

Lysistrata

INTRODUCTION

The comic heart of *Lysistrata*, and the secret of its lasting appeal, lies in its combination, interweaving, and ultimately its confusion of a pair of archetypal human interests: sex and war. The play's brio stems from the evocation of a great and oversimplified dichotomy of the kind which Aristophanes had already exploited to some extent in *Acharnians* (425) and *Peace* (421). This dichotomy aligns sex, and indeed comedy itself, with the life-giving, procreative, and celebratory associations of peace, and sets this cluster of ideas against the negative, disruptive, and destructive effects of war. If we wanted a suggestive slogan to sum up this imaginatively enlarged and (in both senses of the word) theatrically polarized contrast, it might be: war is tragic, peace is comic.

It is arguable, as I shall later suggest in more detail, that the perspective on war which *Lysistrata* offered its first audience in 411, probably at the Lenaia festival (early February that year), had little explicit contact with the military or political realities of the time. In early 411 Athens was making strenuous efforts to rebuild her military strength after the devastating defeat, involving massive losses of both men and ships, suffered by the great expedition sent to Sicily in 415–413. The results of that defeat, in September 413, were intensified by the presence, from spring 413, of a permanent Spartan garrison at Dekeleia, affecting land access to Attika from the north and engaging in periodic plundering (see *Lysistrata* 1146, with Thucydides 7.19, 27). Another pressing factor was that by 412 several of Athens' allies, including Miletos (cf. *Lysistrata* 108), had attempted to secede from the empire. In addition, the Spartans were now building up their own fleet, with the help of Persian funds, to match the Athenian navy in size at least. Yet mass reaction at Athens to the Sicilian débâcle, or to these other developments, showed little interest in making peace. On the contrary, the city voted to make use of a special financial reserve of a thousand talents which had been deposited on the Akropolis in 431.¹ Money was there, in other words, to rebuild the fleet, and the political will

¹ Aristophanes' plot does incorporate one realistic reflection of the economics of this situation: the women's occupation of the Akropolis is designed to prevent further spending of the city's financial reserves (cf. esp. 488).

was there to fight on doggedly. It was probably the democracy's determination to renew the war effort with economic abandon which most prompted a group of disenchanting Athenians to respond to approaches from the exiled Alkibiades in the winter of 412–411, and to make plans for constitutional restrictions on the democratic system. We cannot be sure what stage these plans, which led to an oligarchic *coup* in the spring of 411, had reached by the date of *Lysistrata*'s performance. Rumours at least are likely to have been in circulation, since the would-be reformers had made an initial statement to the army in Samos in December 412 (Thucydides 8.48.2–3). But the play itself, which would have been in advanced preparation by that date, contains nothing which can safely be regarded as hinting at contemporary tensions or forebodings.² Its scenario does indeed presuppose an entrenched commitment to war on the part of Athenian (and other Greek) males; but the solution which it produces to the continuing conflict with Sparta emerges from a decidedly unexpected and 'alternative' source of initiative.

Lysistrata connects the war/peace dichotomy with the age-old functional opposition of the sexes whereby the men go out to fight while the women stay at home and wait to see if their husbands and sons will return alive. It is the women's dissatisfaction with this state of affairs which *Lysistrata* concentrates into her double scheme of a 'sex-strike' and an occupation of the Akropolis. But while this creates a scenario which involves a kind of 'battle of the sexes', the women's aim is purely and simply to bring the war to an end and thereby to restore a world of peace in which marital harmony and erotic fulfilment (which they interestingly regard as interlocking) can prevail. Unlike their counterparts in the later *Assembly-Women* (393), the women of *Lysistrata* do not seek a permanent change in the balance of power between the sexes. They want a return to normality in their married and family lives.

² Most telling is the fact that Peisandros (see Index of Names), leader of the *coup* in 411, is the subject at *Lysistrata* 490 of a gibe normal in comedy for demagogic politicians. The allusion at 1048 is too vague to tell us anything. Nor could Aristophanes' women be regarded in more general terms as an analogue to possible political revolutionaries: apart from anything else, the oligarchs in 411 did not *at first* think of making peace (Thucydides 8.48.1, 63.4). See the Select Bibliography for further reading on the play's chronological context, with my notes on 490, 578, 1048.

Critics have often tried to discover in the play the expression of serious insights into relations between the sexes in Athens, especially *vis-à-vis* the experience of war. *Lysistrata*, as we shall see, does contain some thought-provoking passages on its twin themes of sex and war, but the way in which it runs these themes together is also the reason why its treatment of them leaves us, as I shall contend, with nothing more solid than an alluring fantasy. As in both of Aristophanes' previous 'war plays', *Acharnians* and *Peace*, the root of the fantasy is the notion that conflict with Sparta could be ended by a solution which completely bypasses the reality of military campaigns and the complexities of political negotiations between states. In all three cases, moreover, the solution has a strongly personal and even 'domestic' cast to it: Dikaiopolis' private peace, restricted to his own family, in *Acharnians*; Trygaios' personal journey up to Olympos in *Peace*; and Lysistrata's plan of compelling Athenian, Spartan, and other troops to make peace by denying them sexual gratification from their wives.

The broad sweep of *Lysistrata*'s action, whereby the women use both a seizure of funds on the Akropolis and a suspension of marital sex to compel their husbands to accept peace, is complicated by the various inconsistencies which appear, on closer inspection, in the details of the plot. Most obvious of these is the fact that the women initially complain how military service takes their husbands away from home (99–107), so that the city is allegedly empty of males (107); yet the idea of a sex-strike implies—as the later Kinesias scene exemplifies, and other references (e.g. 17, 555–64) confirm—the presence of men after all.³ At its acutest, the potential contradiction which lurks here amounts to the notion that it is precisely the women's lack of sex (107–110) which motivates their sex-strike! A further oddity is that the opening scene of the play seems to posit a situation in which the younger wives will participate in the sex-strike in their homes (149–66, 217 ff.), while the older women, who are no longer sexually active, occupy the Akropolis (177–9). Yet in the upshot, Lysistrata and the others all go inside the Akropolis, and there is only one later passage which alludes to the motif of a domestic refusal of sex (551–4). As the scenes after the parabasis demonstrate (706 ff.), and in keeping with the idea that the women themselves find sexual abstinence

³ The male chorus and the Commissioner are a different matter, of course: they represent men who are both over fighting-age and past their sexual prime.

near-impossible, *Lysistrata*'s plan eventually depends on segregating the wives from their husbands.⁴

These anomalies are typical enough of the spirit of inconsequence which runs through and colours the zaniness of Aristophanic comedy in general; but they are not all on quite the same level. *Lysistrata*'s exclamation about the paucity of men at 107 can readily be taken in context as a piece of psychological exaggeration, of the sort which parallels, and perhaps reflects, the anxieties about diminished Athenian manpower which we know were in the air around this time.⁵ In any case, periods of military campaign were usually limited by the seasonal nature of Greek warfare, and different men would be out of the city at different times. None of this lessens the fundamental motivation appealed to by *Lysistrata*, a desire on the part of the wives to end the frequent and sometimes prolonged absences caused by war. The anomaly involved in the shift from domestic sex-strike to mass occupation of the Akropolis, however, is a matter of dramatic telescoping or condensation.⁶ It allows Aristophanes to maintain a more concentrated focus of scene, without denying himself the 'striptease' comedy of a confrontation between an individual wife and her husband (845 ff.). Above all, it makes it easier for the play to make the eventual transition from the men's despairing discomfiture to the peace council which *Lysistrata* convenes on the Akropolis (1103 ff.).

The difficulties just considered hardly impinge on an audience's or reader's enjoyment of *Lysistrata*, since they do not deflect from the combined impetus of the women's physical and sexual strategies. Much more important and dramatically pertinent is a tension which takes us close to the work's comic kernel—namely, the sharp divergence of character between the heroine herself, *Lysistrata* the 'disperser of armies',⁷ and the other Athenian wives. This diver-

⁴ For what it is worth, 999–1001 imply that the Spartan side of the sex-strike was carried out according to *Lysistrata*'s original suggestion; but this is, of course, a marginal detail.

⁵ Such anxieties are characterized by *Lysistrata* in reporting the snatches of male conversation (themselves involving paradoxical hyperbole) at 524; they are independently attested by Thucydides for the aftermath of the Sicilian expedition (8.1.2, cf. 2.44.3). Cf. also the implication of *Women at the Thesmophoria* 1169.

⁶ It might also be regarded as a typically Aristophanic piece of 'improvisatory' behaviour at 245–6: on this trait of comic protagonists, see the general Introduction, 'The Dynamics of Fantasy'.

⁷ *Lysistrata* was a real name, but Aristophanes exploits it, as he does with e.g. Lamachos ('Great Fighter') in *Acharnians*, for its comic potential. On the speculation

gence is prominently displayed in the first scene, and later in the attempted escapes after the parabasis (706 ff.), though it is temporarily resolved in the Myrrhine–Kinesias scene when we see that at least one wife who originally jibbed at Lysistrata’s scheme (130) has now developed the strength to carry it through with precisely the right style of paradoxically provocative self-control. But Myrrhine’s successful arousal-cum-deception of her husband does nothing to erase the overall impression of Lysistrata’s superiority to the ordinary women. And this impression arises from the heroine’s ability to rise above what is projected as the norm for Athenian wives, and to embody a more elevated conception of the power of women.

The norm which Lysistrata transcends is a mixture of social reality and comic stereotyping.⁸ When Lysistrata opens the play with exasperation at the women’s failure or lateness to appear, Kalonike reminds her that domestic duties make it ‘hard for women to leave the house’ (16). It is Kalonike who here draws attention to the actualities—in this case, the norms of respectability—which obtain in the audience’s own world, and Lysistrata who presupposes something exceptional. As the scene progresses, Lysistrata comes more and more to embody a commitment, a seriousness,⁹ and a kind of vision which escapes the other women, with the slight exception of the Spartan Lampito (142–4). Two themes, above all, mark this development. One of these is Lysistrata’s ability to see beyond the women’s underlying obsession with sexual gratification. Kalonike’s

that Lysistrata was in some way modelled on a contemporary priestess of Athena Polias, called Lysimache (cf. 554), see J. Henderson, *Aristophanes Lysistrata* (Oxford, 1987), pp. xxxviii–xli: I would go further than Henderson in playing down this point; at the most it should be regarded as an ‘optional’ association or overtone which might have occurred to a few spectators.

⁸ The general presentation of women in *Lysistrata* is an amalgam of three main elements: aspects of social reality (e.g. the status of wives as domestic stewards, 495, 894 ff.; their domestic role as clothes-makers, 519, 567 ff.; the expectation of female modesty, 473–4), comic stereotypes (scheming mischief, 11–12, 1014–15; secret eating/drinking, n. 12 below; ecstatic sensuality, 1–3, 387 ff.; high sex drives, 124 ff., 715 ff.), and the quasi-mythical resonance of both the refusal of sex and the assault on the Akropolis (cf. especially the reference to Amazons at 678).

⁹ Although references to facial expression in Greek drama cannot always be translated into the features of the characters’ masks, it is possible that the mention of Lysistrata’s frowning, dark looks at 7–8 and 707 reflects the use of a semi-tragic mask for the heroine (cf. *Wealth* 423–4 for a somewhat different instance). Lysistrata is reminiscent of tragic women at a number of points: e.g. near the beginning of her great speech, with the Euripidean quotation at 1124 (see note *ad loc.*).

first and, as it turns out, dramatically ironic guess about Lysistrata's purpose in calling the women together is that it must be for sexual excitement of some kind (23–4). Lysistrata quickly quashes her, but the suggestion that sex matters more than anything else to the wives reappears with a vengeance once the proposal of a sex-strike is mooted (125 ff.), and it is this which leads the heroine to an indecent exclamation about female libido (137). As with the later scene where she restrains the women whose sex drive makes them try to escape from the Akropolis (esp. 708–9), Lysistrata's mentality is defined precisely by contrast to what she herself acknowledges to be the characteristic attitudes of her sex. In the heroine, the comic stereotype of women is simultaneously corroborated and transcended.

Yet Lysistrata's greater self-control should not be allowed to obscure the ambiguities of her comic status. In explaining the frustrations which have generated her idea of a sex-strike, she dwells, with a brio that qualifies and complicates the solemnity she shows elsewhere, on the shortage not only of males eligible for adultery, but also of Milesian leather dildoes (107–10). It would be pedantically beside the point to suppose that Lysistrata merely simulates feelings which she knows will appeal to the other women. Although we are given no personal details about her husband or family (the same is true of all the women, except Myrrhine), Lysistrata is herself a wife like the others.¹⁰ We are invited to think of her not as lacking the strong sex drive which the others all too readily reveal, but as a woman who *knows* the workings of sexual arousal (cf. the calculated imagery of 149–54)¹¹ yet is able to exploit these for a grander purpose. Something similar could be said, though this motif is much less important for the play as a whole, about the related comic stereotype of Athenian wives as secret, heavy drinkers:¹²

¹⁰ This is sometimes wrongly denied: the point is not only implied by her repeated use of first-person plurals in such passages as 120–4, 149–54, 495, 1184, but made explicit at 513–20.

¹¹ In the eventual negotiations for peace, Lysistrata continues to exploit her understanding of sex in the phallic references at 1119–21, another passage which refutes the claim sometimes made that Aristophanes gives her no scurrilous utterances.

¹² The stereotype of bibulous wives appears at e.g. 114, 395, 465–6; see my note on 64. The comic idea of women as excessive consumers of food and drink partly (and wryly) reflects their responsibility for the economy of the household in their typical role as *oikonomos* or 'household-steward' (e.g. Lysias 1.7, Xenophon, *Oikonomikos* 7–10, with *Lysistrata* 493–5, *Assembly-Women* 211–12).

Lysistrata herself suggests an oath which betrays the female love of strong alcohol (195–7), and is keen to take the first drink from the wine-cup once the oath is sworn (238).

If Lysistrata's exceptional earnestness and discipline in the realm of sexuality turn out to be less than pure, so, in a rather different way, does the second main quality which differentiates her from the other Athenian wives, her political awareness and acumen. This is glimpsed at an early stage in her reference to a pan-Hellenic cause for the women to pursue (29 ff.). Pan-Hellenism remains a vital strand throughout the execution of the scheme,¹³ and I shall shortly return to it. But it is worth stressing at once what is often overlooked, namely that this element in the plot is entwined by comic logic with the very notion of a sex-strike to end the war. A sex-strike by Athenian women alone might have compelled their husbands to seek peace with Sparta, but that would have left the dramatic problem of how, and on what terms, to bring about Spartan compliance. As it is, the play's pan-Hellenism is, in part at least, an expression and consequence of the universal sexual susceptibility of Greek males. None the less, Lysistrata's own perception of the need for women to 'save' or 'rescue' the whole of Greece from war (30, etc.) reinforces her presentation as a politically motivated character. In the opening scene this motivation is glimpsed but not explained: the explanation comes first in the agon with the Commissioner, and later still in the speech which she delivers to the two sets of ambassadors. Each of these passages calls for close attention in turn, not least because around them hinges the issue of whether Aristophanes' play can be read as containing a politically intelligible message beneath the fantastic daring of the women's sex-strike.

The agon (476–613) pits Lysistrata against an official representative of the contemporary democracy, the testy and misogynistic Commissioner. Following on from her quasi-military victory over his archers, the contest is extremely one-sided: as in *Birds*, the protagonist dominates the argument throughout, and this gives a strong stamp to Lysistrata's political vehemence and sharpness. An important general observation about this part of the play deserves to be emphasized. Because the comic agon is intrinsically a representation (as well as a travesty) of adversarial rhetoric, designed to

¹³ In addition to the involvement of Lampito and her allied companions, see esp. 342–3, 525, 1128–34.

appeal to an audience reared in the Athenian culture of public speech and debate,¹⁴ Aristophanes uses the form in *Lysistrata* to foreground the heroine's mastery of verbal persuasion and argumentative forcefulness. But it is an almost inevitable consequence of this that the motif of the sex-strike, which relies on the women's collective eroticism not on the quasi-political intelligence of their leader, is here relegated to the background. The agon contains a single, free-floating reference to it, at 551–4; no attempt is made to integrate this point into the case for a diplomatic solution which *Lysistrata* goes on to expound at 565 ff. In this respect the agon structurally mirrors and reproduces the anomalies of the plot as a whole by juxtaposing but failing to harmonize the sexual and political components in the women's strategy for ending the war.

Lysistrata's arguments in the agon can be summarized very easily. The root of the war, she claims, is money; conflict has been fostered by corrupt politicians who profit from its perpetuation. Athenian women have suffered the democracy's misguided policies with increasing vexation, but their husbands would never allow them to express their own political views. Now they have had enough, and intend to lift the military blight from the city's life by reforming its politics on the principles of domestic wool-working: they will separate out the 'strands' of the war by diplomacy; get rid of the filthy elements in the city; and integrate all well-disposed groups, binding them together into a ball of wool from which to weave 'a nice warm cloak for all the city's people' (586). And *Lysistrata* finishes by momentarily emphasizing, despite the Commissioner's objections, why women are entitled to shape the city's future: it is they, after all, who bear male offspring to fight for the city, while they themselves suffer from war in various ways, either losing their sons (and husbands) in the fighting,¹⁵ or in some cases growing old without husbands at all because of the shortage of males.

From the point of view of Athenian men, *Lysistrata*'s case is a *tour de force* of bravado, ingenuity—and wishful thinking. That it contains a number of potentially thought-provoking aspects and *aperçus* should not be disputed. Although 507–20 caricatures a

¹⁴ See the general Introduction, 'Formality and Performance'.

¹⁵ This is the point *Lysistrata* is about to make, when interrupted, at 590; it is not made anywhere else in the play (though 651 harks back to 589–90), but it recurs as a general, less highly charged idea at *Assembly-Women* 233–4.

paradigmatic separation of male and female roles, culminating in the echo of *Iliad* 6.492 and similar Homeric passages, the context evokes a world of partially submerged female political consciousness which probably had some reality, however limited, among well-informed Athenian women.¹⁶ More obviously, the account of women's sufferings from war at 589–97 refers to elements of social reality which all Athenian men could have recognized; and the Commissioner's failure to grasp this point, either before (587–8) or after (598) Lysistrata has made it, marks the blindness of his prejudices as clearly as anything in the entire debate. But suggestive though these details are, and however much they may help to load comic sympathy on the women's side, they are subordinate to the two major thrusts of Lysistrata's case: her analysis of why Athens has no need to be at war (488 ff.), and her proposals for bringing the war to an end and reuniting the city. Do *these* elements in the agon stand up to careful scrutiny, or are they, as the Commissioner alleges, 'woolly nonsense' (587)?

To ascribe the war to the corrupt machinations of politicians like Peisandros (490), as Lysistrata does, is certainly not compelling. It is the sort of cynicism which no doubt many Athenians could sympathize with in certain moods, and it was a standard piece of comedy's satirical repertoire.¹⁷ Indeed, it now seems ironic that Lysistrata should pick out Peisandros as a typical demagogue at the very time when, as we know, he was preparing the way for potentially revolutionary restrictions to democracy in Athens.¹⁸ But in any case the analysis of war as fundamentally due to the financial corruption of political leaders is (at face value) hopelessly reductive, and we can be sure that, in this blunt form, it is unlikely to have struck otherwise a general Athenian audience, many of whom had themselves been persuaded to vote for the continuation of war over a period of many years. Lysistrata's arguments do, as we have seen, indirectly acknowledge the democratic support for the war (507–20), but this only reduces the cogency of her basic analysis.

¹⁶ An independent glimpse of wives' interest in political business is found at pseudo-Demosthenes 59 (*Against Neaira*), §§110–11: the speaker assumes that, when individual Athenians return home from the courts, they may face questions from wives and other female kin; and he imagines the possibility that some women will be angry about what they hear. Cf. also the implication of *Assembly-Women* 553.

¹⁷ See e.g. the accusations against Kleon in the 420s, esp. *Knights* 801–9; Thucydides unworthily echoes this crude judgement at 5.16.1.

¹⁸ For Peisandros, see the Index of Names.

It is particularly significant that when she alludes, at 513–14, to the reopening of hostilities with Sparta in the winter of 418, she does not so much as hint at the reasons for this decision, any more than she goes on to discuss the complex factors which had sustained Athenian war policy over the intervening seven years. This omission does not matter if we take her case as a kind of parody of political rhetoric, only if we look for a substratum of coherent meaning. Lysistrata's flamboyance resides in the gap between her confident air of persuasiveness and the synthetic nature of her programme.

The same is true of her recipe for ending the war, which, as already noted, sounds like an *ad hoc* argument whose thrust ignores the sex-strike strategy already activated by the women. Lysistrata's proposals are dominated by a magnificent piece of female imagery, which not only thoroughly 'domesticates' the war to the conditions of wool-working, but also by its cumulative energy outruns any practical correlation with internal or external politics at Athens. No Athenian could have failed to notice that Lysistrata says *nothing* that could be concretely applied to the situation which faced the city in 411. Lines 569–70 refer to the mechanism of diplomacy, but in a gloriously vacuous manner: diplomacy *tout court* is empty, and we hear nothing of the details of bargaining claims and counter-claims which such a solution to the war would have had to deal with (if, that is, diplomacy was an option at all at this date). When the Commissioner expresses disbelief on this point, Lysistrata does not address the immediate issue at all. Instead she shifts, with a discontinuity typical of Aristophanic dialogue, to the further idea that Athens should model *all* its politics on wool-working principles (572–3). In the imagery which she goes on to manipulate, there are difficulties in gauging the resonance of some of her language, especially at 576–8;¹⁹ but we can be confident that, as so often in Aristophanes, there is a comic excess of sentiment over pragmatism in this entire context. 'Common goodwill' (579), and a 'cloak for all the city's people' (586), are stirring democratic phrases, but they represent slogans divorced from reality when coming from the leader of a group of women which has overturned the city's functioning democracy. This is, however, not a failure of sense but an integral part of Lysistrata's fantastic persona: that she should argue

¹⁹ See my note *ad loc.* for the (vague) possibility of an allusion to oligarchic manoeuvres in the early months of 411.

with such stylish and forceful aplomb, while saying nothing that could be translated into a feasible policy in the circumstances of 412–411, is an integral part of her status as comic heroine. In sum, the agon leaves us with a Lysistrata who dominates the blustering Commissioner by a combination of potently sentimental rhetoric and unfeminine force (531–8, 599–613); her triumph would have given an Athenian audience more entertainment, not least in its visual enactment of a gender-reversal for the Commissioner, than concentrated food for political thought.

One of the (comic) deficiencies I have noted in the agon—namely, the lack of practical suggestions for diplomatic negotiations with Sparta—seems at first sight to be made good by the later demonstration of Lysistrata’s political prowess in her speech at 1112–88. But the first thing to be said about that subsequent speech is that it has been made possible by, and brings to final fruition, the women’s sex-strike. The judgement of some critics that Lysistrata’s address to the ambassadors carries a convincing message flies in the face of the ripely comic eroticism of the setting. The ambassadors are in a painfully priapic state (duly highlighted by Lysistrata, 1119–21), and are accordingly obsessed with the erogenous zones of the naked Reconciliation, the female symbolization both of peace and of Greek territory. The central absurdity of the scene blatantly lies in the piquant contrast between Lysistrata’s adoption of an ostensibly lofty tone of pan-Hellenic sentiment, and the recurrent indecencies of the ambassadors on both sides. A reference to the war’s destruction of ‘Greek men and cities’ by Lysistrata elicits an Athenian’s riposte that it is his erection which is destroying *him* (1134–6): physical exigency—one of Old Comedy’s favourite resources—obliterates the note of would-be gravity. Similarly, Lysistrata’s claim that the Spartans had helped Athens to win freedom from tyranny, a century earlier, prompts nothing more than lascivious remarks about Reconciliation’s anatomy (1157–8). The dramatic significance of the heroine’s speech cannot be separated from its obscene ambience, both visual and verbal.²⁰

Let us look a little closer at Lysistrata’s case for ending the war. She starts from, and in a sense never goes beyond, an ideal of

²⁰ The claim of G. E. M. de Ste Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London, 1972), 368–9, that Lysistrata’s speech at 1114–77 is ‘completely serious . . . and without a single jest’, shows a basic failure to grasp the subtleties of register and context in a comic text.

pan-Hellenic solidarity of the kind whose roots lay in Greek dealings with Persia during the first thirty years of the fifth century.²¹ Athenians and Spartans, as well as their allies, are Greeks of common race and religion, so the argument runs, and it is barbarians (Persians) who are their natural enemies; yet they kill one another relentlessly (1128–35). As with parts of the agon, there are sentiments here which could, in a different context, carry real resonance, but which are undermined by the ridiculous irony in which they are enveloped by both visual and verbal aspects of the comic setting. When, as already mentioned, the Athenian at once refers to his conspicuous phallus, the juxtaposition of emotional rhetoric and practical compulsion accentuates the point that military conflicts are not solved by sentiment alone. Moreover, the airiness of Lysistrata's rhetoric only increases when she proceeds to cite two supposed examples of previous co-operation between Athens and Sparta. The first (1138–44), which recalls how Kimon, a major Athenian politician and general in the 460s, had taken an army to assist the Spartans during the Helot revolt in 463/2, is pointedly distorted: Lysistrata claims that Kimon 'saved' Sparta, when in fact he was sent back home prematurely in a way which led, according to Thucydides (1.102), to a *deterioration* in Athenian–Spartan relations. In the second case, where Lysistrata refers to Spartan help in expelling the tyrant Hippias in 510, the irony is more oblique but just as fatal to the cogency of the heroine's case. We need not wonder whether Aristophanes' audience would have remembered that only two years later, in 508, the same Spartan king, Kleomenes, had returned to Athens to try and quash the nascent democracy: the chorus of old men has already reminisced about this event at 273–80. So much for Spartan assistance in allowing Athenians 'to wear the cloak of freedom' (1156)!

Lysistrata, then, has offered pan-Hellenic sentiment which carries an abstract appeal but whose practical relevance to the messy, embedded actualities of war in 411 is, to say the least, hazy; and she has supported it with historical precedents whose inappropriateness is comically ironic. After all this, the effect of which is reinforced by the libidinous inattention of the ambassadors, she brings her case to a point: 'Why not be reconciled? Well, what's to stop it?' (1161). The seemingly rhetorical questions receive a response

²¹ See Herodotos 8.144 for a clear indication of the original link between pan-Hellenism and a Greek sense of a 'common enemy'.

which, while it redoubles the vulgar farce of the ambassadors' sexual desperation, also adds to the paradoxes of the scene. For what was *actually* stopping peace in 411 was a combination of deeply rooted attitudes with an elaborate web of territorial and related issues. When at last we get some allusion to the territorial dimension, in a few lines of highly condensed wit (1162–74), Aristophanes simultaneously hints at some of the real difficulties which would bedevil any attempt at peace negotiations, and yet allows these to be dissolved, for the sake of comic harmony, in the overt imagery of bodily desire. There are enough parts of Reconciliation's anatomy to satisfy the pleasures of both sides to the conflict: the intricacies of political geography can be wished away by the ultimately simple imperatives of sexual longing.

When I first raised the question of the play's pan-Hellenism, I pointed out that it is an entailment of the comic logic of a sex-strike to end the war. What Lysistrata's final speech confirms, I suggest, is that pan-Hellenism is a necessary and convenient sentiment for the heroine's arbitration between Athens and Sparta, but is also entirely secondary to the sexual forces which drive her plan from start to finish. I have referred several times to the heroine's use of 'sentiment', and *Lysistrata* is, after all, a thoroughly sentimental play. It spins its comic fantasy out of the notion that, beneath the extensive political and social disjunctions of male and female in Athenian society, sexual need is something which brings them together and could even triumph over the dynamics of war. However disappointing some modern readers may find the conclusion, this is a play which contains little to disturb the feelings of Athenian males, since it presents an image of women as ultimately unsubversive in their instincts.²² In this connection it is notable that, while Lysistrata's plot effectively represents not only a political revolt but also a blow against the heart of each Athenian husband's power and status as head of his oikos, this latter aspect of the matter is almost entirely suppressed in the interests of concentration on the physically sexual consequences of the strike. *Lysistrata* caricatures both the stereotyped misogyny of men, embodied above all in the antics of the male chorus, and the women's supposed lack of self-control in the face of bodily appetites. But it transcends these weaknesses with an indulgent illusion of concord that emerges, in

²² Cf. the female chorus's statement at 473–4, that underneath their toughness and aggression they really retain the 'modesty' of maidens.

the end, less from the heroine's disciplined calculations than from the cravings of both sexes. In Plato's *Symposium* Socrates describes Aristophanes at one point as someone whose whole activity as a comic playwright 'is concerned with Dionysus and Aphrodite' (177e). *Lysistrata*, we can conclude, is a perfect illustration of this claim: rather than being in any realistic or sustainable sense an anti-war play, it is an unfettered celebration, of the kind possible only in Dionysiac festivity, of the irresistible power of sexuality.

LYSISTRATA

Speaking Characters

LYSISTRATA: leader of the Athenian wives

KALONIKE: a young Athenian wife

MYRRHINE: likewise

LAMPITO: a Spartan wife

COMMISSIONER: member of the Commission of Ten

KINESIAS: Athenian citizen, husband of MYRRHINE

HERALD: Spartan messenger

SPARTAN: spokesman of the Spartan ENVOYS who come to sue for peace

ATHENIAN: leader of the Athenian ENVOYS

OLD MEN: half-chorus of 12

WOMEN: half-chorus of 12

CHORUS: incorporating the two half-choruses (from 1043 onwards)

LEADER^M: of OLD MEN's half-chorus

LEADER^W: of WOMEN's half-chorus

LEADER: of combined CHORUS

(There are also several small parts for individual unnamed women.)

Silent Characters

BOIOTIAN WOMAN

KORINTHIAN WOMAN

SLAVE-GIRL: LYSISTRATA'S

ARCHERS: slaves attending the COMMISSIONER

BABY: child of KINESIAS and MYRRHINE

RECONCILIATION: naked female personification of peace

ENVOYS: official representatives of both Athens and Sparta

SLAVES (various)

[*Early morning. The scene is an Athenian street, in the vicinity of the Akropolis; there is at least one door in the background. LYSISTRATA, accompanied by a SLAVE-GIRL, enters and paces up and down with growing impatience.*]

LYSISTRATA [*exasperated*]. Now, if they'd been invited to a *Bacchic* rite,
 Or a grotto of Pan's, or Aphrodite's shrine,
 You wouldn't be able to move for their tambourines!*
 As it is, not a single woman has shown up yet. [A door opens.]
 Oh—my neighbour Kalonike's coming out.
 Kalonike, greetings!

KALONIKE. You too, Lysistrata.
 What's agitating you? Don't frown, my dear.
 Those arching eyebrows just don't suit your face.*

LYSISTRATA [*gravely*]. Kalonike, I feel a burning pain at heart—
 A sense of bitter grievance for us women. 10
 Among the men we've gained a reputation
 For being fond of schemes—

KALONIKE. And so we are!*

LYSISTRATA. Yet when they're told to gather for this meeting,
 To come and discuss a matter of such importance,
 They stay in bed—no sign of them!

KALONIKE. Look, darling,
 They'll *come*. It's hard for women to leave the house.*
 I dare say some are getting their husbands—up,
 Or waking the slaves, or putting a baby to sleep,
 Or maybe washing and feeding their little ones.

LYSISTRATA. There are *other* things that ought to matter far more. 20

KALONIKE. But what's the reason, dear Lysistrata,
 Which makes you ask us women to meet together?
 What kind of thing? What scale?

LYSISTRATA. It's big.

KALONIKE [*suggestively*]. And beefy?

LYSISTRATA. It's beefy, all right.

KALONIKE. It sounds worth coming for!

LYSISTRATA. It's not like *that*, or else they'd all be here.

It's something I myself have pondered hard
 And tossed around through many sleepless nights.

KALONIKE. And is this thing you've 'tossed'—well, *delicate*?

LYSISTRATA. So delicate that Greece's whole salvation
 Depends entirely on the female sex.

KALONIKE. The female sex? Well, what a slender hope!

LYSISTRATA. It's up to *us* to run the city's affairs.

If we don't, there won't be any Spartans left—

KALONIKE. No Spartans left? How simply wonderful!

LYSISTRATA. And every single Boiotian will be wiped out—

KALONIKE. No, please just spare a few—of their *eels*, that is.*

LYSISTRATA. And as for Athens, my tongue can't bring itself

To say the worst. You grasp my implication.

But if the women attend the meeting here—

Boiotian and Spartan women as well as ours—

40

We'll launch a common effort to rescue Greece.

KALONIKE [*sententiously*]. 'What clever, illustrious deed could women achieve?'

[*Normal voice*] We spend our idle lives at home, dolled up
And draped in chiffon dresses, or prettified
In slinky gowns and ritzy evening shoes.

LYSISTRATA. It's *just* these things that could save the situation:

Little chiffon numbers, perfumes, ritzy shoes,

And all that rouge and see-through lingerie.

KALONIKE. But what could they do?

LYSISTRATA. They might prevent the men

From threatening one another with their spears—

50

KALONIKE. For *that* I'll have my chiffon dress re-dyed!

LYSISTRATA. Or waving shields—

KALONIKE. Straight on with that slinky
gown!

LYSISTRATA. Or swords.

KALONIKE. I'll fetch some ritzy evening shoes!

LYSISTRATA. Well, shouldn't the rest of the women be here by
now?

KALONIKE. They should have simply *flocked* here long ago.

LYSISTRATA. But, dear, you'll see the women from Attika

Do everything too late; it's always the same.

Not a single woman has come from the coastal region,

And no one's here from Salamis yet.

KALONIKE. I bet

That *they* were up at dawn for an early ride!*

60

LYSISTRATA. And as for those I felt quite confident

Would be here first—the women from Acharnai—*

They haven't come.

KALONIKE. I know Theogenes' wife
 Was bracing herself with a drink before she left.*
 Oh look! Here *are* some women approaching now.
 [Women start to appear from both side entrances, among them MYRRHINE.]

LYSISTRATA. And here's another group over here.

KALONIKE. Good heavens,
 What deme are they from?

LYSISTRATA. Anagyrous.

KALONIKE [*sniffing*]. Yes, I see:
 No wonder, then, they're raising such a stink.*

MYRRHINE. I hope we're not too late, Lysistrata?
 Well, what? No answer? 70

LYSISTRATA. You've let me down, Myrrhine,
 Turning up so late for such important business.

MYRRHINE. I'm sorry, I had to find my bra in the dark.
 But now we're here, explain, if it's really urgent.

LYSISTRATA. Not yet: we ought to wait a little longer
 Until the Boiotian and Spartan wives have time
 To get here too.

MYRRHINE. Quite right: I'm sure we should.
 But here, in fact, comes Lampito right now.
 [Enter, from a side entrance, LAMPITO, a muscular beauty, with two other
 young wives, all three wearing short, revealing dresses. The new arrivals
 immediately become the object of close physical attention.]

LYSISTRATA. Warm greetings, Lampito, dear Spartan friend.
 Sweetheart, you're looking simply ravishing.*
 What gorgeous skin—and, oh, those *muscles* of yours. 80
 You could throttle a bull!

LAMPITO. By the Twins,* I swear I could.
 My exercise includes rump-stretching kicks.

KALONIKE. I've *never* seen a finer pair of breasts.

LAMPITO. Stop feeling my flesh: I'm not for sacrifice!

LYSISTRATA. And what about this other girl—who's she?

LAMPITO. A Boiotian—and a fine one, by the Twins.
 She's come for the meeting too.

MYRRHINE [*examining her*]. A true Boiotian!
 Her belly's as flat as any Boiotian plain.

KALONIKE [*peering*]. And look at her little bush, how cutely
 trimmed!*

- LYSISTRATA. This other girl? 90
- LAMPITO. A choice piece, by the Twins.
Korinthian, what's more.
- KALONIKE. A real 'choice piece'!*
That's all too clear in front as well as behind.
- LAMPITO. Now, who's the one who's summoned this gathering
Of all us women?
- LYSISTRATA. It's me.
- LAMPITO. I'd like to hear
What it is you want.
- KALONIKE. Yes, tell us now, dear friend.
Explain this grand idea that's on your mind.
- LYSISTRATA. I'll tell you, then. But first I'll ask a question.
It's something small I need to know.
- KALONIKE. Feel free.
- LYSISTRATA. Don't you ever miss the fathers of your children
When they're off on active service? I certainly know 100
You've all got husbands away from home like this.
- KALONIKE. You're right, my dear. My husband's been in Thrace
The last five months: he's guarding—Eukrates.*
- MYRRHINE. And *mine's* been gone for seven whole months, at
Pylos.
- LAMPITO. While *mine*, even when he comes home, has hardly
time
To hang up his shield before he flies off again.
- LYSISTRATA. Not a glimmer of males—not a single adulterer
left!
And since Miletos ditched our old alliance,
I haven't set eyes on a single five-inch dildo
Which might at least have given synthetic relief.* 110
So, are you ready, if I devise a scheme,
To help me end the war?
- KALONIKE. By the two goddesses!*
I'd even be prepared to pawn this dress
To raise the funds for celebratory drinks!
- MYRRHINE [*frivolously*]. And *I'd* be willing to cut myself in half
And serve myself as a sacrificial flat-fish!
- LAMPITO. And *I* would climb up mount Taygetos
To gaze upon a land of peace below.
- LYSISTRATA. I'll tell you then; no need for secrecy.

I assure you, assembled women: to have a chance
Of ever compelling our husbands to live in peace,
We really must—

KALONIKE. Do what?

LYSISTRATA. Well, *will* you do it?

KALONIKE. We promise we will, if death itself's the price!

LYSISTRATA. We *must* give up the pleasure of—the prick.

[*Women shudder and start to leave.*]

What makes you turn away? Don't try to leave.

You there, why grimace and shake your heads like that?

[*Melodramatically*] 'What means this pale complexion, these
tears that flow?''*

Well, will you or won't you do it? Please tell me that.

KALONIKE. I simply *couldn't*. The war must take its course.

MYRRHINE. I feel the same. The war must take its course. 130

LYSISTRATA. So that's your view, you 'flat-fish'! Just before
You said you'd even cut yourself in half.

KALONIKE. Ask *anything*, anything else. I'd be prepared

To walk through fire. But not give up the prick!

There's nothing like it, dear Lysistrata.

LYSISTRATA. Well, what about *you*?

MYRRHINE. I too would walk through fire.

LYSISTRATA. The female sex! Sheer lustfulness, that's us!

No wonder they write such tragedies about us!

Our lives are simply full of sex and intrigue.*

[*Pleadingly*] But you, dear Spartan friend—if only you 140

Would stick with me, we'd save the situation.

Please lend support.

LAMPITO. It's difficult, by the Twins,

For wives to sleep alone without a dick.

And yet we must: we need peace back so badly.

LYSISTRATA. O dearest friend, you're the only genuine *woman*!

KALONIKE. Suppose we really did abstain from *it*,

Though god forbid! What difference would it make

To getting peace?

LYSISTRATA. A difference like no other.

If we were to sit at home, our faces powdered,

And wore short silken shifts to give a glimpse 150

Of nicely trimmed small triangles of hair,*

So our husbands started to swell and wanted to shag,

But *we* held back and refused to let them do it—

I tell you now: they'd make peace in a flash.

LAMPITO. It's true, when Menelaos caught a glimpse

Of Helen's breasts, it made him drop his sword.*

KALONIKE. But what if our men reject us then, my dear?

LYSISTRATA. To borrow Pherekrates' phrase: try self-abuse!*

KALONIKE. A useless substitute! It's just not real.

And what if they turn quite rough, and drag us upstairs? 160

LYSISTRATA. Then grab the bedroom door and cling for life.

KALONIKE. But what if they beat us up?

LYSISTRATA. Keep on resisting.

They can't derive much pleasure from *forcing* us.*

We've got to make them suffer in every way.

They'll soon give in: no husband can enjoy

A life of constant friction with his wife.

KALONIKE. Well, if you two agree, we'll go along.

LAMPITO. But how will *we* persuade our Spartan husbands

To keep the peace without duplicitous guile?*

And who could hope to persuade the Athenian rabble 170

To keep its mind fixed on negotiations?*

LYSISTRATA. Don't worry, we'll soon convince our people here.

LAMPITO. Not while their triremes still having rigging intact,

And your goddess's vault contains such limitless funds!*

LYSISTRATA. I've made provisions to cover this very point:

We're going to seize the Akropolis today.

This task has been assigned to older women:

While we talk here, they're going to use the pretext

Of a sacrifice to occupy the hill.

LAMPITO. A perfect ploy—you've thought of everything. 180

LYSISTRATA. In that case, Lampito, let's swear an oath

At once, to make our pact unbreakable.

LAMPITO. Reveal the oath you want us all to swear.

LYSISTRATA. Right, where's my Scythian slave?

[*The SLAVE-GIRL, carrying a shield etc., steps forward.*]

Hey you, look

sharp!

Come here and place the shield there, facing down.

Can someone pass the meat?

KALONIKE [*interrupting*]. Lysistrata,

What oath is this you're going to make us swear?

LYSISTRATA. The sort, I've heard, occurs in Aischylos—
A blood-oath over a shield.*

KALONIKE. Lysistrata!

Don't use a shield to swear an oath for *peace!* 190

LYSISTRATA. What oath, then, would you like?

KALONIKE. Perhaps we ought
To find a pure white horse for sacrifice?*

LYSISTRATA. A pure white horse!

KALONIKE. Well think of something better.

LYSISTRATA. All right, I will; just listen to this suggestion.

Let's place a large black *drinking-cup* down here,

And sacrifice a jar of Thasian wine,

Then swear we won't pour in a drop of water.*

LAMPITO. A quite magnificent oath! I'm lost for words.

LYSISTRATA. Let someone fetch a cup, and a jar of wine.

[*The SLAVE-GIRL fetches a huge wine-jar and drinking-cup.*]

MYRRHINE. My dears, what specimens! What ceramic art! 200

KALONIKE [*fondling the cup*]. Could anyone fail to handle this
with pleasure?

LYSISTRATA. Just place it here, and help me hold the beast.

[*She picks up the jar and speaks with the solemnity of a priest.*]

Divine Persuasion*—cup of female friendship—

Be kind to women, receive our sacrifice.

[*Some wine is poured from the jar.*]

KALONIKE. The blood's a lovely colour; it flows so well.

LAMPITO. And what a fine bouquet, in Kastor's name!

MYRRHINE. Allow me, ladies, to be the first to swear.

LYSISTRATA. By Aphrodite, no! Please wait your turn.

Now all must touch the cup. Come, Lampito.

Let one of you, for the group, repeat my words, 210

Then all will solemnly ratify this oath.

[*Gravely*] 'No male, be he adulterer or spouse,'

KALONIKE. 'No male, be he adulterer or spouse,'

LYSISTRATA. 'Shall come near me with prick erect.' [KALONIKE *hesitates.*]

Repeat!

KALONIKE. 'Shall come near me with—prick erect.' Oh dear!

My knees are feeling weak, Lysistrata.

LYSISTRATA [*persisting*]. 'At home I'll stay as chaste as any virgin,'

KALONIKE. 'At home I'll stay as chaste as any virgin,'

LYSISTRATA. 'Draped in a chiffon dress, my face made up,'

- KALONIKE. 'Draped in a chiffon dress, my face made up,' 220
 LYSISTRATA. 'To make my husband hot with lust for me.'
 KALONIKE. 'To make my husband hot with lust for me.'
 LYSISTRATA. 'And never shall I do my husband's will.'
 KALONIKE. 'And never shall I do my husband's will.'
 LYSISTRATA. 'But if he uses force and tries to rape me,'
 KALONIKE. 'But if he uses force and tries to rape me,'
 LYSISTRATA. 'I'll still resist and never writhe with pleasure.'
 KALONIKE. 'I'll still resist and never writhe with pleasure.'
 LYSISTRATA. 'I'll never lift my sexy legs up high.'
 KALONIKE. 'I'll never lift my sexy legs up high.' 230
 LYSISTRATA. 'I'll never kneel in the lioness position.'*
 KALONIKE. 'I'll never kneel in the lioness position.'
 LYSISTRATA. 'If I keep this oath, may wine be mine to drink.'
 KALONIKE. 'If I keep this oath, may wine be mine to drink.'
 LYSISTRATA. 'But if I transgress, may the cup be filled with water.'
 KALONIKE. 'But if I transgress, may the cup be filled with water.'
 LYSISTRATA. Do all you others swear this oath?
 ALL. We do.
 LYSISTRATA [*starting to drink*].
 Now, let me sanctify this cup.
 KALONIKE [*anxiously*]. Fair shares,
 My dear! Let's all be best of friends.
 [*As they drink, an off-stage cry is heard.*]
 LAMPITO. I heard a shout. 240
 LYSISTRATA. Well, didn't I tell you so?
 It means Athena's hill, the Akropolis,
 Is in the women's hands. Come, Lampito,
 You go and settle business back in Sparta,
 But leave these girls as hostages with us.
 [*Exit LAMPITO by a side entrance: the stage building now assumes the
 identity of the Propylaea, gateway to the Akropolis.*]
 The rest of us must join the women inside
 And help them bolt and bar the Akropolis gates.*
 KALONIKE. You mean you think the men will send a force
 To deal with us at once?
 LYSISTRATA. I couldn't care less!
 Suppose they threaten to storm the place with fire:
 We're never going to open these gates to them 250

Unless they come to terms with our demands.

KALONIKE. We'll never give in! We'd lose our reputation
For being nasty and fighting tooth and nail!

[All the women enter the Akropolis. Soon afterwards, the OLD MEN's half-chorus, struggling to carry logs and a brazier up the hillside, appears from a side entrance.]

[PARODOS: 254-386]

LEADER^M. Keep up, old chap, with steady steps; ignore your
aching shoulder
That carries such a heavy load of fresh-cut olive-wood
logs.

OLD MEN. *Strophe*
Long life brings many surprises, shiver me timbers!
Who would have thought, my friends, we'd ever hear
That *women*, whom we reared 260
As blatant mischiefs in our homes,
Should seize Athena's statue,
And occupy our sacred hill,
And fasten up these massive gates
With bolts and bars?

LEADER^M. Come on, my ancient comrade, let's push on up to
the summit.
We've got to pile these logs around the site that's occupied
By all the women who've carried out this bold, audacious
deed.
Let's get to work to build it up and then ignite the bonfire:
We'll burn them all at one fell swoop; not least, the wife of
Lykon.* 270

OLD MEN. I swear that while I live their plot will fail. *Antistrophe*
Why, even when Kleomenes seized this hill,
He did not leave unscathed.* 275
For all his Spartan puff and prowess,
I made him drop his weapons.
He wore a little, patchy cloak;
He starved, he stank, he hadn't shaved
For six full years.*

Let's drop our burdens on the ground. Yuck, what
 disgusting smoke!
 Can we expect a helping hand from the generals now in
 Samos?*

Thank god that's off my back; that wood had almost
 crushed my backbone.
 It's up to you, my brazier, now to fuel the coals inside.
 I want my torch to be the first to set light to the bonfire.
 Athena Nike, goddess proud, help us defeat these women
 And place a monument to show we crushed their
 shameless deed.

[As the men continue to prepare their attack, the WOMEN'S half-chorus,
 carrying water-jars, hurries on from the opposite side entrance.]

LEADER^w. Look up, my women, the atmosphere is full of soot
 and smoke.

There's fire somewhere, it's obvious: we must be quick
 to find it.

320

WOMEN. Look everywhere, before the flames *Strophe*

Engulf our dear companions.

The flames are fanned

By gusting winds

And senile windbags!

My fear is that I've come belatedly.

Just moments ago, in dawn's half-light,

Down by the spring, among noisy crowds

Of women and slave-girls jostling one another for room, 330

I snatched my jug, and rushed up here,

To use this water

To save my friends from burning.

I heard that some deranged old men *Antistrophe*

Have come with tons of timber.

They're arsonists

And threaten 'to cook

These filthy bitches'.

340

Athena, please don't let the women burn!

They'll stop the war, the crazy war,

And rescue Greece, as well as Athens.

Gold-crested,* patron goddess, that's why they've seized

your shrine. 344-6
 O ally, hail! Tritogeneia!*
 Help us fetch water
 To quell the old men's fire.

[*The two half-choruses now face up to one another: they move and act with a stylized 'pantomime' aggression which reflects their leaders' words.*]

LEADER^W. Just wait a moment! What *have* we here? Some right
 old nasty codgers. 350
 God-fearing men, the decent sort, would never behave like
 this.

LEADER^M. Well here's a real surprise for us; we didn't see it
 coming.

A hornet's nest of women here is bringing reinforcements.

LEADER^W. What makes you look so stinking scared? Our
 numbers aren't so large.

Mind you, you've so far only seen a fraction of our forces.

LEADER^M. Can we, my friends, allow these women to jabber in
 this fashion?

It's time we took these logs of ours and gave them all a
 thrashing.

LEADER^W. Well let's respond by putting down our pitchers on
 the ground.

If one of them should raise a hand, we mustn't be
 encumbered.

LEADER^M. They should, like Boupalos, have had their jaws both
 broken for them.* 360

That way, they wouldn't have the voice to be so impudent.

LEADER^W. Well here's my jaw! Just throw a punch! I'll stand
 and let you try.

But if you do, you'll find this bitch will grab your *testicles*.

LEADER^M. Unless you shut your mouth, I'll knock your stuffing
 out, old hag.

LEADER^W. You better hadn't even try to lay a finger on me.

LEADER^M. Suppose I beat you with my fists? What will you do
 about it?

LEADER^W. I'll sink my teeth into your ribs and rip your innards
 out!

LEADER^M. We always knew Euripides possessed poetic insight:

There is no creature on the earth as shameless as a woman.*

LEADER^W. Let's lift our pitchers up again: it's time to use this water. 370

LEADER^M. What made you, god-forsaken crone, come here with so much water?

LEADER^W. And what made *you* bring fire along, you tombstone—your cremation?

LEADER^M. I've come to build a funeral pyre, and burn your friends inside.

LEADER^W. And *I've* come here to quench the flames by dousing them with water.

LEADER^M. You think you'll quench the fire I've brought?

LEADER^W. You'll
see in just a moment.

LEADER^M. I've half a mind to take this torch and grill you right away.

LEADER^W. Perhaps you've brought some soap along; you'll need it for this bath.

LEADER^M. A *bath* from you, you putrid hag?

LEADER^W [*sarcastically*]. A nuptial bath,
what's more.

LEADER^M. Did you hear her outright impudence?

LEADER^W. I'm not a slave,
you know.

LEADER^M. I'll stop this noisy rant of yours. 380

LEADER^W. You're not a juror
now!*

LEADER^M [*brandishing torch*]. It's time to set her hair on fire.*

LEADER^W [*tipping water*]. Now
do your job, my water!

LEADER^M [*pathetically*]. You're soaking me!

LEADER^W. Was the temperature
right?

LEADER^M. The temperature! You've got to stop.

LEADER^W. I'm watering you to help you grow.

LEADER^M. But I'm shivering like a wilting plant.

LEADER^W. Well, as you've brought your fire with you, I'm sure you'll soon get warm.

[As the half-choruses separate, an aged COMMISSIONER* enters, accompanied by two SLAVES and four ARCHERS. He appears more concerned with airing his views than with taking control of the situation.]

COMMISSIONER. So the women's dissipation has flared again?

The usual tambourines and Sabazios stuff,

And all this roof-top nonsense with Adonis!*

[*Rambling*] I heard it once while sitting in the Assembly. 390

Demostratos—ill-fated fool!—was urging

We send a fleet to Sicily.* Nearby,

His wife was dancing, shrieking 'O Adonis!'

He then proposed we fetch troops from Zakynthos,*

While his drunken wife was shouting on the roof

'Bewail Adonis!' *He*, though, persevered—

The god-forsaken, impious lunatic!

So there you have it: women's wantonness!

LEADER^M. Just wait till you hear the crime of *this* lot here.

On top of all their other outrageous deeds, 400

They've soaked us to the skin; so now our cloaks

Are dripping as though we've gone and pissed ourselves.

COMMISSIONER. In Poseidon's watery name, it serves us right!

When we abet our own wives' turpitude

And give them lessons in depravity,

Such are the schemes they're bound to breed and hatch.

Just think of how we talk in craftsmen's shops:

[*Lubriciously*] 'You made a necklace, goldsmith, recently,

But while my wife was dancing in the evening,

The pin came out of the hole it's meant to fit. 410

Now, *I'm* about to leave for Salamis,

So if you've time, bring round your tools one evening

And re-insert the pin: my wife will like it.'

Another husband, talking to a cobbler

Who's young and has a virile prick, says this:

'My wife is having trouble with her foot:

The strap is squeezing round the fleshy cleft.

The skin's so soft; so come at noon one day

And stretch it for her: make more width inside.'

Now what a pretty pass affairs have reached: 420

Here's me, a city Commissioner—I've come

To see that timber's bought to make new oars,*

And I find myself locked out by *women*, no less!
 There's no use standing round. Just bring the crowbars.
 I'll put a stop to this criminal act of theirs.
 [*To his SLAVES*] Stop gawping, will you, wretch! You too,
 you dolt!
 You look as though you're waiting for a drink.
 Get moving with those bars beneath the gates,
 And start to prise them open. I'll do the same
 With a lever here.

430

[*The gates suddenly open and LYSISTRATA comes out.*]

LYSISTRATA. No need to force the gates.
 I'm coming out voluntarily. Why use crowbars?
 It's not such tools you need but careful thought.
 COMMISSIONER. How dare you, filthy bitch! Arrest her, archers!
 Seize her and tie her hands behind her back.
 [*One ARCHER starts to approach her.*]
 LYSISTRATA. By Artemis!* If he lays a finger on me,
 This public slave will get it in the eye. [*The ARCHER hesitates.*]
 COMMISSIONER. You're afraid of *her*? Just grab her round the
 waist.
 [*To another ARCHER*] You help him too: I want her tied at
 once.
 [*As the second ARCHER moves forward nervously, an OLD WOMAN, carrying a basket of wool etc., steps out from the gates behind LYSISTRATA.*]
 OLD WOMAN^A. By Pandrosos!* Just lay a finger on her,
 And I'll trample you until the shit falls out.
 [*The ARCHER backs off.*] 440
 COMMISSIONER. 'The shit'—what shocking language! [*To the third*
 ARCHER] Hey you, come here.
 Tie up this woman first, to stop her prattle.
 OLD WOMAN^B [*appearing*]. By Phosphoros!* Just lay a finger on
 her,
 And you'll soon acquire a shiny blue-black eye.
 [*This ARCHER too backs away.*]
 COMMISSIONER. What, another one! [*To the fourth ARCHER*] Quick,
 archer, here! Grab *her*.
 I'll stop them coming out here to face me down.
 OLD WOMAN^C [*emerging*]. By Artemis goddess of bulls! Just take
 one step!

I'll tear your hair and make you scream to hell.

[*The final ARCHER retreats.*]

COMMISSIONER [*looking round*]. What wretched fate! I've now
used all my archers.

We can't accept defeat at the hands of women: 450

[*To the ARCHERS*] Get into line, you Scythians; be prepared
To charge head-on.

LYSISTRATA. And when you do, you'll find

That we too have our troops: four companies

Of warlike women, all waiting armed inside.

COMMISSIONER [*raging*]. Twist back their arms, you Scythians:
truss them up.

[*The ARCHERS approach tentatively. LYSISTRATA calls to those inside.*]

LYSISTRATA. Come, allied women, rush to our defence!

You market-trading-vegetable-vending swarms,

You tavern-keeping-bread-and-garlic wives,*

Get hold of them and give them all a bruising.

Call them the filthiest names, show no restraint! 460

[*Various women appear and repulse the half-hearted attack of the*
ARCHERS.]

[*Like a commander*] The battle's won. Pull back: no booty-
taking.

COMMISSIONER. My archery division's been destroyed!

LYSISTRATA. Well what did you expect? Did you believe

That we'd obey like slaves? Or don't you know

That women too have spunk?

COMMISSIONER. And plenty too,

Provided alcohol is close at hand!

LEADER^M [*stepping forward*]. Commissioner of our city, you've
expended many words.

Why lock yourself in argument with *animals* like these?

Aren't you aware of what a bath they doused us in just now,

While we were wearing all our clothes—and had no soap,
what's more? 470

LEADER^W. Well now you've learnt your lesson, mate: you
shouldn't harry neighbours.

But if you do, you must expect to get a pair of shiners.

[*Demurely*] I didn't want to start a fight; my aim is like a
maiden's,

To trouble no one here at all, and keep my modest manner,
 Provided no one stirs me up and rouses me to anger.

[AGON: 476–613.]

OLD MEN.	O Zeus, how shall we deal With monsters like these? Intolerable it is. Commissioner, <i>you</i> Must help investigate: What motive could have brought them To occupy this rocky mound? And why Should they have seized our great, Our sacrosanct Akropolis?	<i>Strophe</i> 480
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LEADER^M. Come question them, and don't be duped; be sure to
 test each answer.

What shame there'd be if this affair were left unscrutinized.

COMMISSIONER. Indeed there would. And here's the first enquiry
 I shall make.

[*To* LYSISTRATA] What reason made you shut and bolt the
 Akropolis' gates like this?

LYSISTRATA. We aimed to seize the treasury, and block your
 funds for warfare.

COMMISSIONER. You think it's money that makes us fight?

LYSISTRATA.	And causes <i>all</i> our turmoil. That's why Peisandros and the rest who set their sights on power Created turmoil everywhere—to cover up their thieving. They'll never get their hands again upon the city's silver.	490
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COMMISSIONER. What makes you sure?

LYSISTRATA.	You need to ask? Well we'll be treasurers now.
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COMMISSIONER. You *women* look after the city's funds?

LYSISTRATA.	What makes you think that's strange? Don't we, your wives, already hold the purse strings in your houses?
-------------	--

COMMISSIONER. It's not the same.

LYSISTRATA. Why not?

COMMISSIONER. Because the city pays
for *warfare*.

LYSISTRATA. There isn't any need for war.

COMMISSIONER. How else could we
survive?

LYSISTRATA. We women will keep you safe and sound.

COMMISSIONER. You women?

LYSISTRATA. Yes, we.

COMMISSIONER. Outrageous!

LYSISTRATA. We *will*, no matter what you want.

COMMISSIONER. How shocking!

LYSISTRATA. Now you're angry.

There's really no alternative. 500

COMMISSIONER. Such rank contempt for justice!

LYSISTRATA. You *must* be saved, old thing.

COMMISSIONER. Against my will?

LYSISTRATA. Yes,
all the more so!

COMMISSIONER. What gives you women the right to take control
of war and peace?

LYSISTRATA. I'll tell you, then.

COMMISSIONER. And make it sharp, or else you'll pay.

LYSISTRATA. Then
listen.

And please stop waving round your arms.

COMMISSIONER. I can't: it isn't
easy

To keep my anger bottled up.

OLD WOMAN^A [*chipping in*]. Well, *you're* the one who'll pay,
then.

COMMISSIONER. I hope you croak to death, old crone. [*to* LYSISTRATA]
But *you*, explain.

LYSISTRATA. I shall do.

For quite some time we've seen your faults, yet suffered
them in silence.

We tolerated everything decided by our husbands.

You wouldn't let us grumble, yet your actions didn't please
us.

We learnt precisely what you did, and often in our houses 510
 We heard reports of bad mistakes in very serious business.
 Then, inwardly distressed, we'd wear a smile as we asked
 nicely:

'What vote went through today? Perhaps to change the
 peace inscription?'

But all my husband ever said was 'What's it all to you,
 then?

Now hold your tongue.' And so I did.

OLD WOMAN^A.

Well, *I* would never

have done so!

COMMISSIONER [*to latter*].

You would have earned a thrashing, then.

LYSISTRATA.

And that's

why *I* kept quiet.

But later on we'd learn about an even worse decision.

And then we'd ask: 'How can you, husband, all be quite
 so crazy?'

He'd scowl at me and tell me I should stick to spinning
 yarn

If I didn't want a battered head. 'Just leave the war to
 menfolk.'

520

COMMISSIONER. *Precisely* what he should have said.

LYSISTRATA.

But how,

benighted fool,

Was it ever right we weren't allowed to give you good
 advice?

Then, when we heard you in the streets complaining, broad
 as daylight:

'There isn't a man left in the land', 'You're right, it's quite
 deserted',

That's when we women came to think we ought to stand
 together

And share our strength to save all Greece. *We couldn't* hold
 off longer.

So, if you men are now prepared to take some good
 suggestions,

And hold your tongues as we did then, we'll try to rescue
 you.

COMMISSIONER. You 'rescue' us! What shocking talk! Insufferable!

- LYSISTRATA. Keep quiet!
- COMMISSIONER. Keep quiet for *you*, you loathsome thing—a
 woman with a veil* 530
 Wrapped round her head? I'd rather die.
- LYSISTRATA [*removing her veil*]. Well if my veil's the
 problem,
 Then take it: have it for yourself
 And wrap it round your own head.
 [*She attaches it to him.*]
 And *then* keep quiet!
- OLD WOMAN^A. And take this basket, while you're at it!
 [*She thrusts it into his arms.*]
- LYSISTRATA. Then hitch your tunic, chew some beans,
 And work your wool.*
 Just leave the war to *women*!
- LEADER^W. Come, women, put your jugs aside, and rouse
 yourselves for action.
 It's now our turn to give our friends the help which they
 deserve. 540
- WOMEN. I never could grow tired *Antistrophe*
 Of dancing like this.
 My knees could never ache with weariness.
 I'll go to any lengths
 To help my fellow women.
 For they've got verve and courage,
 Wisdom and patriotism,
 With virtue and intelligence.
- LEADER^W. O bravest woman of us all, both grannies and
 young mothers,
 Proceed with passion, don't relent: you have the wind
 behind you. 550
- LYSISTRATA. Now if delicious Eros, with the Kyprian, Aphrodite,
 Will make our breasts and thighs appear seductively
 attractive,
 And then subject our husbands to exquisite priapisms,
 I'm sure the Greeks will hail us all, 'Lysimache, war-
 breaker!'^{*}
- COMMISSIONER. But what's your plan?

LYSISTRATA. We'll make a start by
 banning from the market
 All lunatics in military dress.

OLD WOMAN. We shall, by Aphrodite!

LYSISTRATA. At present, in the Agora, among the traders' stalls
 These people wander round in arms, like frenzied
 Korybantics.

COMMISSIONER. Of course they're armed, our soldiers brave.

LYSISTRATA. But
 what a silly sight
 To see a man with Gorgon-shield just buying fish for
 supper.* 560

OLD WOMAN. The other day I saw a long-haired cavalry
 commander,
 Yes, buying porridge on his horse: he put it in his helmet!
 Nearby, a Thracian mercenary, with weapons just like
 Tereus,
 Had petrified a poor old woman, and then gulped down
 her figs.

COMMISSIONER. Well how could *women* like yourselves resolve
 such tangled matters
 In all the various parts of Greece?

LYSISTRATA. Dead easy!

COMMISSIONER. Oh? Then show
 me.

[LYSISTRATA *takes some wool and a spindle from the basket: she gives a
 demonstration as she speaks.*]

LYSISTRATA. We'll deal with them precisely like a tangled skein
 of wool.
 We use our spindles in this way, to separate the strands.
 And that's how we'll resolve this war, if only we're allowed,
 By using embassies to separate the warring factions. 570

COMMISSIONER. You think that all your skeins of wool, and
 implements like spindles,
 Can show you how to stop a war? What fools!

LYSISTRATA. If you were
 sane,
 You'd model *all* your politics on our wool-working methods.

COMMISSIONER. Explain your point, and let me see.

LYSISTRATA [*proceeding to demonstrate from the basket*].

To start with,

treat the city

As women do a filthy fleece, by washing off the grease,
Then stretching it and picking out the nasty, prickly bits.
Next, find the ones who club together and press themselves
all tight

In quest for power:* then comb them out, and pluck off all
their heads.

Now fill your basket with communal fabric of goodwill,
With room for everyone, including well-disposed outsiders, 580

And even debtors to the state; there's space to mix them in.
Then don't forget the colonies sent out abroad by Athens:*
You ought to recognize that each is like a flock of wool.

Then take together all these strands, from all these different
sources,

And draw them, bind them into one great mighty ball of
wool,

From which to weave a nice warm cloak for all the city's
people.

COMMISSIONER. How shocking that these women spin out all this
woolly nonsense!

They've played so small a part in war.

LYSISTRATA. 'So small', repulsive
blockhead!

We pay a *double* price for war. For first we bear our
children,

And send them out as fighting troops, but— 590

COMMISSIONER. Silence! Don't
stir trouble.

LYSISTRATA. Then, when we should be finding joy and pleasure
in our marriage,

We sleep alone, because of war. And it's not just wives
who suffer.

Think of the maidens growing old, unmarried. How it
grieves me!

COMMISSIONER. And don't men too grow old?

LYSISTRATA. Of course, but
things are rather different.

Even a grey-haired man can find a youthful bride to marry.

A woman's chance is very brief, and if she doesn't seize it
No man will ever marry her: she sits and waits for omens.*

COMMISSIONER. Well while a man can get it up—

LYSISTRATA [*aggressively*].

Look, isn't it time you just dropped dead?
There are burial plots, and coffins for sale; 600
I'll bake your funeral cake myself.

[*Setting about him*]

And *there's* a wreath to boot!

OLD WOMAN^A.

And take some ribbons for your corpse!

OLD WOMAN^B.

And there's another wreath for you!*

LYSISTRATA. You've everything. Get in the boat:

Old Charon's calling you aboard,
He's waiting just for *you*.

[*The COMMISSIONER manages to extricate himself, and starts to leave.*]

COMMISSIONER. It's shocking I should be abused like this.

I swear I'll go directly, in this garb,

And show my fellow magistrates my plight. [*Exits.*] 610

LYSISTRATA [*calling after*]. You won't complain we failed to wash
the corpse?

In two days' time we'll come at crack of dawn

And have our offerings ready for your grave.

[*LYSISTRATA and the OLD WOMEN go back inside the Akropolis, leaving the
two half-choruses to face one another.*]

[*PARABASIS: 614-705*]

LEADER^M. Now's no time for idle dozing; every free man must
look sharp.

Let's remove our cloaks, my fellows: down to business
straight away.

[*The OLD MEN remove their cloaks to dance.*]

OLD MEN.

I swear I'm on the scent *Strophe*

Of bigger and more dangerous plots.

Indeed, I get a whiff of Hippias's tyranny!*

My fear is that some Spartan males 620

Have rendezvoused with Kleisthenes:

They're now inciting god-forsaken women
 To use their stealth and seize our revenues—
 The source of all my jury-pay!* 625

LEADER^M. I'm shocked, completely shocked. To think that *they*,
 the female sex,
 Should lecture all us citizens and prate about bronze shields,
 While seeking ways to make a truce between us and the
 Spartans—
 The Spartans, who deserve our trust no more than hungry
 wolves!*
 They've woven snares against the city; it's tyranny they're
 after. 630
 But *I* won't let them tyrannize, I'm always on my guard.
 Yes, I shall 'wear my sword' for ever 'beneath a myrtle
 branch',*
 And stand in arms by Aristogeiton in the market place.
 [*Raising their right arms, they move towards the women.*]
 I'll stand like this, in tight-knit rank, all poised to aim a
 blow
 Against the jaw of this decrepit, god-forsaken hag.

LEADER^W. *If* you do, you'll find your own face soon gets
 smashed into a pulp.
 Now's the time, my aged friends, to place our cloaks down
 on the ground.
 [*The WOMEN remove their cloaks, matching the OLD MEN's earlier
 action.*]

WOMEN. O citizens of Athens, *Antistrophe*
 We have some useful things to say.
 Why should we not? I too was reared in splendour by the
 city. 640
 At seven, I served Athena's cult,
 At ten, I ground the goddess's corn,
 And shed my dress to be a bear at Brauron;
 As basket-carrier too I served when young,
 Adorned in dried-fig necklace.*

LEADER^W. Now, who'll dispute my right to give the city good advice?
 It's true that I'm a woman, but suspend your prejudice
 And wait to see if I propose improvements to our plight. 650

WOMEN. If you rouse me up to fever pitch, *Antistrophe*
 Then you'll find my anger turns into a blazing sow.
 First of all I'll tear your hair, until you start to scream for help!
 [*Imitating*]

Women, we should also shed more clothes,
 Till we 'smell' of women with a rage to bite. 690

Now let anyone attack me!

If he does, he's finished:

He's had his final supper.

Now my anger's boiling: watch your tongues,
 Or I'll play Aesop's beetle to your eagle's eggs.*

LEADER^w. Your threats don't make me flinch at all, while
 Lampito's alive,
 As well as that dear girl from Thebes, the fine Ismenia.*
 You'll find you've lost the power you had, your votes
 won't count a jot,
 Especially since you're hated by your neighbours all
 around.

The other day I planned a feast to honour Hekate; 700
 I wanted to invite along a friend from down the road,
 A fine and sweet young thing she is—a Boiotian eel, in
 fact!*

'She can't be sent,' the answer came, 'your state-decrees
 forbid it.'

[*They move towards the men, mirroring the aggression of 680-1.*]

Well, what will stop these mad decrees? There's one sure
 remedy:

To take you by the leg, then throw you down and break
 your neck.

[*The parabasis complete, the half-choruses move aside. Some days have
 now passed since the occupation. LYSISTRATA emerges anxiously from the
 Akropolis. The following exchange burlesques the ethos of tragedy—until
 715.*]

LEADER^w. O mistress of this deed, this mighty scheme,
 What brings you out of doors with such dark looks?

LYSISTRATA. The acts, the female thoughts of wicked women

Oppress my spirit—and make me pace out here.

WOMEN [*wailing*]. Say more! Say more! 710

LYSISTRATA [*similarly*]. It's true, it's true.

LEADER^W. Reveal the horror! Disclose it to your friends.

LYSISTRATA. To speak is shameful; silence too is hard.

LEADER^W. Do not conceal the woe that now is ours.

LYSISTRATA [*plainly*]. Well, in a word—we're dying to be
fucked!

WOMEN. Alas, O Zeus!

LYSISTRATA. Why call on Zeus? What difference can he make?

I've lost the power to keep the women up here,
Cut off from their husbands like this. They're slipping away.

I caught the first one trying to open a hole 720

Just down the slope, right next to Pan's old grotto.

Another I caught wriggling down a pulley, no less.*

What a way to desert! A third was ready to fly

Astride a *dicky* bird, to find some Johnny;

I caught her by the hair and pulled her back.

There's no excuse beyond them, to make a chance

To go back home. [*The door opens and WOMAN^A emerges furtively.*]

Look, here's another one now!

Hey you, why such a hurry?

WOMAN^A. I must get home.

I've left my woollen fabrics from Miletos;

They're being ravaged by the moths. 730

LYSISTRATA. The moths!

Get back inside!

WOMAN^A. I promise I'll come straight back,

As soon as I've spread my things out on the bed.

LYSISTRATA. You'll spread out nothing! You certainly can't go
home.

WOMAN^A. But surely my fabrics will be destroyed.

LYSISTRATA. Hard luck!

[*A second woman appears.*]

WOMAN^B. Oh dear, oh dear! My poor old stalks of flax,

They're waiting to be stripped.

LYSISTRATA. Another one!

[*Suggestively*] She wants to go and finger stalks of flax.

Get back inside!

WOMAN^B. But *please*, in Hekate's name!

I'll be straight back when I've peeled the outside off.

LYSISTRATA. You'll peel off nothing! For if you make a start, 740

Every other woman will want to do the same.

[A third woman rushes out, clutching her belly.]

WOMAN^c. O mistress Eileithya, stop the birth

Until I get myself to sacred ground!

LYSISTRATA. What's all this guff?

WOMAN^c.

I'm almost giving birth!

LYSISTRATA. But I didn't see you pregnant *yesterday*.

WOMAN^c. I am today! Please send me home at once.

I need a midwife, quickly.

LYSISTRATA [examining her]. What d'you mean?

There's something hard in here.

WOMAN^c.

A baby boy.

LYSISTRATA [tapping]. By Aphrodite, it sounds as though you've got

A bronze and hollow belly. I'll soon find out.

750

[Opens the dress.]

Oh how absurd! To use Athena's helmet*

To claim you're pregnant!

WOMAN^c.

Listen—I swear I am!

LYSISTRATA. So why take *this*?

WOMAN^c.

In case of emergency.

Suppose I had to give birth on the hill,

[Demonstrating] I'd squat on this—the way that pigeons do.

LYSISTRATA. What cock and bull! A patent pack of lies.

[Removes the helmet.]

You'll stay with us for your helmet's family party.*

WOMAN^c. I just can't get a wink of sleep up here,

Ever since I caught a glimpse of the guardian snake.*

WOMAN^b. And *I* can't sleep as well; it's all those owls.*

760

They spend the whole night hooting endlessly.

LYSISTRATA. I beg you, please give up this silly twaddle.

No doubt you miss your husbands. Don't you think

That they miss *us*? I'm certain they must find

Their nights unbearable. Stand firm, my friends:

An oracle predicts that victory's ours,

Provided we don't feud. [producing a scroll] Look, here it is.

WOMAN^c. Oh, tell us what it says.

LYSISTRATA.

Keep quiet, then.

[In solemn tones] 'Should swallows huddle together, and stay

in a single enclosure,

770

Fleeing away from the hoopoes,* abstaining from genital

contact,

Then will their sufferings cease, and the higher be turned
into lower,

All by high-thundering Zeus—'

WOMAN^C [*interrupting*].

We women will now lie on
top, then?

LYSISTRATA. 'Should the time ever arrive when swallows will
quarrel and flutter,

Flying away from the holiest shrine, then all will discover
No other bird in the sky loves debauchery more than this
creature.'

WOMAN^C. I've never heard an oracle quite so clear!

LYSISTRATA. So let's not tire or give it up just yet.

Come back inside. It really would be shameful

For us, my dears, to let the oracle down. 780

[*All back inside. The two half-choruses take up their positions for an
exchange of songs.*]

OLD MEN.

Time to tell a little fable

Strophe

Which I heard while still a child.

There lived a young man once, his name Melanion,* 785

Who fled from marriage off into the wild,

To live on mountain slopes.

Now there he hunted hares

By means of woven nets, 790

And kept some sort of dog,

But never came back home, such was his hate.

So that's how much disgust he felt for *women*.

We share his feelings too—and his good sense!

[*The OLD MEN start to approach the WOMEN; the LEADERS speak, while the
other dancers perform matching actions.*]

LEADER^M. [*with mock affection*].

May I have a kiss, old hag?

LEADER^W. First, stop eating onions!

LEADER^M. May I lift your legs*—and kick you?

LEADER^W. What a bushy pubic region!* 800

LEADER^M. Yes, Myronides was like this,

With a black and bristling rump

Which he showed to all his foes.

And Phormio was just the same.*

WOMEN. I too want to tell a fable *Antistrophe*
 Quite unlike Melanion's.
 There lived a homeless drifter: Timon was his name.
 He hid his face inside a thorny thicket, 810
 His life was grim as death.
 So Timon now, this fellow,
 Went off and fed on hate,
 And lived on mountain slopes.*
 He called down curses on all evil men.
 And that's how much he shared our hate for males;
 To *women*, though, he stayed the best of friends. 820

[*The women approach the men, copying their action at 797 ff.*]

LEADER^W. Shall I thump you on the jaw?

LEADER^M [*ironically*].

Please don't. I'm quite afraid.

LEADER^W. What about a hefty kick?

LEADER^M. If you do, I'll see your pussy.

LEADER^W. What you'd see would not be hairy.

Old I may be, but you'd find

All is neatly trimmed and tidy:

I know how to use a lamp.*

[*A scream of alarm is heard. LYSISTRATA, soon followed by MYRRHINE and other women, appears on the roof of the stage-building, which represents the battlements of the Akropolis.*]

LYSISTRATA. Help! Help! Come over here at once, my women.

WOMAN. Is something wrong? What's all the shouting for? 830

LYSISTRATA. A man, a man! I can see him coming near.

[*Coyly*] He's stricken by Aphrodite's sacred needs!

O goddess, queen of Kypros, Kythera, Paphos,

Please keep us safe—but keep it up as well!

WOMAN. Where *is* this man you mean?

LYSISTRATA [*pointing*]. By Chloe's shrine.*

WOMAN. Oh yes, I see. Whoever could he be?

LYSISTRATA. Look, all of you. Does anyone know him?

MYRRHINE. Eeek!

I certainly do. It's Kinesias, my husband.

LYSISTRATA. It's *your* job, then, to roast him on a spit.

Seduce him—but withhold the love you offer. 840

And *dangle* everything—but keep our oath!

MYRRHINE. Of course. I'll get to work.

LYSISTRATA. And I'll stay here
To lend you help in working your seduction,
And help you make him *sizzle*. The rest should leave.

[*Other women off, and MYRRHINE stands back. Enter KINESIAS, with erect phallus beneath his cloak and accompanied by a SLAVE carrying a BABY.*]

KINESIAS. I just can't take much more of this distension!
The strain's as bad as torture on the wheel!*

LYSISTRATA [*aggressively*]. Who's there, inside the sentry line?

KINESIAS. It's
me.

LYSISTRATA. A man?

KINESIAS. Of course a man.

LYSISTRATA. Then clear right off!

KINESIAS. And who are *you* to eject me?

LYSISTRATA. I'm the look-out.

KINESIAS. I beg you, by the gods, call out Myrrhine. 850

LYSISTRATA. Call out Myrrhine for *you*! But what's your name?

KINESIAS. Kinesias, from Paionidai*—her husband.

LYSISTRATA [*softening*]. O greetings, dear. Your name's familiar
here:

We've heard a lot about your reputation.

Your wife forever has you on her *lips*.

So when she takes an apple or an egg,*

She says, 'For my Kinesias!'

KINESIAS. Ye gods!

LYSISTRATA. She does, by Aphrodite! When we start

Discussing our husbands' lives, then straight away

Your wife claims you're a *man* without compare. 860

KINESIAS. Then call her out.

LYSISTRATA. Well, are you willing to pay?

KINESIAS. I certainly am, if it's what you really want.

[*Pointing to phallus*] Look what I've got: I'll happily make it
yours.

LYSISTRATA. I'll go inside and call her out.

KINESIAS. Be quick!

[LYSISTRATA *goes inside.*]

[*Sentimentally*] My life has been without a trace of joy
Ever since my wife departed from the house.

I feel oppressed each time I come back home.
The whole place seems deserted. Even food
Gives me no pleasure at all. It's this erection!

[MYRRHINE *appears above, speaking back to* LYSISTRATA.]

MYRRHINE. I love, I love him so. But he doesn't want 870
To be loved by me. So please don't call me out.

KINESIAS. My sweetie-pie Myrrhine, what are you doing?
Please come down here.

MYRRHINE. Down there? You must be joking.

KINESIAS. Not even when it's me who asks, Myrrhine?

MYRRHINE. You don't have any need to call me out.

KINESIAS. No *need*! I'm in excruciating pain!

MYRRHINE [*retreating*]. Goodbye.

KINESIAS [*desperately*]. No, please don't go. You can't
ignore

Our *baby*. [*He touches the* BABY.] Call your mummy, little one.

BABY. Ma-ma, ma-ma, ma-ma.

KINESIAS [*to* MYRRHINE]. What's wrong? You don't feel sorry for
your baby, 880

Who's not been washed or breastfed five whole days?

MYRRHINE. Of course I do. But its *father* couldn't care less.

KINESIAS. Don't wrangle, just come down for the baby's sake.

MYRRHINE. What it is to be a mother! I'd better go down.

[*She goes inside.*]

KINESIAS [*excited*]. I'm sure my wife looks younger than before;

Her eyes have somehow got a softer look.

And all this temper and this haughtiness,

It only makes me want her all the more.

[MYRRHINE *appears from the Akropolis gates and goes to the* BABY.]

MYRRHINE. My little darling! What a wicked father you've got!
Just let me kiss you, mummy's little darling. 890

[*She takes the* BABY.]

KINESIAS [*approaching*]. You're cruel! What's made you do these
things and follow

These other women? You're just oppressing me

And feeling pain yourself.

MYRRHINE. Just keep your hands off!

KINESIAS. And as for all our property in the house,
You're letting it go to ruin.

MYRRHINE. What's that to me?
 KINESIAS. You mean you're not concerned if valuable wool
 Is damaged by the poultry?
 MYRRHINE. I'm certainly not.
 KINESIAS [*coily*]. You haven't practised Aphrodite's rites
 For such a long time. You really must come home.
 MYRRHINE. No, never—unless you men will stop the war 900
 And make a peace.
 KINESIAS. Well, once it's been decided,
 Of course we will.
 MYRRHINE [*sarcastically*].
 Well, 'once it's been decided'
 I'll come back home. For now, I've sworn I won't.
 KINESIAS [*desperately*]. It's been so long, please lie down here
 with me.*
 MYRRHINE. I can't—and yet I won't deny I love you.
 KINESIAS. You do? Then, lie down straight away, my Myrrhi!
 MYRRHINE. How ludicrous! Right here in front of the baby?
 KINESIAS. Of course not. [*He gives the BABY to the slave.*] Manes,*
 take the baby home. [SLAVE *exits.*]
 So there: the baby's well and truly dealt with.
 You'll surely lie down now? 910
 MYRRHINE. But where, my dear,
 Could we *do* it?
 KINESIAS [*looking around*]. Where? Inside Pan's grotto is fine.
 MYRRHINE. But I'd be impure; I couldn't go back inside.
 KINESIAS. Why not, if you washed in the spring, Klepsydra, first?
 MYRRHINE. I've sworn an oath. You want me to perjure myself?
 KINESIAS. May the punishment fall on *me*: forget your oath.
 MYRRHINE. All right—but let me fetch a small bed.
 KINESIAS. No!
 The ground will do.
 MYRRHINE. You may be desperate,
 But it's out of the question to lie down on the ground.
 [She goes inside.]
 KINESIAS. My wife still loves me: that's entirely clear.
 [MYRRHINE *returns with a light bedframe.*]
 MYRRHINE. Right, lie straight down; I'm taking my clothes off now.
 [KINESIAS *gets onto the bed.*] 920
 But no—I'll tell you what: we need a mattress.

KINESIAS. A mattress! I certainly don't.

MYRRHINE.

Of course you do:

The straps are hard.

KINESIAS [*trying to hold her back*].

But let me kiss you first.

MYRRHINE. Well there you are.

KINESIAS.

Mmmmmmm! Now come back soon.

[MYRRHINE *goes inside again, and returns with a mattress.*]

MYRRHINE. Right, there's the mattress. Lie on it, while I strip.

But no—I'll tell you what: you need a pillow.

KINESIAS. I've everything I need!

MYRRHINE.

Well I need more.

[*In again.*]

KINESIAS. My prick's like Herakles—hungry but cheated of food!

MYRRHINE [*returning with pillows*]. Come on, lift up. That's

everything I want.

KINESIAS. It's more than enough! Please lie down now, my

treasure.

930

MYRRHINE. I'll just undo my bra—but don't forget,

You won't deceive me, will you, over peace.

KINESIAS. If I do, then damn my eyes!

MYRRHINE [*suddenly*].

You need a blanket.

KINESIAS. It's not a blanket I need—it's just a fuck!

MYRRHINE. Of course, you'll get your chance. I won't be long.

KINESIAS. This woman will finish me off, with all her bedding!

MYRRHINE [*returning with blanket*]. Just lift yourself.

KINESIAS [*pointing to phallus*].

Is *this* not

high enough?

MYRRHINE. Would you like some perfume?

KINESIAS.

No, for god's sake, no!

MYRRHINE. You've got to have some, whether you want or not. [*In.*]

KINESIAS. I hope to heaven her perfume all gets spilt!

940

MYRRHINE [*returning with perfume*]. Now give me your hand and

rub that on yourself.

KINESIAS [*smelling*]. This perfume isn't suitable at all:

Its fragrance doesn't *penetrate* enough.

MYRRHINE. Oh dear, I've gone and brought the Rhodian scent.*

KINESIAS. No, look—it's fine. Forget it, please.

MYRRHINE.

You're silly. [*In again.*]

KINESIAS. Damnation on the man who first made perfume!

MYRRHINE [*returning*]. Here, take another bottle.

KINESIAS.

I don't need two.

Stop being heartless. Lie down, just forget
The rest.

MYRRHINE. I'll do exactly what you want. [*Stepping backwards.*]

I'm taking off my shoes. Remember, darling, 950

Be sure you vote for peace. [*She slips back into the Akropolis.*]

KINESIAS.

Of course I will.

[*Looks round and realizes that MYRRHINE has gone.*]

My wife's sadistic! Such a fierce tormentor!

To stretch my skin so far, then disappear!

[*Chanting like a lamenting hero*]

What's left for me? What chance of a fuck?

The loveliest woman has made me her dupe.

How will I nurse this thing of mine?

[*To the audience*]

Where's Foxy the pimp?*

Procure a wet-nurse for me!

LEADER^M [*with mock-tragic sympathy*].

You're in a dreadful plight, poor wretch.

Your life's been crushed by harsh deceit. 960

I'm moved to pity you.

What innards could withstand such woe?

What kind of mind? What testicles?

What groin, what haunch

Could stand this strain

Without an early-morning fuck?

KINESIAS. O Zeus, what spasms of fresh pain!

LEADER^M. All your afflictions are due alone

To a loathsome, hateful female.

KINESIAS. No—dear, delicious wife! 970

LEADER^M. Delicious? *Vile*, she's vile.

KINESIAS. You're right, she's vile. O Zeus, O Zeus,

I pray that you may sweep her up

With a mighty blast of hurricane

And swing her, fling her through the air

Before releasing her once more,

And letting her fall to earth again

Where, lo and behold, she'd find herself

Astride my swollen cock!

[As KINESIAS turns, enter a Spartan HERALD,* an erect phallus bulging
beneath his cloak.]

HERALD. Can you tell me where to find the Athenian Elders,* 980
Or the Council committee? I've got some news for them.

KINESIAS. And what are *you*? A man—or priapic god?*

HERALD. A herald, young man, from Sparta, by the Twins!
I've come to ask for peace negotiations.

KINESIAS [*pointing to the HERALD's phallus*]. I suppose that's why
you've brought a spear along!

HERALD [*embarrassed*]. I swear I've no such thing.

KINESIAS. Why turn
away?

Then what's this bulge beneath your cloak? Perhaps
The journey's swollen your groin?

HERALD. I swear, by Kastor,
This man's deranged!

KINESIAS. You've got a hard on, liar!

HERALD. I swear I haven't. Stop babbling utter nonsense! 990

KINESIAS [*lifting the HERALD's cloak*].

And what's this here?

HERALD. A Spartan message-stick.*

KINESIAS [*gesturing*]. Well if that's so, I've got one here myself!

You can speak the truth to one who understands.

Now, what's the situation back in Sparta?

HERALD. The whole of Sparta's up in—well, just *up*.

Our allies too. They've all got hards. It's dire.

KINESIAS. But what's the cause of all your tribulation?

A curse from Pan?

HERALD. No, Lampito led the way,

And all the other Spartan women joined her.

They reached agreement when to hatch their plot, 1000

Then banned their husbands from their entrances.

KINESIAS. Can you cope?

HERALD. Of course we can't. We walk bent over,
As though we're screening lamps, to keep them lit.

[*He mimics the walk of a lamp-carrier, with his arms round his
phallus.*]

Our wives won't let us touch their bushy plants*

Until we all, by common accord, decide

To make a peace that binds the whole of Greece.

KINESIAS. This whole affair's one huge conspiracy
 By all our wives. At last, I understand!
 Look, hurry home and tell your countrymen
 To send ambassadors back with open mandate. 1010
 I'll ask the Council here to do the same:
 They can't refuse—I'll let them see my prick!
 HERALD. I'll rush back home. An excellent suggestion.

[Both exit by opposite side entrances.]

[The two half-choruses once again confront one another, but this time the
 WOMEN'S approach is different. As before, the dancers follow their
 LEADERS' example.]

LEADER^M. Nowhere will you find a beast that's quite as fierce as
 womankind.

Fire itself is not so harsh. No leopardess is quite so bold.

LEADER^W. Now you understand my nature, will you still make
 war on me?

Even though you've got the chance, you brute, to have
 me as a friend?

LEADER^M. Rest assured I'll never cease to execrate the female sex.

LEADER^W. Should you change your mind, the offer stands. But
 anyhow,

Surely now you need some clothes on. What a funny sight
 you are! 1020

Let me come and wrap you in the tunic which you shed
 before.*

[She wraps his tunic round his shoulders.]

LEADER^M. That, I must confess, was not an altogether hostile act.

When I threw it off, my own hostility was goading me.

LEADER^W. Now you're looking somewhat manly; now you're
 not so ludicrous.

If you weren't so petulant, I might consider helping you
 Take this insect from your eye: it's clearly causing irritation.

LEADER^M [softening]. Ah! so that's what made me angry. Here's
 a ring to help remove it.

Scrape it out, and when you've got it, let me see just what
 it was.

All along it's been so vexing, interfering with my sight.

LEADER^W. Count on me to show you kindness, all despite your
 peevishness. 1030

[*She touches his face, as though removing something from his eye.*]
Zeus above! I've never seen so large a gnat in someone's
eye.

Take a look: you'll rarely find an insect species so immense.

LEADER^M [*sentimentally*]. Thanks for being so kind! That gnat
was digging a well inside my eye:

Now it's out, my eyes are watering—tears are running
down my cheeks.

LEADER^W. Never mind, I'll wipe them for you—even though
you *are* a brute.

Here's a kiss too.

LEADER^M. No, don't kiss me!

LEADER^W. Yes I will, whatever
you say.

LEADER^M. Oh confound you! How can I resist a woman's
artfulness?

Now the truth of that old saying starts to dawn upon my
brain:

'Life with women's too appalling; life without them's just
the same.'

Time has come to make a truce, upon the understanding
that

1040

Neither party does the other any harm in word or deed.

Let us join our ranks together, then embark upon a song.

[*The two half-choruses now, and for the rest of the play, amalgamate
themselves into a single* CHORUS *of twenty-four.*]

CHORUS. First a message for our audience: *Strophe A*
We do not propose to slander
Any Athenian citizen.

Everything we say and do will fill your minds with happy
thoughts, 1046-7

Since the city's present troubles hardly need to be increased.*

Let the word be spread by every man and woman: 1050

When a person's short of money,
We have lots at home—yes, bags of it.

If, one day, the war is over,*
Those who sign for loans with me

Never, ever need repay—
Since they'll never see the cash!

We're about to wine and dine Strophe B
 Some Karystian visitors—
 Actually, they're VIPs. 1060

Soup will start the menu off, and then we'll eat a sucking-pig:
 Ready-roasted this is waiting, tender cuts of pork for all.
 See you round at mine today, but don't be late:

Have a bath before you come;
 Bring your children; feel no need to knock;
 Just imagine that you're walking
 Into your own property—
 Since you'll find in any case 1070
 Bolts are fastened on the door!

[Enter, from a side entrance, long-haired Spartan ENVOYS, with erect phalluses beneath their cloaks.]

LEADER. Here come some Spartan envoys now: their hairy faces
 prove it.*

And what a bulge around their thighs! It seems they're
 wearing tents.

Official greetings to you, men of Sparta,
 Do tell us what has brought you here today.

SPARTAN. What need is there for lengthy explanation?

You see precisely what has brought us here.

LEADER. Phew! Yes, a tense condition you're suffering from!

I see that matters now are worse *inflamed*.

SPARTAN. Incredibly! The facts speak for themselves. 1080

We badly need an offer of terms for peace.

[Enter Athenian ENVOYS, bent over by the same affliction and
 accompanied by SLAVES.]

LEADER. Look over here. Some natives are approaching:

They're bending forwards just as wrestlers do,
 To make their cloaks hang loosely from their groins.

[Mock-medically] I diagnose a case of grave tumescence!

ATHENIAN. We need to find Lysistrata at once.

[Revealing his phallus] The plight we're in is plain for all
 to see.

LEADER [pointing]. This sickness is a perfect match for *that*.

[Diagnostically] D'you find distension most acute at dawn?

ATHENIAN. Not half! We've been reduced to desperation! 1090

Unless a resolution's quickly found,
We'll be compelled to fuck old Kleisthenes.

LEADER. I'd recommend you promptly close your cloaks:
In case those herm-defacers notice you.*

ATHENIAN. My god! That's good advice.

SPARTAN. Yes, by the Twins!
I quite agree. Let's fasten up our garb.

ATHENIAN [*regaining dignity*]. We're glad you've come; we've
been through misery here.

SPARTAN. We too, dear friend, have been in real distress.
To think of people seeing us all aroused!

ATHENIAN. Right, let's begin negotiations proper.
What brings you here?

1100

SPARTAN. We've come to seek a truce,
As envoys.

ATHENIAN. Good to hear! We want the same.
We ought to call Lysistrata at once.

There's no one else who knows the way to peace.

SPARTAN [*desperately*]. Be quick, or else I'll need to take a *man*!

ATHENIAN. But look, no need for us to call her out.

She must have heard; she's coming out here herself.

[*Enter LYSISTRATA from the Akropolis gates.*]

LEADER [*declaiming*]. Hail, boldest of the female sex. It's time
for you to be
Both fierce and gentle, fine and coarse, quite haughty yet
benign.

The foremost men in all of Greece are captured by your
spell:

1110

They're here, and have agreed that you should mediate
between them.

LYSISTRATA. The task will not be hard, provided that
Their passions are inflamed but lack deceit.
I'll soon find out. Call Reconciliation!*

[*Enter the naked RECONCILIATION from the Akropolis.*]

To start with, bring the Spartans here to me.

And don't adopt a rough or surly manner—

Not like our husbands' former boorishness—

But lead them in a feminine, friendly way.

If they refuse their hands, just grab their knobs.

[RECONCILIATION *ushers the Spartans to* LYSISTRATA'S *side.*]

Now bring the Athenians over here as well: 1120

Take hold of any part they offer you.

[RECONCILIATION *does the same with the Athenians.*]

Envoys from Sparta, stand right by me here,

And you Athenians there. Now hear my speech.

[LYSISTRATA *begins solemnly, though the ENVOYS concentrate on* RECONCILIATION'S *anatomy.*]

'A woman I am, but not without sharp wits.'*

My own intelligence is quite robust,

And hearing words of wisdom from my father

Has added greatly to my education.

So now I wish to take both parties here

And reprimand you justly—you who share

A common ritual, just like men of kin, 1130

At Olympia, Thermopylai, and Delphi*

(The list could be extended, if required),

Yet while barbarian armies lie nearby,*

You send Greek men and cities to destruction.

[*Formally.*] 'That is my first contention now complete.'*

ATHENIAN. Well, *my* destruction stems from this erection!

LYSISTRATA. Now, Spartans, I'll address myself to you.

Don't you remember how your countryman,

Perikleidas, came here once as suppliant?

At the altar, pale-faced in a scarlet cloak, 1140

He begged for troops. For at that time Messene

Was in revolt, and Poseidon's earthquake shook.

Kimon went off, and with four thousand hoplites

He saved the whole of Sparta's territory.*

Yet in return for this Athenian help,

You ravage the very land which rescued you.*

ATHENIAN. That shows they're in the wrong, Lysistrata.

SPARTAN. We're in the wrong. [*Examining* RECONCILIATION] But
what a magnificent arse!

LYSISTRATA [*turning*]. You think I've no reproof for *you*, Athenians?

Don't you remember how in turn the Spartans 1150

Came armed with spears, when you were dressed like slaves,

And slaughtered many Thessalian combatants

And many other friends of Hippias?*

It was they alone who forced the tyrants out,

And liberated you: they gave the people
The chance to wear once more the cloak of freedom.*

SPARTAN [*as before*]. I've never seen a more voluptuous woman.

ATHENIAN. Nor I, in all my life, a finer cunt.

LYSISTRATA. Why, then, when precedents like these exist,

D'you go to war and keep up all your hatred? 1160

Why not be reconciled? Well, what's to stop it?

[*Both SPARTAN and ATHENIAN treat RECONCILIATION's anatomy as a map of Greece.*]

SPARTAN. Well, we want peace—provided we get back

This round, enclosed part.

LYSISTRATA. Which?

SPARTAN. The rear—of Pylos.

We've long requested it, and tried to probe.

ATHENIAN. Poseidon hear my oath, that's *not* for you!

LYSISTRATA. Please let them have it.

ATHENIAN. But where will we thrust
then?

LYSISTRATA. Demand another part in return for this.

ATHENIAN [*pointing between the legs*]. Let's see, then: we
demand that you return

This scrubby part—Echinous—and the orifice
Of the Malian gulf, as well as Megara's legs.* 1170

SPARTAN. No, by the Twins! Not *both* legs, my good friend.

LYSISTRATA. O let them! Don't start squabbling over legs.

ATHENIAN. I want to get this land and sow my seed.

SPARTAN. And I to spread manure out, by the Twins!

LYSISTRATA. You'll get your chance, once fully reconciled.

Now if you're sure, then formally decide

And go to get agreement from your allies.

ATHENIAN. Consult our allies! But look at our erections!

Both sets of allies surely won't dissent:

They'll want to fuck. 1180

SPARTAN. I'm certain, by the Twins,

That goes for *ours*.

ATHENIAN. And for the Karystians too!

LYSISTRATA. Well said! In that case, purify yourselves,

In order that we wives may entertain you

With all the contents of our festive baskets.*

Inside you'll swear an oath to show good faith.
 And then each one of you can take his wife
 And go back home.

ATHENIAN. Well, let's waste no more time.

SPARTAN. Lead on, Lysistrata!

ATHENIAN. Without delay!

[LYSISTRATA leads the ENVOYS into the Akropolis; their SLAVES sit down outside the gates. The CHORUS gathers for a dance which matches 1043-71 in form.]

CHORUS Woven blankets, finest mantles, *Antistrophe A*
 First-rate cloaks, gold jewellery— 1190
 I'm prepared to lend the lot.

Never would I hesitate to lend you clothes for all your sons,
 Or for when your daughter serves as basket-carrier to the state.*

Everyone is welcome, I invite you all:
 Come and borrow from my house.
 Nothing need be locked away from you.

All that's there is yours to take. 1200

Only, be prepared to find
 (If my eyes aren't going blind)
 That there's nothing left at all!*

Anyone who's short of food *Antistrophe B*
 For his slaves and little children,
 Ought to get supplies from me.

Finest barley-grain is stored inside my house. The bread it makes
 Swells to loaves of handsome size, all baked for you in quantity.

All who live in penury should come to see me; 1210

Bring your sacks and bags with you,
 They'll be filled up by a slave of mine.

On the other hand, be warned
 Not to come too near my door:

If you do, you'll find yourself
Bitten by my vicious dog!

[Enter, from the Akropolis, ATHENIANS, inebriated from their peace-celebrations and carrying torches.]

ATHENIAN^A [to door-keeper]. Just open the door! You shouldn't
 be in the way.

[*To SLAVES*] Get up, you lot! Don't tell me I need to singe
Your hair with my torch? [*to audience*] A vulgar old routine:
I couldn't stoop to that.* Oh, if we must,
We'll bring ourselves to gratify your tastes. 1220

[*He starts to threaten the SLAVES with his torch.*]

ATHENIAN^B [*entering*]. And we'll join in, though sharing your
distaste.

[*To SLAVES*] Clear off! Or else you'll find your hair on fire!

ATHENIAN^A. Clear off! We want the delegates from Sparta
To leave the celebration undisturbed.

ATHENIAN^B. My eyes have never seen a finer banquet.

The Spartans were such sparkling company,
While *we* are at our best when drinking wine.

ATHENIAN^A. Quite right. It doesn't suit us being sober.

If I can get the Athenians to agree,
All envoys will negotiate when drunk.* 1230

At present, when we make a trip to Sparta,
We're sober—so we're bent on causing trouble.

We take no notice of their actual words,
But keep detecting what they leave unsaid,
And can't agree on what has taken place.

Today, though, all was perfect harmony.
If someone got the drinking-songs mixed up,
We just applauded, swore that nothing was wrong.

But, look, these slaves are coming back again.
Clear out of here, before you get a whipping! 1240

ATHENIAN^B. Yes, just in time—the Spartans are coming out.

[*Enter Spartan delegation from the Akropolis.*]

SPARTAN [*to piper*]. Come, take your blowers up, my merry
friend.*

I'd like to dance a Spartan jig and sing
A song for our Athenian hosts and us.

ATHENIAN^A. Yes, take your puff-pipes, do; you really must.

I always love to watch you Spartans dancing.

[*Space is cleared for the SPARTAN to sing and dance.*]

SPARTAN.

Send down, o goddess Memory, to your singer young
The Muse, your daughter,
Who remembers glorious deeds of both our peoples. 1250

How, first, at Artemision, Athenians
 Assailed like gods
 The Persian ships and won the day.*
 Remember, too, how Leonidas
 Led Spartans whose ferocity
 Was like wild boars with sharpened tusks:*
 Like boars their faces foamed with rage,
 And foam ran down their limbs;
 The Persian hordes were numberless 1260
 As are the grains of sand.
 O goddess of the wild and of the hunt,
 Come down, O virgin Artemis,
 Attend the peace we make
 And help preserve it evermore.
 May friendship's bounty always overflow
 Upon our pact! And may we cease
 To act like wily foxes!* 1270
 Come down, come down,
 O virgin huntress!

[During the music, the wives have emerged from the Akropolis, to be reunited with their husbands.]

ATHENIAN. Well, now our other business is complete,
 You Spartans can escort these women home.*
 Let every man and wife stand reunited,
 Then let us, for the sake of happiness,
 Perform a dance in honour of the gods
 And vow we'll never err again in future.

[Husbands and wives move into pairs for the dance, as the ATHENIAN starts to sing.]

Draw up the dance! Draw in the Graces.
 Invoke, first, Artemis! 1280
 Invoke her brother-twin,
 Who leads the dance and brings us joy!
 Invoke mount Nysa's god,*
 Who revels with his maenads,
 His eyes aflame with light!
 Invoke, too, Zeus, illuminated by his fiery bolt!
 Invoke his queen and wife, fortune's bestower!
 Invoke all other gods, whose memories

Will serve as witnesses for evermore
 To the life of gentle-minded peace
 Restored for us by the Kyprian goddess. 1290

Alalai! Cry for joy!
 Lift up your legs to dance,
 To dance for victory!
 Shout out in ecstasy!

[To SPARTAN] Now sound your own new strain, to match
 that song.

SPARTAN [*singing and dancing*].

Leaving the lovely summit of Taygetos,
 Come Muse, O Spartan Muse, help us to call
 In fitting fashion on Apollo, god of Amyklai,*
 And on Athena, goddess of Bronze-House shrine,*
 And on the noble Tyndaridai 1300
 Who play beside Eurotas' banks.*

Come tread in time,
 Tread lightly to the dance's step.
 Let our singing honour Sparta,
 Where the love of dance is nurtured
 With the beat of stamping feet,
 And where the girls, like colts,
 Upon Eurotas' banks
 Leap in rhythm, kicking up the dust 1310
 Into the breeze,

And let their hair stream out
 Like Bacchants swirling with their wands.*
 At their head moves Leda's daughter,*
 Sacred, charming leader of the dance.

LEADER. Come, bind your hair up neatly for a further dance.

Prepare
 To move with feet like deer, and clap your hands to keep
 in time.

Let's raise a song in honour of the warlike, Bronze-House
 goddess. 1320-1

[*Exit all, dancing.*]