

## Pherecrates and the Women of *Lysistrata*

In this paper, I argue that Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* has a close intertextual engagement with the comedies of Pherecrates. When Lysistrata tells her fellow women that they must go on a sex-strike to end the war with Sparta, Callonice objects that their husbands might leave them (*Lys.* 157). Lysistrata responds "do a Pherecrates and skin a skinned dog!" (*Lys.* 158). Callonice understands this phrase as referring to a dildo. Scholars have generally assumed that "to skin a skinned dog" is a quotation from Pherecrates (Henderson 1987, 86; Sommerstein 1990, 163), but a scholiast on the passage was unable to locate the phrase in the Pherecratean corpus. I argue, with Ruffell (2011, 394), that the passage is not meant to be a quotation, but that it refers to Pherecratean practice: "to skin a skinned dog," as Diogenianus (5.85) tells us, means to do something in vain. Ruffell argues that this is in reference to Pherecrates' repetitive production of female-centered comedies and that Aristophanes points to Pherecrates' non-political women in order to highlight, by contrast, his own innovatively political citizen wives (Ruffell 2011, 394-5). I argue, however, that we should see the injunction by Lysistrata to "do a Pherecrates" in its dramatic context: Lysistrata tells her group of women to keep acting like the *hetaerae* typical of Pherecratean comedy. This Pherecratean comic mode (Urios-Aparisi 1997) is contrasted, throughout the *Lysistrata*, with the more political "serious" comic mode of Lysistrata herself. Ultimately it is only by means of this more traditional, non-political (and arguably funnier) Pherecratean type of comedy that Lysistrata can stop the war. Her own attempts at using politically-persuasive comedy fail.

In the first part of this paper, I offer an overview of passages in the *Lysistrata* that have intertextual links with surviving fragments of Pherecrates, particularly from his *Old Women* and

*Tyranny*. I argue that the women of the *Lysistrata* are characterized in the prologue as women typical of Pherecratean *hetaera* comedy (Henderson 2002; Culpepper Stroup 2004). *Lysistrata* herself is portrayed as different and separate from the other women, as a serious metatheatrical poet figure (Taaffe 1993, 52). This distinction between non-serious women typical of apolitical Pherecratean comedy and the extremely political directorial persona of *Lysistrata* reflects a dichotomy articulated by Aristophanes elsewhere, especially in the parabasis of *Peace*, in which he contrasts his own professed mode of political satire that seeks to advise the city (*Peace* 752-60) with the comedy of his rivals, whose characters are “ordinary little men or women (*Peace* 750-1).

In the second part of the paper I turn to lines 157-9, where I consider the dramatic and metatheatrical implications of the reference to Pherecrates. In addition to suggesting that *Lysistrata* is instructing her troupe of women to act as if they are in a Pherecrates comedy, I also argue that Callonice’s reply can be read as an ironic metatheatrical comment reflecting a common perception that Pherecrates’ comedy was trashy (*fluaria*).

Finally, I consider the Reconciliation scene at the end of the *Lysistrata*. When *Lysistrata* at last manages to make peace between the Spartans and the Athenians, she does so by means of a prostitute distraction scene, typical of the Pherecratean, not the satiric, mode of comedy. This observation suggests that in the *Lysistrata* Aristophanes offers a re-valuation of more universally-appealing low-brow comedy such as that of Pherecrates. It is not *fluaria*, but, in the hands of a good comic poet like Aristophanes, it is an essential element of the comic genre.

#### Bibliography

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