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Unruly Wives and Dancing Girls : The Objectification of Women in Aristophanic Comedy

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UNRULY WIVES AND DANCING GIRLS:
THE OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN IN ARISTOPHANIC COMEDY

By

Jessica Marie Berhang

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Montclair State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

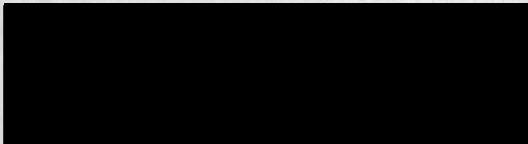
For the Degree of

Masters of Arts

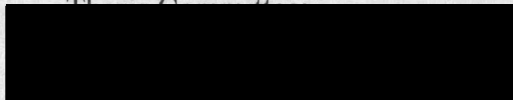
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Montclair, NJ

2009

ABSTRACT

Though the plays of the early Greek comedian Aristophanes are replete with crude humor and buffoonish behavior, it is important to examine the works through a more critical lens rather than discounting them as mere entertainment. Aristophanes expounds upon political conflict and leaders, scoffs at social mores, and highlights the many facets of human nature. In addition, the dynamic between men and women is a central theme in many of Aristophanes' plays. Comedies such as the *Lysistrata*, *Assemblywomen*, and *Women at the Thesmophoria* feature women who appear to be empowered as they try to fight against patriarchal systems; however, examining the plays through a feminist or gender studies perspective may dismiss the possibility that Aristophanes nurtured an early belief in gender equality. It is arguable that the role of women in Aristophanic comedy is to provide a medium for female objectification. In other words, the female characters personify widely-held stereotypes and portray the women as sexual objects.

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Unruly Wives and Dancing Girls:
The Objectification of Women in Aristophanic Comedy

Chapter I: Introduction

Though the plays of the early Greek comic playwright Aristophanes are replete with crude humor and buffoonish behavior, it is important to examine the works through a critical lens rather than discounting them as mere entertainment. Aristophanes expounds upon political conflict and leaders, scoffs at social mores, and highlights the many facets of human nature. In addition, the dynamic between men and women is a central theme in many of Aristophanes' plays. Comedies such as the *Lysistrata*, *Assemblywomen*, and *Women at the Thesmophoria* feature women who appear to be empowered as they try to fight against patriarchal systems; however, examining the plays from a feminist or gender studies perspective may challenge the notion that Aristophanes nurtured an early belief in gender equality. The role of women in Aristophanic comedy is to provide a medium for female objectification. In other words, the female characters personify widely-held stereotypes and portray women as sexual objects.

Aristophanes (447-381 BCE) is said to have written at least forty-four comedies, although only eleven remain in their entirety today. During Aristophanes' prime, his city-state was being torn apart by the Peloponnesian War. The battles between Athens and Sparta wreaked havoc on both the political systems of the day and the domestic stability of Greece. The skillful artistry of Aristophanes derives from his ability to satirize how the wartime agendas of popular political leaders conflicted with the interests of the community. Douglas M. MacDowell discusses Aristophanic comedy in his book *Aristophanes and Athens*: "He asserts that he combines fun with truth, and he includes both fun and truth in the making of the assertion. The ability to do this is the outstanding

feature of Aristophanes' genius" (MacDowell 34). In almost all of his extant comedies, Aristophanes advocates peace and a speedy conclusion to the war. Today his plays remain some of the most important evidence for popular sentiment in late fifth-century Athens.

Aristophanes' career paralleled those of successful tragedians such as Euripides and Sophocles. While the tragedians focused their actions on the mythological past, the playwrights of Old Comedy featured satire of everyday life. Aristophanes' plays included such quotidian subjects as troublesome marriages, economic hardships, and parent-child conflicts. Whereas the tragedies presented mythologized men and women encountering grand dilemmas, the comedies of Aristophanes may have appealed to the common man or woman because they featured fantastic solutions to everyday problems. More importantly, the heroes and heroines of Aristophanic comedy exist in mainstream society, just like the target audience.

Aristophanes' style of writing is unique among fifth-century authors. The language is not usually ornate or complicated. His simple colloquial language may have been used to interest a diverse audience. Bathroom humor, slapstick interchanges, and perverse insinuations predominate throughout the comedies. The tone of Aristophanes' plays function on two levels. On the surface, the tone feels very light due to the inherent nature of the genre. However, although the topical humor is often absurd, the plays offer truthful social commentary cloaked under comic devices.

In order to consider the implications of the roles of women in Aristophanes, we must first consider the lives of women in the fifth and fourth centuries.¹ Women were

¹ This information will be used as context within this paper; however, the basis of this study will be on Aristophanes' literary representations of women rather than the actual lives of Greek women.

most commonly tied to domestic duties in ancient Greece. While the men existed in the *polis* or city, the women were responsible in the *oikos*, or domestic sphere. Isabelle Clark, in her essay "The Gamos of Hera" writes, "It has frequently been noted that the Greek word for 'woman', *gyne*, is the same as that for 'wife', reflecting the fact that the roles available to women in the Greek world were almost exclusively those of wife and mother" (Clark 13). In Aristophanes' comedies that feature women, he draws upon their obligations in marriage and motherhood. The women shirk their domestic responsibilities and thus are seen as lazy or troublesome. This transgressive behavior becomes the basis of his domestic satire. Eva C. Keuls in *The Reign of the Phallus: Sexual Politics in Ancient Athens* suggests that the experience of the free women in ancient Greece paralleled that of the slaves; women were merely the property of men. However, the distinction between women and slaves was that the men would have emotional connections with the women whereas they had no such feelings for the slaves (Keuls 6). Though the women in ancient Greece mainly subsisted in the home, they were also permitted freedom in their religious activities. In Aristophanes' play *Women at the Thesmophoria*, he parodies a female assembly; whereas in ancient Greece the assembly would have religious connotations, in Aristophanes' play the women plot revenge and murder against the tragedian Euripides.

Though most women in fifth-century Athens were homemakers and mere participants in religious events, there were some anomalies. Wealthy women may have risen to the position of priestesses. In the book *The Limits of Participation*, Riet van Bremen considers the role of such women. Though it is documented that wealthy women either inherited the title or were voted into power, van Bremen argues that these wealthy

priestesses served a purpose in society outside of their religious practices: "It appears that religious office was the principal way in which female wealth could be tapped...the wealthier they were, the more conspicuous the benefaction" (van Bremen 28). van Bremen's argument suggests that though there was a semblance of female empowerment in the roles of the priestesses, they were in fact benefiting the men in society.

Furthermore, priestesses were also quite different from their female constituents as they were often virgins. The lifestyle lies in stark contrast with that of a housewife; women were stereotypically known to be highly sexual. In the *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes represents a strong woman in the character of Lysistrata. She is wealthy and outspoken and is clearly an aberration from her fellow women. In addition, Lysistrata is not categorized as being overtly sexual; this may have been an allusion to the celibacy of the priestesses. Though she is certainly empowered within the play, Aristophanes' motivation to employ such a character and contrast her with more stereotypical characteristics of wives and mothers will be considered in this paper.

The attitudes towards women in ancient Greece were often characterized by suspicion. Eva Keuls uses evidence in myth and art to suggest that a patriarchal society such as Greece can be considered a "phallocracy." She argues, "The motif of the rebellion of the Amazons was the most prominent expression of men's gynophobia, or fear of women. Many other myths-- as well as drama, the law, and the practices of everyday life-- document the same view of women, as caged tigers waiting for a chance to break out of their confinement and take revenge on the male world" (Keuls 4). It is arguable that Aristophanes plays upon this fear in his comedies. The men of his plays are

consistently suspicious of the ideas and behavior of their wives, and they therefore (ineffectually) attempt to suppress female rebellion.

Contemporary scholarship on Aristophanes is entering an exciting new stage. Until recently such scholarship did not focus on the depictions of women. Instead, there was a focus on the recurring political themes in the comedies. Critic Arthur Way classifies Aristophanes' plays in four categories: "anti-demagogue series," "anti-war series," "anti-new-culture series" and "fantasies" (Way xxiii). These categories were largely the basis of the existing scholarship. Currently, however, there is an increasing amount of criticism being written on the role of women in the comedies. For example, Jeffrey Henderson has become the first translator, in 1996 no less, to unite the *Lysistrata*, *Assemblywomen*, and *Women at the Thesmophoria* together in the scholarly edition *Three Plays by Aristophanes: Staging Women*.

Scholar Lauren K. Taaffe, in one of the only full-length studies on the topic, addresses the importance of the female characters in her book *Aristophanes and Women*. Taaffe explains that throughout much scholarship on Greek drama, it is the women in the tragedies, such as Euripides' *Medea*, that capture attention because of their highly dramatized actions and speeches. Taaffe, however, delves into Aristophanes' handling of femininity in the comedies. She concludes, "Femininity is represented by Aristophanes as the site of the ultimate comic figure: completely deceptive because 'she' is not real at all. 'She' must be given shape by a man, and everyone knows that" (Taaffe 139). Taaffe's argument suggests that in plays such as the *Lysistrata* or the *Assemblywomen* which feature the seemingly empowered characters of Lysistrata and Praxagora, they merely hold an illusion of power. Taaffe is arguing that the humor in Aristophanic

comedy in essence derives from the women's obliviousness to their own inferiority or folly. If Aristophanes knows that the women were inept, the Athenian audience (probably male-centered) would have known as well; it is the women's overconfidence in their own abilities that pervades in these comedies.

Sarah Culpepper Stroup's essay takes a closer examination of one play, Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. In the play, Lysistrata forces her fellow women to renounce their domestic duties, withdraw from their homes and abstain from sex in order to force the men into peace negotiations. Though Lysistrata is not a cowering, reticent woman, her independence is questionable. Stroup's "Designing Women: Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and the 'Hetairization' of the Greek Wife" echoes Taaffe's view on Aristophanes as a misogynist rather than an early feminist. Stroup's intent in her essay is to consider how the women's appropriation of power in the *Lysistrata* complicates the social order: "Aristophanes capitalizes on this comic 'de-wifing' implicit in the representation of female sexual negotiation- in terms of vivid sympotic imagery and sexual innuendo, to a pointed dramatic end...It is a topsy-turvy world in which sympotic activity not only mimes, but, in a sense, actually becomes the civic, and a world in which a democratic peace can mean only the ultimate return of the wife to the confines of the private home" (Stroup 41-42). Stroup's discussion indicates that the women's negotiations actually reduce themselves to property; though they attain the desired result of peace, the women's sense of accomplishment at the end of the play is unmerited. They are mere chattel within the play, and Aristophanes is utilizing the women as a commodity to achieve comedic success. The theme of women as property or pawns is interwoven throughout many of his plays and provides a major source of humor for Aristophanes.

Though critics such as Taaffe and Stroup consider Aristophanes from a misogynist vantage point, there are some critics that raise a counterargument. One such critic is Christopher A. Faraone in his essay “Salvation and Female Heroics in the Parados of Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*”. Faraone asserts a view of the female characters as more empowered. He states, “Aristophanes seems to take special care in investing both *Lysistrata* and the older women with an unusual kind of authority, a female heroism if you will” (Faraone 39). Arguments that highlight the heroics of Aristophanes’ female characters may fail to acknowledge that Aristophanes’ medium for comedy is satire. With that said, it is important to examine Aristophanes’ dialogue and actions for exaggerations and parody. While the façade of his comedies may represent heroic women accomplishing unheard of tasks, the play’s framework reveals that the women are being objectified or used for the enjoyment of the male characters and the male audience.

Though the *Lysistrata* has been the topic of much scholarship, a great deal has also been written in recent years about the other two dynamic plays featuring women: *Women at the Thesmophoria* and *Assemblywomen*.² Aristophanes’ *Women at the Thesmophoria* is an attention-grabbing comedy, as it features gender bending and murderous women. Fearing for his life after repeatedly denouncing women in his plays, Euripides sends a disguised go-between known as the Kinsman to the female assembly in order to serve as his advocate. The Kinsman dons female apparel and also assumes exaggerated “female” behavior. In the essay “Something to do with Demeter: Ritual and Performance in Aristophanes’ *Women at the Thesmophoria*”, critic Angeliki Tzanetou writes, “Like his character the Kinsman, Aristophanes invades Athenian women’s

² *Women at the Thesmophoria* is also commonly referenced as *Thesmophoriazusae*. *Ecclesiazusae* will be referred to as the *Assemblywomen* throughout the rest of this paper.

religious space. He puts onstage for the whole city a religious festival restricted to women. He suggests that women use this occasion to drink and plot against men, and he portrays them as carrying on adulterous affairs and duping their husbands. As a result of this negative portrayal of women, scholars have concluded that the play undermines women's position in the festival and in the city" (Tzanetou 329). Tzanetou's argument suggests that Aristophanes not only sought to provide humor to the audience, but also to transcend social boundaries. It implies that Aristophanes both belittled women and deprived them of the importance that they held outside of their homes.

Renowned critic Helene Foley also considers the gender discussion in her book *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*. Foley writes, "Many traces of the norm of Athenian life for women appear in the admonitions to female characters to stay in their proper place within, in the horror expressed by male characters when confronted with a female challenge, or in the categorization of unusual female behavior as 'masculine'" (Foley 135). As Foley mentions, in the *Women at the Thesmophoria*, the tensions between the sexes are grossly inflated. Whereas Euripides and the Kinsman speak out against the women for not fulfilling their roles within the home and for being transgressive, the women assume a "masculine" demeanor as they cast off etiquette in order to plot the murder of Euripides and torture the Kinsman. The masculinization of women and the victimization of men will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

The comedy *Assemblywomen*, similar to *Women at the Thesmophoria*, pushes gender boundaries. In the essay "Stolen Cloaks in Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*," Gwendolyn Compton-Engle considers the ongoing Aristophanic theme of gender reversal in the play *Assemblywomen*. In the comedy, the women led by another masculinized

woman named Praxagora, believe that they are better suited to run the *polis* than the men. Therefore, they steal their husbands' clothes and sneak into the Assembly in order to advocate that the power be transferred to the women of the society. Compton-Engle focuses her argument on the significance of the stolen clothes. She suggests:

The women's appropriation of the men's cloaks not only indicates gender role reversal, as does the rest of the disguise, but it also symbolizes all that men stand to lose in the transaction. Furthermore, I argue that when he makes the association between the pilfered cloaks and *lôpodusia*, Blepyrus opens the door for Praxagora (and through her, the poet Aristophanes) to shift the cloaks' function from sex-signifier to symbol of the *oikos-polis* dialectic at the play's core and of the economic issues that motivate the plot. (Compton-Engle 164)

She suggests that Aristophanes uses the disguises to indicate that the women have in essence "stolen" power as they did the clothes, and that the assumption of male identities allow them to reach power, when they would not have been allowed to otherwise. This discussion is significant, because the allusion to "economic issues" once again reveals Aristophanes' hidden subversive content. Aristophanes' suggestion is inherently that "even women" could do a better job of running Athens than the male leaders of the time. Throughout this thesis, I will consider how the playwright has scattered his dislike of the political and economic agendas of the time throughout his comedies.

It is also important to consider the scope of scholarship outside of Aristophanic criticism in order to understand if Aristophanes was working with or against dramatic conventions. The field of performance theory can clarify how women have historically been satirized on stage. *Performance and Gender in Ancient Greece* by Eva Stehle

demonstrates the ways in which the Greeks displayed gender in speeches and drama. She clarifies that “performing” or executing femininity is a more difficult task than promoting masculinity on stage: “Between male control of their words and women as their victims, female performers are forced to enact women’s subjection to male definition....women are empowered to speak in public of their own negative relationship to social power” (Stehle 112). It is important to note that Stehle is specifically discussing women playing women upon the stage. There are conflicting views on whether Aristophanes utilized female performers in his plays; in much of early drama, men performed female roles. However, regardless of whether men or women were playing the female roles in the comedies of Aristophanes, Stehle’s argument is still applicable. Aristophanes’ negative portrayal of his female characters perpetuates stereotypes about women, and also enforces their inferiority to men.

Froma I. Zeitlin, in her book *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Greek Literature*, examines the implications of the manner in which gender is performed. Zeitlin explains from a performance theory perspective how women are subordinate to men not only in Greek society but on stage as well:

Women as individuals or chorus may give their names as titles to plays; female characters may occupy the center stage and leave a far more indelible emotional impression on their spectators than their male counterparts...but *functionally* women are never an end in themselves, and nothing changes for them once they have lived out their drama on stage. Rather, they play the roles of catalysts, agents, instruments, blockers, spoilers, destroyers, and sometimes helpers or saviors for the male characters. (Zeitlin 347)

Zeitlin's reflections on the purpose of women in Greek literature raise an interesting binary. Her observation on how women are "functionally" reduced is significant as it is in stark contrast with an "artistic" examination of Aristophanes. A superficial assessment of the women in Greek drama may yield a flattering view of their heroics, while a more discerning scrutiny proves that the women are the minions of their male counterparts.

The existing scholarship on Aristophanes and Greek drama has served as the framework for this examination on Aristophanes' comedies. In the next chapter, entitled "Objectifying the Domestic Woman," I analyze the comedies *Lysistrata*, *Women at the Thesmophoria*, and *Assemblywomen* through the lens of female objectification.

Examining these plays in the order in which the comedies were created and performed, I argue that Aristophanes has taken the view of women as household matrons and transmogrified the women into the embodiment of common stereotypes. I suggest that Aristophanes has created the archetype of the "hyper-female" in this trio of comedies.

In the third chapter, "The Sexualized Women," I focus on the less-researched women- the dancing girls and prostitutes that populate Aristophanes' work. Calling upon the plays *The Acharnians*, *Wasps*, *Peace* and *Lysistrata*, I examine how Aristophanes utilized the sexualized woman as a comic device. In each of the examples, the sexualized women serve a greater purpose. A common theme throughout both chapters is the manner in which Aristophanes used the scenes featuring women to disguise his subversive political ideologies. A naked, silent woman upon the stage easily becomes a distraction and the political component of the play is subdued.

Finally, in the conclusion, I will consider how Aristophanes' representation of female characters is vastly different from the playwright's representation of male

characters. Though the men are subjected to the comic barbs of Aristophanes in that they are placed in undesirable circumstances and bad luck befalls them, the women are subjected to a worse plight. By studying the conclusions of these comedies, I believe that the final note always resonates on behalf of male dominance. Whereas the women may put on the pretense of power or success during the action of the comedy, I have found that Aristophanes always undermines their schemes in order to restore the image of male supremacy.

Chapter II: Objectifying the Domestic Woman

Written in the late fifth and early fourth centuries, Aristophanes' plays the *Lysistrata*, *Women at the Thesmophoria*, and *Assemblywomen* are comedies intricately embedded with political and social commentary. These three plays are the only ones out of the eleven comedies still in existence today that feature comic heroines. These so-called heroines are domestic women (wives and mothers) with revolutionary instincts. They are frustrated with the war and the overall state of affairs in Greece, and they seek change. Because these heroines endeavor to change the world, it has been suggested that Aristophanes was inclined to believe in female empowerment. However, the shift from a comic hero to a comic heroine can also be interpreted to have political significance. In order to understand the themes present in Aristophanic comedy, it is important to be aware of the historical context. In and around 411 BCE the *Lysistrata*, *Assemblywomen* and *Women at the Thesmophoria* were produced. Democracy and personal freedoms had been challenged, both at the warfront and domestically; in fact in 411 BCE the Athenian assembly had been replaced by a ten-member oligarchy board called the Probouloi (Henderson 34). Aristophanes, frustrated by the conflict, imbues his comedies with anti-war sentiments cloaked in the speeches of the comic heroines. To further hide his true intent, Aristophanes created the farcical dynamic of the hyper-female. It is arguable that Aristophanes has framed these plays in order to highlight the stereotypical attributes of women. Specifically, Aristophanes emphasizes that women are obsessed with sex, avid alcoholics, divisive, and an affliction to men.

In Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (411 BCE), the character of Lysistrata endeavors to put an end to the Peloponnesian war by entreating all women in the surrounding city-

states to abstain from sex. It is her intention that the men will become so distraught by the absence of sex from their lives that they will be willing to listen to the concerns of their wives, lovers, and mothers and end the war. Though the play seemingly presents power being transferred from the men to the women, it is instead apparent that Aristophanes has painted women as sexualized objects rather than the first feminists of the west. As Lauren Taaffe suggests, femininity and empowerment would have been antithetical in Athenian society; by creating the illusion of female empowerment, Aristophanes has set the stage for a comic masterpiece (Taaffe 139). It is important to consider that during the period in which Aristophanes was writing, his ideas may have conflicted with the political ideologies of the time. Therefore, he may have resorted to a heroine instead of a hero because it appeared less threatening. If the audiences found the themes in the *Lysistrata* subversive, they may have discredited these ideas because Aristophanes used a woman as the mouthpiece.

Jeffrey Henderson suggests that Aristophanes may have based the character of Lysistrata on a woman named Lysimache who held an important treasury position for 64 years (Henderson xxxviii). If Aristophanes did indeed create a caricature of Lysimache, there are correlations that can be drawn to Lysistrata, as they are both strong female figures. The original Lysimache clearly transcended the domestic duties of women in order to rise to power. Though she may have been met by opposition by men, she certainly achieved enough success in order to have stayed in power for over six decades. Similarly, Lysistrata has also assumed the role of a leader, and has disengaged herself from domestic concerns in order to save the *polis*. In addition, as a priestess, Lysimache would have been desexualized by her oath of chastity; Lysistrata shares this chaste

existence in the comedy. The character of Lysistrata is an anomaly compared to the other members of her sex. Whereas her fellow women are fixated on personal matters such as sex appeal or grooming, Lysistrata demonstrates her civic consciousness. She exclaims, “the salvation of all Greece lies in the women’s hands” (l. 29).³ She has witnessed the men of her society leading the *polis* astray by pouring funds into war efforts and sacrificing lives, and she feels the need to take action.

As the voice of reason among the women, she faces opposition from all directions. Though she promises the women peace, Lysistrata’s “army” is mortified by the proposition that they must forgo sex in order to accomplish their peaceful intentions. One woman avows, “Anything else you want, anything at all! I’m even ready to walk through fire; *that* rather than give up cock. There’s nothing like it, Lysistrata dear” (l. 139-141). Their nymphomania seems to run their lives to a ludicrous degree. And this is clearly Aristophanes’ intention: the rampant sexuality functions as a comic device in the play. Though Lysistrata’s logical reasoning may not arouse a chuckle from the reader or audience, the way in which Lysistrata’s army flounders over the abstinence agreement is entertaining. However, this humor reduces and objectifies the women. Whereas they might have been seen as crusaders, they have a hard time disengaging from their sexualized identities.

The predominant stereotype about women in the *Lysistrata* is their obsession with sex. In the prologue of the play, Lysistrata has gathered women from warring city-states together in order to share her master plan, and then get everyone to swear-in to the cause. After proposing her strategy, Lysistrata’s neighbor reacts with “Count me out; let

³ Translation text: Jeffrey Henderson, *Three Plays by Aristophanes* (New York: Routledge, 1996). All other quotations from the *Lysistrata* employ this translation.

the war drag on” (l. 135). Another woman complains, “By Twain Gods, is difficult for females to sleep alone without the hard-on” (l. 148-149). The women’s aversion to abstinence highlights the extent to which their existence is defined by their sexual pursuits. Even though *Lysistrata* has not proposed that they give up sex indefinitely, their reactions make it seem as if *Lysistrata*’s revolution is profane. Though Aristophanes clearly defines women as sexual beings, it cannot be ignored that the men are also fixated with sex. However, when the female and male obsessions are juxtaposed, the men’s obsession is seen as natural or necessary, while the women’s behavior is portrayed as hysterical and irrational. Interestingly, K.J. Dover suggests in his book *Aristophanic Comedy* that “It must be remembered that the Greeks...tended to believe that women enjoyed sexual intercourse more than men and had a lower resistance to sexual temptation” (Dover 159). While Aristophanes may have been perpetuating a wide-spread belief about women, in *Lysistrata* the stereotype is certainly inflated.

In addition, this sexual obsession highlights yet another unfavorable facet of the women’s personalities. Though their husbands have been away fighting, they do not appear to miss their husbands because of a loss of companionship or security. Furthermore, they do not complain about how the war has put a damper on the emotional component of their marriage. Instead, it is clear that the women object to it because war, like *Lysistrata*’s scheme, creates a forced abstinence. The conversation also reveals that besides their sexual mania, they also commit adultery. Kalonike remarks, “Even *lovers* have disappeared without a trace” (l. 113). This allusion to extramarital affairs is the first time within the play that the reader or audience is made aware that the women are also treacherous or untrustworthy.

The oath that Lysistrata's "army" is made to swear is humorous because the women begrudgingly repeat Lysistrata's orders. Like a commander issuing military instructions, Lysistrata attempts to transform the women from being sex fanatics into revolutionaries of her own design: "At home in celibacy shall I pass my life/ wearing a party-dress and makeup/ so that my husband will get as hot as a volcano for me/...I will not raise my oriental slippers towards the ceiling. / I won't crouch down like the lioness on a cheese grater" (l. 223-237). With every command, Lysistrata becomes more specific about the banned behavior as she knows that if she does not clearly distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior, the women would unearth loopholes. This passage is also significant because of its vivid imagery. If Aristophanes is indeed construed as masking his political and social ideologies behind the comical behavior of the women, these commands are further blurring his subversive beliefs. The audience might question, what is seditious about sexual positions like a "lioness on a cheese grater"? (l. 237) Though there might be nothing subversive about this reference, Aristophanes is successful in concealing his true intent, or his dissatisfaction with politics.

In order to keep the women from temptation, Lysistrata removes them from their homes and restrains them within the Acropolis. This ideally would ensure that the women could not indulge in the forbidden behavior. Lysistrata's entrapment of the women also reflects that she regards the women as animal-like rather than as autonomous individuals. This reduction of women to beasts is once again perpetuating or enabling demeaning views of women. As discussed by Eva C. Keuls in *The Reign of the Phallus*, little distinguished women from slaves in ancient Greece. With this in mind, Lysistrata

takes on the role of the unsympathetic slave master in the comedy. It is more opportune for Lysistrata to limit their behavior through intense observation than trust that they will abide by the terms of the agreement within the privacy of their own homes. However, this Panopticon-like mechanism proves to be thorny as the women are overcome by their sexual-mania and attempt to flee even under Lysistrata's rigorous scrutiny. Lysistrata complains, "The truth is, I can't keep the wives away from their husbands any longer; they're running off in all directions...They're coming up with every kind of excuse to go home" (l. 735-741). Unwilling to remove themselves formally from the terms of the agreement, they invent far-fetched excuses about forgotten wool and unattended flax. The imagery of women trying to sneak out of the Acropolis is humorous, and it also makes it seem like the women are now unruly children, attempting to avoid the rage of a displeased mother.

The crux of the evasive behavior occurs when one stealthy woman claims that she is due to give birth and must return home, while ironically, she was not even pregnant the day before. Upon searching the woman's person, Lysistrata remarks, "By Aphrodite, it's obvious you've got something metallic and hollow in there. Let's have a look. Ridiculous girl! You're big with the sacred helmet, not with child!" (l. 769-772) Fearing an uprising, Lysistrata must either relinquish her grand scheme or reaffirm the women to the cause. Turning to the power of oracles, Lysistrata reads from a scroll. It is not known to the reader or audience whether the oracle is real or a ruse. She pronounces to the attentive women:

Yea, when the swallows hole up in a single home,
 Fleeing the hoopoes and leaving the penis alone,
 Then are their problems solved, what's high is low:
 So says high-thundering Zeus

But,
 If the swallows begin to argue and fly away
 Down from the citadel holy, all will say,
 No bird more disgustingly horny lives today! (l. 791-799)

The oracle is effective because it promises that Lysistrata's plan will prove successful if everyone abides by the abstinence agreement. Conversely, Lysistrata aptly triggers the warning about ruined reputations. It is one matter for the women to crave sex and abhor giving it up; it is another issue entirely to be known to the community as being "disgustingly horny." The irony of this line is that Aristophanes is doing exactly this: fixing women as existing solely for sexual gratification.⁴

By examining the play through the male characters' eyes, it is clear that Aristophanes also exemplifies women as an affliction for men.⁵ As a chorus leader in the *Lysistrata* exclaims, "No beast exists so shameless as women!" (l. 364-365) The fringe behavior of the women is seen as a burden that the men must unwillingly bear. For example, Lysistrata's abstinence scheme is a nuisance to the women but it drives the men into outright insanity. Rather than acknowledging that the women are protesting for peace, the men view the women as spiteful temptresses whom exist only to tantalize the men from afar and then retreat back into the Acropolis. Ultimately, the ambassadors from the various city-states in Greece give into Lysistrata's scheme out of sexual agony.

⁴ These stereotypes are also reflected on the Greek tragic stage. See for example Euripides' *Medea*. In the play, Medea feels wronged by her husband Jason who marries another woman. Jason defends himself against her allegations with a stereotype-ridden diatribe against women. He states, "But you women have got into such a state of mind that, if your life at night is good, you think you have everything; but, if in that quarter things go wrong, you will consider your best and truest interests most hateful. It would have been better far for men to have got their children in some other way, and women not to have existed. Then life would have been good" (l. 569-575). Translation text David Grene and Richmond Lattimore, *Euripides I* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955).

⁵ In Hesiod's *Theogony*, the poet attributes all evil to women. He writes, "From her [Athena] comes all the race of womankind, the deadly female race and tribe of wives who live with mortal men and bring them harm... Women are bad for men, and they conspire in wrong, and Zeus the Thunderer made it so" (l. 588-601). Translation text: Dorothea Wender, *Hesiod and Theogni* (London: Penguin Books, 1973).

As the First Athenian Ambassador explains, “we’re worn totally raw by being in this condition! If someone doesn’t get us a treaty pretty soon, there’s no way we won’t be fucking Kleisthenes” (l. 1131-1133).⁶ After the undisclosed period of time of having sex withheld from them, Aristophanes makes it seem as if their livelihood has been devastated. At the end of the play, the happiness of both the men and the women is restored as peace has been reinstated and the men once again have access to sex. The men’s complaints propagate the stereotype that women only exist for sex. Regardless of the women’s intentions, the men only care about how the women can fulfill their needs.

A second Aristophanic comedy that features scheming women is entitled *Women at the Thesmophoria* (411 BCE). In the play, the tragedian Euripides has angered the Athenian women by tarnishing their reputations in his plays. At the Thesmophoria, they will conspire on how to enact revenge against the spiteful playwright. However, in order to circumvent this revenge, Euripides looks for a go-between to venture into the Thesmophoria disguised as a woman and act as an advocate for him. John Given’s “When Gods Don’t Appear: Divine Absence and Human Agency in Aristophanes” explains that in Aristophanic comedy, humans are not given the benefit of godly intervention (Given 108). Whereas if this was a tragedy, Euripides may have received assistance from one of the gods, Euripides must find help from a mere mortal in this comedy. When propositioning an effeminate poet named Agathon to perform the task, Euripides explains, “If you sit in on the women’s meeting covertly- since you’ll pass as a woman- and rebut their accusations against me, you’ll surely be my salvation” (l. 203-

⁶ Kleisthenes, an effeminate man, also appears in *Women at the Thesmophoria*.

205).⁷ Though Agathon refuses the task, a relative of Euripides named the “Kinsman” asserts himself for the challenge. Though the Kinsman’s foray into femininity is certainly humorous, his observations of the women at the Thesmophoria are quite telling when considered through the lens of female objectification. The Kinsman of *Women at the Thesmophoria* exclaims, “Women, ye overheated dipsomaniacs, never passing up a chance to wangle a drink, a great boon to bartenders but a bane to us- not to mention our dishes and our woolens” (l. 777-779). This statement primarily reveals “mankind’s” intended purpose for women (to serve men), and then suggests that the women are not fulfilling this imperative responsibility.

Unlike the *Lysistrata*, there is no political agenda among the community of women in this play. Led by a woman named Mika, their purpose is solely to avenge the offenses of Euripides. Mika addresses the congregation, unaware that the Kinsman is hidden amongst them.

With what evil has this fellow not besmirched us? Where, on any occasion where they are spectators, tragic actors and choruses, has he spared us his disparagement, that we are lover-bangers, nymphos, wine-oglers, disloyal, chattery, unwholesome, the bane of men’s lives? It’s gotten so that as soon as our men get home...they start right in giving us suspicious looks and searching the house for a concealed lover. (l. 428-435)

This oration reflects the fact that Euripides has a history of maliciously characterizing women. Mika is clearly angry that the reputation of their sex has been relegated due to his vicious remarks. It is interesting that the same pigeonholing (nymphomania,

⁷ Translation text: Jeffrey Henderson, *Three Plays by Aristophanes* (New York: Routledge, 1996). All other quotations from the *Women at the Thesmophoria* employ this translation.

alcoholism, and deceit) that had been interwoven in the *Lysistrata* appears once again in this play. Based upon Mika's intense reaction, it might originally appear that Euripides is unjustified in representing women in this fashion. However, the reader or audience's view of the aggrieved women quickly transmogrifies.

Mika adopts a self-righteous manner while addressing the issue of Euripides and his tragedies. It soon becomes clear that the problem with Euripides' plays is not that he was disseminating false rumors about the women but that he was instead sharing their behavior with the world. In the book *The Feminine Matrix of Sex and Gender in Classical Athens*, Kate Gilhuly writes that "it was essential for a woman in her capacity as a citizen's wife to stay out of the public eye. Her anonymity was essential to her good name" (Gilhuly 17). Euripides has therefore divested the women of their "good names" and anonymity and is now suffering the backlash of his actions. The women of this play have no qualms about their immoral behavior; they would prefer only that their actions remain a secret from the men of the *polis*. Mika states, "We can no longer do anything that we used to do before, so terrible are the things this man has taught our husbands about us" (l. 435-436). Euripides' campaign against the women has restricted their freedom. The women of this play are seen as collectively troublesome; they clearly had enjoyed their previous autonomy because they were able to take advantage of their husbands' negligence. Euripides represents an undesired hindrance that they have no reservations about destroying.

The victimization of men is found most specifically with the character of the Kinsman, as Euripides has held himself at a distance from the grasp of the merciless women. Before the Kinsman is discovered among the ranks of the women, he attempts to

play the role of a female advocate of Euripides. The Kinsman asks, "Why do we bring the man up on these charges and get so angry with him for telling two or three things he knows we do, out of the *thousands* of other things we *actually do*" (l. 496-499). The Kinsman is making the claim that the duplicity of the women is unbounded; he also passively suggests that men do not share this inclination towards treachery. This statement indicates that the Kinsman is trying not only to act as the mouthpiece for Euripides, but for men in general. He paints an image of the men as having to endure the treachery of the women. The irony of his situation is that in trying to reveal to the women how deceitful they are, he is attempting to mislead them with his disguise. Froma I. Zeitlin's "Travesties of Gender and Genre" highlights the Kinsman's interference at the female assembly. Zeitlin writes, "The women's legitimate presence at their own private ritual also reverses the direction of the transgression; now it is men who trespass on forbidden space and men who penetrate the private world of women for the purpose of spying on them and disclosing their secrets to the public" (Zeitlin 380). Though the Kinsman is inherently committing an offense to the women, the comedy does not emphasize the wrongdoing. The Kinsman remains until the end a hapless prey to female cruelty.

Mika's deliberation on the intended punishment for Euripides displays the sadistic tendencies of the women. Mika states, "I propose that one way or another we brew up some kind of destruction for this man, either poisons or some particular technique whereby he gets destroyed" (l. 457-459). Though Euripides did not hurt any women physically, the women feel that the proper retribution ought to be violent. Furthermore, the women discover the true nature of the Kinsman and he too becomes a target for their

fury. This unmasking is quite similar to Pentheus' downfall in Euripides' *The Bacchae*. In the play, a new leader named Pentheus has slighted Dionysus' divinity and incurred his wrath. Pentheus is cajoled into cross-dressing as a woman in order to observe the Dionysian revelries of the women. Dionysus seeks to inflict revenge upon Pentheus. Upon discovering the man among their midst, the women literally tear him limb from limb with their own hands.⁸ Aristophanes also represents the women as quasi-barbaric in *Women at the Thesmophoria*; though they do not tear apart the Kinsman, they strip him and then torture him. Mika, for instance, threatens to reduce him to ashes. "Let's go get the firewood, Mania! In a minute I'll turn you into a shower of sparks!" (l. 761-762) It is interesting that the attention is taken off of Euripides' offense against the women, and it is the male characters instead that are seen as vulnerable or the victims.

Similar to the *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes' *The Assemblywomen* (392 BCE) features a group of women attempting to overthrow a patriarchal system. In the early fourth century when the *Assemblywomen* was being produced, there was an increasingly anti-democratic climate in Greece. Aristophanes echoes the political disarray in this comedy. In this play, another band of foolish women is led by a rational leader named Praxagora; it is Praxagora's intention to use masculine disguises to infiltrate a male-only assembly in order to advocate that the power over the *polis* be transferred to the women. In addition, Praxagora also wishes to promote an economic plan as well; she wants to equalize access to products and services in Athens. Prior to entering the assembly, Praxagora conveys instructions to her fellow women, "We 'girlfriends' have got to 'commandeer our seats'...

⁸ Among the women participating in the destruction of Pentheus are Pentheus' own mother and aunts. They are in a mesmerized state inflicted upon them by Dionysus.

and settle ourselves without attracting notice” (l. 18-20).⁹ Praxagora believes that the men are leading their city into destruction, but if women were granted authority, they could turn things around. Though Praxagora is certainly ambitious, her band of women does not possess the same proficiency; Aristophanes therefore emphasizes the shortcomings of women with the purpose of inducing laughter. The *Assemblywomen* incarnates the stereotype that women are divisive swindlers who scheme against their husbands and society as a whole.

According to Praxagora’s instructions, the women steal articles of their husbands’ clothing and cease shaving their bodies. Though they may mask their femininity in a physical way, they are unsuccessful at adopting the speech and behavior of men. For example, one woman has brought her knitting along. She justifies her feminine accessory by saying, “I brought this along, just for something to do while the men are filing into assembly...I can hear just as well when I’m knitting. My kids haven’t got anything to wear!” (l. 81-86) Even though the woman has been conscious of the plan, she fails to acknowledge that bringing her knitting would ruin the façade. Another woman is concerned about her ability to move like a man on the day of the assembly. She states, “But one thing we haven’t given much thought to is how we’ll remind ourselves to put up our hands when voting; we’re used to putting up our *legs*” (l. 260-262). Similar to the *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes has once again identified the women with their sexuality, specifically their sexualized bodies, which threaten to reveal their true nature despite their best efforts. The irony of this play is that although Praxagora believes that women can be

⁹ Translation text: Jeffrey Henderson, *Three Plays by Aristophanes* (New York: Routledge, 1996). All other quotations from the *Assemblywomen* employ this translation.

the successful leaders of the *polis*, collectively they cannot even effectively manage themselves.

In the *Assemblywomen*, the husband of Praxagora feels that he has been victimized by his wife's actions. In some respects, the men are reduced to mere stepping stones on the path to power. As Praxagora had stolen his clothing in order to enter the assembly inconspicuously, her husband Blepyros is left with her feminine attire; their neighbor also finds himself in the same position: "Poseidon! Exactly the same thing just happened to me: the woman of *my* house has gone off with *my* clothes! That wouldn't be annoying, but she's taken my boots too!" (l. 343-345) The episode is humorous, as the old men are clothed in dresses standing on their front lawns. In essence, these men have been cuckolded by the women. They are painted as being oblivious and ineffectual, and their young wives have therefore gotten the better of them. It is arguable that the men have been demasculinized by the covert operations of their wives. Several factors contribute to this transition. The most obvious is clearly their style of dress; a second facet of the demasculinization is the power reversal. Although typically the men held the power as they were active in the *polis* and the women were resigned to their domestic duties in the *oikos*, in this episode of the *Assemblywomen* the women have stolen that privilege.

Though the women may have effectively assumed the physical appearance of men, they do not achieve the same success with the rest of their disguise. The women's incompetence is especially demonstrated in their attempts to communicate as men. Praxagora creates a pseudo-dress rehearsal in order to appraise the women's speaking abilities. However, she is disappointed to learn that their femaleness shines through as

soon as they open their mouths; for example, the women refer to the crowd as “ladies” (l. 169), and swear by “Goddesses” (l. 157). The women do not have much faith in their abilities, because they echo society’s expectations of their gender. One woman says, “But how can a congregation of women, with women’s minds, expect to address the people?” (l. 101-102). Rather than resisting the idea that they are inferior to their male counterparts, Praxagora’s team of women has embraced the belief that they are inept and are living up to those meager expectations. Though Praxagora becomes exasperated with them, the women are placed in futile circumstances with little opportunity for success. Being women, they were not permitted to observe male assemblies, and they would therefore have no knowledge of how men were expected to speak or act. Praxagora is in essence taking a wholly apolitical group and attempting to transform them into a political group in one quick practice session. The group’s bungled speeches and improper behavior once again undermine the subversive content of the comedy.

Praxagora, on the other hand, is an effective and articulate orator. She stays on topic, avoids colloquialisms, and conceals any of her “feminine” idiosyncrasies. She practices her argument for the women: “Let us hand over governance of the *polis* to the women...No one is more inventive at getting funds than a woman. Nor would a woman ruler ever get cheated, since women themselves are past masters at cheating” (l. 226-233). This statement features an unusual duality. Primarily, Praxagora demonstrates her powers of persuasion. James McGlew in “‘Speak on My Behalf’: Persuasion and Purification in Aristophanes’ *Wasps*,” states, “Persuasion is obviously important for Aristophanes’ surviving comedies, which make a substantial dramatic investment in relationships between individuals who persuade and those individuals or groups who

allow themselves to be persuaded or resist persuasion” (McGlew 12). McGlew effectively illustrates the juxtaposition of the powers of persuasiveness as it applies to *Assemblywomen*. Beyond her speaking abilities, Praxagora is also exploiting female stereotypes for empowerment purposes. Unlike her counterparts who are held back by the stereotyping, Praxagora is in essence profiting off of the banal notions of women in order to incite support among the men. In the end, she decides that she will personally address the men in order to minimize the chance that one of her foolish constituents might spoil the plan. Praxagora’s vision of a utopian matriarchal society may in actuality represent more than a democracy.

Aristophanes’ use of stereotypical representations of women is not limited to incompetence in the *Assemblywomen*. He also propagates the notion that women are inclined towards rampant alcoholism. During the same “dress-rehearsal,” the women are fixated on finding excuses to drink. The two women that practice speeches focus on one central theme: alcohol. Though this topic has no correlation to the purpose of the assembly, they persist on alcohol-focused tangents to Praxagora’s dismay. The one woman states, “But as far as my own vote goes, I say we outlaw the use of kegs in barrooms, to hold water! It is a bad policy” (l. 155-157). Though the woman’s suggestion for replacing water with alcohol is certainly humorous, the scene reinforces the idea that the concerns of women are trivial. It is apparent that the women are more concerned with turning a serious political assembly into a Dionysian revelry.

Beyond the perceived incompetence of women, Aristophanes also categorizes the women as swindlers. The play features transgression on two levels. Primarily, as previously discussed, the women transcend gender boundaries by donning disguises. A

secondary transgression is political. The women are trying to appropriate the power from the men, even though historically their *polis* had been patriarchal. Praxagora suggests that personal interests are to be put aside and that the citizens will work towards the collective wellbeing. Praxagora decrees, "No more rich man here, poor man there...no, I will establish one and the same standard of life for everyone" (l. 610-614). This model deviates from the democratic ideals of Greece and begins resembling an abstract form of socialism. Susan Saïd discusses the morphing government of the comedy in her essay "The *Assemblywomen*: Women, Economy, and Politics." Saïd likens Praxagora's band of women to the Greek Amazons, or women who lived apart from men in their own exclusive society. She argues that the system that Praxagora develops is not a democracy, but is a *gynaecocracy*. Saïd explains that a *gynaecocracy* can be "A feminization of power if the women adapt the power to their own nature and make the domestic more important than the political" (Saïd 289). Taking this form of government into consideration, Aristophanes parodies how women might steer a government. Praxagora inherently changes the *polis* into one large household, and she is the all-powerful, domineering matriarch. Once in power, Praxagora orders everyone in the community to link their resources together. Praxagora's vision for the society has an unusual component as she equalizes everyone's opportunity for sex. It is Praxagora's policy that no young women will be allowed access to lovers until the older women have had an opportunity to do so. Though this guideline meets with chagrin (especially by the young women), there is minimal dissention amongst the community.

Praxagora clearly believes that in implementing her policies, she is creating a perfected society. She promises, "Adopt my resolution and you'll lead happy lives" (l.

234). Though in essence the idea of the women “improving” the society is noteworthy, a closer examination shows that they can only accomplish this through deceit. They steal clothes from their husbands, sneak away in the middle of the night, and feign new identities in order to creep their way into power and use their influence to procure sex. An important question to ask of this utopia is whether it is largely the women that benefit from the changes. In the essay “Stolen Cloaks,” Gwendolyn Compton-Engle offers her perspective on the women’s intentions. Compton-Engle writes, “Under her interpretation, Blepyrus’ loss of his cloak becomes less emblematic of inversions of male-female and public-private dichotomies than it is symptomatic of the societal problems plaguing Athens—problems that the women aim to solve” (Compton-Engle 172). Though Compton-Engle’s argument lends itself to a heroic or selfless view of the women in the *Assemblywomen*, it cannot be ignored that at the heart of Praxagora’s plan is a major power reversal. Aristophanes has painted a picture of the women as power-hungry mongrels, desperately seeking control of the home and of the city as a whole. The new plan allows women to garner control and grants access to sex, which was previously not enjoyed by the elder members of the society. If Praxagora’s band was solely motivated by hopes for an improved Athens, equalized opportunities for sex probably would not have been a part of the agenda.

By examining the *Lysistrata*, *Assemblywomen*, and *Women at the Thesmophoria* as a unit, it is arguable that the women, with the exception of Lysistrata and Praxagora, represent Aristophanes’ archetype of femininity. Aristophanes typifies women as being maniacal about sex, inclined towards alcoholism, liable to engage in schemes, and most

of all, an overall irritation to their husbands.¹⁰ As Lysistrata states, “I’m terribly annoyed about us women. You know, according to the men we’re capable of all sorts of mischief” (l. 8-10). Though in the twenty-first century this unflattering depiction of women would be met with society’s wrath, in the late fifth century, Aristophanes most likely echoed the widely-held beliefs of his patriarchal society. If Lysistrata’s “army” and Praxagora’s assemblywomen represent the clichéd female, Lysistrata and Praxagora embody masculine traits. There is an obvious schism that separates Lysistrata and Praxagora from the wives in Aristophanic comedy. The main difference is that their actions are fueled by scrupulous reason rather than unbridled passion. Passion is often categorized as an overtly female trait, while reason is typically attributed as masculine. There is no equivalent to these two characters in any of the other plays, which may lead the reader to question why Aristophanes strayed from his archetypal female character. One possible explanation is that without juxtaposing the hyper-females with their polar opposite, their ridiculous behavior might not have the same comic value. Lysistrata and Praxagora’s utter frustration with the members of their sex naturally provokes a comic reaction from the audience. The humor of Aristophanes’ plays which feature domestic women arises both when witnessed on the stage and when read in written form. Though the women play a central role in the plays, their presence is principally to be the target of the jokes and embody the stereotypes of the era. However, the buffoonish behavior of the women is certainly the ideal masking device for Aristophanes’ subversive ideologies

¹⁰ These stereotypes are also reflected elsewhere in Greek literature. See for example Hesiod’s *Works and Days*. In the poem, Hesiod incorporates mythic references and reflections on the tribulations of mankind. His reference to Pandora is especially relevant to this discussion, because he paints a negative portrait of femininity. Hesiod writes, “Before this time men lived upon the earth, apart from sorrow and from painful work, free from disease, which brings the Death-gods in. But now the woman [Pandora] opened up the cask, and scattered pains and evils among men” (l. 90-94). Translation text: Dorothea Wender, *Hesiod and Theogny* (London: Penguin Books, 1973).

CHAPTER III: The Sexualized Women

Aristophanes condemns the respectable or domestic women of society, namely the wives and mothers, in his plays the *Lysistrata*, *Women at the Thesmophoria*, and *Assemblywomen*. However, the women that exist outside of the *oikos*, or the “others” of society, are not free of judgment. By examining the representation of the dancing girls and prostitutes, it is possible to garner an understanding of how Aristophanes used sexualized women as comic devices. If the domestic women are categorized as a general annoyance to the men and poster children for immorality, the sexualized women have been stripped of their humanity. These women are represented as mere tokens for a man’s bidding. They are “silent characters” in that they often have non-speaking roles; their presence on stage highlights their sexuality rather than their personality. In *The Acharnians*, *The Wasps*, *Peace*, and *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes dehumanizes these women and propagates the notion that they merely exist as pawns for male schemes or as sexual objects. Unlike the domestic women, these sexualized women are wholly divested of their free will. Presented in various stages of undress, as they endure the crude propositions of the male characters, Aristophanes exploits these women and their bodies in order to maximize the comic potential of his scenes. Most importantly, these characters distract the audience from the political undercurrents of his comedies.

In *Acharnians*, the comic hero Dicaeopolis is tired of the tumultuous state of affairs in wartime Athens and seeks to procure peace for his family. In order to do so, he secedes from the *polis* and creates his own independent market. Upon his withdrawal from society, he immediately becomes attractive to others because of his wealth and autonomy. An impoverished father named “The Megarian” travels to Dicaeopolis’ newly

opened trading post in order to benefit from his good fortune.¹¹ The Megarian brings his two young daughters with him, because he believes that the girls might entice Dicaeopolis into an exchange of goods. The Megarian intimidates his daughters into submission: “You wretched little kiddies of a father in distress, go up for your grub, if you can find it anywhere. Listen now, and lend me your stomachs: do you want to be sold, or to starve in misery?” (l. 731-734)¹² Driven by their own hunger, his daughters acquiesce to their father’s demands. The objectification of his daughters is calculated. The Megarian needs something to trade with Dicaeopolis, and he decides to disguise his daughters as pigs so as to use them as pawns for his own gain.

The pig disguises denote the father’s lack of regard for his daughters. He orders, “Put on these snouts as well, and then get into the sack here. And make sure you grunt and squeal, and make a noise like the pigs do at the Mysteries” (l. 745-747). From a comic perspective, the imagery of two young girls with make-believe pig parts, emitting pig noises, is certainly humorous. However, the nuances of this scene are grave. The Megarian clearly views his daughters as usable resources rather than humans. His choice of disguise has several implications. Primarily, pigs are a dirty and undomesticated animal, valuable only for their flesh. The disguise insinuates that his daughters are in fact pieces of meat. Secondly, the word for “pig” in Greek has another translation; its alternative meaning is associated with female genitalia. The disguise strips his daughters of their identities and voices and reduces them to animals. The fact that the disguises are far-fetched is significant, because it suggests that Dicaeopolis is aware of the Megarian’s

¹¹ At the time, Megara was an ally of Sparta. Therefore, the Megarian would not have been allowed to trade in Athens (MacDowell 60).

¹² Translation text: Alan H. Sommerstein, *Acharnians* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips Ltd, 1980). All other quotations from the *Acharnians* employ this translation.

scheme and wants to possess the daughters whether or not they are really pigs. If these disguises are compared to the disguises in the *Assemblywomen*, there is a marked difference. Primarily, in the *Assemblywomen*, the women voluntarily assume the masculine disguises because it empowers them. In contrast, the disguises in the *Acharnians* diminish the girls to powerless entities, existing only to serve men.

The Megarian's decision to sell his daughters to Dicaeopolis closely resembles an act of prostitution. In exchange for garlic and salt, the Megarian is willing to dispense of his progeny. Marketed as "fine ones" (l. 766), "plump and pretty" (l. 767), and "porkers" (l. 769), the girls are poked and prodded at by Dicaeopolis as he makes his decision. Despite the girls' youth, the transaction is overtly sexual. For instance, Dicaeopolis questions the "pigs'" lack of tails. The Megarian responds, "No, it's young. When it's full grown it'll have a long, thick, red one. But if you want one to rear, see, here's a fine porker" (l. 787-791). Dicaeopolis' examination of the girls is largely fixated on the girls' budding sexuality. This play suggests that young girls are groomed to be the sexual playthings of adult men. Larissa Bonfante's essay "Nudity as a Costume in Classical Art" explores the implications of being undressed in ancient Athens. Bonfante writes, "In a clothed society, however, nakedness is special, and can be used as a 'costume.' As it developed, Greek nudity came to mark a contrast between Greek and non-Greek, and also between men and women. The latter distinction is connected with the most basic connotation of nakedness, the sense of shame, vulnerability and exposure it arouses in person and the related sense of shock provoked by its sight" (Bonfante 544). The nudity of the Megarian's daughters represents these aforementioned qualities. Being from

Megara, they may have been seen as “barbaric” within Athens. Furthermore, their bareness exemplifies their sexual vulnerability as they are scrutinized by Dicaeopolis.

Aristophanes’ *Acharnians* further objectifies women as it insinuates that in order to drive one’s personal prosperity, *all* women ought to be seen as assets. Once the Megarian has completed his bartering with Dicaeopolis, he remarks, “Hermes, god of trading, grant that I may sell my wife at such a price, and my own mother too!” (l. 816-818) This statement reflects that the relationships that the Megarian has with the women in his life are rather worthless; he sees their value in terms of what he can receive for trading them to others. It is significant that his children are both girls. It is quite possible that if the Megarian had been a father to a son as well, the Megarian would not have sought to dehumanize his son for a bag of salt. The misogyny is also extended to the character of Dicaeopolis because he enables the system. Even as the Megarian is willing to reduce his children to the value of salt and garlic, Dicaeopolis does not object to the human trafficking, and he partakes in it as well. While the Megarian’s actions seem highly motivated by his own greed, it is possible that he is acting out of a sense of self-preservation or preservation of his family. Though he seems to be coercing his children into a life of prostitution, there is the promise that they will at least be fed.

Though it is difficult to condone the sexual marketing that transpires between the Megarian and Dicaeopolis, it is important to examine the political satire that underlies the scene. Aristophanes’ sharpest political commentary is typically masked beneath his most humorous scenes. Though parts of his audience might have acknowledged only the buffoonish behavior that existed on the surface-level of his plays, more discerning audience members may have discovered the embedded critical assessment of society.

Therefore, in examining the Megarian's dealings with Dicaeopolis, one can note the serious amid the outlandish. At the time of the *Acharnians*' production (425 BCE) the Peloponnesian war had been raging for several years. According to Douglas M. MacDowell in his book *Aristophanes and Athens*, the speeches in the *Acharnians* convey that the war was instigated by Megara, the native land of the Megarian and his family. MacDowell writes, "Trivial disputes concerning the small city of Megara were allowed to escalate, and the Athenians took up an unduly stubborn attitude to a reasonable Spartan request" (MacDowell 60). In the *Acharnians*, Aristophanes attributes the voice of dissention against the war to the character of Dicaeopolis. In separating himself from the conflicts, he does well for himself. This may be a veiled moral in the play: adopt peaceful resolutions and reap the benefits. After creating peace, Dicaeopolis believes that he is deserving of luxuries, including sexual favors. Furthermore, while he may have enjoyed bartering for the Megarian's young "pigs," and the audience may have enjoyed the sexual sparring, Aristophanes may be inconspicuously suggesting that the war has reduced citizens to dissolute and immoral behavior such as human trafficking. Though a close reading of the scene is shocking from a contemporary vantage point, Aristophanes would have intended the girls-as-pigs scenario to be both comical and diverting. If Aristophanes was indeed criticizing the war, having the little girls stand naked and pretend to be farm animals would have indeed distracted the audience from the political undercurrents of the comedy.

Whereas the *Acharnians* satirizes society on a larger scale, Aristophanes returns to a more focused parody in his comedy *The Wasps*. In the play, a son named Anticleon has tired of his father's unusual obsession. His father, Procleon, is an aging juror who

cannot bear to miss a day of work. Due to his occupation, Procleon has always erred on the side of the law and had never participated in fringe behavior of any kind. Anticleon literally imprisons his father in his home to keep him away from the court; Procleon's fellow jurors or "wasps" attempt to free him with no success. Finally, Anticleon creates a little court within their home and allows Procleon to deliberate on any bad behavior that occurs within the home. Along with separating his father from his obsession, Anticleon wants his father to become more socialized. Anticleon states, "I'm going to look after you well, father, and take you with me everywhere- to dinner, to parties, to shows- so that in the future you'll lead a life of pleasure" (l. 1004-1006).¹³ By forcing his father to attend parties, Anticleon leads his father into behavior that he had once rejected, namely drinking and objectifying women.

Following a raucous evening of drinking, Procleon has been transformed into a stumbling, law-breaking individual. An observer describes Procleon in his inebriated state: "Why, if the old man didn't turn out to be a most pestilent nuisance, and much the most drunk and disorderly of the company!" (l. 1299-1301) The newly uninhibited Procleon has kidnapped a naked flute-girl named Dardinis from the party. This kidnapping is significant for several reasons; primarily, it demonstrates that Procleon has certainly lost his concern for abiding by the laws which govern society and that at least in his drunken state, he is not concerned with the consequences of his actions. The theft of Dardinis suggests that he views her as property rather than a person. There is no evidence that Dardinis left willingly with Procleon; instead, it is clear that he found the young lady attractive, and listening to his sordid instincts, he stole her away.

¹³ Translation text: Alan H. Sommerstein, *Wasps* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips Ltd, 1983). All other quotations from the *Wasps* employ this translation.

Dardinis clearly represents the archetype of the sexualized woman in Aristophanic comedy. Her role at the party as the “naked flute-girl,” automatically increases her susceptibility to objectification by the men. However, unlike the *Acharnians*, in which the trade of the young girls merely resembles an act of prostitution, Dardinis’ profession is clearly prostitution. In her book *The Reign of the Phallus: Sexual Politics in Ancient Greece*, Eva Keuls asserts that prostitution in ancient Greece may have been an acceptable occupation if the woman was a courtesan. She writes, “One school of thought glorifies the Greek courtesan, or hetaera-- literally, ‘female companion’—as a free and cultivated spirit, a match for men’s wit and education” (Keuls 153). Though there is evidence in literature and art of the acceptance of prostitutes, in the *Acharnians*, Dardinis is seen not as a “female companion” but as a transportable sex object. Even if Dardinis was at the party in order to play music and attend to the sexual desires of the men, she did not attend the party in order to be kidnapped by Procleon. Procleon’s actions can therefore be considered sex trafficking. Procleon drunkenly pronounces, “You see how cleverly I stole you away when you were just about to have to suck the people at the party? Do this prick of mine a favor in return for that. But no, you won’t pay me back, you won’t do the job, I know it; you’ll deceive me” (l. 1345-1349). The distasteful manner of addressing Dardinis reflects that Procleon has no respect for her as a woman. After requesting a sexual act, he further degrades the flutist by claiming that she is untrustworthy and deceitful.

Aristophanes once again masks political commentary in the *Wasps*, just as he did in the *Acharnians*. Though the play does not specifically highlight the issue of the war, an examination beyond the father-son squabbles proves that the events within the play are

indirectly influenced by the Peloponnesian War. In his book *Aristophanes, A Study*, Gilbert Murray states,

It must be remembered that at this time, the citizens of military age were mostly away on active service: the Courts were manned by the old men who could no longer fight and were probably more bitter in consequence. Then the class war between rich and poor, which so largely underlay the war between Sparta and Athens, introduced a further element of savage prejudice. (Murray 70)

This “savage prejudice” is certainly present in the character of Procleon. When he is stripped of his judicial power and forced into social situations, he preserves an antagonism towards the lower classes. This may explain his objectification of the prostitute. Through the eyes of Procleon, Dardinis is inferior both because of her profession and her rank in society, and is therefore susceptible to his whims. Procleon also harasses a female shopkeeper (l. 1390) and assaults a random man (l.1418).

Aristophanes may have been suggesting that at times of peace, justice is served. But in times of war, as demonstrated with Procleon’s unraveling, chaos ensues both in battle and in society. The character of Dardinis is instrumental in making Aristophanes’ subversive beliefs be inconspicuous. Though nothing about her character is inherently funny (she does not say a word throughout the scene), her naked body would have been the prime focus for the male audience rather than Aristophanes’ treasonous ideas.

Reflecting analogous premises of peace and female objectification is Aristophanes’ *Peace*, performed in 422 BCE. In the play, a man named Trygaeus is tired of the war. He intends to travel to Heaven to convince the gods to release the goddess Peace. Aristophanes once again has represented the tension between peace and war, but

once more, the serious themes are tinged with the Aristophanic comic flair. In order to reach Heaven, Trygaeus flies to Heaven on a giant dung beetle. Upon arrival, Trygaeus learns that the goddess Peace (represented in the play as a statue) had been buried in a cave because the Greeks insisted on carrying out the war. Though the goddess Peace had once protected Greece, the god of War has replaced her. Trygaeus finds out where Peace had been hidden, and manages to extricate her along with two ladies, Flora (also known as “Bounty”) and Felicia (“Happiness”).

Though Trygaeus’ original initiative was to instill peace in Greece once again, his focus changes and he instead views the women as sexual objects rather than as ambassadors of peace. Hans-Joachim Newiger, in the essay “War and Peace in the Comedy of Aristophanes” paints too endearing a portrait of Trygaeus. Newiger states, “Trygaeus does not obtain a private but rather a universal peace, and, totally unlike Dicaeopolis, deserves well of his city and of all Greece” (Newiger 151). Though Newiger asserts the heroism of Trygaeus, he fails to examine Trygaeus’ subsequent relationship with the women whom he extricates from the cave. This is significant because it demonstrates that Trygaeus does not act out of selflessness or civic consciousness because he wishes to possess these women for his own purposes. He asserts his heroism: “To end the war I soared aloft in beetle car, brought peace and rest to weary men, restored their rustic blisses, and made the country safe again for sleep and lovers’ kisses” (l. 872-877).¹⁴ “Lovers’ kisses” clearly becomes the main objective. Trygaeus is immediately struck by their beauty and sexual potential.

¹⁴ Translation text: Robert Henning Webb, *Peace of Aristophanes* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1964). All other quotations from *Peace* employ this translation.

Demonstrating his “selflessness,” he decides to keep Flora as his wife, and promises Felicia to the Senate. Although Peace is beautiful, she is represented as a statue and is therefore exempt from the men’s desires. Though Trygaeus becomes enamored with Flora, his misogyny is further suggested because he already has a family. The audience is introduced to his daughters as he embarks on the dung beetle; they cry out because they know he is abandoning them. He falsely promises his return, “But, when this journey is over and I have completed my mission, rich plum pudding you’ll get....and hot knuckle sauce in addition” (l. 124-127). Though he seems to express love to his daughters in Act I, his eagerness to claim one of Peace’s comrades in Act II demonstrates the lack of regard he has for his own family. Furthermore, his daughters’ blind faith in their father is exploited; the audience would have found it comical that the girls trusted him even as he flew away on a beetle.

As Flora is promised to Trygaeus, she is spared most of the objectification upon returning to Athens. Felicia, however, does not have an engagement to protect her from the lust of the male community. Being young and unmarried makes Felicia an accessible object from the men’s vantage point. Furthermore, Trygaeus presents Felicia to the Senate in a manner that suggests prostitution. By providing the Senate with a prostitute of sorts, Trygaeus will receive their support. Trygaeus commands, “Come, girls, with me. And hurry. Entre nous, the Senate stands erect, awaiting you” (l. 726-727). This passage from the text is laden with sexual innuendo. Ironically, the girls have just been freed from their imprisonment in a cave, and Trygaeus is essentially dragging them to a new captivity. Because Felicia (a companion of Peace) is possessed by the Senate, Aristophanes is insinuating that the Senate is power and pleasure-hungry. Trygaeus

announces, "Senators, I present the fair Felicia! She will provide you with a grand good time, opening avenues of sheer delight, to which you will respond effusively; and serving as your humble kitchen maid" (l. 888-891). In this derogatory introduction, Felicia has been relegated to a prostitute; especially given her symbolic significance, it is presumptuous that Trygaeus names her as a common kitchen servant.

Once Trygaeus bestows Felicia upon the Senate, he continues to relish his newfound renown as an "ambassador of peace." Trygaeus and the Chorus gather together in order to worship Peace. However, though the purpose of such a ceremony was typically to demonstrate appreciation for the divine figure, this particular event reflects a different intention. It is rather ironic that they are worshipping Peace subsequent to tormenting her attendants. Furthermore, in a choral ode dedicated to Peace, the chorus resumes the degrading view of women. They sing:

We beseech thee to hear us, O worshipful one!
 Nor play the coquette in the way it is done
 By a mischievous hussy who likes her fun.
 She'll open the door, peep out on the sly,
 In the hope of seeing a male pass by.
 If he does, and gives her a couple of winks,
 In she pops, little minx!
 But at the moment he's gone, she is at it again.
 Deal not in this fashion with us poor men. (l. 978-986)

This passage seems rather blasphemous because the Chorus is addressing a goddess. It is arguable that the Chorus is addressing Peace as if she was a common woman, like a prostitute or dancing girl. The ode reflects many of the stereotypes found in other Aristophanic comedies. For instance, it suggests that Peace (and all women) are temptresses and scheming tricksters. The last line "Deal not in this fashion with us poor

men” once again denotes that men are the victims because they are at the mercy of vindictive women.

Concealed under the objectification of women is Aristophanes’ main concern in *Peace*. Though throughout the play, Trygaeus trumpets the importance of peace, the end of the play insinuates that Aristophanes might have doubts about the timing. At the conclusion, a seer named Hierocles appears to tell the community that Peace has been freed too soon. He states, “Fate hath decreed, ‘tis ordained by the host of Blessed Immortals: Never shall war have an end ‘til the wolf lie down with the lambkin” (l. 1075-1077). He speaks in proverbs, and quickly displeases the men with his sentiments. Trygaeus and his men choose not to listen to his warnings and the play ultimately ends in merriment. However, the discerning reader or audience must consider the significance of Hierocles’ prophesies. Aristophanes might have used the character of Hierocles to caution the audience to be suspicious of peace treaties. Hierocles’ warnings are even more significant because Hierocles is not telling Trygaeus that peace will never be restored in Athens; instead, he is insisting on the poor timing. G.E.M De Ste Croix’s essay “The Political Outlook of Aristophanes” argues:

Peace, produced at the Great Dionysia of 421, only about a fortnight before the conclusion of the Peace of Nicias, at a time when everyone in Athens must have known that peace was certainly coming soon, and even approximately what its terms would be...In this play Aristophanes would not feel the need to *argue* in favor of peace: he could celebrate it with appropriate jubilation. (De Ste Croix 60-61)

Through De Ste Croix asserts that Aristophanes was writing from a position of “jubilation,” his discussion fails to consider the significance of the character of Hierocles. Even if Aristophanes was indeed satisfied with the prospect of the imminent peace treaty, he may have still harbored reservations about its veracity or success. These reservations may have angered other Athenians; therefore, the subversive nature of his concerns is displaced by accenting the sexual trafficking of Peace and her companions. The comic value in *Peace* derives from the men’s voracious attitudes towards the women.

Finally, the *Lysistrata* (411 BCE) exhibits a female character whose sole purpose in the play is to be a sexual object. At the end of the play, Lysistrata and her band of women have finally frustrated the men into submission with their abstinence scheme. They gather all of the men of the surrounding city-states together, but Lysistrata has decided that she will need a visual component in order to truly captivate the men’s attention. Lysistrata calculates, “Well, it’s an easy thing to do if you get them when they’re hot for it and not testing each other for weaknesses” (l. 1158-1159). A woman, aptly named “Reconciliation,” serves as a figurative map of Greece. The men are enthralled by Reconciliation, as she is naked in her symbolic glory. Whereas the men had been solely concentrated on the well-being of their own city-state, Lysistrata endeavors for the men to acknowledge that united efforts would be the optimal solution for everyone. Though Lysistrata’s purpose is peace-making, the men are preoccupied with Reconciliation’s sexuality.

The character of Reconciliation is wholly introduced as a sexual object. Similar to the way in which Trygaeus commits the character of Felicia to the men in *Peace*, Lysistrata brings Reconciliation into precarious grounds, as she walks into a group of

men who have been deprived of sex for an extended period of time. Each part of Reconciliation's body symbolizes a city-state in Greece. Though Lysistrata is trying to get the men to see how the parts, or cities, must unite, the men are obsessed with isolated sections of Reconciliation's body. As Lysistrata lectures about the importance of peace, the utterances of the men reflect their preoccupations. For instance, the Spartan Ambassador exclaims, "We're guilty- but what an unspeakably fine ass!" (l. 1192-1193). The manner in which the men scan Reconciliation's body is quite similar to Dicaeopolis' handling of the Megarian's daughters. The men do not see a person standing before them; Reconciliation literally represents accessible sex.

Though Lysistrata might have been displeased by the men's lack of focus, she is actually quite satisfied with their reactions. Reconciliation's body serves as a distraction; while the men might have otherwise disputed Lysistrata's intentions, they are instead so diverted by their sexual fantasies that they are willing to yield to Lysistrata's objectives. Lysistrata appears to have no qualms about subjecting a fellow woman to this sort of treatment. The way in which she orders Reconciliation around is also very demeaning. For instance, Lysistrata commands, "Now go and fetch those Athenians too; take hold of whatever they give you and bring them here" (l. 1167-1168). Though there is no suggestion in the text that Reconciliation is a slave, it is clear by Lysistrata's management of her that she is a lower-class citizen. Unlike all of the other female characters in the *Lysistrata* who are gallingly loquacious, Aristophanes deprives Reconciliation of a voice. Being mute, Reconciliation merely moves according to Lysistrata's orders; she can neither accept nor refuse. The lack of speech is significant because it denies her of any sense of free will.

The character of Reconciliation is further objectified because the men issue sexual threats towards her. The irony of the scene is that Lysistrata's lecture about creating peace through unification is obscured by the men's violent exclamations. The first Athenian ambassador shouts, "Now I'm ready to strip down and do some ploughing!" (l. 1220-1221) The Spartan ambassador responds, "Me first, by Twain Gods: before one ploughs one spreads manure!" (l.1222-1223) Though Aristophanes shrouds these sexual threats under the metaphor of farming land for comic purposes, a closer examination yields that the men are eager to ravage the poor girl. Reconciliation, being both mute and under the command of Lysistrata, is completely susceptible to the men's violent wishes.

Reconciliation's character is also significant because her presence elicits the greed of the men. In examining her character in terms of Aristophanes' political motivations, the metaphorical rape of Reconciliation may embody Aristophanes' feelings on why the peace treaties between Sparta and Athens were ineffectual. Kate Gilhuly in the book *The Feminine Matrix of Sex and Gender in Classical Athens* writes: "The brutish reassertion of male dominance over the prostitute is intertwined in this ritual equation, which has in turn come to signify Athens' dominance over her enemies" (Gilhuly 169). As the men try to claim the various parts of her body, they are so interested in their individual concerns and interests that they are disregarding the overall intention, which is to make peace. Dover explains the connection between the treaty in the *Lysistrata* and the actual events in the early fourth century. He states: "Yet although the scales were weighted in favor of the Peloponnesians, Athens had made a remarkable recovery from the collapse of 413; it was possible to argue that with every month that passed Athenian chances of at least establishing a stalemate and a compromise peace improved, and this is the kind of peace

that Lysistrata achieves” (Dover 158). A “compromised peace” is certainly demonstrated in the *Lysistrata*. The play ends with the feeling that the men may have finally accepted Lysistrata’s terms in order to assuage their sexual agony, but there is the inherent possibility that they may change their minds. Reconciliation’s character seems to then play a role as a superficial, temporary binding between the conflicting cities. Furthermore, her character elicits the diverting reaction that Aristophanes needs: if the audience is as interested in her nude form as the male characters within the play are, Aristophanes can certainly conceal his seditious beliefs.

If the scheming, divisive tricksters in Aristophanes’ comedies *Lysistrata*, *Women at the Thesmophoria* and *Assemblywomen* represent his archetype of the domestic women, the female characters in the *Acharnians*, *Wasps*, *Peace* and *Lysistrata* are the embodiment of the “others” or women who live on the periphery of society. The Megarian’s daughters, Dardinis, Peace and her friends, and Reconciliation are the women who exist in the plays solely to fulfill the sexual desires of men. Though these women are mostly silent, their importance in the comedies is significant. Aristophanes uses these characters like a skillful puppeteer, as he flaunts their sexuality in order to underscore his political subterfuge. The humor derived from these characters is quite different from the plays in the first chapter. Whereas the other women found themselves in fantastical circumstances, the characters of this chapter mostly stand quietly upon the stage. Therefore, the comic value of the sexualized women is the reactions that their presence instigates in the male characters. Presented with beautiful, naked women, the men resort to immature or immoral behavior which distracts them from any political or economic initiatives they may have otherwise pursued. By studying both the voiced and silent

women of Aristophanes' plays, the reader or audience has an opportunity to understand Aristophanes' unique social commentary as it pertains to femininity.

Conclusion

In Aristophanic comedy, the female characters are recurrently the focus of various forms of objectification and are the embodiment of many common stereotypes; their behavior is antithetical to the “appropriate” behavior of women. Despite their raucous antics, their presence in the comedies masks the complicated nature of femininity in comedy. I will now explore how the negative representation generates derisive humor in Aristophanes’ comedies, and in what ways Aristophanes’ satire of women is more merciless than the comic portrayal of men.

The comedies *Lysistrata* and the *Assemblywomen* are unique, because they demonstrate Aristophanes’ unusual handling of femininity in his works. It is arguable that *Lysistrata* and *Praxagora* maintain a semblance of empowerment. They possess the influence over both men and women to initiate political and economic upheaval. Aristophanes has given both characters strong voices and unwavering beliefs, which is in stark contrast with his other female characters that are either mute or obtuse. However, *Lysistrata* and *Praxagora*’s clout is limited so as to not make Aristophanes’ audience suspicious of his beliefs. When they accomplish their goals in the plays, the audience is reminded that the comedies are only utopian fantasies and that society is still patriarchal in nature. These indications come in several forms. The *Lysistrata*, for instance, represents the illusion of empowered women. Though *Lysistrata* coerces the men into a peace treaty, she does not accomplish her goals through resonant negotiations or effective business strategies. If *Lysistrata* had indeed had her desires come into fruition by using realistic means, the audience may have pointed a finger at Aristophanes for being politically subversive. Instead, the comedy becomes a comic masterpiece because

Lysistrata carries out her plan by imposing abstinence on everyone in society and waiting for the men's sexual agony to overpower their reasoning. In the *Assemblywomen*, Praxagora adopts the universal-sex rule into her economic stimulus plan, which is fantastical at best. Though other imposed regulations are realistic, such as the disposal of personal property in order to create communal opportunities, Praxagora's vision of society is tinged by Aristophanes' blunt humor. Her decree that no young lady will have sex before an older woman angers the youth of the city but benefits the aged. An audience concerned by the comedy's gynaeocracy would then be reminded that this is a farce rather than a reality. Therefore, the characters of the Lysistrata and Praxagora demonstrate the comic value that can be achieved by making the women *think* that they have power.

The behavior of Lysistrata and Praxagora is also aberrational from typical displays of femininity in Aristophanic comedy: their fellow women in the *Lysistrata*, *Women at the Thesmophoria*, and the *Assemblywomen* function as stereotypes. As the wives demonstrate their nymphomania, alcoholism, and overall divisiveness, Aristophanes' male audience may have been reassured of the incompetence of femininity and feel unthreatened by their actions or beliefs. In the *Lysistrata*, the women complicate Lysistrata's plan by their inability to abstain from sex for a prolonged length of time. Their desperate attempts at escaping from under Lysistrata's watch are quite humorous; this humor stems from the way Aristophanes reduces them from adult women to unruly children or caged animals. In *Women at the Thesmophoria*, Aristophanes once again plays with illusions in respect to the wives. Unlike Lysistrata or Praxagora, who are under the chimera of empowerment, the wives led by Mika are bitter because Euripides

has stripped them of their cover as respectable women of society. Without the illusion of respectability, the improper behavior of the women is revealed to their husbands. In the comedy, their hidden characteristics are exposed in an amusing manner; the wives are seen as manipulative and violent. Finally, in the *Assemblywomen*, the women's attempts to assume the roles of the dominant gender demonstrate their incompetence. Once again, Aristophanes is underscoring any threat of a female rebellion by painting a vivid picture of the ineptitude of women in order to pacify the men. In order to ensure laughs in the three comedies, any grace or reverence is stripped from femininity in Aristophanes' representation of the domestic women.

The humor instigated within Aristophanes' representation of the sexualized women in the plays *The Acharnians*, *Wasps*, *Peace* and *Lysistrata* is quite different than the humor generated at the expense of wives and mothers. These silent women do not pester or pose a threat to the men. Instead of using stereotypes to represent womanhood in these comedies, Aristophanes relies upon their nude bodies. The women exist only as objects within the play as they appear devoid of any displays of humanity. Merely by featuring undressed and mute women, Aristophanes reinforces male dominance. The comic value of these scenes is therefore not created by speech or actions: instead, it is reliant solely upon the men's reactions to the female nudity. It is clearly the male characters' fantasy to be presented with an undressed, unvoiced woman whose existence is solely to wait upon his needs. In the *Acharnians*, Dicaeopolis clearly relishes his ability to purchase young girls in order to raise them as his sexual slaves. Aristophanes creates a very balanced tension between the amusement of watching Dicaeopolis submit to the pig disguises, and the horror that he could quickly convert from being an advocate

of peace to a sexual trafficker. In the *Wasps*, Procleon's evolution from a law-abiding citizen to a kidnapper is radical. Once again, Aristophanes plays with the juxtaposition of humor and repulsion as an inebriated Procleon believes that he can merely steal Dardinis, a flute-playing prostitute, from a party. In both *Peace* and *Lysistrata*, the female characters are overt sexual objects. In *Peace*, the characters of Peace, Flora and Felicia originally represent peace, abundance, and happiness; however, these meanings or purposes are not funny. Aristophanes therefore makes these women the desired objects of men, and they are soon emblematic of sexuality. The comic value is then that the men are lecherous towards the very women that they ought to be worshipping. Likewise in the *Lysistrata*, the character of Reconciliation in essence represents the unification of Greece, but her nude form sends the men into hysterical fits. In all of these plays, Aristophanes uses sexuality as an intricate medium for comedy, despite being occasionally disturbing or irreverent. Furthermore, the more scandalous the play, the safer Aristophanes was from being declared a traitor.

A study of the female objectification in Aristophanic comedy cannot disregard that in many cases, the unruly "women" that incite so many laughs would have in actuality been played by male actors. In early Greek drama, men played both male and female roles upon the stage. A man's ability to transmit female speech and behavior raises the question of how a costume can allow one to trespass against gender boundaries. The comedies of Aristophanes may have been funnier because of the male-as-female dynamic; a man parading around the stage in a wig or dress may not have been convincing but it was probably amusing. Michael J. Walton writes, "The jokes are those of men dressed up as women, not of women being women" (*Living Greek Theatre* 206).

Comedies such as *Assemblywomen* and the *Women at the Thesmophoria* would have been conducive for male actors to assume the alternate gender, but in plays such as *Wasps* which feature nude women, their ability to do so would have been difficult. Eva Stehle's "The Body and Its Representations in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousai*: Where Does the Costume End?" explains that a female costume would have involved a dress and a breast band (Stehle 380). However, without a dress, how would the men represent nude women? Jeffrey Henderson suggests that men may have portrayed nude women by wearing body-colored stockings (Henderson 19). Contemporary debates yield the possibility that playwrights may have employed actual women to play the parts of prostitutes or dancing girls.¹⁵ Walton also suggests, "There is no reason why noncitizen women should have been prohibited from acting in festival plays as they did in mimes" (*Greek Theatre Practice* 146). Furthermore, these women may have actually been prostitutes or dancing girls; it would not have been appropriate for women outside of those professions to appear naked upon the stage. Other critics maintain that no women would have been allowed upon the stage or even in the audience. I support the argument that women would have been employed in the Greek theater for these roles. Not only would Aristophanes have been objectifying women in the material of his comedies, he would then be objectifying female actors by having them stand naked upon the stage in front of a predominantly male audience. This duality further accentuates Aristophanes' and Greek society's degrading view of the lower class.

Aristophanes' satire of women and femininity can be further understood when compared to Aristophanes' representation of the male characters. The men in the

¹⁵ In Arthur Pickard-Cambridge's book *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*, Pickard-Cambridge suggests that women playing dancing girls or prostitutes would have been possible because they were "walking on" roles. They would have appeared only briefly upon the stage (Pickard-Cambridge 153).

comedies are also represented in a disparaging manner. For instance, the men are seen as easy to deceive as demonstrated in the *Assemblywomen*. Praxagora's husband Blepyros and their neighbor stand on their front lawns in dresses. Their wives have stolen their clothes and snuck out of their houses inconspicuously. The men are left emasculated, forlorn, and exposed to their community. The reader or audience may then question if there is any disparity between Aristophanes' treatment of men and his treatment of women. I assert that there is a major difference. While Blepyros is indeed made to seem like a fool in this episode of the comedy, the play does not end transmitting a negative view of men. Instead, Aristophanes cleverly reinforces the competence of men and the importance of patriarchy because Praxagora's utopian scheme is so fantastical. There is no indication at the end of the *Assemblywomen* that Praxagora's reign will continue.

Likewise in *Peace*, Trygaeus successfully restored peace in Greece after stealing Peace and her constituents from their imprisonment. However, in the second act, Trygaeus shifts focus from his civic consciousness and instead becomes a sex-maniac and obsessed with planning his own wedding. Trygaeus' concern with his personal interests rather than the collective well-being seems more in line with Aristophanes' depiction of femininity. However, Aristophanes restores Trygaeus as a comic hero before the play is finished; by the end, Trygaeus once again shows his concern about maintaining peace because he gets rid of the naysayer Hierocles who suggests that Athens was not ready for peace. Though Aristophanes does indeed undercut his comic heroes, Aristophanes restores their heroic image. In comparison, Aristophanes' satire of women never maintains the illusion that the women are empowered; the comedies always end with the understanding that women are, and always will be, subservient to men.

In addition, Aristophanes' differential treatment of the genders shows that when the male heroes become too subversive, Aristophanes passes the blame onto the female characters. The female characters are vilified or scapegoated in order to maintain a heroic view of the men. This is also made possible because the audience would have easily dismissed the female characters because women would not be seen as capable of making changes, while the men would be. Furthermore, if the male heroes were the mouthpieces for seditious beliefs, the audience may have attributed these beliefs to Aristophanes. If the Athenian government felt threatened by Aristophanes and his comedies, Aristophanes' ability to write may have been withdrawn and he might have risked being sued in court or expelled from the city. So instead, Aristophanes parades the women on stage as the ultimate camouflage for any of his radical thoughts.

Though the comedies of Aristophanes are embedded with crudeness and obscenities, they offer a valuable portrait of the cultural attitudes of the time as well as highlight the political climate of Greece in the fifth century. The sexual objectification of the women that exists in all six of these comedies is categorized by its twofold nature. Primarily, Aristophanes objectifies the women because of the inherent comic value that exists in presenting women as stupid, nymphomaniacs, or alcoholics. The episodes featuring such women would have met the interests of a largely male audience. Secondly, while the representations of the women are stereotypical and grossly exaggerated for comic effect, a close examination of the comedies will produce a commentary on the role of women in ancient Athens. The comedies reinforce the patriarchal nature of Greek society and the way in which the women were relegated to domestic duties rather than being allowed in the public sphere. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of the objectification

of the wives and prostitutes with the illusions of female empowerment (with characters such as *Lysistrata* or *Praxagora*) makes Aristophanic comedy a prime opportunity to study the dynamics of early representations of gender.

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