



There is general agreement that Lysistrata is an extraordinary figure, but how are we to understand her? Is she, as her many admirers suggest, a woman "endowed with a degree of intelligence, will, and eloquence that would have been considered extraordinary in a citizen of either sex and that emerges triumphant on all fronts" (Henderson 1987, xxxviif.)? Does she in her cleverness represent instead the "hetairization" of the Athenian wife (S. Stoop, *Arethusa* 2004, 37ff.)? Or is she perhaps not really a woman after all, but rather a figure of equivocal sexuality who appropriates masculine forms of speech and in the end reconstitutes the patriarchal order (Taaffe 1993 60ff.)? Although this complex and unusual figure, possibly the first female comic hero, cannot be reduced to a simple formula, I shall argue that a coherent and comprehensive understanding of Lysistrata's role and the gender issues it raises can be derived from close attention to a series of mixed signals encoded in her speech. Since gender is, after all, a system of difference, gender as inscribed in the character of Lysistrata can perhaps best be understood by comparing her words and deeds to those of other women and of men within the framework of the play. From this perspective, she can be seen not merely to have exchanged one gender role for another, but rather to have forged parts of both into a new synthesis. Lysistrata explicitly claims a man's public and political voice but uses it to argue for an understanding of the state as *oikos*, women's realm par excellence, writ large (e.g., A. Saxonhouse *Political Theory* 1980, 65ff.). Hence, for example, the very considerable emphasis in her political argument for the salvation of the state on images from the domestic world of wool-working, an activity associated both with female sexuality and virtue (Ferrari 2002, 25ff.). However improbable her argument seems to her male interlocutor, the Proboulos, it clearly prevails and she oversees his figurative feminization and burial (599ff.).

Similarly, Lysistrata's own apparent immunity to sexual temptation is a (putatively masculine) trait that distinguishes her from the other women, who are depicted with gusto in their stereotypical lack of sexual restraint and self-control. Like an effective politician, however, Lysistrata is able to persuade them to discipline their desire in order to achieve the desired end. The culmination of Lysistrata's success is the hilarious scene in which Myrrhine (with some initial coaching) tantalizes her husband Kinesias to utter distraction, then withdraws leaving him in agony. This scene and the subsequent male "capitulation" that brings war to an end, expose the men as at least equally driven by sexually passion and even less self-controlled than the women, and reaffirm the efficacy of Lysistrata's "political" rhetoric, drawn from the world of the domestic and even intimate life of men and women together. For, as it turns out, it is not just sex, but even more emphatically marriage that is at stake here (Konstan 1995, 48), the foundation of the *oikos* and the source of legitimate offspring to provide the polis with its citizens.

Toward the end of the play, Lysistrata disappears, leaving politics once again in the hands of the men; at most, she reappears when the Athenian wives rejoin their husbands, but with no more lines to speak. This ending has been variously received, but it is hard to imagine its effect as canceling or negating the "women's uprising" that Lysistrata so ably led. On the contrary, with its mixture of political (the restoration of peace) and domestic (the renewal of family life), it brings the action to an entirely appropriate end. The play has not (need it be said?) offered a "real" solution to Athens' troubles, any more than does Dikaiopolis' private peace did in *Acharnians*, or the rejuvenation of Demos in *Knights*. What it does provide, through fantasy, is the vision of possible salvation, of a better world, and over against those earlier plays, it offers its vision with far greater urgency and force, thanks no doubt to its insistence on the need for Panhellenic action, but even more to its inversion of the normal roles of men and women in governing the state, which "indicates a severe crisis in the polis" (Henry 1995, 21), and above all to the potent and cogent mixture of male and female, political and domestic, in Lysistrata's persuasive speech.