

# **The Acharnians**

by

**Aristophanes**

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# The Acharnians

## INTRODUCTION

This is the first of the series of three Comedies--'The Acharnians,' 'Peace' and 'Lysistrata'-produced at intervals of years, the sixth, tenth and twenty-first of the Peloponnesian War, and impressing on the Athenian people the miseries and disasters due to it and to the scoundrels who by their selfish and reckless policy had provoked it, the consequent ruin of industry and, above all, agriculture, and the urgency of asking Peace. In date it is the earliest play brought out by the author in his own name and his first work of serious importance. It was acted at the Lenaeon Festival, in January, 426 B.C., and gained the first prize, Cratinus being second.

Its diatribes against the War and fierce criticism of the general policy of the War party so enraged Cleon that, as already mentioned, he endeavoured to ruin the author, who in 'The Knights' retorted by a direct and savage personal attack on the leader of the democracy.

The plot is of the simplest. Dicaeopolis, an Athenian citizen, but a native of Acharnae, one of the agricultural demes and one which had especially suffered in the Lacedaemonian invasions, sick and tired of the ill-success and miseries of the War, makes up his mind, if he fails to induce the people to adopt his policy of "peace at any price," to conclude a private and particular peace of his own to cover himself, his family, and his estate. The Athenians, momentarily elated by victory and over-persuaded by the demagogues of the day--Cleon and his henchmen, refuse to hear of such a thing as coming to terms. Accordingly Dicaeopolis dispatches an envoy to Sparta on his own account, who comes back presently with a selection of specimen treaties in his pocket. The old man tastes and tries, special terms are arranged, and the play concludes with a riotous and uproarious rustic feast in honour of the blessings of Peace and Plenty.

Incidentally excellent fun is poked at Euripides and his dramatic methods, which supply matter for so much witty badinage in several others of our author's pieces.

Other specially comic incidents are: the scene where the two young daughters of the famished Megarian are sold in the market at Athens as suck[ing]-pigs--a scene in which the convenient similarity of the Greek words signifying a pig and the 'pudendum muliebre' respectively is utilized in a whole string of ingenious and suggestive 'double entendres' and ludicrous jokes; another where the Informer, or Market-Spy, is packed up in a crate as crockery and carried off home by the Boeotian buyer.

The drama takes its title from the Chorus, composed of old men of Acharnae.

## DRAMATIS PERSONAE

DICAEOPOLIS HERALD AMPHITHEUS AMBASSADORS PSEUDARTABAS  
THEORUS WIFE OF DICAEOPOLIS DAUGHTER OF DICAEOPOLIS EURIPIDES  
CEPHISOPHON, servant of Euripides LAMACHUS ATTENDANT OF LAMACHUS A  
MEGARIAN MAIDENS, daughters of the Megarian A BOEOTIAN NICARCHUS A  
HUSBANDMAN A BRIDESMAID AN INFORMER MESSENGERS CHORUS OF  
ACHARNIAN ELDERS

SCENE: The Athenian Ecclesia on the Pnyx; afterwards Dicaeopolis' house in the country.

DICAEOPOLIS[1] (alone)

What cares have not gnawed at my heart and how few have been the pleasures in my life! Four, to be exact, while my troubles have been as countless as the grains of sand on the shore! Let me see! of what value to me have been these few pleasures? Ah! I remember that I was delighted in soul when Cleon had to disgorge those five talents;[2] I was in ecstasy and I love the Knights for this deed; 'it is an honour to Greece.'<sup>[3]</sup> But the day when I was impatiently awaiting a piece by Aeschylus,[4] what tragic despair it caused me when the herald called, "Theognis,[5] introduce your Chorus!" Just imagine how this blow struck straight at my heart! On the other hand, what joy Dexitheus caused me at the musical competition, when he played a Boeotian melody on the lyre! But this year by contrast! Oh! what deadly torture to hear Chaeris[6] perform the prelude in the Orthian mode![7] --Never, however, since I began to bathe, has the dust hurt my eyes as it does to-day. Still it is the day of assembly; all should be here at daybreak, and yet the Pnyx[8] is still deserted. They are gossiping in the marketplace, slipping hither and thither to avoid the vermilioned rope.[9] The Prytaness[10] even do not come; they will be late, but when they come they will push and fight each other for a seat in the front row. They will never trouble themselves with the question of peace. Oh! Athens! Athens! As for myself, I do not fail to come here before all the rest, and now, finding myself alone, I groan, yawn, stretch, break wind, and know not what to do; I make sketches in the dust, pull out my loose hairs, muse, think of my fields, long for peace, curse town life and regret my dear country home,[11] which never told me to 'buy fuel, vinegar or oil'; there the word 'buy,' which cuts me in two, was unknown; I harvested everything at will. Therefore I have come to the assembly fully prepared to bawl, interrupt and abuse the speakers, if they talk of anything but peace. But here come the Prytaness, and high time too, for it is midday! As I foretold, hah! is it not so? They are pushing and fighting for the front seats.

f[1] A name invented by Aristophanes and signifying 'a just citizen.'

f[2] Clean had received five talents from the islanders subject to Athens, on condition that he should get the tribute payable by them reduced; when informed of this transaction, the knights compelled him to return the money.

f[3] A hemistich borrowed from Euripides' 'Telephus.'

f[4] The tragedies of Aeschylus continued to be played even after the poet's death, which occurred in 436 B.C., ten years before the production of 'The Acharnians.'

f[5] A tragic poet, whose pieces were so devoid of warmth and life that he was nicknamed [the Greek for] 'snow.'

f[6] A bad musician, frequently ridiculed by Aristophanes; he played both the lyre and the flute.

f[7] A lively and elevated method.

f[8] A hill near the Acropolis, where the Assemblies were held.

f[9] Several means were used to force citizens to attend the assemblies; the shops were closed; circulation was only permitted in those streets which led to the Pnyx; finally, a rope covered with vermilion was drawn round those who dallied in the Agora (the market-place), and the late-comers, ear-marked by the imprint of the rope, were fined.

f[10] Magistrates who, with the Archons and the Epistatae, shared the care of holding and directing the assemblies of the people; they were fifty in number.

f[11] The Peloponnesian War had already, at the date of the representation of 'The Acharnians,' lasted five years, 431-426 B.C.; driven from their lands by the successive Lacedaemonian invasions, the people throughout the country had been compelled to seek shelter behind the walls of Athens.

### **HERALD**

Move on up, move on, move on, to get within the consecrated area.[1]

f[1] Shortly before the meeting of the Assembly, a number of young pigs were immolated and a few drops of their blood were sprinkled on the seats of the Prytanes; this sacrifice was in honour of Ceres.

### **AMPHITHEUS**

Has anyone spoken yet?

### **HERALD**

Who asks to speak?

### **AMPHITHEUS**

I do.

### **HERALD**

Your name?

### **AMPHITHEUS**

Amphitheus.

### **HERALD**

You are no man.[1]

f[1] The name, Amphitheus, contains [the Greek] word [for] 'god.'

### **AMPHITHEUS**

No! I am an immortal! Amphitheus was the son of Ceres and Triptolemus; of him was born Celeus. Celeus wedded Phaenerete, my grandmother, whose son was Lucinus, and, being born of him I am an immortal; it is to me alone that the gods have entrusted the

duty of treating with the Lacedaemonians. But, citizens, though I am immortal, I am dying of hunger; the Prytanēs give me naught.[1]

f[1] Amongst other duties, it was the office of the Prytanēs to look after the wants of the poor.

**A PRYTANIS**

Guards!

**AMPHITHEUS**

Oh, Triptolemus and Ceres, do ye thus forsake your own blood?

**DICAEOPOLIS**

Prytanēs, in expelling this citizen, you are offering an outrage to the Assembly. He only desired to secure peace for us and to sheathe the sword.

**PRYTANIS**

Sit down and keep silence!

**DICAEOPOLIS**

No, by Apollo, I will not, unless you are going to discuss the question of peace.

**HERALD**

The ambassadors, who are returned from the Court of the King!

**DICAEOPOLIS**

Of what King? I am sick of all those fine birds, the peacock ambassadors and their swagger.

**HERALD**

Silence!

**DICAEOPOLIS**

Oh! oh! by Ecbatana,[1] what a costume!

f[1] The summer residence of the Great King.

**AN AMBASSADOR**

During the archonship of Euthymenes, you sent us to the Great King on a salary of two drachmae per diem.

**DICAEOPOLIS**

Ah! those poor drachmae!

**AMBASSADOR**

We suffered horribly on the plains of the Cayster, sleeping under a tent, stretched deliciously on fine chariots, half dead with weariness.

**DICAEOPOLIS**

And I was very much at ease, lying on the straw along the battlements![1]

f[1] Referring to the hardships he had endured garrisoning the walls of Athens during the Lacedaemonian invasions early in the War.

**AMBASSADOR**

Everywhere we were well received and forced to drink delicious wine out of golden or crystal flagons....

**DICAEOPOLIS**

Oh, city of Cranaus,[1] thy ambassadors are laughing at thee!

f[1] Cranaus, the second king of Athens, the successor of Cecrops.

**AMBASSADOR**

For great feeders and heavy drinkers are alone esteemed as men by the barbarians.

**DICAEOPOLIS**

Just as here in Athens, we only esteem the most drunken debauchees.

**AMBASSADOR**

At the end of the fourth year we reached the King's Court, but he had left with his whole army to ease himself, and for the space of eight months he was thus easing himself in the midst of the golden mountains.[1]

f[1] Lucian, in his 'Hermitimus,' speaks of these golden mountains as an apocryphal land of wonders and prodigies.

**DICAEOPOLIS**

And how long was he replacing his dress?

**AMBASSADOR**

The whole period of a full moon; after which he returned to his palace; then he entertained us and had us served with oxen roasted whole in an oven.

**DICAEOPOLIS**

Who ever saw an oxen baked in an oven? What a lie!

**AMBASSADOR**

On my honour, he also had us served with a bird three times as large as Cleonymus,[1] and called the Boaster.

f[1] Cleonymus was an Athenian general of exceptionally tall stature; Aristophanes incessantly rallies him for his cowardice; he had cast away his buckler in a fight.

**DICAEOPOLIS**

And do we give you two drachmae, that you should treat us to all this humbug?

**AMBASSADOR**

We are bringing to you Pseudartabas[1], the King's Eye.

f[1] A name borne by certain officials of the King of Persia. The actor of this part wore a mask, fitted with a single eye of great size.

**DICAEOPOLIS**

I would a crow might pluck out thine with his beak, you cursed ambassador!

**HERALD**

The King's Eye!

**DICAEOPOLIS**

Eh! Great Gods! Friend, with thy great eye, round like the hole through which the oarsman passes his sweep, you have the air of a galley doubling a cape to gain port.

**AMBASSADOR**

Come, Pseudartabas, give forth the message for the Athenians with which you were charged by the Great King.

**PSEUDARTABAS**

Jartaman exarx 'anapissonia satra.[1]

f[1] Jargon, no doubt meaningless in all languages.

**AMBASSADOR**

Do you understand what he says?

**DICAEOPOLIS**

By Apollo, not I!

**AMBASSADOR (TO THE PRYTANES)**

He says that the Great King will send you gold. Come, utter the word 'gold' louder and more distinctly.

**PSEUDARTABAS**

Thou shalt not have gold, thou gaping-arsed Ionian.[1]

f[1] The Persians styled all Greeks 'Ionians' without distinction; here the Athenians are intended.

**DICAEOPOLIS**

Ah! may the gods forgive me, but that is clear enough!

**AMBASSADOR**

What does he say?

**DICAEOPOLIS**

That the Ionians are debauchees and idiots, if they expect to receive gold from the barbarians.

**AMBASSADOR**

Not so, he speaks of medimni<sup>[1]</sup> of gold.

f[1] A Greek measure, containing about six modii.

**DICAEOPOLIS**

What medimni? Thou art but a great braggart; but get your way; I will find out the truth by myself. Come now, answer me clearly, if you do not wish me to dye your skin red. Will the Great King send us gold? (PSEUDARTABAS MAKES A NEGATIVE SIGN.) Then our ambassadors are seeking to deceive us? (PSEUDARTABAS SIGNS AFFIRMATIVELY.) These fellows make signs like any Greek; I am sure that they are nothing but Athenians. Oh! ho! I recognize one of these eunuchs; it is Clisthenes, the son of Sibyrtius.<sup>[1]</sup> Behold the effrontery of this shaven rump! How! great baboon, with such a beard do you seek to play the eunuch to us? And this other one? Is it not Straton?

f[1] Noted for his extreme ugliness and his obscenity. Aristophanes frequently holds him to scorn in his comedies.

**HERALD**

Silence! Let all be seated. The Senate invites the King's Eye to the Prytaneum.<sup>[1]</sup>

f[1] Ambassadors were entertained there at the public expense.

**DICAEOPOLIS**

Is this not sufficient to drive one to hang oneself? Here I stand chilled to the bone, whilst the doors of the Prytaneum fly wide open to lodge such rascals. But I will do something great and bold. Where is Amphitheus? Come and speak with me.

**AMPHITHEUS**

Here I am.

**DICAEOPOLIS**

Take these eight drachmae and go and conclude a truce with the Lacedaemonians for me, my wife and my children; I leave you free, my dear citizens, to send out embassies and to stand gaping in the air.



**HERALD**

Bring in Theorus, who has returned from the Court of Sitalces.[1]

f[1] King of Thrace.

**THEORUS**

I am here.

**DICAEOPOLIS**

Another humbug!

**THEORUS**

We should not have remained long in Thrace...

**DICAEOPOLIS**

Forsooth, no, if you had not been well paid.

**THEORUS**

...if the country had not been covered with snow; the rivers were ice-bound at the time that Theognis[1] brought out his tragedy here; during the whole of that time I was holding my own with Sitalces, cup in hand; and, in truth, he adored you to such a degree, that he wrote on the walls, "How beautiful are the Athenians!" His son, to whom we gave the freedom of the city, burned with desire to come here and eat chitterlings at the feast of the Apaturia;[2] he prayed his father to come to the aid of his new country and Sitalces swore on his goblet that he would succour us with such a host that the Athenians would exclaim, "What a cloud of grasshoppers!"

f[1] The tragic poet.

f[2] A feast lasting three days and celebrated during the month Pyanepsion (November). The Greek word contains the suggestion of fraud.

**DICAEOPOLIS**

May I die if I believe a word of what you tell us! Excepting the grasshoppers, there is not a grain of truth in it all!

**THEORUS**

And he has sent you the most warlike soldiers of all Thrace.

**DICAEOPOLIS**

Now we shall begin to see clearly.

**HERALD**

Come hither, Thracians, whom Theorus brought.

**DICAEOPOLIS**

What plague have we here?

**THEORUS**

'Tis the host of the Odomanti.[1]

f[1] A Thracian tribe from the right bank of the Strymon.

**DICAEOPOLIS**

Of the Odomanti? Tell me what it means. Who has mutilated them like this?

**THEORUS**

If they are given a wage of two drachmae, they will put all Boeotia[1] to fire and sword.

f[1] The Boeotians were the allies of Sparta.

**DICAEOPOLIS**

Two drachmae to those circumcised hounds! Groan aloud, ye people of rowers, bulwark of Athens! Ah! great gods! I am undone; these Odomanti are robbing me of my garlic![1] Will you give me back my garlic?

f[1] Dicaeopolis had brought a clove of garlic with him to eat during the Assembly.

**THEORUS**

Oh! wretched man! do not go near them; they have eaten garlic[1].

f[1] Garlic was given to game-cocks, before setting them at each other, to give them pluck for the fight.

**DICAEOPOLIS**

Prytanes, will you let me be treated in this manner, in my own country and by barbarians? But I oppose the discussion of paying a wage to the Thracians; I announce an omen; I have just felt a drop of rain.[1]

f[1] At the lest unfavourable omen, the sitting of the Assembly was declared at an end.

**HERALD**

Let the Thracians withdraw and return the day after tomorrow; the Prytanes declare the sitting at an end.

**DICAEOPOLIS**

Ye gods, what garlic I have lost! But here comes Amphitheus returned from Lacedaemon. Welcome, Amphitheus.

**AMPHITHEUS**

No, there is no welcome for me and I fly as fast as I can, for I am pursued by the Acharnians.

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