

OLDER WOMEN IN ATTIC OLD COMEDY

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This paper surveys the various types of older women portrayed in fifth-century Attic comedy and assesses their relationship to actual counterparts.¹ There are two justifications. First, scholars often discuss women as if they were a monolithic group, while poets and dramatists portrayed them according to a social and domestic hierarchy in which age was an important factor. Second, scholarship on older women is relatively scarce² and tends to concentrate on negative portrayals,³ starting from the assumption that for the Greeks old age was always ludicrous or repellent.⁴ Poets and dramatists, however, more often than not portray older women sympathetically and even heroically. But before we begin the survey we should review the circumstances in which public portrayal of women was allowed.

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¹ The plays of Aristophanes are cited from the Oxford texts of M. Platnauer, *Peace* (1964), K. J. Dover, *Clouds* (1968), D. M. MacDowell, *Wasps* (1971), R. G. Ussher, *Ecclesiazusae* (1973), J. J. Henderson, *Lysistrata* (1987), otherwise from V. Coulon (Budé: Paris 1923–30). Fragments of Old Comedy are cited from R. Kassel and C. Austin, *Poetae Comici Graeci* (Berlin/N. Y. 1983–) to date (Aristophanes–Crobylus), otherwise from Th. Kock, *Comicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (Leipzig 1880–88).

² G. S. Kirk, “Old Age and Maturity in Ancient Greece,” *Eranos Jhb.* (1971) 123–58; F. Preisshofen, *Untersuchungen zur Darstellung des Greisenalters in der frühgriechischen Dichtung*, Hermes Einzelschrift 34 (Wiesbaden 1977); M. I. Finley, “The Elderly in Classical Antiquity,” *G & R* 28 (1981) 156–71; J. N. Bremmer, “Oude vrouwen in Griekenland en Rome,” *Lampas* 17 (1984) 96–113 = “La donna anziana: Libertà e indipendenza,” in *Le donne in Grecia*, ed. G. Arrigoni (Rome/Bari 1985) 275–98. B. E. Richardson, *Old Age Among the Ancient Greeks* (Baltimore 1933) is still useful.

³ H. Oeri, *Der Typ der komischen Alten in der griechischen Komödie* (Basel 1948) is a superficial collection of passages used mainly to illustrate negative stereotypes and varieties of “vetula-Skoptik.” Neglect of the social background and of dramatic contexts limits its scope and utility.

⁴ See, for example, Bremmer (above, note 2) 293: “Per quanto un uomo Greco possa aver amato la propria madre o la nutrice, egli temeva e odiava le donne anziane come categoria, come appare chiaramente dell’analisi dell’‘immaginario’ dei Greci. L’orientamento funzionalista maschile bloccava una visione positiva della ‘terza età’ femminile.”

I. Public Portrayal of Respectable Women

In classical Athens a man's honor depended on his ability to control the reputation of his household and the women who occupied it. As far as circumstances allowed, a man tried to ensure the respectability of his household by confining its women to the private sphere and keeping them publicly invisible: "He burst into the women's quarters where my sister and nieces were, ladies who have lived so respectably that they were shamed at being seen even by members of the family" (Lys. 3.6).⁵ Social protocol therefore dictated that citizen males never publicly mention the name of a living citizen woman or otherwise discuss their own or another man's household "either for praise or blame" (Perikles at Th. 2.45.2). To do so was an insult to the men of that family. Thus speakers in lawcourts name only "women of shady reputation, women connected with the speaker's opponent, and dead women."⁶ The frequency of attacks on the women of an opponent's household demonstrates the power of this protocol.

The naming of respectable women in public was therefore allowable only after their death (in epitaphs) or in connection with the public cults, which represented the *oikos* ritually and in terms of traditional ideals and myths. There a woman might offer a dedication in her own name⁷ or serve as a priestess or other cult officer. As we will see below, both epitaphs and cult connections were opportunities to demonstrate safely a woman's irreproachable character.

Thus excluded from the public sphere in their capacity as members of a man's household, respectable women could be portrayed there only by the men themselves. These portrayals took place at the poetic and dramatic festivals, where male performers enacted the female roles written by male poets. Epic, tragic and satyric performances posed no threat to the protocol of silence. They dealt exclusively with mythological characters from distant places in the distant past and avoided portrayals that might be construed as allusions to any living Athenian. Unlike modern Greeks, the Athenians did not have heroic names, and even in Aischylos' topical *Persians*, no Greek is named. Significantly for our purposes, the Persian Queen (Atossa) is not named either.⁸

Tragic portrayals that did bear a resemblance to the lives of the spectators could therefore be thought questionable, as could unfamiliar additions to the traditional repertory of heroic women. Thus in *Thesmophoriazousai* the

⁵ See K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (California 1974) 98, 209ff.

⁶ See D. Schaps, "The Woman Least Mentioned: Etiquette and Women's Names," *CQ* 27 (1977) 323–30.

⁷ See D. Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women in Ancient Greece* (Edinburgh 1979) 71ff.

⁸ On the avoidance of topicality in tragedy see O. Taplin, "Fifth-Century Tragedy and Comedy: A *Synkrisis*," *JHS* 106 (1986) 163–74 (esp. 166–67).

women corporately protest their unjust and insulting portrayal in Euripides' plays, and in *Frogs* (948–50) Euripides boasts that he created roles “for slaves no less than wives, mothers, maidens and old women” in order to be “democratic,” to which Aischylos (the spokesman for tradition) replies that such novelty deserves the death-penalty. What is questionable in untropical tragedy must *a fortiori* be questionable in topical comedy. What can we say about the propriety of comic poets in their portrayal of women?

It would appear that Aristophanes' self-righteous rebuke of Euripides was justified. For “in Greek comedy the rule holds, with no known exception, that a free man (other than a Spartan) does not mention the name of a respectable living woman not holding a position in public life.”⁹ That is, comic poets observed the same protocol as speakers in lawcourts: naming was blaming. In Aristophanes the two exceptions prove the rule. In *Peace* 991–92 the Polias priestess Lysimache (who sat up front in the theatre) is referred to by virtue of her public position.¹⁰ And in *Lysistrata* the heroine is publicly named by men after her victory (and hence her “public” stature) is assured (1086, 1103, 1147).¹¹ It is worth noting that this rule as regards women conforms to a more general rule of topical comedy: portrayal of, or allusion to living Athenians is always for ridicule, while hero(in)es or other sympathetic characters are always fictitious creations.

Curiously, it is not until 411 that comedy took advantage of its option to portray citizen women sympathetically: until then we find only disreputable types like market-women or the relatives of “demagogues.”¹² In that year, Aristophanes presented two plays in which citizen women protest the behavior of men and offer advice to the city. They are portrayed no less sympathetically than their male counterparts in earlier plays, and their advice sounds just as earnest. In *Lysistrata* they corporately protest their exclusion from the policy-making that has resulted in the loss of their men-folk in battle, and in *Thesmophoriazousai* they corporately protest their portrayal by Euripides. In each play only citizen women participate, and they are drawn from each age-group and social class except for maidens, who never have speaking parts in fifth-century comedy.¹³ Topical motivation for this apparent novelty will be

⁹ See A. H. Sommerstein, “The Naming of Women in Greek and Roman Comedy,” *Quaderni di storia* 11 (1980) 393–418. The same no doubt held true for other kinds of poetry which mentioned citizen women: elegiac (Thgn. 257–60, 579–80, 861–64 West), epodic (Arch. S 478 Page), iambic (Arch. 23 West), monodic (Alk. 10 Lobel-Page, Anakreon 385 Page), choral (Stes. 42 Page).

¹⁰ See Henderson (above, note 1) xxxviii ff.

¹¹ See Henderson on the question of *Lysistrata*'s assimilation to Lysimache.

¹² Henderson, xxviii n. 4. The date of *Skenas Katalambanousai* (women compete with men over booths at a festival) is unknown but after 420. Wives also appeared in the mythological burlesque *Amphiaraos* in 414. *Lemnian Women*, *Old Age* and *Phoenician Women* were produced after 409.

¹³ Dikaiopolis' marriageable daughter walks on as kanephoros in *Ach.* 241ff. At *Lys.* 592ff.

considered later. For now it is significant that as leaders and spokesmen Aristophanes chose older women.

In *Lysistrata* it is the older wives, both onstage (387–613, cf. 176–79) and in the orchestra (319–1042), who seize and defend the Akropolis, who support the heroine in her debate with the Proboulos (476–613) and who offer advice in their own right (614–705). The heroine, Lysistrata, corresponds to no actual counterpart (no details about her age or marital status appear), but she aligns herself with the older women and pointedly differentiates herself from the young wives.¹⁴ In *Thesmophoriazousai* the chorus are mothers of grown sons and on that basis claim the right to offer advice in the parabasis (785–845); an old woman supervises the arrest and confinement of the Kinsman (762–74); and we should probably think of the festival president as older too (295–311). It would appear that in Aristophanes' mind the women's rebellions would be more plausible and more palatable if young women had the passive roles and older women the active ones.¹⁵ To see why he might have thought this way, we must consider the meaning of the age-distinction in Athenian terms.

II. Young and Old: Definitions

For women, as for men, age conferred authority. A woman was old when she was no longer defined in terms of procreative or erotic sexuality, that is, when she stopped bearing children and so ceased to be a source of anxiety for the men of the household. As for men, forty was the most *sophron* age¹⁶ and the canonical end of youth, when one was credited with greater rationality and reliability.¹⁷ Thus *πρέσβα* (-ειρα)¹⁸ and *μαῖα*¹⁹ were general terms of respect. At this age women gained a degree of autonomy, assuming advisory and supervisory roles at home and freedom to move about unchaperoned in public.²⁰ The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* provides the ideal definition, for there Demeter prepares to wander abroad by disguising herself as an old

the plight of maidens in wartime is described, but none actually appear, and at *Th.* 689ff. the baby girl turns out to be a wineskin.

¹⁴ Note especially 1ff. (and the whole prologue), 706ff. (where the heroine, after complaining about the young wives to the semichorus of old women, must prevent the wives' desertion).

¹⁵ Some sort of rebellion (led) by old women may have occurred also in Pherekrates' *Old Women*, cf. 34 Ἀθηναίαις αὐταῖς τε καὶ ταῖς ξυμμάχοις.

¹⁶ Aeschines 1.11, Richardson (above, note 2) 16ff.

¹⁷ Cf. Pherekr. 146, 248, Dover (above, note 5) 102ff. The wisdom of elders is often invoked to settle a point, e.g. *Lys.* 1125–27, *Ekkl.* 473.

¹⁸ *Lys.* 85–6 (of a νεᾶνις: correct *LSJ*), *hVen.* 32 (of Aphrodite), A. fr. 285 (of the leader of the Nereids), S. *Ichn.* 331 (of Kyllene).

¹⁹ E. *Alk.* 393, *Od.* 17.499, *hCer.* 147, ironically at *Ekkl.* 915.

²⁰ Hypereides fr. 205 Jensen, "A woman who leaves the house should be at the stage of life when those who meet her ask not whose wife but whose mother she is."

woman, "withdrawn from childbirth and the gifts of Aphrodite, such as are nurses of children and stewards of households" (101-4). For the same reason Euripides and his Kinsman in *Thesmophoriazousai* disguise themselves as old women when they infiltrate the festival.²¹

The position of young women was, on the other hand, fraught with potential danger. Maidens, brides and young wives represented a household's greatest vulnerability to shame and disintegration, so that its men were committed at all costs to protecting their virtue.²² This commitment to protecting the vulnerable created vulnerability as a characteristic of young women. Thus they were portrayed as weak, prone to passion and standing in need of constant supervision. These assigned characteristics acted as a bar to access to the male spheres and the virtues assigned them. Thus in comedy young women are frivolous, naïve and unreliable, unable to speak sensibly about any matter of interest to the city, and always supervised by older women. Nor do they ever confront men: their weapons are intrigue, guile and sexual manipulation. When men are to be confronted or admonished, it is the older women who do the job.

Comic practice with male characters is quite similar. Unlike later comedy, Old Comedy seems for the most part to have been conventionally hostile to young men. Except for the Sausage-Seller in *Knights*, all Aristophanic heroes are older men; rejuvenation is a popular theme; and sexual success is the almost exclusive prerogative of older men. Young male characters are rare, and when they do appear they are usually drawn unsympathetically and are often shown undergoing some kind of discomfiture.²³ The stereotype young man, arrogant but foolish, thus corresponds to his female counterpart.

As in the case of young women, this bias against young men derives from their actual position in society. From the age of twenty young men could attend the Assembly (cf. X. *Mem.* 3.6.1) and appear in court. Aristophanes frequently ridicules their newfangled rhetoric, and in *Acharnians* and *Wasps* the old choruses complain about their ruthless style, citing the trial of Thukydides Milesiou as a recent example.²⁴ Not until he was thirty could a man be a magistrate, a juror or hold one of the offices filled by lot.²⁵ Until then young

²¹ For this disguise cf. also *Il.* 3.386 (Aphrodite), AR 3.72 (Hera). Euripides was perhaps similarly disguised as an old woman in Kallias' *Men in Fetters*, cf. fr. 15 where, however, the first line may have been spoken by a personification of Euripidean tragedy (as at *Ra.* 1305ff.).

²² See in general Dover (above, note 5) 95-102, 205-13, 226-42; M. Foucault, *L'usage des plaisirs* (Paris 1984), tr. R. Hurley, *The Use of Pleasure* (New York 1985). For the pattern in contemporary Greece see M. Herzfeld, *The Poetics of Manhood: Contest and Identity in a Cretan Mountain Village* (Princeton 1985).

²³ For a survey see A. H. Sommerstein, "Aristophanes and the Demon Poverty," *CQ* 34 (1984) 314-33 (esp. 320-21).

²⁴ See MacDowell (above, note 1) at *Ve.* 947.

²⁵ On the political options open to young men see P. J. Rhodes, "Political Activity in Classical Athens," *JHS* 106 (1986) 132-44 (esp. 142-43).

men were mainly a potential source of turmoil and a reminder of their fathers' mortality. In Aristophanes there is considerable tension between fathers and sons over such issues as the transfer of the estate (*Wasps*), the utility of tradition (*Clouds*), access to young women (*Ekkle.*), a son's proper duty (*Banqueters*, *Clouds*, *Wasps*). In the public, competitive and adaptive male spheres, a father's norms were quickly outmoded, thus creating a situation ripe for generational clashes.²⁶ The solution available to the divine fathers of Olympian mythology like Zeus (to remain in the prime of virility and power by having no male heir) was unavailable to mortal fathers. Their duty was to produce sons who would take their place. The comic poets provided vicarious relief from this irksome fact by showing fathers succeeding and sons failing. The main difference on the female side, as we will see in III below, was the absence of the generation-gap. Thus even young women shared the benefits of the comic plots devised and prosecuted by the older women who supervised and spoke for them.

We must note, however, that age alone did not automatically confer respect(ability). Just as there are foolish old men in Aristophanes, so are there foolish old women to whom the negative stereotypes appropriate to young wives could apply: lechery, adultery, quarrelsomeness, intrigue, bibulousness. In addition, loss of youth itself could be a reproach to women: unlike γέρων as applied to men, γραῦς was always an insulting way to address a woman,²⁷ and women (unlike men apparently) could be thought of as middle-aged.²⁸ Let us turn to the one indispensable criterion of respectability.

III. The Maternal Ideal

What conferred status on a woman was not age itself but the achievement of the maternal ideal: the passage from being an Eve to being a Mother of God.²⁹ When Semonides describes the ideal wife (7.85–87) θάλλει δ' ὕπ' αὐτῆς κάπαζεται βίος, φίλη δὲ σὺν φιλέοντι γηράσκει πόσει, τεκοῦσα καλὸν κώνομάκλυτον γένος, we should take τεκοῦσα as causal, for the production of "fine and admired" sons was a woman's chief virtue, principal

²⁶ On the generation-gap in Aristophanes see V. Ehrenberg, *The People of Aristophanes*³ (New York 1962) 207–11, and note Alkibiades' plea for cooperation between young and old at Th. 6.18.6.

²⁷ Cf. Men. *Dysk.* 495, where μήτηρ is a polite substitution.

²⁸ Xenarchos fr. 4.7 νέαι (maiden) παλαιᾷ (crone) μεσοκόποι (apparently a metaphor from coinage, cf. our "used goods," N. Shiel, *CP* 70 [1975] 45ff., Kassel/Austin on Kratinos 473) πεπαιτῆραι ("ripe" or "marriageable" as Plu. *Lyk.* 15.3 = ἀκμαζούση); Ar. fr. 148 (of hetairai) τὰς δρυπετεῖς opp. τὰς ὑποπαρθένους; Men. *Dysk.* 495 ἂν διὰ μέσου τις ἦι γυνή. At *Ra.* 1193 Aischylos says of Oidipous and Iokaste (who had children together) ἔπειτα γραῦν ἔγνημεν αὐτὸς ὢν νέος, but perhaps this refers to one of Euripides' "realistic" portrayals of heroic myth.

²⁹ On this pattern in modern Greece see J. du Boulay in *Gender and Power in Rural Greece*, ed. J. Dubisch (Princeton 1986) 157–67.

glory and sole assurance of safety in old age. Athenian sons had to support their parents in old age (Aischines I.18) on pain of prosecution³⁰ and loss of the right to address the Assembly,³¹ and office-holders were asked if they treated their parents well.³² Good treatment included burial and a grave-cult.³³ These maternal rights were protected for citizens by the archon and for metics by the polemarch,³⁴ but women without sons had no right to support. They were presumably at the mercy of a *kyrios* or on their own, like the blistered old street-women mentioned in *Wealth* as a reproach to Poverty (535–36, cf. 548). In *Clouds* mother-beating is even worse than father-beating (1443–44), and in *Frogs* those who “thrash their mothers” are grouped in Hades with the worst criminals (149). In epitaphs noting female longevity the emphasis lay, except in unusual cases,³⁵ on the continuity of a family lineage over time.³⁶

In Attic comedy the idealization of motherhood is a consistent pattern. Mothers naturally tended to cultivate a son’s devotion,³⁷ and are usually portrayed as indulgent (*Clouds* 68–70) and fiercely protective. In *Ekklesiazousai* mothers claim that, if they ran the city, they would care better for their sons in battle and supply food and pay more regularly (233–35), and in *Lysistrata* the older women undertake and justify their rebellion as preventing further loss of sons in battle (esp. 523–26, 588–90, 648–51). In her social life, too, a mother’s status depended on that of her sons.³⁸ In the parabasis of *Thesmophoriazousai* mothers complain that the men choose scoundrels like Hyperbolos as leaders, so that at festivals his moneylending mother sits alongside mothers of heroes like Lamachos (830–45).

The pattern in tragedy shows the same pride and protectiveness. Most often mothers try to keep their sons from,³⁹ or accompany them to⁴⁰ war;

³⁰ Ἀθ.π. 56.6, Harpokr. s.v. κακώσεως, J. H. Lipsius, *Das attische Recht und Rechtsverfahren* (Leipzig 1905–15, repr. Hildesheim 1966) 344 note 17.

³¹ Aischines I.28, 99, A. R. W. Harrison, *The Law of Athens* (Oxford 1968–71) i.78.

³² Deinarchos 2.17–18, Ἀθ.π. 55.3, D. 57.70, cf. W. K. Lacey, *The Family in Classical Greece* (Ithaca 1968) 116–18.

³³ X. *Mem.* 2.2.13, D. 24.107.

³⁴ D. 35.48, Ἀθ.π. 56.6, 58.3.

³⁵ A ninety-year-old, A. Pantos, *Ath. Ann. Arch.* 7 (1974) 406–15.

³⁶ IG ii² 5673, 6288, 10650, 11998 (grandmothers), 3453 (Lysimache lived to see four generations). In general see S. Humphreys, “Family Tombs and Tomb-Cult in Classical Athens,” in *The Family, Women and Death* (London 1983) 107ff.

³⁷ See Dover (above, note 5) 274. P. Slater, a sociologist, examines the Greek mother-son bond as portrayed in Greek myths in *The Glory of Hera* (Boston 1968) and finds it pathologically intense.

³⁸ Cf. the proverb δέιλου μήτηρ οὐ κλαίει (*PG* ii.155).

³⁹ Astyoche (S. *Euripyllos*), Deidama (S. *Skyrians*), Thetis (E. *Skyrians*).

⁴⁰ Astyoche (S. *Skyrians*), Danae (S. *Larissians*), Thetis and Eos (A. *Nereids*, *Memnon*, *Weighing of Souls*).

advise them⁴¹ or reconcile them when they feud;⁴² seek burial for⁴³ or mourn them.⁴⁴ Often, too, mothers are rescued by their brave sons.⁴⁵ Where mothers are absent, grandmothers sometimes protect the children.⁴⁶ Anxiety-dreams about the children are a frequent motif,⁴⁷ and excessive pride in children can bring divine retribution by envious spinster-goddesses.⁴⁸ Bad mothers like Klytaimestra⁴⁹ and Eriphyle⁵⁰ are exceptions that prove the rule. Yet even when their sons dutifully kill them they must endure madness, exile and purification. Popular aversion to the bad-mother figure is indicated by its being largely displaced onto the wicked stepmother.⁵¹ Mothers sometimes kill their sons because of punitive madness sent by a god(dess),⁵² for vengeance against a husband⁵³ or on behalf of kinsmen,⁵⁴ or by being tricked into it.⁵⁵ These mothers always end in exile, suicide or metamorphosis into an animal.

It is worth mentioning that on the male side the equation is reversed. There are few ideal fathers in tragedy, and in comedy there is mainly the generation-gap (see II above) in which fathers are almost always portrayed as justified in taking a dim view of their sons.⁵⁶

Bad mothers in comedy are mothers of "demagogues" and are equipped with the same stock of satirical traits and offenses that litigants in lawcourts

⁴¹ Thetis and Eos (as above, note 40), Atossa (A. *Persians*).

⁴² Iokaste (E. *Phoenician Women*).

⁴³ The mothers of the Seven (A. *Argives*, *Eleusinians*, E. *Suppliants*).

⁴⁴ Astyoche (S. *Eurypylos*), Klymene (E. *Phaethon*), Periboia (A. *Salaminian Women*), Eos and Thetis (as above, note 40), Atossa (A. *Persians*), Europe (A. *Karians or Europe*), Hesione (S. *Teukros*).

⁴⁵ Antiope (E. *Antiope*), Auge (S. *Mysians*), Danae (A. *Phorkides*, E. *Diktys*), Hypsipyle (E. *Hyps.*), Melanippe (E. *Melanippe Prisoner*), Merope (E. *Kresphontes*), Tyro (S. *Tyro II*).

⁴⁶ Alkmene (E. *Hkld.*), Hekabe (E. *Tro.*, *Hek.*).

⁴⁷ Atossa (A. *Persians*), Erinyes (A. *Eum.* 94–160), Eurydike (S. *Akrisios*), Hekabe (S. *Alexandros*, E. *Hek.* 68–92), Klytaimestra (A. *Ch.*, S. *El.*, cf. Stesichoros *Oresteia*, fr. 42 Page). On this motif generally see G. Devereaux, *Dreams in Greek Tragedy* (California 1976).

⁴⁸ Kassiopeia (S. and E. *Andromeda*), Niobe (S. and E. *Niobe*).

⁴⁹ A. *Oresteia*, S. and E. *Elektra*, E. *Orestes*.

⁵⁰ S. *Epigonoí*.

⁵¹ Medea (S. and E. *Aigeus*), Ino (S. *Athamas II*, E. *Phrixos*), Penelope (E. *Euryalos*), Hippodameia (E. *Chrysippos*), Themisto (E. *Ion*), Theano (E. *Melanippe Prisoner*), Kreousa (E. *Ion*, by mistake), Idaia (S. *Phineus I*), Sidero (S. *Tyro II*), Hermione (E. *Andr.*). These stepmothers are motivated by concern that their own children will not inherit or will be mistreated by legitimate children (cf. E. *Alk.* 304–10). Others are motivated by lust for their stepsons, like Phaidra (S. *Phaidra*, E. *Hp.* I and II), Phthia (S. *Dolopians*, E. *Phoinix*), Stheneboia (E. *Stheneboia*).

⁵² Ino (A. *Athamas*, S. *Athamas I*, E. *Ino*), Agave (A. *Pentheus*, E. *Ba.*).

⁵³ Medea (E. *Med.*), Prokne (S. *Tereus*).

⁵⁴ Althaia (S. and E. *Meleagros*).

⁵⁵ Themisto (E. *Ino*).

⁵⁶ See especially *Banqueters*, *Clouds*, *Wasps*, with Sommerstein (above, note 23).

use to smear their opponents:⁵⁷ foreign birth,⁵⁸ questionable chastity,⁵⁹ selling in the marketplace,⁶⁰ moneylending.⁶¹ Even Aristophanes complains that his rivals have overdone their attacks on Hyperbolos' mother (*Clouds* 551–59), citing Eupolis' *Marikas*, where she appeared as a drunken crone dancing the kordax, and Hermippos' *Breadsellers*, where she was a lecherous market-woman (fr. 10) who rejoiced over her son's (no doubt unjust) acquittal in court (fr. 8). In what spirit the sons of these august ladies took such slanderous portrayals we cannot say. Charges that one's mother was an alien or a whore did not have to be answered in the theatre as they had to be in court. But we are reminded of Aristophanes' claim that he never took a bribe from a jealous erastes to slander the boy in a comedy (*Wasps* 1025–26).

Because maidens rarely appear in fifth-century comedy and never have speaking parts (see note 13 above), we never see a mother-daughter relationship, as we often do in tragedy.⁶² Nevertheless, older women involved in corporate plots are portrayed, in the three extant examples (*Lysistrata*, *Thesmophoriazousai*, *Ekklesiazousai*), as protectors and spokesmen for the young wives, and there is great emphasis on female solidarity.⁶³ Part of this portrayal undoubtedly derives from the male view of all women as a secret tribe in league against the system, a view reflected in scholarship that treats women as a monolithic group. But surely this picture of solidarity had some measure of truth to it. Mothers were in fact protectors, role-models and transmitters of the skills and values of women's culture. Unlike the male sphere, the women's world was private and cooperative, with little stimulus to change or motivation for conflict. Indeed, conflict in the women's sphere was at all costs to be avoided.

Thus in tragedy⁶⁴ and in comedy it is older women, who, in time of crisis, represent the continuity of tradition when it is threatened by men.⁶⁵ The

⁵⁷ See, for example, Demosthenes on Aischines' mother (18.130), who has earned the name Empousa (proverbially ugly and lecherous, Philostr. *VA* 4.25), and Andok. 1.124ff. where Kallias is accused of impregnating his mother-in-law (α γραῦς τολμηροτάτη, 127). In view of the fact that Aischines' mother, whose name was Glaukothea, bore three sons who were elected to high offices, we must not take this kind of insult too seriously. See further W. Süss, *Ethos* (Leipzig 1910) 248.

⁵⁸ *Ra.* 678–82 and Platon 56, 60 (Kleophon), *Eup.* 243 for the stock epithet "Thracian."

⁵⁹ The mother of Autolykos and wife of Lykon in *Eup. Autolykos I and II, Cities* (215), *Friends* (273), cf. *Σ Lys.* 270. She was called Rhodia by the comic poets, but that might have been an opprobrious nickname.

⁶⁰ *Ach.* 475–78, *Th.* 387, 456, *Ra.* 840 (Euripides) and very often, see V below.

⁶¹ *Th.* 830–45 (Hyperbolos).

⁶² Klytaimestra and Iphigeneia (A. and S. *Iphigeneia*, *E. IA*), Eurydike and Danae (S. *Akrisios*, cf. fr. 65), Kassiopeia and Andromeda (S. and E. *Andromeda*), Hekabe and Polyxena/Andromache (S. *Polyxena*, *E. Hek.*, *Tro.*).

⁶³ *Lys.* and *Th.* (prologues), *Th.* 538–39, cf. *E. Hel.* 329 γυναῖκα γὰρ δὴ συμπνεῖν γυναικὶ χρή.

⁶⁴ E.g., Aithra and the chorus in *E. Suppliants*.

⁶⁵ For this pattern see M. Shaw, "The Female Intruder: Women in Fifth Century Drama,"

women of *Ekklesiazousai* claim that their skills and values are superior to the men's in being more conservative (214–28, 583–85), and in *Lysistrata* they remind the men of the historical and religious inheritance of Athens (636–55, 682–703). The heroine and her elderly helpers demonstrate to the Proboulos that the men would run the city better, and avoid chronic strife, by emulating such wifely skills as financial management (489–95) and woolworking (565–86). As she speaks she teaches the woolworking procedures to the Proboulos, who has been dressed as a wife and given a handloom (531–38).⁶⁶ The plea made by rebellious women in comedy—that the men emulate the sensible, efficient and decorous management of the *oikos*—rings truer to life when we try to imagine a male character making the same plea in terms of the public male sphere.

This ideal world of the *oikos* was mirrored in the public cults, where some forty women served as priestesses⁶⁷ and many more in sub-priestly positions. Some of the priestesses sat in the front rows at the theatre.⁶⁸ In these cults, goddesses represented for the city women's various domestic roles.⁶⁹ Some priesthoods were reserved for older women, for example those

CP 70 (1975) 255–66 and H. P. Foley, "The 'Female Intruder' Reconsidered: Women in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae*," CP 77 (1982) 1–21. For parallels from Greek history see D. Schaps, "The Women of Greece in Wartime," CP 77 (1982) 193–213. Note that traditional myths themselves were popularly associated with mothers and nurses, cf. *Ra*. 377, in general M. Detienne, *L'Invention de la mythologie* (Paris 1981), index at "vieilles femmes." Illuminati who scorned the myths branded them "old wives' tales," cf. Com. adesp. 857, M. Massaro, "Aniles Fabellae," SIFC 49 (1977) 104–35. At *Rep.* 377b11ff. Plato recommends that mothers and nurses be required to tell children only approved myths.

⁶⁶ Old women are especially frequent as teachers of young women in later comedy (especially slaves and bawds, cf. *Th.* 1172–89): F. Leo, *Plautinische Forschungen*² (Berlin 1912) 147–48, Oeri (above, note 3) 61ff.

⁶⁷ See H. McClees, *A Study of Women in the Attic Inscriptions* (diss. Columbia 1920) 5ff., J. A. Turner, *Hiereiai: Acquisition of Feminine Priesthoods in Ancient Greece* (diss. Santa Barbara 1983), who fully discusses the social, legal and (often considerable) economic benefits that motivated women to become priestesses and that distinguished priestesses from ordinary women. For a general discussion see also J. Gould, *JHS* 100 (1980) 38ff. The adage "education for men, religion for women" seems to apply to classical Athens.

⁶⁸ E.g., *IG* ii² 5119.

⁶⁹ Demeter, for example, represented the mother and worker, whose sexuality is fruitful rather than erotic, sorrowing and raging over her lost/raped child (the fate of all mothers with marriageable daughters), by turns beneficent and disruptive, like her human counterparts Hekabe and Niobe. For Demeter see A. C. Brumfield, *The Attic Festivals of Demeter* (New York 1981), E. Simon, *Festivals of Attica* (Wisconsin 1983). There were also Hera (matron), Athena (crafts and domestic protection), Eileithyia (midwife), for whom see Th. Hadzelistou Price, *Kouroutrophos* (Leiden 1978) 150ff.

requiring celibacy,⁷⁰ as in the case of oracles,⁷¹ sibyls,⁷² keepers of a sacred hearth,⁷³ or in cults that could be polluting, like that of the Erinyes.⁷⁴ But typically more than one age-group was represented, and when young women participated the older women typically supervised them.⁷⁵ In the Arrhēphoria, for example, the priestess of Athena Polias (who served for life) trained the young girls who wore the goddess' robe for presentation at the Panathēnaia,⁷⁶ just as at Olympia sixteen old women trained the girls who wore Hera's robe.⁷⁷ In the Anthesteria fourteen *gerarai* ("venerable ones") escorted the King Archon's wife to her sacred wedding with Dionysos.⁷⁸ The three groups into which the maenads are divided in Euripides' *Bakchai* (maidens, wives, old women) suggest a similar arrangement (680–82).⁷⁹

In such public enactments the city glorified the characteristic contributions made by ideal citizen women (those who were marriageable, married, mothers). The priestesses and cult personnel who thus represented their age-mates came always from well-born and wealthy families,⁸⁰ and they had a

⁷⁰ See Turner (above, note 67) 206ff. The sanctuary of Eileithyia (above, note 69) Sosipolis on Mt. Krounion (Eleia) was tended by old women who bathed and fed the goddess and who alone could enter: virgins waited in an anteroom and sang songs (Paus. 6.20), presumably because they (unlike the old women) might be polluted, cf. R. Parker, *Miasma* (Oxford 1983) 48ff. Similarly maidens and old women officiated in the cult of Aphrodite at Sikyon (Paus. 2.10.4, where the details suggest a connection also with Demeter). Sometimes these roles were exchanged: the Delphic Pythia (note 71) had to be over fifty but dressed like a maiden, and the legendary substitution of an old woman for a maiden in the cult of Artemis Hymnia at Mantinea (Paus. 8.5.11–12) is typologically similar.

⁷¹ The Delphic Pythia (above, note 70), D. S. 16.26, Paus. 2.24.1, Th. 5.53; the two (or three) "Doves" at Dodona, S. Tr. 171–72, fr. 456, Paus. 10.12.10 ("the first woman singers"), Str. 7.7.12, Hdt. 2.25, cf. S. Dakaris, *Das Taubenorakel von Dodona*, Ant. Kunst Beiheft 1 (1963), H. W. Parke, *The Oracles of Zeus* (Cambridge, Mass. 1967), F. T. van Straten, "Twee Orakels in Epirus," *Lampas* 15 (1982) 195ff. Compare the character and role of Theonoe in E. *Hel*.

⁷² See J. Fontenrose, *The Delphic Oracle* (California 1978) 160ff.

⁷³ E. *Ion* 150, Plu. *Numa* 9–11, *Mor.* 403–4, Pl. *Lg.* 6.795D (who recommends that *all* priest(esse)s be over sixty).

⁷⁴ See note 70. For their cult in Athens cf. E. Wüst, *RE Supplbd.* 8 (1956) 128ff.

⁷⁵ The epitaph of a Demeter-priestess in Kallimachos *Ep.* 40 is valid for our purposes whether it is real or fictional: πολλῶν προστασίη νέων γυναικῶν (4). For female initiations, where older women supervised, see generally A. Brelich, *Paides e Parthenoi* (Rome 1969).

⁷⁶ Paus. 1.27.3, W. Burkert, *Homo Necans*, tr. P. Bing (California 1983) 150ff. The *chlaina* that climaxes Lysistrata's wool-working metaphor at *Lys.* 567–86 reminds the spectators of the Panathēnaic peplos; for its patriotic significance cf. *Eq.* 565–68.

⁷⁷ Paus. 5.16 records a legend that these distinguished women, two of whom represented each of the eight Eleian tribes, had originally been chosen to settle a dispute with the Pisaians: compare Lysistrata's arbitration of the dispute between Athenians and Spartans at *Lys.* 1122ff. For modern parallels see M. Herzfeld in Dubisch (above, note 29) 226–27.

⁷⁸ The procession, depicted on *ARV*² 1102.2, set forth from the Limnaion (open only on this day), where the *Basilinna* was prepared in secret before fourteen altars. See J. Bremmer, *The Early Greek Concept of the Soul* (Princeton 1983) 108–23.

⁷⁹ See J. Bremmer, *ZPE* 55 (1984) 267–86.

⁸⁰ *Aθ.π.* 3, Pl. *Lg.* 6.759c.

public identity and competence not otherwise attainable by women.⁸¹ Thus the elected governors⁸² of the principal Demeter-cult in *Thesmophoriazousai* are εὐγενεῖς γυναῖκες (330) and ἄσται (541), and the old women in *Lysistrata* boast of their birth, breeding and long service in elite cults (638–47). The heroine herself reminds us unmistakably of the venerable Polias priestess Lysimache (see note 11). In plays depicting women taking public action, it was natural for Aristophanes to use the cults to locate and motivate the action, thus supplying the women with a plausible public venue to match the men's. The fact that in many cults the women ritually excluded⁸³ and sometimes defied⁸⁴ the men must similarly condition our response to their comic counterparts.

Because Old Comedy was a feature of national festivals we naturally hear mainly of the city's cults and priestesses, catching only occasional glimpses of their counterparts in the local demes.⁸⁵ This is a pity, for in the sacred, ritual and social life of the demes women's participation seems to have been important and extensive.⁸⁶ Indeed, in the virtually complete sacred calendar of Erchia (*SEG* 21.541) only priestesses, not priests, are mentioned,⁸⁷ and in the orators we frequently feel the social importance attached to such festive activities, for example, the speaker of Isaios 8 on his mother's election by the "wives of the demesmen" as one of two women to hold office for the Thesmophoria (19–20). We can only speculate on what lies behind such

⁸¹ See Turner (above, note 67) 383ff. Allusions to the Polias priestess Lysimache at *Peace* 991–92 and *Lys.* 554 suggest that she was publicly known as a proponent of peace with the Peloponnesians, or at least that someone in her office would probably be, cf. Henderson (above, note 1) xxxix. A sixth-century incumbent of this office forbade Kleomenes to enter the temple on the Akropolis (Hdt. 5.72), a precedent relevant to the attitude of the old men at *Lys.* 271–85, and in Aristophanes' time Theano, a priestess of Demeter and Kore (*PA* 6636), defied a public order to curse Alkibiades (Plu. *Alk.* 22, 33).

⁸² For the political organization of women's festivals see W. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, tr. J. Raffan (Cambridge, Mass. 1985) 230, 242ff. For election at the Thesmophoria cf. Is. 8.19–20, *IG* ii² 1184.3–18.

⁸³ Especially in cults of Demeter like Thesmophoria and Skirophoria. At Hermione, the city's men drove four cows to Demeter's sanctuary, where they were sacrificed secretly by four old women on thrones, Paus. 2.35.7–8, M. Detienne and J. P. Vernant, *La cuisine du sacrifice en pays grec* (Paris 1979) 203–14.

⁸⁴ Most notably in Dionysiac contexts, but there was also a ritual exchange of insults between groups of men and women at the Stenia (Demeter), cf. L. Deubner, *Attische Feste* (Berlin 1932) 53, 57–58, and at the sacrifice for Apollo Aigletes on Anaphe, M. Nilsson, *Griechische Feste* (Berlin 1906) 175–76. Compare Attic vases depicting such exchanges, e.g. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy*² (Oxford 1962) 302–3 nos. 10 and 18. For the many festivals of the Agrionia/Agriania type see Burkert (above, note 76) 163–67, and for the festival of the new fire on Lemnos (an Athenian colony) *ibid.*, 190ff.

⁸⁵ For references to demes and deme-life in comedy see D. Whitehead, *The Demes of Attica 508/7–ca. 250 B.C.* (Princeton 1986) 327–45.

⁸⁶ See Whitehead (above, note 85) 77–81.

⁸⁷ See Whitehead (above, note 85) 199–208.

passing Aristophanic allusions as the one about the formidable women of Teithras ("Teithrasian Gorgons," *Frogs* 475–77), but we may be sure that when Aristophanes created his rebellious women he counted on the spectators' experience of the redoubtable matrons who played such a prominent role in the social life of the local communities.

In this connection it is worth noting the worldliness and esprit de corps that distinguishes Aristophanes' older women from his young wives. Their longer experience and greater freedoms were surely factors, but of equal importance were the friendships they had acquired in cumulative corporate contexts over the years: in *Lysistrata* they mention initiatory sequences (638–47), in *Thesmophoriazousai* past Demeter-festivals (574–654). When *Lysistrata* refers to her helpers as αἱ πρεσβύταται (177) we are probably to think of a typical social or (what amounts to the same thing) cult organization of the sort mentioned in similar terms in inscriptions.⁸⁸ It is also worth mentioning that young wives, by contrast, never appeal to the cults and that their religious behavior is always portrayed unsympathetically (e.g. *Lys.* 1ff., 387ff.).⁸⁹ For them, festivals were merely an excuse for licentious, even immoral behavior. For maidens and young wives, the focus of such great paternal and husbandly anxiety, the freedom from ordinary restraints afforded by festivals must indeed have been enthusiastically enjoyed. The affairs and pregnancies that motivate the plot of many a later comedy cannot have been entirely the creation of comic poets.

IV. Satirical Images

So far we have examined only the idealized (maternal) roles of older women. But no one in any society can always live up to its ideal norms: a fact that comic poets, like all humorists, were eager to turn to use. The sympathetic matrons of *Lysistrata* may be haughtily immune to the failings that afflict young wives, and those in *Thesmophoriazousai* may be genuinely indignant about Euripides' shocking slanders. But elsewhere Aristophanes exploits the all-too-human failings of aging women, the sexual ones of course possessing the greatest comic potential.

Loss of youth and beauty was the socially ordained limit of erotic sexuality and was often ridiculed in and of itself.⁹⁰ Women whose sexuality outlived this limit, a phenomenon found also in lyric and tragic poetry,⁹¹

⁸⁸ See F. Poland, *Geschichte der griechischen Vereinswesens* (Leipzig 1909) 171–72, 298–99, 345ff. on designation of the older/oldest members of an organization or the senior organization among others in the same locale.

⁸⁹ See Henderson (above, note 1) ad loc.

⁹⁰ Oeri (above, note 3) 7–12 and J. Taillardat, *Les Images d'Aristophane*² (Paris 1965) 49–53 survey the rich typology of abuse directed at old people.

⁹¹ E.g., Sappho 21, 58 Lobel-Page, Deianeira in S. *Tr.*

compounded the ridicule. Here the stock butts were women who tried to look younger⁹² and were therefore labeled as lecherous.⁹³ We noted this type earlier in connection with the mothers of “demagogues,” but it also furnished aging hetairai,⁹⁴ of whom one Charixene was a legendary example,⁹⁵ and many merry widows.⁹⁶

The merry widow comes into her own as a type in the fourth-century plays, probably reflecting a social phenomenon of the post-war years (see VII). Two scenes from Aristophanes’ fourth-century plays exemplify the type and illustrate a shift toward generic realism visible also in plastic art of that period.⁹⁷

In *Ekklesiazousai* (877ff.), three women past sixty illustrate the consequences of the women’s new regime, where the old and ugly are to have first go at the young and beautiful. The first, who wears makeup and a festive dress and sings sexy songs, engages in a contest of abuse with a teenaged (984) girl—the first maiden with a speaking part in extant comedy: a sign of a relaxed inhibition?—over the relative sexual merits of young and old women. She stresses her superior erotic skills and her ability to give a man “continuing affection”⁹⁸ as opposed to the fickleness of girls (893–99). After the girl drives her off, a test case arrives in Epigenes, a young man whose budding courtship of the girl is interrupted by a second hag (an Empousa, 1049–65) who drives off the girl. Now a third hag arrives, “a powdered monkey or zombie,” even worse than the second (1065–73). These two dispute rights to Epigenes, who is dragged within lamenting his fate.

This scene has been variously interpreted as a “grotesque triumph of comic energy”⁹⁹ or a dark and morbid protest against radical social change.¹⁰⁰

⁹² The joke at *Nu.* 1183–84 shows that this was a familiar stereotype. It underlies the humor of the incongruous poses struck by the old women as they reminisce about festivals of their youth at *Lys.* 638–47 (to match the old men’s imitation of the young tyrannicides, 631–35). Similar is the comic substitution of a crone for a young girl: *Th.* 1056ff. (Helen and Andromeda, paratragic); Phrynichos 71 (Andromeda, in parody of Sophokles and perhaps illustrated on a chous of c. 430–20, *ARV*² 1215); Theopompos 50 (Sirens, who are young in the heroic tradition).

⁹³ For the proverb γραῦς ἀναθυαῖ (“the crone is in heat again”) cf. Pherekr. 35 (from *Old Women*?) πάλιν αὐθις ἀναθυῶσιν (Meineke: ἀναθύουσιν MSS) αἱ γεραίτεραι. Meineke’s emendation restores the proverbial usage (see testimonia). The reading of MSS suggests rejuvenation, but that motif is elsewhere reserved for men.

⁹⁴ Fr. 364, Philyllios 5. For vase-paintings see C. Johns, *Sex or Symbol: Erotic Images of Greece and Rome* (London/Austin 1982) plates 93, 108 (Florence Arch. Mus. 3921), 107 (Paris, Louvre G 13).

⁹⁵ *Ek.* 943, cf. Kratinos 153, Theopomp. 50.

⁹⁶ *Th.* 345, *Ek.* 877ff. (see below), *Wealth* 959ff. (see below).

⁹⁷ See Richardson (above, note 2) 167ff.

⁹⁸ στέργειν, cf. E. *Andr.* 213.

⁹⁹ D. Konstan and M. Dillon, “The Ideology of Aristophanes’ *Wealth*,” *AJP* 102 (1981) 371–94 (quote on 382).

¹⁰⁰ S. Said, “*L’Assemblée des femmes*: les femmes, l’économie et la politique,” in *Aristophane*,

But, in line with Aristophanes' usual portrayal of young and old as outlined in II above, we may say, with Sommerstein, that "it may actually be a merit of Praxagora's scheme that it enables conceited young men to be treated as Epigenes is treated here, while benefiting older men by giving them preferential treatment as regards opportunities for sexual activity,"¹⁰¹ (note *Ek.* 626–34, 702–9.) After all, the goal of comedy was to create laughter, not sober reflection, and the expression of true pathos is alien to it. The scene's morbid qualities and Epigenes' "pathetic" lament are absurdly out of proportion to the actual situation (Epigenes must have sex with the ugliest woman). In this view, the gross caricature of the hags serves to make Epigenes' fate as comically nightmarish as possible. As usual in the exemplificatory episodes of an Old Comedy, it is a *reductio* (or *exaggeratio*) *ad absurdum* of the motive scheme.

In *Wealth* (959–1096) Aristophanes tempers the same stock jokes with sympathy. Since *Wealth* has regained his vision, prosperity has been redistributed from the undeserving to the deserving. One of those who come to complain is a widow who speaks (963), dresses (1199) and is made up (1064–65) like a young woman, and who has lost her gigolo.¹⁰² The gigolo has become financially solvent and no longer needs her gifts to support his mother and two maiden sisters (984–85). Both *Chremylos* and the gigolo enjoy plenty of cynical and abusive jests at her expense, which she takes with great dignity while firmly insisting on her right to fair treatment: loyalty for past benefactions. Finally *Chremylos* urges the gigolo to relent (1080–97) and thus to remain eligible for his newfound wealth. At first the gigolo refuses, but at the end of the play there is a happy outcome to suit the theme of justice—and perhaps again, as in *Ekklesiazousai*, to saddle a young man with a crone? In any case, the widow reappears as part of a procession to install *Wealth* and learns that her gigolo will return to her that night (1197–1203): a twist on the usual hymenaeal conclusion of a comedy.

Bibulousness was another proverbial¹⁰³ stereotype of older women and, except for *Lysistrata*, an inevitable item in their caricature.¹⁰⁴ Free to wander, old women often wandered to the tavern for a drink,¹⁰⁵ where they might be

les femmes et la cité, edd. J. Bonnamour and H. Delavault (Fontenay-aux-Roses 1979) 33–69 (esp. 58–60).

¹⁰¹ Sommerstein (above, note 23) 320.

¹⁰² The gigolo was disapproved of by both men (*Lys.* 1.15, *D.* 18.260) and women (at *Th.* 345 old women with gigolos are blamed for taking lovers out of circulation at the expense of young wives).

¹⁰³ *Apostol.* 5.62 γράες κωθωνιζόμεναι.

¹⁰⁴ Mothers: *Eup. Marikas* (cf. *Nu.* 551–56), *Th.* 347–50, 689–738. Widows: *Pl.* 972, 1021. Market-women: *Ve.* 1402, *Lys.* 456–66 (as insults). Hetairai: *Phillyl. Auge* 5 (at a symposion), *Pherekr. Korianno* (named from a plant that needs much watering, *Thphr. HP* 7.1.3), where *Korianno* and *Glyke* are served drinks by the latter's daughter (70), *Theopomp. Pamphile* (40–42), where an old nurse participates. Bawds: *Platon Phaon* (174), cf. *Oeri* (above, note 3) 27. Slaves: *Theopomp.* 32, where *Theolyte* and *Spinther* drink from a *kylix*.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Lys.* 465–66, *Th.* 735–38.

served by an old-woman bartender.¹⁰⁶ For young wives it was different: husbands controlled their access to wine,¹⁰⁷ and their only opportunity for communal drinking (as opposed to filching wine at home on the sly, *Ek.* 14–16) was at festivals or other (*Lys.* 1ff.) religious occasions. Symposia were of course off-limits for respectable women. Thus in *Ekklesiazousai* wine-drinking is one of the illicit wifely enjoyments that will be legal in the new regime (257). In comedy wives are comically inexperienced drinkers, by contrast with the routine drinking of older women.¹⁰⁸

A reputation for hard drinking enhanced another inevitable stereotype of older women: forthrightness of speech (including obscenity and abuse) and fearless bellicosity.¹⁰⁹ These are qualities never attributed to young wives,¹¹⁰ whose weapons are the passive ones of guile, intrigue, sexual manipulation. Battles of the sexes involving physical violence and verbal abuse therefore enlist old women versus old men, as in *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazousai*: the occupation and defence of the Akropolis and the arrest and confinement of the Kinsman.¹¹¹ The characteristic prickly temper and abusiveness of old women was ritualized in the Stenia festival of Demeter (see note 84), and its cheerier side, evident when shared among women and not directed at the men, appears in the Demeter-myth in the figure of Iambe/Baubo, whose coarse jokes dispel the goddess' misery.¹¹² In everyday life, however, the forthright older woman was most often encountered in the marketplace, to which we now turn our attention.

¹⁰⁶ *Th.* 347–48, *Pl.* 435–36, Theopompos' play *Kapelides*. For the low repute of this type see Athen. 13.566F, *Pl. Lg.* 918D.

¹⁰⁷ See L. Minieri, "Vini usus feminis ignotus," *Labeo* 28 (1982) 150–63. Women drink wine in Homer, but the rise of the symposion as the distinctive venue of male culture tended to separate the women of a household from wine. In polis life, men feared that drinking would encourage adultery or otherwise disrupt the oikos, which wives both managed and represented. Unlike men (e.g., Sokrates in *Pl. Smp.*), who were expected to control the effects of intoxication on their behavior, women are conventionally displayed in Dionysiac art as ecstatic.

¹⁰⁸ Note the wives' unseemly bickering over who gets first drink at *Lys.* 195–239: this must have raised a laugh from men used to the elaborate protocol of the symposion.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *Lys.* 471–75 with 465–66.

¹¹⁰ Note the contrast at *Lys.* 515.

¹¹¹ *Lys.* 176–79, 387–475 (occupation), 254–386, 614–705 (defence); *Th.* 762ff., where the old woman announces herself as Kritylla, daughter of Antitheos of Gargettos (898). One of the occupying women of *Lys.* is also named Kritylla (323): an actual contemporary, perhaps a priestess of Demeter? But in *Th.* the name was probably chosen arbitrarily, since it sounds comically anticlimactic: the Kinsman/Helen has just told Euripides/Menelaos that she is "Theonoe, daughter of Proteus."

¹¹² See N. J. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford 1974) 213–17 on Iambe and Baubo, and for their witch-like associations G. Devereaux, *Baubo, die mythische Vulva* (Frankfurt/M. 1981).

V. Working Women

During the Peloponnesian War the number of citizen women who had to sell the produce of their labor increased.¹¹³ When they did so publicly, in the marketplace, they had to adapt to a rough environment. Marketwomen were proverbially¹¹⁴ tough, haughty and abusive,¹¹⁵ and Aristophanes frequently portrays them. All were poor. Many were widows without sons or *kyrioi* to protect them, like the garland-seller in *Thesmophoriazousai*, who supports five children and complains that times are even harder since Euripides made atheism fashionable (443–58). In *Wasps* market-women represent the urban poor and the attitudes of radical democracy (496–99): the bread-seller Myrtia proudly names her citizen parents and insists on her legal rights¹¹⁶ after she is assaulted by Philokleon (1388–1414), who has changed from a champion of the poor into one of their oppressors.¹¹⁷ In *Lysistrata* market-women protest war-time disruption of the market-place (555–64) and serve as fully-armed soldiers in the battle against the Proboulos and his slave-police (452–66).

These women were the lowest class of citizens since they were poor and had to work, like metics, freedwomen and slaves.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, they had a privileged position in the market-place¹¹⁹ and, like Myrtia in *Wasps*, they considered themselves honest and respectable.

Nevertheless, it was socially preferable for working women to work at home, leaving the actual selling to others and thus avoiding malicious assimilation to non-citizens.¹²⁰ Comic poets, like litigants, were quick to charge an opponent's mother with being a seller, the point being that public activity made it impossible for the men of the family to guarantee her propriety and difficult to differentiate her from non-citizens, that is, to prove their own legitimacy and citizenship. The classic example of this technique and the attitudes underlying it is Demosthenes' speech *Against Euboulides* (57), where Euxitheos defends his mother's work as a nurse and garland-seller by stressing wartime poverty, that is, she did not belong to that class but was only

¹¹³ See D. 57.45.

¹¹⁴ The joker at *Od.* 18.26–27 is compared to “an old washerwoman.”

¹¹⁵ E.g., *Ve.* 34–36, 497, *Ra.* 549–78, 857–58, *Pl.* 426–28.

¹¹⁶ For which see D. 57.67–68.

¹¹⁷ Philokleon has just left a symposion attended by wealthy men. Just as earlier he had taken dicastic behavior to an extreme, so now he has gone to the opposite extreme: he was the “most drunken and riotous” of the symposiasts (1300, 1303). A similar routine appears to have occurred in *Old Age*: in fr. 129 rejuvenated old men pick on a bread-seller.

¹¹⁸ See M. N. Tod, *BSA Journal* (1901/2) 204ff.

¹¹⁹ See P. Herfst, *Le travail de la femme dans la Grèce ancienne* (Utrecht 1922, repr. N. Y. 1979); Lacey (above, note 32) 170ff.; Schaps (above, note 7) 61–63. Pride is reflected in epitaphs and dedications, e.g., *IG* ii² 11077 [Δημη]τρία [ἀρτόπ]ωλις, cf. W. Peek, *Attische Grabinschriften* I (Berlin 1954) 28.

¹²⁰ Xenophon's story about Aristarchos (*Mem.* 2.7.2–14) is instructive about this attitude.

temporarily forced into it, “like many ἄσται γυναῖκες who were nurses and spinsters and grape-pickers in those days because of the city’s misfortunes” (45). Aristophanes’ sympathetic market-women are similarly characterized as poor but proud. No such defense is provided for mothers of “demagogues”: they always *do* belong to that class and sell voluntarily and for profit, like Hyperbolos’ moneylending mother (*Th.* 839–45). Euxitheos is careful to defend himself against the charge of selling for profit (53). Indeed, “demagogues” themselves are routinely assumed in comedy to be sellers.¹²¹ The mother of Euripides, whom Aristophanes considers to be the poet of the lower orders (*Ra.* 771–76), is therefore consistently referred to as a vegetable-seller (see note 60).

Even in *Lysistrata*, where the old women are heroines, Aristophanes carefully differentiates the market-women in status and behavior from Lysistrata and her respectable comrades.¹²² Because they worked in public, similar aspersions could attach to mothers who performed such sub-priestly business as purifications and drug-dealing,¹²³ who joined the cults of new or foreign deities not recognized by the city or open to the lower orders,¹²⁴ or who haunted temples, like the old woman in *Wealth* who, during a night in Asklepios’ temple, is frightened and robbed of her gruel by the slave Karion (672–95).

Work that resembled an older woman’s domestic functions and was not principally carried out in public areas (like manufacture and selling) was apparently honorable and unobjectionable. No one criticized Sokrates’ mother Phainarete for her midwifery (*Pl. Tht.* 149a ff.), and comic midwives are portrayed as respectable.¹²⁵ Similarly Lysistrata and her comrades playfully offer to take on a job traditionally reserved for women over sixty¹²⁶ when they volunteer to handle the Proboulos’ funeral (599–613).

Among the jobs that could be held by citizens and non-citizens alike were nurse and housekeeper, the canonical types of old women in *hDem.*

¹²¹ See Ehrenberg (above, note 26) 115. The most thoroughgoing example of this kind of characterization is Kleon/Paphlagon in *Knights*.

¹²² See Henderson (above, note 1) at 439–40, 449–52a. In *Ra.* 1346–63 Aischylos parodies Euripides’ tendency (condemned at 945–70) to incorporate low types into his tragedies by singing a pathetic song as a woman struggling to get her wool ready for market.

¹²³ D. 18.259, 284 (Aischines’ mother), D. L. 10.4 (Epicurus’ mother), Diph. 126, Pherekr. 17 *Dem.* ἀνδροκάπραινα καὶ μεθύση καὶ φαρμακίς, Phot. α 1771.

¹²⁴ Female cultists of Bendis, ridiculed in Kratinos’ *Thracian Women* and in Ar.’s *Lemnian Women* (cf. frr. 381, 384), may have contributed to the use of “Thracian” as a stock epithet (*Ra.* 678–85, Platon 56, 60, Eup. 243). Attack on disreputable religious practices of women is suggested by the titles of Eup. *Baptai*, Autokr. *Tympanistai*, Pherekr. *Ipnos or Pannychis*, Lysippos and Diokles *Bakchai*. These attacks were comic versions of the sort leveled at the bakchai by Pentheus in Euripides’ play, which itself shows comic influence.

¹²⁵ *Ek.* 528–34.

¹²⁶ Lys. I.15, D. 43.62, in general D. Kurtz and J. Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs* (Ithaca 1971).

101–4 (quoted above) and the most prominent types in fifth-century drama as in epic. Nurses particularly appear in tragedy in a most favorable light: shrewd and knowledgeable, loyal defenders of the house, confidantes and advisors of wives and children, dependable runners of errands. Like their Homeric prototypes (especially Eurykleia)¹²⁷ the nurses in tragedy¹²⁸ share and complement a mother's role. In Attic usage *μαῖα* was a general term of respect (see note 19) and τροφός/τροφεύειν had broad and favorable poetic and metaphorical applications.

In actual life nurses seem to occupy the same high regard. In Demosthenes' speech *Against Euergos and Mnesitheos* (47) a man takes in, out of a feeling of obligation, the widowed and impoverished freedwoman who had nursed him (56), and nurses are frequently praised in epitaphs.¹²⁹ In Attic cult Ge Kourotrophos, whose altar was founded by her son Erichthonios,¹³⁰ was the archetypal nurse of children.¹³¹ Every sacrifice began with a *prothyma* to her and, together with Athena Polias and Pandrosos, she formed the triad to which Athenian officials made sacrifice upon leaving office and swore that they had behaved properly.¹³² Kalligeneia, for whom the third day of Thesmophoria was named, spoke the prologue of Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousai II* probably as Demeter's nurse (fr. 331), cf. Aischylos' play *Nurses of Dionysos*.¹³³

Aristophanes, however, uses nurses mainly as helpers in wifely intrigue and his off-hand allusions to them show a cynical attitude, as is the case also in later comedy.¹³⁴ Euripides was perhaps the inspiration here: in *Lemnian Women* Hypsipyle's nurse is the go-between in her affair with Jason (fr. 376–77), like Phaidra's nurse in E. *Hp.*;¹³⁵ in *Thesmophoriazousai* the Kinsman's description of how nurses procure babies for wives without sons (502–16)¹³⁶ is an idea credited to Euripides (407–8). In *Knights* Paphlagon (Kleon), who steals Demos' money while claiming to be an honest steward, is compared to nurses who give the child small morsels but eat most of the food themselves (716–18).

¹²⁷ She was a character in A. *The Washing*. For her characterization in Homer see Preisshofen (above, note 2) 39–42.

¹²⁸ A. Ch. 734–82 (the memorable Kilissa), S. Tr. 49–63, *Peleus* (fr. 487), E. *Med.* 1–203, *Andr.* 802–78, *Hyps.*

¹²⁹ L. Robert, *AC* 37 (1968) 439–44, Lacey (above, note 32) 310 n. 121.

¹³⁰ See Price (above, note 69) 114, 117.

¹³¹ The epithet could be applied to any divinity who took this role, see *LSJ*.

¹³² P. Hanslik, *RE* 17 (1949) 533ff., Simon (above, note 69) 69. This is no doubt why the old woman at *Lys.* 439–40 swears by Pandrosos when she threatens the Proboulos. For the importance of Kourotrophos in the demes see Whitehead (above, note 85) 192.

¹³³ Cf. *Th.* 299, Burkert (above, note 82) 244 with n. 32.

¹³⁴ Cf. Oeri (above, note 3) 53ff., Richardson (above, note 2) 44ff., 167ff., 173ff.

¹³⁵ The nurse privy to wifely misdeeds perhaps appeared also in E. *Alope* and *Aiolos* (cf. *Ov. Her.* 11), S. *Phaidra* (cf. fr. 679). A real-life example in *Lysias* 1.8 (cf. *Eub.* 80).

¹³⁶ For this see D. 21.149.

In epic the role of housekeeper overlapped with the role of nurse,¹³⁷ both being practical extensions of the wife-mother's.¹³⁸ In Athens the ταμία was more specifically the steward-manager under a wife's direction: her duties are discussed in Xenophon *Oec.* 9.10ff. In particular she was to help the wife be an οἰκονόμος δεινὴ καὶ φειδωλὸς (thrifty) καὶ ἀκριβῶς πάντα διοικοῦσα (Lys. 1.7), a "trustworthy guardian of the family property" (D. 59.122). A wife was responsible for managing and spending household money: "we turn over πάντα χρήματα to our wives to manage (διαταμιεύειν)" (Pl. *Lg.* 7.805E); "wealth comes into the family generally through the husband's business, but most of it is spent (δαπανᾶται) through the wife's management (ταμιευμάτων)" (X. *Oec.* 3.15).¹³⁹ Since wives were discouraged from leaving the house, families of any means employed or owned a ταμία to shop and run errands, and such a job would ideally be held by an older woman. The greater experience (and thus greater sobriety) of an older woman (see note 17) would also equip her to help in the financial management.

The competent running of the household by wives is contrasted favorably with the men's running of the city in plays of female rebellion. In *Ekklesiazousai* (210–12) the women, disguised as assemblymen, say that "we must hand over the city to the wives, because in our homes we employ them as managers and stewards (ἐπιτρόποις καὶ ταμίαισι)," and in *Lysistrata* (493–95) the women justify their seizure of the city treasury on the grounds that they will manage (ταμιεύειν) the money better than the men, just as they do at home. These arguments play upon the fact that the terminology of wives' domestic management (ταμιεύειν and διοικεῖν) was also used in the context of public administration: male elected ταμίαι were responsible for managing funds, and Xenophon could say (*Mem.* 3.4.12) that "domestic management differs from the management of the city only in scope." The Athenian treasury was, after all, lodged with Athena and guarded by her priestess, just as the household coffers were lodged with the wife and her ταμία.¹⁴⁰ This assimilation of city funds to family funds was not merely metaphorical, since the Polias priestess did in fact have to put her seal on the financial registers (Lykurg. fr. 5.3 συσσημαίνεσθαι τὰ γραμματεῖα).¹⁴¹ We have already noticed Lysistrata's assimilation to the Polias priestess (see note 11).

¹³⁷ Cf. *Od.* 2.345–46 of Eurykleia: ἐν δὲ γυνὴ ταμὴν νύκτας τε καὶ ἡμαρ/ἔσχ', ἥ πάντ' ἐφύλασσε νόου πολυιδρεΐησιν.

¹³⁸ Household slaves thus had an enviable position relative to outdoor ones: *Ve.* 968–72, *Men. Dysk.* 496, where οἰκέτης is a polite way to address a θεράπων.

¹³⁹ In general see Schaps (above, note 7) 14–16.

¹⁴⁰ In *Th.* 418–23 wives complain that their husbands, whom Euripides has made suspicious, have taken to locking up the pantry with "Spartan keys."

¹⁴¹ Since 1949, when Mrs. Georgia Neese Clark replaced as Treasurer of the United States a man who had been killed in an automobile accident (*Congressional Record* for 9 June), the Treasurer (who signs the currency) has always been a married woman.

Another kind of older figure is the doorkeeper, who appears frequently in tragedy as a protector of the women in the house from intrusion by strange men.¹⁴² The doorway, as boundary between inside and outside realms, was a dangerous place for maidens and young wives to be. The occupying (older) women in *Lysistrata* adopt this role when they forcibly prevent the Proboulos from entering the Akropolis, which has been converted into a shelter for the city's wives, and seizing the heroine (430–75). In other cases the doorkeeper may invite someone inside, as in *Ekklesiazousai* (1112–43) where an old (? 1138) drunken διάκονος invites everyone to a banquet to celebrate the gynecocracy, or in *Frogs* (503–18) where Persephone's servant (and therefore old)¹⁴³ invites “Herakleioxanthias” (499) to a feast within.

Both of these comic invitation-scenes include prostitutes in their catalogue of inside entertainments, the doorkeepers thus resembling their most prominent analogue, the bawd (πορνοβοσκοῦσα, “keeper of a household of whores”), who describes to customers the delights on sale within. The bawd is a type already in archaic iambos (Archilochos 112, where the bawd is called “kourotrophos” as in Platon 174.7, where the bawd is apparently Aphrodite herself),¹⁴⁴ and was a comic staple in Aristophanes' time and beyond.¹⁴⁵

Two clever twists on the type of doorkeeping bawd appear in the plays of 411, perhaps inspired by Euripides (see note 142). In *Thesmophoriazousai* Euripides disguises himself as an old bawd and supplies a whore for the Skythian policeman as a way of liberating his captive Kinsman (1177ff.).¹⁴⁶ In *Lysistrata* the heroine refuses entry to Kinesias, who has come looking for his wife (845–52). In the subsequent bargaining Kinesias assumes the role of a bawd's customer as Lysistrata describes in salacious fashion how much Myrrhine loves him and demands a fee before producing her.

¹⁴² At E. *Tro.* 194–95 Hekabe worries that when she arrives in Greece as a slave she will be a nurse or doorkeeper, τὰν παρὰ προθύροις φυλακὰν κατέχουσα. In *Hel.* 437–82 such a doorkeeper tries to prevent Menelaos from entering to seize Helen, as in A. *Phorkides* the Graiai try to keep Perseus from getting to Medousa.

¹⁴³ Some editors (see Stanford at *Ra.* 503) think that this doorkeeper was male, but in view of the typology I have sketched she must be female. An oath by Apollo is not always confined to men (*Lys.* 917, *Ek.* 155–60). That she was old is also suggested by the fact that Xanthias does not immediately respond favorably to her “come hither” (508, 512) but only after he has heard what she offers inside (515).

¹⁴⁴ Arch. 112 is best interpreted as a brothel-scene with young soldiers, see J. Henderson, *Areth.* 6 (1976) 175 n. 1. Other allusions to kourotrophos = bawd are Homeric *Epigram* 12 as applied to old men praying for young girls (Homer at Hdt. *Vita* 410–20 Allen, Sophokles at Athen. 13.61.7–14) and *AG* 6.318 Κύπριδι κουροτρόφῳ δάμαλιν ῥήξαντες ἔφηβοι χαίροντες νύμφας ἐκ θαλάμων ἄγομεν.

¹⁴⁵ See Oeri (above, note 3) 50ff. The best young whores end up as bawds with their own stables (Hypereides in Athen. 1.20ff.). Athenaios, especially in Book 13, and Lukian in *Dialogues of Courtesans* record numerous anecdotes about whores and bawds and their careers, many of which draw on comic sources. Nikarete in D. 59.18–19 is a memorable real-life example.

¹⁴⁶ See above, note 21 (for Euripides), note 66 (old women as teachers).

This scene is an example of the comic tendency to portray young wives in terms more appropriate to whores than to actual wives.¹⁴⁷ In part this portrayal derives from the comic role-reversals inherent in female rebellions. But the comic fantasy also enables husbands to have in wives all the qualities one could hope for in mistresses, while at the same time it distances the portrayal of wives from the potentially disturbing facts of actual conjugal life and from the group-ideal of real wives. Thus we may doubt that the sexy and titillating wives of comedy reproduce in any naturalistic way the qualities expected in actual respectable wives. Similarly, Lysistrata's assumption of the bawd's role reveals the ambiguity that attached to the older woman's role as supervisor of young wives (as mother, house-servant, nurse).

VI. Witches

Having surveyed the comic versions of actual older women, we must ask whether any were assimilated to the witch-figure, which for many scholars¹⁴⁸ epitomized the fear and hatred that older women supposedly inspired categorically.

Witches were an imaginary personification of the social power of older women in its negative aspects. As we have seen, women grew in authority and responsibility as they aged, unlike men. That is probably why the theme of rejuvenation in heroic myth and in comedy appears only on the male side (see note 93). The sinister power ascribed to witches derives from old women's contact with the mysterious, disturbing and polluting events surrounding birth and death.¹⁴⁹ No doubt the Athenian male's memory, and vestigial awe, of the formidable women who had dominated his years of rearing in the oikos also contributed to the witch-fantasy.

Witch-figures were traditional and appear frequently in early tragedy and satyr-drama. They were associated with such divinities as Artemis, the Erinyes (A. *Ch.*), Hekate (Ar. fr. 515) and the Moirai (Phryn. tr. *Alkestis*). They figured in travellers' tales as Graiai and Gorgons (A. *Phorkides*), Kirke (A. *Kirke*), Harpyiai (A. *Phineus*) and as bogeys to frighten children,¹⁵⁰ like Lamia (E. *Lamia*, *Bousiris*), Empousa (note 57) and Mormo. They also furnished such abstractions as Bia (A. *PV*) and Lyssa (E. *HF*) and made a terrifying blazon for a soldier's shield.¹⁵¹ Their characteristic mask, a horrible

¹⁴⁷ For this phenomenon in later comedy see M. Henry, *Menander's Courtesans and the Greek Comic Tradition* (diss. Minnesota 1983).

¹⁴⁸ For example Bremmer (above, note 4) 292–93.

¹⁴⁹ See in general A. Billault, "La vieille femme incarnation du mal," in *Mythe et personification*, ed. J. Duchemin (Paris 1980); Devereaux (above, note 112); Th. Feldman, "Gorgo and the Origins of Fear," *Arion* 4 (1965) 484ff.; J. Gould, *JHS* 100 (1980) 56.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. X. *HG* 4.4.17 ὥστε οἱ μὲν Λακεδαιμόνιοι καὶ ἐπισκώπτειν ἐτόλμων ὥς οἱ σύμμαχοι φοβοῖντο τοὺς πελταστὰς ὥσπερ μορμόνας παιδάρια.

¹⁵¹ *Ach.* 574, 582, *Eq.* 693, *Pax* 473–74 with scholia.

hag-face, was called the μορμολυκεῖον (Ar. fr. 31) after Mormo.¹⁵² Votive examples were a common (and characteristic) sight in the precinct of Dionysos (Ar. fr. 130) and in other cults as early as the seventh century.¹⁵³

In comedy, however, the witch-type appears to be rare and early. Except for Krates' *Lamia* and Kratinos' mythological burlesque *Odyssees*¹⁵⁴ there are only occasional jocular references to witch-figures,¹⁵⁵ and the μορμολυκεῖον was appropriate only for satirical portrayals like the hags in *Ekklesiazousai*, Poverty in *Wealth*,¹⁵⁶ and probably the mothers of "demagogues."¹⁵⁷ Otherwise, old women's costumes resembled the clothing that their actual counterparts would wear¹⁵⁸ and their masks were generic (wrinkles, straight nose, a mop of white hair).¹⁵⁹ Moreover, when old women are insulted it is for physical deterioration or shamelessness, not for witch-like qualities.

Comic poets apparently distinguished between witches and ordinary old women. In any case, witches, as creatures of the night and of far-off or wild places, and as representatives of the opposite of civilized behavior, will only seldom have been relevant to the urban milieu and smart sensibility of comedies in the Aristophanic style. The equation old woman = witch thus finds no support in topical comedy.

VII. Conclusions

Comic poets were careful, in their creation of women's parts, to maintain the conventional social and domestic hierarchies and to give the various types of women the attributes, duties and behavior that characterized their actual counterparts. That is to say, the comic fantasy, exaggeration and norm-reversal based itself upon realities taken for granted by the spectators. As in their portrayal of men, comic poets gave sympathetic roles to older women and unsympathetic ones to young wives, the main difference being that women are portrayed as solidary and men as antagonistic across the generation-gap. As with men, unsympathetic portrayals of women often refer to actual contem-

¹⁵² The ancestor of the later mask-type described by Pollux (4.150–51). For vase-paintings illustrating the type see L. Séchan, *Études sur la tragédie grecque* (Paris 1926) 93–101. A recently published fifth-century example in *Hesp.* 37 (1968) 204 with fig. 59 C.

¹⁵³ See R. M. Dawkins, *The Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia*, JHS Suppl. 5 (1929) 163ff. with plates 47ff. Comparable were the stone portraits of elderly priestesses of the Erinyes at Keryneia (Paus. 7.25.4).

¹⁵⁴ Featuring Kirke, cf. *Pl.* 302–15.

¹⁵⁵ *Lamia* (*Ve.* 1035, *Pl.* 76–77), *Empousa* (*Ra.* 285–305, *Ek.* 1056, fr. 575), (proverbial) Thessalian witches (*Nu.* 749–52).

¹⁵⁶ Cf. 423–24 ἴσως Ἐρινύς ἐστὶν ἐκ τραγωιδίας· βλέπει γε τοι μανικόν τι καὶ τραγωιδικόν.

¹⁵⁷ Compare Paphlagon/Kleon's bogey-mask in *Knights*, for which see K. J. Dover, "Portrait-Masks in Aristophanes," in *Aristophanes und die alte Komödie*, ed. H.-J. Newiger (Darmstadt 1975) 155–64.

¹⁵⁸ See in general L. Stone, *Costume in Aristophanic Comedy* (N.Y. 1981).

¹⁵⁹ A. D. Trendall, *Phlyax Vases*, BICS Suppl. 8 (1959) 23, 78.

poraries (relatives of “demagogues”) and are attached to conventionally disreputable types (sellers, whores), while sympathetic portrayals are composites fabricated from idealized versions of the wife/mother, often with assimilation to public cults like Athena’s or Demeter’s. Always the women’s actions are motivated by desire to help or save the men, whether it be to rescue the city or to advance a “demagogue’s” career or to protect the integrity of the oikos, and these actions are portrayed in terms of wifely or maternal roles.

It is understandable, given the position of women in fifth-century Athens (see I), that young wives, market-women, whores and the relatives of “demagogues” would be freely portrayed in comedy in a ridiculous and unsympathetic fashion. But it is harder to account for the sympathetic and even heroic roles assigned to old women in topical comedy. Part of the reason was the influence of tragedy, especially Euripides. But this does not explain the idea of sympathetic rebellions by women in the first place, for this motif does not occur in the heroic tradition. We are entitled to seek a topical motivation for corporate action taken by citizen women on behalf of the city.

In the period after the unprecedented losses of the Sicilian disaster in 413,¹⁶⁰ it is hard to believe that the protests heard in the plays of 411 (but not earlier) were entirely the product of Aristophanes’ imagination or that he drew them entirely from festive or literary antecedents. Surely these protests echo real female discontent, even rebelliousness (in the home), much as the devastation of the countryside was protested by the farmer-heroes of the plays of the 420’s. Nor is it unlikely that the widows and spinsters created in great numbers after 413 (cf. *Lys.* 591–97) reappeared as the old women who fight over young men in the plays produced twenty years later.

The comic poet’s role was to give humorous and reassuring expression to the social currents running beneath the surface of public discourse. The comic festival was a “privileged time when what oft was thought could for once be expressed with relative impunity.”¹⁶¹ The characters and the choruses were men in safe comic disguise speaking to their mates in the audience. It would appear that in 411 and afterwards Aristophanes found in the situation of Athenian women, as earlier in the situation of farmers, a way to voice complaints and offer advice to the city. But there is a difference. Dikaiopolis’ real-life counterparts could, like Dikaiopolis himself (*Ach.* 1ff.), attend the Assembly and make known their views, whereas Aristophanes’ women behave as no actual counterpart could ever behave. Why then did Aristophanes resort to women?

The likeliest answer lies in the requirement that comic poets be humorous and not offensive. In the volatile and dangerous atmosphere of 411 and of the period after 404, Aristophanes generally avoids portrayals and *ad hominem*

¹⁶⁰ See Th. 8.1 ἅμα μὲν γὰρ στερόμενοι καὶ ἰδία ἕκαστος καὶ ἡ πόλις ὀπλιτῶν πολλῶν καὶ ἱππέων καὶ ἡλικίας οἶαν οὐχ ἑτέραν ἑώρων ὑπάρχουσιν ἐβαρύνοντο.

¹⁶¹ P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London 1978) 182.

attacks that could be construed as accusatory or be thought to impugn the fitness of the city's leaders to extricate it from its troubles. The exuberant confidence of the 420's has been replaced by circumspection. The decree of Syrakosios, passed in 415, forbade only comic mention of individuals involved in the scandals of the mysteries and the herms,¹⁶² but it was a sign of the people's new touchiness that was not lost on Aristophanes.

A safe vehicle for the expression of "what oft was thought" was the city's women. Removed from the public world of the men, they could be mouth-pieces for observations and advice that, if credited to male types, might produce anxiety and resentment rather than laughter. In addition, the introduction of respectable women into the satirical modes of comedy opened up new creative avenues for comic poets and must be counted among the principal contributions of Aristophanes.

¹⁶² For this decree see A. H. Sommerstein, *CQ* 36 (1986) 101–8.