

# **PEACE**

by

Aristophanes

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# Peace

## INTRODUCTION

The 'Peace' was brought out four years after 'The Acharnians' (422 B.C.), when the War had already lasted ten years. The leading motive is the same as in the former play--the intense desire of the less excitable and more moderate-minded citizens for relief from the miseries of war.

Trygaeus, a rustic patriot, finding no help in men, resolves to ascend to heaven to expostulate personally with Zeus for allowing this wretched state of things to continue. With this object he has fed and trained a gigantic dung-beetle, which he mounts, and is carried, like Bellerophon on Pegasus, on an aerial journey. Eventually he reaches Olympus, only to find that the gods have gone elsewhere, and that the heavenly abode is occupied solely by the demon of War, who is busy pounding up the Greek States in a huge mortar. However, his benevolent purpose is not in vain; for learning from Hermes that the goddess Peace has been cast into a pit, where she is kept a fast prisoner, he calls upon the different peoples of Hellas to make a united effort and rescue her, and with their help drags her out and brings her back in triumph to earth. The play concludes with the restoration of the goddess to her ancient honours, the festivities of the rustic population and the nuptials of Trygaeus with Opora (Harvest), handmaiden of Peace, represented as a pretty courtesan.

Such references as there are to Cleon in this play are noteworthy. The great Demagogue was now dead, having fallen in the same action as the rival Spartan general, the renowned Brasidas, before Amphipolis, and whatever Aristophanes says here of his old enemy is conceived in the spirit of 'de mortuis nil nisi bonum.' In one scene Hermes is descanting on the evils which had nearly ruined Athens and declares that 'The Tanner' was the cause of them all. But Trygaeus interrupts him with the words:

"Hold-say not so, good master Hermes;  
Let the man rest in peace where now he lies.  
He is no longer of our world, but yours."

Here surely we have a trait of magnanimity on the author's part as admirable in its way as the wit and boldness of his former attacks had been in theirs.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

TRYGAEUS TWO SERVANTS OF TRYGAEUS MAIDENS, DAUGHTERS OF TRYGAEUS HERMES WAR TUMULT HIEROCLES, a Soothsayer A SICKLE-MAKER A CREST-MAKER A TRUMPET-MAKER A HELMET-MAKER A SPEAR-MAKER SON OF LAMACHUS SON OF CLEONYMUS CHORUS OF HUSBANDMEN

SCENE: A farmyard, two slaves busy beside a dungheap; afterwards, in Olympus.

**FIRST SERVANT**

Quick, quick, bring the dung-beetle his cake.

**SECOND SERVANT**

Coming, coming.

**FIRST SERVANT**

Give it to him, and may it kill him!

**SECOND SERVANT**

May he never eat a better.

**FIRST SERVANT**

Now give him this other one kneaded up with ass's dung.

**SECOND SERVANT**

There! I've done that too.

**FIRST SERVANT**

And where's what you gave him just now; surely he can't have devoured it yet!

**SECOND SERVANT**

Indeed he has; he snatched it, rolled it between his feet and bolted it.

**FIRST SERVANT**

Come, hurry up, knead up a lot and knead them stiffly.

**SECOND SERVANT**

Oh, scavengers, help me in the name of the gods, if you do not wish to see me fall down choked.

**FIRST SERVANT**

Come, come, another made from the stool of a young scapegrace catamite. 'Twill be to the beetle's taste; he likes it well ground.

**SECOND SERVANT**

There! I am free at least from suspicion; none will accuse me of tasting what I mix.

**FIRST SERVANT**

Faugh! come, now another! keep on mixing with all your might.

**SECOND SERVANT**

I' faith, no. I can stand this awful cesspool stench no longer, so I bring you the whole ill-smelling gear.

**FIRST SERVANT**

Pitch it down the sewer sooner, and yourself with it.

**SECOND SERVANT**

Maybe, one of you can tell me where I can buy a stopped-up nose, for there is no work more disgusting than to mix food for a beetle and to carry it to him. A pig or a dog will at least pounce upon our excrement without more ado, but this foul wretch affects the disdainful, the spoilt mistress, and won't eat unless I offer him a cake that has been kneaded for an entire day.... But let us open the door a bit ajar without his seeing it. Has he done eating? Come, pluck up courage, cram yourself till you burst! The cursed creature! It wallows in its food! It grips it between its claws like a wrestler clutching his opponent, and with head and feet together rolls up its paste like a rope-maker twisting a hawser. What an indecent, stinking, gluttonous beast! I know not what angry god let this monster loose upon us, but of a certainty it was neither Aphrodite nor the Graces.

**FIRST SERVANT**

Who was it then?

**SECOND SERVANT**

No doubt the Thunderer, Zeus.

**FIRST SERVANT**

But perhaps some spectator, some beardless youth, who thinks himself a sage, will say, "What is this? What does the beetle mean?" And then an Ionian,[1] sitting next him, will add, "I think 'tis an allusion to Cleon, who so shamelessly feeds on filth all by himself."-- But now I'm going indoors to fetch the beetle a drink.

f[1] 'Peace' was no doubt produced at the festival of the Apaturia, which was kept at the end of October, a period when strangers were numerous in Athens.

**SECOND SERVANT**

As for me, I will explain the matter to you all, children, youths, grownups and old men, aye, even to the decrepit dotards. My master is mad, not as you are, but with another sort of madness, quite a new kind. The livelong day he looks open-mouthed towards heaven and never stops addressing Zeus. "Ah! Zeus," he cries, "what are thy intentions? Lay aside thy besom; do not sweep Greece away!"

**TRYGAEUS**

Ah! ah! ah!

**SECOND SERVANT**

Hush, hush! Mehinks I hear his voice!

**TRYGAEUS**

Oh! Zeus, what art thou going to do for our people? Dost thou not see this, that our cities will soon be but empty husks?

**SECOND SERVANT**

As I told you, that is his form of madness. There you have a sample of his follies. When his trouble first began to seize him, he said to himself, "By what means could I go straight to Zeus?" Then he made himself very slender little ladders and so clambered up towards heaven; but he soon came hurtling down again and broke his head. Yesterday, to our misfortune, he went out and brought us back this thoroughbred, but from where I know not, this great beetle, whose groom he has forced me to become. He himself caresses it as though it were a horse, saying, "Oh! my little Pegasus,[1] my noble aerial steed, may your wings soon bear me straight to Zeus!" But what is my master doing? I must stoop down to look through this hole. Oh! great gods! Here! neighbours, run here quick! here is my master flying off mounted on his beetle as if on horseback.

f[1] The winged steed of Perseus--an allusion to a lost tragedy of Euripides, in which Bellerophon was introduced riding on Pegasus.

**TRYGAEUS**

Gently, gently, go easy, beetle; don't start off so proudly, or trust at first too greatly to your powers; wait till you have sweated, till the beating of your wings shall make your limb joints supple. Above all things, don't let off some foul smell, I adjure you; else I would rather have you stop in the stable altogether.

**SECOND SERVANT**

Poor master! Is he crazy?

**TRYGAEUS**

Silence! silence!

**SECOND SERVANT (TO TRYGAEUS)**

But why start up into the air on chance?

**TRYGAEUS**

'Tis for the weal of all the Greeks; I am attempting a daring and novel feat.

**SECOND SERVANT**

But what is your purpose? What useless folly!

**TRYGAEUS**

No words of ill omen! Give vent to joy and command all men to keep silence, to close down their drains and privies with new tiles and to stop up their own vent-holes.[1]

f[1] Fearing that if it caught a whiff from earth to its liking, the beetle might descend from the highest heaven to satisfy itself.

**FIRST SERVANT**

No, I shall not be silent, unless you tell me where you are going.

**TRYGAEUS**

Why, where am I likely to be going across the sky, if it be not to visit Zeus?

**FIRST SERVANT**

For what purpose?

**TRYGAEUS**

I want to ask him what he reckons to do for all the Greeks.

**SECOND SERVANT**

And if he doesn't tell you?

**TRYGAEUS**

I shall pursue him at law as a traitor who sells Greece to the Medes.[1]

f[1] The Persians and the Spartans were not then allied as the scholiast states, since a treaty between them was only concluded in 412 B.C., i.e. eight years after the production of 'Peace'; the great king, however, was trying to derive advantages out of the dissensions in Greece.

**SECOND SERVANT**

Death seize me, if I let you go.

**TRYGAEUS**

It is absolutely necessary.

**SECOND SERVANT**

Alas! alas! dear little girls, your father is deserting you secretly to go to heaven. Ah! poor orphans, entreat him, beseech him.

**LITTLE DAUGHTER**

Father! father! what is this I hear? Is it true? What! you would leave me, you would vanish into the sky, you would go to the crows?[1] 'Tis impossible! Answer, father, and you love me.

f[1] "Go to the crows," a proverbial expression equivalent to our "Go to the devil."

**TRYGAEUS**

Yes, I am going. You hurt me too sorely, my daughters, when you ask me for bread, calling me your daddy, and there is not the ghost of an obolus in the house; if I succeed and come back, you will have a barley loaf every morning--and a punch in the eye for sauce!

**LITTLE DAUGHTER**

But how will you make the journey? 'Tis not a ship that will carry you thither.

**TRYGAEUS**

No, but this winged steed will.

**LITTLE DAUGHTER**

But what an idea, daddy, to harness a beetle, on which to fly to the gods.

**TRYGAEUS**

We see from Aesop's fables that they alone can fly to the abode of the Immortals.[1]

f[1] Aesop tells us that the eagle and the beetle were at war; the eagle devoured the beetle's young and the latter got into its nest and tumbled out its eggs. On this the eagle complained to Zeus, who advised it to lay its eggs in his bosom; but the beetle flew up to the abode of Zeus, who, forgetful of the eagle's eggs, at once rose to chase off the objectionable insect. The eggs fell to earth and were smashed to bits.

**LITTLE DAUGHTER**

Father, father, 'tis a tale nobody can believe! that such a stinking creature can have gone to the gods.

**TRYGAEUS**

It went to have vengeance on the eagle and break its eggs.

**LITTLE DAUGHTER**

Why not saddle Pegasus? you would have a more TRAGIC[1] appearance in the eyes of the gods.

f[1] Pegasus is introduced by Euripides both in his 'Andromeda' and his 'Bellerophon.'

**TRYGAEUS**

Eh! don't you see, little fool, that then twice the food would be wanted? Whereas my beetle devours again as filth what I have eaten myself.

**LITTLE DAUGHTER**

And if it fell into the watery depths of the sea, could it escape with its wings?

**TRYGAEUS (EXPOSING HIMSELF)**

I am fitted with a rudder in case of need, and my Naxos beetle will serve me as a boat.[1]

f[1] Boats, called 'beetles,' doubtless because in form they resembled these insects, were built at Naxos.

**LITTLE DAUGHTER**

And what harbour will you put in at?

**TRYGAEUS**

Why is there not the harbour of Cantharos at the Piraeus?[1]

f[1] Nature had divided the Piraeus into three basins--Cantharos, Aphrodisium and Zea. [Cantharos] is Greek for dung-beetle.

### **LITTLE DAUGHTER**

Take care not to knock against anything and so fall off into space; once a cripple, you would be a fit subject for Euripides, who would put you into a tragedy.[1]

f[1] In allusion to Euripides' fondness for introducing lame heroes in his plays.

### **TRYGAEUS**

I'll see to it. Good-bye! (TO THE ATHENIANS.) You, for love of whom I brave these dangers, do ye neither let wind nor go to stool for the space of three days, for, if, while cleaving the air, my steed should scent anything, he would fling me head foremost from the summit of my hopes. Now come, my Pegasus, get a-going with up-pricked ears and make your golden bridle resound gaily. Eh! what are you doing? What are you up to? Do you turn your nose towards the cesspools? Come, pluck up a spirit; rush upwards from the earth, stretch out your speedy wings and make straight for the palace of Zeus; for once give up foraging in your daily food.--Hi! you down there, what are you after now? Oh! my god! 'tis a man emptying his belly in the Piraeus, close to the house where the bad girls are. But is it my death you seek then, my death? Will you not bury that right away and pile a great heap of earth upon it and plant wild thyme therein and pour perfumes on it? If I were to fall from up here and misfortune happened to me, the town of Chios[1] would owe a fine of five talents for my death, all along of your cursed rump. Alas! how frightened I am! oh! I have no heart for jests. Ah! machinist, take great care of me. There is already a wind whirling round my navel; take great care or, from sheer fright, I shall form food for my beetle.... But I think I am no longer far from the gods; aye, that is the dwelling of Zeus, I perceive. Hullo! Hi! where is the doorkeeper? Will no one open?

f[1] An allusion to the proverbial nickname applied to the Chians [in Greek]--'crapping Chian.' There is a further joke, of course, in connection with the hundred and one frivolous pretexts which the Athenians invented for exacting contributions from the maritime allies.

(THE SCENE CHANGES AND HEAVEN IS PRESENTED.)

### **HERMES**

Meseems I can sniff a man. (HE PERCEIVES TRYGAEUS ASTRIDE HIS BEETLE.)  
Why, what plague is this?

### **TRYGAEUS**

A horse-beetle.

### **HERMES**

Oh! impudent, shameless rascal! oh! scoundrel! triple scoundrel! the greatest scoundrel in the world! how did you come here? Oh! scoundrel of all scoundrels! your name? Reply.

**TRYGAEUS**

Triple scoundrel.

**HERMES**

Your country?

**TRYGAEUS**

Triple scoundrel.

**HERMES**

Your father?

**TRYGAEUS**

My father? Triple scoundrel.

**HERMES**

By the Earth, you shall die, unless you tell me your name.

**TRYGAEUS**

I am Trygaeus of the Athmonian deme, a good vine-dresser, little addicted to quibbling and not at all an informer.

**HERMES**

Why do you come?

**TRYGAEUS**

I come to bring you this meat.

**HERMES**

Ah! my good friend, did you have a good journey?

**TRYGAEUS**

Glutton, be off! I no longer seem a triple scoundrel to you. Come, call Zeus.

**HERMES**

Ah! ah! you are a long way yet from reaching the gods, for they moved yesterday.

**TRYGAEUS**

To what part of the earth?

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