

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

Much groundwork has been laid for a discussion concerning female heroics in *Lysistrata* (Whitman 1964; Faraone 2006). Faraone (1997) provides a particularly significant discussion where, focusing on events in the *parodos*, he shows that the older women are characterized heroically in light of their role as saviors of the city. Faraone also demonstrates that the women secure salvation for the city through distinctly feminine/domestic means. It is my contention that our understanding of the nature of female heroics and the role of the women as saviors of the city which Faraone outlines can be furthered through analysis of two Homeric parallels Aristophanes draws. Here I demonstrate that Aristophanes conflates the role of the comic hero Lysistrata with that of the Homeric hero Hector in two key scenes. First, we see this conflation in a scene from the *agon* (*Lys.* 520-538) in which Lysistrata quotes a line from the *Iliad* (6.492) originally spoken by Hector. This Homeric model then continues in the episode between Myrrhine and Kinesias (*Lys.* 889-953), which I argue is modelled on the scene of farewell between Hector and Andromache (*Il.* 6.390 – 502). Understanding these two scenes as interacting directly with the Homeric scene enhances our understanding of Aristophanes' portrayal of female heroics.

The reversal and upturning of societal norms is perhaps one of the most obvious themes in *Lysistrata*. This theme is first evident in the fact that Aristophanes has given the role of the comic hero to a woman. Within the narrative, Lysistrata then affirms as much when she reads aloud the 'oracle' which predicts the women's victory, in which is promised that Zeus will put "the bottom things on top" (*Lys.* 772). Though the implications of this reversal are at first misunderstood by the other women, it becomes clear that Lysistrata is here referring to the overturning of both the traditional role of women within the *oikos*, and the relationship of their domestic role to matters of state.

The heroic role take on by the women as saviors of the city is no small part of this theme. However, while the parallel with the scene of the *Iliad* slots the women as taking the role of Hector and places the men in the role of Andromache, it is not a simple or direct reversal of roles. The women, and Lysistrata in particular, retain their marked femininity by continuing to act in distinctly feminine ways (i.e. using their expertise from their domestic duties to untangle the complicated mess of the state). This nuance of characterization thus enlightens our understanding of the ways in which Aristophanes presents female heroics in *Lysistrata*.

Bibliography

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