

Aristophanes, Ecclesiazouses (Women in Parliament), 1-240

Praxagora O light of my lamp!

Bright light in this lamp,

This well crafted lamp,

This lamp built on a wheel by inventors with good aim.

Let me tell of your birth and of your charms: The potter's wheel spun you and gave you

A face

And thus your function is placed within

Your nostrils

A function as bright as the sun's

Rays!

So then,

O, light of my lamp,

Let your light give out the signal we women have

Arranged.

She waves the lamp towards the windows of the other two houses again

To you, alone, o light of my lamp, we'll reveal all

[...] *To the audience*

Here we are! Minutes only before Parliament starts and not a woman in sight! It's damned near daylight!

Walks up and down anxiously.

Not a single one of them! [...]

Well, we should get in there, in Parliament, quietly and quietly plonk our whore's bums on our seats nice and early. Make no noticeable fuss at all.

Pause

What on earth is keeping them? Haven't they sown together the false beards that I've told them to get? Maybe they've found it difficult to run off with their husband's clothes.

She suddenly sees something in the distance (Stage Left)

I wonder what that light is. It's coming this way. I better hide somewhere in case it's a man.

She moves back and hides the lamp behind her. A woman, dressed in man's clothes and carrying a dimly-lit lamp and a bundle appears. She waves her lamp to the others behind her and they follow her onto the stage.

First Woman We've got to hurry, girls! The cock crowed twice already!

Praxagora *Relaxes and moves forward towards them.* 32

I was up here all night, waiting for you, girls!

Hang on. Let's get my neighbour out without her getting caught by hubby. Let's scratch softly at her door.

She does so. A minute later the SECOND WOMAN comes out to join them. She's dressed in men's clothes

Second Woman I had just put on my sandals when I heard your scratching. I couldn't sleep all night either. [...]

Praxagora *Looks in the direction of Stage Left.*

Ah! Here they are! Cleinareti, Sostrati... and Philaneti! Come on then, move it girls!

Enter the three women.

Glyki said the last one to get here will be paying a fine. Three jugs of wine and a sack of chickpeas.

Second Woman *Laughs at the sight of Melistichi in the distance.* 46

Ahahaha! Here's Melistichi, Smicythion's wife! Look at her run in her husband's boots! And there I was thinking that, what with her queer husband, she'd be the first one to be able to get away!

First Woman And... here's the innkeeper's wife, Mrs Lush herself, complete with her torch.

Praxagora And there's Mrs Generous and Mrs Happy and, behind them, a whole lot of women... The absolute cream of Athenian women! 51

Enter THIRD WOMAN puffing.

Third Woman What a nightmare it was to get away from my husband, girls! Up all night, coughing and splattering, coughing and splattering! All night! No wonder though, he gorged himself on my short'n curlies for his supper!

Laughter and nods all round.

Praxagora Now, ladies! Now that you're all here, sit down and let me ask you a question!

They all sit around her.

Right. Have you all done what we said we would, back at Scira? At Demeter's festival? [...]

Praxagora And have you all got the beards?

First Woman Pulls one out of her bundle. 70

Here! Look at this one! By Hekate, isn't it great?

Second Woman And look at mine, too, Praxagora! Isn't it great? Better even than that mop which shields Epicrates' face!

Praxagora *To the rest of the women*

You too? All of you?

First Woman Yeap. Nods all round. They've got them, all right!

Praxagora *She walks around them, looking pleased.*

Good. Looks like you've done everything as we said.

Points at the items she mentions.

Spartan boots...walking sticks...men's cloaks... Right! You've got everything, I see.

First Woman *Brings out a huge, thick truncheon out of her bag.*

And I even knocked off my husband's truncheon, when he was asleep. Poor Lamius!

[...] **Praxagora**

All right! Now while there are still stars in the sky, let's get to the next thing.

Parliament is opening at Dawn and we're prepared for Parliament. Right, sisters?

First Woman Absolutely, by Zeus! And we've got to get in there early and sit ourselves directly in front of the Chairman's stone platform.

Second Woman *She takes out of her bag some knitting*

Absolutely, by Zeus! That's why I've brought along my knitting. *Get some done before the place fills up.*

Praxagora While the place fills up, you idiot? Knitting?

Second Woman Absolutely, by Artemis! Why not? Don't you think I can knit and listen at the same time? My kids are totally naked! 90

Praxagora Listen to you, woman! Here we are trying to hide our body and you're talking about knitting! [...]

Remembers something and chuckles.

Phornisius' beard, ey? What a stack of pubes that beard is! Hehehe!

Catches herself

Right! Now, if we get there first and take our seats before all the others, hold our man's clothes tightly wrapped around our body and have our beards with us and let them roll out in front of our face, no man will suspect a thing. [...]

Applause

And! And we should do it before Dawn arrives.

Loudly, intently.

Let's hope to take the power in our hands, sisters! Let's save our city!

Applause

Pause. Relaxes her tone.

Because for a long time now, our city has been going nowhere at a fast oar!

Third Woman But Praxagora, how could we, a group of women, with women's brains make convincing speeches? 110

Praxagora We can make excellent speeches exactly because we are women! Better than any man can. They say that youths make splendid orators, don't they? [...]

Applause and "right, too right, Praxagora, we know a thing or two about that!"

First Woman Oh, I don't know, really. Lack of experience is a dreadful thing, you know. I mean about speeches. 115

Praxagora But that's precisely why we're here, darling; to get ourselves all prepared with what we're going to say in there. Now, put your beards on quickly and, those of you who are ready to speak go ahead and speak!

First Woman Ha! We're all ready Praxagora! Who among us is not an absolute specialist in the art of talking, ey? We're brilliant!

Praxagora Put your beards on then and act like you're a man. I'll put mine on and then I'll wear these garlands if I want to make a speech.

Women put their beards on and fool around pretending to be acting like men;

Second Woman After putting her beard on, takes a mirror out of her bag and looks into it. She is shocked.

Ooooooh! No! Sweetheart, Praxagora, look! Come and see just how ridiculous we look! This is awful!

Praxagora *Approaches and takes a look.*

But why, darling? What's so ridiculous about it?

Second Woman But... with these black beards on our fair faces we look like someone stuck a squid on our heads grilled on charcoal!

Praxagora Ignoring her, calls out as if she is the clerk of the Parliament:

Purifier! Let the Purifier sanctify this place with the sacrificial cat!

Whispers among the women such as "Shouldn't it be a piglet? Is that Persephone's cat? Poor thing!"

A "Purifier" walks around with a cat, then takes it behind the curtains a moment after which we here the cat being slaughtered.

Praxagora Right! All of you, girls now gather around.

Indicating someone among them.

Ariphrades, stop that chatter! Move closer please and take your seat. Now! Who wishes to address Parliament?

First Woman Me!

Praxagora Good. Put the garland on and good luck!

First Woman *Puts it on.*

Done.

Praxagora Go on, then!

First Woman What, make a speech on a dry throat?

Praxagora What do you mean? You want a drink? Now?

First Woman Of course! Isn't that why men put on the garland? I'd like some wine, please!

Praxagora Get out of there! Is that what you'd be doing in the real Parliament?

First Woman Whaaaaat? Don't they drink in the real Parliament? 135

Praxagora Don't be silly, girl!

First Woman Of course they do, by Artemis! Absolutely! And it's the totally unadulterated strong stuff! Who else but drunks would come up with laws like those they do? Not only that but they also go on with libations, *mimicking* "By Zeus this and by Zeus that!" one libation after another with loong prayers and loong gulps of wine and then go on yelling at each other like drunks and then the archers come along and remove the drunkest of them! Sure they drink! All the time!

Praxagora Come on, enough. Off you go! Go and sit down. You are worthless to our cause!

First Woman *Coughs* 145

By Zeus! I reckon I'd be far better off without this beard. I'm dying of thirst!

Praxagora Anyone else wishing to address the Parliament?

Second Woman Me!

Praxagora Go on then, put the garland on! *Sarcastically* Oh, we're doing just fine so far. Now, speak loudly, just like a man. Lean your body well over your stick.

Second Woman *Speaking to the Parliament*

Ahem! Now, my thinking is that I'd rather a better orator came up to speak on our behalf and defend our drinking rights, letting me stay sitting down and resting but, never mind! Now! Ahem! My view is that we shall not let a drop of water pollute our bars. Not a drop! Get rid of all the water kegs in bars! Dreadful policy, by Demeter and Persephone, dreadful, whoever invented it!

Praxagora *Interrupts her and corrects her.* 156

Stop, you idiot! By Demeter and Persephone? The two goddesses? Two GODDESSESS? What were you thinking?

Second Woman What's up, Praxagora? I didn't ask for a drink, did I?

Praxagora No, of course you didn't ask for a drink but you swore by the two Goddesses. You're supposed to be a man, not a woman. The rest of the speech though, was sheer eloquence!

Look, girls! I'm not making the slightest move from here until I know we have perfected everything. We are simply not going into Parliament like this!

[...] **Praxagora** *Guides the woman away angrily.*

Come on, off you go, you twit. Sit down with the others. I've got a hunch that I had better take the garland myself and speak on behalf of all of us.

Puts the garland on.

Now! Ahem! I beg the gods that they fulfil all our wishes.

I am as much a part of this country as all of you, men. I am truly anxious, truly sad about the dreadful state of our city's affairs.

You're always electing awful leaders! Awful! And if one of them gets something right for one day and he's useful, he gets all sneaky and dodgy and completely stuffs up everything for the following ten days! Then you get another leader and he's even worse than the last one! I know it's damned hard to put brains into a thick skull but you're always sending away those who love you and approach those who hate you. You're always afraid of the wrong lot of people!

There was a time when Parliament hardly ever met but we did know what a Agyrrios was. Now though, when we do meet, what you do is get abundant praise from the man who draws a leader's salary whereas he who draws none and tells you that all those who attend Parliament do so just so they can get paid, you condemned him to death!

Applause all round interrupts her speech.

Second Woman By Aphrodite, how well you spoke, Praxagora!

--**Praxagora** Charming! Superb! Once again, you twit, you swore by Aphrodite! How would we look if you did that in the House? 190

Second Woman I wouldn't be doing that in there.

Praxagora Stop doing it now!

Continues

Right! And then there's this... this "Coalition of the Willing" treaty we've just signed against the Spartans. When we were all debating it here, every one of us was shouting that if we didn't sign up the city would be ruined; then when we did, every one of us had changed his mind -AND the man who put the proposal up, shot through!

Then we get another proposal, say to launch a fleet of ships. What happens? Well, the wealthy will vote "yes" but the poor and the farmers will vote the opposite.

One minute you get vicious against the Corinthians to which they reply in kind and the next they're "great" so you're "great" is back again!

Those from Argos are uneducated fools yet *General Hieronymus* is an absolute genius!

We get a slight chance at peace but then, our *General Thrasyboulos*, goes off screaming that he wasn't consulted!

Applause all round again

First Woman *Indicating Praxagora*

Hey, this guy is smart!

Praxagora Now that's a good way to praise me. 204

Back to her speech

And you, fellow citizens of Athens, yes, you alone are the cause of all this mess. You come here, draw your funds and use them for your own personal purposes while the city rolls downhill, like our poor *Aesimus*.

Yet, there's hope! There's hope if you listen to my proposal and it is this: I propose that we hand the city over to the women. Who better to run the city than they who run our households? They are the managers and treasurers of our house.

Applause again

All women together *Yeaeaeaeae!*

First Woman Indeed, kind sir! Please go on!

Praxagora *Continues with the speech* 214

And let me prove to you just how much better they are equipped up here (*indicating the brain*) than us. Number one, they dye their wool in hot water. Each and every one of them! They've

never strayed from that ancient custom. If a system works, they'll stick with it; not like this Parliament where we're always fiddling with everything, trying to change it this way and that, looking for some new way to do the same thing. Totally different to the women who: Do the frying seated, just as they always did.

Carry things on their head, just as they always did.

Carry out the festival of Thesmophoria, just as they always did.

Bake their sweets, just as they always did.

Have their secret lovers, just like they always did.

Do that little extra bit of shopping for themselves, just as they always did.

Love their wine straight off the bottle, just like they always did.

Takes a deep breath

For all these reasons, gentlemen, I say, let the women govern the city! Don't start analysing and debating it all, trying to be convinced by the argument. Just hand it over to them. We need only to consider the following: Being the mothers of our soldiers, they'd want to protect them as best they can; and... and think how much bigger the rations would be and how much faster they'd reach our soldiers when they're fighting!

Then, so far as the treasury is concerned, women know all about money. They've learnt the game a long time ago. A woman will never be diddled by anyone if she's the leader -women are the absolute masters at diddling!

I'll stop here now. If I have convinced you you'll have wonderful lives.

Second Woman What a sweet woman you are, my Praxagora! Where did you learn all this, darling?
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Praxagora My husband and I lived near the Pryx, where Parliament met when we were all thrown out of Athens. I've learnt by listening to the speeches of the other orators.

First Woman Ah! That's why you're so awesome, so brilliant! Well, then. If you pull this off and we get the leadership of the city, we shall elect you *General*! But then what if Cephalus, our famous orator and potter gets up and insults you? How will you tackle him?

Praxagora I'll simply say he's out of his kiln!

First Woman Nothing new in that, Praxagora. You need to say something else.

Praxagora In that case, I'll say, he's a phlegmatic, black-livered madman!

First Woman Nahhh, nothing new in that either, Praxagora.

Praxagora Well then, I'll just say his pottery stinks and so will his work on the city!

First Woman And what if crusty-eyed Neocleidis starts insulting you as well?

Praxagora What I'll say to him is, "Neocleidis, go and shove your crusty eyes up a dog's bum!" 255

First Woman But what if they try to fuck you?

Praxagora Darling! I'm very well versed in slipping away ~~fucking. I'll fuck them back!~~ I'm very well versed in slipping away, I will return it back properly

First Woman Ah! Something else we haven't thought of! The archers. What if the cops do the drag on you? One from the front and one from the back?

Praxagora I'll just stick my elbows out, like this. They won't be able to grab me by my waist. 259

Chorus And if they do lift you up in the air, we'll scream at them to let you go.

First Woman Right. We've got all that under control... all, that is, except the fact that we mustn't forget to raise our hands when we vote, like the men do. We women are used to raising our legs, instead!

Praxagora Hm, that's a toughie, that one. Nevertheless, we've got to vote, so remember: Raise your right hand. Pull the cloak down and raise it bare. 266

All right. Now, just lift up your skirts and put on those Spartan boots... and hurry! That's right, just as you see your husbands wearing them when they go off to Parliament or whatever. Now tie on your beards, all of you. Properly! Done? Good. Now put on your husband's cloak and be careful how you do that also. Good! Now, let me see you leaning on those walking sticks. That's right. Good,

and, as you're heading off start singing some song that the old men sing. Sing it like the peasants do.

Chorus Quite right. Well said!

Praxagora Let's go then. I think there are women going to Parliament from the farms, as well, so let's get there before they do. We've got to hurry because you know what it's like with payment in Parliament: either you're in by Dawn or you're given bugger all! 279

Exit Praxagora and the two women.

Bibliography

<https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Greek/WomenInParliament.php>