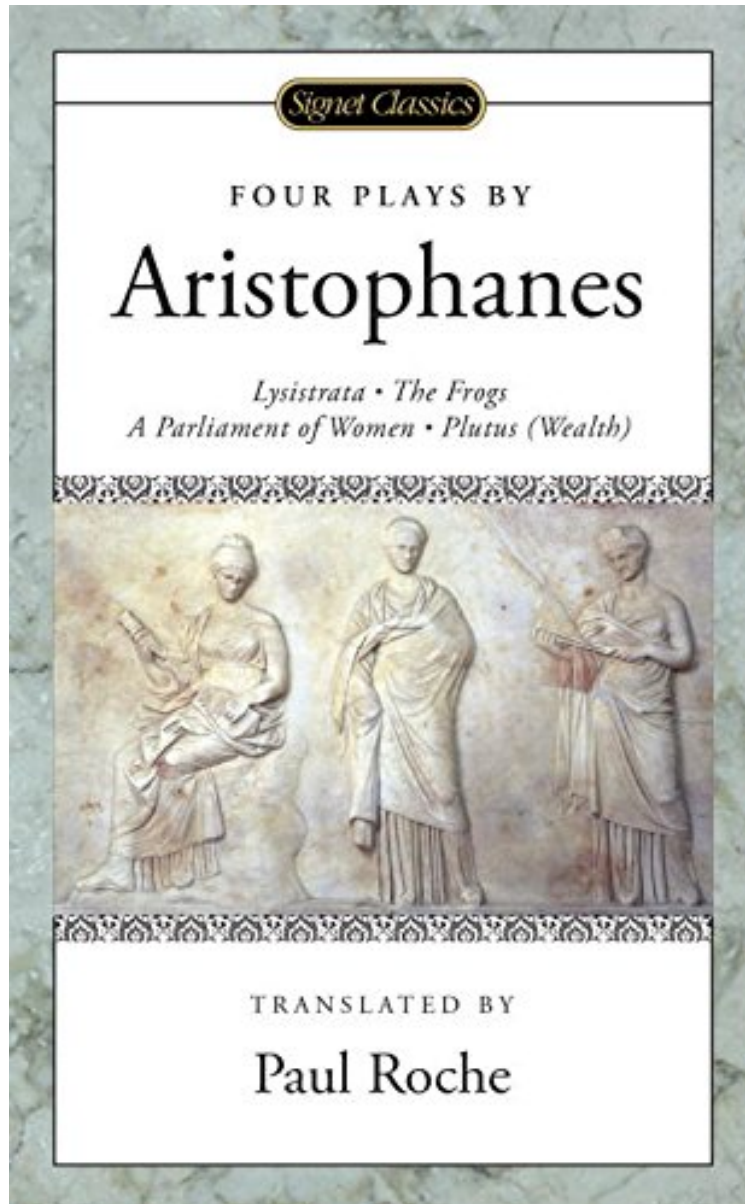


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Whether his target is the war between the sexes or his fellow playwright Euripides, Aristophanes is the most important Greek comic dramatist and one of the greatest comic playwrights of all time. His writing at once bawdy and delicate brilliantly fuses serious political satire with pyrotechnical bombast, establishing the tradition of comedy as high art. His messages are as timely and relevant today as they were in ancient Greece, and his plays still provoke laughter and thought. This volume features four celebrated masterpieces: *Lysistrata*, *The Frogs*, *A Parliament of Women* and *Plutus (Wealth)*, all translated by the distinguished poet and translator Paul Roche.

About the Author Aristophanes is the most important Greek comic dramatist and one of the greatest comic playwrights of all ages. Little is known about his life except that he was of Athenian parentage and either lived or owned land on Aegina. He composed about fifty-five comedies, of which only eleven plays and numerous fragments remain. Aristophanes comedies continue to be a valuable aid to an appreciation of the Athenian culture of the late fifth century B.C. Paul Roche (1916-2007) was a distinguished English poet, translator, and the author of *The Bible's Greatest Stories*. His other translations include *Euripides: Ten Plays*; *Sophocles: The Complete Plays*, and *The Orestes Plays of Aeschylus*. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. SIGNET

CLASSICS INTRODUCTION ARISTOPHANES The dates of Aristophanes birth and death are variously given, but 445/375 B.C. is a possibility. We know that he was considered too young to present his first three plays in his own name: the lost *Daitelis* (*The Banqueters*), which won second prize at the Lenaea in 427 B.C., when he would only have been about eighteen; the lost *Babylonians*, which won second prize in 426 B.C.; and *The Acharnians*, which brought him first prize in 425 B.C. when he was barely twenty. These plays and the four that followed over the next four years are the work of a very young man endowed with the courage to level unrelenting attacks on no less than the head of state the demagogic Cleon. Like the great tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides (and, I expect, the poets of all ages), he decried the destructiveness and sheer stupidity of war, and in his most celebrated plays he warned and pleaded against it. Yet for twenty-seven years of his writing life, with one brief interval, Athens was at war with Sparta in an internecine struggle that finally left her exhausted and shorn of her glory, never fully to recover. Aristophanes had no respect for shoddy politicians like Cleon, who plunged Athens into campaigns that led to defeat and decline, and he lampooned them without mercy. He himself came from a landowning family and his political outlook was conservative. Not necessarily in favor of oligarchy, he believed that democracy was best served by the brightest minds and not by selfish, clamorous demagogues. He was conservative too in his general thought, defending religion though he laughed at the gods, and he was suspicious of contemporary philosophy. He mocked Socrates as a Sophist knowing full well he was as anti-Sophist as Aristophanes himself; it was just too easy to use him as a scapegoat because he was well known and easy to parody. Aristophanes conservatism did not extend to his language, which is almost unimaginably rich and varied. The obscenity that crops up here and there is funny because it is unexpected. When one considers the milieu in which the plays were presented under the auspices of the state, to the entire population, at a religious festival under the presidency of a priest and on consecrated ground how could it not be hilariously incongruous? It was as if somebody (preferably the grandest dignitary present) trumpeted a fart in a solemn moment at high mass. But it is incongruous too because the rest of Greek literature from Homer to Thucydides (if we except Sappho) is so well behaved. Yet we ought not to be surprised by the phallic thrust of Aristophanes jokes, because the origins of comedy are undoubtedly found in fertility rites at the dawn of drama. Sex, after all, is the oldest human hobby. Having said all this, it is important to add that the plays of Aristophanes are serious. In them he confronts and dares to laugh out of court some current trend or action or human aberration. He recognized that the prime function of the poet is to reduce to order Shelley's unacknowledged legislator of this world in other words, to preserve a world worth living in, with the greatest political and personal freedom consonant with order, and the leisure to enjoy it all. This is essential teaching at an organic level, and it is done not by giving information the way of prose but by lifting the spirit to a new plane of truth and beauty. Ut doceat, ut demonstrat, ut delectat. 2 Such is the brief of the poet, and it is this last, to please, which is the touchstone of lasting poetry. This does not mean that poetry deals only with the beautiful but that when it deals with ugliness it remains in itself beautiful. Not only was Aristophanes one of

the greatest poets of antiquity but, in the words of Lemprieres Classical Dictionary, the greatest comic dramatist in world literature: by his side Molire seems dull and Shakespeare clownish. Be that as it may, the lyrics of Aristophanes present the translator with an irresistible but crippling challenge, and the best he can do to meet it if he is really trying to translate and not just to paraphrase or adapt is ineluctably doomed to be a poor reflection of the original. Nevertheless, even this pittance is well worth trawling for.***THE PLAYS

Of Aristophanes forty-four comedies, only eleven have come down to us: The Acharnians, which won first prize at the Lenaea in 425 B.C. when he was about twenty; The Knights, a courageous attack on Cleon, then at the height of his power, which also won first prize, in 424 B.C.; The Clouds, in 423 B.C., which for some reason was not a success and which he rewrote (it is this second version that survives); The Wasps, winning second prize in 422 B.C.; and Peace, again with second prize, in 421 B.C. After this comes a gap of six years in which what he wrote is unknown to us, but in 414 B.C. came The Birds, perhaps his masterpiece and another second-prize winner. Thereafter we have no record of prizes, but we do know that he produced Lysistrata in 411 B.C.; the Thesmophoriazousae (Women at the Festival of Demeter) in 411 B.C.; The Frogs in 405 B.C.; Ecclesiazusae (A Parliament of Women) in 392 B.C.; and Plutus (Wealth) in 388 B.C. (There were two additional comedies of which we do not even have the titles.) In the Ecclesiazusae, produced when Aristophanes was about fifty-three not old in our day but comparable to sixty-five or seventy there is a slackening of the youthful zest of his earlier comedies, and the choruses that were so essential to their lyric ebullience are greatly reduced. This perhaps is the first step in the evolution of what is known as Old Comedy into New. In Plutus, some four years later, the transmogrification is complete. The chief features of New Comedy are that it virtually did away with the choruses, turning them into musical interludes (a direction already taken by Euripides); it presented characters as types rather than as individuals; it constructed elaborate plots rather than letting the context itself of a story dictate the setting; it discarded topical allusions, political satire and direct attacks on individuals, and it introduced the ups and downs, the torture and the ecstasy, of romantic love. As to this last, New Comedy was the progenitor of the boy-meets-girl story, as well as all the clever Cox-and-Box mix-ups of mistaken identity. It is in fact the blueprint of drama such as we know it, with its complex but logical plots, its love entanglements, and its domestic comedy of manners. The chief exponent of New Comedy was Menander (ca. 342-292 B.C.), the Aristophanes of his generation, of whose work we have extensive fragments and one almost-complete play, Dyskolos (The Grouch). It is, however, mainly through Roman adaptors, Plautus and Terence, that we know his work.***CHORUS, COSTUMES, STRUCTURE, MUSIC

There were twenty-four actors in the chorus, which was divided into two sets of twelve that could sing and dance against each other. The chorus members were elaborately dressed in costumes on which large sums of money were spent. The choruses wore masks suitable to their parts: birds, frogs, wasps and these masks in themselves must have generated a good deal of merriment. One can imagine the laughter that must have greeted the appearance of the dog Cleonacur in The Wasps, almost certainly wearing a mask that was an unmistakable caricature of the despised Cleon. Reflecting back to the Dionysiac fertility rituals of the Comus the origins of comedy the members of the chorus wore long floppy phalluses strapped to them, but these need not have been always visible and could be hidden if need be by a variety of clothing. Though the members of the chorus were not professional actors, as were the leading players, they were rigorously trained in dance and song at least six months preparation being thought necessary. Music, dance, and song were at the heart of the performance, and one would not be far wrong in regarding an Aristophanic comedy more as a musical than a play. All parts, including female, were played by men. The naked flute girl Dardanis, for instance, in The Wasps, would have been a boy or young man dressed in tights with female breasts painted on him. As to its general structure, the Aristophanic comedy followed this pattern: (1) Prologue, which could be a dialogue; (2) Parados, or entry of the Chorus, singing and dancing in character; (3) the Agon, or debate; and (4) the Parabasis, or address of the Chorus to the audience in the name of the author. Each of these sections was characterized by its own particular meters and system of prosodic repetition akin to the strophe and antistrophe of Tragedy. The music was provided by flute, lyre and kettledrum. Strophe literally means turning (one way), so antistrophe would mean turning the other. These refer to movements of the Chorus: either the whole Chorus or the Chorus split into two, each part balancing the other. Normally strophe and antistrophe are identical in the number, meter, and length of lines.***THE TRANSLATION

Aristophanes is not easy to translate: He stretches the Greek language that most elastic of tongues to the breaking point and uses a vocabulary almost Shakespearian in its variety and richness: five or six times as large as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. And as if it were not enough, he puns and coins words at the drop of an iota subscript. Moreover, the plays are in verse that shifts from one intricate meter to another throughout. Some translators have valiantly set out to reflect this teeming prosody by using rhyme, but the results for the most part seem merely forced or fussy. My own solution is first of all to reflect the meter as far as I can, and then to echo rhyme more often than to use it, though I do use it fairly strictly in the choral parts where the sound pattern of the Greek becomes emphatic and condensed. Did Aristophanes himself use rhyme? Yes, but not in the way we do. Greek versification compared to English is more like a plum pudding than a blancmange. In blancmange you get what you see. In a plum pudding you get what you don't see. Greek prosody is stuffed with every kind of syllabic analogy: assonance, consonance, alliteration, rhyme but because Greek is a polysyllabic language these sounds are buried in the middle of words, and even if they are at the end of lines they don't get the same stress that they would in

English. Consequently, this matching of sound with sound, Greek with English, is not subtle enough, especially when it comes to rhyme. Putting Aristophanes into the straitjacket of English versification is like trying to turn plum pudding into a blancmange; perhaps this is a misleading simile, though, for English, far from being a blancmange, shares with Greek the delight in a rich variation of sounds. The difference ultimately is between a constantly polysyllabic language and a seldomly polysyllabic one. To use rhyme in an attempt to reflect Aristophanes verbal effulgence produces something that is not nearly subtle enough. For this reason, I use rhyme warily, though I do use it, and instead I put the burden of capturing Aristophanes variations of sound, tone, and rhythm on a novel system of prosody that I call, rather grandly, sonic intercoping. This means that the end syllable of every line is coped, that is, topped with or tied into the endings of other lines before and after. Thus one gets the effects of verse without actually using verse. Let me demonstrate this by taking a page at random from *Lysistrata* and showing how all the lines are sonically linked. One need not be conscious of this while reading the play. It will have its effect willy-nilly, so long as the flow of a passage reads naturally and the tie-ins of the preceding and succeeding lines do not seem forced. If on occasion they do, the fault is mine.

that comes with women. (a) MENS LEADER: Wait till you hear how they've gone (a) completely beyond the pale with their jars of water (b) and almost drowned us, so that (c) we had to wring out our clothing later (b) as if we'd peed in it. (c) MAGISTRATE: Great briny Poseidon, we get (c) exactly what we deserve. (d) We ourselves collaborate with our womenfolk (e) and abet them in behavior that's absurd. (d) What follows is a blooming herbacious border of nonsense. We go into a jeweler's and say something like: (e) Goldsmith, you know that torque, (3) the one you made my wife, she was dancing with it on (f) the other night, and the prong (f) slipped out of its groove. (g) I have to go to Salamis, so do you think (e) you could spare the time one evening to pop into her and fit the prong inside her groove? (g) Any reader who wants to stop and analyze the system will see that sonic intercoping is based on a play of consonance, assonance, and alliteration, occasionally bolstered by rhyme. Let me take five lines from *A Parliament of Women* and trawl them in my English translation and see how much can be retrieved. But first, let us be clear about the following.

Assonance: the same vowel sound enclosed by different consonants: boat, soul
Consonance: the same consonants enclosing different vowels: boat, but
Alliteration: syllables beginning with the same consonants or vowels: watered, wine; angry, assassins
Rhyme: the same vowel sound preceded by different consonants: boat, coat; at, bat

The English translation
If he can do it, I swear by this dawning day that we too can carry out a coup and essay something for our city, but as things are we lie stuck in the doldrums with power of neither sail nor oar.

Line 1: 4 assonances: if, it, ing, this
2 half consonances: can, dawn
6 alliterations: if, it, I; do, dawn, day
Line 2: 6 assonances: that, can, car, and; too, coup
4 half consonances: can, car; that, out
3 alliterations: can, carry, coup
4 rhymes: too, coup; day, say
Line 3: 5 assonances: thing, things, cit; our, are
5 half consonances: thing, things; for, our, are
Line 4: 2 assonances: stuck, drums
2 half consonances: stuck, drums
2 alliterations: dol, drums
Line 5: 4 half consonances: power, neither, nor, oar
2 alliterations: neither, nor
2 rhymes: nor, oar

Sonic intercoping line endings: day, essay; are, oar. Perhaps the most perennial and greatest difficulty of all is that Greek, compared to English, is devilishly condensed. A single word often can only be done justice by a phrase, or sometimes only by a whole sentence. Mere transcription is not enough. One is trying to bring over not only words but thoughts, feelings, and connotations, which the words themselves sometimes merely adumbrate. And here lies a pitfall difficult to avoid: when one discovers that in one's efforts to bring out the fullness of the Greek one has leapt from the legitimate boundaries of translation and landed in the realm of mere paraphrase. Fidelity to the original, too, can be a stumbling block. Fidelity, yes, but this should not mean being a slave to the literal, which can put one on the high road to the absurd. For instance (to take a current language), one would not translate the name of the Spanish newspaper *Ultima Hora* as *The Last Hour*, which is the literal meaning, but by what the idiom means: *Up to the Minute*. Sometimes the translator feels compelled for the sake of clarity to add a phrase or sentence that is not actually in the original. Is this being unfaithful? Not necessarily, not if the addition makes explicit that which was truly implicit in the original. One might even go as far as saying that to leave it out is not so much fidelity as pedantry. Perhaps the final challenge of attempting to translate Aristophanes is that, unlike the three great tragedians, he did not deal with grand universal themes ineluctably germane to the human scene, but with the here and now of a particular place and particular people, with particular problems, and at a particular time in history. It's almost as if an Athenian of the fifth century B.C. were asked to put into Attic Greek the antics, absurdities, the cleverness and sparkle of a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta. The miracle is that, even if one is only half successful in doing justice to the letter and spirit of Aristophanes, and even if many of the names and places he mentions mean nothing to us, we still find him funny so original is the cast of his imagination and so delightful his penchant for rank nonsense.

LYSISTRATA
Lysistrata was produced by Callistratus in the early spring of 411 B.C., probably at the Lenaea. He had already presented four plays of Aristophanes, the last being *The Birds*. It is not known how it was received or if it won a prize.

THEME
It was a bad time for Athens. The grandiose armada invasion of Sicily had proved a disaster. She lost her fleet, her army, and a great deal of money. Meanwhile, the Spartans were on her doorstep and many of her allies were seizing the opportunity to defect from the Athenian hegemony. Aristophanes, who in his last three plays had done his best to show the stupidity, the waste, the corruption of war, now courageously writes a comedy with a brilliantly unexpected slant: funny enough to get around the warmongers, and serious enough to make them think.

CHARACTERS
LYSISTRATA, young Athenian wife
CALONICE, young Athenian

wifeMYRRHINE, young Athenian wifeLAMPITO, young Spartan wifeMAGISTRATE, Athenian, with servantsTHREE OLD WOMEN, of the marketplaceFOUR WIVES, citizens of AthensCINESIAS, husband of MyrrhineBABY, of Cinesias and MyrrhineHERALD, from SpartaSPARTAN DELEGATES, with servantsATHENIAN DELEGATES, with servantsTWO LOOTS, of AthensPORTER, of gate to AcropolisCHORUS, twelve old Athenian menCHORUS, twelve old Athenian womenOthers: Spartan and Athenian wives, a Corinthian wife, Ismenia (a Theban wife), young Theban woman (Miss Boeotia), Scythian girl (servant of Lysistrata), more old women, four Scythian archer police, women friends of Calonice and Myrrhine.***THE STORYTo put an end to war Lysistrata hits on a startlingly simple way of forcing husbands to stay at home and become pacifists: deny them sex. Not all the husbands, of course, are immediately subject to this radical treatment because they are already away fighting, but even these would come home on leave with one thought on their minds. Withholding sex from panting young husbands is the strategy Lysistrata has devised for their wives, but she has a different one for the older women: to make an assault on the Acropolis and seize and freeze the assets that fund the war.***OBSERVATIONS

Lysistrata (pronounced LySIStrata) means in Greek the Demobilizer, and if one wanted to be clever in English one could simply call her Lisa. But there is more to it than that. The lys part of the name is from the verb lu, to loosen, and one of the powers women possess is that of loosening the loins of men. Lysistrata herself is something of a grande dame and is treated with decided respect by the other women. It is also noticeable that though she is the organizer of Operation Prick, she is not in the least bawdy, unlike her friend Calonice. In her initial conversation with Calonice, when she describes her enterprise as pressing, huge, and weighty, she is being quite literal; it is Calonice who is thinking of something very different. Lampito, a Spartan, speaks in a Greek the Athenians would consider a dialect. Her words have shorter syllables than Attic Greek. The Spartans, or Lacedaemonians, from Laconia (another name for Sparta), were noted for their brevity from which we get the word laconic and their speech must have had the same relation to Attic Greek as, say, Catalan Spanish has to Castilian. Aristophanes takes pains to have Lampito speak in short clipped syllables, and translators do their best to follow suit and tend to put her into broad Scots. I don't know what the American equivalent would be (perhaps Hillbilly), but for my part I would speak her lines in London cockney,³ because Cockneys also go in for swallowing their words in a language that is faster than the Queens English. The same applies to the Spartans. As to my intentions as translator, let me say again what I think I said before: This rendering is strict translation, neither paraphrase nor adaptation. I try to keep as close to the Greek of Aristophanes as I can. This is not simply a matter of being faithful to meanings but of organizing them into patterns of sound that reflect the original, which entails keeping a steady watch on the way phrases and sentences hit the ear.***TIME AND SETTING

A street in Athens in the early morning, with the Acropolis in the background. LYSISTRATA is pacing up and down impatiently, and finally bursts out: LYSISTRATA: Honestly, if they'd been invited to a Bacchic party or a do at Pans or those goddesses of fucking, the Genetyllides, the streets would be jammed and tambourines at the ready.... Just look, not a female in sight! [she continues to pace, then sees someone approaching] Ah, at last! My neighbor at least. Good morning, Calonice. CALONICE: And to you too, Lysistrata.... But, my dear, what a state you're in! All tensed up! It doesn't suit you, lovey. LYSISTRATA: Calonice, I'm absolutely furious and with us women. No wonder men think we're an impossible group. CALONICE: Well, aren't we? LYSISTRATA: Asked to come to a crucial meeting of no piffing import, and they're all asleep and don't turn up. CALONICE: They'll be here all right, my sweet, but you know what a business it is to get out in the morning: There's a husband to pack off, a maid to wake up, a baby to bathe and give something to eat. LYSISTRATA: I know, but some things are more pressing. CALONICE: Like what you've summoned us to hear? Well, I hope what's pressing is something really big, Lysistrata dear. LYSISTRATA: Its huge. CALONICE: And weighty? LYSISTRATA: God, its huge, and God, its weighty. CALONICE: Then why aren't they all here? LYSISTRATA: Oh, its not that; if it were there'd be a stampede. No, its something that sticks in my mind hard as a shaft and keeps me from sleeping, though I tease it and tease it night after night. CALONICE: By now the poor thing must be floppy. LYSISTRATA: Its collapsed. Which leaves us women to save Greece. CALONICE: Us women? Some hope! LYSISTRATA: All the same, the salvation of our State rests with us, even if its the end of the Peloponnese.... CALONICE: Ah! That would be a help. LYSISTRATA:... and the Boeotians are wiped out. CALONICE: Wait a minute, not the eels, please! LYSISTRATA: And I won't mention the Athenians, but you know what I mean.... If all us women united en masse Boeotians, Spartans, and us, we all together could save Greece. CALONICE: What on earth could we women do? Anything brilliant and clever is beyond females like us. We're just household ornaments in flaxen dresses and negligees you see through, all nicely made up in pretty come-hither flats. LYSISTRATA: Precisely, that's exactly what were going to need to save Greece: a seductive wardrobe, our rouge, our negligees and our pretty flats. CALONICE: But what's it all meant for? LYSISTRATA: To stop every living man from ever raising a spear against another and... CALONICE: I'll have a frock dyed crocus yellow. LYSISTRATA:... from ever lifting a shield or... CALONICE: I'll make myself completely see-through. LYSISTRATA:... springing a dagger. CALONICE: I'm off shopping for new shoes. LYSISTRATA: But oughtn't the women to have come? CALONICE: They should have flown here long ago. LYSISTRATA: I know, sweetie, but they're Athenians and can't do anything on time. No one has exactly raced here on the Paralus and Salaminia. CALONICE: All the same, I bet they've been properly manned and coming since early

morning.LYSISISTRATA: Even the women I counted on to be the first to appear are not here.CALONICE: I happen to know that Theogenes⁶ wife has been skimming this way at the tip of her ploughing skiff. But look, here are some more of your ladies.LYSISISTRATA: And there are others over there. [MYRRHINE⁷ and a group of women enter]CALONICE: [wrinkling her nose] Ugh! Where are they from?LYSISTRATA: AnagyrusStink City.⁸CALONICE: I thought wed just made someone fart.MYRRHINE: [breathless] Lysistrata, I hope were not too late. [a critical pause] Speak, damn it! Say something.LYSISISTRATA: I do not approve, Myrrhine... um... of people who turn up late when theres so much at stake.MYRRHINE: Dear, Im sorry. Couldnt find my girdle in the dark. But at least were here,so whats cooking?LYSISTRATA: Wait a bit till the women from Boeotia and the Peloponnese appear.CALONICE: Right... But look, heres Lampito coming. [LAMPITO, a robust young woman, arrives with other Spartan wives, a wife from Corinth, and ISMENIA, a Theban wife]LYSISTRATA: Good morning, Lampito, my Spartan darling! How luscious you look! Quite stunning! Such clear skin, and that firm body,why you could strangle a bull.LAMPITO: By Castor and Pollux,⁹ that I could. Its the work I do in the gym, buddy,jump-kicking and bumping my tail.LYSISISTRATA: [putting out a hand to feel] My, what marvelous tits!LAMPITO: Hey, lovey, you feeling me up for sacrifice?LYSISTRATA: And whos this young lady here?LAMPITO: By Castor and Pollux, would you believe it, its no less than Miss Boeotia.MYRRHINE: Miss Boeotia? What a surprise! Lovely as a meadow.CALONICE: [gazing at her crotch] Yes, when the hays just been cut.LYSISISTRATA: And this other girl?LAMPITO: Shes from Corinth. A bit o all right by Castor an Pollox, real cute.CALONICE: One can see that, back and front.LAMPITO: But who called us all together?LYSISTRATA: Me, right here.LAMPITO: Pray tell, what for?CALONICE: Yes, dear lady, do explain what makes this so important.LYSISISTRATA: Explain I shall, but first I have a small question.CALONICE: Then out with it.LYSISISTRATA: Dont you all miss your kiddies dads when theyre at the front? I expect that every one of you has a man away from home.CALONICE: My mans been away five months in Thracehow I miss him! keeping an eye on Eucrates.¹⁰MYRRHINE: Mines been seven months at Pylos.LAMPITO: As for mine, hardly is he in the door when hes strapping on his shield again.CALONICE: Whats more, theres not the shadow of a lover left for us,and since the Miletus crisis,¹¹not a dildo in the offing. That at least would be better than nothing.The highest mountain in Laconia (Sparta).LYSISTRATA: Well, suppose I hit on a way to stop the war, would you be with me?CALONICE: Holy Demeter and Persephone! Absolutely. Even if I have to pawn this blouse [sotto voce] and spend the proceeds on booze.MYRRHINE: And Im ready to slit myself down the middle like a mackerel and give half to support the cause.LAMPITO: Id clamber to the tiptop of Mount Tagetus¹² just to get a wee peep at peace.LYSISISTRATA: Then let me disclose. In a word, dear ladies,to make the men make peaceweve got to forgo...CALONICE: Oh, what, please?LYSISTRATA: Are you ready for it?CALONICE: You bet. Even if death is the price.LYSISISTRATA: All right, what were going to have to forgo isphallus.¹³ALL: Oh no!LYSISTRATA: Hey, dont turn away.... Where are you off to so dolefully with clamped lips, ashen cheeks and shaking heads? Will you or wont you do it? Whats bugging you?CALONICE: This is where I stick.... Let the war drag on.MYRRHINE: Me too. I couldnt for the life of me. Let the war drag on.LYSISISTRATA: That coming from you, Miss Mackerel, is against the odds. Werent you saying just now that you were ready to slit yourself in two?CALONICE: Ask for anything else, just anything you like, Ill walk through fire if you want,but I simply cant give up prick. Lysistrata, darling, theres nothing to compare.LYSISISTRATA: And what about you?MYRRHINE: Fire for me too.LYSISISTRATA: Oh, what a low-down randy lot we are! No wonder were the subject of tragedies,like Poseidon and the Tub of Sophocles:have fun with a god, then dump the brats. But, Lampito, Spartan dear,even if only you side with me, thatsenough for us to make a go of itso please!LAMPITO: Eh, but its tough on a woman not to sleep side by side with an erection. All the same, we do need peace,so... well... oh, all right!LYSISTRATA: You perfect darling, the only real woman of the lot.LAMPITO: But if we do give up... er... what you suggest, which God forbid, is there any guaranteethat peace will result?LYSISTRATA: By Demeter and Persephone, absolutely! Imagine it: us lolling around all tarted up,our pussies sweet little triangles neatly plucked,and we float past them in our see-throughs,and our men get stiff as rods and want to screw,but we elude them and hold ourselves aloofwhy, theyll suefor peace real quick. That you can bet.LAMPITO: Like Menelus at the sight of Helens melons, chucking away his sword when he meant to slay her on the spot.¹⁴CALONICE: I know, darling, but say the men just ignore us?LYSISTRATA: That would be likeas old Pherecrates¹⁵ said skinning the same dog twice. Wed just have to take dildos to bed.CALONICE: Substitutes are so disappointing. Anyway, what if they grab us and drag usinto the bedroom by brute force?LYSISTRATA: Hang on to the door.CALONICE: What if they hit us?LYSISTRATA: Then give in, but start sulking. Men dont enjoy sex by force,and you can get at them by other means. Have no fear, theyll soon kowtow. No mans happy with an uncooperative wife.CALONICE: Well, if you two agree with this, we do too.LAMPITO: Therell be no problem with our Spartan men; theyll agree to a fair and honorable peace,but those crazy Athenian roughsgood grief!how does one knock any sense into them?LYSISTRATA: Dont worry. Well get them to go along with us.LAMPITO: I dont see how: not with triremes all primed for seaand bottomless holds of brass in Athenas treasury.LYSISISTRATA: Thats all been taken care of now. Were raiding the Acropolis today:a job the older women will undertake,and while the rest of us carry out our peace work here belowtheyll capture the Acropolis up thereon the pretext of coming to sacrifice.LAMPITO: My, but youve got it all wrapped up real nice!LYSISTRATA: Lampito, in that case why dont we

ratify everything right now and make it binding with a vow? LAMPITO: Yes, a vow: were all agog to swear. LYSISTRATA: Fine! Where's that Scythian girl? [she calls and her maid, a swarthy Scythian girl, appears carrying a shield and glancing about her open-eyed] Hey, girl, what's making you stare?... Put your shield down in front of us, bottom up, right there.... Somebody fetch me the sacrificial bits and pieces. LAMPITO: What sort of oath are we going to swear? LYSISTRATA: What sort? One like Aeschylus, with the victim slaughtered over a shield. LAMPITO: My dear Lysistrata, not over a shield, not when we're making a vow about peace. LYSISTRATA: Then how should the vow proceed? CALONICE: How about getting hold of a white stallion and slicing a piece off him? LYSISTRATA: A white stallion? Come on! CALONICE: How are we going to swear then? LYSISTRATA: I've got an idea that you might like: we put an enormous black wine bowl in position and over it we slaughter a skin of Thracian wine, swearing not to... add a drop of water. LAMPITO: Yeah! That's an oath you couldn't do better. LYSISTRATA: Will somebody go inside and bring out a wine bowl and a skin of wine. [the Scythian girl goes into the house and brings out a bulging wine skin and an enormous bowl] MYRRHINE: My word, girls, what a whopper! CALONICE: Merely to touch it is to hiccup. LYSISTRATA: Now lay your hands with mine on this mighty beast. [solemnly intoning] My lady Persuasion and you good Convivial Cup, deign to accept this sacrifice from us. [she opens the wine skin and lets the dark red wine bleed into the bowl] CALONICE: What a robust and richly colored spurt! LAMPITO: The aromas superb without a doubt. MYRRHINE: Girls, I beg be first to take the oath. CALONICE: By Aphrodite, not so fast. Wait and see if your lot comes first. LYSISTRATA: Hold your hands over the bowl Lampito, are you listening? now, one of you repeat after me this vow: No man whatsoever whether husband or lover, shall... CALONICE: No man whatsoever whether husband or lover, shall... LYSISTRATA: ... come near me with a rampant cock... Speak up. CALONICE: Come near me with a rampant cock. Oh, Lysistrata, my knees are buckling! LYSISTRATA: I'll live at home in continence unrutting. CALONICE: I'll live at home in continence unrutting. LYSISTRATA: All tarted up in my saffron frock... CALONICE: All tarted up in my saffron frock... LYSISTRATA: so that my husband is bursting to erupt... CALONICE: so that my husband is bursting to erupt... LYSISTRATA: while I stay aloof and adamant. CALONICE: while I stay aloof and adamant. LYSISTRATA: And if he exercises force... CALONICE: And if he exercises force... LYSISTRATA: I'll receive him coldly; won't waggle my hips or grunt... CALONICE: I'll receive him coldly; won't waggle my hips or grunt... LYSISTRATA: nor lift slippered feet to make it easy, nor of course... CALONICE: nor lift slippered feet to make it easy, nor of course... LYSISTRATA: crouch like a lioness waiting to be grated. CALONICE: crouch like a lioness waiting to be grated. LYSISTRATA: And only if I keep this vow may I quaff from this cup. CALONICE: And only if I keep this vow may I quaff from this cup. LYSISTRATA: And if I don't keep this vow may the wine be watered. CALONICE: And if I don't keep this vow may the wine be watered. LYSISTRATA: Now let all of you swear, all united. THE WOMEN: We swear, we swear. LYSISTRATA: Good. I'll consecrate the cup. [she takes a long draught] CALONICE: Darling, not more than your share... Surely we're all on equal footing. [while they quaff the sound of cheering from the older women reaches them] Whatever is that cheering? LYSISTRATA: It's what I told you: we women have seized the Acropolis and the temple of the goddess. Therefore, Lampito, get cracking and go and do what you have to do back home. We can use your Spartan friends here as hostages. [LAMPITO leaves] Meanwhile, let's join the other women on the Acropolis and help them to barricade the gates. CALONICE: But won't the men launch an attack on us? LYSISTRATA: If they do, I don't give a damn. Just let them try with threats and fire to unbar those gates, we'll make them come to heel. CALONICE: So help me, Aphrodite, so they will! Or else we women are an impossibly hopeless breed. [All the women disappear into the Acropolis and the MENS CHORUS enters in a slow shambling dance. They are old and shabby. They carry logs, unlit torches, and live coals in earthen pots as they shuffle toward the Acropolis.] MENS LEADER: Forward, Dracus, though your shoulders ache from carrying logs of green and heavy olive wood. STROPHEMENS CHORUS: Live a long life and much will surprise you, such as we elders are witnessing now. Oh yes, Strymodorus, can you believe we'd ever be told these pestilent females reared in our homes had taken possession of Pallas' image on the Acropolis and now have control. And that's not the end of their damnable damage: They've bolted and blocked every entry and portal. MENS LEADER: To the Acropolis, forward Philurgus, as fast as you can. Let us arrange around these women logs in a circle. They are the ones who have thought up this deplorable plan. Let's make a bonfire and sizzle them up with our own hands, Yes, every one of them, starting with Lycons lecherous wife. ANTISTROPHEMENS CHORUS: Holy Demeter, I'll not have them laughing while I have life, Especially not Cleomnes, the first who ever besieged this place, and in spite of the bellicose Spartan spirit he breathed he surrendered to us and scurried away in the flimsiest jacket without his arms. Dirty, disheveled, and needing a shave: For six years he hadn't deigned to wash his limbs. MENS LEADER: Yes, I was fierce and that's the way I dealt with this fellow. We camped before the gates in ranks of seventeen. And now will I simply stand and watch these brazen women, Enemies of Euripides and of heaven? Oh, I might as well wipe out the glories of Marathon. STROPHMENS CHORUS: A little bit more and the slogging is done. The steepest stretch is the last to come before the Acropolis, and I strain to reach the spot. How can we lug these logs along? We need a donkey that's for sure. This log is making my shoulders sore But I've got to reach that blessed gate And also keep this fire alight; I simply mustn't let it go out Until I'm where I should be at. Phew! Phew! Fuck! Fuck! The smoke, the

smoke!ANTISTROPHE Lord Heracles help methis bloody smoke Plunges out of the bucket and bites Both my eyes like a bitch gone mad, a bitch in heat, The fires a volcano. Yuk! Yuk! My poor eyes, how they ache! They must be a couple of bloodshot holes. But Ive got to get to the Acropolis, And run, run, run if I can To rescue the goddess Pallas Athena. Laches, could the time be better? Phew! Phew! Fuck! Fuck! The smoke, the smoke!MENS LEADER: This fires a lively thing, thank heavens its awake. Lets put our logs down hereand dip our torches in the coals to get them lit. Then well batterthe gates like rams and summon the women to surrender. But if they wont and refuse to open the gates,well set the doors on fireand smoke them out. But first, lets set the logs down here. Phew! Phew! This bloody smoke! I wish some of you admirals at Samos²² couldlend us a hand with this damned wood. [the old men unshoulder the logs and lay them down] Oh brother! At last Ive freed my poor back! Now its all yours, you coals in the bucket. My lady Victory, secure us a triumph over this womanhoodon the Acropolis. Bring us luck,it is high time to punish them for their cheek. [the CHORUS OF WOMEN, middle aged and elderly, comes into view. They are better dressed than the old men and carry pitchers of water. When names are used they are, as with the men, generic]WOMENS LEADER: Women, I can see sparks and smoke. Theres a bonfire somewhere. Hurry.STROPHEWOMENS CHORUS: Wings, wings, Nicodc, Fly to Critilla, Calc, And quench the galloping flames Fanned by malevolent breezes And nasty old men whose aims Are to kill us. But are we Too late for the crisis? Weve come from the well with our pitchers And filled them to the brims: A task that was hardly easy With the crush and the clatter and din, And elbowing maids from the homesteads And branded slaves, but I heaved my Pitcher on my head, Rushing to help my neighbor And rescue her with water.ANTISTROPHE²³ Fanatic old men, it appears Are gadding about with timbers Costing a lot, and heading Toward the Acropolis, stokers Bawling their heads off, saying: Well burn you women to cinders. Grant, O Pallas Athena, Well not be set on fire. See us as heroines rather, Saving Hellas from warfare And folly. That is the reason, O golden helmeted one. Defender of your temple, Theyve pounced on your holy shrine. Divinity, I implore You to be our helper And if they should light a bonfire Be nearby with water. [WOMENS LEADER steps forward just as the old men are about to charge the gates]WOMENS LEADER: Stop it, you disgusting men! What dyou think youre doing? No decent men would behave the way you are.MENS LEADER: Weve got an unexpected problemwomen outside the gates, simply swarming.WOMENS LEADER: Worried are you? Dont tell me were too hot to handle? You arent seeinga thousandth part of our forces yet.MENS LEADER: Phaedrus, are we going to let them go on blabbing? Its time we got those logs and conked them on the nut.WOMENS LEADER: Women, put your pitchers down and free your hands. We may have to withstand a charge.MENS LEADER: Two or three hefty socks in the jaw, ye gods, would shut them up.WOMENS LEADER: Okey-doke, heres my mug, I wont budge. Have a sock and see if it quells. But if you do, Im the bitch that bites off balls.MENS LEADER: Shut your damned gob, or Ill bang you out of your ancient hide.WOMENS LEADER: Just lift a little finger, slob, and I, Stratyllis,²⁴ will...MENS LEADER: Will what? Got a secret weapon to stop me knocking you flat?WOMENS LEADER: Ill tear your chest wide apart and rip your entrails out.MENS LEADER: Euripides got it right: no beasts so bloody as a woman, he said.WOMENS LEADER: [calling to the others] Rhodippe and everybody, get your pitchers ready.MENS LEADER: So, you god-detested crone, youve brought water, have you?WOMENS LEADER: So, up yours too! Youve brought fire for a funeral, have you?MENS LEADER: Not mine. The pyres for your cronies.WOMENS LEADER: [thrusting out her pitcher] And Ill put it out with this.MENS LEADER: Youll put out my fire, will you?WOMENS LEADER: Thats what youre going to witness.MENS LEADER: While I roast your backside with my torch.