

Aristophanes' *Frogs*
(translations by Matthew Dillon)

***Frogs* 1006-1088**

Aeschylus

I am indignant at this encounter, and it gripes my guts,
if I have to argue against this fellow—but so that he can't say I was helpless,—
Answer me, why should one admire a poet?

Euripides

For cleverness, and giving good advice, since we improve
the people in the cities.

Aeschylus

So if you haven't done this,
but turned them from fine and decent types into villains,
what will you say you deserve to suffer?

Dionysus

Death: don't ask him.

Aeschylus

Consider now what kind of men he first received from me
if they were generous and six feet tall, no runaway citizens,
no loafers, rascals, like now, nor miscreants,
but men who breathed spears and lances, white-crested helmets,
and headgear, and greaves and sevenfold oxhide tempers.

Dionysus

This is really getting bad: he'll crush me with his helmet-making.

Euripides

And what did you do to teach men to be so noble?

Dionysus

Speak, Aeschylus; don't be a stubborn highfalutin' sorehead.

Aeschylus

I composed a drama filled with Mars.

Dionysus

Which one?

Aeschylus

The Seven against [Thebes](#).
Everyone who saw it fell in love with being fierce.

Dionysus

That was a bad thing you did, since you made the Thebans more courageous in war. For that at least get whacked.

Aeschylus

You could have trained for this as well, but you weren't so inclined. Then, producing The Persians after that, I taught them to yearn to beat the enemy; this finest feat did I honor.

Dionysus

Well, I rejoiced when you lamented for the death of Darius, and the chorus straightway clapped their hands like this and said, "Ee-ow!"

Aeschylus

This is the stuff poets should work on. Just look right from the start how useful the noble race of poets has been.

For Orpheus taught us rites and to refrain from killing,
And Musaeus taught the cures of illness and oracles, and Hesiod
the working of the land, harvest seasons, plowing. Divine Homer,
Where did he get honor and glory if not from teaching useful things,
battle lines, courageous deeds, men's armory?

Dionysus

But I bet he didn't
teach Pantacles, that clumsy oaf. The other day, when he was parading,
He fastened his helmet on first and then was going to tie on the crest!

Aeschylus

And many other brave men too, of which the hero Lamachos was one;
from Homer, my brain composed many great feats of valor,
of Patrocluses, lion-hearted Teucrians, so I could rouse the citizenry
to strive to equal them, when it hears the call to arms.
But by God, I never created whores like Phaedra and Sthenoboea
No one's ever known me to write about any woman in love.

Euripides

No sir, you've got nothing to do with Aphrodite.

Aeschylus

And may she stay away!
But she settled down on you and yours in force,
and destroyed your very self.

Dionysus

By God, that she did.
What you used to do to other mens's wives, you got hit with yourself.

Euripides

And how have my Stheneboeas harmed the state, you wretch?

Aeschylus

Since you persuaded noble ladies, wives of noble men
to drink hemlock out of shame because of people like that Bellerophon of yours.

Euripides

So did I make up some non-existent story about Phaedra?

Aeschylus

No, it existed. But a poet should conceal wickedness, not bring it forward and teach it. For little boys
have a teacher who advises them, and grown-ups have poets.
We have a serious obligation to speak of honorable things.

Euripides

So, if you speak to us of Lycabettuses
and the heights of Parnassuses, this is “teaching honorable things”,
when a poet ought to speak in human terms?

Aeschylus

You fiend! It is the compelling power
of great thoughts and ideas to engender phrases of equal size.
And anyway it is proper that demigods speak in grander terms.
For they also wear much finer clothes.
What I so nobly exhibited you defiled.

Euripides

What did I do?

Aeschylus

First you dressed the kingly types in rags, so
they'd look pitiful to the audience.

Euripides

And what harm did I do by that?

Aeschylus

Because of that, no wealthy man was willing to fund the navy,
but wrapped in rags he weeps and claims he's poor.

Dionysus

By Demeter, yes, but wearing a tunic of pure wool underneath!
And if he fooled 'em with that story, he'd pop up in the fish market.

Aeschylus

Then again, you taught them to practice drivel and gossip,
which emptied the gymnasia and ruined the butts
of our prattling youths, and persuaded the Paralian crews
to argue with their officers. But when I was alive,
they knew nothing but to call for grits and sing Yo-ho!

Dionysus

Yessir, and fart in the face of their rowing mate,
dump on their mess partner, go ashore and rob someone.
But now he argues and doesn't row, and sails to and fro.

Aeschylus

Of what crimes is he not guilty?
Didn't he show pimps,
women giving birth in temples,
sleeping with their brothers,
claiming that life is not life?
And then our state
is filled with these bureaucrats
and oafish democratic apes
always cheating the people,
and there's no one able to carry the torch
any more because of lack of training.