Fight like a Woman: Female Heroics and Homeric Models in *Lysistrata*

**1) *Lys*. 772-3: [[1]](#footnote-2)**

Lysistrata: τὰ δ᾿ ὑπέρτερα νέρτερα θήσει Ζεὺς ὑψιβρεμέτης… / High thundering Zeus shall put the bottom things on top…

Wife Three: ἐπάνω κατακεισόμεθ᾿ ἡμεῖς; / You mean we get to be on top?

**2) *Lys*. 502:**

ὑμῖν δὲ πόθεν περὶ τοῦ πολέμου τῆς τ᾽ εἰρήνης ἐμέλησεν; / Since when is war and peace a concern to you?

**3) *Lys*. 520/*Iliad* 6.492:**

πόλεμος δ᾿ ἄνδρεσσι μελήσει. / Let war be a care for men.

**4) *Lys*. 538:**

πόλεμος δὲ γυναιξὶ μελήσει. / Let war be a care for women.

**5)**

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| **Motif** | ***Iliad* 6** | ***Lysistrata*** |
| 1) Presentation of the baby to the hero | ἥ οἱ ἔπειτ᾿ ἤντησ᾿, ἅμα δ᾿ ἀμφίπολος κίεν αὐτῇ παῖδ᾿ ἐπὶ κόλπῳ ἔχουσ᾿ ἀταλάφρονα, νήπιον αὔτως, Ἑκτορίδην ἀγαπητόν, ἀλίγκιον ἀστέρι καλῷ,  *She now met him, and with her came a handmaid holding to her bosom the tender boy, a mere babe, the well-loved son of Hector, like a fair star*  (399-401) | μὴ δῆτ᾿, ἀλλὰ τῷ γοῦν παιδίῳ ὑπάκουσον. οὗτος, οὐ καλεῖς τὴν μαμμίαν;  *No, wait! At least listen to the baby. Come on you, yell for mommy!*  (877-8) |
| 2) Emotional effect on the hero of seeing child | ἦ τοι ὁ μὲν μείδησεν ἰδὼν ἐς παῖδα σιωπῇ  *Then Hector smiled as he glanced at his boy in silence* (404)  Ὣς εἰπὼν οὗ παιδὸς ὀρέξατο φαίδιμος Ἕκτωρ  *So saying, glorious Hector stretched out his arms to his boy* (466)  αὐτὰρ ὅ γ᾿ ὃν φίλον υἱὸν ἐπεὶ κύσε πῆλέ τε χερσίν, εἶπεν ἐπευξάμενος Διί τ᾿ ἄλλοισίν τε θεοῖσι·  *And he kissed his dear son, and fondled him in his arms, and spoke in prayer to Zeus and the other gods:* (474-5) | οἷον τὸ τεκεῖν. καταβατέον.  *How momentous is motherhood! I have to go down there.* (884)  ὦ γλυκύτατον σὺ τεκνίδιον κακοῦ πατρός, φέρε σε φιλήσω, γλυκύτατον τῇ μαμμίᾳ.  *My sweetie, my bitty baby, that’s got such a bad father, let me give you a kiss, mommy’s little dearest!*  (889-90) |
| 3) Plea of the spouse to the hero to take pity on the child (and spouse) | οὐδ᾿ ἐλεαίρεις παῖδά τε νηπίαχον καὶ ἔμ᾿ ἄμμορον, ἣ τάχα χήρησεῦ ἔσομαι  *You have no pity for your infant child or for unfortunate me, who soon will be your widow* (404-6)  ἀλλ᾿ ἄγε νῦν ἐλέαιρε καὶ αὐτοῦ μίμν᾿ ἐπὶ πύργῳ, μὴ παῖδ᾿ ὀρφανικὸν θήῃς χήρην τε γυναῖκα·  *Come now, have pity, and stay here on the wall, lest you make your son fatherless and your wife a widow.* (431-2) | αὕτη, τί πάσχεις; οὐδ᾿ ἐλεεῖς τὸ παιδίον ἄλουτον ὂν κἄθηλον ἕκτην ἡμέραν;  *Hey, what’s wrong with you? Don’t you feel sorry for the baby, unwashed and unsuckled for six days already?* (880-1)  κατάβηθ᾿, ὦ δαιμονία, τῷ παιδίῳ.  *Come down here, you screwy woman, and see to your child* (883) |
| **Motif** | ***Iliad* 6** | ***Lysistrata*** |
| 4) Plea of the spouse that the absence of the hero causes them the lack of all comforts | ἐμοὶ δέ κε κέρδιον εἴησεῦ ἀφαμαρτούσῃ χθόνα δύμεναι· οὐ γὰρ ἔτ᾿ ἄλληἔσται θαλπωρή, ἐπεὶ ἂν σύ γε πότμον ἐπίσπῃς, ἀλλ᾿ ἄχε᾿  *But for me it would be better to go down to the grave if I lose you, for never more will any comfort be mine, when you have met your fate, but only woes.* (410-13) | ὡς οὐδεμίαν ἔχω γε τῷ βίῳ χάριν,ἐξ οὗπερ αὕτη ᾿ξῆλθεν ἐκ τῆς οἰκίας,ἀλλ᾿ ἄχθομαι μὲν εἰσιών, ἔρημα δὲεἶναι δοκεῖ μοι πάντα  *I’ve had no joy or pleasure in my life since the day she left my home. I go into the house and feel agony; everything looks empty to me;*  (865-8)  ἐπιτετριμμένος μὲν οὖν.  *I’m in agony without you!* (876) |
| 5) Suggestion from spouse that the hero stop fighting and return home | ἀλλ᾿ ἄγε νῦν ἐλέαιρε καὶ αὐτοῦ μίμν᾿ ἐπὶ πύργῳ,μὴ παῖδ᾿ ὀρφανικὸν θήῃς χήρην τε γυναῖκα· λαὸν δὲ στῆσον παρ᾿ ἐρινεόν, ἔνθα μάλιστα[13](https://www-loebclassics-com.ezproxy.library.wisc.edu/view/homer-iliad/1924/pb_LCL170.307.xml?result=1&rskey=WSeqZ4#note_LCL170_306_13)ἀμβατός ἐστι πόλις καὶ ἐπίδρομον ἔπλετο τεῖχος.  *Come now, have pity, and stay here on the wall, lest you make your son fatherless and your wife a widow. And as for your army, station it by the wild fig tree, where the city may best be scaled, and the wall is open to assault.* (431-4) | ὦ γλυκύτατον Μυρρινίδιον, τί ταῦτα δρᾷς; κατάβηθι δεῦρο.  *Myrrhinikins, dearest, why are you doing this? Come down here!* (872-3)  τί, ὦ πονήρα, ταῦτα ποιεῖς χἀτέραιςπείθει γυναιξί; κἀμέ τ᾿ ἄχθεσθαι ποιεῖςαὐτή τε λυπεῖ.  *What do you think you’re doing, you naughty girl, listening to those other women and giving me a hard time and hurting yourself as well?* (891-3)  οὐ βαδιεῖ πάλιν;  *Won’t you come home?* (899) |
| 6) Refusal of hero to comply with wishes of spouse | πόλεμος δ᾿ ἄνδρεσσι μελήσει  *war will be the concern for men* (492)  (the refusal is rather implicit in his whole response, 440-465) | μὰ Δί᾿ οὐκ ἔγωγ᾿,  *I certainly will not.* (900)  (although before running off, she does agree to comply with his request so long as he votes for peace, 949-51) |
| 7) Fear of the hero to be shamed by comrades for failing to complete duty | ἦ καὶ ἐμοὶ τάδε πάντα μέλει, γύναι· ἀλλὰ μάλ᾿ αἰνῶςα ἰδέομαι Τρῶας καὶ Τρῳάδας ἑλκεσι πέπλους, αἴ κε κακὸς ὣς νόσφιν ἀλυσκάζω πολέμοιο·  *Woman, I too take thought of all this, but I dreadfully feel shame before the Trojans, and the Trojans’ wives with trailing robes, if like a coward I skulk apart from the battle.* (441-3) | νῦν δ᾿ ἀπομώμοκα.  *But meanwhile I’ve sworn to stay here*. (903)  καὶ πῶς ἔθ᾿ ἁγνὴ δῆτ᾿ ἀνέλθοιμ᾿ εἰς πόλιν;  *But how could I go back up to the Acropolis no longer pure?* (912)  ἔπειτ᾿ ὀμόσασα δῆτ᾿ ἐπιορκήσω, τάλαν;  *You’re telling me, dear, that I should break the oath I swore?*  (914) |

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1. Greek text of Homer and Aristophanes is taken from the Loeb (2014) editions, ed. A.T. Murray and Jeffrey Henderson respectively. Translations of handout 1-4 are my own; translations of handout 5 are taken from the Loeb. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)