

Theôria and Gender in Aristophanes' *Peace* and *Lysistrata*

In Aristophanes' *Peace* (421 BCE), Trygaeus retrieves Peace (represented onstage by a statue) and two attendants from a cave on Olympus and brings them back to earth. Peace's attendants, Theôria and Opôra, are two of the many mute female characters that populate Aristophanes' plays, and they represent travel to international festivals and harvest, respectively, activities decidedly associated with peace in classical Athenian thought (for historical theôria, see Rutherford). In *Lysistrata*, another "peace" play produced ten years after *Peace* in 411 BCE, Theôria does not appear as a character, yet the theme of *theôria* persists, in significantly altered form. This paper argues that, in *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes reworks the theme of theôria in *Peace*, this time firmly associating procreation with theoric travel, as a means of putting a stop to the Peloponnesian War.

In *Peace*, while both Theôria and Opôra are described in sexual terms, Theôria is figured as a *pornê*, "prostitute" (Sells), and she is transferred to the *boulê*. Opôra, by contrast, will be the bride of Trygaeus alone, and their wedding celebration concludes the play. When Theôria is handed over to the members of the *boulê* in the theater of Dionysus (905), she is, by extension, given to the audience in a play particularly loaded with metatheatrical references (Slater). In *Peace*, thus, the *boulê* /theater audience represent *theôroi*, permitted once again to enjoy the delights of *theôria*. A violent passage that combines athletic and sexual language (894-905) highlights how the men will take advantage of Theôria, underscoring Theôria's low status. Theôria is similar to Thratta, a slave girl in *Acharnians* also threatened with sexual violence. Spectators might imagine that the assault of Theôria, like that of Thratta, will not result in repercussions because Theôria and Thratta are figured as non-citizen women of low status

(Robson). Furthermore, sex with Theôria will not result in children. By contrast, the play emphasizes the reproductive potential of Trygaeus and Opôra (706-08).

Many scholars have drawn attention to the ways in which Aristophanes foregrounds Hesiod to fashion his poetry (e.g., Rosen, Hall, Telò), and it has been suggested that *Peace*, in particular, offers a battle for peace that includes a battle over literary genres (e.g., Homeric war v. Hesiodic farming; see Hall). In Hesiod's *Theogony*, the patriarchal force of order removes the disorderly and threatening female association with procreation, leading to a stable regime (Clay). To some extent *Peace* reverses this Hesiodic theogonic trajectory, as (the male) character War represents a force of disorder, while Peace (who arrives with female attendants) is a force of order (Lytle and Sells). The play, however, only links procreation with Opôra, not with Theôria. Theôria does not offer reproductive potential within the context of *Peace*.

In *Lysistrata*, *theôria* appears again as theme, inasmuch as married women, representatives of their respective *poleis*, travel to Athens – which functions, in effect, as a Panhellenic theoric site – to hear Lysistrata's sex strike plan and subsequently return to their homes. At the start of the play, female representatives from different *poleis* converge in Athens and take on the landscape features of the regions from which they hail (e.g., a Boeotian woman has a “nice πεδίον (88).” As the play draws to a close, Lysistrata appeals to *theôria* as a cultural practice that binds the Greeks together (1128-34), as she emphasizes Panhellenic unity just before the body of Reconciliation is divided up between Spartan and Athenian representatives. Ultimately, the theoric women of *Lysistrata* bring about the cessation of the Peloponnesian War and a resumption of normative procreative sex, expressed in agricultural terms, as an Athenian representative remarks, “now I want to get naked and plow (1173).” In *Lysistrata*, thus,

the theme of *theôria* is associated with procreation within the context of marriage, a contrast with *Theôria*, figured as a *pornê* of low status, in *Peace*.

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