

ARISTOPHANES'
"WOMEN AT THE FESTIVAL"
(Thesmophoriazousae)

Produced at the City Dionysia in 411 B.C.

Translated by
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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

EURIPIDES

MNESILOCHUS (Euripides' elderly father-in-law)

AGATHON (A poet)

AGATHON'S MALE SLAVE

KLEISTHENES

MAGISTRATE

SKYTHIAN ARCHER (Policeman)

KRITYLLA

MIKA (Kleonymus' wife)

GARLAND SELLER

ECHO

CHORUS OF ATHENIAN WOMEN (Celebrants of the Festival)

SILENT PARTS

THRATA (Mnesilochus' female slave)

MANIA (Mika's Nurse)

PHILISTA (Mika's slave)

FAWN (A dancing Girl)

TEREDON (A flute boy)

Day. Winter. A street in Athens. The day of the festival. There are two houses opposite each other. One is that of the poet Agathon; the other is the Temple of Demeter. Next to this house is an altar upon which sits a "sacrificial bowl," used to catch the blood of the victim and a stack of three or four flat wooden, votive shingles. On them are drawn images of Apollo. These will be used by Mnesilochus to scratch S.O.S. messages on. Next to the altar and nearer to the audience, is a small bench.

Enter Euripides who's anxiously checking each house, searching for the one belonging to Agathon. Behind Euripides comes his elderly father-in-law, Mnesilochus who's exhausted, badly limping and looking for a place to sit and rest. Thrata, his female slave, walks behind him. She is carrying a basket with a small, wrapped cake inside it. It is very cold and Mnesilochus feels it more so than the others. They walk silently around the street for a few moments, Euripides, hurriedly, anxiously, Mnesilochus painfully dragging his feet.

MNESILOCHUS: *(Looks up, searching the sky. Exasperated.)* Dear Zeus! Dear, dear Zeus! Grrrr! Will I ever get to see the first Swallow of Spring? *(To the audience)* This man here has me walking all over Athens since the crack of Dawn! He's killing me! *(To Euripides)* Hey, you! Listen you! *(No response from Euripides who is engrossed in his search)* Euripides, I'm talking to you!

(Euripides turns to him annoyed) Could you... I mean, before my guts drop, out, Euripides, would you be so kind as to let me know, just where you're taking me?

EURIPIDES: *(Who has just found the house he was looking for)* Look here, Mnesilochus! What's the point of hearing about it when you're about to see it?

MNESILOCHUS: *(Places the palm of his hand behind his ear to help him with his hearing)* What? What did you say? No point in hearing? Hearing what?

EURIPIDES: No, there's no point in hearing what you're about to see! Is there?

MNESILOCHUS: What? I don't need to see, either?

EURIPIDES: No, of course not! Not if you're about to hear it!

MNESILOCHUS: *(Bewildered)* Euripides! What... what is it you're trying to tell me? This is all far too sophisticated for me, far too... too clever for me! You're saying, I don't need to hear and I don't need to see? Is that right? *(Shakes his head in confusion)*

EURIPIDES: Look, mate! What I'm trying to tell you is, that it is in the nature of these two senses –that of hearing and that of seeing- that they should be totally different from each other! You see?

MNESILOCHUS: *(Nods but then shakes his head again)* ...what – hearing and seeing?

EURIPIDES: *(Rolls his eyes in frustration)* Yes! Exactly!

MNESILOCHUS: Ehhh, how do you mean, different?

EURIPIDES: Different! They are two distinct and separate entities. (*Mnesilochus looks even more perplexed*) All right! Let me explain to you how they got separated from each other, all right? You see, Aether... Up there, Aether... Well, back in the beginning of time he got separated from Earth, you see? And straightaway, all these little beasties began living inside of him... mortals and birds and flies and suchlike; so, he first thought up this thing we call "eye" – built it in the shape of a disc, like that of the sun, see? Made it so that all the beasties could see. But for hearing, you see, he thought up something different. For hearing he built something in the shape of a funnel, which we call an "ear." Right?

MNESILOCHUS: (*Shakes his head in confusion but then nods as if he had just understood*) Right! So... now that we've got this funnel ear, we can't see and we can't hear! Now I get it! By Zeus, what a pleasant lesson! You learn something every day. The stuff one learns when he walks with wise men!

EURIPIDES: Stick around, old man and you'll learn much more!

MNESILOCHUS: Ehhh, Euripides? Euripides can you also teach me how to limp with both legs? I... (*He sees the bench and he sits down.*)

EURIPIDES: Mnesilochus, come over here! (*Mnesilochus reluctantly gets up and walks over to Euripides*) Now listen. Pay attention to everything I say.

MNESILOCHUS: I'm listening.

Euripides: (*Points at Agathon's door*) See this door here?

MNESILOCHUS: (*Stands back to observe the door. Loudly.*) By Hercules! Yes, I see that door!

EURIPIDES: (*Puts his index finger across his lips*) Shhh! Quiet!

MNESILOCHUS: Quiet? What for? Don't speak to the door?

EURIPIDES: Listen to me!

MNESILOCHUS: I'll be quiet to the door and I'll be attentive to your words. Right!

EURIPIDES: This door here is the door of the house of our very beautiful and very accomplished poet, Agathon. Does excellent work on tragic choruses. Won first prize with his first work... about five or so years ago... gorgeous looking chap...

MNESILOCHUS: Agathon, ey? Which Agathon is that, then?

EURIPIDES: This Agathon is...

MNESILOCHUS: Oh, you mean that tall chap with the darkish complexion?

EURIPIDES: No, no, no! Not that one. This is a different guy. Don't tell me you've never seen him before?

MNESILOCHUS: You mean the one with that massive beard?

EURIPIDES: Haven't you ever seen him?

MNESILOCHUS: No, by Zeus! No. Not as far as I know...

Euripides: Yeah, right! I'll bet you've fucked him, though... without knowing who he was, I mean! (*Noise is heard from within the house*)

Shhh! Let's move back a bit. (*They go back to where the bench is and Mnesilochus sits down*) **A slave exits from Agathon's house, looks around, checking the street and then goes back inside.**) That's one of his slaves...

(*The slave comes out again bringing out a brazier and a basket of myrtle branches.*) A brazier and myrtle branches! He'll probably make a prayer for his master. He'll probably pray to the Muses to send his master some inspiration... for his poetry.

SLAVE: (*Solemnly*) Silence! Holy silence all! Let your mouths be silent and shut! Here, inside my master's home, the chorus of the holy Muses is constructing odes! Aether! I call upon you to make silent all your winds! And you, grey waves of the ocean, cease your murmur.

MNESILOCHUS: (*loudly*) What bullshit!

EURIPIDES: Shhh! What was that? What did he say?

SLAVE: "...all you feathered birds lie down and be silent! And you, beasts of the forest, silence your wild hooves...

MNESILOCHUS: (*louder*) Bullshit, bullshit, bullshit! Utter crap!

SLAVE: Be silent all, for my master, the master of exquisite poetry is, at this very minute, getting ready...

MNESILOCHUS: (*louder still*) ...to get fucked!

SLAVE: Whaaaat? Who said that?

MNESILOCHUS: That was the windless Aether!

SLAVE: (*regaining his composure*) ...He's getting ready to cut to measure the oaken planks for the keel of a new tragedy! At this very moment he is constructing brand new stanzas – polishing them, spinning them, gluing them together. New metaphors, new similes, forms of speech unheard of by human ears before! All these are being hammered out now, at this very moment, as I speak. In my master's mind, his play is like soft modeling wax which he will then drop in the casting funnel of bronze and then he will...

MNESILOCHUS: ...suck cocks!

SLAVE: (*This time he cannot go on*) Who is the uncouth peasant who dared approach this holy gate?

MNESILOCHUS: (*Waving his big phallus at him*) An uncouth peasant who'd love to grab a hold of you and your wonderful poet, spin both your gates around and ram this funnelling big cock of mine right up them!

SLAVE: Ohh! What a disgusting little boy you must have been once, you old, old, old codger!

EURIPIDES: *(To the slave)* Forget about him, mate and run up and get Agathon down here. Go on, hurry!

SLAVE: I won't have to. Master will be down soon in any case.

With such cold winters it's near impossible for him to twist and turn those stanzas to perfection indoors, away from the sun, so he'll have to come out here soon.

EURIPIDES: I see... so... what shall I do in the meantime?

SLAVE: Just wait. He'll be around soon. *(Exit slave into the hous. Short awkward pause during which the two friends look at each other perplexed by the Slave's dismissive treatment.)*

EURIPIDES: *(bursting out in despair* O, Zeus! O Zeus, Zeus, Zeus! What do you have in store for me today?

MNESILOCHUS: And I'd like... by the gods! I'd like to know what on earth is going on here? *(Realizes that Euripides is worried)* Ey? What's up? What are you groaning and moaning about? Tell me, don't keep it all bottled up. Trust me, I'm your daddy... in-law!

EURIPIDES: It's bad! Very bad, Mnesilochus! Very, very bad! Very, very bad things are being cooked up for me today! Nasty stuff!

MNESILOCHUS: Yeah? What sort of nasty stuff?

EURIPIDES: A question will be asked this very day, Mnesilochus, my good mate! A judgment will be made: "To kill or not to kill Euripides?"

MNESILOCHUS: A judgment? How can a judgment be delivered today? The courts are shut. No cases will be adjudicated today. The parliament isn't sitting either. It's the holy day of the Thesmophoria. Fasting day. Mid-Festival day. Women's Day.

EURIPIDES: And that's exactly why I'm certain the judgment will be "Kill Euripides!" You see, mate, there's a plot schemed up against me by the women and today the two priestesses of the Festival are going to gather together an assembly at the Temple of Demeter and bring down this judgment about my life... or about my death.

MNESILOCHUS: Why would they want to do that, Euripides?

EURIPIDES: Why, Mnesilochus? *(Shrugs his shoulders as if he can't understand women.)* Because I write tragedies about them, mate. Because I say bad things about them.

MNESILOCHUS: Quite right, too, Euripides. Quite right. They're right, you know! By Poseidon, you thoroughly deserve all the suffering you get for that! Ehh... How you gonna get out of it? By what mechanism will you extract yourself from their clutches?

EURIPIDES: I'm going to try and persuade Agathon, the great tragedian here, to go to the Temple of Demeter.

MNESILOCHUS: Agathon? What can he do there?

EURIPIDES: What he can do is get himself to that assembly and say to those women whatever needs to be said to save my hide.

MNESILOCHUS: Just like that? Openly? A man, among all them women? Or will he go in there... covertly?

EURIPIDES: Covertly. Covered in women's clothes.

MNESILOCHUS: Nice one! Just your style, Euripides! The prize for craftiness will be ours! (*Noises from within Agathon's house.*)

EURIPIDES: Shhh!

MNESILOCHUS: What is it?

EURIPIDES: Agathon is coming out. (*Agathon is wheeled out on a lounge chair through his door. Conspicuous is the smallness of his phallus. He is dressed in exaggerated women's clothes. On his head he wears a hairnet. Above his dress, around his waist, he is wearing a tight, broad girdle. A sword is hanging by his side. One slave is carrying out all sorts of women's clothes, dresses, wigs, garlands, etc, Another brings out a writing desk with writing paraphernalia on it.*)

MNESILOCHUS: Where, where?

EURIPIDES: What do you mean where? Right there! That's him being wheeled out right now!

MNESILOCHUS: Well, bugger me dead! I must be going blind! I can't see a man there! Looks more like our famous whore, Kyrene, to me. (*Agathon gets up slowly, theatrically. One of the slaves quickly applies make up on his face. He raises a hand mirror to his face and shows appreciation of what he sees. He picks up an oil flask and with the oil rubs his arms, armpits and legs. Then he picks up a lyre and strums it experimentally. He looks around him sombrely, seriously and takes on the air of an opera diva.*)

EURIPIDES: Shhh! He's getting himself ready to sing! (*Agathon vocalises the "do, re, mi" scale.*)

MNESILOCHUS: What sort of sickly noise is that he's making? Sounds like ants are crawling up his larynx. (*Agathon sings a song that has two parts: that of the leader of a chorus of women and that of the chorus itself. He changes his voice accordingly.*)

AGATHON:

As the leader: O, Virgins!

For the sake of your free country, take up the sacred
Torch of Demeter and Persephone,
The pair of goddesses of the Underworld,
And dance a thunderous dance!

As the chorus:

Tell us, then, for which god should
We dance?

I love the gods and I respect them so!

As the leader:

Apollo, my dear Muses!
Praise Phoebus, the god whose arrows are of gold and
Who, with Poseidon, built the tall towers in the
Land of Trojan Simois.

As chorus:

O, praises to you, with our delightful songs!
Praises to you, o, Phoebus!
You, Phoebus, are the first to reward the
Holy prize to us, the Muses!

As leader:

Sing praises to Artemis, also!
The virgin goddess who loves her walks
In the oak-dense forests.

As chorus:

I sing and I praise the holy goddess,
Daughter of revered Leto,
Bed-partner of none.

As leader:

Ah, yes! Let us praise, indeed,
Leto and the Asian lyre whose strings
Mark the rhythm for the feet of
The dancing Trojan Graces.

As chorus:

I revere and I praise our Lady Leto
And the lyre, worthy mother of song.
Most famed for its virile sounds.

As leader:

I see Leto's eyes flash and spin as she hears
Our enchanting chants.
Come, Muses, my friends!
Honour the mighty Apollo!

As chorus:

All praise be to you,
Apollo, god,
Son of Leto!

MNESILOCHUS: By the holy god of fucking! By Genetyllides, herself! What a horny song! Full of ardour! Pussies and tongues right through the whole thing, all locked together! Made my bumhole shiver with excitement! (*Moves close to Agathon and shouts at him angrily.*) Now, laddie, let me use Aeschylus' words... the ones he used in a play of his, called, Lycourgeia: "Wherefrom comes this manlike-woman? What is its country?" Good Zeus, lad! Look there at your dress! Look what oddities of behaviour your clothes proclaim, lad! Or is it "lady?" A lyre in the hand and a hairnet on the head! A girdle around your waist and an oil flask that smells of a wrestling school! So many things that don't fit a man, so many things that

don't fit a woman! Are swords and mirrors relatives? By Zeus, what atrocious taste! And you, laddie! What are your parents doing with you, raising you as a boy or as a girl? Where's your dick? Where's your man's cloak? What's that you're wearing on your feet? Where are your Spartan sandals, boy? (*Agathon shakes his head, trying to stop Mnesilochus from getting it even more wrong.*) What? You're trying to tell me you're a woman? (*Agathon nods.*) Well, where are your tits, then? Come on, speak up, say something! All right then, you won't tell me so I'll just have to judge your sex by your voice...

AGATHON: (*Exasperated*) Old man! Old, old, old man, you've got it all wrong!

I heard the prick of mockery but I felt not its pain! I, Agathon, wear only the clothes that suit my inspiration! I, Agathon, am an author of poems and plays; and an author must behave as his plays dictate. If, for example, an author is writing a play about women, then he must behave like one and...

MNESILOCHUS: (*Indicating the "horse" position*) So, when you're writing about our darling cunt, Phaedra, you go off on a fucking ride, is that right?

AGATHON: ...but if he's writing about men, then he must also behave like a man, use his manly parts accordingly. Of course, what Nature didn't provide us with, we must provide it for ourselves... by mimicking the real thing...

MNESILOCHUS: Hahaha! Well, then, when you're about to write a play about horny satyrs, let me know. I'll come over with my hard cock and ram it up your arse! That'll inspire you with your play!

AGATHON: ...and then, also, it's just totally improper for a poet to look all boorish and beastly. Bring to mind, if you care, poets like Ibycus, for example and Anacreon of Teos and Alkeus –great lyrical love poets of the last century, poets who spiced up their poems with all the harmony their Muse could muster. Well, all these poets used to wear lovely little girl's caps and used to swing their little bums like little Ionian girls.

(*Demonstrates*) And what about our tragedian, Phrynicus? (*Mnesilochus shakes his head*) Don't tell me you haven't heard of him! No? O, he was such a gorgeous looking man! Wore all those gorgeous looking gowns! That's why all his plays were so gorgeous! So, you see? The Nature of our work reflects our own Nature!

MNESILOCHUS: Hehehe! That must be why the sleazy Philocles' poetry is so sleazy, that nasty Xenocles' poetry is so nasty and that frosty Theognis' poetry is so frosty!

AGATHON: That's the Nature of things. That's how it is. I've learnt all about that and that's why I've treated myself accordingly.

MNESILOCHUS: What, in god's name are you on about?

EURIPIDES: (*To Mnesilochus*) Stop hassling the poor boy, Mnesilochus! I used to do the same thing myself, when I was his age, when I first began my writing!

MNESILOCHUS: By Zeus, is that right? What a training you must have had, Euripides! Not too much to my liking, I must say! Euripides: *(To Agathon)* All right, Agathon. Let me tell you why I'm here. *(Agathon picks a hand bag, rummages through it, finds a nail file and begins filing his nails.)*

AGATHON: Tell me.

EURIPIDES: Agathon, let me quote myself: "The wise man says much with just a few, well-chiselled words." Here I am, begging for your assistance, because a new disaster has befallen me!

AGATHON: O, yes? What sort of assistance?

EURIPIDES: I... I have said some nasty things about women, so, today, this very day, they'll all gather at the Temple of Demeter and... well, they'll devise a plot to have me utterly and terminally destroyed!

AGATHON: *(Using the "royal 'we'")* And so, what could we do about that?

EURIPIDES: You, you could save my life! It'll be easy for you! I mean look at you! You already look like a woman, so if you go there, to that meeting, dressed as a woman and you stand up for me, and speak on my behalf, you'll bound to save me from being ruined. *(Agathon is tentative)* O, come on, Agathon! You're the only one who can do me justice!

AGATHON: But why don't you go there yourself, mount your own defence?

EURIPIDES: Why? Let me tell you the reason why, my boy. First, everybody there knows me. They all know me there. Second, I'm an old man with a beard whereas you, well look at you: you're young, with a bright white, clean-shaven, soft and beautiful face! Even your voice is feminine!

AGATHON: Euripides, I...

EURIPIDES: Yes?

AGATHON: Tell me: Will I be quoting you correctly if I said, "My son, you think that you love life but so does your father?"

EURIPIDES: Yes, that's me all right.

AGATHON: *(using the "royal 'we'" again)* Well, don't expect us now to suffer the consequences of your actions! We're not that crazy! No, yours is the deed and so yours is the suffering of its consequences; and you should not try and escape the suffering of those consequences by trickery. Embrace them, Euripides, be honest about them, suffer them!

MNESILOCHUS: *(To Agathon)* Yeah, right! And you, you little poofter! Did you get that wide bumhole of yours with little speeches about "honesty" or by "embracing" their suffering?

EURIPIDES: *(To Agathon)* But what's the problem, Agathon? Why are you afraid to go there?

AGATHON: Why? Because they'll ruin me even more!

EURIPIDES: What do you mean? Why?

AGATHON: You ask me why? Darling, I will be so beautiful, so much more beautiful than any of them, that they'll think that I will be stealing all of their whoring business! That I'd be running off with the goddess Aphrodite herself!

MNESILOCHUS: Ha! Listen to him! "Stealing their whoring business," he says! Stealing it! By Zeus! Getting bugged's more like it! And loving it! It's a pretty good excuse though, god damn it!

EURIPIDES: Well, Agathon, will you do it?

AGATHON: I shouldn't think so. *(He sits by the little desk and begins writing.)*

EURIPIDES: O, poor, poor, poor me! This is it then! I'm dead meat! What a way to go!

MNESILOCHUS: Come, come, come, now, Euripides, my good mate, my son-in-law! Don't betray your own worth! Don't underestimate yourself...

EURIPIDES: Yeah, but what shall I do?

MNESILOCHUS: First, tell him to go to buggery and then let me help you. I'll do anything you want!

EURIPIDES: Really? *(Ponders about the possibilities. Walks around his friend, examining him from all angles. Mnesilochus looks a little worried.)* Well then, if you really want to help me... take off your cloak!

MNESILOCHUS: *(Mnesilochus takes off his cloak, drops it on the ground and immediately feels the cold.)* Grrrr! Here you are, it's off! On the ground. Now what do you want me to do?

EURIPIDES: First, let's shave this beard off and then... lifts Mnesilochus' tunic, walks around him and examines carefully what's beneath it ...and then we'll have to singe your pubes and all your bum fluff.

MNESILOCHUS: *(Loyalty battles with fear for a few seconds.)* Well... all right then. Go ahead, if you think that's a good idea. I've got to suffer the consequences of my own actions, I guess!

EURIPIDES: *(Walks over to Agathon)* Agathon, you're always carrying razors around, don't you? Could you let me borrow one for a minute?

Agathon: Sure. There's my razor case. Choose one from in there. *(Euripides opens the case and selects one.)*

EURIPIDES: Thanks. You're a gentleman and a scholar. *(He walks back to Mnesilochus.)* Right! Now, sit down and don't move. Puff up your right cheek. *(He raises the razor far too enthusiastically for Mnesilochus.)*

MNESILOCHUS: God help me! Ouch! *(Euripides continues)* O, Zeusy, Zeusy, Zeusy! Heaven help meeeee!

EURIPIDES: What? Stop that! What are you screaming about? Stop it... stop that or I'll have to ram a stick between your jaws! *(Euripides shaves off a bit of Mnesilochus' beard. This hurts Mnesilochus and he jumps up in pain and fright. He begins dancing around in agony, holding his face.)*

MNESILOCHUS: Ouchhhhh! Ouch, ouch, ouch! *(He's heading off.)*

EURIPIDES: Hey! Stop! Where are you running off to?

MNESILOCHUS: I'm running off to the shrine of our Holy Goddesses because, by Demeter, I'm not sitting there getting my face all hacked to pieces!

EURIPIDES: Stop it, mate! Come back here! You're going to look stupid walking around with only half your face shaved off!

MNESILOCHUS: I care very little about that.

EURIPIDES: Mnesilochus! Mate! My best father-in-law! In the name of all the gods, come back here! Don't let your friend down in his hour of grave need!

MNESILOCHUS: *(Surrenders)* Every god is against me! *(He goes back and sits on the bench, shaking with fear)*

EURIPIDES: Come, now. Stop shaking and lean your head back a bit... that's it... *(Mnesilochus keeps smarting and tries to escape the rough treatment)* Stop moving around!

MNESILOCHUS: Ouch! Ouch! Noooo! Ouch! *(The shaving has ended. Euripides stands back and admires his work.)*

EURIPIDES: What are you "ouching" about? It's all over. You look great! *(Mnesilochus runs his hands over his face)*

MNESILOCHUS: God, damn it! They'll be shoving me in the light infantry when I get to the army!

EURIPIDES: What are you worried about? You look bloody gorgeous! *(Euripides walks over to Agathon's table and picks up the mirror, which he proffers to Mnesilochus.)* Wanna look at yourself?

MNESILOCHUS: If I must. *(Takes the mirror and looks into it. He's horrified.)*

EURIPIDES: You look great, right?

MNESILOCHUS: No, I don't! I look like pretty boy Kleisthenes! *(He's about to smash the mirror on the ground when one of Agathon's slaves, gives out a squeal of horror and rushes over to him. A minor wrestle ensues and the slave wins the precious mirror. In utter disgust, he takes the mirror back to Agathon who examines it carefully, until he's satisfied that both, his mirror and his face are unhurt.)*

EURIPIDES: Now get up so I can singe the rest of your hairs! *(Mnesilochus this time is very afraid and edgy.)* Bend over and this time don't move!

MNESILOCHUS: Me and my big mouth! He'll make roast pork out of my arse in a minute!

EURIPIDES: *(To Mnesilochus' slave)* Thrata, go and bring us a torch, please dear! *(Thrata walks over to Agathon's slaves, talks to them for a second before one of them runs inside the house and a minute later returns with a torch which she then hands to Euripides.)*

EURIPIDES: *(Wielding the torch menacingly)* Now bend over! *(Mnesilochus does so and his phallus hits the ground. He groans with pain.)* Watch out for your dick-head now! *(Euripides walks behind Mnesilochus and begins the "singeing")*

MNESILOCHUS: Ouch! I'm watching, I'm watching... Ouch! Bloody hell! My bum's on fire. *(He runs around the stage and calls out to the audience.)* Fire! Fire! Water someone! Is there any water in the house? Help! Help me before someone else's bum catches fire!

EURIPIDES: Stop that! There's nothing wrong with you! Be a man, man!

MNESILOCHUS: Be a man? Not when my arse in a blazing inferno!

EURIPIDES: Come, come, come now! We're over the worst part. Nothing to worry about from now on. Come over here! *(Mnesilochus reluctantly, cautiously walks back. On his way he lifts his tunic and has a look at the damage.)*

MNESILOCHUS: Damn! Look at all that black soot! It's changed the colour of my balls... and my bum!

EURIPIDES: Don't worry about it. There's bound to be someone to... sponge it all off!

MNESILOCHUS: Let them just try! No one's going to wipe my bum off for me! I'll kill them! *(Euripides, Mnesilochus and Thrata walk over to Agathon)*

EURIPIDES: Agathon, if you don't want to help me yourself, could you at least let me borrow a dress and a girdle for this guy here? Come, on, I know you've got plenty of them!

Agathon: Go ahead, take what you need. I'm not fussed. *(All three rummage through the clothes)*

MNESILOCHUS: Hmm, which one should I take, Euripides?

EURIPIDES: Let's see... *(picks up a yellow dress and examines it)* Here, try this yellow dress on for size. Looks like it's made for festivals and suchlike. Hands dress to Mnesilochus.

MNESILOCHUS: *(brings it to his nose and sniffs hard)* Oh, yuuuum! By the goddess Aphrodite! What a delicious aroma! Very... very dickie! Quick, strap it on me! *(Puts it on with great difficulty considering the impediments caused by his phallus and corpulence)*

EURIPIDES: *(To Agathon)* Can I have a girdle, as well?

AGATHON: *(picks one and hands it to him)* Here, take this.

MNESILOCHUS: *(Still having difficulties with the dress)* Come on, mate, help me. It won't go over my legs. *(Thrata helps him tuck his phallus under the dress. The girdle fastens the phallus to his stomach. Euripides examines the result)*

EURIPIDES: Hmm, I think we'll need a hairnet and a hat.

AGATHON: No, he'd be better off wearing this wig here. *(Hands Thrata a wig which she tries on)* I wear this one after dark.

EURIPIDES: *(Takes it from Thrata and puts it over Mnesilochus' head)* By Zeus, that's just absolutely perfect!

MNESILOCHUS: Does it fit?

EURIPIDES: By Zeus! It certainly does, mate! It certainly does. To Agathon What about a shawl? Do you have one?

AGATHON: There's one on the lounge chair. Take that one. *(Thrata dashes to it, snaps it up and tries it on approvingly. She then throws it over Mnesilochus' shoulders)*

EURIPIDES: Shoes?

AGATHON: *(Takes off the shoes he's wearing)* Here, take these.

MNESILOCHUS: *(Takes them and puts them on)* I wonder if they'll fit. Hmm, you love them loose, don't you?

AGATHON: That's for you to decide. Now you've all got what you need, I'm leaving. To his slaves Come on, dears, wheel me back inside! Hurry! *(The slaves rush about collecting everything and wheeling Agathon back inside his house. Euripides stands back from Mnesilochus and admires his achievement)*

EURIPIDES: *(To Thrata)* Our man here looks just like a woman! Now, mate, remember to talk like a woman, too! Convince everyone you're a girl!

MNESILOCHUS: *(in falsetto)* I'll have a go.

EURIPIDES: Ok, then. Off you go!

MNESILOCHUS: No way! Not until you swear that...

EURIPIDES: Swear what?

MNESILOCHUS: Swear that you'll save me from any terrible thing that might happen to me! That you'll try everything in your power to save me!

EURIPIDES: Fine. I swear by Zeus' home, Aether!

MNESILOCHUS: Ha! I'd rather you'd swear by the halls and chambers of our dear physician, Hippocrates!

EURIPIDES: All right, all right! I swear by all the gods in Heaven. Every one of them!

MNESILOCHUS: All right, but let me quote you, if you don't mind: "Though my tongue did swear, my heart did not!" I don't want any of those tricks, thank you. Both, your tongue AND your heart have sworn to me, right? *(Bells are heard from within)*

EURIPIDES: Hell! Go on! Quick, get going! That was the signal for the Festival assembly. I'm off too.

(Exit all. Euripides runs off Stage Right while Thrata and Mnesilochus walk out Stage Left. Pause. Slow change of light (Dim then bright) during which the door of the Temple of Demeter opens and the chorus of women carrying torches emerges through it. A "smoke machine" creates some momentary

haze. A “soapbox” and a number of chairs are brought out. Baskets of flowers, laurel branches and wreaths are also carried onto the stage)

MNESILOCHUS: *(From within)* Come, darling Thrata. This way...

(Enter Mnesilochus and Thrata)

MNESILOCHUS: *(sees all the commotion)* Wow, look, Thrata! Good Heavens! Look at all these torches! And all these women coming to the temple of the divine pair of goddesses! Cough, cough! All that smoke! By, Demeter and Persephone, the divine pair of law-givers! Deliciously beautiful goddesses! Help me survive all this and... help me get home safe afterwards! Thrata, put the basket down please and give me the sacrificial cake. I wish to make an offering to our two beloved pair of Divinities. *(Thrata hands him the cake)* Most holy mother, Demeter and, you, too, wise Persephone! Make me very, very rich so that I might make you lots of offerings in return! If not, then at least, let me get out of this little scheme alive! With my dick intact! And while we're at it let my daughter, Vagina, find a filthy rich boy –but one that's a total moron, of course- and give my little son, Cockhead, lots of brains and common sense! Now let me see... I want to find a seat someplace where I can hear everything. Thrata, you better go now, dear. Slaves are not allowed in here. They're not allowed to listen to speeches.

(Mnesilochus finds a seat and sits down. Thrata picks up the basket and leaves. On her way out, she bumps into Kritylla who has just walked in, rushing towards the soapbox. Kritylla has a document in her hand. The Garland Seller, Mika and Mania (her Nurse) also enter. Mania is holding a baby in her arms. The Garland Seller hands Kritylla a garland which she puts on her head before she steps up onto the soapbox. She is greeted with loud applause from the rest of the floor.)

KRITYLLA: Silence! Silence please! Let us pray! Let us pray to the Divine pair of law protectors, Demeter and Persephone, And to the gods Wealth and Blueblood, And to Earth, the nurturer of our youth, And to Hermes, And to the Graces. Let us pray that our gathering here today is conducted well and we all behave excellently and that we bring about wonderful achievements for the citizens of Athens and the greatest of luck for all of us. Let us also pray that the woman amongst us whose words and deeds most help the State of Athens and the State of Women is adequately rewarded and heeded. Let this be our prayer! O, Holy Cock! O, Holy Cock! Holy be they name. Let us all rejoice!

Chorus: And so we all shall! May the Heavens send us a sign that they're pleased with our prayers!

(The sound of chirping birds is heard and this is taken by everyone as the sign of approbation they asked for.)

O, you, magnificently named father of the gods, Zeus!

Apollo, god of the golden lyre, whose temple is in Delos!

Athena, almighty goddess of the sparkling eyes and of the golden spear!

Goddess whose temple is here, in Athens, the city you defended against Poseidon!

Artemis, goddess who has an abundance of names, killer of wild beasts and daughter of Leto of the golden eyes!

Poseidon, revered and respected by all, king of the salty waters, leave now your stormy, fish-abundant deep home!

Daughters of the sea god Nereus!

Nymphs whose feet tread the forests!

Let us join in harmony the strands of Apollo's golden lyre!

And so, let this meeting of noble Athenian women end splendidly!

KRITYLLA: And!

Pray, too, to all the gods of Olympus and to all the goddesses thereat!

Pray to all the gods of Delphi and to all the goddesses thereat!

Pray to all the gods of Delos and to all the goddesses thereat!

And pray to all the other gods and goddesses everywhere else, as well!

Let us all pray that:

If any man schemes a scheme or plots a plot with Euripides and with the

Persians to cause harm to or to overthrow the Women's Republic,

If any man tries to establish himself or establish some other man as a tyrant of the Women's Republic,

If any man dobs in a woman who has claimed another woman's child as her own,

If any female slave who has knowledge of her mistress' secret affairs dobs her in to her husband,

If a female slave is entrusted by her mistress to deliver a secret message but does not do so and, instead, delivers a false message,

If a lover makes many promises to his woman but delivers none and, instead, tricks her with lies,

If an old hag seduces with gifts the boyfriend of a young girl, or steals him into her house secretly,

If a barman or barwoman rips off customers by short-selling them drinks,

Pray, friends that the gods pour all of their awesome wrath upon these people and upon their families, too and

Pray, too, that the gods give their every blessing only to you!

CHORUS:

We are with you in these prayers, Kritylla!

Let us pray that all these prayers be accomplished, for the sake of both, our city, as well as her people and let us pray, too, that the woman whose proposal is the wisest be heeded.

Let me denounce them as sacrilegious and traitorous:

those women who betray us by breaking their sacred oath
and

those women who trample upon our city's laws
and

those women who betray us to the enemy
and

those women who because of sheer greed, want to allow the Persians to enter our city!

Almighty Zeus! We are women but we ask you, nevertheless, to hear our prayers and bring the rest of the gods to our side and protect us!

(Loud applause from the floor)

KRITYLLA: Now, please listen to me, ladies! *(Clears her throat and then unfurls a document from which she reads.)* “In the Women’s General Assembly, the Chairwoman of which is Timocleia and the Secretary Lysilla, Sostrate has moved the following motion which was duly passed: “That a meeting be held at Dawn of the Middle Day of the Thesmophoria Festival, the day during which we have the most time to ourselves, during which meeting the main item of discussion shall be the proper punishment of the man we, women consider to be a criminal, namely, Euripides.”

Now, is there anyone who wishes to speak on this matter?

MIKA: Me!

KRITYLLA: Fine, *(taking the garland off her head and handing it to Mika.)*
Here, put this on first, Mika.

(Mika wears the garland, stands on the soapbox and clears her throat)

CHORUS: Quiet! Quiet, please! Listen carefully. Mika is clearing her throat and, like a real politician, she’s preparing to make a long speech!

MIKA: Ladies, I’m not up here, to try and impress you with my rhetorical skills. No, I swear by our beloved pair of Divinities, Demeter and Persephone that I’m not up here because I’m chasing personal praises. No, I’m speaking today because I’m thoroughly sick -sick to the back teeth of putting up with that... that cabbage-seller’s son, Euripides and sick with the insults, the verbal abuse and the invective he endlessly throws upon us, women!

Is there an insult he hasn’t hit us with yet? There is no indignity, not a foul word he hasn’t used yet to sally our name with! Give the bastard an audience, give him a chorus, give him some actors and there’ll be no end to the garbage he’ll find to defame us with.

Yes, ladies, Euripides! He’ll call us fuck-lovers, lecherous seducers of men, alcoholics, chatterboxes, treacherous, sick-in-the-head, a pain-in-the-arse of our husbands, you name it, he’ll find it and he’ll happily throw it at us!

And our husbands listen to that crap in the theatre so the moment they get home, instead of saying ‘hello,’ they give us dirty and suspicious looks and they start searching every nook and cranny of the house looking for a hidden lover!

This man has stuffed up our lives! We can do nothing any more. None of the things we used to do. He has brainwashed our husbands completely! Clogged their heads up with utter bullshit! Don’t go weaving a little wreath for yourself because your husband will think you’re in love or something, don’t go dropping a pot or a pan or break some crockery, you know, the sort we send to our boyfriends, ‘cause your idiot husband will straightaway yell at you: “So, who you got in your head these days, ey? I bet it’s that foreigner from Corinth!”

God help the poor girl that feels a bit crook. Up will jump her stupid brother and say, “I really, really don’t like the colour on that girl’s face! I

reckon she's pregers!" And God help the childless woman who wants to shut her husband up by passing some other woman's child as her own! It can't happen! Her husband will insist on being right there, next to the delivery room! Not long ago, our young girls could marry older men. Now, thanks to Euripides' bullshit, that can't happen either! All the old men listened to that line of his... the one that says, "The old man who marries a young woman marries a tyrant!" Outrageous!

And what do your houses look like these days, thanks to this Euripides? I'll tell what they look like: They look like and feel like prisons! Locks and bolts everywhere, "special" women's quarters, and mountainous bloody dogs at the front gate to keep our lovers away! Fine! We'll overlook all that but then, once upon a time, we used to have some responsibilities in the running of our households. Not any more! We can't take care of the food supply, any more; or even go to the pantry to get some flour or some wine, or oil, even!

And why? Because our dear little idiot husbands have locked everything up with those new nasty little Spartan keys. The ones with the tree notches on them; and they carry those keys around their neck all the time! We used to be able to unlock those doors easily, once! We'd buy a special little ring for three obols and, no matter how difficult the lock was, we'd be able to open it! No probs! Now, though, their miserable little spy, Euripides, showed them how to carry around with them these little seals, stupid things, with wormholes carved into them!

So, I move, therefore, Ladies, that we get rid of this disgusting little pest, Euripides, by poisoning him or whatever, or do anything that will definitely knock him dead! That, ladies, is why I got up here on the box. That is what I want to announce today! There are other matters, of course, but I'll talk to the Secretary about them and record them in the minutes.

(Loud applause from the floor)

CHORUS: What an intelligent, eloquent, subtle speech this woman just uttered! I've never heard anything like it in my life! This was one seriously impressive speech! Everything she said is absolutely true! It's obvious, she's done her homework well: studied the matter from all its angles, weighed up every little detail of it, churned everything in her wise brain and produced all the necessary arguments that her motion requires. Even Xenocles himself –you know, Karkinios' son- couldn't compete with her on the same platform! He'd sound like a prattling idiot, compared to her, I reckon!

(It's now the Garland Seller's turn. She gets up, takes the garland from Mika and changes places with her.)

GARLAND SELLER: Thank you, Mika. You have spoken well and covered all the bases in respect of your indictment. I have only but a few words to add to yours. Words that will explain the monstrous torture that I, personally, have to suffer. I am a single mother. A widow. My husband died in Cyprus, leaving me with five kids which I had to bring up on my own, with great

difficulty and sacrifice. I'm doing it by weaving garlands and selling them in the myrtle market. *(Raises her basket of garlands for all to see.)*

Until now I wasn't doing too bad a job of feeding my kids –it was hard but I managed, but now, now this... this tragedy writer, is going around everywhere, telling all the men that there are no gods! He's gone and convinced them all that there are no gods, for gods' sake and so what happens? My income is now half it ever was! And so, ladies, I suggest to you all -no, I beg you all- to punish this idiot severely for all he's done to us! He's committed outrageous crimes against us. Wild, brutish stuff! But then what do you expect? His mother sells wild herbs! He was brought up out in the wild! *(Looks up at the sun as if to check the time.)* But I've got to go now. I've got to go and weave garlands for some twenty men. *(Applause as she gets down from the box and leaves.)*

CHORUS: Wow! Now this was an even better tailored speech than the first one! What a well-trimmed, refined piece of cloth! She's certainly sewn up a proper lawsuit for him! Everything she said about this monster was filled with intelligence and relevancy. Sound logic, no bullshit and a totally credible prosecution! This man must be punished in no uncertain terms for his grotesque behaviour towards us!

(Mnesilochus rushes over to the soapbox. He's excited and ready to defend Euripides. As he speaks, however, the women get more and more uncomfortable with and suspicious of what he's saying and we hear whispers of outrage right up until the end of his speech.)

MNESILOCHUS: Girls! Girls! Girls! O, believe me, girls! I understand you completely! Golly gosh, darlings! I know very well why your anger against Euripides is so... so... angry! Your boiling bile is well justified! What a dreadful, insulting treatment he dished out to you all! Totally unacceptable! I, too, hate the man! I swear by my own kids, I hate the man. Only crazy women wouldn't... But... but let us think a little. Let us consider our position a bit better. Here, it is just us, women – every one of us - and our words won't go past these walls. So let us think carefully.

All this anger, all these... all these charges we're laying against the man! What's the point? What for? The man has only mentioned one or two of the naughty things we do but he's well aware of all the rest of little indiscretions! Golly gosh! Thousands of them! Take me, for example -and I'm sure there are other women here who shall remain nameless, who, like me, know full well their own little bits of mischief – but I, myself... hahaha... well this is my greatest bit of mischief: See, three days after I got married, well, that night, my husband just turned his bum to me and began snoring. Now a guy, who had plucked my cherry when I was seven years old, had that very night got so horny that he came by my house. I heard him scratching at the door downstairs so I slowly got out of bed, without making a sound and began to go down to let him in. But my husband woke up anyhow and so he asked me angrily, "and where do you think you're going?" I turned 'round and said, "I've got a terrible stomach ache, darling. Colic. I need to go to the dunny." He turns round and says, "all right, then, go!" Then, the fool, gets up and starts grinding together some

juniper berries, some aniseed and some sage. Mix them all together for a remedy for me!

But I... Hehehe... I went and oiled the door hinges a bit so they wouldn't creak and then went out to my boyfriend. Golly gosh! Screwed me right there and then! Bending over Apollo's altar, I was and holding fast at the Daphne tree beside it! See? Now that's something Euripides has never ever mentioned! Anywhere!

And has he said anything about the fact that when we get desperate, we screw our slaves and our mule drivers? No, he hasn't! And what about the morning-after-the night-before? You know, the mornings we chew up all the garlic so that our hubbies won't suspect us of screwing around while the poor buggers were spending the whole night guarding the city walls! Have you seen Euripides say anything about that one at all? Well, have you? Of course not! So, sometimes he insults Phaedra. So what? Big deal! What's that got to do with us? And what about that other trick we often do? When we've got the boyfriend behind us and the husband turns up –in the middle of the day. What do we do then? What's our saving trick for that? We spread our cloak wide open so that the boyfriend hides behind it and, while the husband stands gawking at it, admiring it, the boyfriend gets the time to run away!

And I know this woman who had her husband believe she had labour pains for ten whole days! Carried on like that right up until she managed to buy herself some other woman's baby and pretend to him that it was hers! Poor husband! She had him run all around in circles looking for drugs and stuff, to help her bring about the delivery quicker! Hahaha! And while the poor bastard is spinning round all over town, some old woman brings the newborn round to the house. Brought it round in a pot, she did. Had its mouth stuffed full with honeycomb so it wouldn't make a sound. The old woman comes into the house carrying the baby in the pot, winks at the wife and the wife takes up the farce. She begins groaning and moaning and pleading with her husband, "Get out now, husband! Get out! I think I'm about to give birth! Run off now, the baby's kicked my belly!" Yeah, right! The belly of the pot she means! So, anyhow, the husband runs out, delirious with joy, the old hag plucks the baby out of the pot, unplugs its gob and poof, the baby begins to cry! Then the old woman picks it up and rushes out to the husband! She puts on a big grin on her face and tells him straight out, "Look at this! You're the father of a lion! Looks just like you! Every bit of him, dick and all. Look at it, bent like a rainbow!"

Isn't this the sort of mischief we get up to? Sure it is! By Artemis, it is! And then we go and get angry at Euripides! Goodness! He gives us no more hassle than we deserve, honestly!

CHORUS: (*amidst the booing, speaking singly*)

- Outrageous!
- This is disgusting stuff she's coming out with!
- What land spawned this idiot?
- What an impudent bitch!
- The nerve of the slut!

-The cheek of the bitch!
-How dare she throw all this shit at our face!
-Brazen bitch!
-Incredible!
-So it's true what they say about bloody orators: they're like scorpions –
hiding under every little stone!
-Only one thing's worse than a woman slut and that's another woman slut!

MIKA: Ladies! Ladies! Hang on a minute! By our heroine Aglaurus!
Think! Let's think straight for a moment! What's the matter with you?
Why are you sitting there looking stunned and stupid? Surely we're not
going to let this bitch get away with all this disgusting stuff? It's a shocking
slander! *(To the audience)* Now, is there anyone among you out there
who... ah, never mind, whether there is or there is not, we girls up here will
go and grab some hot coals from somewhere and singe the crap out of this
slut's cunt! *(Applause and nodding from the rest of the women. Trembling
fear from Mnesilochus)* That will teach the bitch to go round insulting her
fellow women!

MNESILOCHUS: Ey! Hang on a minute! No, no, no! Not my cunt! No!
Girls, no! We have freedom of speech in this country! Surely we also have
it in this meeting! So I said what I thought about Euripides... and so it was
to his favour. Should I get my pinky singed for that? No way!

MIKA: Of course you should! Do you think we should let someone like
you get away with going against everything a woman stands for? This
bastard Euripides, has absolutely destroyed our reputation with all his
stupid plays about whores and raped women like Melanippe and Phaedra.
Why has he never written a play about women like Penelope? Such a
lovely, virtuous woman that Penny! Why has he never written a play about
her, ey?

MNESILOCHUS: Why? Why? Isn't it obvious? Look at us! Is there a single
woman among us who resembles Penelope in any way, shape or form?
Look at us! We're all Phaedras! With no exception at all!

MIKA: There she goes again, girls! This slut won't stop insulting us!

MNESILOCHUS: By Zeus! I haven't finished yet! Do you want me to spill it
all out for you? Tell you all the stories I know?

MIKA: You've already spilled out the lot! You can't have anything left in
there!

MNESILOCHUS: No way! By Zeus, no! There are millions more stories to tell
you about what we girls get up to. What about... for example, what about
when we get our body scrapers and use them as straws to siphon the wine
out from the barrel, ey? Or when we...

MIKA: Fuck you, you bitch!

MNESILOCHUS: When we sneak into the all-male Festivals, the Apaturia
and steal their juicy morsels of meat, give them to our boyfriends and then
say, "what chops? The cat's pinched the chops!" Isn't that right?

MIKA: Bullshitting bitch!

MNESILOCHUS: And what about that woman who bashed the crap out of her husband with an axe? Or the other one, the one who drugged her husband into insanity? I haven't mentioned them yet... and then there's that Acharnian woman who had her father...

MIKA: Die you bitch!

MNESILOCHUS: ... buried under the bath tub, in the burning coals that boil the water... or...

MIKA: Girls, are we going to sit here and cop all this bullshit?

MNESILOCHUS: (*Pointing at Mika*) Hehehe! What about you? Didn't you swap your baby girl with your slave's baby boy?

MIKA: By the two goddesses, you're not getting away with this! I'll tear out all your pubes, one by one, with my very own hands!

MNESILOCHUS: O, no you won't! You keep your hands to yourself!

MIKA: No? Well, you just watch me, bitch!

MNESILOCHUS: No, you watch ME, girl!

MIKA: (*She hands her overcoat to Philiste*) Hold onto my coat, Philiste!

MNESILOCHUS: Oh, yeah? You just touch me, darling and by Artemis, I'll... I'll...

MIKA: Yeah? You'll do what?

MNESILOCHUS: I'll beat that sesame-bun you just had, right out of your fat guts!

KRITYLLA: Girls, girls, girls! Stop that! (*Indicates behind the stage*) Stop all this fighting for a moment! I can see a woman rushing towards us. (*Enter cross-dresser Kleisthenes*) Now let's hear what she has to say. Be quiet please, girls. Quiet!

(*Kleisthenes takes the soapbox*)

KLEISTHENES: Darlings! Darlings you know how much I love you! I do everything you do. Behave just like a girl. See? Look how smooth my cheeks are! Not the slightest shadow of a beard! I am your sister! I just love girls! Wacky about you all! I care about you always!

Now listen! There's an awful bit of rumour doing the rounds in the market about you girls. Simply awful stuff! That's why I'm here. I want to tell you what that dreadful rumour is about. Get you prepared for it and do what I can to help you from suffering this shocking blow!

KRITYLLA: What is it, dear boy? I mean... yes, boy, since your cheeks are so smooth!

KLEISTHENES: They say in the marketplace that Euripides has sent one of his relatives to this very meeting here, today!

KRITYLLA: Here? What for? What's he up to?

KLEISTHENES: He's sent him here to spy on you. Listen to everything you girls say and do. Hear all your plans and plots.

KRITYLLA: In here? How could a man come here and not be noticed by all us women?

KLEISTHENES: Euripides has singed all his hair, darling! Plucked it all out. Then dressed him up like a woman!

MNESILOCHUS: Hahaha! What a joker this little boy is! Hahaha! Could you believe that? Who'd be stupid enough to let himself be singed and plucked like that? He'd never manage to sit still for it! What a likely story! I doubt it, honey! By the two goddesses, I doubt it very much sweetheart! Hahaha!

KLEISTHENES: Nonsense, dear girl! Would I have come here to tell you this if I hadn't heard it from a very reliable source?

KRITYLLA: What a dreadful thing we've just heard, ladies! Incredible! Well, let's all look around us, seek this bastard out. Don't just sit on your arses. Look for him. Where could he be sitting not to have been noticed? Must be wearing a good disguise. Kleisthenes, help us, will you? We'll owe you one!

KLEISTHENES: Of course, darling! Now all you girls... all of you must be questioned. *(Pointing at Mika)* All of you!

MNESILOCHUS: *(aside)* Shit, I'm stuffed now!

MIKA: Me? You want to know who I am? I am Mika, Kleonymus' wife! The man who dropped his shield in the battlefield and ran for his life!

MNESILOCHUS: *(suspiciously)* Hmmm... Do you girls know this woman?

KRITYLLA: Yes, yes. We know her! Question the rest of them!

KLEISTHENES: And this? Who is she?

MIKA: That's my Mania, my nanny! *(Mnesilochus tries to slide away unnoticed.)*

KLEISTHENES: *(sees Mnesilochus trying to escape)* And you! Hey you! Stop right there! Where do you think you're going?

MNESILOCHUS: Who me, sweetie? I need to go and do my wee-wees! What a cheeky little boy you are!

KLEISTHENES: All right then, this way. *(Guides him to the side of the stage. Mnesilochus disappears from view.)* I'll wait for you out here. *(Sounds of urine hitting a metal bucket. They sound suspiciously loud.)*

KRITYLLA: Yes, you stand there and wait for her, Kleisthenes. Watch her! She's the only one here we've never seen before. Don't know who she is. *(Mnesilochus seems to be taking too long.)*

KLEISTHENES: Come on! You're taking ages! You're only doing number one!

MNESILOCHUS: (*feigning distress*) I know, I know! Damned water cress seeds! Totally constrict my bladder, sweetie!

KLEISTHENES: Water cress seeds, is it? Hmmm, come out here immediately! (*Mnesilochus refuses so Kleisthenes rushes to him*)

MNESILOCHUS: (*Obviously in a scuffle*) Hey, stop that! Take your hands off me! O, I'm feeling sick! (*Kleisthenes drags Mnesilochus onto the stage*)

KLEISTHENES: So, tell me! You're married, ey? Who's your husband, then? What's his name?

MNESILOCHUS: His name? You want to know my husband's name? It's... it's... well, you know the town Cockophile? Kleisthenes nods Well, you know that guy...

KLEISTHENES: What guy?

MNESILOCHUS: You know... the guy who... you know! That guy who once... o, dear! You know the guy who's the son of that guy who...

KLEISTHENES: (*losing patience with him*) Stop babbling, girl! Have you ever been here before? To this Festival?

MNESILOCHUS: Of course I have! By Zeus, I have! Same time, same spot!

KLEISTHENES: Oh yeah? And who did you stay with last year?

MNESILOCHUS: Who did I stay with? Let's see... I stayed with a girl, who else?

KLEISTHENES: Bloody hell! You're not giving much away, are you?

KRITYLLA: Hang on a minute, Kleisthenes. Let me deal with this girl. I'll interrogate the bitch good and proper. Move away a bit. You're a man and you mustn't hear... (*To Mnesilochus*) Now, about last year's Festival... Tell me about the litany. What was the first item of the epiphany?

MNESILOCHUS: Ahhhh, now let me think... ah, yes, now I remember. The first was... we all had a drink.

KRITYLLA: Yes, yes but what then? What came after that?

MNESILOCHUS: Then? Then we all had a toast.

KRITYLLA: Someone must have told you that. What came after that then?

MNESILOCHUS: (*Chuckles cheekily*) Then... Xenylla had asked for a big bowl 'cause there was no potty anywhere!

KRITYLLA: You're talking crap! Kleisthenes! Kleisthenes come here! This is the man you're talking about!

KLEISTHENES: (*walks over to Mnesilochus and holds him tightly by the arm.*) Right! Now... what do I do now, girls?

KRITYLLA: (*Take his gear off.*) Something's not right with his story.

MNESILOCHUS: What? You guys are going to strip naked a mother of nine?

KLEISTHENES: Come on, come on, get that girdle off and be quick about it!

MNESILOCHUS: My, my! What a shameless little boy you are!

KRITYLLA: *(walks around Mnesilochus and examines him thoroughly, feeling his body.)* She's a big girl this one, isn't she? And –by Zeus!- where are her tits? She hasn't got them like we do, does she?

MNESILOCHUS: *(As he's talking he is also shuffling about trying to conceal his phallus by tucking it between his legs and behind him.)* Tits? How can I have any tits? I... I've never had any children so I never got pregnant! I'm a... barren woman!

KRITYLLA: Never got pregnant? You just said you've got nine kids!

KLEISTHENES: Stand up straight, you! I can see what you're doing! You're shoving your cock down between your legs and –there! You're pushing it behind you!

KRITYLLA: *(Runs behind Mnesilochus. Begins laughter.)* Ahahaha! Here's his prick! Look at its little head! Oh, and what a beautiful colour, darling!

KLEISTHENES: *(Excited at the prospect of seeing a naked prick.)* Where? Where is it? *(Mnesilochus pulls it back towards his front.)*

KRITYLLA: Oh, it's gone now... here it is, at the front!

KLEISTHENES: No... it's not here!

KRITYLLA: Hahahaha! It's back here again!

KLEISTHENES: What a deep canal you've got there, my man! You glide that cock of yours back and forth faster than our neighbours the Corinthians, slide their barges through our isthmus!

KRITYLLA: What a shameful bastard! No wonder he puked out all those Euripides insults on us!

MNESILOCHUS: Oh, Zeusy, Zeusy, Zeusy! Dear Zeus, what a dreadful web I've weaved for myself!

KRITYLLA: *(Turning to Kleisthenes)* What do we do now, Kleisthenes?

KLEISTHENES: *(To all the women)* Don't let him out your sight while I go tell the cops. Don't let him get away! I'm going to the cops right now!

(Exit Kleisthenes. Some of the women, including Mika and Mania surround Mnesilochus.)

CHORUS:

Come, girls, let's go and light up some lamps.

Do a bit of investigative work!

Search around everywhere, including the Assembly House, see if there's another man snuck in amongst us.

Take off your vests and search hard! Search thoroughly, search seriously, search everywhere!

Hurry! Don't waste a minute!

Be quick and quiet about it! Move your feet! Let's get this over and done with quickly!

(They all take their vests off and begin the search)

Off you go then, follow every track that may lead to a man near by.
Look to your right, look to your left, look to your rear and look all around
you again!
Examine every nook and cranny. Examine every hole!
Zeus help the bastard who's committed an act of impiety if I catch him!
He'll cop it good and proper!
We'll make an example of him. Show all the other men what happens when
they do disgusting, dreadful and unholy things!
He'll accept the existence of gods!
Other men will learn from him! They will learn to follow, observe, revere
and respect the laws of the Gods and the mortals.
They will learn to turn away from their evil ways and do good or else suffer
the mighty wrath of the Heavens.
They will learn that he who commits a sin will burn in a blaze of flames
and a frenzy of madness!
And!
They will learn that their every move will be abundant proof for all to see –
men AND women- that god punishes acts of sin and injustice on the spot,
there and then, post haste!

*(They finally end their search. Mania, in the meantime, sits down exposes
her breast and begins to feed Mika's baby which seems to be over-swaddled.)*

Right! Looks like we've cleared the ground.

Didn't find a man anywhere.

Not hanging around here, anyhow.

*(Mnesilochus suddenly snatches the baby from Mania's arms and runs
towards the altar.)*

MIKA: Hey! Stop! Where do you think you're going! Stop! Bloody hell! He
snatched my baby right off her nurse's tit!

MNESILOCHUS: *(Pulls out a knife from under his clothes and waves it about
menacingly.)* Oh yeah? Scream all you want, girlies! If you won't let me go,
right now, this baby will never see another tit again! I'm going to cut open
all the veins of her little thigh! Splatter the altar with her bright red blood!
Right here, right now! A million cuts! With this knife!

MIKA: Ahh! No! No! Women, women, please help me! My only child!
Scream, women, scream blue murder! Stop him! A reward, a reward for his
capture! He's got my only child!

CHORUS: Oh, Holy Fates! What is this new horror I see before my eyes?
What disgusting deed is this he's gone and done now? Is the whole world
filled with such shameful disrespect? Women, what is he doing?

MNESILOCHUS: What am I doing? I'm doing something that will rid you of
all your shamelessness and disrespect, that's what I'm doing!

CHORUS: Is there anything more dreadful than what you're doing?

MIKA: Dreadful! Absolutely dreadful! Appalling! He kidnapped my kid!

CHORUS: There're no words for it! He feels no shame in what he's doing!

MNESILOCHUS: And it's not over yet, girlies!

CHORUS: If you think you're going to get away with performing such a despicable act, you're badly mistaken! You will not escape punishment, you can be sure of that!

MNESILOCHUS: I'm praying for something else here!

CHORUS: Prayers? Wishes? Which one of all the immortal gods will come to help you commit a crime?

MNESILOCHUS: (*laughs sarcastically*) Forget it, girls! Scream and squeal all you like! It'll do you no good! I'll never let go of this kid!

CHORUS: Oh yea? You're enjoying this aren't you? Well, by Demeter and Persephone! You won't be enjoying it much longer! Such a disgraceful behaviour and such a shameless speech will not go unpunished. A sin for a sin! Your Fate is turning right now, mister! Your fall is nigh! Come, let's all get some firewood together. Quickly! Burn the horrible bastard! Turn him into cinders! Hurry!

MIKA: (*Leads Mania by the arm*) Come Mania, let's go and collect some firewood. (*To Mnesilochus*) And you! I'll personally make a spinning fireball out of you! You wait!

MNESILOCHUS: Go ahead, darling! Spin me up and spin me down!

(*Exit Mika and Mania*)

(*To the baby*) Now, as for you, young... lady, is it? Yes. Let's get rid of this little Cretan cape of yours... unwraps the baby slowly... and the only one to blame for your death, dear girl is that mother of yours... when the cape is fully unwrapped he is shocked to find a wine skin. Hey! What's this? What's going on here? This isn't a little girl! This is a wine skin... with little Persian booties... (*To the women*) Oh, you... you... women! Bloody drunkards, the lot of you! That's all you ever think about! Fucking and wine! Make the wine sellers happy and your men miserable! Destroy your households! Pots, pans, the lot!

(*Enter Mika and Mania carrying firewood*)

MIKA: Come on, Mania. Let's stack them up high, right under him.

MNESILOCHUS: (*quickly covers the "baby" again.*) By all means, girls. As high as you can. Stack them right up! Ehhh... tell me! This is your baby, right? You gave birth to it. Is that so?

MIKA: Sure did! Carried it the full nine months!

MNESILOCHUS: You did, did you? The full nine months?

MIKA: Absolutely! Swear by Artemis!

MNESILOCHUS: (*Lets the baby's cape fall slowly, teasingly to the ground*) Ripper of a baby, Mika! What's it hold? Three jugs?

MIKA: You're winding me up, you bastard! You dared take my baby's clothes off? A tiny baby like that? Shameless creep!

MNESILOCHUS: Tiny? By Zeus! How old is it? Three, four wine festivals old?

MIKA: Yeah, around that... born around the last Dionysiac Festival! Give it to me!

MNESILOCHUS: No way! I swear by Apollo you're not getting this little baby!

MIKA: Fine then. We'll burn you!

MNESILOCHUS: (*Wields the knife again*) Burn away, girls but this little baby gets chopped up! Sacrificed to Apollo!

MIKA: No! No! Please, I beg you! Do what you want with me but let my little baby live!

MNESILOCHUS: Ah, good ol' "mother's instinct!" Admirable, I must say but still, this little squirt will cop it on the neck!

MIKA: My baby! Mania, go and get the sacrificial bowl so that I may catch my darling's blood! (*Mania gets the bowl from the altar.*)

MNESILOCHUS: Here, bring it under here. It will give me a great pleasure to do you this little favour! (*He laughs while he lifts the wine skin above the bowl and tears into it with his knife. The wine splashes into the bowl and elsewhere.*)

MIKA: Rotten, decrepit creature! Hateful, disgusting little man! I hope you die in agony!

MNESILOCHUS: (*shakes the wine skin dry.*) And now, this little skin becomes the property of the priestess!

(Enter Kritylla)

KRITYLLA: Yes? What little skin goes to the priestess? (*Mnesilochus offers her the wine skin.*)

MNESILOCHUS: This one here. Here you are, take it!

KRITYLLA: (*takes the wine skin. Sadly.*) O, poor, poor Mika! Who did this? Who stripped you of your girdle, my girl? Who ripped your baby from your tit?

MIKA: This cunning bastard here! He did it! Stay here, Kritylla and keep a close eye on him while I go and get Kleisthenes and tell the cops all about him. (*Kritylla approaches Mnesilochus watchfully while Mika and Mania exit.*)

MNESILOCHUS: (*To the audience*) Now what do I do? How do I get out of this? What's my next move? A plan! A plan! I need a plan! And where is the man who dropped me right into this mess? Vanished! Still not here! How do I send a message to him, I wonder? (*Suddenly*) I know! I'll do what one the men in his play Palamedes did! I'll write a message on some oars and drop them into the sea... Hmm... can't see any oars around here though! I wonder where I could get some oars... looks around him and discovers the wooden shingles on the altar. Ah! The votive shingles! Perfect stuff! I'll write on them and then toss them into the sea. Tests them

by tapping onto them and checking them on both sides. Wood, just like the oars. They'll float from one end of the sea to the other!

(He pulls out his knife and begins scratching a message onto one of them, pausing, at times to utter the words of the following prayer) Oh, come, my darling hands! Try your very, very best to engrave my safe, safe escape from here. And oh, you, you little tablets of finely sanded wood! Please receive this knife's work with grace and please be the bearers of my message, a message of my distress! *(Suddenly the knife slips)* Bugger! This R letter is a real pain in bum! *(Concentrates. Pokes his tongue out as he scratches more carefully. Finally he is happy with his work.)* Wow! Brilliant! Look at that! What a fantastic job I've done! Right, then dear tablets, off you go! Go in every direction, now and hurry! *(He hands the tablets to the chorus who pass them on to each other, as if waves in the sea, until all the shingles disappear. While the chorus utters the lines below, Mnesilochus tries anxiously to find an escape route. Kritylla follows him closely wielding a threatening torch.)*

CHORUS: And now, ladies! Let us say a few words praising our own virtues!

Oh, yeah!

Because, ladies, men never stop whinging and whining about us all! O, they tell us, we are a veritable pain in humanity's bum! We are, in short, a bum-pain! We are the very womb of conflict and of clash!

So they say!

We are the cause of dire insurrection, of misery and of war! *(To the audience)* Come on! I mean if we're so terrible, why do you marry us then?

Oh, yeah!

If we're such bum-pains for you, then why don't you let us get out of the house for a bit? Or even do a bit of window-shopping every now and then? Goodness! You guard your bum-pains so very, very well!

Oh yeah!

And then, if your little wife happens to go out somewhere and you bump into her out in the street, what do you do?

I ask you!

You carry on like a frenzied rooster, screaming and yelling at the top of your head! If we're as bad as you say, then you'd be toasting a drink to the gods, thanking them for making your bum-pain vanish for ever from your life!

Oh yeah!

Say we went out, had a great time and fell asleep at a friend's house. Well, what do our dear hubbies do? They go searching every house, every bedroom and every bed looking for his... bum-pain!

I ask you! Hehehe!

And if we stood by the window, trying to check out the street, there they'd be, every man and his dog, gawking at us, us, their bum-pain! Then we get all embarrassed, shy away and hide but the men?

Oh yeah!

But the men become even more keen to gawk at us- their bum-pain- the next time we stand by the window! Now let's be certain about one thing: We are superior to men! No doubt about it!

Oh, yeah!

Proof? (*They turn towards Mnesilochus*) Did I hear someone ask for proof? Fair enough! Let's see what we can do here. Here we have the two sexes disagreeing, each claiming to have superiority over the other! So, let's compare each sex with the other by checking out names; one by one.

Let's see:

Charminus, for example. Now that's a hell of a lot worse than Naustimache. Let the records be examined: Charminus lost a naval battle; Nausimache's name on the other hand, means "sea warrior," that is, she is...nautically victorious!

And then, of course, we've got Kleophon, our great leader! Yuk! Compare that to our Salabakho, the most scrumptious whore in Athens!

And what about our Aristomache, ey? "Excels in battle," that's what her name means! Or Stratoniki! How many of you men can come up to that Marathon standard?

And of all of last year's councillors, those who retired this year, which of them can stack up to our Euboule? That's right, none!

Oh, yeah!

See? Women are far superior to men!

Look around you! Search the streets! Will you find a woman running off with fifty talents of the State's money, splashing it about on splendid chariots and the like?

No way!

The biggest haul a woman will ever make is a cup of flour from her husband's pantry and then she'll pay him back that very night! We point all these scoundrels out to you right now. They're all among you, not among us! Fatsoes, thugs, free-loaders, slave mongers, the lot! They're out there, amongst you lot. Men!

Oh, yeah!

They talk about "economy" all the time! They do that while they spend and waste the whole of their father's estate. Can't save a bloody thing! We, on the other hand, we know how to save, we know how to keep our baskets, our looms, our shuttles, our umbrellas! Whereas you, men! Some of our husbands have lost their spears -wood, iron, the lot! Can't find them anywhere in the house; and others, well, they just tossed the shields off

their backs on the battlefield, anyhow! There's lots of stuff that we women are angry about and justly, too!

One of the worse things is that we just don't get recognised for our good work! I mean, if a woman gives birth to a man who serves the State well, let's say he becomes a Brigadier, or a General, then she should be honoured in some way! She should be given a seat at the Honours Row at the Stenia and the Scira, as well as all the other women's festivals! Whereas if a woman whose sons end up as cowards or thugs, or nasty Brigadiers or foolish leaders, then she should have all their hair cut into the shape of a soup-bowl and she should be made to sit behind the good man's mother.

Why should a woman (*Indicating one in the crowd*)—that one there, for example— who gave birth to someone like our ridiculous politician, Hyperbolus, why should she be able to come in here all prettied up in white gowns and trailing hair and sit right next to the woman who gave birth to a brilliant General like Lamachus and then engage herself in ripping people off with money loans and punishing interest rates?

Really, if anyone has taken a loan from that woman, not only should he not pay her any interest on it but he shouldn't even pay the capital back! And if she demands it back, he should tell her to bugger off. "Pay you interest? You? Me pay you? After you giving us a son like that?"

(Mnesilochus has suddenly stopped searching around for Euripides. He and Kritylla appear from behind the altar.)

MNESILOCHUS: Damn! I think I've gone cross-eyed looking for that man! Can't see him anywhere. Where on earth is he? He's taking a very long time! I bet he's still feeling sore after the failure of his play, Palamedes! A real ice block that play was! But then, which of his plays can I use to reel him in here? I know, I'll take on the role of his Helen. She is the protagonist of his last play, called Helen. I'd be good, too. I'm already dressed for the part. Spins around like a model Woman's wardrobe!
(Prepares to enunciate.)

KRITYLLA: Oi! What do you think you're doing now? Stop gawking like that! You'll cop a real hell of a Helen if you don't smarten up before the cops get here!

MNESILOCHUS: *(Throws his arms about as he recites. He has learnt well from Agathon.)* O, fair virgin springs of the Nile! O, you who do Heaven's undone work and quench the thirst of the plains of Egypt! O, you people of Egypt! You, Egyptians who love your powerful purgatives!

KRITYLLA: What a sly old codger this man is, by Hekate the torch bearing goddess!

MNESILOCHUS: It is I, Helen and my father's country is not nameless! She is called Sparta and my House is the House of Tyndareus!

KRITYLLA: Ha! You? You're the son of Tyndareus? You, the no-hoper, the loser? Ha! Phrynonidas, our infamous petty thief! That'd be more likely!

MNESILOCHUS: And I? I am called Helen! Sits upon the altar and looks sad.

KRITYLLA: Hahaha! Another woman act! We haven't yet punished you for your first impersonation and here you are, at it again!

MNESILOCHUS: *(continues unperturbed)* So many dear souls have expired by the fair streams of Scamander!

KRITYLLA: What a shame you weren't one of them!

MNESILOCHUS: Yet I am here! Alive! O, how I wish my poor husband, Menelaos, were here, alive also! O, why then, am I still alive?

KRITYLLA: Because the birds of prey are cunning! *(Strange noises from within)*

MNESILOCHUS: Yet, halt! Something flutters within my heart! O, Zeus! Toy not with my newfound hope!

(Euripides barges in, dressed in the role of Menelaos in his play "Helen". Clothes torn and wet, weeds around his neck. He has just survived the sinking of his ship.)

EURIPIDES: O, behold! What grandiose halls are these? Who has sway over them? Will he welcome strangers who have battled the intemperance of the salty oceans? Will he welcome strangers who have suffered cruel winters and shipwrecks?

MNESILOCHUS: Ay, friend, these halls belong to Proteus!

KRITYLLA: Proteus, who, you triple loser! *(To Euripides)* Don't listen to him, stranger. Proteus our General has been dead for over a decade! Proteus, indeed!

EURIPIDES: O, do tell me fair maiden, what land is this that our ship has touched?

MNESILOCHUS: Why, friend, this is Egypt!

EURIPIDES: Egypt! O, dreadful Fates! How far the dire waves have driven me!

KRITYLLA: Stranger, don't believe this man! He's a lunatic. He's stark, raving mad! This is the Temple of Demeter. We're in the middle of her festival!

EURIPIDES: Is King Proteus within his halls or has he gone out?

KRITYLLA: Still seasick, ey? Hmm... obviously; if it didn't register when I told you that Proteus is dead! He's neither within nor without, friend!

EURIPIDES: Dead, is he? O, my! Is Proteus verily dead? In truth? But where is his tomb?

MNESILOCHUS: This place here, where I am sitting, is Proteus' tomb!

KRITYLLA: Well, don't just sit, there! Die and let Hades take you! *(She charges at him angrily)* And die you shall, you no-hoper! How dare you call Demeter's altar a tomb!

EURIPIDES: But, o, strange maiden, why do you sit upon his tomb? Why clothe yourself in that sad clothing?

MNESILOCHUS: I'm forced to sleep with Proteus's son. Forced against my will to marry.

KRITYLLA: Damned liar! Why lie at the poor stranger? Stranger, this is one very cunning, sly old bastard. He's walked in here, in the women's gathering so he can pinch all our gold jewellery!

MNESILOCHUS: *(to Kritylla)* You may shower my body with insults, if you like! I care not!

EURIPIDES: *(To Mnesilochus)* Dear lady, who is this old hag who does insult you so?

MNESILOCHUS: That there is Proteus' daughter, Theonoe!

KRITYLLA: By Persephone and Demeter! I am not Theonoe! I am Kritylla, Antitheus' daughter! Antitheus from Gargettos and *(To Mnesilochus)* you! You are a sly, sleaze-bag!

MNESILOCHUS: O, Theonoe! Say whatever you want to say! In no way will I ever marry your brother and betray my husband, Menelaos who's fighting in Troy!

EURIPIDES: *(Approaches Mnesilochus and touches his cheek fondly)* Lady, say your words once more! Turn and let my eyes see yours!

MNESILOCHUS: *(wraps her face with the shawl)* No, I cannot do that! No, stranger, do not ask me that! I'm too ashamed to show the shame suffered by my cheeks!

EURIPIDES: O, what is this that's overtaken my tongue? Some speechlessness has rendered me speechless! He turns Mnesilochus' face towards him O! O, tell me once more, fair girl! Tell me again! What do my eyes perceive? Lady, who are you?

MNESILOCHUS: And you, stranger? Who are you? Your words have been snatched from my mouth!

EURIPIDES: But... are you Greek? Or are you from these parts? Are you an Egyptian?

MNESILOCHUS: I am a woman born in Greece. You, now tell me everything about you.

EURIPIDES: Dear Lady! You are identical to my Lady, Helen!

MNESILOCHUS: And you! Your clothes, stranger declare a Menelaos!

EURIPIDES: O, me! Indeed, my Lady your eyes do not deceive you. I am, indeed that very same, unfortunate creature! *(They embrace passionately. Euripides' phallus creates a problem until Mnesilochus tucks it in between his legs.)*

MNESILOCHUS: Come, come, come darling husband into your wife's flower! So long! It's been so long since you have taken me, husband! Take me! Take me now and hold me deeeep into your arms! Come, come! Come let me kiss you! Come, come! Let us elope! Let us run away together quickly!

(They begin to sneak away but Kritylla stops them, wielding a threatening torch)

KRITYLLA: I swear by the two almighty goddesses, Demeter and Persephone! I'll clobber to death anyone who tries to run away with you, you useless loser!

EURIPIDES: What? Will you begrudge me taking my own wife home to Sparta with me? This here is Helen! Helen, Tyndareus' very own daughter!

KRITYLLA: Oh yeah? I reckon you're just as big a conman as this idiot is and I reckon you two are mates! Now I know why both of you have been behaving like two sly Egyptians, crapping on about Egypt! Aha! Now he'll pay his dues! Here's the Magistrate with a cop!

(Enter the Magistrate and a Skythian archer. The archer holds a bow and a whip. A quiver of arrows hangs from his shoulder. From his belt hangs a long menacing sword.)

EURIPIDES: *(whispers to Mnesilochus.)* Oh, no! I've gotta slide out of here somehow.

MNESILOCHUS: *(whispers back)* Hey, what about me? What am I supposed to do?

EURIPIDES: You just stay calm, mate. I won't let you down. Not, at least while I'm still breathing and while my supply of schemes holds out. *(Mnesilochus hops off the altar and stretches his gown wide concealing Euripides' escape.)*

MNESILOCHUS: Bugger! What a waste of time this fishing line was! Caught nothing with it!

MAGISTRATE: *(To Kritylla)* Right! Is this the crooked bastard that Kleisthenes told us about? *(To Mnesilochus)* You! You there! Why are you looking so guilty! *(To the archer)* Take him around the back and tie him to an executioner's plank. Then bring him back here and watch him very carefully. If anyone comes anywhere near him, rip out your whip and whip the crap outa him!

KRITYLLA: Yeah! Watch him very carefully because just now a man came around and tried to run off with him! The cunning little sail-patcher!

MNESILOCHUS: *(runs over to the Magistrate, takes his hand and pleads.)* O, dear Magistrate! Let me take you by this bribe-loving hand of yours and let me beg you, in this the final hour before my execution - do me a small favour?

MAGISTRATE: What sort of favour?

MNESILOCHUS: Please, Your Honour, tell that policeman to strip me naked before tying up at the executioner's plank. Have mercy on an old man, Your Honour. Look at me! I'm clothed in veils and women's dresses. When the vultures come down to tear at my flesh they'll cack themselves laughing!

MAGISTRATE: Nonsense! Council's orders! You will be executed in the clothes you are now wearing. Let the type and extent of your criminality be noted by everyone!

MNESILOCHUS: (*Tugging at his clothes madly*) You see clothes? You see what you've gone and done to me? Dresses! I can't see how on earth I'll save my neck now!

(*The Magistrate and Kritylla exit one way while the policeman directing*)

CHORUS: Right then, Ladies! It's a Ladies' Festival, the Festival of our two most reverend goddesses, makers of law and so, we should now honour them with the customary celebratory dance! These are the two goddesses who our very own artist, Pauson the pauper, also honours and respects and for whom he fasts to starvation! He, too, prays, as we do, that these festivals continue to be celebrated for all eternity. (*Music*) Light on your feet, now, girls! Easy, breezy feet! That's it, make a circle! Now spin it all about... hold hands... quick steps... that's it! Careful... keep up with the beat now! Good! Now look to the left... look to the right... look to the left again... now eyes all around! Swing your bums a bit... thank you ladies! Voices! Sing the song of praise now girls!

(*Chanting*)

"Praise and glory be to all the gods on Mount Olympus!" (*Shouts of ecstasy and frenzy interspersed with the song.*) And if any of you in the audience think that we'll be shouting abuses at men just because this is a women's festival, you're wrong! Let's do something new, here, girls! Something innovative! Let's see some new steps now in this circle! Steps never seen on a stage ever before! Oh, yeah!

Apollo, god of the lyre, we praise you!

Artemis, chaste goddess of the hunt, we praise you! Artemis, whose arrows rich far, grant us the crown of victory in the field of war and dance!

Hera, goddess of marriage, guardian of the dance and of the key to the nuptial bedroom, we adore you!

And you, two gods, Hermes the protector of the shepherd and Pan, come with your beloved Nymphs and grace our dance with your approving smiles!

Oh yeah!

Come girls! A new step now! Double-quick, double spunk, double the dance, double the fun! It's a Festival, girls! Give it to the Divine pair! And don't forget to do your fasting, now! Stay hungry! It's a solemn Festival!

Oh, yeah!

Spin that subtle foot about again, girls! Hold onto the rhythm tight now! And... sing loud, sing clear, sing well and let the Heaven hear! Heaven hear us!

Bacchus! Bacchus! Bacchus! God with the ivy crown, lead our dance! Come Lord Bacchus! It's you we praise, it's for you we dance with such

frenzy! Evius, son of Zeus and Semele, Bromius, lover of noise and din,
lover of pretty chorus girls and nymphs of the woody mountains!

Bacchus! You sing with girls and you dance with them and you shout out
the sacred sound:

Evoi! Evoi! Evoi!

And your echo resounds in the thick foliage and the crags of mount
Kitheron

Evoi! Evoi! Evoi!

And the burgeoning tendrils of the ivy girdle your body.

*(Mnesilochus enters, chained to a tall wooden cross. He is held by the
archer who guides him roughly to the altar. The archer speaks "broken"
English with a strong, foreign accent.)*

ARCHER: You stand right there! You groan and groan all you like now. The
winds be your audience!

MNESILOCHUS: Please, please, mister archer...

ARCHER: No say "please" to me, mate!

MNESILOCHUS: Please loosen my chains a bit!

ARCHER: Loosen, ey? Sure! *(He tightens them instead)*

MNESILOCHUS: Bloody hell! Ouch! Ahhhhh! You're making them tighter!

ARCHER: Want more looser still? *(Tightens them a bit more)*

MNESILOCHUS: Ouch, ouch, ouchy ouch! Rotten bastard!

ARCHER: Ha! If you no like shut your traps! Now I'm off to get me a little
mat, to me lie down a little bit, while I'm guard for you!

(Exit Archer)

MNESILOCHUS: That's what I get for loving Euripides! (Suddenly he sees
something deep into the sky. He follows it across over the stage.) Yes! By
Zeus the Saviour and by all the other gods on Mount Olympus! I can see a
ray of hope up there! I think! What? What was that? Ah, ha! Looks like
the boy hasn't abandoned me yet! I just saw him flying across the sky, like
Perseus wearing Hermes' winged sandals and winged cap! I suppose this
means I ought to change roles now. Take up the role of Andromeda, I
guess. *(Examines his wardrobe.)* No probs. Chains. I've got all the props I
need for the job. And he's flying right this way! *(Declaims as if in the part
of Andromeda)* Oh, dear, dear virgins! How can I escape from the archer's
chains? How can I run away? You, Echo! Echo of deep leafy caves! Do you
hear my call? *(He listens for an echo. To no avail.)* Allow me, please dear
virgins to leave this place and go home to my wife!

Here I am, girls: A man whose Fate has tortured him so much and now has
him even chained by this wild beast of an archer! One bad Fate after
another! I've only just escaped the claws of a miserable old hag and now
my full destruction awaits! It's a destruction I'm sure I won't be able to

escape. This... this Skythian cop is all over me! Won't take his ugly eyes off me. Chained me all up and turned me into lunch for the vultures. (*Looks all around him*) Dear gods! I feel so lonely! Not a friendly face anywhere! Where are the girls of my age? Where are the dances? Where is my prayer candle? Just chains! Wrapped up and ready to be served as a cute little morsel to that glutton of a man, Glaucetes! O, dear, dear friends! Sing a song of sorrow for me! Sing no joyful wedding songs for me! I am not free, my friends; I am shackled! In shackles and in misery! Oh, how dreadfully I suffer this suffering! Poor, poor, alas, poor me! The tragedy of it is that I suffer this suffering because of a relative of mine! My own son-in-law has caused me this suffering! Such suffering! Hades! I implore you! I send you my tears, my groans! I implore the man who shaved me! The man who singed my bum-fluff, The man who dressed me up in these saffron gowns, The man who made me come here, to this temple of women! Save me! O, God who rules my Fate, why are you so cruel? Great gods, I am a wretched man! Could anyone witness my awful suffering and not lose a tear? O, if only a thunderbolt would strike this barbarian who's guarding me! Destroy him! (*Looks up to the sun*) O, I cannot look upon that bright light with pleasure any more! That immortal light of the sun. Not while I'm hung up here, chained to this plank! Not while I'm spinning down to Hades so fast! Not while I'm in chains! Not while I'm being strangled to death!

(Enter Echo)

ECHO: Dear girl, hello! (*Examines Mnesilochus' predicament carefully, then goes behind him and behind the altar.*) Goodness! I hope the gods make minced meat out of your nasty, nasty daddy, Kepheus! Fancy making you stand out here like this! Fully exposed! Nasty man!

MNESILOCHUS: Ey? Who are you? How come you feel sorry for me?

ECHO: Me? My name is Echo. I... I'm repetitive by nature and repetitive by occupation. In other words, I repeat... everything I hear. It was I who had helped dear old Euripides win the Drama Prize, last year, at this very spot, in fact! Your turn now! Come on, start wailing!

MNESILOCHUS: And, I suppose, you'll repeat my wailing, will you?

ECHO: Yes, that's my job. Go on!

MNESILOCHUS: Ooooo, Holy Night! How tardy you are, Holy Night! How slowly your horses run their course across the starry heavens, across the starry kingdom of Ether and Olympus!

ECHO: ...across the starry kingdom of Ether and Olympus!

MNESILOCHUS: O, but why should Andromeda be forced to bear all the misfortunes of the world?

ECHO: ...the misfortunes of the world?

MNESILOCHUS: What miserable death awaits me!

ECHO: ...death awaits me!

MNESILOCHUS: You're being bloody annoying, now, you old nag!

ECHO: ...now, you old nag!

MNESILOCHUS: By Zeus! Very, very bloody annoying! Stop interrupting me!

ECHO: ...annoying! Stop interrupting me!

MNESILOCHUS: Darling, do me this favour! Let me wail on my own, will you please? There's a good girl! Now, please stop!

ECHO: ...girl! Now please stop!

MNESILOCHUS: Argh! To the crows with you, woman!

ECHO: Argh! To the crows with you, woman!

MNESILOCHUS: What IS it with you?

ECHO: What IS it with you?

MNESILOCHUS: Babble, babble, babble!

ECHO: Babble, babble, babble!

MNESILOCHUS: Watch out, you'll be doing some real wailing now!

ECHO: ...doing some real wailing now!

MNESILOCHUS: Die, you bitch!

ECHO: Die, you bitch!

(Enter Archer carrying a mat. He cannot see Echo who is behind the altar.)

ARCHER: Oi! What all this yakity yak about?

ECHO: ...all this yakity yak about?

ARCHER: Hmm... I think I better call the Magistrates!

ECHO: ...think I better call the Magistrates!

ARCHER: What's going on?

ECHO: What's going on?

ARCHER: Where in Hades is that voice coming from?

ECHO: ...is that voice coming from?

ARCHER: *(To Mnesilochus)* Hey! Is that you?

ECHO: Hey! Is that you?

ARCHER: You be running tears of pain from your eyes for this!

ECHO: ...running tears of pain from your eyes for this!

ARCHER: You pulling me foot?

ECHO: You pulling me foot?

MNESILOCHUS: No, no, no, by Zeus! It's not me. It's that woman behind me!

ECHO: ...woman behind me!

ARCHER: (*Looks around*) Woman? Where? Where the woman-bitch?

ECHO: Woman? Where? Where the woman-bitch?

MNESILOCHUS: Look, there! She's running away!

ARCHER: Hey, where you goin'?

ECHO: Hey, where you goin'?

ARCHER: I catch you! You no get away with this!

ECHO: ...get away with this!

ARCHER: Still squealing, are ya?

ECHO: Still squealing, are ya?

ARCHER: Grab the woman-bitch!

ECHO: (*as she runs off the stage*) Grab the woman-bitch!

ARCHER: Bloody, bloody, bloody squealing squealy woman-bitch!

(*The Archer lies down on the mat for a short moment **before Euripides enters**, leaping and bounding about as if trying to fly. He is dressed in the role of Perseus: winged cap and winged sandals and carrying a bag with the head of Medusa in it.*)

EURIPIDES: O, gods! O, speedy sandals! To which barbaric land have you brought me? I have flown through all the highways and byways of all the skies with my winged feet, heading for Argos. I am Perseus and in this bag I am carrying the head of a Gorgon!

ARCHER: (*Jumps up, whip at the ready.*) What you say? You got head of the Suckatary in bag? Suckatary Gorgos?

EURIPIDES: I said it's the head of a Gorgon!

ARCHER: Yeah, I say Gorgos, too!

EURIPIDES: (*Looks around him pretending he sees Mnesilochus for the first time*) Ah, but what is this rock I see before me? And there! There, beside it, who may this divine maiden be, moored upon it like a fair boat, ready for her virgin voyage?

MNESILOCHUS: O, dear, dear friend! Come! Pity me my dire misfortune! Untie these awful fetters from me!

ARCHER: You! No more yakity yak! You say one word and you be dead divine virgin maiden!

EURIPIDES: O, divine virgin! My heart breaks when I see you hanging there like that!

ARCHER: Hahaha! She no virgin! She a dirty man! A naughty, naughty old man! She... eh... he a bad thief and a bad... sneaky, sneaky man!

EURIPIDES: You're delirious, Skythian! That there is Andromeda, Kepheus' darling daughter!

ARCHER: (*Points at Mnesilochus' phallus*) Hahaha! Look there! Look at her fig... It's no little fig is it? Noooo, it's big... (*gesticulates an enormous cock.*)

EURIPIDES: O, do give me her fair hand that I may hold it in mine. Come, come, Skythian! Let me! All humans have their illness and I'm ill to the heart with lust for this girl!

ARCHER: Yuk! You got sick all right! I no like that one! You... I turn him round and you fuck him backside, yes?

EURIPIDES: (*becomes physical*) Ah, no. Why don't you untie her and let me rush her quickly to my... wedding bed?

ARCHER: You want fast fuck? Why you no go behind and dig hole on wood. Fuck him bum good, from there.

EURIPIDES: (*Clearly frustrated. He moves towards Mnesilochus.*) By Zeus, No! I'll just untie...

ARCHER: (*Lifts his whip*) No, no! I whip you!

EURIPIDES: Nevertheless, I'm going to untie her!

ARCHER: (*Pulls out a sword from his belt*) I chop off her head with this big sword!

EURIPIDES: (*Terrified now. To the audience.*) Now what? What am I supposed to do now? Refined words defy the brains of barbarians! No point in trying anything subtle with such brutes! You're wasting time and effort. I think I better go away and think some more about it!

ARCHER: (*Also to the audience*) I think he tricky fox! He try something more tricky again!

(Exit Euripides)

MNESILOCHUS: (*Shouts at Euripides as he leaves.*) Perseus! Don't forget the dire trouble I'm in!

ARCHER: You like more whip? (*Archer goes over to his mat and falls asleep.*)

CHORUS:

Pallas Athena! Dance lover!
The law has it that I must invite you to join our dance,
So, come now, dear Virgin! Dear unwedded girl!
Almighty goddess who alone holds the key to our city and who so
righteously despises tyrants!
Appear before us now!
We, the women of the city call you!
Come and bring dance-loving Peace with you!
You, too, most Divine pair!
Come, Demeter and Persephone,
Gentle of heart and joyous of temper!
Come to this, Ladies! To your very own fair precinct!
Where men cannot enter!
Where men cannot witness our sacred rites!

They cannot take part in the rites which you
Shower with the light of torches!
Torches that show us your immortal faces.
Come goddesses, come! We beg you!
Reverent law-maker goddesses!
We've called you before and you came
So come to us again now because again we beseech you!

*(Enter Euripides with Fawn, a dancing girl and Teredon, a flute boy.
Euripides is dressed up as an old procuress. His face is hidden by a veil.)*

EURIPIDES: *(Makes an announcement.)* Ladies, ladies, ladies! I hereby give you this chance: *(He reveals his face to the sudden astonishment of the women.)* Ladies, if you wish to clinch a deal with me, to strike an everlasting bargain with me, now is the time! I will sign up to the promise that not one woman will ever be insulted by me again! Never! Not insulted in any way! Now, that's what I propose!

CHORUS: And you're doing this because?

EURIPIDES: That guy there, you've got chained at the plank is my father-in-law. If you let me take him home with me, that'll be the end of my insults. You'll never hear a nasty word about you from me. But, if you don't, if you won't release him to me, then, rest assured, all of your seedy activities while your husbands are the battlefield, will be revealed to them upon their return!

CHORUS: Done! It's a deal as far as we're concerned. But about that chained man, you've got to try and persuade that barbarian there.

EURIPIDES: Right! I'll do that. To his companions. Now you two! Fawn, do you remember what I told you to do on the way here? Fawn nods Yeah, good, first just lift your skirts a bit and shake your cheeks as you dance back and forth in front of the archer. Teredon, you play something for her to dance to. Something Persian. All right? *(The music and dancing begins. Euripides hides his face behind the veil again)*

ARCHER: *(Wakes up)* Oi! What's going on? Too many noise! Big party wake me up!

EURIPIDES: Sorry, mister policeman! The girl is doing a bit of rehearsing before she goes off to entertain some gentlemen.

ARCHER: Oooo! Dancing! Sure, she dance! Dance, girly dance! She very, very pretty! She very, very hop-hop. Like a flea in the wool!

EURIPIDES: Right! Now Fawn, darling. Take off your dress and go sit on the Skythian's lap. *(She obeys.)* Good, now bring your legs out for me so I can take off your sandals.

ARCHER: Oh, yeaaaah. Sit down, sit down, yeah, little girlie, yeah, little girlie. Ooooo, what beautiful titties... oooooh, just like beautiful turnips... Ohhhh!

EURIPIDES: Teredon, play a bit faster for the girl! *(Teredon obeys)* *(To Fawn)* You're not afraid of the Skythian any more, are you, darling?

ARCHER: Ohhh! Very, very good bum, too! (*Talking to his phallus*) Oi, you! You bad boy! You cry if you no stay inside. Oooo, beautiful body! Phallus pops up!

EURIPIDES: Well done, girl! Now pick up your clothes and both of you run like hell!

ARCHER: (*Disappointed*) Oh! No kissy, kissy first?

EURIPIDES: Kissy, kissy? Oh, all right. Go ahead, Fawn, give him a kiss. (*She obeys*)

ARCHER: Ooooo, so very, very, sweet! Tongue sweet like the honey from Attica! Oooo, you no want to... sleep with me?

EURIPIDES: (*Drags her from the archer's arms*) No, mister Archer. That wish will not eventuate. Come on, we've got to go.

ARCHER: Oooo, old lady wait! Please old lady... one wish only...

EURIPIDES: You got lots of money for me? One drachma?

ARCHER: Sure! Sure, I give lots of money.

EURIPIDES: Well, where is it? Give it to me!

ARCHER: Give it to me? I have nothing with me... offers him his quiver Here, take quiver... but I give you money and you give back to me after! To Dawn You, girlie, you come with me. To Euripides, indicating Mnesilochus You watch that old man there very, very carefully, yes? What's your name, old lady?

EURIPIDES: Artemisia.

ARCHER: (*Poking at his temple*) I remember name: Artamoochia! (*Exit Archer with Fawn*)

EURIPIDES: (*Removes the veil*) Good old Hermes! Full of tricks as always. What good luck he's brought me so far! Teredon, you can run off, too, now! Hands him the quiver And take this stuff with you. I'll go and get the old guy unchained. (*Teredon exits. Euripides walks over to Mnesilochus and begins to unchain him*) Now listen pop, the moment I let you loose, you run like buggery and go home, right? Off to your wife and kids. Got it?

MNESILOCHUS: Absolutely! The very second I'm free!

EURIPIDES: There you go! Now run! Run off before the archer comes back in and arrests you again.

MNESILOCHUS: Done!

(*Exit Mnesilochus and, a moment later, after taking a final "fairwell" look all around him, Euripides follows. A short moment before Fawn and the Archer return.*)

ARCHER: (*before noticing the absence of Euripides and Mnesilochus*) Your little girlie is very nice, old lady Artamoochia, very, very happy to me. Do everything very, very nice. Easy and nice. (*Looks all around. To the chorus:*) Hey! Where's the old lady? O, no! They kill me! O, no! Where's

the old man? Where he gone? Shouts Lady! Lady! Where are you? O, I no like this very, very much! This very, very bad! Artamoooochia! Old lady! O, the old bad, bad lady! She trick me! *(To Fawn)* You run for her! Run quick! Catch old lady! *(Fawn runs off. He searches through his stuff and sees that his quiver is gone)* Ha! My quiver! She's gone! Quiver takes arrows I take shafts. Up the bum! They fuck me very, very good! What I do now? Shit! *(Shouts)* Old lady! Old lady, where are you? Artamoooochia!

CHORUS: Are you looking for that old lady with the harp?

ARCHER: Yeah, yeah, you see him?

CHORUS: That old lady went off with an old man. That way!

ARCHER: *(Turns in the direction she pointed and begins to go that way.)*
The old man... he wear yellow dress, yes?

CHORUS: Yes, yes, that's him, all right. If you want to catch them you have to run... that way indicating the opposite direction now.

ARCHER: Very, very nasty old lady! Which way I run? *(Shouts)*
Artamooooochia!

CHORUS: That way! To the right... up there... Hey where are you going?
No, not that way, that way! Quick run! No, not that way! You're going the wrong way again!

ARCHER: Oooo! I'm running, I'm running, I'm running!
Artamooooochia!

(Exit Archer)

CHORUS: Run, you idiot, run after them! Run all the way to the crows! And we, too, ladies! Enough fun for a day! Time for us all to go back to our home and let us pray that the pair of law-loving goddesses reward us well for our work today!

Dr. D's abbreviated cultural notes:

(1) Athenian comedy was (as you will quickly notice) full of sexual innuendo, sexual situations, and frank language. The humor in it also tended to be on the slapstick side. But in addition:

(2) It was very much oriented to the immediate concerns of Athenians at a given time. In *Thesmophoriazousai*, Aristophanes (whom we encounter again at Plato's Symposium as the guest at a dinner party) satirizes public figures, such as the playwright Agathon (the host of the drinking party in the Symposium, so probably a close acquaintance or friend of his), Kleisthenes (a political figure who often acted as an emissary in the war in which Athens was engaged in, and who may or may not have been known as effeminate or pathic), and Kleonymus, a prominent political leader who had supported a disastrous military expedition that Aristophanes, an outspoken advocate of making peace, had opposed, and who was probably not known for cowardice [throwing away his shield, a shorthand for making a cowardly retreat]. There are a great many "in jokes" that might

sail past us – for example, the personal references, or the reference to Scythian archers, foreign mercenaries hired as a kind of police force for Athens, who may or may not have spoken Greek badly with heavy accents.

(3) Euripides is a character in the play, and a lot of the humor comes from comic stagings of his recent plays, notably *Helen*, which depicts Helen and Menelaus meeting when he is shipwrecked in Egypt, with the premise being that not Helen herself, but an image of her, was taken to Troy, while the real Helen was trapped in Egypt. Also, there are scenes from the lost play *Andromeda*, in which the heroine is chained to a rock, waiting for a sea serpent to come eat her, until the hero Perseus comes to rescue her. Other references are sprinkled throughout, which the version I've linked below notes.

(4) Thesmophoria was a yearly festival in which married, sexually active women performed rites to Demeter in order to assure the prosperity of the next year's crops. It was a disconcerting time for male Athenians, since their wives and daughters spent three days away from home, camping on the hill that usually served as the male assembly place in which political discussions took place and weighty decisions made. (There were very rarely times when wives spent the night away from home, and even fewer when large numbers of women gathered without men.) Thesmophoria, as a fertility festival, contained some elements of sexual joking and obscenity. But it was regarded as a serious festival, necessary to the right relationship with Demeter and the city's prosperity.

(5) Staging: Comedies were put on in the same theater in which tragedies were staged. But the presentation was rather different. In contrast to the serious and beautiful masks of tragedy, the masks of comedy were ugly and ridiculous, so that characters appeared onstage already satirized. In addition – the costume element most disconcerting to us – all the male characters appeared on stage wearing giant leather phalluses, which would have waved around amusingly whenever they danced around (for whatever reason). As always, the text does not have any stage directions, but this translation has reconstructed the stage action from attention to the text, and I would say represents pretty well what would have happened on the stage.

(6) For an edition with notes, see:

<http://www.ellopos.net/elpenor/greek-texts/ancient-greece/aristophanes/thesmophoriazusae.asp>