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Women's Masculine, Maternal and Minor Roles in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata, Ekklesiazusae* and *Thesmophoriazusae*

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Abstract

Women's Masculine, Maternal and Minor Roles in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata, Ekklesiazusae* and *Thesmophoriazusae*
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By examining the minor characters and topics of gender reversal and motherhood as discussed throughout Aristophanes' Lysistrata, Thesmophoriazusae, and Ekklesiazusae, it is possible to better understand Aristophanes' motivations for writing and for writing these plays particularly. The characters of Praxagora in Ekklesiazusae and Mnesilochus in Thesmophoriazusae are reflections of each other in various ways, but most importantly they both cross-dress in order to accomplish their goals. Praxagora, as a man, does succeed in her goal, but Mnesilochus, as a woman, does not succeed in his. Aristophanes has presented Lysistrata and Praxagora as childless in order to allow them to devote their maternal instincts to the city. If Lysistrata and Praxagora were distracted by children they would not be able to focus on protecting Athens. The minor female characters who appear in these three plays are unintelligent and stereotypical compared to the brilliance and uniqueness of Praxagora and Lysistrata and are meant to show that women like Praxagora and Lysistrata, who know their worth and the worth of their ideas, are exceptional. Although Aristophanes' portrayal of women in his other plays is quite unflattering, the way he shows them in these three women plays shows a glimpse of someone who, if he is not a proto-feminist, at least sympathizes with women and realizes their potential as leaders.

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Introduction

Aristophanes, a classical Athenian playwright, wrote three plays of his last extant five which focus on female characters and their occupation of powerful political positions. The most famous of these three plays today takes its name from its main character and is called *Lysistrata*. The titles of the other two are *Thesmophoriazusae*, or *Women at the Thesmophoria,* and *Eccleziazusae,* or *Women at Assembly*. *Lysistrata*[1] and *Thesmophoriazusae* were produced in the same year, 411 B.C.[2] and *Eccleziazusae* was presented close to twenty years later in 392 B.C.[3] This paper will focus on women in their roles as mothers, female/male gender reversals and what effect minor female characters have on the leading ladies of the plays. In order to discuss such themes, a basic understanding of the events of the period in which they were written is important.

The history of Athens was never smooth, but all three plays were written and produced during one of the city's largest conflicts, the Peloponnesian War, and its aftermath. This war lasted from 431 B.C. until 404 B.C.,[4] and was the struggle of Athens versus the cities of the Peloponnesus led by Sparta. The causes of the war are debatable and varied, but to provide a context for this paper, let it suffice to say that the Spartans disliked and feared the amount of power which Athens was gaining and felt that Athens had betrayed certain treaties which had been previously established.[5] Ultimately, Athens surrendered to the Peloponnesian Confederacy, but during the extent of the war, in

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[1] Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, trans. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000). Introductory Note, pp. 254-262. 254.
[2] Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusae*, trans. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000). Introductory Note, pp. 444-450. 444.
[3] Aristophanes, *Ekklesiazusae*, trans. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002). Introductory Note, pp. 238-243. 238.
[4] Paul Cartledge, *Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). 104.
[5] Raphael Sealey, "The Causes of the Peloponnesian War." *Classical Philology* 70.2 (1975): 89-109. *JSTOR*. Web. 13 Jan. 2011. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/267930>.

Athens, there were periods of both great optimism and then those of intense pessimism about the outcome of the war.

In 413 B.C., Athens suffered one of her gravest defeats during the war in the failure of the Sicilian Expedition. The Athenians attacked Syracuse in Sicily but were beaten back by the army of that area which was reinforced by Spartan troops. Then, after Athens was routed on land, its navy was also destroyed, leaving retreat its only option. This retreat led to many negative repercussions for Athens, beyond a simple loss. Only a few of the city's best generals, who were also leading politicians, and its best soldiers survived the fray, and 216 triremes were destroyed, [6] leaving the navy at a severe deficit of ships. These losses were compounded by the fact that the Athenian treasury was running low, which left the city dependent on its few allies for loans of ship-building resources.[7] The gloom which surrounded this defeat was not counteracted by any victories for Athens until the latter part of 411 B.C., leaving plenty of time for Aristophanes to have written his two plays, that is *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae*, during what Thucydides attests was a period of despair for Athens, "The citizens and the city were alike distressed…"[8]

In 413 B.C., after the Sicilian Expedition, Athens "[chose] a council of the elder men, who should advise together, and lay before the people the measures which from time to time might be required,"[9] and the men on this council were called *probouloi*. This oligarchic council was meant to help the popular assembly make wiser decisions and generally keep the government on course.

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[6] Donald Kagan, *The Peloponnesian War* (New York: Penguin Group, 2003). 327.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1881). 8.1.2. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.04.0105>
[9] Ibid. 8.1.3.

Lysistrata

The events of the Peloponnesian War and their repercussions are especially relevant to the plot of *Lysistrata*, as the internal date of the play is contemporary with the external one (411 B.C.). At the opening of the play, Lysistrata, an upper-class Athenian wife, has called a meeting of all the wives of men who are soldiers in the Peloponnesian War, including women from Athens as well as the Peloponnesus and Boeotia. When all the women have convened, Lysistrata reveals the purpose for the meeting – she requests that each woman denies her husband sexual intercourse until the men agree on a peace treaty. The women are hesitant to agree to Lysistrata's plan at first, but soon see the wisdom in it. The meeting adjourns, and each woman goes back to her respective town to enact Lysistrata's new boycott.

The Athenian women march onto the Acropolis in order to guard the funds in the treasury there from being taken and employed for war by any man. What ensues is at first a farcical battle between the elderly men, who are the only ones left in the city, and the wives, but it turns into a rhetorical debate between Lysistrata and a magistrate, probably one of the probouloi, who has indeed come to make a withdrawal for the navy from the treasury. It is within this verbal exchange that Lysistrata explains her plan in more detail. The magistrate, having been humiliated by the women and being appalled at Lysistrata's audacity, exits the stage, presumably in order to share news of the uprising with his fellow magistrates.

After some exchange of the choruses, we learn that Lysistrata's plan has a flaw, and that is the libidos, or at least feelings of obligation to wifely duties, of many of the women who are sneaking off of the Acropolis in order to be with their husbands.

Ultimately, despite this flaw, Lysistrata's strategy is successful and the men, willing to do whatever necessary to have sex with their wives again, quickly reach a peaceful conclusion to the war and return themselves to their women's good graces.

Thesmophoriazusae

The *Thesmophoriazusae* has no focus on the war, but rather deals with a totally fictional situation in which the women of Athens have become angry with the tragedian Euripides for the negative way he depicts females in his plays.

The *Thesmophoriazusae* opens with Euripides, with an older relation of his as a companion, who will be called Mnesilochus, going to visit his friend Agathon. Agathon is a historical character himself and was in fact a playwright who was known both for being flamboyantly homosexual and for his feminine attributes.[10] Euripides tells Agathon that he has heard a group of women have undertaken a plot against his life because of how badly they believe he portrays women in his plays. The women who are plotting against him will be meeting during the Thesmophoria.

The Thesmophoria celebrated Demeter, the goddess of crops, and her daughter, Persephone. Much of the festival is a mystery to this day because of the punishments which would have been inflicted on anyone who revealed any of its most sacred parts or rites. It is known that the festival lasted three days, was strictly for females and more specifically, only wives of Athenian citizens were allowed to participate. During the period of the festival, all male business in the agora and courts was adjourned and the

[10] As Henderson (above n. 2) explicates in his footnote on Agathon on page 459, he was "famed for his personal beauty and promiscuous passive homosexuality."

women held meetings of their own. It is during one of these meetings, probably on the second and middle day of the festival, that Aristophanes sets his play.[11]

Euripides asks Agathon to use his feminine ways in order to sneak into the women's meeting to discover exactly what they are planning. Agathon does not dare to intrude on the female festival and refuses to do as Euripides requests; however, he supplies Euripides with female garments so that he might disguise Mnesilochus and send him into the meeting. A scene of transforming Mnesilochus from male to female follows, with many jokes throughout the process.

After women come forward condemning Euripides, Mnesilochus acts his part to defend his man using a strange logic implying that Euripides has showcased only a few of the slighter evils women have ever committed. The rest of the women are quite outraged by this speech but are not suspicious of exactly who the speaker is until yet another effeminate man, Cleisthenes, enters the meeting in order to warn the women that he has heard rumor that there is a spy among them. Mnesilochus, now anxious, gives himself away. The women hand Mnesilochus over to the law to be guarded until he can be sentenced to death for his crime of intrusion.

During both of these last parts, while he is found out but still in the women's meeting and while he is being held by the guard, Mnesilochus acts out female characters from Euripides' plays who require someone to come to their rescue. Euripides comes to his relative's aid, though unsuccessfully at first while he is attempting to act the parts of the respective male rescuers from his plays. Finally, Euripides devises an entirely new scheme which involves himself taking the part and dress of a pandering old lady who has

[11] Niall Slater, *Spectator Politics: Metatheatre and Performance in Aristophanes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002). 154.

with her a beautiful, young girl. The old lady/Euripides encourages the young girl to seduce Mnesilochus' guard, the archer, who being aroused and thus distracted from his duty, pays for the girl and exits in order to receive her services. Upon the archer's leaving, Euripides cuts Mnesilochus down from where he is being held and they both make a hasty escape.

Ekklesiazusae

Ekklesiazusae is the second to last of Aristophanes plays, and is slightly removed from the history of Athens as described above. At the production of this play, Athens had surrendered to the Peloponnesian Confederacy 12 years before. As Henderson explains in the introduction to his translation of the play, "*Assemblywomen*…satirizes contemporary Athenian fondness for political experimentation and theorizing." Since Athens had lost its empire in the Peloponnesian War, it went through a period of political crisis which led its leaders to hypothesize about many new kinds of government, including one ruled by women.[12]

Ekklesiazusae opens with a woman, Praxagora, waiting in the early morning for the Athenian women she has called together. When the women finally arrive they begin dressing in clothes stolen from their husbands. It is revealed that they are planning to stage a coup by entering the Assembly dressed as men and proposing their own legislation, specifically, that women should be given control of the government. After the women are outfitted, they begin to practice what they will say later in the actual assembly. Two women try to give speeches, but both give themselves away as women by the turns of phrase they use. In order to show the women how it should be done,

[12] *Ekklesiazusae,* (above n.3), 241.

Praxagora takes the lead and delivers her address encouraging the men to let the women lead the state, illustrating how much better suited they are for the job.

The next scene shows the husbands of some of the women who went to the assembly, including Blepyrus, Praxagora's husband, talking to one another about the strangeness of their wives' absences so early in the morning. During this scene, a friend of the husbands' walks by, so the men greet each other. The friend, Chremes, tells the husbands that he has come from the Assembly, which is now over, and summarizes what went on there. Chremes says that the topic before the Assembly was "the salvation of the city," (*Ekkl*. 397) and that three men spoke on the matter. Little did he know that the third who he mentions as a "pale, good-looking " (*Ekkl.* 426) young man was actually Praxagora. Chremes says that this third man extolled the virtues of women and explained compellingly how women are fit to govern, and that the Assembly voted to put the women in charge.

Soon Praxagora returns to her house. Blepyrus ironically explains to her the news he has just heard from Chremes, and Praxagora plays her part of ignorance well, for a short while at least, but then moves on to bolder terms, saying that she has been chosen as leader of the women, and telling of the intent which she has for governance of the state. Praxagora tells of a communist ideal for Athens: that one man should not have more than another, but all will be fed and clothed from the state's communal treasury. She also proposes that marriage will not exist and is forthright about the fact that, because of this, children will not know their fathers.

The next major scene is an aside from the story of Praxagora, but it illustrates how her new laws will go into effect. A young girl and an old woman argue over how

Praxagora's communist sex laws will work. Soon, the girl's lover enters and calls out to her, but the old woman puts herself between the couple insisting that he attend to her desires first. The young man puts up a strong fight, but is overwhelmed when a second and third old woman, each older and uglier than the first, also makes her own claim to him.

As the young man is dragged off by the old women, a maid enters to call the citizens of Athens to their first communal dinner. After a short verse from the chorus, the audience is left with the image of Blepyrus going to dinner, apparently with no ill thoughts of the new government on his mind.

Though it remains unclear whether or not women generally attended the theater during the classical period in Athens,[13] it is certain that during the beginning of the 20th century, women were prohibited from attending performances of Aristophanes' plays in Greece. Men barred women from the plays on the grounds that "women's 'impressionable' nature was not strong enough to withstand the onslaught of Aristophanic comedy…If women were to attend plays, they might discover Aristophanes' transgressive language, humor, and body politics. The poet's comic fictions might even encourage them individually or collectively to assume a stance of audacity, immorality, and disobedience…"[14] It is this chauvinist attitude that empowers the plays even more fully since it is evidence that men acknowledged that the plays could move women in such a way.

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[13] Douglas Olson, *Broken Laughter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). 169.
[14] Gonda Van Steen, "Trying (on) Gender: Modern Greek Productions of Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae." American Journal of Philology*, vol. 123 no. 3, pp 407-427. 411.

Men of approximately present day saw the danger of putting such radical ideas into the heads of women because a female revolution inspired by Aristophanes was not impossible. Though presented as a joke, the fundamental concepts of the plays (i.e. women using sex as leverage over men, women plotting against a man, and women in power in the government) were extremely progressive for the time in which they were presented and remained so more than 2000 years later.

Underneath the jokes and all the layers of interpretation that have been and have yet to be dissected, it is apparent that Aristophanes writes not only to entertain, but also to teach. The most basic goal of Aristophanes in these three plays is to disseminate his want for peace and reconciliation for his city in order to bring an end to the many years of turbulence it had weathered. Aristophanes is even willing to sacrifice the precious male democracy, as we see in *Ekklesiazusae*, as long as it will bring a happy, unified city.

All line citations and references to the original Greek text will be from Jeffrey Henderson's translations from the Loeb editions as cited above in footnotes 1-3. Translations are my own unless indicated to be by Henderson.

Chapter One

Gender Reversal

The kind of joke dearest to Aristophanes is that which deals with gender, in all the aspects and stereotypes that word connotes. In the world of these three plays of Aristophanes, gender is a fluid characteristic and one that exists on a continuum. There are male characters that have feminine attributes, and there are female characters that have masculine attributes. On one end of this continuum is Euripides who is heterosexual and only ever considers dressing like a woman as a last resort. On the opposite end is Agathon, a homosexual male who takes pleasure in dressing like a woman and happily owns his femininity. Then Lysistrata falls between these two characters, closely to Euripides since she never actually dresses as a male, but does take on a masculine political leadership position. Then between Lysistrata and Agathon comes Praxagora, who is female but adopts a male role, clothes and all, in order to accomplish her political goals. Finally, between Praxagora and Agathon comes Mnesilochus since at first he does not like the idea of taking on a woman's role, but later comes to terms with it and (mostly) embraces his femininity.

If we lay all these characters out thus, it is Praxagora and Mnesilochus who seem to be most comparable in their similar positions on the line. Then, beyond terms of straightforward gender identity, where Mnesilochus is a man but is capable of at least passable femininity and Praxagora is a woman but acts as a man quite well, there are other ways in which Praxagora and Mnesilochus are reflections of one another.

Before entering into a comparison, however, let us remember the simple fact that all the actors were male. This means that in each case there are dual layers of costuming that composed each character during at least some point of the play, and in fact, triple layers of representation, including the actor and then the primary and secondary characters.

The character of Mnesilochus requires two overlapping guises so that the male actor is playing a male who pretends to be a woman. The costume for this character would have included an exaggeratedly padded body suit, as well as an exaggerated phallus, perhaps tied on around the waist, and the standard theatrical mask for an older man. Upon the metamorphosis to a woman, further padding would be added to the breasts, the phallus would remain, but be covered by the dress, and the beard would be removed from the mask.[15]

The popularity of this gag of transvestitism is confirmed by the fact that it is still a commonly used device in modern plots. This device allows much room for comedy during the period in which the male character struggles to take on the female role, as it highlights the divides between the genders in carriage of the body, in hygienic and cosmetic measures, and in (this case, literally) costuming.

Although much of the humor that Aristophanes uses in Mnesilochus' transformation scene is presumably physical, there are a few instances of verbal humor that carry into translation quite well. The first of these jokes comes when Euripides shaves Mnesilochus' beard, and halfway through Mnesilochus (probably) jumps up and runs away from the razor, deciding he does not want to lose his beard. Euripides cajoles him back into the barber's chair by saying, "οὔκουν καταγέλαστος δῆτ' ἔσει

[15] Slater, *Spectator Politics* (above, n. 11), 157-158.

τὴν ἡμίκραιραν τὴν ἑτέραν ψιλὴνἔχων; And won't you be ridiculous having the other half of your head bare?" (*Thesmo.* 226-227). Even for modern audiences, for whom facial hair might not be that common, this conjures a rather funny image.

The next joke Aristophanes uses occurs just before Euripides begins singeing the hair from Mnesilochus' pubic area, a precaution that was certainly meant more for the comedy than to serve a real purpose of disguise since once someone examines that area for feminine smoothness, his penis would certainly give Mnesilochus away. Just before Euripides is given the heat source with which to singe the hair, Mnesilochus says, "οἴμοι κακοδαίμων δελφάκιον γενήσομαι, My bad luck! I will be made a little piggy." (*Thesmo.* 237). It was popular to use any word for pig or piglet as slang for the female genitalia. Most commonly, χοιρος is the word used for such double entendre, but δελφαξ and its diminutive, δελφακιον, as seen here, also carries the same meaning. Χοιρος , however, usually refers to the young and hairless genitalia where as δελφαξ, and even its diminutive, refers to the mature vulva, which is more appropriate to Mnesilochus in his older age.

During the singeing process, Mnesilochus begins to shout that he feels that his rear is on fire, "...κάομαι. οἴμοι τάλας. ὕδωρ ὕδωρ ὦ γείτονες... I am burning! Miserable me! Water, water, neighbors!..." (*Thesmo.* 240-241). This type of physical comedy is still popular today especially in children's humor, where the character runs around yelping in pain until he can extinguish the fire by plunking himself into a bucket of water. This is a safe assumption for the type of physicality which would accompany the line here.

The last joke from this section is one that pertains to sexuality in its basest sense. Once Mnesilochus has been shorn of his facial and pubic hair, Agathon, the cross-dresser,

lends him one of his female costumes. Upon donning the dress, Mnesilochus comments, "νη την Αφροδιτην, ηδυ γ' οζει ποσθιου. By Aphrodite! It smells sweet, of penis" (*Thesmo.* 254). The term ποσθη, ποσθιον more precisely than only meaning "penis," carries a connotation pertaining to a pederastic relationship. As Henderson explains, it refers specifically to "a small member, or a young boy's member," and, "had an affectionate and playful tone."[16] The use of ποσθιου emphasizes, or perhaps reveals, Agathon's desire for young boys and his previous attainment of fulfilling that desire. Though this joke might not have been particularly thought-provoking for the contemporary audience, it provides interesting insight for the modern reader. The smell of ποσθη on the dress is a perversion of what might occur when a woman has intercourse with a (grown) man, and highlights the inversions which are taking place in the play.

Praxagora is even more complex than Mnesilochus because of the more intricate intertwining of the genders from which she is composed. Here, there is a man playing a woman who takes the part of a man. With modern stories as a judge, this scenario seems to be much less funny than Mnesilochus', as indicated by the far fewer number of recent plots that include a woman dressing as a man, in fact *Victor/Victoria* and *Twelfth Night* and remakes of that play are the only examples that come to mind. To use more concrete proof that the female to male situation is far less funny than the male to female one, we must only turn to Aristophanes' plays themselves.

The opening scene of *Ekklesiazusae* leading up to the transformation scene is really not all that funny, in fact. Besides a few sexual innuendos, the jokes which are

[16] Jeffrey Henderson, *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). 109.

employed in the transformation section are mostly at the expense of the women who will enter into the assembly with Praxagora in order to support her legislation.

One of Praxagora's followers actually says,"ταυτί γέ τοι νὴ τὸν Δί' ἐφερόμην, ἵνα/ πληρουμένης ξαίνοιμι τῆς ἐκκλησίας, By Zeus, I brought this thing here [presumably a knitting basket], so that I may comb [wool] while the assembly fills up" (*Ekkl.* 87-88). Not only is this statement obtuse, as attending the assembly with any kind of knitting accoutrement would be extremely suspicious, but also it once again highlights the divide between men and women, with the joke being in the irony that women's work should ever be brought into the arena of men.

It seems strange that where Aristophanes instructed Mnesilochus to be depilated even in his most private regions for comic purposes, he did not allow the women to put on the phallus, which would certainly have potential for laughs. It might have been too real and uncomfortable for the men of the audience to see what were supposed to be women with a phallus between their legs. And if the lack of this addition to the women had nothing to do with any sort of gender issue, than perhaps it would have been too metatheatrical for Aristophanes to present any characters (either male or female) donning a basic part of the general comic, male costume.[17]

The movement from the male to the female gender might have been familiar to the actor who portrayed Mnesilochus. Since there were no female actors, it is very possible that the actor had to actually go through the same transformation at some point in his own career to play a female character, so that the motions of the transformation were known and only hyperbole in action had to be added for comedic effect. Contrarily, for the actor who played Praxagora, his transformation might have been more difficult for

[17] For metatheater in Aristophanes, see Slater, (above n. 11).

the simple fact that he was a "he" and could never know the nuances of the female to male change. It would also be more difficult to retain femininity in his portrayal of Praxagora as a man, since it would be too easy to revert to a purely male role. Thus, the comedy for this type of role would be more forced, perhaps in cracks in the voice or in an exaggeratedly noticeable restraint of female habits of movement.

We see Aristophanes supply the men who surround Mnesilochus during his transformation scene with many gags and jokes about the process the poor man must go through to become a woman. He is poked and prodded, shaved and singed, all the while his companion jests at his expense. Praxagora's transformation scene, however, is nothing if not down to business. The women have already done their preparation and it only remains for them to don their masculine clothes over their newly bronzed and hairy bodies, in fact keeping their female garments on underneath,

> …μέν γ᾽ ἔχω τὰς μασχάλας
> λόχμης δασυτέρας, καθάπερ ἦν ξυγκείμενον:
> ἔπειθ᾽…ἀλειψαμένη τὸ σῶμ᾽ ὅλον δι᾽ ἡμέρας
> ἐχραινόμην ἑστῶσα πρὸς τὸν ἥλιον.
>
> …I have armpits shaggier than underbrush, just as agreed,
> then…I anointed my body with oil and I was touched slightly
> [i.e. I tanned] having stood under the sun all day.
> (*Ekkl.* 60-64)

Even these beginning scenes give away a view of men and women that has remained until today – for a woman to become a male is for her to become empowered and serious, while for a man to become a woman is degrading and shameful, only able to be borne through laughter.

Though Aristotle was born a few generations after Aristophanes, he is a good resource from whom to get an understanding of the approximately contemporary

scientific thoughts on gender. Giulia Sissa provides a succinct summary of Aristotelian sexual philosophy, "Female characteristics are described in two ways: by analogy with the male and by comparison of inferiority with the male body."[18] She then provides examples of this, quoting Aristotle, "In hairy species the hair of the female is finer…Females also have softer flesh than males…, their legs are thinner, the females' feet are smaller than the males'."[19] She continues later to quote, "…the male brain is larger in volume than the female."[20] Thus, everything about being male is larger and more complete than its counterpart in the female, so that one can see why a female becoming male is an additive process, and why for a male becoming a female the process is a subtractive one, as Slater notes.[21] The male must reduce himself to femininity by removing his male clothes and hair, and, and ultimately, penis, while the female must increase herself by adding the male clothes, (facial) hair, skin color and penis.

Despite each character's efforts to become the opposite sex, there will always be the presence or absence of a phallus to define the boundaries of what the character truly is and to prevent him or her from completely becoming the opposite. Mnesilochus' phallus is the key to his true gender when the women begin interrogating him – try as he might, he finds his manhood impossible to hide. Just as Mnesilochus does not remove the phallus to become a woman, the women do not add this to their male costume. The women seem to be guarded by the social convention that generally it is more acceptable to point out the presence of a penis than to ask a man where his is.

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[18] Giulia Sissa, "The Sexual Philosophies of Plato and Aristotle," *A History of Women in the West*, v. 1, ed. Pauline S. Pantel (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 65

[19] Aristotle, *On the History of Animals*, v. 3, trans. A.L. Peck (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965) 638b 7-24

[20] Aristotle, *On the Parts of Animals*, trans. A.L. Peck (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983) 653a 27-b3

[21] Slater, *Spectator Politics* (above n. 11), 157

Both Mnesilochus and Praxagora use the costume of the opposite sex to enter a meeting which would usually be forbidden to them as a man and a woman, respectively. Within each meeting, the one being a part of the female religious festival of the Thesmophoria, and the other being the standard civic and governing assembly held by men, each character gives his or her position in a speech to the rest of the attendees. These speeches are similar in form, but since they are for different purposes, there are, of course, many points at which they diverge.

The first way in which the speeches differ is how they are presented to the audiences of the plays. Mnesilochus' speech is heard by the audience of *Thesmophorizusae* at the same time the audience of females at the Thesmophoria within the play hears it so that throughout the timeline of play, Mnesilochus delivers his speech once. Praxagora gives her speech twice throughout the timeline of *Ekklesiazusae*: the first time is when the audience of the play hears it while she practices the speech in front of only her female supporters; the second time Praxagora gives the speech she is presumably at the bema on the Pnyx, but the audience does not hear this, as the scene they see while this occurs is of the husbands of the women who are at the assembly wondering where their wives are.

Both of the speeches[22] begin with an announcement of solidarity with the cause of the respective meeting in order for each imposter to cement his or her place within the rest of the group. Mnesilochus begins,

> τὸ μὲν ὦ γυναῖκες ὀξυθυμεῖσθαι σφόδρα
> Εὐριπίδῃ, τοιαῦτ᾽ ἀκουούσας κακά,
> .. μισῶ τὸν ἄνδρ᾽ ἐκεῖνον...

[22] Mnesilochus' from *Thesmophoriazusae* 466-519 and Praxagora's from *Ekklesiazusae* 171-240 with interruptions.

> O women, you are vehemently angry at
> Euripides upon hearing these bad deeds
> …I hate that man
> (*Thesmo.* 466-470)

He officially announces himself as one of the women, sharing equally in their hatred of Euripides. Praxagora uses the same device,

> ἐμοὶ δ᾽ ἴσον μὲν τῆσδε τῆς χώρας μέτα
> ὅσονπερ ὑμῖν: ἄχθομαι δὲ καὶ φέρω
> τὰ τῆς πόλεως ἅπαντα βαρέως πράγματα,
>
> For me there is an equal part of this land,
> as much as there is for you. I am grieved and
> bear heavily all the problems of the city
> (*Ekkl.* 173-175)

Though both comments are necessarily ironic, Praxagora's is especially so. As a woman, Praxagora yearned for her place in the assembly and to be a full citizen possessing equal measure of her city, but this right was disallowed to her. Now she has finally obtained her small share, and wields it more strongly than any of the men who have taken their portion for granted and use the assembly and jury systems only as a welfare program.[23] Since Praxagora's intended audience is the male assembly, but the audience sees her make her speech in front of her female followers, those followers become part of both the internal and external audiences of the play. She addresses the women as if they are part of the play's internal Assembly, therefore making them part of it and part of the political and governmental machine, giving them all a stake in their city. And the women are part of the external audience in the theater, listening to Praxagora's speech just as the spectators of the play are. Thus, Aristophanes simultaneously and stealthily inserts women into two arenas where they are not usually found.

[23] See lines *Ekklesiazusae* 186-188 and for jury, see *Wasps* (below, n.37).

Next, both speakers deliver the true purpose of their speech. Mnesilochus reveals that he is a supporter of Euripides, and somewhat contradicts his previous statement,

> τί…‘κεινον αιτιώμεθα
> βαρέως τε φέρομεν, ει δύ’ ημων η τρία
> κακα ξυνειδώς ειπε, δρώσας μυρία;
>
> Why…do we accuse Euripides and take it badly if he,
> knowingly, spoke of two or three of our bad deeds,
> when we have done so many more?”
> (*Thesmo.* 473-475)

Here, Mnesilochus points out that if women are not as bad as Euripides’ portrayal of them, they are worse.

Before actually delivering the purpose of her speech, Praxagora first explains the problems of the existing democracy, including corruption within the government and unhappiness with the Anti-Spartan League and its failure. She mentions these issues in order to support her movement towards change, which she announces, “ταῖς γὰρ γυναιξὶ φημὶ χρῆναι τὴνπόλιν / ἡμᾶς παραδοῦναι. I say that it is necessary that we grant the city to the women” (*Thesmo.* 210-211).

After these statements of purpose, each speaker goes on to support his or her cause. Mnesilochus employs two stories in particular as evidence for the evil that women do. The first misdeed is one he attributes to his female self, saying that after only three days of marriage to his/her husband, he/she sneaked out of their bedroom, with the excuse of stomach pains, to have sex with a lover he/she had known from childhood (*Thesmo.* 484-501). The second example is the story of a woman who faked her pregnancy, so that when it came time for her to give birth, she had to pretend to be in labor for more than a week giving her maid enough time to find and buy another newborn to present to her husband as their own (*Thesmo.* 511-527). In between these two stories

Mnesilochus mentions that women will have sex with "δούλων τε κώρεωκόμων/ …ἢν μὴ 'χωμεν ἕτερον...slaves and muleteers if [they] have no one else," (*Thesmo*. 491-492) and reveals a woman's trick of chewing garlic before her husband comes home after a night of guard duty so that he does not suspect any other man has been there while he was gone (*Thesmo.* 505-507).

Mnesilochus does not get much farther than his bawdy examples of female evil before the women of that assembly begin reacting badly to his speech. After the women verbally assault him, and threaten him with physical violence, Mnesilochus pleads for one of the basic rights afforded to Athenian citizens, the right to *παρρησια* (*Thesmo.* 541), literally frankness, but here probably closer to freedom of speech, as Henderson translates it. The women deny him this and physically restrain him, so that his next words are constantly cut off and interrupted. Mnesilochus continues his speech and begins listing crimes committed by women starting with two smaller scale ones (not mentioned here), then moving on to four quite serious ones:

> …ὡς τὸν ἄνδρα τῷ πελέκει γυνὴ κατεσπόδησεν...
> …ὡς φαρμάκοις ἑτέρα τὸν ἄνδρ᾽ ἔμηνεν…
> …ὡς ὑπὸ τῇ πυέλῳ κατώρυξέν ποτ᾽—...
> ἀχαρνικὴ τὸν πατέρα,
> …ὡς σὺ τῆς δούλης τεκούσης ἄρρεν εἶτα σαυτῇ/ τοῦθ᾽ ὑπεβάλου,
> τὸ σὸν δὲ θυγάτριον παρῆκας αὐτῇ.
>
> (*Thesmo.* 560-565)

> …How another woman assaulted her husband with an axe…
> …How another drove her husband crazy with drugs…
> …How an Acharnian woman once buried –…
> her father under a tub,
> …How your slave bore a male, and for yourself you bore this thing, so you let your little daughter go to her [suggesting a switch of the babies].

This list which Mnesilochus presents begs the question of the source of his information. Mnesilochus gives no clue as to where he might have heard of these horrible deeds, and though they are outrageous accusations, they are by no means impossible. They may also illustrate the exaggeration and extent of men's fears about the evils of women, and actually only barely be based in reality.

In *Ekklesiazusae*, Praxagora's speech extolling women takes the form of a concise list including nine items, each in the same pattern of "They still do [x], as they always have." The list focuses on the virtue of the ability of women to retain old fashioned methods and values in every aspect of their lives ranging from the ways they keep house to the way they enjoy sex (*Ekkl.* 221-228). Her list carries a slight tone of misogyny, but only in a way that her character of a husband might speak about his wife including phrases such as, "τοὺς ἄνδρας ἐπιτρίβουσιν ὥσπερ καὶπρὸ τοῦ. They irritate their husbands, as they always have." Or, a less literal translation, but one that captures the intended tone, "They drive their husbands nuts…." (trans. Henderson).

Praxagora's list ranges from the polished to the obscene. The first four items on the list deal with, respectively, cooking, physical labor, celebration of the Thesmophoria, and baking. Then, the item which is quoted above, having to do with husbands, acts as a moderate hinge from good actions women take to items that deal more with female vices. After the item about wives annoying their husbands, the phrases pertain to wives' lovers, desire for sweets, preference for wine and desire for sex.[24] The entire point of this list is to emphasize the fact that cleaving to tradition has made women successful in keeping

[24] In fact for the last item, Henderson uses the term "fucking" for βινούμεναι.

house, and efficient perhaps even to a fault, and so should make them successful and efficient at running the state.

This portion of the speech speaks to the common theme of the good old days and appeals to the male assembly's conceptions of virtue. According to Praxagora, the men have recently been leaning away from this old-fashioned virtue, and have been attempting innovation, which has ruined the state. Just before the list, Praxagora says:

> πρῶτα μὲν γὰρ τἄρια
> βάπτουσι θερμῷ κατὰ τὸν ἀρχαῖοννόμον
> ἀπαξάπασαι, κοὐχὶ μεταπειρωμένας
> ἴδοις ἂν αὐτάς. ἡ δ' Ἀθηναίων πόλις,
> εἰ τοῦτο χρηστῶς εἶχεν, οὐκ ἀνὲσῴζετο,
> εἰ μή τι καινὸν ἄλλο περιηργάζετο.
> (*Ekkl.* 215-220)

> First, they each dip the wool in hot [water] out of ancient custom,
> and you won't see them trying a different way. The city of Athens,
> if it had such a useful custom, wouldn't preserve it,
> not if it could fiddle with[or try] something new.

This whole passage is rife with irony. That women will keep to the traditional way of running the government is almost an oxymoron. Praxagora is proposing the most forward thinking and non-traditional legislation possible. And, unlike Mnesilochus who can give no source for his information, Praxagora names hers outright when one of her companions asks about her rhetorical skill, "…μετὰ τἀνδρὸς ᾤκησ' ἐν πυκνί:/ ἔπειτ' ἀκούουσ' ἐξέμαθον τῶν ῥητόρων. I lived with my husband on the Pnyx. Then, hearing the orators, I learned" (*Ekkl.* 243-244). Not only did she learn the form of the speeches, but it is evident that she also learned their content.

Between Mnesilochus and Praxagora there occurs a kind of exchange of rights. Mnesilochus is a man who plays a woman to enter a meeting into which he would not be allowed in his masculine form/attire. While at the meeting he is stripped of his right to

free speech, which he would receive if he were a man in a normal setting. Contrarily, Praxagora is a woman who plays a man to enter a meeting to which she would be denied entrance in her feminine form/attire. While at the meeting she is given rights which she would usually not receive, unless she was in attendance at a festival such as the Thesmophoria, the one at which Mnesilochus was present. Praxagora wins her cause and totally overturns the government, while Mnesilochus' plan backfires and he becomes a laughing stock and a prisoner.

The character of Euripides takes a short foray into transvestitism at the end of the *Thesmophoriazusae* as part of his plan to save Mnesilochus from being punished for entering the women's meeting on his behalf (1172-1209). He has previously pretended to be male characters from his own plays, Menelaus and Perseus, both of whom rescue their woman, who Mnesilochus respectively becomes, first Helen and then Andromeda, reverting back into feminine characters, but these tricky attempts to extract Mnesilochus from his guard's care are unsuccessful. Finally, Euripides returns to the stage in another disguise, this time of an old procuress who has with her a young girl who seduces the guard away from Mnesilochus leaving him to be untied by Euripides. So though Euripides condemns manipulative and deceitful women in his plays, it is these very characteristics that he must take on in order to save his kinsman.

A short occurrence of cross-dressing also occurs in *Lysistrata.* After a heated argument with the magistrate about what should be a woman's position in society, Lysistrata becomes especially annoyed with the magistrate and tells him to be quiet, "σιώπα." (*Lysis.* 529). Now the magistrate becomes enraged and tells Lysistrata,"σοί γ' ὦ κατάρατε σιωπῶ 'γώ, καὶ ταῦτα κάλυμμα φορούσῃ / περὶ τὴν κεφαλήν; μή νυν ζῴην, Με,

be quiet for you, wretched woman, who wears this veil on her head? Not while I'm alive" (*Lysis.* 530-531). So Lysistrata tells him to take her veil, and presumably forcibly places it onto his head. And one of Lysistrata's cohorts chimes in and hands the man a sewing basket, too. The women are attempting to use the lowliness of the female station to degrade the magistrate into leaving, telling him that "πόλεμος δὲ γυναιξὶ μελήσει, War will be a concern for women," (*Lysis.* 538). This, however, does not seem to have a great affect on the magistrate and he remains in the scene until Lysistrata and the women make believe that he is dead and pretend to prepare him for burial seventy lines later.

It is important to remember that the purpose of Aristophanes' plays was to serve as part of the religious rites of Dionysus, who was not only the god of wine and drunkenness, but also the god of any kind of experience that loosened the one undergoing it from normal restraints, such as insanity or ecstasy. Dana Sutton notes that, "In myth and literature he is often represented as a god who works his way by disguising himself or by creating illusions to deceive others."[25] The characters of Mnesilochus and Praxagora are especially Dionysiac and are appropriate figures in plays meant to be votives for such a god. There is no more basic transformation or disguise a person can take than to change his or her gender.

Not only do these transformative characters make the plays appropriate for the festivals of Dionysus, but also they provide a deeper level of meaning beyond the superficial, comic one. The plays broadcast to the public a reassignment of gender roles, making the woman, Praxagora, the one who is successful in achieving her goals, while her male counterpart, Mnesilochus, fails miserably. Though it is not impossible to argue that Praxagora herself is meant to be a joke (a woman becoming a political leader, ha!),

[25] Dana F. Sutton, *Ancient Comedy: The War of the Generations* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993). 2.

the fact remains that at the end of the small glimpse of her life which Aristophanes tells, she has conquered Athens for women.

Chapter Two

Implications of Parenthood

There are several subtle references to parenthood, especially motherhood, that thread throughout *Lysistrata*, *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Ekklesiazusae*. Though there are only two children of characters who makes an appearance in any of the plays (in *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae*), none of the leading ladies can escape this most fundamental female role. Aristophanes disguises this theme with sexual innuendo and jokes, but motherhood remains a key motivator for his women to make the societal changes they seek.

If we examine the kind of Athens where women can and do indeed succeed in a political movement and institute a sex strike, as occurs in *Lysistrata*, this would be more punishment to the women than the men as follows: as Aristophanes makes clear throughout his plays, he is quite aware that women have libidos (though he does make light of this fact); then, women probably participated in homosexual behavior rarely, if at all[26]; and finally, it is only the respectable, married matrons who have barricaded themselves into the Acropolis. All of these factors add up to reveal that the men left in the other areas of the city have plenty of options for sexual activity including other men and prostitutes, while their wives are left atop the Acropolis becoming sexually frustrated to the point of breaking their pact.

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[26] Though it is true that a lack of ancient sources and modern scholarly work on this topic is not evidence for absence of female homosexuality in ancient Athens, it is certain that we may at least say that there were few opportunities for women to engage in such behavior. Since women were mostly restricted to the home, they were usually surrounded by female relatives and slaves, neither group being appealing for such sexual activity. Also, the homosexual bond between an older and younger man was a tutelary one, as much as it was for sexual pleasure, a function which would have had less purpose in a female homosexual relationship.

Men could have had sex with others than their wives, as Kinesias reveals after being rejected by his wife, Myrrhine, in *Lysistrata*, saying, "ποῦ Κυναλώπηξ; μίσθωσόν μοι τὴν τίτθην. Where is Fox-Dog[27]? I will hire a nurse" (957). The men, however, do finally accede to their wives' demands and appear on stage with phalloi straining against their clothes, begging to find a solution to the war. Intercourse would have been important to the soldiers in the war since producing offspring, whether or not it was their conscious urge, would have been especially important to the men whose own lives as well as perhaps their older son's lives were in danger, and who would have been instinctively looking for ways to continue their bloodlines. By refusing sex, the women deny their husbands pleasure as well as the opportunity to sate the naturally occurring need to have children, which is widely confirmed by scholars. As Judith Feeney writes, "Having children can be seen as the fulfillment of strong biological needs to procreate."[28]

The apparent lack of a mothering tendency in Lysistrata is interesting. At the beginning of the play Lysistrata is trying to understand why more women have not shown up on time to the rally for her cause, and she must be reminded that most of the women are mothers and that it takes time for the women to prepare themselves and their families for the day in the morning. Kalonike tells her,

> ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἡμῶν περὶ τὸν ἄνδρ᾽ἐκύπτασεν,
> ἡ δ᾽ οἰκέτην ἤγειρεν, ἡ δὲ παιδίον
> κατέκλινεν, ἡ δ᾽ ἔλουσεν, ἡ δ᾽ἐψώμισεν.
> (*Lysis*. 17-19)

> For we [wives] dote on our husbands,
> and wake the slave, and the baby,
> we put him to bed or wash him or feed him.

[27] As Henderson tells in his footnote for this word, this is "The nickname of the pimp or brothel keeper Philostratus, cf. Knights 1069" (p. 401).
[28] cf. Judith Feeney, et al., *Becoming Parents: Exploring the Bond Between Mothers, Fathers, and Their Infants* (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 2001). 5.

Lysistrata finds it difficult to bear that these matronly and wifely duties should interfere with the grand plan that she has for the women.

Lysistrata's forgetfulness of motherhood only goes so far, however. During Lysistrata's argument with the magistrate, Lysistrata makes a metaphor comparing a woman's ability to untangle wool and set it into such an order as to make clothes, with her ability to untangle and order the government (574-586). The magistrate retorts, saying,"οὔκουν δεινὸν ταυτὶ ταύτας ῥαβδίξειν καὶ τολυπεύειν, /αἷς οὐδὲ μετῆν πάνυ τοῦ πολέμου; Isn't it awful how these women go like this with their sticks, and like that with their bobbins, when they share none of the war's burdens?" (*Lysis.* 587-588).[29] This incites a ferocious objection from Lysistrata,

> καὶ μὴν ὦ παγκατάρατε
> πλεῖν ἤ γε διπλοῦν αὐτὸν φέρομεν, πρώτιστον μέν γε τεκοῦσαι
> κἀκπέμψασαι παῖδας ὁπλίτας -
>
> (*Lysis.* 588-589)
>
> Accursed man!
> We bear twice more than you, first we give birth and
> then we send our sons out as hoplites –

This objection is the most basic one Lysistrata can possibly make, as it is simple enough that without the half (or perhaps some would argue a larger part) of the childbearing process women provide, there would be no men at all.

Beyond even the issue of children and motherhood, being a wife also entails managing the daily tasks that are involved in the running of the household, including taking care of the finances. Though this is one of Praxagora's main points in her campaign to put women in the government, Lysistrata also touches upon it, saying, in the

[29] I use Henderson's translation here to capture the tone especially in the verbs ῥαβδίξειν and τολυπεύειν.

same argument with the magistrate, "οὐ καὶ τἄνδον χρήματα πάντως ἡμεῖς ταμιεύομεν ὑμῖν; And don't we manage all the property for you [already]?" (495).

Then, Lysistrata acknowledges a deeper issue, that of age in the cycles of reproduction. She and the magistrate discuss how the men being gone to war affects the reproduction of females more than it does males. Women have a much smaller time-window than men during which they are able to procreate.

Λυσιστράτη
εἶθ᾽ ἡνίκα χρῆν εὐφρανθῆναι καὶ τῆς ἥβης ἀπολαῦσαι,
μονοκοιτοῦμεν διὰ τὰς στρατιάς. καὶ θἠμέτερον μὲν ἐάσω,
περὶ τῶν δὲ κορῶν ἐν τοῖς θαλάμοις γηρασκουσῶν ἀνιῶμαι.

Πρόβουλος
οὔκουν χἄνδρες γηράσκουσιν;

Λυσιστράτη
μὰ Δί᾽ ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ εἶπας ὅμοιον.
ὁ μὲν ἥκων γάρ κἂν ᾖ πολιός, ταχὺ παῖδα κόρην γεγάμηκεν:
τῆς δὲ γυναικὸς σμικρὸς ὁ καιρός, κἂν τούτου μὴ 'πιλάβηται,
οὐδεὶς ἐθέλει γῆμαι ταύτην,ὀττευομένη δὲ κάθηται.
(*Lysis.* 591-597)

Lysistrata
Then, when it is necessary for us to be glad and to enjoy our youth,
We sleep alone because of the army [where our men are]. And I will
let alone our problem,
I am worried about the maidens growing old in their rooms.

Magistrate
Don't men grow old?

Lysistrata
By Zeus, yes, but not in similar terms.
For coming home, even if he is gray, quickly he has married a young girl:
The right time of a woman is small, and if she does not seize it,
And no one wishes to marry her, she would sit looking for good omens
[of marriage].

Women who are of childbearing age are most likely to have husbands who are within the age-range to serve in the military. Once a husband has surpassed the maximum age for service, which, for example, was 60 in Spartan society,[30] his wife is less likely to be able to conceive. When a man retires from service, however, he is still able to have children, and it is much easier for an old man to find a young wife than for even a middle aged woman to find a man of any age, as Lysistrata points out in this passage.

The women's chorus recites the ritual path to womanhood which only a few upper class girls will undertake in service to Artemis. The chorus describes the third step in this path as when, "κᾆτ' ἔχουσα τὸν κροκωτὸν ἄρκτος ἦ Βραυρωνίοις: Putting off the saffron [robe], I was a bear at the Brauronia" (644). Nancy Demand notes that "in antiquity the bear was noted for its mothering skills,"[31] so that through this ritual the girls were temporarily transformed into maternal creatures, although they would have only been perhaps slightly more than ten at this stage in the progression. Not all the women present in Lysistrata's movement would have been involved in these rituals, but since the chorus uses the first person in this section, we can assume that at least some of them have. Though this is only a small point, it is certainly evidence of motherhood as an undercurrent in the play.

After another argument between the men and women, Lysistrata tells her companions what a difficult time she is having keeping her women on the Acropolis and away from their husbands, "βινητιῶμεν, ᾗ βράχιστον τοῦ λόγου, In few words, we want sex" (*Lysis*. 715). She even includes herself, admitting her desire, but she holds firm in her resolve and does not try to escape as many of the other women do, citing household

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[30] Kagan, *The Peloponnesian War* (above n. 6), 4.
[31] Nancy Demand, *Birth, Death, and Motherhood in Classical Greece* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994). 107.

chores to which they should attend: the first woman says, "οἴκοι γάρ ἐστιν ἔριά μοι Μιλήσια/ ὑπὸ τῶν σέων κατακοπτόμενα. For at home, there is my Milesian wool being cut up by moths" (*Lysis*. 728-729); and a second woman, "τάλαιν᾽ ἐγώ, τάλαινα τῆς Ἀμοργίδος,/ ἣν ἄλοπον οἴκοι καταλέλοιφ᾽, I am foolish! I am foolish because I forgot the Amorgidian flax at home unshucked" (735-736); and a third woman, "αὐτίκα μάλα τέξομαι, I will give birth very soon!" (744).

This last woman is particularly suspicious to Lysistrata since she replies, "ἀλλ᾽ οὐκ ἐκύεις σύ γ᾽ ἐχθές. But you weren't pregnant yesterday," (745, *trans*. Henderson). This woman uses a most basic maternal task, childbirth, to try to leave the Acropolis. The situation becomes ironic when Lysistrata reveals that the woman has been using a "ἱερὰν κυνῆν, holy helmet" (751), which Henderson clarifies as belonging to the Acropolis' statue of Athena Promachos. Athena would be the correct goddess to be involved in Lysistrata's women's war, but she was also a virgin who would have had no stake in participating in the sex strike or pregnancy.

Then Myrrhine's husband, Kinesias, comes to the foot of the Acropolis with a servant carrying their baby and uses the excuse of the child needing its mother to lure Myrrhine off the Acropolis. Kinesias makes it quite clear during a short soliloquy that his intention for this visit to Myrrhine is sexual, when he says, "ὡς οὐδεμίαν ἔχω γε τῷ βίῳ χάριν… ἔρημα δὲ/ εἶναι δοκεῖ μοι πάντα… ἔστυκα γάρ. I have no joy in my life,…it seems to me that everything is desolate…for I am stiff [i.e. horny]" (*Lysis.* 865-869).

As soon as Myrrhine goes down from the Acropolis to attend her child, Kinesias begins trying to persuade her to "[celebrate] Aphrodite's holy mysteries" (*Lysis.* 898, trans. Henderson). After some more coaxing by Kinesias for Myrrhine only to lie down

with him, Myrrhine uses the excuse, "ἐναντίον τοῦ παιδίου; In front of the baby?" (*Lysis*. 907). Immediately, Kinesias orders the slave to take the child home. It is at this point that it becomes apparent to the audience that the child was just a ruse by Kinesias who knew his wife could not remain on the Acropolis while her child cried for her.

Though Myrrhine is a devoted mother, she is also devoted to the cause of the women. It also becomes apparent, from her following actions, that Myrrhine is aware of her husband's wiles, and she quickly switches from the role of mother to that of seductress in order to toy with him. After leading on her husband in preparing for sex, making sure every detail is just right, from bedding to perfume, she simply "dashes," as Henderson describes in his stage direction,[32] back to the Acropolis just before actually doing the deed.

In *Ekklesiazusae*, Praxagora's proposition of new communist sex laws is perhaps even more revolutionary than she has thought. Praxagora demands that in order for an attractive or high class Athenian to have sex with the person he or she desires (assuming that this desired person would be of at least equal looks and class), he or she must first have intercourse with a person of lesser looks or class.

The implications for actual sex are quite apparent – even the sexual needs of those who are less desirable will be sated. This, however, means that more lower class offspring will be born since if a woman of either class has intercourse with a male of the opposite class and gets pregnant by him, then proceeds to have sex with her desired mate, there is no chance of having a child with him. In this case a lower class or ugly mother might be glad to be able to have a child by an upper class or handsome man, but an upper

[32] *Lysistrata*, (above, n. 1), p. 399.

class woman would have more incentive to evade the law and not risk raising a child by a low class father as an upper class child.

This model also only takes into account the first generation of children had under Praxagora's proposition since later on there would be no class division there would be no need for such a law. It is possible that Aristophanes realized this and included this sex law to illustrate how silly legislation from women might be. Or perhaps, on a more superficial level, Aristophanes simply did not consider the repercussions of a law which would serve his comic purpose.

It is interesting that in lines 591-593, Praxagora says,

> καὶ μὴ τὸν μὲν πλουτεῖν, τὸν δ' ἄθλιον εἶναι,
> μηδὲ γεωργεῖν τὸν μὲν πολλήν, τῷ δ' εἶναι μηδὲ ταφῆναι,
> μηδ' ἀνδραπόδοις τὸν μὲν χρῆσθαι πολλοῖς, τὸν δ' οὐδ' ἀκολούθῳ:
>
> No more rich man here, poor man there,
> or a man with a big farm and a man without land enough for his own grave,
> or a man with many slaves and a man without even one attendant.
> (*trans.* Henderson)

Despite calling for equality among citizens, she does not go so far as to abolish slavery. So though the new society seems at first glance to be completely lacking in hierarchy, one of the most basic components of the old ways will remain, and be even more strict,

> …καὶ τάς γε δούλας οὐχὶ δεῖ κοσμουμένας
> τὴν τῶν ἐλευθέρων ὑφαρπάζειν Κύπριν,
> ἀλλὰ παρὰ τοῖς δούλοισι κοιμᾶσθαι μόνον…
> (*Ekkl*. 721-724)
>
> …And it is necessary for slave girls to not fix
> themselves up in order to snatch away the heart
> of free mennbut they will lie only with male slaves…

Praxagora speaks specifically of slave women, but does not mention that slave men should not try to seduce free women. This is evidence that the notion of maternity was in

fact far more important than paternity for the determination of the status of a child. A citizen or free woman who became pregnant by a slave could quite possibly disguise the child as her husband's own, while a child born to a slave woman was automatically considered a slave since its father would be impossible to prove.

Praxagora, though interested in a fatherless society, is very aware of the role mothers play in their children's lives. During her practice speech to her female cohorts, Praxagora makes the claim that women will be better military leaders because they will have the best interests of the soldiers, who are their children, in mind, "...ὡς τοὺς στρατιώτας πρῶτον οὖσαι μητέρες/ σῴζειν ἐπιθυμήσουσιν. ...As they will want to save the soldiers…being [their] mothers" (*Ekkl.* 233-234), implying simultaneously that fathers, who are the men currently in power, have no such consideration for or emotional attachment to their sons.

Just as mentioned before, in the previous section on *Lysistrata*, Praxagora makes her claims of women's abilities to run the government off of their abilities to run the household. Praxagora wants to transform all the citizens, both male and female into children of the state, more or less, and since she has been voted (or placed herself as) the leader of this new government, she sees herself as their mother. When Praxagora's husband asks how the people will get their clothes if they have no personal wealth, she says, "τὰ δὲ λοίφ᾽ ἡμεῖς ὑφανοῦμεν, and [in the] future, we will weave [them]" (654). The "we" here is the government, and specifically women in the government since they are now the main officials. Also, under Praxagora the government becomes not only the food supplier, but also the food preparer and server, "τὰ δικαστήρια καὶ τὰς στοιὰς ἀνδρῶνας πάντα ποιήσω. I will make all the lawcourts and stoas into dining rooms"

(676). Thus, the government is adopting the roles previously taken by individual mothers, and converting what previously had been male institutions into areas directly controlled by the (female) government. This new arrangement seems to leave very little work for the men and falls in line very well with a typical reaction of a mother taking over a task completely when she sees her child erring or failing at it, leaving the child with no part in the action.

In *Thesmophoriazusae*, while the women try to strip him of his womanly guise, Mnesilochus tells them that he is, "ἐννέα παίδων μητέρα, a mother of nine children" (*Thesmo.* 637). Being a mother would solidify Mnesilochus amongst the women and give credence to his character. Though this defense does not work for Mnesilochus, and the women go on to discover that he is definitely a man, the fact that Mnesilochus tried to hide behind motherhood is telling of the fact that mothers were afforded a high respect, or least, perhaps, more respect than a woman who was not a mother.

Aristophanes especially mocks motherhood with the character of Mika. Throughout the first sections of the play, Mika seems to be an upright citizen mother, with her child and its nurse accompanying her in the background, who argues against Mnesilochus' defense of Euripides strongly, albeit not in a particularly formal or legal way, saying,

> τέφραν ποθὲν λαβοῦσαι
> ταύτης ἀποψιλώσομεν τὸν χοῖρον, ἵνα διδαχθῇ
> γυνὴ γυναῖκας οὖσα μὴ κακῶς λέγειν τὸ λοιπόν.
> (*Thesmo.*537-539)

> Taking [hot] ashes from somewhere
> we will strip bare her pussy, so that the woman might be
> taught not to speak badly of women in the future.

This threat of such violence against someone she only knows to be one of her fellow women should be a warning of the insanity that will ensue later.

After Cleisthenes delivers the news that a man has sneaked into the women's meeting and, while the women are confirming which among themselves they know and do not know in order to discover the imposter, Cleisthenes asks, "ἡδὶ δὲ δὴ τίς ἐστιν ἡ τὸ παιδίον ἔχουσα; And this one here, who is this holding the little child?"And Mika replies, "τίτθη νὴ Δί' ἐμή. By Zeus, my wetnurse" (608-609). The child and wetnurse have been in the background during the previous proceedings, but soon the child comes to the forefront. Though this is the first mention of the child or the nurse in the play, it is probable that they have been in the background throughout the entire meeting, filling in the crowd there, with the nurse taking part in the chorus.[33]

In his anger of being found out, Mnesilochus snatches the baby from its nurse and threatens to kill it (*Ekkl.* 689-764). Mika raises shouts of alarm and calls for war against Mnesilochus, οὐ πολλὴν βοὴν/ στήσεσθε καὶ τροπαῖον…;, Why do you [other women] not give a great shout and set up a trophy[34]…?" This is certainly the appropriate action by a mother when her child has been stolen by a stranger, and one who is seemingly unbalanced at that.

As Mnesilochus removes the baby's swaddling in order to follow through on his threat, he makes a very strange discovery, "τουτὶ τί ἔστιν; ἀσκὸς ἐγένεθ' ἡ κόρη/ οἴνου πλέως καὶ ταῦτα Περσικὰς ἔχων. What is this? The girl has become a wineskin full of

[33] In the one presentation of this play that I have seen at the 2011 AIA/APA conference, the nurse was in fact in the background holding a bundle the whole time, sometimes taking part in the chorus.
[34] A trophy was a temporary erection to commemorate a victory and the fallen of a battle and consisted of the armor of the dead either merely in a pile or set up to look almost as if it were being worn with the helmet atop the breastplate, perhaps propped against a stake in the ground.

wine and even wearing these Persian things[35]" (*Thesmo.* 733-734). Rather than bringing a child to the meeting, Mika brought a skin of wine and treated it as preciously as a child. Suddenly, it is Mika who seems unbalanced as she is revealed as a drunk.

Women drank especially as part of the rites of Dionysus, in whose honor the plays were given, and so it is appropriate for wine to appear with women in the play, in that sense. This kind of maternal devotion to wine, however, would have been far from appropriate in everyday life or even in the context of the Thesmophoria, the festival within the play which itself had nothing to do with Dionysus. Though drinking or drunkenness would have been unacceptable during the Thesmophoria, as one of the major themes of that festival was abstinence from all vices, Kritylla, during her opening prayer, mentions that "…κεῖ τις κάπηλος ἢ καπηλὶς τοῦ χοῶς/ ἢ τῶν κοτυλῶν τὸ νόμισμα διαλυμαίνεται…,… a barman or barmaid who sells short pints or liters…" should be cursed (trans. Henderson, 346-347). Douglas Olson attests, "That women generally are heavy drinkers is a comic trope,"[36] but this presentation of alcoholism to the point of maternal delusion is novel.

Mika's proclivity for wine as well as her apparent madness not only weaken her case against Euripides, since her argument might be written off as the ravings of a drunk, but also degrade motherhood. A woman who has had a child would never esteem a bottle of wine as highly as to take the place of that child, but Mika continues her delusion to the extreme, responding to Mnesilochus holding a knife to the wineskin by saying, "μὴ δῆθ', ἱκετεύω σ': ἀλλ' ἔμ' ὅ τι χρῄζεις ποίει/ ὑπέρ γε τούτου. Don't! I beg you. Do whatever you want to me, for its [sake]" (*Thesmo*. 750-751).

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[35] Henderson supposes that the "Persian things" are booties.
[36] Douglas Olson, *Broken Laughter,* (above, n. 13), 309.

Both Praxagora and Lysistrata have motherhood in mind as at least an underlying motivator for their causes. They both want to run the state like a house, so that the women are in charge and are able to protect the citizens like their own children. Conversely, Mnesilochus and Mika distort motherhood by associating it with strange situations – transvestitism in Mnesilochus' case and alcoholism in Mika's.

Some kind of treatment of motherhood by Aristophanes' was unavoidable. In writing about (what seem to be) middle-aged women, he automatically adopted a necessity to discuss that part of a woman's life. Since Aristophanes does not illustrate Praxagora and Lysistrata as having children of their own, he presents government and the state as the outlets for their maternal instincts. At the same time, he portrays these women without the burden of children, thereby making them masculine, since they can spend as much time as they would like focusing on their causes without directly affecting anyone besides themselves.

Chapter Three

Minor Female Characters

Throughout *Ekklesiasuzae*, *Lysistrata*, and *Thesmophoriazusae* there are female characters besides the three leading characters of Praxagora and Lysistrata (and Mnesilochus). These minor characters have been neglected in studies of the plays so far, but they too are important to their respective plots because they help to characterize the leading ladies.

These female characters fall into two categories, those who support the main woman, and then those who work against her, both directly and indirectly. The first type of woman appears in groups, rallying behind Praxagora and Lysistrata, especially, taking up her cause. The second type of woman does not appear in a group, but is usually alone and represents superficiality and carnality and takes a different form in each play. These female foils bring a layer of irony to the plays, and though they provide another source of humor, it comes at a serious cost to the feministic tones in the rest of the play.

In *Ekklesiazusae,* the minor female characters that support Praxagora are introduced during the first scene. None of these women is given a name, so it seems that that they are only used for their votes to increase support for Praxagora's legislation in the assembly. In fact, they call to mind the image of sheep in the assembly, which Aristophanes uses in *Wasps*,[37]

> ἔδοξέ μοι …ἐν τῇ πυκνὶ
> ἐκκλησιάζειν πρόβατα συγκαθήμενα,
> βακτηρίας ἔχοντα καὶ τριβώνια
> (31-33)

[37] Aristophanes, *Wasps*, trans. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

> It seemed to me…[that] on the Pnyx
> sheep, which were sitting down, held an assembly,
> holding staves and [wearing] cloaks.

As long as they blend in amongst the men and vote at the appropriate time, Praxagora's women could just as well be these sheep. They follow their leader somewhat blindly without thinking of what could be the negative repercussions of her newly proposed law.

Though it seems that the women grasp the idea of having to look like men, they do not understand quite as well having to act like them. One woman suggests, (as mentioned in chapter two) that she plans to bring her knitting into the assembly saying, "τί γὰρ ἂν χεῖρον ἀκροώμην ἄρα/ ξαίνουσα; For would I listen any worse while combing [wool]?" (*Ekkl.* 91). Praxagora must scold her and remind her that knitting or anything having to do with it would give them away in the male assembly.

Then, the women have a difficult time speaking in male terms rather than female ones. They continuously swear with oaths that are only used by women, as in "…μὰ τὼ θεώ, …by the Two Goddesses" (*Ekkl.* 155), which refers to Demeter and Persephone. Finally, after reprimanding some women for this and similar offenses multiple times, Praxagora tells them all to sit back down, and, "αὐτὴ γὰρ ὑμῶν γ᾽ ἕνεκά μοι λέξειν δοκῶ…, On account of you all, I think that I myself will speak…" (*Ekkl*. 170). Henderson extrapolates from the Greek text and uses, "To judge from what I have seen of your abilities it seems best that I…make a speech myself," in his translation. This translation captures the tone of exasperation which Praxagora is feeling at this moment, since it has become apparent that she is the only one capable of carrying out her plan.

The speech which Praxagora then delivers (*Ekkl.* 173-240) shows an impressive knowledge of the current political atmosphere and the people who have important roles in

it. Her followers, however, are even confused as to the procedure of the assembly. They assume that the men drink before they make their speeches because,

> τὰ γοῦν βουλεύματα
> αὐτῶν ὅσ᾽ ἂν πράξωσιν ἐνθυμουμένοις
> ὥσπερ μεθυόντων ἐστὶ παραπεπληγμένα.
> (*Ekkl.* 137-139)

> When you think about
> what they get up to, their decrees are
> like the ravings of drunkards.
> (*trans.* Henderson)

Somehow, the women do know the names of two specific politicians and the ways in which each might try to strike down Praxagora's proposition. These sorts of jabs at politicians are a favorite scheme of Aristophanes', and we must take this into account when he momentarily forgoes the ignorant personalities which he has established for these women and gives them limited political knowledge in order to set up the punch lines with which Praxagora replies. One such excerpt from the dialogue deals with Kephalos, who Henderson notes was "a distinguished orator who ran a pottery business."[38]

> **Γυνὴ Α**
> ἀτὰρ ἢν Κέφαλός σοι λοιδορῆται προσφθαρείς,
> πῶς ἀντερεῖς πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐν τἠκκλησίᾳ;
> (*Ekkl.* 248-249)

> **Πραξάγορα**
> ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ τρύβλια
> κακῶς κεραμεύειν, τὴν δὲ πόλιν εὖ καὶ καλῶς.
> (*Ekkl.* 252-253)

> **Woman A**
> But if Kephalos reviles you trying to ruin you,
> How will you speak against him in the assembly?
> …

[38] Henderson, *Thesmo.* (above, n. 2) p. 275.

Praxagora
[I will say] He throws pots badly,
He will do the city [just as] well.

All of these exchanges are evidence of Praxagora's superior intelligence and awareness amongst the other housewives. Though these women are supporting Praxagora's agenda, they are also a foil to her. Aristophanes uses this group of unintelligent and unaware women as a contrast to Praxagora in order to emphasize that her leadership qualities and political ideas are unique amongst women.

The next scene in which there are minor female characters comes much later in the play after the audience has learned that Praxagora's new sex law has been passed. An old woman speaks, almost giddy in her excitement to take advantage of the law and be ravished by some young man. First she says, describing herself grotesquely, "ἐγὼ δὲ καταπεπλασμένη ψιμυθίῳ/ ἕστηκα, I am standing here plastered over with white lead [i.e. makeup]," and then she continues:

> … καὶ κροκωτὸν ἠμφιεσμένη
> ἀργός, μινυρομένη τι πρὸς ἐμαυτὴν μέλος,
> παίζουσ' ὅπῶς ἂν περιλάβοιμ' αὐτῶν τινὰ
> παριόντα.
>
> (*Ekkl.* 878-882)

> …and wrapped in this pale yellow
> [dress], warbling some tune to myself,
> dancing in such a manner that I may embrace
> one of the men coming along [this way].

It is strange that she has chosen the participle καταπεπλασμένη (meaning, plastered over) which could be used just as well in the context of mending a crack in a wall. This shows that the woman is aware that she could use some repairs, but she will not let that prevent her from trying to attract a man with her song and dance. Then she uses the verb,

περιλάβοιμι which may be translated more violently than above, to mean "to seize," which may in fact better capture what is to come.

A young girl is also on stage with the old woman and has heard what she just said and the song that she tried to sing to entice the men. The young girl thinks she can sing better than the old woman and requests a singing competition in which each woman extols the best qualities of her age. The old woman claims, "οὐ γὰρ ἐν νέαις τὸ σοφὸν ἔνεστιν ἀλλ᾽ ἐν ταῖς πεπείροις, Skill is not in young girls, but in ripe women," (*Ekkl.* 895), to which the girl rebuts, "τὸ τρυφερὸν γὰρ ἐμπέφυκε/ τοῖς ἁπαλοῖσι μηροῖς,/ κἀπὶ τοῖς μήλοις ἐπανθεῖ, delicacy is in [young girls'] tender thighs, and blooms in their breasts."

This scene not only shows the effects of Praxagora's new law, but also is an interesting glimpse of the interactions of the younger and older generations in Aristophanes' world. Just as in Aristophanes' *Wasps*, the two generations find it difficult to get along well precisely because of the differences in their ages. The girl is angry at the old woman for thinking that she will be able to steal her boyfriend from her now, but in her old age, there is no doubt that the girl will happily also take advantage of Praxagora's legislation, that she must be sexually satisfied by a young man before he can be with the young girl who he wants.

Soon Epigenes, who has been the object of the conversation between the girl and woman, enters and the old woman approaches him, beginning to make her claim on him. Epigenes refuses numerous times, saying, "ἐγὼ δὲ ταῖς γε τηλικαύταις ἄχθομαι, I am disgusted by [sleeping with] women of your age!" (*Ekkl.* 1010). Exactly what her age is he has previously revealed to be over 60,

ἀλλ᾽ οὐχὶ νυνὶ τὰς ὑπερεξηκοντέτεις
εἰσάγομεν, ἀλλ᾽ εἰσαῦθις ἀναβεβλήμεθα.
τὰς ἐντὸς εἴκοσιν γὰρ ἐκδικάζομεν.
(*Ekkl*. 982-984)

But we are not now leading in [cases of]
The over-sixties, but hereafter we have thrown them out.
We are judging the under-twenties.

Despite Epigenes' attempts to save himself from the old woman, she presses on in trying to persuade him, even to the point of reciting the law to him. Then, it seems that this old woman has grown tired of arguing, so she retires into her house. Just as Epigenes is thanking Zeus that she has left, a second old woman, who Epigenes describes saying, "τοῦτο γὰρ ἐκείνου τὸ κακὸν ἐξωλέστερον, This evil is more wretched than the other" (*Ekkl.*1053), enters and makes her claim to him, since she sees that he is with the young girl. Then, a third old woman enters, disputing the second old woman's claim to Epigenes saying he does not have to go with that second old woman, "ἢν ἑτέρα γε γραῦς ἔτ᾽ αἰσχίων φανῇ, if another old woman, yet more ugly shows up" (*Ekkl.* 1079), herself being the woman who is even more ugly. In this topsy-turvy world, it will be the ugliest and oldest who will always have her pick of young lovers.

These old women act as a foil to Praxagora and her law because when Praxagora describes her new plan it is with an idyllic air,

πᾶσι γὰρ ἄφθονα πάντα παρέξομεν,
ὥστε μεθυσθεὶς αὐτῷ στεφάνῳ
πᾶς τις ἄπεισιν τὴν δᾷδα λαβών.
αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες κατὰ τὰς διόδους
προσπίπτουσαι τοῖς ἀπὸ δείπνου
τάδε λέξουσιν: 'δεῦρο παρ᾽ ἡμᾶς:
ἐνθάδε μεῖράξ ἐσθ᾽ ὡραία.'
'παρ᾽ ἐμοὶ δ᾽ ἑτέρα'
φήσει τις ἄνωθ᾽ ἐξ ὑπερῴου,
'καὶ καλλίστη καὶ λευκοτάτη:
πρότερον μέντοι δεῖ σε καθεύδειν

αὐτῆς παρ᾽ ἐμοί.᾽
(*Ekkl.* 690 -701)

We will provide everything to everyone
limitlessly so that all the men go away
drunk with a garland and holding a torch
And the women will fall upon the men in
the streets coming from dinner saying
such things as, ‘Here we are: a young girl is
inside in the bloom of youth’ and ‘Near me,
there is another’ someone from an upper
storey will say. ‘She is most beautiful and
has the whitest complexion. First, however
it is necessary for you to lie with me.

Praxagora imagines a world where it is middle-age and average looking women who demand their right to have sex with the younger and better looking men, and demand it in a rather unaggressive way. The old women who appear here, however, are anything but idyllic and are actually horrific to the young man who is pulled in by them, in this extreme situation.

In fact, it should be mentioned that Praxagora describes her whole plan as without flaw, which is simply unrealistic. She says,

μὴ λωποδυτῆσαι, μὴ φθονεῖν τοῖς πλησίον,
μὴ γυμνὸν εἶναι μὴ πένητα μηδένα,
μὴ λοιδορεῖσθαι, μὴ 'νεχυραζόμενον φέρειν.
(*Ekkl.* 565-567)

[There will be] no mugging, no begrudging your neighbor,
no poor man will be without sufficient clothes,
no collecting debts, no repossessing.

When instead, as soon as the law is instituted there are those who are trying to trick the system, as with the man who Henderson labels as “Selfish Man” says,

νὴ τὸν Δία δεῖ γοῦν μηχανήματός τινος,
ὅπως τὰ μὲν ὄντα χρήμαθ᾽ ἕξω, τοισδε τε
τῶν ματτομένων κοινῇ μεθέξω πως ἐγώ.
(Ekkl. 872-874)

> By Zeus, there is need for some scheme
> So that somehow, keeping my property, I will take a share
> Of the baked foods which are held in common.

The minor female characters in *Ekklesiasuzae* bring an element of reality to Praxagora's utopian hopes for society. Dull characters like Praxagora's women followers and greedy characters like the old women, show not only that the general population is not intelligent enough to understand the possible positives of the new legislation, but also that even if the people do understand, it is difficult to restrict the flaws of human nature.

Near the end of *Thesmophoriazusae*, there appears a young female character called Elaphium. She accompanies Euripides when he is disguised as an old procuress, and is in fact his merchandise, which he uses to lure the archer away from his duty of guarding Mnesilochus. Elaphium is a foil to both the women who are attending the meeting themselves and to their cause.

First, Elaphium is the opposite of the women attending the meeting in some superficial ways. She is presumably young, and probably has never had a child, since the archer exclaims, "ὡς ἐλαπρός, How nimble!" (*Thesmo.* 1180) and "οἴμ᾽ ὡς στέριπο τὸ τιττΐ, ὥσπερ/ γογγύλη. Wow, what firm titties - like turnips!" (1185) and finally, "καλό γε τὸ πυγή, What a fine butt!" (1187).[39] Also, because of the status of her profession, she is probably unmarried. The women of the Thesmophoria, contrarily, are all wives of citizens (as previously mentioned), and are probably mothers. Though it is not impossible for any of them to have retained her youthful figure, there is a certain and well-known toll that pregnancy and motherhood take on the body.

[39] All three phrases translated by Henderson.

Second, on the one hand, the women are holding their meeting in order to combat what they believe are untrue and unfair representations of female manipulations and treachery in Euripides' plays. On the other hand, Elaphium is used precisely for her abilities to manipulate men, and specifically the archer, here; though she is not treacherous, she is yet another one of Euripides' females, who will do what she must in order to achieve her ends, or in this case, those of her master/mistress.

Even Elaphium's name, meaning "young deer" or "fawn," carries with it a connotation of innocence. In fact, it does seem that Elaphium is somewhat inexperienced in seduction since Euripides finds it necessary to give her directions, such as "πρῶτον μὲν οὖν δίελθε κἀνακάλπασον, ...the first thing is to walk back and forth swinging your haunches" (*Thesmo.* 1174).

Before Elaphium unleashes her charms on the archer, Euripides promises the women that if they let him go through with his plan to save Mnesilochus, he will never slander them again in his plays "ἢν οὖν κομίσωμαι τοῦτον, οὐδὲν μή ποτε/ κακῶς ἀκούσητ', If I may attend to [my relative] now, you will not ever hear bad things," (*Thesmo.* 1166) and so the women encourage the very behavior, that is, female manipulations and trickery, with which they previously disagreed in order to achieve their ultimate goal.

In one of the last scenes of *Lysistrata*, a character, who is very much like Elaphium, called Reconciliation[40] makes her entrance. Henderson writes in the stage directions that Reconciliation is "costumed as a naked girl," (*Lysis*. p.419) so this character may be meant to provide laughs if it was a man dressed in the puffy comic female padding, or perhaps to titillate, if, instead of Henderson's suggestion, it was a real

[40] As Henderson translates Διαλλαγή.

girl who was allowed to take the non-speaking part. Whichever way the costuming was done, the character of Reconciliation is meant to be purely sexual.

Lysistrata uses Reconciliation to bring the warring parties together by asking her to physically pull them and "ἢν μὴ διδῷ τὴν χεῖρα, τῆς σάθης ἄγε, If he does not give his hand, lead him by his penis" (1119). At this point, the men on each side are extremely sexually frustrated because of their forced celibacy and are described as having erections, "ἐγὼ δ' ἀπόλλυμαί γ' ἀπεψωλημένος, My cock is bursting out of its skin and killing me!" (1136, trans. Henderson), so that by pulling their members, Reconciliation is literally using the men's sexual desire to bring them together.

In their aroused state, the men proceed to admire Reconciliation's body and let her distract them from their true purpose for meeting. Lysistrata begins to list ways in which the Athenians and Spartans have aided each other in the past, ending her speech by asking the Spartans, basically, why they dare to attack Athens when they have been friends in the past. Then, the Athenian delegate chimes in, "ἀδικοῦσιν οὗτοι νὴ Δί' ὦ Λυσιστράτη. Yes, by Zeus, Lysistrata they wrong [us]" (1147). The Spartan delegate cannot even muster a defense, "ἀδικίομες: ἀλλ' ὁ πρωκτὸς ἄφατον ὡς καλός. We have done wrong, but such an unspeakably beautiful ass!" (1148).

Lysistrata continues on in what it seems she thinks will have to be a very long speech to persuade the parties to agree, but then is surprised when the Spartan delegate quickly says, "...αἴ τις ἁμὶν τῶγκυκλον λῇ τοῦτ' ἀποδόμεν, [We are ready to talk] if someone wishes to give this fortress to us" (1162-1163), presumably referring to Reconciliation, and more specifically her vagina, with τῶγκυκλον, meaning "an encircling" or "circular thing." What follows is a series of double entendres that "could

be illustrated by reference to Reconciliation's body," as Henderson explains in a footnote to this section.[41]

First the Spartans ask for Pylos, saying, "τὰν Πύλον, This Pylos," as if pointing to a map. A πύλος was a gateway and thus has associations with the vagina as well as the anus, since both may be entrances and exits of the body.[42] The double entendre becomes even clearer when the Athenians deny the Spartans Pylos, and give their own demands,

> … παράδοθ' ἡμῖν τουτονὶ
> πρώτιστα τὸν Ἐχινοῦντα καὶ τὸν Μηλιᾶ
> κόλπον τὸν ὄπισθεν καὶ τὰ Μεγαρικὰ σκέλη.
> (*Lysis*. 1168-1170)

> …Give us this thing here,
> this Echinous, first of all, and the Malian
> Gulf behind it, and the Megarian legs.

They ask for the Echinous which besides meaning urchin, also referred to the female genitalia, to which the τουτονὶ, being deictic, points on Reconciliation. Then, the Athenians request the Malian Gulf. In his footnote to this section, Henderson mentions the correlation between Μηλιᾶ and μᾶλον meaning apple, which in turn would refer to the buttocks. Κόλπος, in its turn, may refer to a gulf, as the translation above reflects, or to a woman's breasts or vagina, meanings which stem from the word's original notion of a cavity or hollow space.[43] Finally, the "Megarian legs" do not have any overtly sexual meaning beyond the men wanting Reconciliation's legs, but in another footnote, Henderson tells that, geographically, the Athenians are asking for Megara. Thus the negotiations are simply comprised of the Spartans asking for Reconciliation's rear-end, while the Athenians seem to be asking for every other part of the girl, including her

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[41] *Lysistrata*, (above, n.1), pg. 423.
[42] Henderson, *Maculate Muse*, (above, n. 16), 202.
[43] Ibid. 140.

vagina, breasts and legs. Neither of the men bothers to mention any kind of facial beauty of Reconciliation, but instead, they both focus only on her most sexual organs.

An important distinction to remember is that Elaphium is a real person, whereas Reconciliation is more of a personification of peace and the steps that are necessary for its achievement. As Rachel Finnegan explains, "[Reconciliation symbolizes] the erotic consequences of peace…"[44] This distinction, however, should not change the analysis of these two characters, since Aristophanes has not treated this special personification with any more reverence than he treats the real girl.

All of the minor female characters put the virtues of the leading women into high contrast. Though Praxagora and Lysistrata are obviously extraordinary characters, especially for their time, they seem even more brilliant when presented alongside their more common counterparts. The women who follow Praxagora, though they may sense that her idea is good, do not fully grasp it. The old women who take advantage of Praxagora's new laws reveal the problems with Praxagora's idealized vision for society. Elaphium and Reconciliation, in their willingness to be objectified, show a kind of woman who has no regard for herself or even the worth of her physical assets, a worth which Lysistrata is aware of in herself and her followers, since she makes the men re-earn their rights to their women's bodies.

[44] Rachel Finnegan, *Women in Aristophanes* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1995). 105.

Conclusion

From this study, it is impossible to say definitively that Aristophanes was a feminist, but it is not so difficult to see the makings of one. Although Aristophanes' main characters were men, with women taking very minor and unflattering roles in most of his works, these three women plays illuminate the poet in an entirely different light.

Lysistrata and Praxagora are paragons of feminine strength and intelligence in an otherwise weak and dim world. These two women stand out against their minor counterparts for their will and forethought to make improvements to their society, rather than to settle for their lot as dutiful and silent females. While it is certainly virtuous and honorable to be known for being a good wife and the mother of upstanding citizen sons, as many Athenian women were, it is a greater thing still to be recognized for exceptional and unique personal abilities such as these two women possess.

They have both given up motherhood in order to mother and protect their entire city and to save it from itself. While other women are burdened by children, Lysistrata and Praxagora are free to consider the city and to devise ways to help it. If these two had children tugging on the hems of their skirts and were busy knitting clothes for them, Athens might have ruined itself in war, or fallen in on itself as a result of political unrest.

Then, each woman takes her sacrifice for Athens to a higher level still. Praxagora believed in her ideas so much that she shunned her very gender in order to be able to share them with her fellow citizens, and by doing so transformed Athens from a male-dominated society to a female-dominated one, almost literally, over night. Praxagora understood that entering the Assembly as a man was the only possible way that her

proposal would pass, knowing that any man would not take seriously such a revolutionary idea from a woman, no matter how good the argument. By casting off her feminine appearance, she allowed her proposal the opportunity to be approved by the Assembly, and by its acceptance, the ingenuity of the idea was also confirmed, unrestrained by the gender of the proposer.

Lysistrata's plan came to her, not from the world of politics, but rather from the domestic realm. Despite the fact that she does not seem to have a husband of her own, Lysistrata understands men and exploits the weakness she has discovered in them, holding her own body, as well as the other women's, as something to be striven for by the men. In this, however, she must restrain her own lusts and denies not only the men, but also herself and the other women any sexual pleasure.

Mnesilochus' foray into the women's meeting is a counterbalance to Praxagora's entrance into the men's assembly. Mnesilochus comes across crudely and steps on many figurative toes without any of the delicacy of a lady. He fails in his mission, but distracts the women from their cause so much that it is inadvertently achieved in the end. It is while Mnesilochus is tied up that Euripides and the women strike their bargain (that Euripides can rescue Mnesilochus in turn for never slandering women again), and though this deal is a result of Mnesilochus' capture, that capture was never intended. So the man, who so often is in control of any situation involving himself and women, is left at a loss to save himself, and like the damsel in distress, must await the arrival of a man to rescue him.

Aristophanes wrote chiefly about men, because it was chiefly, if not only, men who attended his plays. Writing about the stuff of women's lives would have been

beyond both the writer's and the audience's scope of knowledge, but removing women from their usual environment and placing them in that of men provides the comedian with novel comic material and situations.

Aristophanes has undertaken the task of this insertion of the female into the male thoughtfully, and though there are definitely parts of each of the three plays which are purely farcical and demeaning to women, the sum of all the parts shows Aristophanes' sympathy for women, and his belief that given the chance, or if they seized the chance, they could be exactly the cure for the ailing democracy and failing empire.

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