?

XANTHIAS. That dog Labes dashed into the kitchen, grabbed A Sicilian cheese, and gobbled it all.

BDELYCLEON. Then this is the first offense I'll bring

Before my father. You, Xanthias, be prosecutor.

XANTHIAS Not I, by Zeus. The other dog says he'll prosecute, If an indictment is cited.

BDELYCLEON. Go and bring them both.

XANTHIAS. The proper course.

(PHILOCLEON enters carrying his surrogate railing.)

BDELYCLEON. What's that?

PHILOCLEON. A pig barrier from Hestia's hearth.

BDELYCLEON. Temple robbing?

PHILOCLEON. I'll consecrate Hestia by smashing somebody.

Bring your case on. I'm all for sentencing.

BDELYCLEON. I'll bring the rolls and the briefs.

PHILOCLEON. You're wasting time, your dawdling is killing me;

I'm all set to scratch the long "guilty" mark.

BDELYCLEON. Ready!

PHILOCLEON. Make the summons.

BDELYCLEON. At your service.

PHILOCLEON. Who comes first?

BDELYCLEON. The devill I'm sorry, I forgot to bring the voting urns.

PHILOCLEON. Where are you running off to?

BDELYCLEON. For the urns.

PHILOCLEON. Don't. I've got these sauce pans.

BDELYCLEON. Excellent; we've got all we need now, except the water clock.

PHILOCLEON. What's the potty? Isn't it a water clock?

BDELYCLEON. Well provided! The country way.

Quick, someone, bring out coals and incense and myrtle;  
We must open with prayer.

CHORUS. For these prayers and these libations  
We too offer felicitations.

Nobly after exacerbation  
Have you reached reconciliation.

BDELYCLEON. The holy silence let everyone keep!

CHORUS. Phoebus Apollo in Pythia sought,  
Bless the work this man has wrought  
Before these doors. To an end he brought  
Errors in which we've been caught.

Ho, Paean!

BDELYCLEON. Lord, my neighbor at my entrance gate,

This new rite for my father I inaugurate.  
His oaken temper do thou moderate,  
With honey his tartness alleviate.  
Make him to his fellows a gentle excuser,  
To favor accused rather than accuser,  
To show to suppliants a kindlier temper,  
To cease from acerbity and from rancor,  
To amputate his nettle anger.

CHORUS. Your chants we join and heartily share

For your novel policy your cordial prayer.  
For the people's cause rich fruit may it bear.  
Among younger men such prudence is rare.

BDELYCLEON. Enter, judges, at the door. No admission after speaking's begun.

PHILOCLEON. Who's the defendant? —He'll catch it.

BDELYCLEON. Attention to the indictment! *Dog of Cydathon charges:*

*Labes of Aexone transgressed in devouring, all by himself,  
A Sicilian cheese. Penalty: fig-wood collar.*

PHILOCLEON. No, a dog's death if he's convicted.

BDELYCLEON. Here's the defendant Labes.

PHILOCLEON. The brutal! What a thievish look! Thinks he'll win me

With that smirk. Where's the accuser, Dog of Cydathon?

DOG. Bow-wow!

BDELYCLEON. Present!

XANTHIAS. Another Labes—good yelper and pot licker.

BDELYCLEON. Silence! Be seated! Prosecutor step forward!

PHILOCLEON. Meanwhile I'll help myself to the bean soup.

XANTHIAS (*for* DOG). You have heard my accusation against him, your honors;

A heinous crime he perpetrated against me and the boys in blue:

He sneaked into a corner and Sicilized a whole cheese in the dark:

PHILOCLEON. A clear case. The stinker belched a cheese stench in my face.

XANTHIAS. And wouldn't share though I begged him. Could he Ever do kindness to you if he won't throw a bit to me, a dog?

PHILOCLEON. Threw you nothing? Neither to me. He's hot, like these beans.

BDELYCLEON. In heaven's name, Father, don't pass sentence till you've heard both.

PHILOCLEON. But my good man, the case is obvious; it cries to heaven.

XANTHIAS. Don't let him off. He's the solitariest glutton of all hounds.

He coasted round the platter and nibbled the city's rind.

PHILOCLEON. I've not the wherewithal even to mend my jug.

XANTHIAS. Wherefore punish him. The same den cannot keep two thieves.

Let me not bark in vain, else I shall never bark again.

PHILOCLEON. Oho, what rascality is here charged. A monster of a thief!

Don't you agree, old cock? He nods Yes. Hi, clerk!

Hand me down the pot.

BDELYCLEON. Get it yourself. I'll call the witnesses: Plate, Pestle, cheese-grater, griddle, and other scorched utensils.—

You, there, still on the pot? Take your place on the bench.

PHILOCLEON. I'll pot him today I think.

BDELYCLEON. Must you always be irritable and grouchy to defendants,

Always baring your teeth? —Step up, make your defense.

Why silent? Speak up!

PHILOCLEON. Apparently he has nothing to say.

BDELYCLEON. No, I think it's the same accident that befell Thucydides—

Sudden lockjaw. —Step aside; I'll make the defense.  
It's difficult, gentlemen, to speak for a slandered dog,  
But speak I shall. It's a good dog and chases wolves.

PHILOCLEON. No, a thief; moreover, a conspirator.

BDELYCLEON. The best of dogs, by Zeus, able to care for many sheep.

PHILOCLEON. What's the use if he gobbles cheese?

BDELYCLEON. Use? He fights for you, guards your door. He's Good all round. Forgive him an abstraction. He's no musician.

PHILOCLEON. I wish he were as ignorant of *a-b-c*;

We'd been spared his rascally speech.

BDELYCLEON. Hear my witnesses, please. —Cheese-grater, step up!

Speak out! You were quartermaster. Answer clearly. Did you

Grate up all the cheese allotted our soldiers. He answers Yes.

PHILOCLEON. He's lying, by Zeus!

BDELYCLEON. Show pity to the unfortunate, friend. Labes here

Gets only fishbones and briars to eat, is always on the go. The other dog is a stay-at-home, and demands his share Of what others bring in. If denied he bites.

PHILOCLEON. I must be sick. What makes me go soft?

Something's gone wrong. I'm being won over.

BDELYCLEON. I beseech you, Father, pity him, do not destroy him.

The puppies, where are they? Step up, poor dears; Whimper, wail, whine!

PHILOCLEON. Step down, step down, step down, step down.

BDELYCLEON. I'll step down. That "step down" has fooled many;

Nevertheless, step down I shall.

PHILOCLEON. Damn it, stuffing myself is no good. I was weeping,

I thought, but it was only the beans.

BDELYCLEON. Then he's not acquitted?

PHILOCLEON. It's hard to know.

BDELYCLEON. Take the better turn, dear Papa. Dash with your ballot

To the farther urn. Set him free!

PHILOCLEON. No, I don't understand music.

BDELYCLEON. Come, I'll lead you the shortest way.

PHILOCLEON. Is this the near urn?

BDELYCLEON. Yes.

PHILOCLEON. It's in.

BDELYCLEON. He's fooled. He's acquitted, unwittingly. I'll dump the ballots.

PHILOCLEON. How did we make out?

BDELYCLEON. We'll see. —Labes, you're free!

What's happened to you, Father?

PHILOCLEON. Water! Where's the water?

BDELYCLEON. Pull yourself together.

PHILOCLEON. Tell me this: is he really acquitted?

BDELYCLEON. Yes.

PHILOCLEON. I'm done for.

BDELYCLEON. Don't worry sir, up with you!

PHILOCLEON. How can I face such a thing, acquitting a defendant!

Ye gods revered, forgive me; unwittingly I did it.

It is not my character.

BDELYCLEON. Don't be distressed. I'll take good care of you, Father,

Take you with me everywhere, to dinners, banquets, shows. You'll spend all your life agreeably, and Hyperbolus Shan't trick you and fool you. But let's go in.

PHILOCLEON. Very well, if you think so.

CHORUS. Go wherever you will, rejoicing.

*(The actors retire, and the CHORUS faces the audience for the parabasis.)*

Spectators, myriads numberless,

Hearken now to our address.

Of intellect there is here no dearth;

Let not our remarks fall useless to earth.

Attend, people all, to what is plain-spoken if what is candid you have loved;

To find fault with his spectators the comic poet now is moved.

You have used him ill, he says, though he has served you best,

In his person sometimes, entering anon another's breast

Like Eurycles the ventriloquist ghosting jests for another to declaim.

Later on he shed his mask and spoke in his own name,

Working the lips of his very own and not another's Muses.

Esteem unprecedented was his, yet never did he lose his

Drive for perfection. Never was he arrogant. Never did he entertain  
 The lads in the gymnasium. If a disgruntled lover should complain  
 Of the poet's deriding his passion, calmly he ignored the slander;  
 The pure Muses that he served he'd never set to pander.  
 Mere men he disdained to attack in his plays; instead he kept his eye on  
 The fiercest monster, and made it his game, like Heracles charging a lion.  
 Straight he went for the jag-toothed beast with Cynna's fiery eyes;  
 Head girt with a hundred slaving sycophant tongues; raucous cries  
 Like a ruinous torrent's; privates unwashed like a Lamian fairy;  
 Stench of a rotting seal; noisome buttocks of a dromedary.  
 Confronting such a monster, no fear he felt, took no blackmail;  
 For you he fights and ever will. Last year he dared to assail  
 The hectic, spectral, sophist spooks who garroted your father,  
 Your grandfather strangled. On their beds at night they glue together  
 Affidavit, summons, evidence, against guiltless folk to litigate;  
 In terror the innocent sprang from their beds, ran for help to the magistrate.  
 But though a champion Heracleian you'd got to purify the state,  
 Last year you betrayed him. When his *Clouds* sought to disseminate  
 Novel notions you missed the seed he sowed. With many a libation  
 He swears that never a cleverer comedy was presented to our nation.  
 This you did not straightway see; yours the shame. In wiser eyes  
 My work's approved. They thought I ran in front, yet I got no prize.

In future, friends, cosset and cherish  
 The fresh and inventive poet.

Never let his fine thought perish;  
 In your wardrobe stow it.  
 All year will your garments keep the relish  
 Of sparkling wit, and all will know it.

High our prowess in days gone by,  
 High in fighting, in dancing high.  
 As choristers we gained great glory,  
 But that was back in ages hoary.  
 Now our cheeks are pale and wan  
 White our hair as plume of swan.  
 Yet from these embers' humble glow  
 Youthful vigor shall bright flame show.  
 Better are we to curvet and whirl  
 Than mincing youths who sport a curl.

If any of you spectators there sit astonished and wide-eyed  
 To see our middles so tightly laced, in fact waspified,  
 And wonder at the meaning of our sharp-pointed sting,  
 Though my IQ is low I'll explain the thing.  
 We upon whose backs you see these appendages portentous,  
 Athenians born we avow us, with the pride of the autochthonous,  
 A sturdy and a manly breed who helped this city most  
 When the Persian invader marched on us with his host.  
 With fuming smoke he blinded us, seared us with his flame,  
 Seeking to obliterate our wasp nest's very name.  
 Armed with spear and shield we rushed, all our stalwart swarm,  
 Man to man we fought amain, our glands secreting juices warm.  
 In the fury of the fray we bit our lips till they grew pale;  
 The very heavens were eclipsed by enemy arrows' hail.  
 Before the evening, with heaven's help, we smote them hip and thigh;  
 Over us the owl, Athena's bird, hovered in the sky.  
 We followed up harpooning them in their baggy drawers;  
 Routed then they fled away, stung in brows and jaws.  
 Now barbarians everywhere, and time out of mind,  
 Say no wasp is waspier than the Attic kind.

How glorious a thing it is  
 To have no fear of enemies,



Their poltroon armies roundly to thrash  
 Their country invade with galleys' dash.  
 The rhetoricians' eloquence  
 Was then no proof of excellence.  
 Lawyers' tricks were not the test;  
 The question was: Who rows the best?  
 Of credit, therefore, we deserve most  
 For laying low the Persian host.  
 The imperial tribute *we* earned for your weal—  
 Those very revenues which our juniors now steal.

Examine us from every side and surely you will find  
 Our habits and our characters most like the waspish kind.  
 First, no creature is so sharp-set, none easier to irritate;  
 All our business we transact in a kind of waspish state.  
 Into the courts we all swarm, like wasps into their haven,  
 Some to the Archon's, to the Odeon some, and some to the  
 Court of Eleven.

Some cling to walls, with head stooped low, like grubs in a  
 nesting weft.

In finding means to turn a penny we are exceedingly deft.  
 Any man we're ready to sting, in order our income to  
 double.

Stingless drones are among us too, who without taking  
 trouble

Devour what the others earn. 'Tis this that grieves us sore—  
 That men who evaded soldiering, who never wielded spear  
 or oar,

Should with hands unblistered and soft carry off our reve-  
 nue.

In future be this the rule: You carry no sting? No obols  
 for you.

(Enter PHILOCLEON and BDELYCLEON.)

PHILOCLEON. Never, so long as I live, will I shed this old  
 cloak.

It saved me in the campaign of the North Wind.

BDELYCLEON. You won't let anything good happen to you.

PHILOCLEON. It's not good for me. When I gorged on fried  
 fish the other day

I had to pay the cleaner three obols to get the grease spots  
 out.

BDELYCLEON. Try it anyhow. You did agree to let me treat  
 you well.

PHILOCLEON. What do you want me to do?

BDELYCLEON. Take the old cloak off and drape this over you.  
 PHILOCLEON. We beget children and bring them up—and now  
 he's trying to smother me.

BDELYCLEON. Take it and put it on. Don't babble.

PHILOCLEON. What is this nuisance, in the name of all the  
 gods?

BDELYCLEON. Some call it Persian, some Caunaces.

PHILOCLEON. I thought it was a rug from Thymaetadae.

BDELYCLEON. No wonder, you've never been to Sardis; you'd  
 have known it.

PHILOCLEON. Me? Never. It seems to me like a Morychus  
 folderol.

BDELYCLEON. The material is woven in Ecbatana.

PHILOCLEON. Does tripe grow *outside* in Ecbatana?

BDELYCLEON. Those barbarians fabricate this shag at great  
 expense;

It sucks up a talent of wool, easily.

PHILOCLEON. Why not call it, instead of Caunaces, wool  
 consumer?

BDELYCLEON. Take it. Stand still and put it on.

PHILOCLEON. Curse the monster, what a steamy belch!

BDELYCLEON. Won't you throw it on?

PHILOCLEON. I won't, by Zeus. If you must, put a stove on me.

BDELYCLEON. Come, I'll put it on you. Now you can go.

PHILOCLEON. Put a meat hook by me too.

BDELYCLEON. What for?

PHILOCLEON. To pull me out before I'm cooked away.

BDELYCLEON. Ready, now. Take these damned brogues off  
 and put on

These nice Laconian slippers.

PHILOCLEON. I go shod in the enemy's cursed hides?

BDELYCLEON. Put your foot in, step out firmly.

PHILOCLEON. It's no fair to put my foot in hostile territory.

BDELYCLEON. Now the other foot.

PHILOCLEON. Not that, please. One of my toes is a Spartan-  
 hater.

BDELYCLEON. There's no way out.

PHILOCLEON. What a fix! For my old age I'll have not a—  
 chilblain.

BDELYCLEON. Walk out in your shoes now—a stylish swagger.

PHILOCLEON. Look at my posture and tell me what nabob's  
 my gait is most like.

BDELYCLEON. Like a boil under a garlic plaster.

PHILOCLEON. I do feel like wriggling my behind.

BDELYCLEON. Come, now. Can you converse seriously with educated and clever men?

PHILOCLEON. I can.

BDELYCLEON. What would you say?

PHILOCLEON. Many things. First, how Lamia caught broke wind,

Then how Cardopion treated his mother.

BDELYCLEON. No legends, please; domestic affairs, the kind we talk about.

PHILOCLEON. I know a very domestic affair. Once there was a cat and a mouse—

BDELYCLEON. You ignorant oaf, as Theagenes scolded the dung collector.

Will you talk of cats and mice among well-bred folk?

PHILOCLEON. What should I talk about?

BDELYCLEON. Important things—how you went on a mission with Androcles and Cleisthenes.

PHILOCLEON. My only mission was to Paros, for two obols a day.

BDELYCLEON. You can tell how skillfully Ephudion fought the pancratium

Against Ascondas—an old man but rugged, a chest steel-plated—

PHILOCLEON. Nonsense! How do you wrestle with steel plate?

BDELYCLEON. That's the way smart people talk sport. Tell me something else.

Suppose you're drinking with strangers. What youthful adventure

Of yours showed the most mettle?

PHILOCLEON. The most mettle? When I stole Ergasion's vine props.

BDELYCLEON. What a yokell! Tell how you hunted a boar, or a jackrabbit,

Or ran in the torch relay, some boyish stunt.

PHILOCLEON. I know. I overhauled the runner Phayllus when I was still green,

And won—by two votes in a suit for slander.

BDELYCLEON. Enough of that. Here, learn how to recline gracefully

At table, in polite society.

PHILOCLEON. Recline? How? Tell me.

BDELYCLEON. Elegantly.

PHILOCLEON. This way you mean?

BDELYCLEON. Not in the least.

PHILOCLEON. How then?

BDELYCLEON. Spread your knees, ease yourself into the cushions like a supple athlete,

Praise some *objet d'art*, inspect the ceiling, admire the hangings.—

A basin for the hands, trays in, dinner, wash, libations.

PHILOCLEON. A dream of a dinner, by the gods.

BDELYCLEON. The flute girl has tootled. Guest list: Theorus, Aeschines,

Phanos, Cleon, a visitor at Acestis's head, table verses—

Could you fling them?

PHILOCLEON. No highlander better.

BDELYCLEON. I'll find out. Say I'm Cleon and start the Harmonius catch;

You take it up. *Never have Athenians seen your equal—*

PHILOCLEON. *An unprincipled thief, a brazen rascal.*

BDELYCLEON. Would you do that? He'd shout you to destruction, annihilate you,

Drive you out of the country.

PHILOCLEON. If he threatens me I'll sing another:

*Fellow by lust of power crazed, By you will our tottering city be razed.*

BDELYCLEON. If Thorus sitting at Cleon's feet, should take his hand and say,

*With Admetus as your model, learn to love the good; what say you?*

PHILOCLEON. *Two rival parties you cannot befriend, To play the fox is no good in the end.*

BDELYCLEON. After him Aeschines son of Sellus, a clever and musical man sings:

*For Cleitagoras and for me, And for the men of Thessaly—*

PHILOCLEON. *How we swaggered, all we three.*

BDELYCLEON. You've got the trick well enough. Let's go to dinner to Philoctemon's.

Boy! Chrysus! Pack our dinner! There's a lot of drinking ahead.

PHILOCLEON. No, drinking is bad—leads to breaking-in, bawling, hangover, damages.

BDELYCLEON. Not if you're with gentlemen. They'll either effect reconciliation,

Or you can say something witty, Aesopic or Sybaritic,

Which you got at a party, and turn the thing into a joke:

He lets you off.

PHILOCLEON. I must learn lots of those stories if I don't have to pay.

For any mischief I do. Let's go; nothing must hold us back.

(PHILOCLEON and BDELYCLEON withdraw.)

CHORUS. Often I thought I was a man of parts, stupid never; But Amynias, Sellus' son, the Topknotter, is a man very clever.

Hungry as Antiphon, with apple and pomegranate as his contribution

He came to dine with Leogoras. At Pharsalus on a mission, None but cockney Thessalians he met, a proper evolution For one who'd always a cockney been at home in his own nation.

Happy Automenes we felicitate for the gifted sons he's sired.

First the virtuoso harper, by Grace herself attended, whom everyone admired

Next the actor, supple and wise. Then talented even more Ariphrades. With none to teach him, his father swore, Self-inspired he learned, the bawdyhouses among, How most ingeniously to operate his tongue.

He's reconciled with Cleon, some have said. Not so. When the fellow

Persecuted and flayed me, the public laughed to hear me bellow,

Concerned not for me but only to see how I would retaliate. Seeing this, I did for a little monkeyish antics imitate; The very prop it leans upon will later leave the vine prostrate.

(Enter XANTHIAS.)

XANTHIAS. Lucky tortoises to have a shell! Thrice lucky for the casing

On your ribs, the sound roof and weather-proof tiles Which protect your flanks. I'm tattooed to death.

CHORUS. What's the matter, boy? —Boy it must be if you're whipped;

What you are is an old man.

XANTHIAS. That old man was the worst reprobate and the drunkest

Of the company. There were Hippolytus, Antiphon, Lycon, Lysistratus, Theophrastus, Phrynichus' gang; but of all He was most outrageous by a mile. Stuffing done, He cavorted around, guffawed fore and aft, like a donkey On an emptied crib. Like a juvenile delinquent he beat me,

Yelling Boy, Boy! This was Lysistratus' figure: Old man, says he,

You're like a ferment working, or a brayer running to bran. And you, the old man shouted back, are like a locust, bursting

Out of its shabby coat, or Sthenelus shorn of his effects.

All applauded but Theophrastus, who remarked with well-bred sneer;

Tell me, the old man asked him, what gives you such grand airs?

You're always apple-polishing the haves. One after another The old man insulted the company, cracking country jokes And telling boorish stories, nothing to do with anything.

Fully loaded he's off for home, beating everybody he meets. Here he comes a-reeling. I'll get out of the way of his fists.

(Enter PHILOCLEON, holding a torch in one hand and a nude flute girl in the other. He is followed by angry guests.)

PHILOCLEON. Stop, get out, you silly clown

If you keep following me through the town,

With this torch in my hand I'll singe you brown.

GUEST. You senile delinquent, we'll never budge

Tomorrow you can tell it to the judge.

PHILOCLEON. Judges and suits, old stuff and corny,

Trials at law make me sick.

Here's what I like, no canvassing a jury.

Is that judge here? Give me a stick!

Up here, my golden little chickadee. Take hold of the rope With your hand. Careful, it's worn out; but likes being rubbed.

See how cleverly I abstracted you when you were going to polish off

The company. In return you must be kind to the old thing. But you won't pay up. You'll tease and trick me as you've done

To many another. But if you do your part now, I'll buy you off,

When my son's dead, sweetie, and you'll be my piggy.

Now I can't sign checks—I'm too young, and closely watched.

My little son's a hawk-eye, irritable, a cheese-paring skin-flint.

He's afraid I'll be spoiled, and I'm his only father.

There he is; it's to me he's running. Stay here and hold

the torches;

I'll catechize him, as he did me before my initiation.

BDELYCLEON. You randy old lecher—all agog for a young-coffin!

You won't get away with it, by Apollo, you won't.

PHILOCLEON. How you'd relish a marinated lawsuit!

BDELYCLEON. No cross-examination when you stole the girl from the company?

PHILOCLEON. What girl! You're raving. Stumbled in from hell?

BDELYCLEON. But there's the Dardanian creature beside you!

PHILOCLEON. That? Only a torch burning in the market place.

BDELYCLEON. She a torch?

PHILOCLEON. Yes, a torch; don't you see the color effects?

BDELYCLEON. Then what's the black in the middle?

PHILOCLEON. Pitch exuding with the heat.

BDELYCLEON. And isn't that a bottom?

PHILOCLEON. A knot in the pine.

BDELYCLEON. Knot? What are you talking about?—Come here, girl.

PHILOCLEON. Hey, what are you going to do?

BDELYCLEON. Take her away from you, because you are decayed and impotent.

PHILOCLEON. Listen to me. At the Olympics I saw old Ephudion fighting

Against Ascondas, splendidly. You'd better take care.

BDELYCLEON. You have learned sporting talk, haven't you?

(Enter BAKING GIRL, with CHAEREPHON.)

BAKING GIRL. Stand by me, in heaven's name! There's the man who ruined me.

Hit me with his torch, knocked ten obol-loaves down, then four more.

BDELYCLEON. See the trouble and lawsuits your toping brings?

PHILOCLEON. A few smart stories will straighten things; she'll be content.

BAKING GIRL. By the goddesses, you won't spoil the wares of Myrtia,

Daughter of Angkylion and Sostrate, and get away with it!

PHILOCLEON. Listen, ma'am, I'll tell you a pretty story.

BAKING GIRL. Not me, thank you.

PHILOCLEON. On his way home from dinner one evening, Aesop was barked at

By a bold, drunken bitch. Bitch, says he, you'd be smarter To buy flour to bake, instead of that wicked tongue.

BAKING GIRL. You jeer me to boot! I summon you before the market inspectors

For damage to merchandise. Chaerephon here is my witness.

PHILOCLEON. Dear me! Listen, this is a good one. Lasus and Simonides

Were in competition. Said Lasus, I don't care.

BAKING GIRL. Is *that* so?

PHILOCLEON. And you, Chaerephon, will you testify for her, like pale Ino

Hanging at Euripides' feet?

(Enter COMPLAINANT.)

BDELYCLEON. Here comes another to summon you, and with a witness.

COMPLAINANT. Luckless me! Old man, I summon you for outrage.

BDELYCLEON. For outrage? Please don't. I'll make good whatever damages

You claim, and be grateful to boot.

PHILOCLEON. I'll be glad to be reconciled. I confess assault and battery.

Tell me, would you have me name the indemnity and be friends,

Or would you rather name it?

COMPLAINANT. You name it; I want no troublesome lawsuits.

PHILOCLEON. A Sybarite fell out of his sulky and cracked his head:

He was not much of a horseman. A friendly bystander said, Every man to his trade. You'd better see Dr. Pittalus.

BDELYCLEON. This is in keeping with the rest.

COMPLAINANT. Notice the response!

PHILOCLEON. Listen, don't go! A Sybarite woman once broke a box.

COMPLAINANT. Note this, witness!

PHILOCLEON. The box called a witness. Hang the witness. It's saner

To buy a cord.

COMPLAINANT. Go on insulting me—till the Archon calls your case.

BDELYCLEON. You won't stay here, by Demeter. I'll hoist you and carry you—

PHILOCLEON. What are you doing?

BDELYCLEON. Out of here, inside—or the witnesses will lack complainants.

PHILOCLEON. The Delphians once charged Aesop—

BDELYCLEON. It doesn't interest me.

PHILOCLEON. With stealing the god's cup: he said the beetle—

BDELYCLEON. You and your beetles! I'll ruin you.

(BDELYCLEON carries PHILOCLEON off.)

CHORUS. Envious is the old man's transformation

From harsh and crusty frugality;

He's profited from his education

In paths of ease and luxury.

It may be just a passing phase:

Ingrained ways are hard to change.

But many another has changed his ways

And learned an easier and wider range.

Praise unbounded to Philocleon's son

From me and all men perspicacious!

Love and admiration he has won

By filial piety and manners gracious.

A character so amiable is without peer:

My fondness for him is beyond comparing!

How skillfully did he the discussion steer

To adorn his parent with seemlier bearing.

(Enter XANTHIAS, followed by PHILOCLEON and BDELYCLEON.)

XANTHIAS. Dionysus! A desperate business has some demon trundled

Into the house! When the old man guzzled unaccustomed wine,

And heard the flute he was so enraptured he never stopped,  
The night through, dancing the old steps Thespis first produced.

He'll prove our tragedians are dotards, he says; presently  
He's going to outdance them.

PHILOCLEON. Who by the entrance doth palely loiter?

XANTHIAS. The plague marches on.

PHILOCLEON. Barriers down! This is the first figure.

XANTHIAS. Of madness, perhaps.

PHILOCLEON. The powerful current contorts my sides, my  
nostrils wheeze,

My vertebrae crack.

XANTHIAS. Take a dose of hellebore.

PHILOCLEON. Like a cock Phrynichus crouches low—

XANTHIAS. Soon you'll discharge.

PHILOCLEON. He kicks out heaven-high, his rump gapes.

XANTHIAS. Watch out!

PHILOCLEON. My joints whirl in their sockets.

BDELYCLEON. No, no, by Zeus! This is madness.

PHILOCLEON. Now I challenge all comers. Any tragedian that  
claims

He's a good dancer, come up and try a match with me.

Anyone? No one?

(Enter, severally, the three stunted SONS OF CARCINUS  
["Crab"].)

BDELYCLEON. Here's one, alone.

PHILOCLEON. Who's the poor devil?

BDELYCLEON. Carcinus' son, the middle one.

PHILOCLEON. He'll be a casualty. I'll batter him with a tragic  
fling.

In rhythm he's a blank.

BDELYCLEON. Ah, but here comes his brother, another Carci-  
nite tragedian.

PHILOCLEON. I've had crab enough for dinner.

BDELYCLEON. There's nothing but crab; here comes another  
Carcinite.

PHILOCLEON. What's this crawling in? A shrimp or a spider?

BDELYCLEON. He's a hermit crab, the smallest of the lot.  
Writes tragedy.

PHILOCLEON. What a lucky father is Carcinus, what a brood  
Of crested wrens! I must step out against them.

You get the pickle ready, in case I win.

Clear we now a space; unhindered let them pirouette.—  
Proudly named offspring of the brine, by the seaside gam-  
bol and curvet.

By the strand of the unharvested main, ye brethren cru-  
stacean,

Nimble twirl your feet in an arc, kick the high kick  
Phrynichean.

Let spectators enjoy a treat. Fling your legs up to the sky.  
Twist, twirl, spin like a top, smack your belly and your  
thigh.

Carcinus himself now crabs it forward, the majestic ruler  
of the sea,

Rejoicing in his wriggling kinglets, proud of his proper  
progeny.

Dance your way out, if you please, to the door lead us  
prancing;

Never was a tragic chorus known to make its exit dancing.

(Exeunt.)