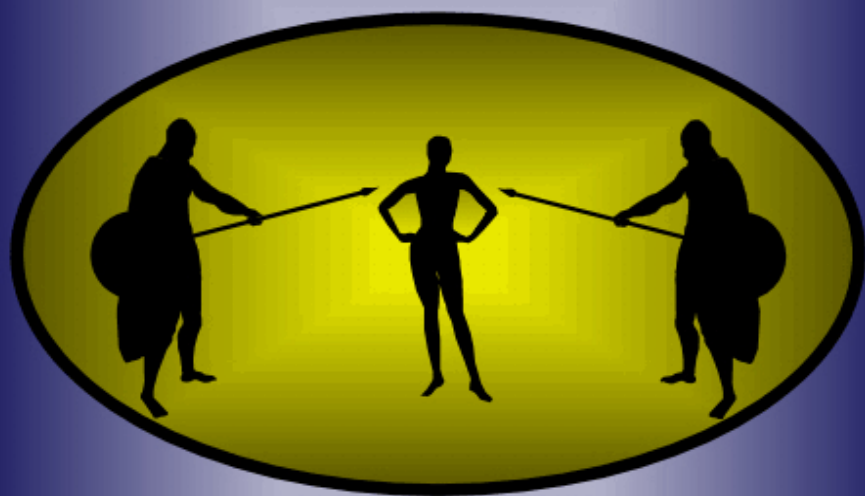


Aristophanes  
*Lysistrata*



Translated by Ian Johnston

Aristophanes  
Lysistrata

Translated  
by  
Ian Johnston  
Vancouver Island University  
Nanaimo, British Columbia  
Canada

Richer Resources Publications  
Arlington, Virginia  
USA

Aristophanes  
Lysistrata

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Translator's Note

In the text below the numbers in square brackets refer to the lines in the Greek text; the numbers without brackets refer to the lines in the translated text. In numbering the lines of the English text, the translator has normally counted a short indented line with the short line above it, so that two short lines count as one line.

In a number of places in *Lysistrata* there is some confusion over which speeches are assigned to which people. These moments occur, for the most part, in short conversational exchanges. Hence, there may be some differences between the speakers in this text and those in other translations.

The translator would like to acknowledge the valuable help provided by Alan H. Sommerstein's edition of *Lysistrata* (Aris & Phillips: 1990), particularly the commentary.

Historical Note

Aristophanes (c. 447 to c. 385) was the foremost writer of Old Comedy in Athens. His play *Lysistrata* was first produced in Athens in 411 BC. By this time Athens and Sparta had been at war for about twenty years.

Aristophanes  
Lysistrata

Dramatis Personae

LYSISTRATA: a young Athenian wife  
CALONICE: a mature married woman  
MYRRHINE: a teenage wife  
LAMPITO: a young country wife from Sparta  
ISMENIA: a woman from Thebes  
SCYTHIAN GIRL: one of Lysistrata's slaves  
MAGISTRATE: an elderly Athenian official  
CINESIAS: husband of Myrrhine  
CHILD: infant son of Myrrhine and Cinesias  
MANES: servant nurse of the Child  
HERALD: A Spartan envoy  
CHORUS OF OLD MEN  
CHORUS OF OLD WOMEN  
ATHENIAN AMBASSADOR  
SPARTAN AMBASSADOR  
WOMAN A: one of the wives following Lysistrata  
WOMAN B: one of the wives following Lysistrata  
WOMAN C: one of the wives following Lysistrata  
ARMED GUARDS: police officials attending on the Magistrate  
WOMEN: followers of Lysistrata  
RECONCILIATION: a goddess of harmony and peace  
ATHENIAN DELEGATES  
SPARTAN DELEGATES  
SLAVES AND ATTENDANTS.

*[The action of the play takes place in a street in Athens, with the citadel on the Acropolis in the back, its doors facing the audience]*

LYSISTRATA

If they'd called a Bacchic celebration  
or some festival for Pan or Colias  
or for Genetyllis, you'd not be able  
to move around through all the kettle drums.  
But as it is, there are no women here.

*[Calonice enters, coming to meet Lysistrata]*

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Ah, here's my neighbour—at least she's come.<sup>1</sup>  
Hello, Calonice.

CALONICE

Hello, Lysistrata.

What's bothering you, child? Don't look so annoyed.  
It doesn't suit you. Your eyes get wrinkled.

LYSISTRATA

My heart's on fire, Calonice—I'm so angry 10  
at married women, at us, because, [10]  
although men say we're devious characters . . .

CALONICE [*interrupting*]

Because by god we are!

LYSISTRATA [*continuing*]

. . . when I call them all  
to meet here to discuss some serious business,  
they just stay in bed and don't show up.

CALONICE

Ah, my dear, they'll come. It's not so easy  
for wives to get away. We've got to fuss  
about our husbands, wake up the servants,  
calm and wash the babies, then give them food . . .

LYSISTRATA

But there are other things they need to do— 20 [20]  
more important issues.

CALONICE

My dear Lysistrata,  
why have you asked the women to meet here?  
What's going on? Is it something big?

LYSISTRATA

It's huge.

<sup>1</sup> . . . *at least she's come*: Lysistrata is complaining that if the city had called a major festival all the women would be in the streets enjoying themselves. But none of them, it seems, has answered her invitation to a meeting (as we find out a few lines further on).

CALONICE

And hard as well?

LYSISTRATA

Yes, by god, really hard.

CALONICE

Then why aren't we all here?

LYSISTRATA

I don't mean that!

If that were it, they'd all be charging here so fast.

No. It's something I've been playing with—  
wrestling with for many sleepless nights.

CALONICE

If you've been working it like that, by now  
it must have shrivelled up.

LYSISTRATA

Yes, so shrivelled up

that the salvation of the whole of Greece  
is now in women's hands.

30

[30]

CALONICE

In women's hands?

Then it won't be long before we done for.

LYSISTRATA

It's up to us to run the state's affairs—  
the Spartans would no longer be around.

CALONICE

If they weren't there, by god, not any more,  
that would be good news.

LYSISTRATA

And then if all Boeotians  
were totally destroyed!

CALONICE

Not all of them—

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you'd have to save the eels.<sup>1</sup>

LYSISTRATA

As for Athens,  
I won't say anything as bad as that. 40  
You can imagine what I'd say. But now,  
if only all the women would come here  
from Sparta and Boeotia, join up with us, [40]  
if we worked together, we'd save Greece.

CALONICE

But what sensible or splendid act  
could women do? We sit around playing  
with our cosmetics, wearing golden clothes,  
posing in Cimmerian silks and slippers.

LYSISTRATA

Those are the very things which I assume  
will save us—short dresses, perfumes, slippers, 50  
make up, and clothing men can see through.

CALONICE

How's that going to work?

LYSISTRATA

No man living  
will lift his spear against another man . . . [50]

CALONICE [*interrupting*]

By the two goddesses, I must take my dress  
and dye it yellow.<sup>2</sup>

LYSISTRATA [*continuing*]

. . . or pick up a shield . . .

CALONICE [*interrupting again*]

I'll have to wear my very best silk dress.

<sup>1</sup> . . . *save the eels*: At the time *Lysistrata* was first produced, the Athenians and Spartans had been fighting for many years. The Boeotians were allies of the Spartans. Boeotia was famous for its eels, considered a luxury item in Athens.

<sup>2</sup> . . . *dye it yellow*: The two goddesses are Demeter and her daughter Persephone. The Athenian women frequently invoke them.

LYSISTRATA [*continuing*]  
... or pull out his sword.

CALONICE

I need to get some shoes.

LYSISTRATA

O these women, they should be here by now!

CALONICE

Yes, by god! They should have sprouted wings  
and come here hours ago.

LYSISTRATA

They're true Athenians,  
you'll see—everything they should be doing  
they postpone till later. But no one's come  
from Salamis or those towns on the coast.

60

CALONICE [*with an obscene gesture*]

I know those women—they were up early  
on their boats riding the mizzen mast.

[60]

LYSISTRATA

I'd have bet  
those women from Acharnia would come  
and get here first. But they've not shown up.

CALONICE

Well, Theogenes' wife will be here.  
I saw her hoisting sail to come.<sup>1</sup> Hey, look!  
Here's a group of women coming for you.  
And there's another one, as well. Hello!  
Hello there! Where they from?

70

[*Various women start arriving from all directions*]

LYSISTRATA

Those? From Anagyra.

CALONICE

<sup>1</sup>*Theogenes*: a well-known merchant and shipowner.

My god, it seems we're kicking up a stink.<sup>1</sup>

*[Enter Myrrhine]*

MYRRHINE

Hey, Lysistrata, did we get here late?  
What's the matter? Why are you so quiet?

LYSISTRATA

I'm not pleased with you, Myrrhine. You're late. [70]  
And this is serious business.

MYRRHINE

It was dark.  
I had trouble tracking down my waist band.  
If it's such a big deal, tell these women.

LYSISTRATA

No, let's wait a little, until the women 80  
from Boeotia and from Sparta get here.

MYRRHINE

All right. That sounds like the best idea.  
Hey, here comes Lampito.

*[Lampito enters with some other Spartan women and with Ismenia, a woman from Thebes]*

LYSISTRATA

Hello Lampito,  
my dear friend from Sparta. How beautiful  
you look, so sweet, such a fine complexion. [80]  
And your body looks so fit, strong enough  
to choke a bull.

LAMPITO<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>... *a stink*: Calonice is making an obscure joke on the name Anagyra, a political district named after a bad-smelling plant.

<sup>1</sup>LAMPITO: In Aristophanes' text, Lampito and other Spartans use a parody of a Spartan dialect, a style of speaking significantly different from (although related to) Athenian Greek. Translators have dealt with this in different ways, often by giving the Spartans a recognizable English dialect, for example, from the Southern States or Scotland. Here I have not tried to follow this trend, since such dialects as often as not are unfamiliar to

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Yes, by the two gods,  
I could pull that off.<sup>1</sup> I do exercise  
and work out to keep my bum well toned.

CALONICE [*fondling Lampito's bosom*]  
What an amazing pair of breasts you've got!

90

LAMPITO  
O, you stroke me like I'm a sacrifice.

LYSISTRATA [*looking at Ismenia*]  
And this young woman—where's she from?

[90]

LAMPITO  
By the twin gods, she's an ambassador—  
she's from Boeotia.

MYRRHINE [*looking down Ismenia's elegant clothes*]  
Of course, from Boeotia.  
She's got a beautiful lowland region.

CALONICE [*peering down the dress to check Ismenia's pubic hair*]  
Yes. By god, she keeps that territory  
elegantly groomed.

LYSISTRATA  
Who's the other girl?

LAMPITO  
A noble girl, by the two gods, from Corinth.

CALONICE [*inspecting the girl's bosom and buttocks*]  
A really noble girl, by Zeus—it's clear  
she's got good lines right here, back here as well.

100

LAMPITO  
All right, who's the one who called the meeting  
and brought this bunch of women here?

many readers.

<sup>2</sup>. . . *the two gods*: Spartans commonly invoke the divine twins Castor and Pollux, brothers of Helen of Troy.

LYSISTRATA

I did.

LAMPITO

Then lay out what it is you want from us.

MYRRHINE

Come on, dear lady, tell us what's going on,  
what's so important to you.

LYSISTRATA

In a minute.

Before I say it, I'm going to ask you  
one small question . . .

CALONICE

Ask whatever you want.

LYSISTRATA

Don't you miss the fathers of your children  
when they go off to war? I understand  
you all have husbands far away from home.

[100]

110

CALONICE

My dear, it's five full months my man's been gone—  
off in Thrace taking care of Eucrates.

MYRRHINE

And mine's been off in Pylos seven whole months.<sup>1</sup>

LAMPITO

And mine—as soon as he gets home from war,  
he grabs his shield and buggers off again.

LYSISTRATA

As for old flames and lovers—there're none left.  
And since Milesians went against us,  
I've not seen a decent eight-inch dildo.

<sup>1</sup> . . . *after Eucrates*. Thrace is a region to the north of Greece, a long way from Athens. Eucrates was an Athenian commander in the region. Pylos is a small area in the south Peloponnese which the Athenians had occupied for a number of years.

Yes, it's just leather, but it helps us out.<sup>1</sup> [110]  
So would you be willing, if I found a way, 120  
to work with me to make this fighting end?

MYRRHINE

By the twin goddesses, yes. Even if  
in just one day I had to pawn this dress  
and drain my purse.

CALONICE

Me too—they could slice me up  
like a flat fish, then use one half of me  
to get a peace.

LAMPITO

I'd climb up to the top  
of Taygetus to get a glimpse of peace.<sup>2</sup>

LYSISTRATA

All right I'll tell you. No need to keep quiet  
about my plan. Now, ladies, if we want [120]  
to force the men to have a peace, well then, 130  
we must give up . . .

MYRRHINE [*interrupting*]

Give up what? Tell us!

LYSISTRATA

Then, will you do it?

MYRRHINE

Of course, we'll do it,  
even if we have to die.

LYSISTRATA

All right then—  
we have to give up all male penises.

[*The women react with general consternation*]

<sup>2</sup> . . . *went against us*. Miletus had rebelled against Athens in the previous year. That city was associated with sexuality and (in this case) the manufacture of sexual toys.

<sup>1</sup> . . . *Taygetus*: a high mountain in the Peloponnese.

Why do you turn away? Where are you going?  
How come you bite your lips and shake your heads?  
And why so pale? How come you're crying like that?  
Will you do it or not? What will it be?

MYRRHINE

I won't do it. So let the war drag on.

CALONICE

I won't either. The war can keep on going. 140 [130]

LYSISTRATA

How can you say that, you flatfish? Just now  
you said they could slice you into halves.

CALONICE

Ask what you like, but not that! If I had to,  
I'd be willing to walk through fire—sooner that  
than give up screwing. There's nothing like it,  
dear Lysistrata.

LYSISTRATA

And what about you?

MYRRHINE

I'd choose the fire, too.

LYSISTRATA

What a debased race  
we women are! It's no wonder men write  
tragedies about us. We're good for nothing  
but humping Poseidon in the bath tub. 150  
But my Spartan friend, if you were willing, [140]  
just you and me, we still could pull it off.  
So help me out.

LAMPITO

By the twin gods, it's hard  
for women to sleep all by themselves  
without a throbbing cock. But we must try.  
We've got to have a peace.

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LYSISTRATA

O you're a true friend!  
The only real woman in this bunch.

CALONICE

If we really do give up what you say—  
I hope it never happens!—would doing that  
make peace more likely?

LYSISTRATA

By the two goddesses, yes, 160  
much more likely. If we sit around at home  
with all our make up on and in those gowns  
made of Amorgos silk, naked underneath, [150]  
with our crotches neatly plucked, our husbands  
will get stiff and want to hump. But then,  
if we stay away and won't come near them,  
they'll make peace soon enough. I'm sure of it.

LAMPITO

Yes, just like they say—when Menelaus  
saw Helen's naked tits, he dropped his sword.<sup>1</sup>

CALONICE

But my friend, what if our men ignore us? 170

LYSISTRATA

Well then, in the words of Pherecrates,  
you'll find another way to skin the dog.<sup>2</sup>

CALONICE

But fake penises aren't any use at all.  
What if they grab us and haul us by force [160]  
into the bedroom?

LYSISTRATA

Just grab the door post.

<sup>1</sup> . . . *naked tits*. In a famous story, Menelaus went storming through Troy looking for his wife, Helen, in order to kill her. But when he found her, he was so overcome by her beauty that he relented and took her back home to Sparta.

<sup>2</sup> *Pherecrates*: an Athenian comic dramatist. The line may be a quotation from one of his plays.

CALONICE

And if they beat us?

LYSISTRATA

Then you must submit—  
but do it grudgingly, don't cooperate.  
There's no enjoyment for them when they just  
force it in. Besides, there are other ways  
to make them suffer. They'll soon surrender.  
No husband ever had a happy life  
if he did not cooperate with his wife.

180

CALONICE

Well, if you two think it's good, we do, too.

LAMPITO

I'm sure we can persuade our men to work  
for a just peace in everything, no tricks.  
But how will you convince the Athenian mob?  
They're mad for war.

[170]

LYSISTRATA

That's not your worry.  
We'll win them over.

LAMPITO

I don't think so—  
not while they have those triremes under sail  
and that huge treasure of theirs stashed away  
up there, where your goddess makes her home.<sup>1</sup>

190

LYSISTRATA

But that's all been well taken care of.  
Today we'll capture the Acropolis.  
The old women have been assigned the task.  
While we sit here planning all the details,  
they'll pretend they're going there to sacrifice  
and seize the place.

<sup>1</sup> . . . *where your goddess makes her home*. The financial reserves of the Athenian state were stored in the Acropolis.

LAMPITO

You've got it all worked out.  
What you say sounds good.

[180]

LYSISTRATA

All right Lampito,  
let's swear an oath as quickly as we can.  
That way we'll be united.

LAMPITO

Recite the oath.  
Then we'll all swear to it.

200

LYSISTRATA

That's good advice.  
Where's that girl from Scythia?

*[The Scythian slave steps forward. She's holding a small shield]*

Why stare like that?  
Put down your shield, the hollow part on top.  
Now, someone get me a victim's innards.

CALONICE

Lysistrata, what sort of oath is this  
we're going to swear?

LYSISTRATA

What sort of oath?  
One on a shield, just like they did back then  
in Aeschylus' play—with slaughtered sheep.

CALONICE

You can't, Lysistrata, not on a shield,  
you can't swear an oath for peace on that.

210

[190]

LYSISTRATA

What should the oath be, then?

CALONICE

Let's get a stallion,  
a white one, and then offer up its guts!

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LYSISTRATA

Why a white horse?

CALONICE

How else would one swear an oath?

LYSISTRATA

I'll tell you, by god, if you want to hear.  
Put a large dark bowl down here on the ground,  
then sacrifice a jug of Thasian wine,  
and swear we'll never pour in water.

LAMPITO

Now, if you ask me, that's a splendid oath!

LYSISTRATA

Someone get the bowl and a jug of wine.

*[The Scythian girl goes back in the house and returns with a bowl and a jug of wine. Calonice takes the bowl]*

CALONICE

Look, dear ladies, at this splendid bowl.  
Just touching this gives instant pleasure.

220 [200]

LYSISTRATA

Put it down. Now join me and place your hands  
on our sacrificial victim.

*[The women gather around the bowl and lay their hands on the wine jug. Lysistrata starts the ritual prayer]*

O you,  
Goddess of Persuasion and the bowl  
which we so love, accept this sacrifice,  
a women's offering, and be kind to us.

*[Lysistrata opens the wine jug and lets the wine pour out into the bowl]*

CALONICE

Such healthy blood spurts out so beautifully!

LAMPITO

By Castor, that's a mighty pleasant smell.

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MYRRHINE

Ladies, let me be the first to swear the oath.

CALONICE

No, by Aphrodite, no—not unless  
your lot is drawn. 230

LYSISTRATA [*holding up a bowl full of wine*]

Grab the brim, Lampito,  
you and all the others. Someone repeat  
for all the rest of you the words I say—  
that way you'll pledge your firm allegiance:  
No man, no husband and no lover . . . [210]

CALONICE [*taking the oath*]

No man, no husband and no lover . . .

LYSISTRATA

. . . will get near me with a stiff prick . . . Come on,  
say it!

CALONICE

. . . will get near me with a stiff prick.  
O Lysistrata, my knees are getting weak!

LYSISTRATA

At home I'll live completely without sex . . . 240

CALONICE

At home I'll live completely without sex . . .

LYSISTRATA

. . . wearing saffron silks, with lots of make up . . .

CALONICE

. . . wearing saffron silks, with lots of make up . . . [220]

LYSISTRATA

. . . to make my man as horny as I can.

CALONICE

. . . to make my man as horny as I can.

LYSISTRATA

I'll never willingly give in to him.

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CALONICE

I'll never willingly give in to him.

LYSISTRATA

If against my will he takes me by force . . .

CALONICE

If against my will he takes me by force . . .

LYSISTRATA

. . . I'll be a lousy lay, not move a limb.

250

CALONICE

. . . I'll be a lousy lay, not move a limb.

LYSISTRATA

I'll not raise my slippers up towards the roof . . .

CALONICE

I'll not raise my slippers up towards the roof . . .

[230]

LYSISTRATA

. . . nor crouch down like a lioness on all fours.

CALONICE

. . . nor crouch down like a lioness on all fours.

LYSISTRATA

If I do all this, then I may drink this wine.

CALONICE

If I do all this, then I may drink this wine.

LYSISTRATA

If I fail, may this glass fill with water.

CALONICE

If I fail, may this glass fill with water.

LYSISTRATA

All you women swear to keep this oath?

ALL

We do.

260

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LYSISTRATA

All right. I'll make the offering.

*[Lysistrata drinks some of the wine in the bowl]*

CALONICE

Just your share,  
my dear, so we all stay firm friends.

*[A sound of shouting is heard from offstage]*

LAMPITO

What's that noise?

[240]

LYSISTRATA

It's what I said just now—the women  
have already captured the Acropolis.  
So, Lampito, you return to Sparta—  
do good work among your people there.  
Leave these women here as hostages.  
We'll join the others in the citadel  
and help them barricade the doors.

CALONICE

Don't you think the men will band together  
and march against us—and quickly, too?

270

LYSISTRATA

I'm not so worried about them. They'll come  
carrying their torches and making threats,  
but they'll not pry these gates of ours apart,  
not unless they agree to our demands.

[250]

CALONICE

Yes, by Aphrodite, that's right. If not,  
we'll be labelled weak and gutless women.

*[The women enter the citadel. The Chorus of Old Men enters slowly, for they are quite decrepit. They are carrying wood for a fire, glowing coals to start the blaze, and torches to light.]*

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Keep moving, Draces, pick up the pace,  
even if your shoulder's tired lugging

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all this heavy fresh-cut olive wood.

280

#### CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Alas, so many unexpected things  
take place in a long life. O Strymodorus,  
who'd ever think they'd hear such news  
about our women—the ones we fed  
in our own homes are truly bad. [260]  
The sacred statue is in their hands.  
They've seized my own Acropolis  
and block the doors with bolts and bars.

#### LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Come on Philurgus, let's hurry there  
as fast as we can go up to the city. 290  
We'll set these logs down in a circle,  
stack them so we keep them bottled up,  
those women who've combined to do this.  
Then with our own hands we'll set alight  
a single fire and, as we all agreed  
in the vote we took, we'll burn them all,  
beginning first with Lycon's wife.<sup>1</sup> [270]

#### CHORUS OF OLD MEN

They'll won't be making fun of me,  
by Demeter, not while I'm still alive.  
That man Cleomenes, who was the first  
to take our citadel, went tamely back. 300  
Snorting Spartan pride he crept away,  
once he'd handed me his weapons,  
wearing a really tiny little cloak,  
hungry, filthy, with his hairy face.  
He'd gone six years without a bath.<sup>2</sup> [280]  
That's how I fiercely hemmed him in,  
our men in ranks of seventeen.  
We even slept before the gates.

<sup>1</sup> . . . *Lycon's wife*: a woman in Athens famous for her promiscuity.

<sup>2</sup> *Cleomenes*, a king of Sparta, once came with a small army to Athens (in 508 BC). He had a very hostile reception and took refuge in the Acropolis, where he stayed under siege for two days. A truce was arranged and the Spartans left peacefully.

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So with these foes of all the gods  
and of Euripides, as well,  
will I not check their insolence?  
If I do not, then let my trophies  
all disappear from Marathon.<sup>1</sup>  
The rest of the trip I have to make  
is uphill to the Acropolis.  
We must move fast, but how to haul  
this wood up there without a mule?  
This pair of logs makes my shoulders sore.  
But still we've got to soldier on  
giving our fire air to breathe.  
It may go out when I'm not looking,  
just as I reach my journey's end.

*[They blow on the coals to keep them alight. The smoke comes blowing up in their faces. The Old Men fall back, coughing and rubbing their eyes]*

O the smoke!

Lord Hercules, how savagely  
it jumped out from the pot right in my face  
and bit my eyes like a raving bitch.  
It works just like a Lemnian fire,  
or else it wouldn't use its teeth  
to feed on fluids in my eye.  
We need to hurry to the citadel  
and save the goddess. If not now,  
O Laches, when should we help her out?<sup>2</sup>

*[The men blow on the coals and are again overpowered by the smoke]*

Damn and blast this smoke!

<sup>2</sup> . . . *from Marathon*: Euripides is the famous tragic dramatist, a younger contemporary of Aristophanes. Marathon was the site of the great Greek victory of the Persian expeditionary forces in 490 BC, a high point of Athenian military achievement.

<sup>1</sup> . . . *help her out*: The reference to Lemnian fire is not clear. The island of Lemnos perhaps had some volcanic activity, or else the reference is to the women of Lemnos who killed all their husbands.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Thanks to the gods, the fire's up again —  
a lively flame. So what if, first of all,  
we placed our firewood down right here, then put  
a vine branch in the pot, set it alight,  
and charged the door like a battering ram?  
We'll order women to remove the bars  
and, if they refuse, burn down the doors.  
We'll overpower them with the smoke.  
All right, put down your loads.

[310]

340

*[The men set down their logs. Once again the smoke is too much for them]*

This bloody smoke!  
Is there any general here from Samos  
who'll help us with this wood? <sup>1</sup>

*[He sets down his load of wood]*

Ah, that's better.  
They're not shrinking my spine any more.  
All right, pot, it's now your job to rouse up  
a fire from those coals, so first of all,  
I'll have a lighted torch and lead the charge.  
O lady Victory, stand with us here,  
so we can set our trophy up in there,  
defeat those women in our citadel,  
put down this present insolence of theirs.

350

*[The Old Men stack their logs in a pile and start lighting their torches on the coals. The Chorus of Old Women enters. They are carrying pitchers of water]*

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Ladies, I think I see some flames and smoke,  
as if a fire was burning. We'd better hurry.

[320]

CHORUS OF OLD WOMEN

We have to fly, Nicodice, fly

<sup>2</sup> . . . *Samos*: Samos is an important island near Athens. A number of the generals of Athenian forces came from there.

before Critylla is burned up  
 and Calyce, too, by nasty winds  
 and old men keen to wipe them out.  
 But I'm afraid I'll be too late  
 to help them out. I've only just  
 filled up my pitcher in the dark. 360  
 It was not easy—at the well  
 the place was jammed and noisy too,  
 with clattering pots, pushy servants,  
 and tattooed slaves. But I was keen  
 to carry water to these fires  
 to help my country's women out.  
 I've heard some dim and dull old men  
 are creeping here and carrying logs—  
 a great big load—to our fortress, 370  
 as if to warm our public baths.  
 They're muttering the most awful things  
 how with their fire they need to turn  
 these hateful women into ash. [340]  
 But, goddess, may I never see  
 them burned like that—but witness how  
 they rescue cities, all of Greece,  
 from war and this insanity.  
 That's why, golden-crested goddess  
 who guards our city, these women 380  
 have now occupied your shrine.  
 O Tritogeneia, I summon you  
 to be my ally—if any man  
 sets them on fire, help us out  
 as we carry this water up to them.<sup>1</sup>

*[The Old Men have lit their torches and are about to move against the Acropolis. The Old Women move to block their way]*

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Hold on, ladies. What this I see? Men— [350]  
 dirty old men—hard at work. Honest types,  
 useful, god-fearing men, could never do

<sup>1</sup> *Tritogeneia* is a common name for the goddess Athena. Its precise meaning is unclear (“Trito born”).

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the things you do.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

What's happening here  
is something we did not expect to see—  
a swarm of women standing here like this  
to guard the doors.

390

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

So you're afraid of us?  
Do we look like an enormous crowd?  
You're seeing just a fraction of our size—  
there are ten thousand more.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Hey there, Phaedrias!  
Shall we stop her nattering on like this?  
Someone hit her, smack her with a log.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Let's put our water jugs down on the ground,  
in case they want to lay their hands on us.  
Down there they won't get in our way.

400

*[The Old Women set down their water jugs]*

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

By god, someone should hit them on the jaw,  
two or three times, and then, like Boupalus,  
they'll won't have anything much more to say.<sup>1</sup>

[360]

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Come on then—strike me. I'm here, waiting.  
No other bitch will ever grab your balls.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Shut up, or I'll hit you—snuff out your old age.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Try coming up and touching Stratyllis  
with your finger tips!

<sup>1</sup> . . . *much more to say*: Boupalus was a sculptor from Chios.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

What if I thrashed you  
with my fists? Would you do something nasty?

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

With my teeth I'll rip out your lungs and guts! 410

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Euripides is such a clever poet—  
the man who says there's no wild animal  
more shameless than a woman.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Come on then,  
Rhodippe, let's pick up our water jugs. [370]

*[The Old Women pick up their water jugs again]*

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Why have you damned women even come here  
carrying this water?

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

And why are you  
bringing fire, you old corpse? Do you intend  
to set yourselves alight?

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Me? To start a blaze  
and roast your friends.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

I'm here to douse your fire.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

You'll put out my fire?

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Yes I will. You'll see. 420

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS *[waving his torch]*

I don't know why I'm not just doing it,  
frying you in this flame.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

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Get yourself some soap.

I'm giving you a bath.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

You'll wash me,  
you old wrinkled prune?

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Yes, it will be  
just like your wedding night.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Listen to her!  
She's a nervy bitch!

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

I'm a free woman.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

I'll make you shut up!

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

You don't judge these things.

[380]

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Set her hair on fire!

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Get to work, Achelous.<sup>1</sup>

*[She throws her jar of water over the Leader of the Men's Chorus, and, following the leader's example, the women throw water all over the old men]*

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

O, that's bad!

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Was that hot enough?

*[The women continue to throw water on the old men]*

<sup>1</sup> . . . to work, Achelous: The Achelous was a large river in northern Greece.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Hot enough?

Won't you stop doing that? What are you doing? 430

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

I'm watering you to make you bloom.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

I'm too old and withered. I'm shaking.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Well, you've got your fire. Warm yourselves up.

*[A Magistrate enters with an armed escort of four public guards and slaves with crowbars and some attendant soldiers]*

MAGISTRATE

Has not our women's lewdness shown itself  
in how they beat their drums for Sabazius,  
that god of excess, or on their rooftops  
shed tears for Adonis? That's what I heard [390]  
one time in our assembly. Demonstrates—  
what a stupid man he is!—was arguing  
that we should sail to Sicily. Meanwhile, 440  
his wife was dancing round and screaming out  
"Alas, Adonis!" While Demonstrates talked,  
saying we should levy soldiers from Zacynthus,  
the woman was on the roof top, getting drunk  
and yelling out "Weep for Adonis! Weep!"<sup>1</sup>  
But he kept on forcing his opinion through,  
that mad brutal ox, whom the gods despise.  
That's just the kind of loose degenerate stuff  
that comes from women.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

Wait until I tell you

the insolent things these women did to us— 450

<sup>1</sup>. . . *Weep!*?: Sabazius was a popular foreign god associated with drinking (like Dionysus). Adonis was a mortal youth loved by Aphrodite. An annual festival was celebrated in his memory. Demonstrates was a politician promoting the disastrous Athenian military expedition to Sicily. Zacynthus is an island off the Peloponnese, an ally of Athens.

all their abuse—they dumped their water jugs  
on us. So now we have to dry our clothes. [400]  
We look as if we've pissed ourselves.

MAGISTRATE

By Poseidon,  
god of the salt seas, it serves you right.  
We men ourselves share in the blame for this.  
We teach our wives their free and easy life,  
and so intrigues come flowering out from them.  
Here's what we tell some working artisan,  
"O goldsmith, about that necklace I bought here—  
last night my wife was dancing and the bolt 460 [410]  
slipped from its hole. I have to take a boat  
to Salamis. If you've got time tonight,  
you could visit her with that tool of yours  
and fix the way the bolt sits in her hole."  
Another man goes to the shoemaker,  
a strapping lad with an enormous prick,  
and says, "O shoemaker, a sandal strap  
is pinching my wife's tender little toe.  
Could you come at noon and rub her strap,  
stretch it really wide?" That's the sort of thing 470 [420]  
that leads to all this trouble. Look at me,  
a magistrate in charge of finding oars  
and thus in need of money now—these women  
have shut the treasury doors to keep me out.  
But standing here's no use.

*[He calls out to his two slaves]*

Bring the crow bars.  
I'll stop these women's insolence myself.

*[He turns to the armed guards he has brought with him]*

What are you gaping at, you idiot!  
And you—what are you looking at?  
Why are you doing nothing—just staring round  
looking for a tavern? Take these crowbars 480  
to the doors there, and then pry them open.

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Come, I'll work to force them open with you.

LYSISTRATA [*opening the doors and walking out*]

No need to use those crowbars. I'm coming out—  
and of my own free will. Why these crowbars?  
This calls for brains and common sense, not force.

[430]

MAGISTRATE

Is that so, you slut? Where's that officer?  
Seize that woman! Tie her hands!

LYSISTRATA

By Artemis,  
he may be a public servant, but if  
he lays a finger on me, he'll be sorry.

MAGISTRATE [*to the first armed guard*]

Are you scared of her? Grab her round the waist!  
You there, help him out! And tie her up!

490

OLD WOMAN A<sup>1</sup>

By Pandrosus, if you lift a hand to her,  
I'll beat you until you shit yourself!

[440]

[*The two armed guards trying to grab Lysistrata are so terrified they  
shit themselves*]

MAGISTRATE

Look at the mess you made! Where is he,  
that other officer?

[*The Magistrate turns to a third armed officer*]

Tie up this one first,  
the one who's got such a filthy mouth.

OLD WOMAN B

By the god of light, if you just touch her,

<sup>1</sup>OLD WOMAN A: In many modern productions the old women who speak in this scene either come out of the gates to the Acropolis or are members of the Chorus. Alternatively the speeches could be assigned to the characters we have met earlier (Myrrhine and Calonice), who emerge from the Acropolis behind Lysistrata.

you'll quickly need a cup to fix your eyes.<sup>1</sup>

[*This officer runs off. The Magistrate turns to a fourth officer*]

MAGISTRATE

Who's this here? Arrest her! I'll put a stop  
to all women in this demonstration!

500

OLD WOMAN C

By bull-bashing Artemis, if you move  
to touch her, I'll rip out all your hair  
until you yelp in pain.

[*The fourth officer runs off in terror*]

MAGISTRATE

This is getting bad.

There are no officers left. We can't let ourselves  
be beaten back by women. Come on then,  
you Scythians, form up your ranks.<sup>2</sup> Then charge.  
Go at them!

[450]

LYSISTRATA

By the two goddesses, you'll see—  
we've got four companies of women inside,  
all fighting fit and fully armed.

MAGISTRATE

Come on,

Scythians, twist their arms behind them!

510

LYSISTRATA [*shouting behind her*]

Come out here from where you are in there,  
all you female allies, on the double—  
you market women who sell grain and eggs,  
garlic and vegetables, and those who run  
our bakeries and taverns, to the attack!

[*Many women emerge from the Acropolis, armed in various ways*]

<sup>2</sup> . . . *fix your eyes.* Black eyes were treated with a small cup placed over the eye to reduce the swelling.

<sup>1</sup> *Scythians.* The armed guards accompanying the Magistrate are traditionally Scythian archers.

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Hit them, stomp on them, scratch their eyeballs,  
cover them with your abuse! Don't hold back!

[460]

*[A general tumult occurs in which the women beat back the Scythian guards]*

LYSISTRATA

That's enough! Back off! Don't strip the armour  
from those you have defeated.

MAGISTRATE

Disaster!

My guards have acted quite disgracefully.

520

LYSISTRATA

What did you expect? Did you really think  
you were facing a bunch of female slaves?  
Or is it your belief that mere women  
have no spirit in them?

MAGISTRATE

Spirit? By Apollo, yes!

If they're near any man who's got some wine.

LEADER OF MEN'S CHORUS

In this land you're a magistrate, but here  
your words are useless. Why even try  
to have a conversation with these bitches?  
Don't you know they've just given us a bath  
in our own cloaks? And they did not use soap!

530

[470]

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Listen, friend. You should never raise your hand  
against your neighbour. If you do, then I  
will have to punch you in the eye. I'd prefer  
to sit quietly at home, like a young girl,  
and not come here to injure anyone  
or agitate the nest, unless someone  
disturbs the hive and makes me angry.

CHORUS OF OLD MEN

O Zeus, however will we find a way  
to deal with these wild beasts? What's going on

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is no longer something we can bear. 540  
But we must question them and find out why  
they are so angry with us, why they wish [480]  
to seize the citadel of Cranaus,  
the holy ground where people do not go,  
on the great rock of the Acropolis.<sup>1</sup>

LEADER OF THE MEN'S CHORUS [*to Magistrate*]

So ask her. Don't let them win you over.  
Challenge everything they say. If we left  
this matter without seeking out the cause  
that would be disgraceful.

MAGISTRATE [*turning to Lysistrata*]

Well then, by god, 550  
first of all I'd like to know the reason  
why you planned to use these barriers here  
to barricade our citadel.

LYSISTRATA

To get your money  
so you couldn't keep on paying for war.

MAGISTRATE

Is it money that's the cause of war?

LYSISTRATA

Yes, and all the rest of the corruption. [490]  
Peisander and our leading politicians  
need a chance to steal. That's the reason  
they're always stirring up disturbances.<sup>2</sup>  
Well, let the ones who wish to do this  
do what they want, but from this moment on 560  
they'll get no more money.

MAGISTRATE

What will you do?

LYSISTRATA

<sup>1</sup> . . . *of the Acropolis*. Cranaus was a legendary king of Athens.

<sup>2</sup> . . . *up disturbances*. Peisander was a leading Athenian politician, suspected of favouring the war for selfish reasons.

You ask me that? We'll control it.

MAGISTRATE

You mean  
you're going to manage all the money?

LYSISTRATA

You consider that so strange? Isn't it true  
we take care of all the household money?

MAGISTRATE

That's not the same.

LYSISTRATA

Why not?

MAGISTRATE

We need the cash  
to carry on the war.

LYSISTRATA

Well, first of all,  
there should be no fighting.

MAGISTRATE

But without war  
how will we save ourselves?

LYSISTRATA

We'll do that.

MAGISTRATE

You?

LYSISTRATA

That's right—us.

MAGISTRATE

This is outrageous!

LYSISTRATA

We'll save you,  
even if that goes against your wishes.

570

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MAGISTRATE

What you're saying is madness!

LYSISTRATA

You're angry,  
but nonetheless we have to do it.

MAGISTRATE

By Demeter, this is against the law!

[500]

LYSISTRATA

My dear fellow, we have to rescue you.

MAGISTRATE

And if I don't agree?

LYSISTRATA

Then our reasons  
are that much more persuasive.

MAGISTRATE

Is it true  
you're really going to deal with peace and war?

LYSISTRATA

We're going to speak to that.

MAGISTRATE [*with a threatening gesture*]

Then speak fast,  
or else you may well start to cry.

LYSISTRATA

Then listen—  
and try to keep your fists controlled.

580

MAGISTRATE

I can't.  
It's hard for me to hold back my temper.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

It's more likely you're the one who'll weep.

MAGISTRATE

Shut up your croaking, you old bag.

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[*To Lysistrata*]

You—talk to me.

LYSISTRATA

I'll do that. Up to now through this long war  
we kept silent about all those things  
you men were doing. We were being modest.  
And you did not allow us to speak up,  
although we were not happy. But still,  
we listened faithfully to you, and often  
inside the house we heard your wretched plans  
for some great deed. And if we ached inside,  
we'd force a smile and simply ask, "Today  
in the assembly did the men propose  
a treaty carved in stone decreeing peace?"  
But our husbands said, "Is that your business?  
Why don't you shut up?" And I'd stay silent.

590 [510]

OLD WOMAN

I'd not have kept my mouth shut.

MAGISTRATE [*to Lysistrata*]

You'd have been smacked  
if you hadn't been quiet and held your tongue.

LYSISTRATA

So there I am at home, saying nothing.  
Then you'd tell us of another project,  
even stupider than before. We'd say,  
"How can you carry out a scheme like that?  
It's foolish." Immediately he'd frown  
and say to me, "If you don't spin your thread,  
you'll get a major beating on your head.  
War is men's concern."

600

[520]

MAGISTRATE

Yes, by god!

That man spoke the truth.

LYSISTRATA

You idiot!

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Is that sensible—not to take advice  
when what you're proposing is so silly? 610  
Then we heard you speaking in the streets,  
asking openly, "Are there any men  
still left here in our land?" and someone said,  
"By god, there's no one." Well then, after that  
it seemed to us we had to rescue Greece  
by bringing wives into a single group  
with one shared aim. Why should we delay?  
If you'd like to hear us give some good advice,  
then keep your mouths shut and start to listen,  
the way we did. We'll save you from yourselves. 620

MAGISTRATE

You'll save us? What you're saying is madness.  
I'm not going to put up with it!

LYSISTRATA

Be quiet!

MAGISTRATE

Should I shut up for you, you witch, someone [530]  
with a scarf around her head? I'd sooner die!

LYSISTRATA

If this scarf of mine really bothers you,  
take it and wrap it round your head. Here—

*[Lysistrata takes off her scarf and wraps it over the Magistrate's head.]*

Now keep quiet!

OLD WOMAN A

And take this basket, too!

LYSISTRATA

Now put on a waist band, comb out wool,  
and chew some beans. This business of the war  
we women will take care of.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Come on, women, 630  
get up and leave those jars. It's our turn now [540]

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to join together with our friends.

#### WOMEN'S CHORUS

With dancing I'll never tire—  
weariness won't grip my knees  
or wear me out. In everything  
I'll strive to match the excellence  
these women here possess—in nature,  
wisdom, boldness, charm,  
and prudent virtue in the way  
they love their country.

640

#### LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

You grandchildren of the bravest women,  
sprung from fruitful stinging nettles,  
let your passion drive you forward,  
and don't be shy, for now you've got  
the winds of fortune at your back.

[550]

#### LYSISTRATA

O Aphrodite born on Cyprus  
and, you, sweet passionate Eros, breathe  
sexual longing on our breasts and thighs  
and fill our men with tortuous desire  
and make their pricks erect. If so, I think  
we'll win ourselves a name among the Greeks  
as those who brought an end to warfare.

650

#### MAGISTRATE

What will you do?

#### LYSISTRATA

For a start, we'll stop  
you men hanging around the market place  
armed with spears and acting up like fools.

#### OLD WOMAN A

Yes, that's right, by Paphian Aphrodite!

#### LYSISTRATA

Right now in the market they stroll around  
among the pots and vegetables, fully armed,

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like Corybantes.<sup>1</sup>

MAGISTRATE

Yes, that's right—  
it's what brave men should do.

LYSISTRATA

It looks so silly—  
going off to purchase tiny little birds  
while carrying a Gorgon shield.<sup>2</sup> [560]

OLD WOMAN A

By god,  
I myself saw a cavalry commander—  
he had long hair and was on horseback—  
pouring out some pudding he'd just bought  
from an old woman into his helmet.  
Another Thracian was waving his spear  
and his shield, as well, just like Tereus,  
and terrifying the woman selling figs  
while gobbling down the ripest ones she had.<sup>3</sup> 670

MAGISTRATE

And how will you find the power to stop  
so many violent disturbances  
throughout our states and then resolve them?

LYSISTRATA

Very easily.

MAGISTRATE

But how? Explain that.

LYSISTRATA

It's like a bunch of yarn. When it's tangled,  
we take it and pass it through the spindle  
back and forth—that's how we'll end the war,

<sup>1</sup>*Corybantes* were divine attendants on the foreign goddess Cybele.

<sup>2</sup>. . . *Gorgon shield*: Shields with monstrous Gorgon heads depicted on them were common in Athens.

<sup>3</sup>*Tereus* was a mythical king of Thrace and a popular figure with Athenian dramatists.

if people let us try, by sending out  
ambassadors here and there, back and forth.

[570]

MAGISTRATE

You're an idiot! Do you really think  
you can end such fearful acts with spindles,  
spools, and wool?

680

LYSISTRATA

If you had any common sense,  
you'd deal with everything the way we do  
when we handle yarn.

MAGISTRATE

What does that mean?  
Tell me.

LYSISTRATA

First of all, just as we wash the wool  
in a rinsing tub to remove the dirt,  
you have to lay the city on a bed,  
beat out the rascals, and then drive away  
the thorns and break apart the groups of men  
who join up together in their factions

690

seeking public office—pluck out their heads.  
Then into a common basket of good will  
comb out the wool, the entire compound mix,  
including foreigners, guests, and allies,  
anyone useful to the public good.

[580]

Bundle them together. As for those cities  
which are colonies of this land, by god,  
you must see that, as far as we're concerned,  
each is a separate skein. From all of them,  
take a piece of wool and bring it here.

700

Roll them together into a single thing.  
Then you'll have made one mighty ball of wool,  
from which the public then must weave its clothes.

MAGISTRATE

So women beat wool, roll it up in balls!  
Isn't that wonderful? That doesn't mean

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they bear any part of what goes on in war.

LYSISTRATA

You silly fool, of course it does—we endure more than twice as much as you. First of all, we bear children and then send them off to serve as soldiers.

MAGISTRATE

All right, be quiet.  
Don't remind me of all that.

710 [590]

LYSISTRATA

And then,  
when we should be having a good time,  
enjoying our youth, we have to sleep alone  
because our men are in the army.  
Setting us aside, it distresses me  
that young unmarried girls are growing old  
alone in their own homes.

MAGISTRATE

Don't men get old?

LYSISTRATA

By god, that's not the same at all. For men,  
even old ones with white hair, can come back  
and quickly marry some young girl. For women  
time soon runs out. If they don't seize their chance,  
no one wants to marry them—they sit there  
waiting for an oracle.

720

MAGISTRATE

But an old man  
who can still get his prick erect . . .

LYSISTRATA [*interrupting*]

O you—  
why not learn your lesson and just die? It's time.  
Buy a funeral urn. I'll prepare the dough

[600]

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for honey cakes.<sup>1</sup> Take this wreath.

*[Lysistrata throws some water over the Magistrate]*

OLD WOMAN A

This one, too —

it's from me!

*[Old Woman A throws more water on the Magistrate]*

OLD WOMAN B

Here, take this garland!

*[Old Woman B throws more water on the Magistrate]*

LYSISTRATA

Well now,  
what do you need? What are you waiting for?  
Step aboard the boat. Charon's calling you.  
You're preventing him from casting off.<sup>2</sup>

730

MAGISTRATE

I don't have to put up with these insults!  
I'll go to the other magistrates, by god,  
and show myself exactly as I am!

[620]

*[The Magistrate exits with his attending slaves]*

LYSISTRATA *[calling out to him as he leaves]*

Are you blaming us for not laying you out  
for burial? Well then, on the third day,  
we'll come and offer up a sacrifice  
on your behalf first thing in the morning.

*[Lysistrata and the old women with her return inside the Acropolis]*

LEADER OF THE MEN'S CHORUS

You men, no more sleeping on the job  
for anyone born free! Let's strip ourselves  
for action on this issue. It seems to me

740

<sup>1</sup> *Honey cakes* were traditionally part of the funeral service, given to make sure the dead shade reached Hades.

<sup>2</sup> *Charon* was the ferryman who transported the shades of the dead across the river into Hades.

this business stinks—it's large and getting larger.

*[The Old Men strip down, taking almost all their clothes off]*

CHORUS OF OLD MEN

And I especially smelled some gas—  
the tyrant rule of Hippias.

I've a great fear that Spartan men  
collected here with Cleisthenes,  
have with their trickery stirred up  
these women, whom the gods all hate,  
to seize the treasury and our pay,  
the funds I need to live my way.<sup>1</sup>

750

It's terrible these women here  
are thinking about politics  
and prattling on about bronze spears—  
they're women!—and making peace  
on our behalf with Spartan types,  
whom I don't trust, not any more  
than gaping wolves. In this affair,  
those men are weaving plots for us,  
so they can bring back tyranny.

[630]

But me, I won't give any ground,  
not to a tyrant. I'll stand guard,  
from now on carrying a sword  
inside my myrtle bough. I'll march  
with weapons in the market place  
with Aristogeiton at my side.<sup>2</sup>

760

I'll stand with him. And now it's time  
I struck those hostile to gods' law  
and hit that old hag on the jaw.

*[The Old Men move to threaten the Old Women with their fists]*

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

<sup>1</sup>*Hippias* was a tyrant in Athens from 528 to 510. *Cleisthenes*, an Athenian, was a favourite target of Aristophanes, ridiculed as a passive homosexual. The pay the old men refer to is a daily allowance of three obols to jury men.

<sup>2</sup>*Aristogeiton*: One of the two men who led the attack on the Athenian tyrants and thus became a symbol of the highest democratic ideals in the city.

When you get back home, your own mother  
won't know who you are. Come on, old ladies, 770  
you friends of mine, let's first set our burdens  
on the ground.

#### WOMEN'S CHORUS

All you fellow citizens,  
we'll start to give the city good advice  
and rightly, since it raised us splendidly [640]  
so we lived very well. At seven years old,  
I carried sacred vessels, and at ten  
I pounded barley for Athena's shrine.  
Later as bear, I shed my yellow dress  
for the rites of Brauronian Artemis.  
And once I was a lovely full-grown girl, 780  
I wore strings of figs around my neck  
and was one of those who carried baskets.  
So I am indebted to the city.  
Why not pay it back with good advice?<sup>1</sup>  
I was born a woman, but don't hold that  
against me if I introduce a plan  
to make our present situation better. [650]  
For I make contributions to the state—  
I give birth to men. You miserable old farts,  
you contribute nothing! That pile of cash 790  
which we collected from the Persian Wars  
you squandered. You don't pay any taxes.  
What's more, the way you act so stupidly  
endangers all of us. What do you say?  
Don't get me riled up. I'll take this filthy shoe  
and smack you one right on the jaw.

#### CHORUS OF OLD MEN

Is this not getting way too insolent?  
I think it's better if we paid them back. [660]  
We have to fight this out. So any one  
who's got balls enough to be a man 800

<sup>2</sup>The Old Women in these lines are referring to many city activities and rituals in which girls of noble families played important roles. The phrase "as bear" refers to a ritual in honour of Artemis.

take off your clothes so we men can smell  
 the way we should—like men. We should strip.  
 It’s not right to keep ourselves wrapped up.  
 We’re the ones who’ve got white feet.  
 We marched to Leipsydryon years ago.<sup>1</sup>  
 And now let’s stand erect again, aroused  
 in our whole bodies—shake off our old age. [670]

*[The Old Men take off their remaining clothes, hold up their shrivelled phalluses, and threaten the women]*

If one of us gives them the slightest chance  
 there’s nothing these women won’t continue  
 trying to work on—building fighting ships, 810  
 attacking us at sea like Artemesia.<sup>2</sup>  
 If they switch to horses, I draw the line.  
 For women are the best at riding bareback—  
 their shapely arses do a lovely job.  
 They don’t slip off when grinding at a gallop.  
 Just look how Micon painted Amazons  
 fighting men on horseback hand to hand.<sup>3</sup>  
 So we must take a piece of wood with holes, [680]  
 and fit a yoke on them, around their necks.

#### CHORUS OF OLD WOMEN

By the two goddesses, if you get me roused, 820  
 I’ll let my wild sow’s passion loose and make  
 you yell to all the people here today  
 how I’m removing all your hair.

#### LEADER OF WOMEN’S CHORUS

You ladies,

let’s not delay—let’s take off all our clothes,

<sup>1</sup>*Leipsydryon* was the site of a battle years before when the tyrant Hippias besieged and defeated his opponents. The old men are treating the event as if they had been victorious. The detail about their white feet, Sommerstein suggests, refers to those who were hostile to Hippias and the tyrants (hence, lovers of freedom).

<sup>2</sup>*Artemesia* was queen of Halicarnassus in Asia Minor. She led ships from her city as part of the Persian expedition against Athens in 480 and fought at the Battle of Salamis.

<sup>3</sup>*Micon* was a well-known Athenian painter.

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so we can smell a woman's passion  
when we're in a ferocious mood.

*[The Old Women take off their clothes]*

#### WOMEN'S CHORUS

Now let any man step out against me—  
he won't be eating garlic any more, [690]  
and no black beans. Just say something nasty,  
I'm so boiling mad, I'll treat you the same way 830  
the beetle did the eagle—smash your eggs.<sup>1</sup>

#### LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Not that I give a damn for you, not while  
I have Lampito here—Ismenia, too,  
my young Theban friend. You have no power,  
not even with seven times as many votes.  
You're such a miserable old man, even those  
who are you neighbours find you hateful.  
Just yesterday for the feast of Hecate, [700]  
I planned a party, so I asked my neighbours  
in Boeotia for one of their companions, 840  
a lovely girl—she was for my children—  
a splendid pot of eels. But they replied  
they couldn't send it because you'd passed  
another one of your decrees.<sup>2</sup> It doesn't seem  
you'll stop voting in these laws, not before  
someone takes your leg, carries you off  
and throws you out.

*[Lysistrata comes out from the Acropolis, looking very worried and angry. The leader of the Women's Chorus addresses her]*

Here's our glorious leader,  
who does the planning for this enterprise.

<sup>2</sup>*beetle . . . eagle*: This is a reference to an old story in which the dung beetle got its revenge against an eagle by smashing its eggs. The old woman obviously threatens the man's testicles as she says this.

<sup>1</sup>As noted earlier (at line 28) eels were a delicacy associated with Boeotia, a state allied with Athens' enemies. *Hecate* was a goddess whose worship was associated with birth and children.

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Why have you come here, outside the building,  
and with such a sad expression on your face?

850

LYSISTRATA

It's the way these women act so badly,  
together with their female hearts—it makes  
me lose my courage and walk in circles.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

What are you saying? What do you mean?

[710]

LYSISTRATA

It's true, so true.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

What's wrong? You can tell us—  
we're friends of yours.

LYSISTRATA

I'm ashamed to say,  
but it's hard to keep it quiet.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

Don't hide from me  
bad news affecting all of us.

LYSISTRATA

All right,  
I'll keep it short—we all want to get laid.

LEADER OF WOMEN'S CHORUS

O Zeus!

LYSISTRATA

What's the point of calling Zeus?  
There's nothing he can do about this mess.  
I can't keep these women from their men,  
not any longer—they're all running off.  
First I caught one slipping through a hole  
beside the Cave of Pan, then another  
trying it with a rope and pulley, a third  
deserting on her own, and yesterday  
there was a woman on a giant bird

860

[720]

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intending to fly down to that place  
run by Orsilochus.<sup>1</sup> I grabbed her hair.  
They're all inventing reasons to go home.

870

*[A woman come out of the citadel, trying to sneak off]*

Here's one of them on her way right now.  
Where do you think you're going?

WOMAN A

Who me?

I want to get back home. Inside the house  
I've got bolts of Milesian cloth, and worms  
are eating them.

LYSISTRATA

What worms? Get back in there!

[730]

WOMAN A

I'll come back right away, by god—but now  
I need to spread them on the bed.

LYSISTRATA

Spread them?

You won't be doing that. You're not leaving!

WOMAN A

My wool just goes to waste?

LYSISTRATA

If that's what it takes.

880

*[Woman A trudges back into the Acropolis. Woman B emerges]*

WOMAN B

I'm such a fool, I've left my wretched flax  
back in my house unstripped.

LYSISTRATA

Another one

leaving here to go and strip her flax!  
Get back inside!

<sup>1</sup>*Orsilochus* was either a well-known seducer or someone who kept a brothel.

WOMAN B

By the goddess of light,  
I'll be right back, once I've rubbed its skin.

LYSISTRATA

You'll not rub anything. If you start that, [740]  
some other woman will want to do the same.

*[Woman B returns dejected into the citadel. Woman C emerges from the citadel, looking very pregnant]*

WOMAN C

O sacred Eileithia, goddess of birth,  
hold back my labour pains till I can find  
a place where I'm permitted to give birth.<sup>1</sup> 890

LYSISTRATA

What are you moaning about?

WOMAN C

It's my time—  
I'm going to have a child!

LYSISTRATA

But yesterday  
you weren't even pregnant.

WOMAN C

Well, today I am.  
Send me home, Lysistrata, and quickly.  
I need a midwife.

LYSISTRATA *[inspecting Woman C's clothing]*

What are you saying?  
What's this you've got here? It feels quite rigid.

WOMAN C

A little boy.

LYSISTRATA

No, by Aphrodite,  
I don't think so. It looks like you've got [750]

<sup>1</sup> *permitted to give birth*: To have a child in a holy place was a sacrilege.

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## A Note on the Translator

Ian Johnston was born in Valparaiso, Chile, educated at McGill, Bristol, and Toronto universities, and taught for many years in the British Columbia college and university-college system. He is now retired and lives in Nanaimo, British Columbia.

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# Aristophanes Lysistrata

Translated by Ian Johnston

*Lysistrata*, one of the most famous and most popular plays of the great comic writer Aristophanes (456-386 BC), tells the story of how the women from the Greek city states decide to take over the public treasury in Athens and to stop having sex with their husbands until the men agree to stop fighting a destructive civil war. Written in 411 BC, when the Athenians and the Spartans had been at war for about twenty years, the play is celebrated not only as an extremely funny and frank comedy but also as a major landmark of feminist and pacifist literature.

The sexually explicit nature of the story and especially the use of huge male phalluses make *Lysistrata* a very robust comedy, so much so that in modern times it offended middle-class tastes for many years. However, the play also explores a number of serious themes: the connection between male sexuality and violence, the destructive effects of war on women's lives, and the corruption and absurdity of war, among others. The importance of these themes in recent decades has encouraged all sorts of productions and adaptations of this most eloquent and relevant of plays.

Ian Johnston's new translation conveys the humour and the seriousness of Aristophanes' original text in a fluent and accurate modern English. The text also provides footnotes to assist the reader with references to people and events mentioned in the play.

## About the Translator



Ian Johnston was born in Valparaiso, Chile, and educated in Canada and England. He has a BSc from McGill in Geology and Chemistry, a BA from Bristol in English and Greek, and an MA from Toronto in English. For many years he taught as a college and university-college instructor in British Columbia teaching English, Classics and Liberal Studies. He is the author of *The Ironies of War: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad*. His translation of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* have recently been

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