

Laura McClure : *Courtesans Reconsidered: Women in Aristophanes' Lysistrata*

This essay provides a reassessment of the view that the young wives of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* are modeled on hetaeras. It begins by examining a parallel debate in contemporary Attic red-figure vase paintings of women at home to show that displays of female sexuality are not incompatible with marriageable maidens and free citizen wives. Aristophanes similarly situates his female characters within a domestic context as the site of sexual and social legitimacy. A detailed analysis of clothing, footwear and grooming practices deployed in the sex strike demonstrates that they represent the standard accoutrements of housewives rather than of hetaeras. Their domesticated eroticism, while enabling the male spectators a voyeuristic glimpse of other men's wives, reinforces their procreative function as mothers and producers of future Athenian citizens. The importance of sexual desire within marriage for the production of legitimate offspring is dramatically reinforced by the onstage presence of the boy child in the thwarted sexual encounter of Myrrhine and Cinesias. Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* fits with a pattern of heightened interest in women and domestic ideology at the end of the fifth century BCE. The centrality of marriage in the play may represent a response to the erosion of Pericles' citizenship law in response to the depletion of Athenian men in the waning years of the Peloponnesian war.

**Mots-clés :**

marriage – citizen – bride – clothing – cosmetics – saffron – footwear – hetaera – courtesan – prostitute – Alcestis – Pericles