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Women and War: Power Play From Lysistrata to the Present

Cindy Luo

Although women have gained definitive and tangible improvements in many areas throughout the centuries, the more I delved into the topic of women and violence, the more I realized that while certain progress was made, that was not the case when it came to the issue of women in war. The first time I read Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, I was intrigued. The premise of the play, that the women were going to attempt to end the world by capitalizing on their sexuality, seemed to posit several important points about the nature of war and the concept of power. *Lysistrata* was about sex, but it was also about gender, war, and the construction of masculinity and femininity.

My intentions for this project were as follows:

1. *Lysistrata* was a subversive text, as it presented a challenge to men's authority that otherwise remained unchallenged.
2. A modernized retelling of *Lysistrata* would still be a subversive text, because men still hold nearly absolute authority in war.
3. Representing the comedic nature of *Lysistrata* in a modern text; namely, why women's choices constitute a comedy, and the implications of a modernized version being comedic.

Other questions I sought to answer were: why do women still lack agency? Why is the concept of women's autonomy comedic? As I examined the original Greek and the way translators rendered certain passages, I attempted to place the same emphasis on certain areas where Aristophanes' intended humor is clearest, but I also modified passages that I deemed sufficiently different from my own intentions. The three parts, in tandem, are meant to examine and critique the advances, or lack thereof, women have made since Aristophanes' time.

Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*: A Challenge To Male Authority

On the surface, *Lysistrata* appears to be simply as translator Douglass Parker says in the introduction to his translation, “the last refuge of genteel ribaldry—heterosexual intercourse” (Parker 342). Today, *Lysistrata* is one of the most recognizable of Aristophanes' plays, as people recognize the plot even if they are unfamiliar with the playwright. Often times, though, modern interpretations oversimplify the matters that Aristophanes tackles in his comedy, rendering a lack of full understanding on what *Lysistrata* is meant to critique and explore. The typical interpretation tends to be superficial, glossing over the details in favor of the sex.

However, there are other aspects of the play that need to be examined in order to understand the meaning of *Lysistrata* during the time it was written, and what it means to translate the comedy into a modern day perspective. There are several facets to this analysis: first, unpacking the gender paradigms and what Aristophanes intended by portraying the male and female characters the way he does; second, analyzing the text and the nature of the relationship between men and women during the time; and finally, discussing the ramifications of such portrayals with respect to modern-day interpretations of *Lysistrata*.

This analysis is part of a three-part project that intends to demonstrate that, despite progress in certain areas of gender equity, women are still largely powerless when it comes to their roles during wartime. The argument set forth here will demonstrate that Aristophanes' portrayal of male-female relationships during the time of *Lysistrata* is critical of the excessive egotism of the Greek men, challenging their authority with the women's sex strike. The next part of this project includes a modernized retelling of *Lysistrata*, which includes nearly all the same basic premises of the original play and retains the original humor. Consequently, this prompts the question: why is it that even now, the concept of women's autonomy and personal choice

constitutes comedy? The final portion attempts to reconcile the differences between Aristophanes' original play and the adaptation, taking into consideration the reversed stereotype of women's sexuality as well as the inclusion of sexual violence as a prevalent modern war crime.

Parker notes in his introduction that the play is not merely about sex, but of love. Part of the humor would be lost if there was no sense of humanity, instead focusing only on an animalistic lust. According to Parker, "the fundamental relationship is not blind sexual gratification...but love in its civic manifestation—the bond between husband and wife" (Parker 343). This bond becomes the foundation of the relationships that are seen in *Lysistrata*: the ones between the women, the men, the men and the women, and ultimately, the citizens of Greece.

Jeffrey Henderson, in his translation, also remarks upon the nature of Aristophanes' criticism. "The powers that be are portrayed unsympathetically as self-interested, corrupt and misguided, and the status quo as unjustly burdensome for ordinary, decent people" (Henderson 36). This lends itself to the interpretation that all is not well during the Peloponnesian War, and that there would have been popular appeal in showing a play that criticized the way the war was going on. By presenting *Lysistrata* the way he did, Aristophanes was able to make several different types of commentary on war society.

Insofar as the release was motivated by acceptable civic ideals (peace and solidarity) and achieved in humorous fantasy (wives determining policy), it was safe and festive, cohesive rather than divisive. But insofar as it was a valid expression of people's real war-weariness and an expression of social discontent that had no other public outlet, it was also fair warning to the people's leaders that public patience might not last indefinitely. (Henderson 36)

One can see, then, that comedy serves a multitude of purposes—and that each feature (characters, plot, etc.) finds itself with a distinctive role.

First of all, the women in *Lysistrata* are not meant to be realistic imitations of Greek women of the time. Rather, they were caricatures, "...theatrical, comic women, whose gender identity is determined by what men think, by exaggerated fantasies and fears. They are female figures completely created by men, on the stage and in the imagination" (Taaffe 54). This begs the question: if the women in *Lysistrata* are supposed to be recognizable as exaggerations, what is the viewer meant to infer by their uncharacteristic, masculine-like actions?

According to Taaffe, however, there is still a certain type of μίμησις involved. The female character has an inner self—the motivation behind Lysistrata and her co-conspirators' actions—and an outer self, which they display to the men. On the one hand, the women plot extensively to ensure that their plans will succeed. But on the other hand, it is not until Lysistrata explains that she views "the seductress as the saviour of Greece" then Kleonike "becomes interested in the role, and offers to go out and buy a new costume" (Taaffe 55). Apparently, there exists a duality of male and female characteristics, with the latter being an undercurrent to the former. When the women are acting rationally, that is, seeking to end the war, they are ostensibly utilizing their "male" sensibilities. This portrayal is not at all unusual coming from a male perspective, as the association of certain characteristics with specific genders is still a commonly accepted notion today. And since Aristophanes was writing for a male audience, he would want characters that would resonate with them.

Thus, Aristophanes also plays heavily on stereotypical traits of women as well, rendering them as representations of what men believed women to be. The women rely on posturing and apparent contradictions to get what they want. From the very beginning, it's clear that women are being satirized, as Lysistrata's opening statement bemoans the lack of attention her announcement has received. "*Women!* Announce a debauch in honor of Bacchos/...and traffic

stops—the streets are absolutely clogged/with frantic females...No urging for an orgy! But *today*—there’s not one woman here!” (Parker 350). Such a statement is criticizing the lack of female presence at a serious matter, especially compared to how excited they apparently are at the thought of debauchery.

However, the women, even if their words were written by a man, Aristophanes, do not appear to be simply mouthpieces either. The women’s complaints are legitimate and not far-fetched. For one thing, with their husbands—or for that matter, all men of a reproducing age—at war, women are unable to conceive and bear children. As Lysistrata says, “A man, an absolute antique, comes back from the war,/and he’s barely/doddered into town before he’s married the veriest/nymphet./But a woman’s season is brief; it slips, and she’ll have/no husband, but sit out her life groping at omens—/and finding no men” (Parker 401). Also, the women “represented every group and social class, and each combatant city; they had nothing to do with bringing on the war in the first place; and though they stood outside its politics, they were integral to the polis: their importance in the home and in the cult of the gods entitled them to give sane advice to the men of their respective cities” (Henderson 37). Their demands are quite sensible: wanting their husbands at home so that they can have and raise families. As a matter of fact, such demands would have been in the interest of the men as well. Not all of them would have had sons, specifically, heirs, at home. If the men of the Peloponnese and Athens killed each other off, then both of their cultures and ways of life would have been annihilated.

Additionally, the women have prepared contingencies, understanding the intricacies of war. When the magistrate questions Lysistrata about the money, she remains unfazed.

Magistrate: So we’re at war on account of the money?

Lysistrata: Yes, and the money’s why everything else got messed up too...

Magistrate: But what do you plan to do?

Lysistrata: Don’t you see? We’ll manage it for you!

Magistrate: *You'll* manage the money?

Lysistrata: What's so strange in that? Don't we manage the household finances for you already? (Henderson 486-96)

Indeed—what is so strange in that? The magistrate does not have a proper response. When he asks, “And where do *you* get off taking an interest in war and/peace?” (Henderson 514-15)

Lysistrata has prepared a response for him. She talks about the women conversing with their husbands, but not being able to criticize them because their men would tell them to be quiet or face a beating. Yet as the decision-making grew worse, as Lysistrata claims, the women found it harder to be quiet. And consequently, despite the men's claim that “πόλεμος δ' ἄνδρεςσι μελήσει” (520-21) or that “war is the concern of men,” Lysistrata rightly points out that at the very least, the women's criticism should be allowed to be stated, if not heeded. Even if men themselves were the only people directly involved in combat, it is abundantly clear that women still had to face the consequences. Ultimately, all the women wanted was to return to the way their society was pre-war, with their men back home—not to enact a revolution or overthrow the status quo.

As far as the role women would have played with respect to war, or the attitudes that they would have had, they are clearly far from being pacifists and simple bystanders. During the Persian War, when battles were being fought constantly, “In the wake of Salamis and on the eve of Plataea, the Athenian women, at any rate, were no appeasers” (Schaps 194), as the women of Athens took it upon themselves to stone the family of Lycides, who had supported a proposal of peace. When Pyrrhus, king of Epirus, attacked Sparta, the women refused to be evacuated. Rather, they assisted the men in the war effort—that is, until “as soon as the royal army returned, the women went back to their homes, “thinking it no longer decent to meddle in military affairs” (Schaps 194). To provide some context for which to consider *Lysistrata*, the Peloponnesian War

occurred from 431 to 404 B.C., with the first staging of *Lysistrata* taking place in 411 B.C., also two years after the end of the Sicilian Expedition.

So when Aristophanes chooses to have women propose an end to the war, it's not as simple as a generalization that women are pacifists. It appears that women, just like men, were split on the issue. It's important to note that the women's roles, though, were always befitting to their station: they never challenged the men, or continued their behavior when it was no longer seemly to do so. The women in *Lysistrata* are nonetheless directly opposing the men, which is a testament to Aristophanes' feelings on the Peloponnesian War at the time. Especially because in general, "Women's influence in Greece was not always, and probably not chiefly, a matter publicly visible," (Schaps 198), and usually, "The women, in short, fought when attacked, but sat on the sidelines as long as they were left alone" (Schaps 208). To have the women publicly denounce the war, and attempt to persuade their husbands from fighting in it, puts them in a public sphere that cannot be ignored. The private (domestic relationships) has been made public. This was a clever tactic for Aristophanes to adopt, for as Henderson states, "By using women as his heroic voices, Aristophanes could admonish and advise the Athenians from an unpartisan direction (the private world), and in case the spectators should be offended they would have to admit that it was only a woman talking" (Henderson 37).

Then there's the matter of how enemy women were treated. The sex strike in *Lysistrata* may have implied that the men did not want to force their women, but what about other women? In modern day warfare, hearing about sexualized violence is far from the norm. The question remains: would the Greek men have raped and pillaged after their battles as well? Death was one thing. "They [women] did not, in general, have to fear death; ancient warfare, unlike modern did not consist of the indiscriminate bombardment of noncombatants." (Schaps 202). Rape, however,

was apparently another. The men would have no qualms about taking female prisoners or simply sexually assaulting them before leaving them to their fates. Such behavior is noted repeatedly in Homer's *Iliad*, from the abduction of Briseis to the violation of Cassandra.

Yet it is interesting to note that although Schaps claims that "it is not likely that the armies that sacked cities for more usual reasons will have shown much delicacy about the defeated women," he also follows it with this qualification, "Oddly, however, rape is rarely mentioned in connection with the sack of a city" (Schaps 203). Also interesting is the idea that "If the sources rarely mention rape, this is probably because the suggestion was indelicate as long as the women were citizens, superfluous once they were captives" (Schaps 203-04). This stems from the dominant view that women in general were property. For Greek women, mentioning rape would have been unseemly and disrespectful toward their husbands. For foreign women, rape was assumed. Once their enemies had captured them, the life of a woman was usually appropriated to slavery of some variety or another, depending on age and appearance. Since *Lysistrata* takes place when the men are home in their respective countries, it allows the men's behavior and reluctance to rape their wives more credibility.

Next, it is important to examine the role that the men and women have in the play, and how they are viewed, with respect to one another. Despite the dearth of male dialogue, characters, and appearances, the male gaze is never actually absent from the play, but appears subtly through the eyes of some of the women. It begins as early with Lysistrata's frustration with the other women in the play. "*Women!* Utter sluts, the entire sex! Will-power,/nil" (Parker 361). It's fascinating how frequently Lysistrata opens a speech with the exhortation of "women," separating herself from the others, in Parker's translation. While performed on stage by all men, one might imagine that it would be much easier for the audience (also all men) to imagine

women as described by Lysistrata. She seems to be how the men have access to the women, her narration providing secret insight into the other women's behavior. When one is only reading the text, the emphasis on Lysistrata being different from the other women is not as obvious to discern.

Even then, not only does Lysistrata remind the audience through her own words that she is not to be grouped along with the other women, the men also indicate that she is different from the others as well. At the end, when the men and women attempt to reconcile their differences, Kinesias says, "Let's send for Lysistrata. Only she can reconcile/our differences. There'll be no Peace for us without her" (Parker 443). When Lysistrata enters the stage, the way that the chorus of men greets her is also telling. "Hail, most virile of women! Summon up all your experience:/Be terrible and tender,/lofty and lowbrow,/severe and demure./Here stand the Leaders of Greece, enthralled by your/charm" (Parker 444). This greeting is filled with a multitude of contradictions: virile is associated with masculinity, charm with femininity. Terrible versus tender, lofty versus lowbrow, severe versus demure—it is quite a demand to expect all of these characteristics from a single person. Yet it seems that the chorus and Kinesias are in agreement that Lysistrata is the one who must fulfill their hopes.

Lysistrata agrees with this sentiment, as she reappears at the end to explain her reasoning. Not only does she come up with a statement about the conflict, but she seems adds a qualifier for her sex. "ἐγὼ γυνὴ μὲν εἰμι, νοῦς δ' ἔνεστί μοι/αὐτὴ δ' ἐμαυτῆς οὐ κακῶς γνώμης ἔχω" (1124-25). I have translated this to mean (in more of a literal fashion to emphasize Lysistrata's attempts to separate herself from the other women), "Indeed, I am a woman, but I am thoughtful/and I don't stand badly where judgment is concerned." More colloquially, she says, "Yes, I am a woman, but I have the ability to think/and I have pretty good judgment besides." The emphasis

on “I” by Lysistrata indicates that she feels very strongly that her personal ability should not be judged based on the fact that she is a woman.

She follows up this statement with one addressing her education, bolstered by support from her father (πατρός) and other male figures (γεραιτέρων)—“ τοὺς δ’ ἐκ πατρός τε καὶ γεραιτέρων λόγους πολλοὺς ἀκούσας’ οὐ μεμούσωμαι κακῶς” (1126-27). Taaffe argues that these statements together emphasize Lysistrata’s recurring theme of ambiguous gender, saying, “She does, as her own explanation makes clear, seem like a strange combination of male and female: a woman with an idea, a woman with a brain, is a woman whose teachers are men, and who perhaps is a man disguised as a woman” (Taaffe 70). The reasoning is that Lysistrata “...cannot be a man and propose a return to the regular *oikos* and peace” but also that she “...cannot be a woman and speak out against the war and public policy either... So Aristophanes confuses her gender to let the play go on” (Taaffe 65). However, judging by the flexibility that female characters had throughout the play, versus the rigidity of the male chorus and male characters, ultimately, it seems more likely that Lysistrata, as a female, could bend the expected norms, rather than being a male character that attempts to act as a female one. This is a limitation that has also been noted in the adaptation, with more detail regarding masculinity and aversion to the feminine.

The portrayal of Lampito, the Spartan representative, is particularly interesting. Lysistrata and Kleonike both examine her very carefully, through a very male, sexually oriented gaze. They remark upon her physique and praising her for her physical appearance, which, of course, is important in that part of the women’s plot is to use their bodies to convince the men to end the war. When first greeting Lampito, Lysistrata exclaims, “οἷον τὸ κάλλος γλυκυτάτη σου φαίνεται” (79) remarking on Lampito’s beauty (τὸ κάλλος). Kleonike becomes even more

explicit, adding, “ὡς δὴ καλὸν τὸ χρῆμα τιθίων ἔχεις” (83) to remark on Lampito’s “beautiful breasts” (καλὸν τὸ χρῆμα τιθίων). Nor is just Lampito subject to objectification. The young women from Boeiotia and from Corinth, neither of whom are granted names, also are examined critically by the Athenian women. Their bodies are literally examined as a weapon in the women’s plot against the men, and not even humanized with a name. This is one interesting feature that is easily translatable to modern day objectification: the idea of women’s bodies on display for ready consumption and manipulation.

Still, the women are aware of the effect that their physicality would have on the men, and are willing to embrace it and take advantage of it. When the women dubiously ask Lysistrata whether or not she thinks a sex strike will be successful, she unequivocally says yes, that

Here’s how it works:/We’ll paint, powder, and pluck ourselves to the last/detail, and stay inside, wearing those filmy/tunics that set off everything we *have*—/and then/slink up to the men. They’ll snap to attention, go absolutely *mad* to love us—/but we won’t let them. We’ll Abstain./ —I imagine they’ll conclude a treaty rather quickly. (Parker 362)

With this being said, Lysistrata has no qualm about using the women’s femininity to woo the men. But not only is she suggesting the other women behave in this manner, but she allows herself to be included. She allies herself with the women this time, adding herself as a possible participant in the proposed women’s behavior. When she says, “εἰ γὰρ καθοίμεθ’ ἔνδον ἐντετριμμένα” (149), she utilizes the first person plural, “we” form of κάθημαι, saying that she will hypothetically sit down inside and preen along with the other women. Another feature of κάθημαι is how frequently it is attributed to the behavior of women. From the men’s standpoint, women, who spend their day-to-day lives indoors, are a mystery. Consequently, their activities are often categorized under the category of sitting around all day. Lysistrata’s ownership of this behavior simultaneously affirms her position with the women as well as making commentary of the stereotypes that the men in the audience would have held. In a way, she is saying that since

the men believe that all the women do is sit around and preen, they will, for once, actually do just that—and do it to spite the men.

In this manner, it seems that the women are well aware of their power and will not hesitate to flaunt it. On stage, though, all of the women would have been portrayed by men. Consequently, even though most of the main characters are female, and that there are plenty of scenes when only female characters appear, “masculinity is always present on stage” (Taaffe 51). So during a staged performance, none of the men would have had the features that Lysistrata, Kleonike and Myrrhine remark upon. This, again, would lend a comic element to the play, and a reminder that the play is still influenced by the male gaze. Regardless of the male actors, though, the role of the women in the play is to address the war, a role that would usually be considered outside of a woman’s domestic sphere—a role that would usually be considered for the men. In general, it is family that takes precedent over all other aspects of life. Women did not belong in external affairs, and even if there was use for them, it was rarely expected for women to actually fulfill these needs. “For a woman to subordinate family to state was not the Athenian ideal” (Schaps 211). The view that these women would challenge male authority would be laughable to the audience.

Additionally, the alliance between the different groups of women, such as the Athenians and the Spartans, would have been seen as unusual. “. . .it does seem that the women of Athens were Athenians, the women of Sparta Spartans; and they felt and acted that way” because after all, “citizen women did not see themselves as an entirely disfranchised group. They would not have been willing to die for a city that was not theirs” (Schaps 213). There was no unification of gender, no feeling of solidarity due to femininity. Having women from different backgrounds and with different interests unite for a common cause to uniting all the Greeks is a strong

statement, considering that this would not have been typical behavior. There didn't seem to be unity among women as an identity—that as women, they would look out for one another's interests. So to have Aristophanes identify solidarity among the Greek women empowers them by allowing them to have a central sense of womanhood.

Yet, because this is out of character for women at the time, it seems more appropriate that these activities be attributed to men. When the men finally encounter the women, they are shocked at what they find: women behaving as they would expect men to. Women leaving their homes, banding together, united to fight a common cause. This flips the expectation of women being preoccupied with sex and reproduction—duties pertaining to their households and maintaining their families—as the men become beholden to their need for sex and are shown as increasingly desperate for their wives' attention. As the magistrate says when the chorus of men complains,

Useless. Your suit won't hold water. Right's on their side/For female depravity,
gentlemen. WE stand guilty—/we, their teachers, preceptors of prurience, accomplices
before the fact of fornication. We sowed them in sexual license, and now we reap
rebellion. (Parker 384)

The men must reap what they sowed; the magistrate claims that the men's actions are what allowed the women to act this way. He seems to say that the men did not exert enough power on the women, allowing them a false notion of power. This, perhaps, indicates that Aristophanes believes that the men are not as secure in their power as they may believe—and that if they continue the war, they have only themselves to blame for any problems that may arise—even if it is something as absurd and disturbing as women claiming power for their own. Whether or not this is a feminist message is debatable; while the magistrate's implication is that the women should have been more closely controlled, he is also the most condemnable character in the entire comedy, humiliated and mocked as the epitome of the intractable man.

Interestingly enough, the scene with the magistrate is the most striking when it comes to highlighting the nature of masculinity. After the argument that he has with Lysistrata over a woman's role in war, she responds by making him over into a woman. When he derides her words by calling her cursed and refers to her as “ταῦτα κάλυμμα φορούση/περὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν;” (530-31), addressing her concerns with regards to being one who wears a veil about her head, she responds by removing her own veil and throwing it at him, telling him to wear it and shut up instead—“παρ’ ἐμοῦ τοῦτὶ τὸ κάλυμμα λαβὼν/ἔχε καὶ περὶ τοῦ περιθίου περὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν,/κᾶτα σιώπα” (533-35). In a way, the magistrate could be saying that Lysistrata (and similarly, other women) are both literally and figuratively hampered by wearing veils—the veil, a clear sign of womanhood, prevents the women from seeing the men's reality.

This scene can be interpreted one of two ways. First, it can be seen as acknowledging women's weaknesses, and the fact that putting on a woman's garb is what makes them a woman and renders them powerless. But it can also have a more subversive meaning, in that Lysistrata knows that the veil is symbolic and not indicative of women as a community. There is no feature innate to being a woman that makes women powerless, but instead, the way men use garments and such to separate women from men. Rather, she knows that the veil acts as an instrument of the men's oppression, and that is why she gives it back to the magistrate, the representative of men in this scene. The second intent seems more likely, for the women continually pile instruments that represent femininity upon the magistrate, such as spindles and baskets. The magistrate does not truly lose his power until Lysistrata, in a fit of frustration, tells him that he ought to just die “σὺ δὲ δὴ τί μαθὼν οὐκ ἀποθνήσκεις;” (559)—and that is when he finally leaves the stage.

However, the magistrate's actions are only one example of the interactions between the men and women of *Lysistrata*. There is also the scene between the men and women of the chorus. When the older men and women battle for the Akropolis, it is quite clear which group comes out on top. Yet this is only after threats and attacks from both sides—a literal and not just verbal spar. An interesting feature about the exchange between the men and women is how undeterred they are by potential violence. The nature of war entails violence. It may be physical, but also may include emotional. The damage caused by war isn't necessarily limited to destruction of buildings, but that of lives. The actual definition of war, according to Merriam-Webster, is a state of usually open and declared armed hostile conflict between states or nations, a state of hostility, conflict or antagonism.

But throughout the text, sexualized violence, specifically assault or rape, is not seen as a viable option. In the Greek text, “οὐ γὰρ ἐνι τούτοις ἡδονὴ τοῖς πρὸς βίαν” (163) seems to imply that “τούτοις” is not enjoyed (ἡδονή) when force (βίαν) is employed. The English translation is similar, in that the men agree that “they don't enjoy these forced/affairs” and thus are not interested in raping their wives, so to speak (Parker 363). Rather, it seems that they want their wives to want them. This creates a relationship paradigm that implies that the men don't want to violate their wives' bodies. Examined in context to the way rape was viewed during the time, this seems to make sense. Women, seeing their country and their men defeated, would not want to become enslaved and their bodies violated.

Indeed, the fear of rape and enslavement was often enough to spur women to kill their own children and/or to commit mass suicide rather than allow the enemies to take control of them. Rape and enslavement would have destroyed the honour of a woman and brought disrepute for her city. (Loman 43)

However, marital rape is not always viewed the same way (at least not universally in present-day), and it would require knowledge of sexual relations within a marriage to truly determine whether or not marital rape would have faced the same stigma.

At the very least, though, it consequently makes it seem as though sexualized war crimes would not have been the norm, as the women would have associated a greater sense of shame with rape and been more apt to take their own lives to avoid it. Although as noted above, rape was not an unusual weapon in war, and the taking of enemy women as slaves in different capacities was not unusual either. But though sexualized violence is called thus, it is not because rape is for pleasure or attraction, but because of a desire for domination. The men could have this sense of power over enemy women, but they apparently did not find it tasteful for their own households.

However, the threat of non-sexualized violence is a prominent theme in the text, specifically in the interactions between the male and female choruses. When the men have arrived at the Akropolis, they are disconcerted at being locked out and turn toward violence to force their way in. What follows is an exchange of threats and attempted blows between the male and female choruses, with the threats being even explicitly violent at times. When the chorus of women challenges the men in front of the gate of the Acropolis, the chorus of men respond with, “Never been confronted with such backtalk. Can’t allow/it. Somebody pick up a log and pulverize that brass./Any volunteers?” (Parker 379). None of them are willing to take up the offer, even as the chorus of men repeats the threat by saying, “Look, men, a few sharp jabs/will stop that jawing. It never fails” (Parker 379). The women, undeterred, retort with, “Then step right up. Have a jab at me./Free shot” (Parker 380).

Consequently, it is curious why the men are unsettled by the idea of forcing sex on their wives, but have no problem threatening to hit or attack them in other ways. On the other end, the women have no qualms about being equally violent toward their men. When the younger women come out from within the Acropolis, the magistrate calls for his men to arrest Lysistrata, who is holding a spindle. But instead of complying, she “jabs the spindle viciously at the First Archer” and says, “By Artemis, goddess of the hunt, if he lays a finger/on me, he’ll rue the day he joined the force!” (Parker 386). This oath, which she takes to a goddess well known for her chastity, is one of determination. It is echoed momentarily after three times by three different women, with one of them saying, “By Artemis, goddess of Tauris, if you go near/that girl, I’ll rip the hair right out of your head!” (Parker 387). When the issue of sexualized violence is taken out of the equation, the men and women are on at least equal footing in the battle—if not an advantage given to the women. The women all carry objects (household objects, no less) with which they physically threaten the men, who, realizing that they are out of their realm of comfort, do not know how to react. They may be trained warriors for battle against other men, but they cannot figure out how to deal with their rebellious women.

Nonetheless, the men refuse to retreat. Their reluctance to make any concessions for the women seems to be indicative of an unwillingness to resign the “battle” – the conflict against the women – in favor of preserving the war. Aristophanes seems to be critiquing them for their narrow-mindedness. These women, from all different areas of Greece, are coming together under a common cause. If even the women can do it, why not the men? *Lysistrata*, being a comedy, is meant to subvert. And Aristophanes provides the subversion, especially clear in the prophecy he has Lysistrata read,

But when the swallows, in flight from the/hoopoes, have flocked to a hole/on high, and stoutly eschew their/accustomed perch on the pole,/yea, then shall Thunderer Zeus

to/their suffering establish a stop,/by making the lower upper...

But should these swallows, indulging their/lust for the perch, lose heart,/dissolve their flocks in winged dissension,/and singly depart/the sacred stronghold, breaking the/bands that bind them together—/then know them as lewd, the pervertedest/birds that ever wore feather. (Parker 414)

It would not be remiss to interpret this as an indication of female unity—perhaps as a cautionary tale to men that they are not as all-powerful as they believe. The swallows are asked to “eschew their/accustomed perch,” that is, their isolation through citizenship, and Zeus will assist them “by making the lower upper,” or by granting power to women. Lysistrata again reminds the men that “We’re not slaves;/we’re freeborn Women, and when we’re scorned, we’re/full of fury. Never underestimate the Power of a Woman” (Parker 389).

Indeed, Lysistrata hints to this last concept from the very beginning. When she is first relaying the plans to the other women, Kleonike asks Lysistrata what would happen if the men tried to force sex by being violent. “—Suppose they take us by force and drag us off to the bedroom against our wills?/...Suppose they beat us!” (Parker 363). Lysistrata responds, as aforementioned, that the men wouldn’t enjoy this. What is most interesting, though, is her justification. She follows it up by saying, “A married man wants harmony—/cooperation, not rape” (Parker 363), which again reminds the reader of the importance of stability in marital relationships, but not necessarily desire. The translation gives more of a sense of marriage as a contractual matter, where the men and women enter an agreement and operate in a businesslike manner. Henderson offers a different translation, “No husband can have a happy life if his wife doesn’t want him to” (Henderson 168-69) changing the focus slightly and allowing the wife to determine her husband’s happiness. In Henderson’s introduction, he mentioned that his translation would take care with respect to gender, and Parker’s goal was to render the Greek in what he believes is the spirit of the original text, so not necessarily a literal word-for-word

translation. Aristophanes' original words seem to be ambiguous: “οὐ γὰρ οὐδέποτε εὐφρανθήσεται/άνηρ, ἐὰν μὴ τῆ γυναικὶ συμφέρη” (165-66), for a man never enjoys himself if it doesn't suit his wife.

Nonetheless, the emphasis on translating άνήρ as a married man/husband seems to be due to a goal of impressing the importance of marriage to the reader. And if this is the case, it explains why the men do not want to force their wives, for that would disturb their marital harmony if what the women say about sex is true. There is, after all, an interpretation of *Lysistrata* that holds that the reason for the sex strike and the protesting was not directly due to the war, but rather, because of a consequence of the war: the absence of men.

Yet, it can be justifiably argued that Aristophanes's female characters are not, in fact, pacifists per se. They did, of course, want the war to be stopped, but this was not for humanitarian or ideological reasons. What drove Lysistrata to initiate the sex strike, with the view that this would force the men to end the war, was her wish to bring her husband back home. She, like her female friends, missed her husband, felt lonely and unimportant, and most of all she was sexually unsatisfied. (Loman 35-36)

When this interpretation is applied, it implies a greater understanding between the men and the women—though initially, also a greater reliance on the men by the women, as the men are initially reluctant to make this compromise. However, to attribute the cause of the strike simply to the desire of the women for their husbands subtly undermines the greater message—that there is a fundamental issue with the war, and that it needs to end for the good of all Greece—not just lonely women. As a matter of fact, the simplistic concept of missing their husbands is really only applied to the younger women. When Kleonike, Myrrhine and Lampito each share how long their husbands have been gone for, Lysistrata makes no mention of her own situation. She is consistently set apart from the other women to emphasize that her motivations are not the same, that she is a woman, yet at the same time, greater than the other women.

As far as a modern day perspective goes, it is not irreconcilable to view *Lysistrata* through a feminist lens. However, to do so would necessitate a careful examination of the gender roles present in the text. It is important to note that *Lysistrata* is about more than just sexual relationships, but rather, about relationships in general: between the men and the women, and between the citizens of Greece. One cannot analyze the meanings behind *Lysistrata* without first asking: why was it meant to be funny? As Aristophanes is known for comedy, there has to be a reason why *Lysistrata* was comedic for the time, and continues to be considered comedic to this day.

The women's preoccupation with sex seems to be the primary sense of entertainment. Lysistrata has finally corralled the women together, and after rousing them with an impassioned speech about how to end the war, has the women excited and clamoring that they will do whatever she asks—or as Kleonike says, “Of course we’ll do it! We’d even *die!*” that is, until she clarifies her statement as “Total Abstinence/from SEX!” At this point, the stage directions indicate that “the cluster of women dissolves” (Parker 360) and that the women murmur amongst themselves, with Kleonike declaring, “Afraid I can’t make it. Sorry. *On with the War!*” (Parker 361), a sentiment echoed by other women as well. Here, these women are portrayed in a shallow and silly manner. But as a contrast, the women manage to get their wishes fulfilled—Lysistrata makes a rousing speech at the end, and everyone comes together, satisfied.

Consequently, it's very easy to want the women to be the heroes of the play, to want them to be early feminist renditions of progressive peacekeepers. However, this would not explain the content or context of the play. While there are certainly instances where Aristophanes critiques men and their self-confidence, he is not advocating any type of feminine independence or pacifism. This doesn't mean that one cannot integrate portions of Aristophanes' thought into a

feminist revision, however. Aristophanes still criticizes the men of his time over their delusions of total control, for despite how much he satirizes the young women of his play, the older men are mocked in a much more humbling manner. *Lysistrata* contains the potential for rebellion, and at least a question that challenges unilateral male authority.

In the end, it is still a novel concept for women to have power in either sex or war. Although the Greek stereotype might have been that women, restless in their domestic sphere, had only sex on their minds as they did not have to worry about the state of affairs of their country, this is definitely not the case in modern-day society. Judging by societal attitudes toward sex, it is still seen as a male-dominated, male-initiated act. The same also applies to war. After examining the gender dichotomy and the way men and women are portrayed in *Lysistrata*, as well as the way these characters interact with one another, the play is indeed thought-provoking about the nature of women and war. Throughout *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes allows the women of the play a chance to have a voice that they otherwise would not have. He questions the absolute hold that men seem to believe they have, wondering whether that really is the most appropriate response to war.

Lysistrata

Cast

IRENE, *woman of DC*

CLEO, *woman of DC*

MARINA, *woman of DC*

LANA, *a southern debutante from Section III*

ISABELLA, *from Section IV*

KORA, *from Section V*

CHORUS OF WOMEN

CHORUS LEADER (F)

CHORUS LEADER (M)

CHORUS OF MEN

PRESIDENT

FOUR OFFICERS

FIRST WOMAN

SECOND WOMAN

THIRD WOMAN

KEN, *Marina's husband*

CHILD *of Marina and Ken*

BUTLER

SECTION III HERALD

SECTION III MEN

Scene: A small, upscale coffee shop located on a busy street in the center of the Capitol, located in Washington, D.C. The year is 2050 and the United States has been split into six regions and are at war: Northeast (Section I), Mid-East (Section II), Southeast (Section III), Central (Section IV) and Southwest (Section V), Northwest (Section VI). The primary antagonists are Section II, where the Capitol is located, and Section III. The other sections are all randomly allied. The time is approximately 7 a.m. and Irene is standing outside. She is 43, married and divorced three times to three different men, all politicians. She has found herself a role as a mentor to the younger wives of her nation's most prominent politicians. A half-used cigarette dangles out of the corner of her mouth, and she is looking at her watch, clearly waiting someone else's arrival.

IRENE

Fucking hell, what is with these women? If I told them that we were going to a swinger party or even the fucking bar, they'd be mobbing this fucking place already. They'd be tripping down the street in their fucking Louboutins. The fucking advertisers got it right. Sex sells. But now? Not a single fucking one of them in sight.

The click-clack of five-inch stiletto heels becomes louder and IRENE looks up to see CLEO, mid-thirties, wife to the Speaker of the House, who lives in the same rich, homogenous neighborhood as Irene, staggering toward her.

Finally! I told the damn girl I'd give her a ride—she lives right down the street—About fucking time, Cleo!

IRENE wrenches open the door and goes in. CLEO follows. The two women order their coffee and take a seat in a corner booth.

CLEO

Irene! I'm so sorry darling, it's just that I was out all last night, and you know how it is, I had a couple cocktails too many, and, well, *why* must we meet so early in the morning? And goodness, why are you so angry? You know it makes your fine lines more apparent.

IRENE

I'm fucking 43, Cleo, my goddamn lines don't matter right now. Fuck, it's times like this I hate being a woman. You don't hear your goddamn husbands telling the fucking president that frowning causes fine lines, do you?

CLEO looks taken aback, but before she can respond, IRENE drives on.

I'm fucking pissed, Cleo. I'm sick of being insulted by the fucking patriarchy. To hear them say it, we're all bitches and sluts.

CLEO proudly

No one's bitchier or sluttier than me.

IRENE exasperatedly

That's just great. Just fucking great.

CLEO *seriously*

What? You're not the only one who's taken women's studies classes, woman. So I've embraced my femininity. I own my sexuality.

IRENE

You—what? Never mind. The whole point here is that we were supposed to meet today so we could finally enact some fucking change, except that there is NO ONE HERE. I bet they're still fucking hungover from last night. On a fucking Monday! What the hell do I need to get them up?

CLEO

Aw, give them a break, Irene. It's only 7:25. You know what they have to do—it's hard to be a woman—especially a woman like us. We've gotta get their husbands in order, make sure housekeeping's on time and knows what to do, get the kids up and ready for the day.

IRENE

Feh. Domesticity.

She takes a long drag from her cigarette before turning to the other woman.

This is more important, Cleo.

CLEO

That's just it, Irene, what the hell did you even call us all here at this godforsaken hour for? It better be important, that's all I'm saying.

IRENE

Most fucking important thing you'll ever do in your lives.

CLEO

Yeah? And urgent?

IRENE

Like you wouldn't believe.

CLEO

Well hell, where are those ladies, then?

IRENE

They should be here. I've spent a lot of time thinking this over, Cleo.

She leans forward, about to launch into a grand speech. CLEO rolls her eyes. This is one she has heard many times before.

IRENE

Don't give me that look, Cleo. This is different. I'm serious this time. I'm telling you—only women are going to be able to save our country from the mess we're in.

CLEO

Women!?! Now you're really messing with me.

IRENE

Yes, women. We should be the one deciding our domestic and foreign policies. Why have war against Section III when we could have peace?

CLEO

But war is exciting!

IRENE

You find the complete extermination of Section IV *exciting*?

CLEO

Thrilling. All right, fine, let's leave Section IV alone—they have the most wonderful truffles.

Not paying attention, IRENE continues.

IRENE

And as for our own glorious city...well, let's just say that I have plenty of choice words, none of which are pretty. But anyway, listen to me: if we can get the women from Section IV and the islands of V, we can save all of our country.

CLEO, in the middle of taking a swig of coffee, spews it all out.

CLEO

You've gotta be kidding me, Irene. Us? Come on. The only skills I've retained since college are how to put on mascara while driving a minivan full of screaming children. That's all we do, Irene. Sit and look pretty. That's all we do. If I'm feeling ambitious, I leave my house to shop in real stores instead of online. But it's all the same. It's all the fucking same. Clothes, makeup, jewelry. That's all I am.

IRENE

That's just it. We'll use our objectification to our advantage.

CLEO

What?

IRENE *slowly standing up*

We'll objectify ourselves...

CLEO

Oh, wonderful! So does this mean I have an excuse to buy the new La Perla collection?

IRENE *ignoring her*

...making ourselves irresistible so that the men cannot fight one another...

CLEO

Now, do I want to buy a set? Or just piece by piece?

IRENE

...Or even conduct their business...

CLEO

I do enjoy a deliberate mismatch. Matchy-matchy is so passé...

IRENE

Now *that's* what I call owning one's sexuality.

She sits down, satisfied, before realizing that her only audience, CLEO, is busy examining her nails.

Dammit, where are those women? They definitely should be here by now.

CLEO

My coffee's cold. They should have been here ages ago. But you know how the city women are. They're never on time.

IRENE

What about the ones from I and II? They would have had to come in before today.

CLEO

Well, I'm sure they're just stuck in rush hour right now. Everyone's trying to get to work.

IRENE

I had thought at least that the ladies from III should be here by now. They would support me. But they're not here...

CLEO

I passed by the ambassador from V's wife. She was just leaving the embassy.

Looking to her right, CLEO sees a group of women through the window. They begin stumbling in, all hungover and disgruntled.

IRENE

I see the others!

CLEO

Who on earth *are* these women?

IRENE *waving a dismissive hand*

Oh, they're from the suburbs.

CLEO *snorts into her coffee*

You've even got the suburban women. You're really something, Irene.

Most of the women order their coffee and settle in near IRENE and CLEO. One, MARINA, however, attempts to sidle in next to Irene without being seen. IRENE spots her promptly and gives her a dirty look.

MARINA

Oh dear. I'm sorry about being late, Irene—it's really been a hectic morning, darling, please forgive me.

IRENE

What is it, woman? You expect me to give you a fucking medal or something?

MARINA

I said I'm sorry! I couldn't find a matching bra in the dark—the baby was sleeping. But we're here now, so there's no sense in you being angry. Just tell us why you called us here.

CLEO

Hang on, the other women are still getting their coffee. Let's wait for them.

IRENE *looking up*

Finally, someone else here is talking my language.

A tall, statuesque woman (LANA) from Section III comes striding purposefully from the counter with a gigantic tumbler of coffee, practically dragging along a much smaller, pretty-in-a-timid way (ISABELLA) woman. Behind them enters an even bigger woman (KORA).

Ah, here's our southern beauty—and how are you, Lana, honey? Why, aren't you just the belle of the ball. Have you been tanning? Get some work done?

CLEO

Damn girl, you look *fit*.

LANA

Aw shucks, darlin', you know how it is. Ah've always gotta look good, ya know, dancin' at balls and whatnot. Have y'all seen my square dance?

She attempts to pull IRENE into the dance with her, but falters after seeing the older woman's cold look and demonstrates on her own; the other women ooh and ahh as IRENE sits there, disgruntled.

CLEO

Jesus, Lana, you sure you didn't get implants?

LANA

My stars, ladies, what are y'all doing gawkin' at me? I feel like a hog at the fair!

IRENE *turning to ISABELLA*

And who is this young thing here?

LANA

Why, she's the daughter of the diplomat of IV—practically royalty.

IRENE *gazing into the distance*

Ah, picturesque IV: her sprawling shopping malls and unbelievable spas...

CLEO *peering closely*

Woman, does the carpet match the drapes?

LANA

Darling, carpets are so out of fashion. It's hardwood flooring all up and down the South.

IRENE *turning to KORA*

And well, who is this—ah—petite party?

LANA

Oh, she's just from Section III, but her family's no junk heap.

CLEO *prowling behind KORA*

Well, she's certainly got junk in her trunk.

LANA *clapping her hands*

Well, now that we have all the women, what shall we do? Whose idea was this shenanigans, anyhow?

IRENE

Mine.

LANA

Well, then get on with it! I want to know what all this fuss is about.

MARINA

Me too! I can't even imagine what kind of plan she's got!

IRENE

All right ladies, but first, I have a question for you. It's not too hard—even you should be able to figure it out. Just answer yes or no.

A pause.

MARINA

Well, aren't you going to *ask* it?

IRENE

It's about the fathers of your children, your husbands (or boy toys), who are all abroad because of this war. Wouldn't you rather they be home?

CLEO

Well, my husband sure isn't going to any war, but it's not like I see him anyway. I do miss the pool boy, though...gone five months since last Tuesday.

MARINA

Ken is stationed in Section VI for seven whole months!

LANA

Well, I haven't seen hide nor hair of my man either—he's no sooner home than has to go again.

CLEO

I called the pool company, but all their boys are abroad! Can't find a good man for love or money—or even a good replacement, for that matter. Ever since the damn Milesians cut off their plastic trade, there have been no rabbits rampant on the market.

IRENE

If I tell you that I have an idea to end the war, do I have your support?

CLEO

Absolutely. If you need money, I'll sell the DVF wrap-dress off my back.

Aside

But I think I'd deserve a good cocktail or ten before giving you your cut.

MARINA

I'd give you half of my Jimmy Choo collection if that's what you need.

LANA

Why, I'd go a week without makeup if that's what it took!

IRENE

Very well, then. I'll tell you. Gather round.

The women huddle closer, leaning in.

We can force our husbands and men to agree to a truce, my doves, by using our own self-control. What I mean, ladies, is that all we need is total abstinence—

A pause.

CLEO
From...what?

MARINA
Yes! What?

IRENE
So, you'll do it?

CLEO
Of course we'll do it! We'd even *die*!

IRENE
All right then, ladies. Total abstinence from...sex.

The women all recoil, pushing their chairs back and picking up their bags, getting ready to leave.

Wait, where are you going? Why are you turning away? What's with those faces? Stop crying, you'll smear your mascara! Will you or won't you?

CLEO
So, about that, um, sorry, no can do, love. Guess it's on with the war!

MARINA
Me neither. Sorry! On with the war!

IRENE
What!?! I expected better from you, Marina. Just a moment ago you were offering me a share in your Choos!

CLEO stepping in between
Listen, Irene, it's not like we don't agree with you. But seriously, don't you have any better ideas? I mean, just about any alternatives would work. We already offered you our worldly goods.

But to give up sex? There's nothing like that, Irene!

IRENE *to MARINA*
And you?

MARINA
I don't know, Irene, I mean, I'm as much about the sisterhood as anyone else, but don't you think this is a bit excessive?

IRENE

Oh, the shame, ladies! Are we nothing more than nymphomaniacs, every last one? What about self-control?

She turns to LANA.

Oh, my sweet southern belle, don't you let me down too. I don't need the other women if only you would help me.

LANA

Ladies aren't meant to sleep alone, without a decent bedding before bed. But I'm with you—war is even more unnatural.

IRENE

Well aren't you just the sweetest thing—the only real woman out of all of these. If we're going to be pigeonholed by conventional femininity, then I am damn well going to take advantage of it.

CLEO

Well, fine, let's say we did, well, as much as we could, abstain from sex, not that I'm saying that we *would*, but could that even work?

IRENE

Of course it will. Here's the plan: we'll exfoliate, depilate and decorate every inch of our bodies, and lounge around casually in our sexiest lingerie, sidling up to our men. And they'll be so hot for us, but we'll be cold. Think about it. I imagine they'd be tripping over themselves to write a treaty.

LANA *nodding*

Menalaos took one look at Helen's naked tits and nearly passed out...passed out from his boner.

CLEO

What if they just don't care?

IRENE

Well, then we'll just take matters into our own hands.

CLEO

But that doesn't make any sense! What if they drag us into bed against our will?

IRENE

Hang on to the door.

CLEO

What if they hit us?

IRENE *gives a cold stare*
You call yourself a modern woman?

CLEO
While my husband wouldn't dare, not all women are so privileged, Irene.

Frustrated, IRENE bangs her fist on the table, knocking over several empty coffee cups.

IRENE
Modern men should understand consent, but if they don't, document the shit out of those and we'll bring them all to court after. If your men try to force you, just keep saying no. We'll see how they like it when you divorce them and sue them for all they're worth. Ladies, these men won't know peace until we do.

CLEO
Awfully optimistic of you, Irene, but if both you and Lana think this is the best course of action, we'll follow.

LANA
Well, our men will be easy enough. I'll take care of them. But what about *your* men? The DC rabble are all about being the 1 percent.

IRENE
That's my task, so don't worry your pretty little head about it. We'll convince them.

LANA
You sure? Not as long as they've got their nukes and all that money hoarded up in the Capitol.

IRENE
Ah, but we're taking over all of central DC, including the Capitol, today. Our older women are already there, disguised as tourists, waiting for us to figure out our parts. As soon as we do, they'll take over.

CLEO
Wait, I'm supposed to believe that a couple of old hags are going to take down the entire government?

IRENE
Never underestimate an angry woman who's been ignored for far too long.

LANA
Well golly, Irene, the way y'all going on makes it seem impossible for us to fail!

IRENE
Good. Now that that's settled, Lana, let's move on—let me get the contracts.

She reaches under the table, whipping out a gigantic briefcase that is pops open from the strain. She grabs a stack of papers, slapping them onto the table, causing the remainder of the cups to scatter.

Now, let me see here...hmm, no, those are stipulations, ah, wait, that's just my copy of *Vogue*...oh, here we go! All right ladies, come here. Who's going to speak for you all?

CLEO

Uh, Irene, don't you think this is just a teeny bit excessive?

IRENE *irritably*

Cleo, honey, listen, I know you don't get out of the house much, but when you do business—

LANA *clapping her hands together*

Oh, I know, why don't we just drink to it instead?

IRENE

What?

The women all clamor their assent, reaching into their bags and pulling out flasks. IRENE, seeing herself outnumbered, sighs and takes out one of her own.

LANA

Bottoms up, ladies!

As the women drink, they are suddenly interrupted by a loud siren's wail.

LANA

What's all this!

IRENE

What I said—that means our women have succeeded. The Capitol is ours! Lana, you go to your folk and get them in line. We'll hang on to your women until your return.

LANA exits, with a few of the other women in tow.

IRENE

Let's get to the Capitol and help the ladies get to work.

CLEO

But don't you think the men will get reinforcements?

IRENE

Not since their phone lines were cut and cell phone jammers placed. Don't worry about it. The place is completely defensible.

CLEO *fist pumping*
Yes! Let's go! Girl power!

As the women flood out of the shop toward the Capitol, they call,

Down with the patriarchy!

The curtains close behind the women, and the stage remains empty. A set change occurs, as the scene changes from the coffee shop to out in front of the Capitol building. A group of older men, portly and puffy and in suits, shuffle onto the stage, clearly straining under physical loads they are not used to carrying.

CHORUS OF MEN

Come on, boys, let's keep going. Somebody's gotta keep the country running.
I never thought that my wife was anything more than an old windbag. Who knew there was anything to that bark, eh?

CHORUS LEADER (M)

It's profane, I tell you, a deadly sin
For women to think that they can win
Everyone knows patriarchy's a fake
It's power that they want to take.

CHORUS OF MEN

Now, if we can just get these signal boosters over to the Capitol, we can send out our distress signals and get some help.

CHORUS LEADER (M)

Wait, where do all these wires go? Someone find the outlets!

After moments of confusion and the men running about aimlessly, the machines are piled together precariously in front of the Capitol gate. Suddenly, one starts to tremble, and they all come tumbling down. The men, preoccupied with rearranging the machines, don't notice the CHORUS OF WOMEN, middle-aged, but still younger and heartier than the men, entering. They are smartly dressed in suits and carrying briefcases. As they chatter to themselves, they initially don't see the CHORUS OF MEN either.

CHORUS LEADER (F)

Do you hear that noise? Our sisters need us.

The women pick up their pace, hurrying off stage right. The men continue to grunt and bumble about as the women come hurrying back in, stage left. They notice the men.

CHORUS LEADER (F)

What's this? I thought I sensed incompetence in the air. Here stands our enemy!

CHORUS LEADER (M)

Dammit! Women. Are they multiplying or something?

CHORUS LEADER (F)

Please, we're just the rear guard. If we scare you, you don't want to see our leaders.

CHORUS LEADER (M)

Pah! You, scare us? You're just a bunch of shriveled, dried-up old has-beens. Come on, men. Who wants to show these women their place? Anyone?

There are no volunteers.

CHORUS LEADER (F)

Put down your bags, ladies. It'd be a shame to ruin so many Birkins.

CHORUS LEADER (M)

Come on now, men! There's nothing a slap across the face can't fix.

CHORUS LEADER (F) *advancing*

Well? Come on. Hit me.

CHORUS LEADER (M)

Shut up! You think I won't?

CHORUS LEADER (F)

No, I don't actually. You know what I think?

CHORUS LEADER (M)

Ha! Now there's a joke, women thinking.

CHORUS LEADER (F)

You're all talk. That's all it is. Talk.

CHORUS LEADER (M)

Talk? I'll show you talk.

CHORUS LEADER (F)

That's all you've shown me, frankly. With all your babbling about feminism and matriarchy, you've been too busy hand-wringing to get anything done. If you've lost your power, it's because you've lost your ideals. You've dug your own grave, you fool.

CHORUS LEADER (M)

Who gave you permission to leave the kitchen?

CHORUS LEADER (F)

I don't need anybody's permission to do what I want.

CHORUS LEADER (M)
You'll regret your impudence!

CHORUS LEADER (F)
Who's going to make me regret it? Not you, certainly. We've got better things to do with our time. Women! Your cases.

The women thrust a packet of papers into the men's hands

You've been served. Read them and weep.

The men, taking the cases, shuffle off-stage, defeated.

Enter the President, stage-left, with a group of four police officers.

PRESIDENT
What's going on here? Women, eh? Always causing trouble.

CHORUS LEADER (M)
We've been insulted beyond belief. Teach these women a lesson!

PRESIDENT
Ah, but it's a lost cause, boys. Women can't learn. It's a proven fact. You can talk all day to them, but they just won't listen. It's because their brains aren't fully developed. Give a woman an inch, and she'll take a mile. It's karma—we've let them go on with their fantasy of equality and now we're suffering the consequences. But now it's gone too far. I need my money, and they've cut off the treasury! Officers! Help me break into the Capitol. Grab a crowbar and let's go. One...two...

The Capitol gates suddenly open and Irene is standing there, brandishing an iron. The men quickly backpedal.

IRENE
What's all this ruckus? If you ask me, you're in more desperate need for brains than for money.

PRESIDENT
Brains? How dare you! Officer!

He pushes Officer 1 at Irene.

Arrest her!

IRENE
By my honor as a woman, if you lay a hand on me, you won't ever lay a hand on anything else.

She waves the iron at the officer, who slowly backs away.

PRESIDENT

Come on, men! Do something!

He grabs Officer 2, pushing him towards Officer 1.

Go! Help him!

Cleo appears stage right, carrying a diaper disposal, advancing towards Officer 2.

CLEO

By my honor as a woman, if you touch her, you'll be in more shit than you could ever have imagined.

Officer 1 and 2, clutching at each other, flee stage left.

PRESIDENT

We can't let this stand! Why won't you do something?

He grabs the third officer and pushes him towards CLEO.

Go get her and show her some manners. I hate a woman who uses profanity.

MARINA suddenly appears stage right, holding a lamp.

MARINA

By my honor as a woman, if you even think about doing anything, I'll make sure you see the light.

The third officer screams, and follows the first two.

PRESIDENT

Cowards, the whole lot of you. Won't any of you do your job?

ISABELLA enters, carrying a kitchen mixer, glaring at the fourth officer.

PRESIDENT

Bah! What an embarrassment. You call yourselves men?

ISABELLA

By my honor as a woman, if you threaten anyone again, I'll get you mixed up in something you'll regret.

The fourth officer runs off stage-left as well.

PRESIDENT

Oh, the shame! The disgrace!

IRENE

Maybe you should have had some women with you.

CHORUS LEADER (M)

The impudence! Come on, sir, you don't have to put up with that! Don't waste your breath talking to *them*. Save it for the real people.

He aims a kick at the CHORUS LEADER (F), who dodges it and responds.

CHORUS LEADER (F)

Excuse me? People don't attack others unprovoked. You can't reason with us, so you resort to violence instead? Sound logic!

CHORUS OF MEN

What's going on? What should we do? Since when did the women decide to act like this?

PRESIDENT *turning to IRENE*

You, woman. Why the hell did you cut off of the treasury!?

IRENE

Well, no money, no war. Money is power, as they say.

PRESIDENT

The money is the reason for the war?

IRENE

And all of our other internal disasters. Inflation, poverty, you name it, money's caused it.

PRESIDENT

So what's your plan?

IRENE

What are you, an idiot? We'll budget the money.

PRESIDENT

You? You'll budget the money!?

IRENE

What's so surprising about that? Who do you think budgets grocery shopping? How do you think we get such great deals at flash and sample sales? We manage the entire household accounts, and I've never heard a man complain about that.

PRESIDENT

But that's different!

IRENE
Different? Bullshit!

PRESIDENT
The war needs this money!

IRENE
But who needs the war?

PRESIDENT
Why, every blue-blooded man who wants to save our country!

IRENE
Oh, that. Well, we can take care of that.

PRESIDENT
You?

IRENE
Who else?

PRESIDENT
That's absurd.

IRENE
We'll save you. Trust me, we're the only ones who know best.

PRESIDENT
Ridiculous!

IRENE
You don't seem to have very good basic comprehension. That'll make things harder. But don't worry, we'll still take care of you.

PRESIDENT
Absolutely immoral!

IRENE
We consider it *our* duty as blue-blooded women who want to save our country.

PRESIDENT
I DON'T WANT TO BE SAVED BY YOU, DAMMIT.

IRENE
Well, all the more reason for us to save you, from both other countries and yourself.

PRESIDENT

Where did you women get this crazy idea?

IRENE *loftily*

Well if you shut up for a moment, we'll explain.

PRESIDENT *making a fist*

Well get on with it, woman, or I'll lose my temper.

IRENE

Like I said, *listen*. And stop resorting to physical violence all the time.

PRESIDENT *moves threateningly toward her*

I can't. My righteous fury moves me thus.

CLEO *brandishing a toilet*

To be given a swirlie?

PRESIDENT *retreating*

Calm down, woman. No need to resort to hysterics. Let that one speak.

IRENE

Don't patronize us. When the war started, we, the prudent and dutiful wives that we are, tolerated your poor decisions, thinking you would learn quickly from your mistakes. We sat around quietly (we had no choice, as you would have chewed us out for breathing too loudly) listening as you fucked up again and again, manhandling deals of the state again and again with your usual bumbling idiocy. And we'd sit by, nervously looking away, asking how the assembly meeting went and whether or not you'd heard any news about peace, and then our husbands would bellow, "Why do you care? Shut up!" So we did.

CLEO

Not me! I never shut up.

PRESIDENT

No one shut you up? I'm surprised...

IRENE

Anyway, *I*, at least, shut up. But when we heard that you passed another law even worse than the first, and we asked again, "Darling, how could you author such a terrible idea?" they would tell us to get back in the kitchen.

PRESIDENT

As they should.

IRENE

Should, you bumbling buffoon? They should tell us to keep our mouths shut when all we've done was try to present a sensible alternative while you fumbled away any chance of peace? Enough is enough. If what DC needs is a man, but there's scarcely a man to be found, what would you expect us to do? We women met and realized that there was only one thing left to do. Why get a man to do what a woman can do?

PRESIDENT

What? Women?

IRENE

Oh, shut up.

PRESIDENT

I will not shut up to a woman who wears heels as a symbol of her oppression.

IRENE *kicking off her heels*

That's all? Well, if that's all in the way, that's easy enough to fix.

CLEO and MARINA run forth, brandishing lipsticks and blush.

CLEO

Don't move now. Ugh, your complexion is so sallow. This coral will have to make do.

MARINA

Ohhh stop making that face, you'll make the blush uneven! Or worse, develop wrinkles!

The two women each grab one of the PRESIDENT's arms, and IRENE jams her heels onto his feet.

IRENE

There, how do you feel now? Feel the oppression yet, old man?

Women, embrace your femininity. Let's show these men what it really means to be a woman.

CHORUS OF WOMEN

More than just any superficial beauty
Makeup is not meant to replace my face
We're not weak because we're women
But because you've kept us from our rightful place.

CHORUS LEADER (F)

Patience, kindness, love, and grace
All are virtues that I'll embrace
But who says that those are all?
I'll not be made as some man's thrall.

IRENE

Our demands are simple. Peace.

PRESIDENT

Simple only in your heads. How will you accomplish that?

IRENE

Well, we're withdrawing the troops from the National Mall.

CLEO

Thank goodness! It's nerve-wracking to do your shopping with all those men watching.

IRENE

You can't go anywhere without running into a soldier. Not even in the grocery store.

PRESIDENT

One must always be prepared!

IRENE

For what? A food fight?

CLEO

You know, the other day, I saw a soldier carrying a bag of groceries using his gun. I was afraid it'd misfire.

PRESIDENT

Okay, fine, so maybe we could use some more efficiency around here. But what could *you* do about it?

IRENE

It's easy.

PRESIDENT

Pray go on.

IRENE

Have you ever had to untangle thread?

PRESIDENT

What?

IRENE

Oh, of course you haven't. But basically, you have to work the knots out one at a time. Even a gigantic gnarl of a knot can be dealt with as long as you do each one individually.

PRESIDENT

What? You can't compare politics to thread. Typical female logic.

IRENE

Female logic? If you had *any* logic you'd easily see how we're right. This is just like cleaning house, which you'd know if you ever offered to do it.

First you have to purge. Get rid of all the garbage that you've been hoarding. You need to dust, you need to wipe. You'll have to deal with stains and all manners of ugly and disgusting things.

Oh, go shove your head in hole and die, old man. Your kind is obsolete. We will not be oppressed by old white men any longer. While you're busy squabbling, we've found solidarity. While you've been fighting, we've been flirting. Call us what you will, but where has your hyper masculinity gotten you?

PRESIDENT

What! The sheer insolence of this. I don't need to justify myself to you, you who've never fought in a war, who doesn't understand loss—

IRENE

Oh? And I'm sure you know all of this firsthand?

PRESIDENT *splutters*

That's not the point, and you know it!

IRENE

Actually, that's entirely the point. It's all well and good for you to talk about protecting the "weaker sex," but we don't want or need your protecting. Frankly, the war is stupid, and we shouldn't be having it in the first place, and that's all there is too it. But even so, you clearly don't understand the burden we bear either.

PRESIDENT

Pah! What burdens?

IRENE

Exactly. While you send the poor men off to war, bombing civilians, destroying lives, people like you strut around, telling your "war stories" to your conquests. But as for me, and the women I stand with and for today, there are some of us who would like to bear children, and don't have the luxury of waiting an extra twenty years.

PRESIDENT

All right, then, what's this folly about a sex strike? That's remedied easily enough—Men!

IRENE

Oh, go fuck yourself. Here, I'll help you out.

She grabs a cardboard box that was holding some of the women's kitchen appliances and shoves it toward him.

There's a bed for you to lie in—

CLEO

Some lube for your deed—

She dumps the contents of the diaper bin over him.

ISABELLA

And here's what'll enable your fantasy—

She drops the mixing bowl onto his head.

PRESIDENT

Enough! Begone! How dare you treat me this way? I've had it with you! Barbarians!

He staggers off stage left, bumping into a few boxes with the bowl still on his head. The women cheer for a moment, and then the stage falls silent as they look at the CHORUS OF MEN, who have just noticed themselves significantly outnumbered. IRENE clears her throat, and the CHORUS OF MEN scamper off. The curtains close for the next set change.

When the curtains re-open, IRENE is standing by the entrance of the Capitol, looking out.

IRENE

Ah, I thought the hard part was over, but as it turns out, I underestimated these women. It turns out that, words are one matter, but convictions another entirely. They keep on trying to sneak by me in hopes of sneaking sex!

As she speaks, the audience sees FIRST WOMAN attempting to sidle by her, but IRENE grabs her sleeve and holds her.

—Where are you going?

FIRST WOMAN

Oh, I left the stove on. I have to go back and cook dinner.

IRENE

Hell no you don't. Get back inside.

FIRST WOMAN

I'll be right back, I promise. I just want to unplug the slow cooker.

IRENE

Leave it.

FIRST WOMAN

But my house will burn down!

IRENE

The fuckin' city'll burn down if you go.

The SECOND WOMAN tries to sneak by.

IRENE

And where do you think you're going?

SECOND WOMAN

I left my laundry in the washing machine. My clothes will wrinkle!

IRENE

Please, like you need an excuse to buy new clothes? Get back inside!

SECOND WOMAN

But all I want to do is stick them in the dryer...

IRENE

No! If I let you go, then everyone will want to go stick them in the dryer, and don't think I can't imagine what kind of euphemism that stands for.

The THIRD WOMAN comes staggering by, clutching her stomach and moaning.

THIRD WOMAN

Oh, God, don't let me die here without my doctor.

IRENE

What the hell is this?

THIRD WOMAN

I think I'm going into labor...early...

IRENE

About nine months too early, if you ask me. You weren't pregnant yesterday!

THIRD WOMAN

I am now! Immaculate conception!

IRENE

Immaculate my ass. No, I will not let you go and come back actually being pregnant. Get back inside!

She swats at THIRD WOMAN's stomach, which emits a loud clang.

What's this? Why is it hard?

THIRD WOMAN

Because it's a boy...duh.

IRENE

Not unless he's made out of...

She grabs the THIRD WOMAN'S coat

Jesus, what the hell is this? The sacred helm of Athene? Out of all the...pregnant, yeah, sure.

THIRD WOMAN

I *am*. I grabbed that in case I went into labor and needed somewhere to have my baby!

IRENE

Just...no. No. Take the damn helm and get back inside. You can nurse that for awhile.

THIRD WOMAN

I don't want to go inside! It's musty and dark and it smells and I hear creaks of who knows what—

IRENE *interrupting*

Those are all figments of your imagination.

THIRD WOMAN

I don't care *what* they're called, I want to go home.

A crowd of women gather, all clamoring to be heard.

IRENE *holding up her hand*

Ladies, LADIES. JESUS. CALM THE FUCK DOWN. Someone get me a cigarette.

CLEO passes her one obligingly.

Okay. Seriously, cut the bullshit. I know what this is about. You just want to get some action, don't you?

The women shift uneasily.

But don't you think the men want to get laid too? Even more, even?

SECOND WOMAN *shouting*

NO!!!

IRENE

Okay, fine, maybe not more. But seriously, we may have needs, but the do too. Just hold out a bit longer. Listen, I read my horoscope this morning, and the gods are on our side. If I tell you what it said, would you all just listen to me?

WOMEN

Fine, but it better be good.

IRENE

Birds of a feather flock together and as long as they act as one
The gods will approve and make lower the upper—

FIRST WOMAN

So no more missionary?

CLEO

I don't think that's what she means...

IRENE

LADIES. Seriously.

The gods will approve and make lower the upper
Allowing the birdies their fun.

There is a pause as the women look at each other. Then they all start shouting at once.

SECOND WOMAN

I call bullshit.

THIRD WOMAN

You just made that up!

IRENE

Fuck it, who cares if I made it up? The sentiment behind it is the same.

FIRST WOMAN

So will this change be permanent?

IRENE

Only your actions can tell. Anyway, I'm not done yet.
But if these birds betray their words and abandon one another
Then disgraced and denounced will they forever be
And oppression they shall suffer.

WOMEN

Okay, we get it. You're right.

IRENE

Good. Now let's get back to work.

The women drift off, appeased for the moment. The curtains close for the next scene change. When the curtains reopen, IRENE is standing atop the patio of the Capitol, looking around. As she glances to the right, she freezes

IRENE

Ladies! To your posts, stat!

The women all rush forward, crowding along the deck.

CLEO

What's happening?

MARINA

Why is everyone shouting?

IRENE

There's a reason why I didn't say man your posts, ladies. Because there is one incoming! But...

She grabs a pair of binoculars from MARINA.

What is he doing? Blue balls, I say.

The women mutter among themselves.

Don't worry, ladies, it won't happen to us.

CLEO

Who cares what he's doing? Where is he?

IRENE *pointing*

He's right there, see?

CLEO *takes the binoculars*

Oh boy, *definitely* a man.

MARINA *clamors for the binoculars, which CLEO holds above out of her reach, before settling to worm her way underneath to take a look.*

I wonder who that is?

IRENE

Hell if I know. All these men look the same to me.

MARINA
Oh, oh, it's KEN.

IRENE
Well, then that's settled. You know what to do.

IRENE
Well, then that's settled. You know what to do. Make like it's high school again and you'll do *everything but*.

MARINA
Oh darling, I appreciate the advice, but it's been what, fifty years since you were in high school?

IRENE chooses to ignore the slight.

I've got this.

IRENE
Ah, the exuberance of youth. I'll just supervise—you're too young to be without a chaperone, you know. Ladies! The rest of you inside.

All the women exit except Irene, standing on the deck, and MARINA, who is hiding in the shadows. KEN appears, staggering laboriously, his erection obvious despite his suit, with a BUTLER carrying a baby boy hurrying along behind.

KEN
God, I feel like a fuckin' Viagra commercial. It's been four hours but there's not a doctor, let alone a woman, in sight. Fuck fuck fuck fuck.

IRENE *commanding*
Who dares to enter the sanctity of the women?

KEN
Me.

IRENE
Me who? I don't recognize the autonomy of the *corrupt*.

KEN
Goddammit woman, what are you talking about?

IRENE
Are you a man?

KEN
Do I *look* like a man?

IRENE *disdainfully*

I do not seek to uphold gender binaries. But you're not one of us, so you're not welcome.

KEN

Who the hell are you? You can't throw me out!

IRENE

Watch me.

She turns threateningly.

KEN

Okay, okay, hold your horses. I just want to see Marina. Is she there?

IRENE

Maybe she is, maybe she isn't. What's it to you?

KEN

She's my wife.

IRENE

Oh, so you think you're entitled to her whenever you want?

KEN

Well, yes.

IRENE

Goodbye.

She turns again.

KEN

Wait! No, that's not what I meant. What do you want? Can't you see what I'm going through?

IRENE

No.

KEN

Listen, if you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours, if you know what I mean.

IRENE *recoils*

What? Sacred vows, my ass.

KEN

Oh, I see, you play for the other team.

IRENE

Men! That's your best excuse for rejection? You're not interested in one, and suddenly you're not interested in any. I've got news for you, boner boy. Maybe your juvenile antics don't appeal to me. You know what? Forget it. I can't deal with you. Marina!

MARINA *from the shadows*

Yes, Irene?

IRENE

There's some fellow here looking for you. Care to see him?

MARINA *loudly*

Oh, I wonder who it could be—

KEN

It's ME, Ken, your HUSBAND.

MARINA

Oh, Ken, what are you doing here?

KEN *laments*

A house without a woman is no house. A man without a woman is no man. I've had to cook my own dinner, and wash my own clothes, and feed my own baby, and oh, oh, it is dreadful. Life without a woman is hard, I tell you, and growing harder by the minute.

MARINA

So that's how it is, eh? All this time and you only come to see me because you can't jack yourself off?

KEN

That's not what I mean at all, darling! Please come down, I need you. Your son needs you!

MARINA

I'm not listening to this nonsense. I'm leaving.

KEN

KEN grabs the baby, who flails wildly and begins to wail. The butler quickly sticks a lollipop into the baby's mouth, who instantly calms down.

No, no, he does! If you won't come down to me, come down for him!

He whispers fiercely to his son.

Call your mother!

There is silence as the boy sullenly sucks on his lollipop, glaring at his father.

Call your mother, you ungrateful little ingrate!

CHILD *wails*

MOOOOOOOOOOMMMMMMMMMYYYYYY! DADDY'S BEING MEANNNNNNNNNNN!

KEN

Where's your maternal instinct, eh? He hasn't been fed or watered for a week. Heartless harpy! Have you no heart?

MARINA

For my son, of course—with such a heartless father!

KEN

Come now, darling, for the baby.

MARINA

Alas, the mother's burden. Fine, you win.

KEN

Ah, look at her. I haven't seen anything so beautiful since the pay-per-view last night. O, Marina, you divine creature, come to me!

MARINA *taking the baby and smothering him with kisses*

Oh, my sweet little darling, I'm sorry you had to be with your terrible daddy. But Mummy is here now, and everything is okay.

KEN *hands inching closer*

See, Marina, isn't this wonderful? How did you get yourself mixed up with those terrible women? This is how it should be, isn't it, hmm?

MARINA *slaps his hands away*

Shove off, Ken, this is a bonding moment between my son and me.

KEN

But I need you too! The house is falling apart without you.

MARINA

Then you better put it back together.

KEN

But the kitchen is all dirty! The fridge is overflowing with rotten leftovers.

MARINA

Eat them then. Or throw them away. I don't give a damn what you do.

KEN

But what about your wifely duties? How long has it been since those?

MARINA

Aside Too long.

That's irrelevant. The only way I will relent is if you end the war.

KEN

I'll end whatever you want, darling, just come down here.

MARINA

Well, if that's what you choose, I'll come down—after the truce. But for now, I'm abstaining.

KEN

Can we just cuddle, at least?

MARINA

“Cuddle”? I'm no naïve teenager, Ken, I know what you're implying. But...well, I do love you, and maybe just a little bit.

KEN

Well, if you love me, then what's the problem? Lie with me.

He begins to unbutton his shirt.

MARINA

That's absurd—in front of the baby?

KEN

Oh, uh, of course not...

He grabs baby and shoves him toward the butler.

Take this away.

The butler obeys and exits stage-right.

There! That obstacle is out of the way. So what's stopping you?

MARINA

Well, a sense of decency for one. Where are we supposed to do it?

KEN *flustered*

Where? What do you mean where?

Aside Anywhere! Here! For God's sake.

Here, let's just go behind the Capitol. In the gazebo. Yard. Something.

MARINA

But how will I make my excuses to her?

She jerks head in IRENE's direction.

How will I clean myself off?

KEN

There's a fountain or something there.

MARINA

But I made a promise. I'm no liar.

KEN

You're not lying, darling, just omitting the truth.

Pause.

MARINA

I don't want to lie on the ground. Let me get a mattress.

KEN

No, no, it's okay, you can be on top!

MARINA

I'll still have to touch the dirt. Who knows how many people have trod all over it since then?
Ew. I'm not having sex on the ground.

She disappears back into the Capitol.

KEN rubbing his hands together

Good to know I still have my charm.

MARINA

MARINA reenters, dragging a mattress behind her.

Here, take this. I'll be there in a sec.

KEN drops the mattress and hops on.

Oh, how silly of me. I didn't get sheets.

KEN
Sheets!?! Who cares??

MARINA
Other people may want to use this mattress again! Besides, who knows who else's bodily fluids are already on this mattress?

KEN
You're killing me here! At least give me a kiss.

MARINA *pecks his cheek*
I'll be back.

KEN
Ahh I don't think I can't wait any longer. Hurry!

MARINA
MARINA ambles back in with a bundle of sheets, gesturing for KEN to get off so that she can put them on. She fumbles slowly, taking her time to put the sheets onto the bed.

Ah, there we are. Corners all tucked in!

KEN lies down again.

Oops! I forgot to get you a pillow!

KEN
Hang the pillow, woman, just lie down.

MARINA
Hmph, you might not need one, but I do.

KEN
Fine, fine, do what you need to.

MARINA leaves.

KEN
Women! Can't live without them, can't brainwash them.

MARINA *tosses the pillow at his head.*
Stop fooling around!

KEN *leaps up*
Satisfied?

MARINA *seductively*
Not quite...

KEN
I think I can help you with that...come here.

MARINA
Let me take off my clothes. Don't forget, I don't want to break the promise.

KEN
I'm waiting, Marina!

MARINA *shivers*
Oh, it's cold! We don't have a blanket.

KEN
For God's sake, Marina, it's not cold. Here, I'll keep you warm.

MARINA
Good things come to those who wait!

She leaves again.

KEN
Forget good things, I'll settle for halfway decent!

MARINA reenters, holding a blanket.

MARINA
I'm back!

KEN
Now let me see yours.

MARINA
Uh-oh, I forgot candles!

KEN
Dammit Marina, screw the candles. My mood's been set already!

MARINA
Not mine!

MARINA leaves.

KEN

Let this be the last thing she needs to get, please.

MARINA returns with candles and begins to light them.

MARINA

Ah, there we are. Go on, smell them.

KEN leans in to take a whiff, before recoiling in disgust.

KEN

Yuck! *These* are supposed to set the mood? I've never smelled anything more disgusting!

MARINA

Shit, I got the bug-repellant candles by mistake!

She blows out the candles and starts gathering them up.

KEN

No no no, forget it! It's fine!

MARINA

Don't be stupid. It smells *horrid*. I'll be back.

She leaves again.

KEN

I hate romance.

MARINA returns.

MARINA

Here, let me set up these—

KEN

No no, set me up instead. We don't need anything else!

MARINA

Well, we need to take off our clothes. Hang on, my shirt will wrinkle if I toss it on the ground. You sure you'll ask for a truce.

KEN

Yes yes, I'll even iron your damn shirt, just come here already.

MARINA

You don't even know what an iron looks like, unless it's a nine-iron. Just let me go hang up my shirt in my quarters.

She leaves once more, this time for good.

KEN

Goddammit, Marina, now what am I supposed to do?

Suddenly, there is noise off-stage, and the CHORUS OF MEN shuffle out from behind their perch in the Capitol where they were hiding.

CHORUS OF MEN

What you did before you married. Come on, we've all suffered the indignity. There's no women, thus no shame.

KEN

Ahh, it hurts too much. I can't even do it.

CHORUS OF MEN

I pity you, with your devilish, evil—

KEN

No! Don't speak of her that way. She's the love of my life, my light—

CHORUS OF MEN

What? But women are a dime a dozen! You can just find a new one.

KEN moans in pain, not able to respond as he staggers off-stage.

On the other side, a foreign HERALD from Section III appears, his cloak bulging in front of him as he tries in vain to hide his condition.

HERALD

Oi, where's there someone in charge of this joint?

The PRESIDENT shuffles back on stage, now wearing a cloak.

PRESIDENT

Who are you, and what do you want?

HERALD

I'm just a herald, and I want what you do.

PRESIDENT

Ha! I doubt you know what I want.

HERALD
Peace!

PRESIDENT
Yet you come carrying a concealed weapon?

HERALD *quickly trying to turn aside*
Am not.

PRESIDENT
Why are you trying to avoid me, then?

HERALD
I'm not!

PRESIDENT *reaches over and grabs the HERALD's cloak, opening it up*
Ha! You've got a boner!

HERALD
Do not! How dare you lay hands on me like this!

PRESIDENT
What is it, then?

HERALD
It's a special letter from the embassy.

PRESIDENT *opens his cloak*
I'll show you *my* special letter.

The HERALD sputters in outrage, until the PRESIDENT holds up his hand to stop him.

All right, fine, let's get back to work. How are things where you've come?

HERALD
Well, if this keeps up, we'll need buckets instead of women. Things are on the brink of explosion, and I'm not just talking about tension or fear.

PRESIDENT
What prompted this? Some outbreak of sickness?

HERALD
No, some woman named Lana—wife of some undersecretary or other. One minute she was just gettin' the ladies together for some tea, and the next moment, all of the women had disappeared!

PRESIDENT

So what have you done since then?

HERALD

Suffered, mostly. All of the women have joined in, even those who've made their business in strike-busting, if you know what I mean.

PRESIDENT *smacks his forehead*

How can this be? How could these women have that kind of presence of mind? Never mind, then. Hurry back to your people and have them send a peace envoy. And I will get our Senate to do the same.

HERALD

Yessir! Right away.

Both leave hurriedly; the PRESIDENT to the left and the HERALD to the right.

CHORUS LEADER (M)

There's nothing more unnatural
Than a woman...
Except for maybe a woman who claims
To have a mind of her own.

From stage right, the CHORUS LEADER (F) comes out to respond.

CHORUS LEADER (F)

Well, with friends like this
Who needs enemies?
You expect us to just blindly obey you?
We won't have it.
We want to be treated as equals.

CHORUS LEADER (M) *taking a step closer*

Tempting, but no. Actually, not tempting at all.
You're not equal to us, just accept it already.

CHORUS LEADER (F) *also steps closer*

If we're inferior to you, why not have us replaced already?
We aren't looking for anything radical.
Just equality.
Or is that too hard for you to wrap your minds around?

CHORUS LEADER (M) *taking another step*

Listen, if this were up to us
We'd have found the technology
To render you obsolete.

Somehow the President, however,
Seems to think that you are of value.

CHORUS LEADER (F) *also takes another step*
Screw the President.
What do we care?
That's not the reason why we do what we do.
Like it or not, we'll have our way.

CHORUS LEADER (M)
Typical! How like a woman that response is.

CHORUS LEADER (F)
And what's that supposed to mean?

The two CHORUS LEADERS are now standing nearly face-to-face. At this point, the HERALD comes back in with a group of SECTION III MEN, all of who are unsuccessfully trying to hide erections. They are followed by KEN, whose desperation is now palpable, as he runs to the front of the stage to lament.

KEN
Let us send for Irene. She's the one who started this, so she's the only one who can end it.
Without her, we can't have peace.

The gates of the Capitol open and IRENE enters.

CHORUS LEADER (M)
Welcome, Irene, most exemplary woman. You are beautiful and brave, delicate and demanding, cunning and charming—

IRENE
Yeah, yeah, okay, whatever. Fuck that. I don't want your praise. Don't think I didn't notice that you commented on my appearance first. Nice try. I'm 43. You're about twenty-two years too late if you wanted to seduce me via shameless flattery.

Now come here, boys, and stop dicking around.

The SECTION III MEN and the CHORUS OF MEN all shuffle up to her.

Listen here.

Yes, I'm a woman. But what the hell does that matter? I've had an education, probably better than yours. At the very least, I think I was able to listen and learn, which is why I'm here right now with all of the blood in my brain, and you...well...with yours elsewhere, let's just say.

She turns to the SECTION III MEN.

Don't you remember what we've accomplished as a unified country? How could you do this, my southern brethren, after all that the Capitol has done for you? After we supported your industries, traded your products, assisted your development?

KEN

Yeah, that's right! You tell them, Irene.

IRENE

Shut up, you fool. Don't think you're off the hook. You would have been nothing without their assistance. The fact of the matter is, no one succeeds in isolation.

She turns to face the CHORUS OF MEN.

And you! Don't you remember when Section III came to your rescue. If it weren't for them, we wouldn't even have been able to be fighting over sections right now.

IRENE

So that's that, then. We're all settled. Ladies?

CLEO, MARINA, ISABELLA, and KORA all enter from the Capitol as well.

CLEO clasping her hands and about to launch into a dramatic speech

Well, see now, boys, that wasn't so hard—

MARINA

Though some things still are, apparently...

CLEO glares at MARINA, who looks back indignantly.

What? It's *true*.

CLEO ignoring her

We can all learn to get along

Now, this violence we'll discard

And cease to do each other wrong.

MARINA

Peace isn't so tough

There's no need to be rough

CLEO

Oh, I don't know about that...

It's MARINA's turn to glare at CLEO, who looks innocently at her.

ISABELLA

And lest you say
That we ladies are weak
We'll remind you again
Of our technique

KORA

So seriously, boys
Don't try this again.
Or next time we'll
Make more than noise.

IRENE

That's right. Now, don't you men have some work to do? Let me rebuild this city in peace.

ALL are escorted off stage by IRENE, who lingers for one moment to look at the audience, and gives a curt nod. Curtains close.

Lysistrata: Past and Present

Although I wanted an adaptation to align with my interpretation of Aristophanes' intentions, there remain differences between the original text (or any translation rendered faithfully to it) and my adaptation as I also wanted an adaptation to accommodate changes in societal perspectives since Aristophanes' time. The following are what I consider to be the most important differentiations that I took into consideration:

1. The nature of violence as expressed between the male and female characters.
2. The polarity of the masculine/feminine.
3. The characterization of Lysistrata.

While there were other changes that needed to be made, these were the issues I thought most in need of attention from a thematic perspective.

In the original text, there are multiple violent encounters between the male and female choruses and threats of violence were a common theme. This seemed strange, seeing as how the issue of sexual violence was glossed over in the beginning when it was proposed as a problem to the women's plan of abstinence. It was not practical to get rid of all references to violence, however, as the adaptation was still about war. As homage to modern day society's more litigious tendencies, though, I had the women confront the men with lawsuits when the violence did not seem to have a direct and productive role in advancing the plot (Part II, 15). In contrast, however, I followed suit with Aristophanes' usage of domestic tools as the women's weaponry when the President tries to have the officers take the women away. Faced with an immediate threat that had the potential to derail their careful planning, the women threatened violence from self-defense. Practically speaking, framing Lysistrata into an advocate of complete non-violence would have resulted in a message of passivity that I did not think was suitable. Consequently, I saw fit to have the women use their tools of domesticity and turn that against the men, who were

used to seeing these tools used to their advantage (15-16). This also provided me with the opportunity to engage in wordplay, which Aristophanes used also in the original text.

There were also contrasts between what is considered masculine and feminine in Aristophanes' original that I had to consider. The symbolism of the veil that women wore during the time was used by the Magistrate's character as evidence that the women were separate and suppressed by its usage (Part I, 13). As a modern day example, I had the President inquire about the women's heels (Part II, 20). As the subject of objectification could not (and ought not) be avoided, the choice to switch from veil to heels was an important one. The heels played additional roles from the veil in several aspects. First, that heels are symbols of sexuality, and are worn by women to be more attractive. Veils, on the other hand, were worn to prevent temptation instead. The second is that heels also constrain movement, providing a physical limitation to what their wearers can and cannot do. While the veil may provide a symbolic separation, it also enables mystery: the covering works both ways. Heels do not do the same. Ultimately, though, the significance of Lysistrata/Irene returning the veil/heels to the Magistrate/President remains the same. By forcing the objects onto the man, it demonstrates that whatever they symbolize is socially constructed, not biologically.

One of the additional highlights of this scene occurs when Lysistrata, finally fed up with the Magistrate, tells him to go die (Aristophanes 559). He leaves the stage, but obviously did not oblige. I decided that this scene had more potential that could be explored. In order to further develop the relationship of sex and power, I had Irene tell the President to leave, specifically, to "go fuck yourself" (Part II, 22-23). With the absence of women, and the fact that he goes off-stage, the implication is that the President literally and figuratively followed Irene's commands. This interchange focuses on the importance of power and control through sex. The women use

symbols of domesticity and femininity as a challenge to the men, setting up the view that symbols alone are insufficient to keep them from rebellion.

As one last example, the end of the play has the Spartan and Athenian male choruses reconciling, but I decided to replace that with a cautionary statement from the primary female characters. While Aristophanes has the men narrating the reunification of the Greeks to seek peace, I opted to have the women remind the men the dangers of repeating this situation. Although this creates a more ominous ending, I also find it more appropriate. This allows greater agency in the parts of the women, who do not relinquish control at the end. As the women succeeded in their goals this time, any implication that they would not hesitate to repeat their actions the next time grants them an additional level of control over preventing war.

The final portion that I wanted to explore and kept in mind in my adaptation is the characterization of the titular character, Lysistrata, or Irene, as I renamed her. Lysistrata, from the Greek λύσις (loosening) and στρατός (army), means “disbander of armies.” To play off of that, I opted to name her Irene, from the Greek ειρήνη, which does literally translate as peace. There are several reasons for this decision. First, I wanted the characters in my adaptation to be more proactive. The intimation of “Lysistrata” has, more directly, a military implication, whereas peace could have a more general implication.

Lysistrata’s character is curious because of her duality: throughout the play, there are references to her persona as masculine, though she is a woman. As a matter of fact, Lysistrata is often set apart from the other women, held up as a paragon of femininity because of her ostensible masculinity. From her opening speech about how none of the women of Greece were present as promised, but had she suggested revelry or debauchery, they would have immediately been there, to the description by the chorus of men, who ascribe both traditionally masculine and

traditionally feminine traits to her. She also complains about the women (Aristophanes 137), categorizing them as overly dramatic.

Irene still complains about the tardiness of the women and their nature, but as Cleo points out in conversation, the burdens of wifedom and motherhood, neither of which Irene has to face, are high—and don't they merit some type of personal reward? (Part II, 3). As for the description by the chorus of men in *Lysistrata*, I had Irene acknowledge that it might not be as complimentary as initially appeared. The male chorus leader says, "Welcome, Irene, most exemplary woman. You are beautiful and brave, delicate and demanding, cunning and charming—" and gets cut off by Irene responding with, "Yeah, yeah, okay, whatever. Fuck that. I don't want your praise. Don't think I didn't notice that you commented on my appearance first. Nice try" (Part II, 40). What is important here is not deciding whether Irene is able to fulfill the criteria as peacekeeper because she is ostensibly both male and female, but because such ambiguity exists in all men and women as a result in the lack of truly strict masculine versus feminine characteristics.

Since in my adaptation I wanted her character to be more integrated with the women, as I believe that unification is important in achieving common goals, I did not want Irene to be a woman who still sided with the men, in that she would opt to Other the women and set herself apart as superior. I do believe Aristophanes' intentions were similar, although perhaps not his motivations. As the unification of the women in *Lysistrata* would have been surprising for a male audience used to female frivolity, it seems likely that showing how easily they ally themselves with one another would play an extra role in shaming the divisive, argumentative men, who are consistently defeated by the women in all of their encounters. *Lysistrata*, though a woman, was meant to represent an ideal that could only be related to being a man. (Part I, 12)

Instead of highlighting certain traits as masculine and others as feminine, I decided to address this duality directly in Irene's words. In particular, I spent some time considering my favorite line from *Lysistrata*, “ἐγὼ γυνὴ μὲν εἰμι, νοῦς δ’ ἔνεστί μοι/αὐτὴ δ’ ἐμαυτῆς οὐ κακῶς γνώμης ἔχω” (Aristophanes 1124-25), which I translated as “Yes, I am a woman, but I have the ability to think/and I have pretty good judgment besides” (Part I, 8). After some deliberation, I opted to render it as, “Yes, I’m a woman. But what the hell does that matter?” (Part II, 40). Since the original passage was followed by references to Lysistrata's apparent education (which would have been through men), I thought that the best way to adapt this was to have Irene challenge this notion. While Lysistrata contrasts her womanhood with her wisdom, Irene just doesn't care. She's a woman, as are the other women in the play, but this has no grounding on the legitimacy of her perspective or decisions.

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