IBADAN JOURNAL OF THEATRE ARTS (NOS 7&8) 2011/2012

THE ARTIFICE OF LYSISTRATA AND THE PLIGHT OF HELLENIC WOMEN IN ARISTOPHANES' *LYSISTRATA*

Olakunbi O.Olasope

Abstract

This essay discusses the subtlety of ancient Greek women in restoring peace that had eluded Hellas for many years, without apparently condemning war. It is based on the comedy, ***Lysistrata*** *of Aristophanes. Aristophanes satirises the weakness of the male sex in ending the war between Athens and Sparta, and comments on the strength and canniness of the female sex, who has been stereotyped as weak, inferior, and with insatiable appetite for sex; also on their feminist candour in defining an end to the war. Aristophanes elevates the status of Greek women by creating female characters that can control their libido and resist male sexual overtures and domination. In* ***Lysistrata****, the women are deprived of sex as a result of the Peloponnesian War. As a form of 'quid pro quo' to force the men to a ceasefire and embrace peace, the women, with Lysistrata as their leader, occupy the Acropolis where the treasury of the Greek poleis is located and from which the war is funded, and also agree to refuse marital sex until and unless the men invoke peace.*

This paper scrutinizes the resilience of the female gender, as a tool for societal change. The women's sex-strike and seizure of the treasury on the Acropolis force the belligerent men to sign a pact to end the war, which has lasted 27 years. The play continues to influence movements for change in various theatres of war, and has led to disarmament movements such as The Lysistrata Project (a peace project initiative on Iraq). The main thesis of this paper is to explore the role of women in the 'battle of the sexes' and how women use different ploys to highlight their argument and proffer mutually beneficial solutions.

Keywords: Artifice, Lysistrata, Hellenic Women, Aristophanes.

Introduction

The period leading up to the first performance of *Lysistrata* is one of the most complex in Athenian history. Athens had been at war since 431 BC, along with other *poleis*, which constituted the Athenian empire in the Peloponnesian War. As the Athenians held supremacy at sea and the Spartan Confederacy on land, the war had been inconclusive. Indeed, in 421 BC, a treaty was signed, which led to the so-called peace lasting eight years, but which was, in fact, similar to a cold war, with each side becoming increasingly involved in proxy wars (Stuttard, 2010:2). In 415 BC, Athens sent a large expeditionary force to Sicily with the intention of defeating the island's richest city, Syracuse. But, the expedition failed. One of the three generals, Alcibiades, was summoned back to Athens to stand trial on the capital charge of sacrilege. However, he escaped to Sparta, where he divulged information advantageous to the enemy. Another of the generals was killed, and the third, who had resisted the expedition from the start, mishandled it completely. A further task force was sent out, but events deteriorated. First, the Athenian navy, then the army, was annihilated. When the news of this defeat at the hands of the Spartans reached home in September 413 BC, many Athenians felt that it was an inevitable conclusion owing to the incompetence with which the campaign was managed (Stuttard, 2010:3).

This series of events led to the writing of *Lysistrata* and its performance the following year at the Lenaea, one of two annual Athenian religious festivals of drama sacred to the god Dionysus (Stuttard, 2010:1). The real-life war is absorbed by Aristophanes into the fictional world of *Lysistrata* and provides the backdrop to – and indeed the motivation – for the women's sex-strike (Robson, 2010: 53).

Synopsis of the Play

Lysistrata demonstrates a world turned upside down by depicting men as subject to the power of women. This gender dichotomy then reverberates in the play with more divisions among the women: they are

explicitly divided into young and old. The older women are honourable and easily succeed in their task; the young women, on the other hand, are shown to be bibulous and incontinent (Gilhuly, 2009:58). Women act male roles, including lining up in battle formation like soldiers, defending the Akropolis and participating in political debates, acts from which women are usually excluded. This role reversal is seen as a key element of the festival, with its temporary suspension of social hierarchy, public humiliation of powerful figures as an exercise of democratic freedom, and a check on the dominance of powerful figures that is almost synonymous to ostracism or banishment from the seat of power (Sommerstein, 1990:4).

The plot is simple: weary of war, Lysistrata, an Athenian woman, organises a secret conference at which she persuades not only the other Athenian wives, but also representatives from the wives of other warring city-states in the Peloponnesian war, to forswear sexual intercourse with their husbands until the men agree to end the war. The foreign wives depart after the consensus, and Lysistrata, with the Athenian wives, seizes and occupies the Akropolis. The occupation leads to the total collapse of efforts by men to prosecute the war as the state's wealth reserves are kept at the Akropolis, and this is now in the possession of the women (Dover, 1972:151).

There are two semi-choruses in this play. The two groups attack each other, indicating societal conflict. The first chorus, of old men, arrives at the Propylaia laden with fire-pots and wood; having heard of the seizure of the Akropolis, they have come to burn down the door and smoke the women out to reclaim the symbol of masculine authority. Before they can put this plan into effect, however, a chorus of old women arrives from the opposite direction, carrying water with the threat of quenching the men's fire. After an exchange between the two choruses, the men threaten the women with their torches and the women repulse them. Further strife is averted by the arrival of Proboulos, one of a commission of elderly and distinguished citizens appointed in autumn of 413, in the aftermath of the Sicilian disaster, to maintain a judicious control of the economy (Dover, 1972:150).

Proboulos is full of indignation at the occupation of the Akropolis by the women, an act he blames on the complacent permissiveness of modern husbands. When Lysistrata, with other women, comes out to confront him, he orders his policemen to arrest them, but the police are routed by these Amazons, and Lysistrata and Proboulos are left to engage in a verbal contest, the former backed by the women's chorus and the latter by the men's (Dover, 1972:151). Lysistrata contends that women have come to realise that they have more sense than men and will rectify the situation. Proboulos, bursting with indignation, unwisely says that war is 'nothing to do with women', and Lysistrata trenchantly retorts, women contribute sons:

> **Lysistrata**: Why, you damned fool, we have to endure it in double quantity, in the first place because we've born sons and sent them out as soldiers.
> **Proboulos**: Quiet! Don't bear malice!
> **Lysistrata**: Secondly, when we ought to be enjoying life and getting the best out of our youth, we sleep alone, because of all the expeditions. And it doesn't matter so much about *us* – it's the girls growing old indoors that I'm worried about.
> **Proboulos**: Don't men grow old too?
> **Lysistrata**: Why, it's not the same thing! Anyone who comes back, even if his hair's grey, is married to a girl in no time: but a woman doesn't have her chance for long, and if she hasn't managed to grasp it no one wants to marry her, she sits at home watching for omens.
> (MacDowell, 1995:239; *Lysistrata* 588-597)

The women contemptuously thrust articles of their dress and spinning implements on Proboulos and send him away (MacDowell, 1995:239; Dover, 1972:151).

News of the success of the women's conspiracy at Sparta reaches the women through the arrival of a Spartan herald, complete with an unrelieved erection, to announce his country's intention to entreat for

peace. Just before the Spartan legation arrives, the two choruses also become reconciled; the old women taking the initiative in a sentimental way, and the old men sullenly acquiescing (1038f.): And how right the old saying is: '(*sc. We can live*) neither with you – damn you! – nor without you – damn you!' Lysistrata reprimands both sides for their betrayal of their common religious and cultural heritage and for their forgetfulness of ancient favours conferred by Athens and Sparta on each other. Their eyes dwelling on the anatomy of Reconciliation, they make concessions with little resistance, and peace is assured. While the chorus sings, Athenians and Spartans go into the Akropolis to feast and drink, their more obvious physical need now entirely forgotten. When they come out from the feast, it is a Spartan, not the chorus, who utters the last words of the play (*Lysistrata 1320f*; Dover, 1972:153)

> Hymn the goddess,
> mightiest, invincible
> goddess of the House of Bronze[1].

The Backbone of *Lysistrata*

The household and its women are shown to embody the stable core of Athenian life, both civic and religious. Women seize the Akropolis and the treasury so that the men would not have access to money to fund the war. The women do not take power from the men and become rulers, but only obstruct the men in order to safeguard the state's money until the men come to their senses. Their conspiracy is designed to protect the men and the *polis*; it is unselfish and temporary and relies not on magical or supernatural mechanisms but only on the traditional skills, attributes and prerogatives peculiar to their gender: domestic management, care of kin, and procreation (Henderson, 2010:40). And just as a wife might protect the household money from a spendthrift husband, Lysistrata bars the magistrate's access to the treasury. Incredible, too, are the strength,

[1] Athena, the patron goddess of Athens, was worshipped at Sparta with the cult-title 'of the House of Bronze'.

independence and discipline displayed by the women compared to the weakness, dependency and rapid capitulation of the men: a reversal of prevailing gender stereotypes (Henderson, 2000:258). The strength of the play lies in its projection of women's characteristic roles outside the domestic sphere. Aristophanes assimilates the polis to the individual household, and Lysistrata converts the Akropolis into a household for all women citizens. Its exclusivity turns the tables on the men, who have neglected their wives and excluded them from policy-making (Henderson, 2000:258).

Lysistrata is filled with women circulating in the public sphere; they outwit and defeat the men. There is a startling contrast between what the women are going to do and the failures of the males in politics – an exclusively masculine preserve. The first, and the more prominent in the play as a whole, is the boycotting of sexual relations. This campaign is prosecuted by the younger married women of Athens and Sparta, such as Kalonice, Myrrhine and Lampito. Its effects on the men become manifest for the first time in the Kinesias-Myrrhine scene, which is immediately followed by the first moves towards negotiations for peace (Sommerstein, 1990:3). Its perceptible symbol is the erect phallus. The men cannot be affected by the women's action when they are not at home: men away on campaigns would not be affected by their wives' abstention at home; anyway, other forms of sexual activity, such as prostitution, pederasty, masturbation would remain available. But in the fantasy world of the play, such contradictions and omissions are more amusing for their boldness than worrying for their illogicality. Aristophanes naturally ignores those difficulties for the sake of the comic idea of a sex-strike and the comic sight of the men's frustrated priapism in later scenes (Beale, 2010: 64).

But Lysistrata has another plan too, which she suddenly brings out in response to an objection by Lampito; Lampito thinks that she and the other Spartan women can persuade their husbands to make peace, but that the Athenian democracy will never give up the war as long as there is enough money in the treasury on the Akropolis to maintain the

Athenian navy. So, the older Athenian women use their role in civic ritual to seize the Akropolis where the financial reserves of the state are kept with the intention of denying Athens the resources to sustain the fight. Unlike the sexual strike, this is a purely Athenian action. It is carried out in the first instance by old women who cannot take part in the strike, as they are no longer sexually active; but once they have occupied the Akropolis, the younger Athenian women soon join them there. The dramatic climaxes of this aspect of the action are two assaults on the Akropolis, first by the old men of the chorus and then by Magistrate and his assistants. Its primary symbol is the Akropolis (Sommerstein, 1990:3-4).

Although the two schemes are distinct in conception and in dramatic treatment, they are not isolated from each other. Lysistrata is in charge of both. From 252, the Akropolis is the headquarters of both – the citadel of the virgin goddess, whose siege (conducted with quasi-phallic weapons – the old men's logs, the magistrate's crowbars) can be seen as an attempted rape. The play ends with the successive resolution of both themes, the admission of men to the Akropolis – not to take out money to be used for war purposes, but to share in a feast of reconciliation cutting across both political and gender boundaries – being followed by the formal re-uniting of husbands and wives (Sommerstein, 1990:3-4).

In a sense, the play actually has a triple plot. The battle of the sexes that forms the actors' part of the play, centred on the two themes of the sexual strike and the occupation of the Akropolis, is paralleled by another battle taking place in the orchestra between the (semi) choruses of old men and old women, a battle which ends in a reconciliation that precedes and prefigures the greater reconciliation to come. After the initial assault on the Akropolis by the men and its repulse by the women, the choruses take no part in either the "strike-plot" or the "occupation-plot" but, instead, confront each other in a conflict of words and symbolic action, which, after the half-way point of the play, steadily de-escalates until two unilateral acts of kindness by the women herald its end (Sommerstein, 1990:4-5).

Lysistrata and the Goddesses

Aristophanes respects his culture's strict separation of public and private duties. In order to portray his women in a plausible way outside the household, he associates them with the cults of goddesses. In real life, these provided the only realistic avenue from which his women could publicly confront men (Henderson, 2010:27). In her possession of the most admired attributes of power, wisdom, and statesmanship, in her dual role as defender of home and polis, in her acquaintance with both domestic and martial arts, in her Pan-Hellenic outlook, in her advocacy of internal solidarity, in her self-discipline and immunity to sexual temptation, in her appeal to young and old, and in her close connection with the Acropolis, Lysistrata finds her closest analogue in Athena herself (Henderson 2000:260). This is one of the reasons for the occupation of the Akropolis. The women occupy the Akropolis precisely because it is a pure place, where it is not possible to succumb to the desires of love without being impious. It is the ban against entering the Akropolis when defiled by a sexual encounter that Myrrhine uses to counter the advances of the impatient Kinesias when she says: "and how could I return in purity to the Akropolis?" (Loraux, 1996:161).

Aphrodite is the goddess of the race of women, and Athena is the civic divinity. Aphrodite and Athena's powers are implied in the Athenian institution of marriage, which integrates the female *genos* in the city. When it comes to marriage, Aphrodite presides over this institution in every city in collaboration with the civic deity or with the dominant divine figure. Aphrodite dominates the *genos* of women because of her place as the goddess of desire and sensual pleasure (Loraux 1996: 170-171). Women are caught between "the race of women" and the city, just as they are caught between Aphrodite and Athena. Aphrodite is found at the foot of the Akropolis in Athens, and Athena is at the very summit. The race of women and the city, the first of these elements, is devoted to Aphrodite; the second element, when it refers to Athens, is under the authority of Athena. Truly, the patron

goddess of this play is Athena. Between Aphrodite and Athena, then, we find the women of Athens (Loraux, 1996: 147,149).

Lysistrata describes the taking of the city by the women of Athens. This is not an oddity in itself as an act, since everything points to an opposition between Athena and Aphrodite, starting with the inflexible resistance that the Parthenos sets up against the law of desire. But while she herself refuses to submit to Aphrodite's power, Athena knows how to make a place for the goddess of *philotes* in her city; she welcomes her on the very slopes of the Akropolis (Loraux, 1996:149). On the side of the Propylaea, Aphrodite is found with Peitho (Persuasion) and on the side of the Erechtheion, her place is in the sanctuary of the Gardens, where she is linked to Eros. The female Athenian unquestionably understood that Aphrodite's power was, in no way, incompatible with Athena's authority, and perhaps the Athenian man shared this view. In fact, Lysistrata's plan actually involves putting each goddess in the service of the other. Indeed, the secession onto the Akropolis, under the protection of the Parthenos, is supposed to arouse men's desire and quite effectively does so, but arousing desire in order to restore marriage and all of its rights must also mean striving for the good of Athena's city. To use Athena in the service of Aphrodite and Aphrodite in the service of Athena is a feminine way of serving the city, a method that functions right in the midst of the constant friction between *genos gynaikon* and *polis* (Loraux, 1996: 149, 151).

Athena, as a *parthenos* and the goddess of the *polis*, presides over the civic adolescence of the young girls of Athens, and the female Athenians entrenched on the Akropolis earnestly commend themselves to her protection. Thus, the chorus of women naturally calls her to help them against the assaults of the old men:

> O Goddess, let me never see my companions become the prey of flames, But let them deliver Greece and my fellow citizens from war and folly; it is to that end, o goddess with the golden helmet-crest, protectress of the City, that they have occupied their dwelling place. And I call upon you as an ally, o

> Tritogeneia; if any man sets fire to them, come, join us in bringing water (*Lysistrata*, 341-49).

Known as Chrysolopha ("of the golden crest"), Athena is Pheidias' chryselephantine Parthenos. And she is *polliouchos*, the Polias, (guardian of the city) honoured in the "ancient temple" – the Erechtheion – which was just being completed in the year 411. As Tritogeneia, the goddess of Lake Triton, she is invited to join the women in pouring water on the old men. Faced with the old men, who have intended to annex Athena for themselves in the double role as Polias and Nike, the women respond by integrating the goddess into their group (Loraux, 1996:172).

But Athena, as the protector of the city, could not be indifferent to marriage or sexual union, which ensures reproduction by the continued existence of Athens; nor, as Lysistrata and her companions believe, could their goddess be indifferent to peace. In the final scene, the goddess of Athens fades, as a sign of an *entente cordiale*, and is replaced by the Spartan Athena, the "sovereign with the temple of bronze", the consummate warrior-woman, Chalkioikos. Meanwhile, the chorus of Athenian men praises Aphrodite. There has been an understanding, then, between the Parthenos and the mistress of desire (Loraux, 1996: 172-73).

Kypris, however, is also the civic goddess of *concordia* in *Lysistrata* when peace is re-established both between the sexes and between Sparta and Athens and when marriage unites the couples once again, bringing together Athenians (and the "couple" of Athens and Sparta). The chorus calls together a whole procession of divinities for the glory of peace (Ησυχια), work of the goddess Κυπισ (Loraux, 1996:171-172).

D.M. Lewis asserts that, when *Lysistrata* was produced, the position of priestess of Athena Polias – the highest appointment that any Athenian woman could hold – was occupied by a woman named Lysimache. Not only is this name strikingly similar to that of Lysistrata both in form and in meaning, but also, in the play itself, the heroine

expresses her confidence when she is addressing Magistrate: she says that since women desire men and men desire women, then she and her female comrades will be successful in their aims and 'be known amongst the Greeks as *Lysimaches*, 'the women who put a stop to the fighting' (*Lysistrata* 551-4). This explains the remarkable admiration shown towards Lysistrata by the male characters in the latter part of the play, and for the breach in her case of the convention – strictly observed throughout Greek comedy – shows that a free man neither addresses nor refers to a respectable living woman by name in public (Sommerstein, 1990: 5). It helps to link the heroine with the power and wisdom of Athena, with the reverence and affection felt by Athenians for their patron goddess, and with the oldest religious traditions of their city. So, it promotes in the audience the feeling that her cause is justified, and that, though the women under her leadership break through the bonds of the married state and home life, the rules of conventional decency and all the norms of womanly behaviour in Athenian society, they do so in the service of higher and divinely sanctioned principles. The object of this is not that of disrupting but of reintegrating households and communities and a Greek world disrupted by war, which fully deserves the triumph they achieve (Sommerstein, 1990:5-6).

Therefore, Lysistrata is a sophisticated and complex figure, who shares features with several other women both in Greek myth and cult, and in social reality (Hall, 2010: 29). There are other strong similarities between Lysistrata, the heroine of the comedy, and the role of the priestess of Athena Polias at Athens. The priestess had a residence on the Akropolis and could not be married: I assume that is the reason Lysistrata never seems to speak specifically of a husband, children or household of her own, and her nonchalant attitude to sex. The priestess of Athena had the duty of organising the preparation of sacred banquets: Lysistrata invites the Athenian and Spartan negotiators to a ritual meal to ratify their treaty (*Lysistrata* 1181-7). Like the priestess of Athena who, nearly a century before, had stood up to the Spartan invaders, Lysistrata is totally fearless in the face of male violence: she is not afraid of the men attacking the barricaded Akropolis (248-51), she wards off the

thuggish Scythian sent to arrest her (431-6), and, like Athena in a Homeric battle, utters the battle cry to bring the battalions of women out of the Akropolis (*Lysistrata* 456-65; Hall, 2010: 33).

The priestess of Athena also had an extraordinary degree of public power: unlike other women, she could seek legal redress in court and be charged with offences herself. Lysistrata is also an expert at weaving, as she shows in the extended metaphor by which she conceives the organising and administering of the state as a process of textile production – the weaving of a cloak (667-86). Athena was herself, of course, the goddess of weaving in her role as Athena *Ergane*, 'Athena of handicrafts'. But even more significantly, weaving was a central duty of the goddess' high priestess. She trained the female teenage attendants who officiated in the cult, including the two specially selected high-born girls who were chosen to live on the Akropolis for the nine months leading up to the Panathenaea (the great summer festival of Athena). These two girls, called the *arrephoroi*, had to weave the new gown for the goddess' statue, and to supervise eleven younger girls who helped them in this arduous task. It is significant that the chorus of *Lysistrata* remember fulfilling the role of *arrephoros* in their younger days (638-41; Hall, 2010: 33-34).

Role Reversal in *Lysistrata*

The concept of reversal is central to the play: reversal of roles between women and men. The women appropriate masculine functions. Even more arresting than the women's usurpation of the military sphere is their appropriation of control of sexual relations within marriage when the women from all over Greece boycott marital sex. They take their oath not over the customary shield, but over a wine cup and they pour wine into it, not blood. These substitutions thrust home the comedy's plea for peace. The women become soldiers, seizing the Akropolis, arming themselves and taking control of the treasury so that the war can no longer be funded. They make the chorus of old men retreat in defeat, and they take initiatives in effecting reconciliation (Morwood, 2010:22-23).

In a similar pattern of reversal, Lysistrata liberates the women from male oppression; indeed, the women become the oppressors (Morwood, 2010:25). She uses the weapons of femininity and accoutrements of seduction: saffron-coloured tunics, perfumes, and transparent little blouses to frustrate the desire of the men. The boundary between exalting the word *gyne* and the institution of the inverted world, in which men pass into female hands, is a very thin line indeed. The old men are not mistaken, and the commissioner of the people gets the worst of it: while the conspirators laugh, he is invited to don all the symbols of femininity himself, which is the most prized jewel that adorns womankind. "War will be women's business", the conquest of the Akropolis is exactly what it seems to the old men: a seizure of power in the purest tradition of archaic tyranny (Loraux 1996: 156-57).

Lysistrata is about mankind's impulse for sexual union, and about overcoming every barrier to achieve it. The women refuse to have sexual intercourse with their men, creating a frustration in the men. Hostilities ensue. The bravest of women, Lysistrata, determines that there is only one way to end war forever. She calls a convention for women only and makes them swear to give up love. Dressed for seduction and armed to the teeth, they beat off their men and refuse to sleep with them until the fighting has ceased. When the men can bear their abstinence no longer, they enter into negotiations. But, no matter how strong the will, the flesh is sometimes weak, and it is impossible to keep the women from joining the men. Harmony between the sexes is restored and, with it, sexual relations. In Aristophanes' equation, the restoration of sexual relations between men and women equals the restoration of peace between the warring states (Stuttard, 2010: 6-7). The play ends with, not an orgy, but an invocation by Spartans and Athenians of the whole pantheon. Eros and Sophia, sex and wisdom, join as the civilising force of love (Parker, 1964:3).

The corollary of all this is that the men of the play are emasculated, a fact paradoxically emphasised by the painfulness of the useless erect phalli in the second half of the play. Kleisthenes is a figure poised between the masculine and feminine. And before being dressed as

a corpse, Proboulos is costumed as a woman (Morwood, 2010: 23). The scene of Proboulos completes the political overthrow of male authority. His failure to acknowledge that the women are in control and his insistence on their subservience leads to a comic reversal, as he is unceremoniously dragged into the fantasy world and into a woman's role: Lysistrata's veil is put round his head, he is given a basket and told to start carding wool. Lysistrata also offers Proboulos advice on the conduct of affairs in terms of the quintessential domestic and female activity of woolworking (574ff.). The metaphor is absolutely appropriate (Beale, 2010: 66-67).

The sex-strike has worked, but Kinesias' capitulation is not complete until, in the scene with the Spartan Herald who arrives in a similar distended condition, it finally dawns on him that it is an international conspiracy. At that point he sends the Herald off to Sparta to arrange for delegates to be sent to conclude a peace settlement while he himself will ask the Council in Athens. With men routed by women in battle, politics reduced to wool working; husbands afflicted with permanent priapism; (Beale, 2010: 68-69) the loss and the deprivation endured by the women, virgin spinsters growing old, indeed too old for marriage. The two plans seem at first to be complementary: the younger women stage the sex-strike, the older women, no longer attractive to men, will control the treasury. When the Akropolis is taken, Lysistrata and her Athenian comrades go to occupy it themselves (Beale, 2010: 68-69).

LAMPITO: What cry was that?
LYSISTRATA: Exactly what I said.
The Goddess's Akropolis has now
Been taken by the women, Lampito,
You go off home and make arrangements
there,

But leave these women here as
hostages. We'll go inside and help the other
women
To bar the gates of the Akropolis
(*Lysistrata* 240-6)

Women and Peace

Lysistrata has been adjudged a satirical invective against women by some scholars, and they can point to many parts of the play where a woman, or the female sex, in general, is the object of a joke. Obviously, the audience is expected to laugh at the women's keenness on sexual intercourse and their reluctance to give it up, especially when Lysistrata first propounds her plan. They are also mocked for being bibulous, for example, when they use wine to confirm the oath which Lysistrata administers to them. Kalonike and Myrrhine, after regarding the plan with reluctance, suddenly become enthusiastic when they see what form the oath is going to take. More generally, Aristophanes seems to mock their naivety, their preoccupation with trivialities and their use of weak excuses, which come to the fore when several of them want to leave the Akropolis and go home to their husbands (MacDowell, 1995:246).

WOMAN: O Ileithya, hold my baby back
Until I've got outside the sacred
place!
LYSISTRATA: What's all this nonsense?
WOMAN: I'm just giving birth
LYSISTRATA: What, you? But you weren't
pregnant yesterday.
WOMAN: I am today. Quick, send me home
at once
To the midwife!

(MacDowell,1995:247;*Lysistrata*742-7)

Aristophanes seems to be laughing at women from an external viewpoint, which is what one might expect in a play written by a male

author and performed by male actors for a male audience. There is at least one passage in which he invites the men's sympathy for women: because of the war, young women miss their chance of getting husbands, while those already married lose their husbands or sons. Throughout the debate between Lysistrata and Proboulos, it is the woman who appears sensible, while the man does not. It, therefore, seems quite reasonable for Lysistrata to complain at the men's refusal to listen when the women offer good advice (MacDowell, 1995:247).

Lysistrata is indeed a dignified figure that commands respect throughout the play, and her dignity is not undermined when she occasionally makes a humorous or cynical remark. In the choral passages, too, the women come off better than the men: early in the play, it is the men who are made to look foolish by being drenched, and in subsequent songs it is always the old men who first deliver some blustering threat and the old women who then cap it and have the last word, never the other way round. There is a persistent implication that domestic tasks, performed by women, are carried on more efficiently than political affairs, for which the men are responsible. This becomes explicit when Lysistrata maintains that the men ought to handle the citizens in the same way as the women handle wool. Furthermore, if we accept that the women represent the traditional religion of Athens, that is another feature likely to attract the audience's sympathy (MacDowell, 1995:247-248).

Thus, Aristophanes sometimes laughs at women and sometimes supports them. As a whole, the play is neither a feminist manifesto nor a misogynistic jeer. Even if this is the first play in which he makes extensive use of women for his comic and dramatic purpose, that purpose is not to make a point about women. He is certainly not advocating that women should be given political responsibility or power. In fact, in this play, the women do not take political power or action. The object of the sex-strike and of the seizure of the Akropolis is, rather, to induce the men to take action. Even Lysistrata's comparison of politics to wool-work advocates a programme which she says men, not women, ought to carry

out. At the end of the play, she does not impose a peace-treaty; she merely persuades the men on both sides to make one (MacDowell, 1995: 248).

The main theme of the play, then, is not women, and not citizenship. It is peace. Fourteen years after the *Akharnians*, Aristophanes is still upholding peace as the goal at which the Athenians ought to be aiming. This is reinforced by Aristophanes' skilful blending of the political and domestic themes. In the first half of the play, when Athens is at war with Sparta, the women are at odds with the men. Just as Athens makes no headway against Sparta, so too the men's pugnacity is ineffective against the women. In the second half of the play, the men, represented by Kinesias, try persuasion instead. Kinesias' main motive is, of course, sexual satisfaction, but he has a few lines which seem to reflect more widely on the pain of marital separation: he takes no pleasure in life since his wife's exit from home, 'and everything seems empty to me now' (865-8). His attempt to win over Myrrhine fails; but as soon as the first steps are taken towards reconciliation on the political level, there is also reconciliation between the old men and women of the chorus. The lines here are attributed to the two semi-choruses, but probably only one woman and one man speak on behalf of them all. The woman takes the initiative and gradually overcomes the man's surly grumpiness. First, she comes and puts back on to him the tunic that he has taken off to prepare for a fight (MacDowell,1995:248-249).The excerpt below captures the foregoing analysis:

> **WOMAN:** If you hadn't so upset me, I'd do something else for you: I'd have caught this little creature in your eye, and got it out.
> **MAN:** Oh, so that's the thing that's killing me! Look, take this ring of mine; Poke it out with that, and when you've got it, show me what it is. It's been there for ages now, by Zeus, and biting at my eye!
> **WOMAN:** Well, I will, although you don't deserve it, you bad-tempered man! Look at that! Zeus, what a monstrous gnat

> it is you've got in there! There! You see it? Don't you think this gnat's a Trikorysian?
> **MAN:** That's a real good turn you've done me. It's been digging wells in me. All this time, and now it's out my eyes are watering so much!
> **WOMAN:** Let me wipe them; I'll soon dry them, though you are a naughty man. And I'll kiss you -
> **MAN:** No, don't kiss me!
> **WOMAN:** If you want me to or not!
> **MAN:** Well, I hope you have bad luck, then! What a coaxing lot you are! That old saying's right, the poet understood it very well: 'Deadly pests are they to live with, deadly pests to live without'. Still, I make my peace with you now, and for all the time to come I shan't do you any harm, and you will do no harm to me.
>
> (*Lysistrata* 1025-41).

This is an emotional passage, but very effective in conveying the compromise needed for a happy marriage. It is followed by the scene of political reconciliation and finally by the songs about Sparta and Athens as allies in the past, with men and women dancing together. Hence, the theme of personal and domestic harmony between women and men enhances the theme of ending the war, which is the principal focus of the play (MacDowell, 1995: 250).

Conclusion

In sum, Aristophanes employs socio-political satire as a symbolic ingredient in this play. He intends to remind the menfolk of the crucial role women play in the maintenance and success of institutions even though the depiction of women in comedy is far from complimentary, a common misogynist charge in ancient Greece which articulates itself in an insatiable appetite for alcohol, poison and sex. This portrayal is, however, complicated by the fact that there is one single female figure in preserved comedy who is curiously exempt from most of these stock

characteristics: Lysistrata. Nowadays, one would probably pinpoint women's desire for sex and money, never knowing which to place first.

References

Beale, A. (2010) "Fantasy and Plot in *Lysistrata*". in *Looking at Lysistratra*. Ed. Stuttard, D. London and New York: Bristol Classical Press.

Dover, K.J (1972) *Aristophanic Comedy*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press

Faraone Christopher & McClure Laura (eds.) (2006) *Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World*. Wisconsin, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Foley, Helen P. (ed.)(1993) *Reflections of Women in Antiquity*. London and New York, Routledge.

Gilhuly, Kate (2009) *The Feminine Matrix of Sex and Gender in Classical Athens*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hall, E. (2010) "The Many Faces of *Lysistrata*". In *Looking at Lysistratra*. Ed. Stuttard, D. London and New York, Bristol Classical Press.

Hardwick, L. (2010) "*Lysistrata* on the Modern Stage". In *Looking at Lysistratra*. Ed. Stuttard, D. London and New York: Bristol Classical Press.

Henderson, Jeffrey tr.& ed.(2000) *Loeb Classical Library ARISTOPHANES*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: Harvard University Press.

Henderson, Jeffrey (2010) *Three Plays by Aristophanes: Staging Women*. London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group

Lacey, W.K (1968). *The Family in Classical Greece*. London: The Camelot Press Ltd.

Lewis, D.M (1955) "Notes on Attic Inscriptions (II): Who Was Lysistrata?" Annual of the British School at Athens 50:1-12.

Loraux, Nicole (1996) tr. Carole Levine, *Children of Athena*. Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

MacDowell, D. M. (1995) *Aristophanes and Athens: An Introduction to the Plays*. Oxford: University Press.

Morwood, J. (2010) The Upside-down World of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. In Looking at Lysistratra. Ed. Stuttard, D. London and New York: Bristol Classical Press.

Parker, Douglas tr. (1964) *Aristophanes Lysistrata*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press

Revermann,M. (2010) On Misunderstanding the *Lysistrata*, Productively. In *Looking at Lysistratra*. Ed. Stuttard, D. London and New York: Bristol Classical Press.

Robson, J. (2010) Friends and Foes: The People of *Lysistrata*. In *Looking at Lysistratra*. Ed. Stuttard, D. London and New York: Bristol Classical Press.

Segal, Erich (1996) Oxford Readings in Aristophanes. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sommerstein, A.H. (ed.) (1990) LYSISTRATA. The Comedies of Aristophanes Vol. 7, Warminster: Aries and Phillips Ltd.

Sommerstein, A.H. (2010) *Lysistrata* the Warrior. In *Looking at Lysistratra. Ed. Stuttard, D.* London and New York: Bristol Classical Press.

Stuttard, David (2010) Looking at Lysistrata. London and New York: Bristol Classical Press.

Taaffe, Lauren, K (1993) Aristophanes and Women. London and New York: Routledge.

Walton, M.J. (2010) Where is the Spine? In *Looking at Lysistratra*. Ed. Stuttard, D. London and New York: Bristol Classical Press.