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Lysistrata's Clew and the Proboulos' Response

Proboulos: Isn't it awful, how these women go like this with their sticks and ... their bobbins (*rhabdizein kai tolupeuein*)—when they share none of the war's burdens?

Lysistrata... We bear more than our fair share, ...giving birth to sons and sending them off to the army

Proboulos: Enough...don't open old wounds! (Lys.587-90, adapted from Henderson 2000)

Lysistrata's plan for reconstituting Athens (571-90)—like processing a fleece into a cloak—is perhaps the most studied passage in the play. Scholars have treated it seriously as reflecting the aftermath of the Sicilian disaster and, preoccupied with such serious implications, they tend to overlook the comic dimension of this exchange: Lysistrata's woolly scheme represents a formal Reconciliation, *diallagai*, which the women demonstrate upon the Proboulos.

Lysistrata, after all, is a play about peace of a practical sort. The fetching figure of *Diallage* herself, revealed at the end of the play, represents peace as a contractual agreement; as *Diallage* takes the adversaries in hand, Lysistrata negotiates the covenants between Athens and her enemies(1090-1187). That theme is introduced in the lines preceding our passage, where Lysistrata takes up the woolworking metaphor (567-70): she will resolve quarrels abroad like teasing apart a tangled skein. Then she applies that model to troubles at home: there must be a purge of partisans, balanced by citizen rights for metics and others. Draw these together "making one big bobbin" or clew (*tolupe*) from which to weave a "cloak for the people." (586).

Commentators have focused on the end-product, the "cloak for the people," but Aristophanes is doing something more provocative by stretching the metaphor backward into the woolworking . The Proboulos protests against this part of the plan, not the cloak but the 'working-with-wands' (*rhabdizein*) and 'winding-up.' Tolupe properly describes the clew or ball of yarn formed by winding around the spindle. Deceptive 'winding' (*tolupeuein*) was linked with women's wiles ever since Penelope's ruse (Od. 19.137), so the Proboulos finds it subversive.

He is also protesting against what they are **doing** to him. The women are demonstrating their prowess, teaching him as Lysistrata describes the technique. "Isn't [this] awful" (587) indicates stage business, not just wordplay. By the end of the scene, the Proboulos is wrapped up like a shrouded corpse (599-611) as scholars have recognized from Lysistrata's taunts and his protest (*oukhi deina*, 608). Largely unrecognized, this shtick develops continuously from 534: Lysistrata drapes her *kalumma* around him; the women present him with the woolworking basket and lay aside their pitchers to take up the yarn. To illustrate, the Douris cup in Berlin (F2289) shows a woman drawing the strands over her leg and twisting them together around her arm; for a tough guy wrapped up in such

women's work, we have the later images of Heracles spinning for Omphale. The women's demonstration dramatizes the restrictive effect of *diallagai*, disabling the trouble-makers. And the Proboulos is so flummoxed by this clewing that in a moment's desperation he, too, invokes Reconciliation, before he waddles off in retreat.