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SEX CAN KILL: GENDER INVERSION AND THE POLITICS OF SUBVERSION
IN ARISTOPHANES' *ECCLESIAZUSAE*

Scholarship on *Ecclesiazusae* (as on *Wealth*) has been largely divided between those who are in a favour of a fantastical/positive reading of the play and view it as a celebration of comic energy void of serious social critique,¹ and those who argue for an ironic/satirical interpretation and deem Praxagora's plan as a spectacular failure.² The unsuccessful

* Many thanks to Angus Bowie, Felix Budelmann, Ian Ruffell, Matthew Wright, and the anonymous reviewer of the journal, who read and commented on earlier drafts of this piece.

¹ D. Konstan and M. Dillon, 'The ideology of Aristophanes' *Wealth*', *AJPh* 102 (1981), 371–94, A.H. Sommerstein, 'Aristophanes and the demon poverty', *CQ* 34 (1984), 314–33, N.W. Slater, *Spectator Politics: Metatheatre and Performance in Aristophanes* (Philadelphia, 2002), 207–34.

² D. Auger, 'Le théâtre d'Aristophane: le mythe, l'utopie et les femmes' in D. Auger, M. Rosellini and S. Saïd (edd.), *Aristophane, les Femmes et la Cité* (Fontenay-aux-Roses, 1979), 71–101, S. Saïd, 'L'assemblée des femmes: les femmes, l'économie et la politique' in id., 33–69, H.P. Foley, 'The "female intruder" reconsidered: women in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae*', *CP* 77 (1982), 1–21, T.K. Hubbard, *The Mask of Comedy: Aristophanes and the Intertextual Parabasis* (Ithaca and London, 1991), 246–51, F.I. Zeitlin, 'Aristophanes: the performance of utopia in *Ecclesiazusae*' in S. Goldhill and R. Osborne (edd.), *Performance, Culture and Athenian Democracy* (Cambridge, 1999), 167–200, K.M. De Luca, *Aristophanes' Male and Female Revolutions: A Reading of*

realization of the new political program is often regarded as a commentary on the state of democracy at the time. Other views are more affirmative of the democratic values of the play: Scholtz claims that the women in *Ecclesiazusae* succeed into putting into action Lysistrata's dream of a cohesive civic order, although, according to him, the play does not present 'an unambiguously *pro* or *contra* viewpoint vis-à-vis gynaecocratic communalism'.³ Rothwell believes that the satire is directed against the greedy demos rather than Praxagora's plan. He sees the persuasion exercised by women as 'a benevolent and indispensable force in democracy', and argues that the women of *Ecclesiazusae*, like the ones in *Lysistrata*, strive to assure the continuity of the community; in his view, the play is about 'the potential advantages of leadership in building a community'.⁴ Moodie

Aristophanes' *Knights and Assemblywomen* (Lanham, MD, 2005). I.A. Ruffell, 'A little ironic (don't you think?): utopian criticism and the problem of Aristophanes' late plays', in L. Kozak and J. Rich (edd.), *Playing Around Aristophanes* (Oxford, 2006), 65–104 cautions that this sharp division limits the possibilities of the play which should not be read as simply 'ironic' or 'serious' but as 'progressive thought experiments'. J. Henderson, *Aristophanes IV: Frogs, Assemblywomen, Wealth* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), 241 believes that the play 'satirizes contemporary Athenian fondness for political experimentation and theorizing'.

³ A. Scholtz, *Concordia Discors: Eros and Dialogue in Classical Athenian Literature* (Hellenic Studies Series 24; Washington, DC, 2007).

⁴ K.S. Rothwell, *Politics and Persuasion in Aristophanes' Ecclesiazusae* (Leiden, 1990), 103.

also outright rejects a threatening or pessimistic reading and makes the case that the audience is encouraged to take the women seriously as political actors due to their unusual interaction with the audience and the rupture of dramatic illusion, which creates a rapport between the women and the audience. If the play is subversive it is so only in its ‘non-satirical presentation of female leadership’.⁵

While it would be exciting to discover proto-feminist traits in the portrayal of Aristophanes’ women in the *Ecclesiazusae*, I do not believe that there are any. Contrary to what has been argued, the comparison between the permanent gynaecocracy in *Ecclesiazusae* and the temporary one in *Lysistrata* does not paint the world of *Ecclesiazusae* in a positive light. Whereas both female leaders are preoccupied with issues concerning the *oikos*, the new world of *Ecclesiazusae*, as formed by Praxagora’s laws, is the opposite of Lysistrata’s leadership and the world brought about at the end of *Lysistrata*. The women in *Lysistrata*, by taking matters into their hands, uphold the institution of marriage and restore the process of reproduction⁶ in a world controlled once more by men. The play is almost a lesson on how a well-governed and restrained sexuality may prove beneficial for the city. As I will argue, *Ecclesiazusae* is a far cry from this. The women in

⁵ E.K. Moodie, ‘Aristophanes, the *Assemblywomen* and the audience: the politics of rapport’, *CJ* 107 (2012), 257–81, at 278.

⁶ The preoccupation with sterility and cessation of reproduction is evident throughout *Lysistrata* and becomes the main motivation of the women to seize power (cf. 588–97, 648–52). On this topic see N. Tsoumpra, ‘Comic leadership and power dynamics in Aristophanes’ (Diss., University of Oxford, 2014).

Ecclesiazusae abolish the institution of marriage, and create a chaos and a wild sexual disorder, which smacks of prostitution and an inability to reproduce. The years that intervened between the production of *Lysistrata* and that of *Ecclesiazusae* make all the difference for the fantastical portrayal of a world dominated by women, a world which now enacts the nightmarish scenario of an ungoverned and unrestrained female sexuality.

It must be clear by now that my reading falls into the dystopian camp. It focuses on the competition scene between the three old women and the young girl over Epigenes, which follows the application of Praxagora's plan, in order to show that there are dark aspects to the way power relationships are transacted between men and women in the new world. The analysis is divided into two parts. The first part argues that the old women are assimilated to agents of death and mythical female monsters that prey on the young man, who is gradually emasculated and finally reduced to a state of impotency and symbolic death. In the second part I propose that the old women and the young girl perform magical practices, such as the pronouncement of separation curses and ἀγωγή spells on stage, in order to satisfy their sexual cravings. Both the treatment of the young man at the hands of the women and the control of magic practices by the women over the young man reveal some alarming aspects of the new world, namely sterility, impotency, and (figurative) death of the young and vital forces of the city.

Such a dystopian reading propounds an escapist fantasy politics of a darkly misogynistic sort. At the same time, however, Praxagora's brave new world has something to say about Aristophanes' own world and that of his audience. I will come back to this point at the end of my analysis.

1. FEMALE MONSTERS AND THEIR MALE VICTIM

Men are thoroughly humiliated in *Ecclesiazusae*, as is often the case in the ‘female’ plays of Aristophanes. Even before a man shows up on stage, all women’s references to men seem to question their masculinity: Agyrrhius used to be a woman (102–3) and Epigonus looks like a woman (167–8); the most successful male speakers are believed to have a woman’s role, since they assume a passive sexual role (112–14). The entrance of the first male character, Blepyrus, sets the tone for how the young man will be later portrayed in the play.⁷ Blepyrus shows up on stage as an involuntary transvestite,⁸ who puts himself in the position of a pregnant woman and prays to the goddess of childbirth for assistance, while he is squatting for reasons other than delivery: he wants to bring forth not an infant, but a pear (354–5, 361–2). The attempts at this rather unorthodox delivery remain unsuccessful. Blepyrus compares himself to a σκωραμίς κωμῳδική (371), a comic chamberpot, which receives excrement but cannot discharge it: he is sterile.⁹ His impotency

⁷ D.D. Leitao, *The Pregnant Male As Myth and Metaphor in Classical Greek literature* (Cambridge, 2012), 147.

⁸ G. Compton-Engle, *Costume in the Comedies of Aristophanes* (New York, 2015), 77–9.

⁹ A.H. Sommerstein, *Ecclesiazusae* (Warminster, 1998), 173 notes that ‘it is likely, though not certain, that Blepyrus’ prayer proves effective [...] while Blepyrus after much labour has given birth to a quantity of excrement, the Assembly under his wife’s guidance has been giving birth to a new Athens’. However, Blepyrus does not find relief: Chremes’ question and Blepyrus’ answer (372–3 οὗτος, τί ποιεῖς; οὐτὶ που χέζεις; ἐγώ; / οὐ δῆτ’ ἔτι γε μὰ τὸν Δί’, ἀλλ’ ἀνίσταμαι) refer to his unsuccessful attempts, as previously the word

and sterility are stressed several times in the play.¹⁰ In the comic world, where sexuality is often the driving force and sexual prowess the most powerful male weapon, sexual death and impotency equals (symbolic) death.¹¹ Indeed, the overtones of death are manifest when

χέζοντα (322 οὐ γάρ με νῦν χέζοντά γ' οὐδεὶς ὄψεται). Even if Blepyrus was relieved, the product of his labour would be most suggestive. In this way, the contrast between the two parallel situations of Praxagora and Blepyrus is to be traced in the fertile female nature and the sterile male one. Contrast Leitao (n. 7), 146–81 who believes that Blepyrus finally gives birth to a turd and claims that there is a ‘heroic quality’ to Blepyrus’ pregnancy.

¹⁰ Blepyrus’ first thought when he discovers that his wife is not at home is that she is with a lover, seeking elsewhere the pleasure that he, being much older, cannot give her (323–6). Blepyrus’ impotence is also evident both in his fears that old men like himself may not be able to satisfy the women’s sexual demands (465–72), and in his insecurity about his sexual performance (619–20). In fact, Blepyrus’ concern that women may force them to have sexual intercourse with them reveals another side to the (supposedly) upbeat ending. His wife also hints twice at Blepyrus’ near-impotence (525, 621–2). See Sommerstein (n. 9), 192–3 and A.H. Sommerstein, ‘Nudity, obscenity, and power: modes of female assertiveness in Aristophanes’, in A.H. Sommerstein (ed.), *Talking About Laughter and Other Studies in Greek Comedy* (Oxford, 2009), 247–8.

¹¹ The equation of impotency and death is very common in comedy, as those who are old and sexually decrepit are often treated as dead. For Aristophanes cf. *Pl.* 1008, 1033 and the discussion below about the old women in *Eccl.*; Eubulus’ joke in his Ἀστυτοι (fr. 14) juxtaposes the literal meaning ‘dead’ with ‘impotent’ in the case of Adonis. In later poetry

he describes himself as a corpse lying in bed with his wife's mantle over him, but in an incomplete state of preparation: without the traditional garland and oil-bottle (536–8).¹²

The implications of impotency and death return more prominently in one of the scenes which exemplifies the consequences of the radical plan of Praxagora for a city 'as one giant household': three old women quarrel over the sexual services of a young man. The first references to death are traced, naturally, in the jokes and insults against the old women. Although the first woman considers her maturity to be an advantage over her young competitor (895), in reality she is old and 'rotten' (884, 926 σαπρά, 934 ὥλεθρε), almost dead already (904–5 σὺ δ', ὡς γραῦ, παραλέξειαι κάντέτριψαι/τῷ Θανάτῳ μέλημα, 926 οὕκουν ἐπ' ἐκφοράν γε); her lover cannot be anyone else but Geres (932) or the best painter of the funerary jars, Death himself (993–7).¹³ However, the death undertones

the impotent member itself is viewed as a corpse (*Automedon Anth. Pal.* 11.29.3–4, *Ov. Am.* 3.7, *GP II*, 398–9).

¹² As has been noted (M. Rosellini, 'Lysistrata: une mise en scène de la féminité' in D. Auger., M. Rosellini and S. Saïd (edd.), *Aristophane, les Femmes et la Cité* (Fontenay-aux-Roses, 1979), 11–32 at 17–8, S. Saïd, 'Travestis et travestissements dans les comédies d'Aristophane', *CGITA* 3 (1987), 217–48 at 233–5, A.M. Bowie, *Aristophanes: Myth, Ritual and Comedy* (Cambridge, 1993), 259, Sommerstein (n. 9), 185, Compton-Engle (n. 8), 169), the scene brings to mind the dressing and the ἔκθεσις of the Proboulos in *Lysistrata*.

¹³ For the interpretation of this passage see R.G. Ussher, *Aristophanes' Ecclesiazusae* (Oxford, 1973), 214 and Sommerstein (n. 9), 224. If we identify the painter of the jars for funerals with Death, then the young man's exhortation to the old woman to go inside her

gradually shift from the old woman (and her old and ugly competitors that soon appear on stage) to the young man. The comic inversion of the natural state of things is funny, but also rather alarming: in the new world the morbid imagery of death is not reserved just for the old, but extends to the young and threatens their vitality.

At first the young man appears confident about his sexual prowess: he is burning with passion and desire since he has been yearning for the young woman for a long time (938, 948, 960–75). As soon as he finds out, however, that he has to deal with the old woman first (and the rest of the old women later) his confidence vanishes together with his potency. The first sign is given in the young man’s exchange with the first old woman which is loaded with sexual innuendos:¹⁴ the old woman claims that the man knocked on her door (977 καὶ τὴν θύραν γ' ἤραττες) to which the young man replies ‘I would rather

house, lest her ‘lover’ sees her outside the door acquires a double meaning: if Death sees the old woman standing out of the house, he will probably be more tempted to take her with him! Moreover, the young man implies that the old woman should not expect anyone but Death to knock on her door (cf. 989–90).

¹⁴ J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy* (New Haven and London, 1991), 137–8, 171, Sommerstein (n. 9), 223, P. Brown, ‘Scenes at the door in Aristophanic comedy’, in M. Revermann and P. Wilson (edd.), *Performance, Iconography, Reception: Studies in Honour of Oliver Taplin* (Oxford, 2008), 349–73 at 368–9. Cf. the door-knocking motif in *Lysistrata*, which also strongly invites sexual undertones of attempted penetration. See M. Revermann, *Comic Business: Theatricality, Dramatic Technique, and Performance Contexts of Aristophanic Comedy* (Oxford, 2006), 185.

die' (977 ἀποθάνοιμ' ἄρα). The young man's reply to the old woman's sexual advances foreshadows the later scene (1105–11), where death is what the young man expects to come out as a result from his sexual intercourse with the old woman.

When the young man appears unwilling to serve the first old woman sexually, she recites the new decree which permits her to 'drag the man by the peg' (1020 ἔλκειν ἀνατεί λαβομένας τοῦ παττάλου).¹⁵ The young man's response betrays his concern about his bodily integrity (οἴμοι, Προκρούστης τήμερον γενήσομαι): Procrustes used to kill his victims by cutting or stretching out their limbs so that they fit in his bed and was himself killed by Theseus in the same way.¹⁶ The young man is afraid that he will suffer like Procrustes, but with reference to his penis (note the pun with προκρούω, that is have sex),¹⁷ not his limbs: he might be thinking of castration or over-stretching of his phallus due to the excessive sexual activity he will be subjected to. A similar fear for the integrity of his body is expressed later on, when the two old women drag him violently in opposite directions

¹⁵ Cf. *Eq.* 771, *Lys.* 1019. The gesture of being dragged by the penis is degrading for the man who submits to it, as it involves an involuntary handling of a part of his body, or, in this case, a part of his costume. By contrast, in *Ach.* 1216 Dicaeopolis most happily welcomes and invites the gesture by his female companions. For the idea that control over costume in Aristophanes is associated with power and heightened status see Compton-Engle (n. 8).

¹⁶ Sommerstein (n. 9), 225. This is the earliest passage where Procrustes is mentioned. See also *Bacch.* 18.27–30, *Apoll. Ep.* 1.4, *D.S.* 4.59.5, *Plu. Thes.* 11.1.

¹⁷ Ussher (n. 13), 217 and Sommerstein (n. 9), 225.

(1076 διασπάσεσθέ μ', ὡς κακῶς ἀπολούμεναι). As the situation escalates, sexual intercourse with the old woman assumes connotations of death: the old woman insists that the young man should follow her to her place out of ‘Diomedian compulsion’ (1029). The scholia explain that the reference is to Diomedes, the Thracian son of Ares; his daughters were prostitutes who forced passers-by to have sexual intercourse with them until the men were exhausted, whereupon Diomedes killed them.¹⁸

The scene of the old woman with its lethal undertones calls to mind the nightmarish female monsters or deities who destroy men in Greek literary tradition (the Furies and their sisters, the (three) Moirai, the three Graiai, Sphinxes, Erinyes, and Sirens).¹⁹ A particular feature of some of these creatures was their alluring and seducing voice. The binding song sung by the Furies in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* (303–6, 327–33=341–6) maddens, deranges and withers their male victim.²⁰ In the *Odyssey* (12.1–200) and in Apollonius’ *Argonautica* (4.485–921) the Sirens lured passing ships to destruction with their irresistible voices and enchanting songs on the rocky coast of their island home, and represented one of the many obstacles that Odysseus and Jason respectively had to overcome in their voyages.²¹ The

¹⁸ Sommerstein (n. 9), 227. These daughters are identified in the scholia with the man-eating mares of the Heraclean feat, perhaps in an attempt at rationalization of the myth.

¹⁹ Rothwell (n. 4), 71.

²⁰ L. McClure, ‘Clytemnestra’s binding spell (*Ag.* 958–974)’, *CJ* 92 (1996–7), 123–40.

²¹ The magic song of the Sirens is a recurring theme throughout the *Odyssey* (39–40, 41, 44, 52, 158–9, 183, 185, 187, 192, 198; see G.K. Gresseth, ‘The Homeric Sirens’, *TAPA*

Sphinxes, in many ways like the Sirens, are said to carry off the person captured by their song (Eur. *El.* 471–72). Lamias also may have used their enchanting voice to attract males (Plu. *Mor.* 515f). Likewise, the old and the young woman sing their songs to the passers-by in order to lure them into their houses (880–2, 885–7) – as, of course, prostitutes would also do. In her song, the old woman promises to her much-expected lover that he will have a very good time due to her long sexual experience, and that she will be faithful to him forever:

893–9

εἴ τις ἀγαθὸν βούλεται παθεῖν τι, παρ' ἐμοὶ χρὴ καθεύδειν.

οὐ γὰρ ἐν νέαις τὸ σοφὸν ἔνεστιν, ἀλλ' ἐν ταῖς πεπείροις.

οὐδέ τāν στέργειν τις ἐθέλοι μᾶλλον ἢ 'γὼ

τὸν φίλον ὥπερ ξυνείην,

ἀλλ' ἐφ' ἔτερον ἀν πέτοιτο—

Whoever wants to have a good time

should sleep with me.

For finesse dwells not in girls

but in ripe women. You can bet she's no readier than I

to cherish the boyfriend I'm with,

101 (1970), 203–18, at 205). Cf. Circe who sings and invites Odysseus' men in her house in *Od.* 10.226–9.

but more likely to flit to another.²²

This is similar to what the Lamia (φάσμα) in Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius* (4.25) says to her victim, Menippus:

«ές ὁ ἐσπέρας» ἔφη «ἀφικομένῳ σοι ώδή τε ὑπάρξει ἐμοῦ ἀδούσης
καὶ οἶνος, οἶνον οὕπω ἔπιες, καὶ οὐδὲ ἀντεραστὴς ἐνοχλήσει σε,
βιώσομαι δὲ καλὴ ξὺν καλῷ».

If you come to my place this evening, you will have songs sung by me and wine, such as you never drank before; no rival will disturb you and we will live together as a beautiful couple.

(my translation)

The song – to which the girl refers twice (887 ἄδουσ', ἀντάσομαι), as does Lamia (ώδή, ἀδούσης) – the promise of a good, memorable time, the reassurance of good faith to the potential victim and the erotic rhetoric of a continuous, life-long love are folk tale features,²³ which are all to be found in Aristophanes. The love which is ‘now and forever’ is also found

²² All translations of Aristophanes are taken from the Loeb edition of Henderson (n.2).

²³ A.A. González-Terriza, ‘Los rostros de la Empusa: monstruos, hetera, niñeras y brujas: aportación a una nueva lectura de Aristófanes *Ec.* 877–1111’, *CFC(G)* 6 (1996), 261–300 at 273–4.

in the practice of the ἀγωγή, to which I will return, where the agent aims at an eternal bondage with the victim.²⁴ Both the old and the young women display the features of female monsters: thus, female sexual desire and incessant appetite in the new world of Praxagora is portrayed in a negative light, coming from either old or young women. Any women who express their sexual impulses in this open, straightforward way cannot but resemble, in the eyes of the ancient audience, female rapacious and deadly monsters.

The appearance of the other two old women adds to the death overtones of the text as they also share common features with female monsters who seduced men in order to finally destroy them. If the first old woman is the girl of Geres or Death, the second is an Empusa (1056) and the third looks as if she does not belong to the world of the living but that of the dead (1073 ἀνεστηκυῖα παρὰ τῶν πλειόνων): each of them is more repulsive than the other (1053 τοῦτο γὰρ ἐκείνου τὸ κακὸν ἐξωλέστερον, 1070 τοῦτ' αὖ πολὺ τούτου τὸ κακὸν ἐξωλέστερον). The implications of death are straightforward in the case of the third old woman and latent in the second: Empusa was a female monster or bogey who could take many shapes.²⁵ In one of her numerous disguises, she could be identified with Hecate

²⁴ Apuleius *Met.* 2.5 *amoris profundi pedicis aeternis alligat*, PGM VII.913–14, XVI.24–25, DT 267 *usque ad diem mortis suaे*. See J.J. Winkler, ‘The constraints of eros’, in C.A. Faraone and D. Obbink (edd.), *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (New York, 1991), 214–43, at 232–3.

²⁵ For the implications of the assimilation of the old woman to Empusa see González-Terriza (n. 23).

(Alciphr. iii.26.3).²⁶ Even more suggestively, Empusa was often associated with another mythical monster, Lamia, who was initially conceptualized as a child-devouring demon who sought out pregnant women and devoured their babies before or after they were born.²⁷ Lamias at some point become man-eating creatures, which mate with young attractive males before devouring them.²⁸

All aspects of the creatures to which the old women and the girl are assimilated have important implications for the new world of Praxagora: death has not been banished from the new world and threatens the vitality and fertility of the young. In the light of the representation of the three old women as agents of death, one may argue that Epigenes calls

²⁶ Ussher (n. 13), 221.

²⁷ D.S. 20.41, [Ps.-Luc.] *Philops.* 3, D. Chr. *Orationes* 55, Hor. *AP* 340, Str. 1.2.8. Since further below the women are also assimilated to aspiring witches it is worth noting that Medea, the archetypical witch, has been conceptualized as a demon of infertility and linked to Lamia. See S.I. Johnston, ‘Corinthian Medea and the cult of Hera Akraia’, in J.J. Clauss and S.I. Johnston (edd.), *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art* (Princeton, 1997), 44–70.

²⁸ Philostr. *VA* 4.25, Apuleius *Metamorphoses* 1.17. All evidence comes from the second century A.D. See Stes. fr. 182, according to which Scylla, who ate plenty of young men, was the daughter of Lamia. Scylla of course features in the *Odyssey*, like the Sirens, but the tradition may have existed earlier. See D. Ogden, *Night's Black Agents: Witches, Wizards and the Dead in the Ancient World* (London, 2008), 160–9.

the two old women, who drag him to different directions, *χαλεπαὶ πορθμῆς* (1086) because he has in mind Charon, the ferryman of Hades.²⁹

When the third old woman appears on stage, the young man seems for a moment to rediscover his lost potency, as he mistakenly believes it is the young girl who has come to free him from the old woman (1045–8, note the obscene pun on the *παχεῖαν χάριν*). Yet, when it becomes clear that his supposed saviour is an even uglier old woman, he becomes a ‘softie’ (1058 *μαλακίων*), which may refer not only to his fear of the old woman’s ugly face,³⁰ but also to the loss of his sexual prowess.³¹ This is further emphasized later on, when he professes to be unable to perform sexually with both women (1090–1 *βινεῖν δεῖ με διαλελημμένον / πῶς οὖν δικωπεῖν ἀμφοτέρας δυνήσομαι;*) and the old woman reassures

²⁹ According to the ancient scholia, which both Ussher (n. 13), 224 and Sommerstein (n. 9), 230 follow, ferrymen used to fight over passers-by as to who would embark on their boat.

³⁰ Sommerstein (n. 9), 229.

³¹ As a term *μαλακός* (soft) is suitable to describe the lack of erection. Herodotus associates *μαλακία* with femininity (7.153.4; cf. Arist. *Nic. Eth.* 1150b15). See V. Wohl, *Love Among the Ruins: The Erotics of Democracy in Classical Athens* (Princeton, 2002), 171–88 who reads the references to *μαλακία* in Thucydides (see 1.122.4, 2.18.3, 3.37.2, 5.72.1, esp. 6.13.1) as unmanliness, the opposite of the Athenian ideal of imperial aggression and manly hardiness.

him with the promise of a ‘potful of bulbs’, which was supposed to be a strong aphrodisiac.³²

Sex in the new world can have a lethal effect – on young men, at least. The prime symbol of death, λήκυθος,³³ which we encountered earlier on in Blepyrus’ self-description as a corpse, recurs in two scenes which are inextricably linked to one another. In the first one (1030–6), the young man urges the (first) old woman to make preparations for her funeral, because he professes that she is so decrepit that she will not survive the intense sexual experience. The old woman misinterprets the description of the ritual and thinks that Epigenes talks of marriage, since some of the items that he mentions are appropriate for both the context of πρόθεσις in a funeral and the ἔκδοσις and the ἔξαγωγή of the wedding ceremony:³⁴ ribbons (ταινίαι), flasks (λήκυθοι), pots of water (օστρακον ὕδατος) and diadems (στεφάνη) had a different function in either ritual.³⁵ Epigenes hurries to specify

³² Winkler (n. 24), 221, C.A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1999), 19–20.

³³ For λήκυθος as a symbol of death see lines 538, 996, 1032, 1111. From the 460s to the 410s λήκυθοι became the most popular offering to the dead and developed a funerary iconography. See R. Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (London, 1985), 107–8.

³⁴ Sommerstein (n. 9), 227.

³⁵ Garland (n. 33), 36–7, 107–8, 170–1, J.H. Oakley and R.H. Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens* (Madison, 1993), 12 and 16, R. Rehm, *Marriage to Death: The Conflation of Wedding and Funeral Rituals in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton, 1994), 12–4 and 22–9, C.

that the στεφάνη will be of wax, hence making clear that it is the funeral of the old woman that he has in mind (1036).³⁶ However, later on, when the other two old women have made their appearance and also claimed his attentions, the young man appears to believe that it is he who will soon be in need of a funerary ritual (1105–11). The implications of death have shifted from the old women to the young man himself: he asks to be buried ‘at the mouth of the strait’ where he will perish, that is the old woman’s house (1106–7), and he envisages the old woman as the monumental urn placed over his grave (1111 πρόφασιν ἀντὶ ληκύθου).³⁷ As Saïd, Auger, and Zeitlin have argued,³⁸ the new laws of Praxagora do not only bring unhappiness upon individuals: they signify the death of the whole city, whose vital forces are destroyed by sterile unions. It is not without significance that the ramifications of Praxagora’s sexual communism are explored only from the side of old and ugly women seeking sexual gratification from younger men, and that the alternative

Sourvinou-Inwood, ‘Reading’ Greek Death: To the End of the Classical Period (Oxford, 1995), 332–3.

³⁶ Sommerstein (n. 9), 186. For the common theme of conflation of marriage and funeral in tragedy see Rehm (n. 35).

³⁷ Sommerstein (n. 9), 232 ‘referring this time to the large marble *lēkuthoi* which were sometimes placed over graves’.

³⁸ Saïd (n. 2), 60, Auger (n. 2), 92, Zeitlin (n. 2), 75.

scenario, that of old men lusting after young women is not dramatized.³⁹ Old women represent a sexuality which cannot be associated anymore with child-bearing,⁴⁰ hence their union with the young man is doomed to be sterile.

This is not to say that Epigenes comes across as a sympathetic character. Far from feeling sorry for him, the audience would probably experience a feeling of *Schadenfreude* and would laugh at his misfortunes. The fact that the positive aspects of the new world are reserved for the old and the ugly, while the young and the beautiful fare badly at their hands is the main cause of mirth in the play.

2. LOVE MAGIC

Although the lyrical duel between the old and the young woman, and the love-duet have attracted much scholarly attention, the references to magic practices in these scenes have remained unnoticed. Yet, the use and control of magic practices by the women over the man reflect the changes in the new world: the inversion of the gender roles, the complete abandonment of the *oikos*-focused role of women and the unrestrained expression of female sexuality outside the context of marriage. These women are not only depicted as *hetairai* whose competing sexual interests threaten the stability of the community, but also as ominous figures who openly engage in practices from which respectable citizen women

³⁹ Blepyrus being handed two young girls at the end of the play (1136–1153) is hardly an example, as he seems more interested in the prospect of food than sexual intercourse. See also n. 6.

⁴⁰ Auger (n. 2), 92–3.

should refrain.⁴¹ Although explicit condemnation, such as legal charges, were not expressed, unless there was harm done,⁴² magic practices were looked upon with suspicion

⁴¹ As shown by the distaste of Deianeira and Phaedra for the magic practices they are advised or forced to follow. See M.W. Dickie, ‘Who practised love-magic in classical antiquity and in the late Roman world?’, *CQ* 50 (2000), 563–83, at 581.

⁴² D. Ogden, ‘Binding spells: curse tablets and voodoo dolls in the Greek and Roman worlds’, in B. Ankarloo and S. Clark (edd.), *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe, ii: Ancient Greece and Rome* (London, 1999), 1–90, at 83–4 argues ‘that harmful magical practice was generally illegal throughout Graeco-Roman antiquity’, but struggles to find evidence for Athens; for a more balanced consideration, see C.R. Phillips, ‘Nullum crimen sine lege: socioreligious sanctions on magic’, in C.A. Faraone and D. Obbink (edd.), *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (New York, 1991), 260–76. Fifth and fourth century legal actions that involved charges of using φάρμακα preserve a distinction between means and intent. For the criminalization of magic in fourth-century Athens see D. Collins, ‘Theoris of Lemnos and the criminalization of magic in fourth-century Athens’, *CQ* 51 (2001), 477–93, E. Eidinow,¹ *Oracles, Curses, and Risk Among the Ancient Greeks* (Oxford and New York, 2007), 29, and nn. 23 and 24, and E. Eidinow,² *Envy, Poison, and Death: Women on Trial in Ancient Athens* (Oxford, 2016), 33 who notes the apparent difference between general opinion and legal charge: ‘it is implicit in both accounts that while some people found the activities of the *gune magos* indictable, others were quite happy to employ her for the same reasons’.

and dread.⁴³ The legal cases that have come down to us concerned women of low social status, such as prostitutes, which were probably seen as interfering with the established traditional religious practices.⁴⁴ Since most of the magic practices invoked powerful and potentially dangerous forces which normally one was expected to avert,⁴⁵ practitioners of

⁴³ See Ar. *Nu.* 749–55 where practices like drawing down the moon and creating an eclipse are regarded as an opportunity for the unscrupulous to avoid paying their burdensome debts; and S. *OT* 387–9 where Oedipus denounces Teiresias as a μάγος and an ἀγύρτης who only has sight when it comes to profit. Plato *Leg.* 933b1–4 shows distrust against the practices of μάγοι and ἀγύρται and believes that they create social tension and do not serve the public interest; [Hipp.] *De morbo sacro* 1.22–46 who condemns the practices of magicians who tried to cure epilepsy through variegated interactions with divinity (ἐπαοιδάς). See Eidinow¹ (n. 42), 152 and Eidinow² (n. 42), 309, D. Collins, *Magic in the Ancient Greek World* (Malden, Mass., 2008), 33–63.

⁴⁴ See R. L. Fowler, ‘Greek magic, Greek religion’, in R. Buxton (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Greek Religion* (Oxford, 2000), 38–55, at 12 who distinguishes between Greek religious and magic acts on the grounds of social context: ‘one is approved, the other almost always is not’. Eidinow² (n. 42), 31 suggests that the figure of a woman standing trial for supernatural activities may have become a stock figure of the cultural imaginary of ancient Greek society.

⁴⁵ Cf. the old woman in *Ecclesiazusae* who swears by Hecate (1097).

these rituals were viewed as adopting a deliberately anti-social and subversive stance.⁴⁶ A female magic practitioner may come across 'as a sinister figure, one who has scant respect for the values and structures of *polis* and *oikos*, who has tremendous influence over the men she meets—who may (possibly) use *pharmaka* to get her way—and who sets the city at risk with regard to the god'.⁴⁷ Thus, by assuming the role of aspiring magic practitioners the women personify the dismantling of the city and embody the sexual and social confusion in the new world of Praxagora. At the same time, this is the earliest representation of old women with witch-like qualities in comedy.⁴⁸ Only much later, in particular in the Roman Augustan period, does the decrepit old witch becomes a literary stereotype.

Significantly, the implications of sterility reoccur. The first old woman uses the language of separation curse-tablets in order to condemn the union of the young man and woman to sterility. According to Eidinow, separation curses 'are aimed at a ritual in a love

⁴⁶ K.B. Stratton, *Naming the Witch: Magic, Ideology, and Stereotype in the Ancient World* (New York and Chichester, 2007), 41–2.

⁴⁷ Eidinow² (n. 42), 313.

⁴⁸ J. Henderson, 'Older women in Attic Old Comedy' *TAPA* 117 (1987), 105–29, at 127 claims that 'witches, as creatures of the night and of far-off or wild places, and as representatives of the opposite of civilized behavior, will only seldom have been relevant to the urban milieu and smart sensibility of comedies in the Aristophanic style. The equation old woman = witch thus finds no support in topical comedy'. However, it is exactly the dismantling of the urban milieu and civilization that makes the equation both possible and appropriate here.

triangle situation and, occasionally, at the object of affection, as well, in order to inhibit contact between the two'.⁴⁹ The main purpose of such a curse is ‘to restrain erotic attraction and break any bond that may have already developed between the accursed and their partner’.⁵⁰ This description is very fitting to the case of *Ecclesiazusae*. There is the love triangle situation (young woman, old woman and young man), at least before the rest of the old women appear, and there is an obvious competition between the young and the old woman over the young man, who is soon to appear: the two women exchange insults (884–7, 904–5, 918–20, 926–7, 932), shoo one another away (890, 930), advertise what they have to offer, one in contrast to the other (893–9, 900–5), and both state their superiority and their confidence that they will prevail, the one over the other (921–4, 925–6, 933–5). Before the old woman utters her curse against the young woman, the young woman notes that the old woman is jealous of her (900 μὴ φθόνει ταῖς νέαισι) and goes on to give an account of what causes the old woman’s jealousy: the sexual attractiveness that a youthful, graceful body emanates (901–3). Enraged by her words, the old woman immediately exclaims her curse.

906–10

ἐκπέσοι σου τὸ τρῆμα

τό τ’ ἐπίκλιντρον ἀποβάλοι

⁴⁹ Eidinow¹ (n. 42), 207.

⁵⁰ Eidinow¹ (n. 42), 207. For a publication of separation curses see Faraone (n. 32) and the catalogue in Eidinow¹ (n. 42).

βουλομένη σποδεῖσθαι.

κάπι τῆς κλίνης ὄφιν

<– υ > εὕροις καὶ προσελκύσαιο <– υ >,

βουλομένη φιλῆσαι.

I hope your twat falls off,

and when you hanker for humping

you can't find your back seat.

And in bed when you hanker for smooching

I hope you take a snake in your arms.

The old woman phrases her curse in the form of separation: she uses the ‘wish formula’ (optative)⁵¹ and attempts to prevent the girl from having sex with the young man by a) targeting a specific part of the girl’s body (*τρῆμα*), b) focusing on relevant objects or locations, such as the bed or part of the bed (*ἐπίκλιντρον*, *κλίνης*) and c) using an analogy to condemn any act of sexual nature between the two and, at the same time, control the young man’s potency (909–10). All these features are also to be found in separation curses. The curses often deploy a binding formula, which targets parts of the body and aspects of the behaviour; for example one (*DT* 86) is directed against an *hetaira* and binds her food,

⁵¹ Faraone (n. 32), 5, Eidinow¹ (n. 42), 150.

her drink, her sleep and laughter, as well as her buttock and her eyes: these last two probably evoke the sexual power of the woman, that someone was desperate to disable:⁵²

Side A:

παρατίθομαι Ζο-
ιδα τὴν Ἐρετρικὴν
τὴν Καβείρα γυναικα
-[τ]ῆ Γῆ καὶ τῶ 'Ερμῆ, τὰ βρώ-
ματα αύτῆς, τὸν ποτᾶ, τὸν ū-
πνον αύτῆς, τὸν γέλωτα,
τὴν συνουσίην, τὸ κιθ{φε}άρισ [μα]
αύτῆς κὴ τὴν πάροδον αύ-
[τῆς], τὴν ἡδον<ὴν>, τὸ πυγίον,
[τὸ] (φρό)νημα, {ν} Ὁφθα[λμοὺς]
-- ααπηρη(?) τῆ Γῆ.

Side A:⁵³

I assign Zois, the Eretrian wife of Kabeira, to Earth and to Hermes. I bind her food and her drink, her sleep and her laughter, her intercourse⁵⁴

⁵² Eidinow¹ (n. 42), 143–4 and 217–8.

⁵³ Translations of the curses are taken from Eidinow¹ (n. 42).

⁵⁴ Eidinow's¹ (n. 42) translation reads ‘meetings’, but intercourse is more appropriate here.

and her cithara playing, her entrance, her pleasure, her little buttocks,
her thoughts, her eyes ...

Other curses target female genitalia (*DTA* 77 κύσθους, κύσθον, *DTA* 89 ἀκρωτήρια), which, apart from inhibiting sexual contact, may also signify the intention of causing infertility.⁵⁵ In *Ecclesiazusae* the situation is very similar: the crude curse of the old woman has obviously erotic overtones, since she targets the ‘hole’ of the young girl, wishing that it falls out,⁵⁶ when she is about to perform the sexual act. In addition to preventing sexual intercourse, the curse may also aim at causing infertility and childlessness for the young woman. This has grave implications for the *oikos* in the new status quo: at the rare instances that a young woman is able to mate with a young man, before any other old and ugly woman, the union is still not allowed to result to the production of children.

The reference to the bed is also common in curses and binding spells. In *DT* 68 and 69 the κοίτη is mentioned as a way of implying the sexual act: in *DT* 68 a woman called Theodora is cursed in her relationship with Charias (probably that of a *hetaira* with a client).⁵⁷

Side A:

[κα] ταδῶ Θε [ο] δώρα [ν] πρὸς [τ] ḥ-

⁵⁵ Eidinow¹ (n. 42), 151.

⁵⁶ Probably a medical reference to ὑστερικὴ πρόπτωσις. See Ussher (n. 13), 201.

⁵⁷ Eidinow¹ (n. 42), 218.

[ν] παρὰ Φε [ρρε] φαττηι και πρὸς
[το (ὑ) ζ] ἀτελ [έ] σ [το (υ) ζ] · ἀτελής [ε] ᾶ [η] α [ύτὴ^η
κα] ἵ ὅτι ἄμ πρὸς Καλλίαν διαλ [έγειν] μέλ-
[ληι και πρ] ὃς Χαλλίαν ὅτι ἄν διαλ [έγειν] μέλληι
και ἔ] ργα και ἔπη και ἐργασίας· α πρ
ἔπη λόγον ὅν ἄμ πο [τ] και λέ [γηι · καταδῶ (?)
Θεο] δώραν πρὸς Χαρίαν ἀτελή αύτὴ (ν) ε [ίν] αι
[και ἔπι] λαθέσθαι Χαρίαν Θεοδώρα [ζ] και το [ῦ π] α [ι-
δί] ο (υ) τοῦ Θεοδώρας ἐπιλαθέσ [θ] αι Χαρί [α] ν
[και τῆς] κοίτης τῆς [π] ρὸς Θε [οδ] ώρα [ν.]

Side B:

[ώς] οὔτος [έ] ντ [α] ӯ [θ] α ἀτε [λ] ḥς κ [εῖται, οϋ -]
[τως] ἀτέλεστα εῖναι Θεοδώρ [ας πάντα]
[κα] ἵ ᔁπη και ἔργα τὰ πρὸς Χαρίαν και
[πρ] ὃς ἄλλος ἀνθρώπος· καταδ [ῶ Θεόδω-]
[ρον π] ρὸς τὸν Ἔρμην τὸ<γ> χθόνιον κα [ὶ πρὸς]
τὸς ἀ] τελέστος και πρὸς τὴν Τῆθυν. ἀ [τελέστ-]
[α κ] αὶ ἔργα τὰ πρὸς Χαρίαν · και τὸς ἄλλος
[ἀνθ] ρώπος και [τὴν] κοίτην τὴν π [ρ] ὃς Χαρίαν
[ἐπι] λαθέσ [θ] αι Χαρίαν τῆς κ [οί] της· [χ] αρ [ίαν]
και. το (ῦ) παιδίο (υ) [θ] ε [οδ] ώ [ρας ἐπιλαθέ-

σθαι ἥσ] π [ερ] ἐρᾶ [ι] ἐκε [τνος]

γ ο

Side A:

I bind Theodora in the presence of the one beside Persephone and the unhappy dead. May she be useless both whenever she is about to chat with Kallias and whenever she is about to chat with Charias and her deeds and words and business ... Words, talk that, at any time, she may say. I bind Theodora to be useless with regard to Charias and Charias to forget Theodora and Charias to forget the child of Theodora /dear little Theodora and sex with Theodora.

Side B:

Just as this man lies here, useless, in the same way may everything of Theodora's be useless, both her words and deeds, those directed to Charias and those to other men. I bind Theodora in the presence of Hermes of the underworld and in the presence of the unhappy dead and before Tethys. Useless the deeds directed at Charias and the other men and sex with Charias and Charias should forget sex; Charias should forget the child of Theodora /dear little Theodora, the woman he loves.

The person who curses the relationship asks that Charias forgets the bed (*κοίτης*) of Theodora and that Theodora and her deeds towards Charias (and other men) prove to be

useless (καταδῶ Θεοδώρα πρὸς Χαρίαν ἀτελὴ αύτὴν εἶναι, ἀτέλεστα καὶ ἔργα τὰ πρὸς Χαρίαν καὶ τὸς ἄλλος ανθρώπος). Thus, the main target appears to be the sexual power and success of Theodora, mainly with regard to Charias; the sexual contact may have already taken place or it could be the possibility of it that the curse is targeting.⁵⁸ Again, the situation is reminiscent of that in *Ecclesiazusae*. The old woman wishes that the girl loses the headrest (ἐπίκλιντρον) when she lies down with her man, and we may reasonably assume that it is the sexual act that she wants to impede or prevent from taking place. On the other hand, if Sommerstein⁵⁹ is right that the ἐπίκλιντρον refers to the girl's bum, then the old woman is trying to immobilize another part of her body, a particularly erogenous one. In the last part of the curse (908–10 κάπι τῆς κλίνης ὄφιν/εῦροις καὶ προσελκύσαιο/βουλομένη φιλῆσαι) the text is corrupted and not very clear: probably the snake alludes to the phallus of the young man,⁶⁰ to which the old woman addresses her

⁵⁸ One of the possibilities for the writer of the curse is that it was a woman jealous of Theodora's trade, a *hetaira* perhaps. See Dickie (n. 41), 516, Eidinow¹ (n. 42), 218. Cf. a text from Attica (4th century) which seeks to bind the wife of Dion, Glykera, so that she becomes ἀτελὴς γάμου, which may be a curse to the couple's hope for children. See W.K. Kovacsovics, *Die Eckterrasse an der Gräberstrasse der Kerameikos* (Berlin, 1990), Eidinow¹ (n. 42), 350.

⁵⁹ Sommerstein (n. 9), 216.

⁶⁰ Ussher (n. 13), 201, Henderson (n. 14), 127. See also P.E. Slater, *The Glory of Hera: Greek Mythology and the Greek Family* (Princeton, 1992), 80 for the traditional psychoanalytic interpretation of the snake as a phallic object.

curse. Since snakes are also symbolic of death,⁶¹ it could be that the old woman curses the man's phallus to be limp, so that the sexual union with the girl is unsuccessful. Again, there are some parallels in curses, where the male genitals are targeted (*DTA* 77 ψωλάς, ψωλήν) not always in an erotic context, but as a wish for an enemy's general ill-will (*SGD* 88). The writer of *SGD* 57 wants to separate Euboula from Aeneas, but more attention is drawn to the male half of the couple, since his body parts are mentioned, from which Euboula is cursed to stay away (cf. esp. πρωκτοῦ and, possibly, ψωλίου in line 8):⁶²

ἀποστρέφω Εῦβουλαν
ἀπὸ Αἰνέα, ἀπὸ τοῦ ^{vv}
προσωπού, ἀπὸ τῶν ὄφ-
θαλμῶν, [ἀπό] τοῦ στόμα
τος, ἀπὸ τῶν τιθθίαν, ^v
ἀπὸ τᾶς ψυχᾶς, ^{vvv}
ἀπὸ τᾶς γάστρος, ἀπὸ
[τ] οὗ.... ., ἀπὸ τοῦ πρω
κτου, ἀφ' ὅλου τοῦ σώμα
τος. Ἀποστρέφω Εῦβου-

⁶¹ Cf. the Erinyes which are portrayed as dragons with attendant vipers (A. *Ch.* 549, E. *IT* 286) and the snakes on Greek portrayals of royal tombs. See Slater (n. 60), 85.

⁶² See Eidinow¹ (n. 42), 220–1 and 418.

λαν ἀπ' Αίνέα.

I turn Euboula away from Aineas, from his face, from his eyes, from his mouth, from his breasts, from his spirit, from his stomach, from his penis, from his anus, from his whole body. I turn Euboula away from Aineas.

Unsurprisingly, it is the old woman and not the girl who resorts to a binding curse in order to thwart her rival. By contrast to the aforementioned separation curses, which were written on tablets, the old woman addresses her curse to the young woman in person. One must bear in mind, however, that the pronouncement of the curse was as important as its inscription on lead, wax or other pliable material. The cursing formula attended the gesture, as it could be recited over the tablet while it was being twisted and perforated.⁶³ It may be that the practice of writing binding curses grew out of existing oral traditions, as many

⁶³ C.A. Faraone, ‘The agonistic context of early Greek binding spells’, in C.A. Faraone and D. Obbink (edd.), *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion* (New York, 1991), 3–32 at 4–5. Cf. the use of both inscribed and uninscribed voodoo dolls in classical Greece. See Faraone (id.), 24, n.19 and n.31. Unfortunately, we have no indication as to whether the old woman makes twisting or perforating gestures on stage that would reinforce the interpretation of the binding curse.

scholars have argued.⁶⁴ In Euripides' *Medea* plain cursing takes place in the context of erotic competition, as Medea spells out her curses to Jason and Glauke on stage (E. *Med.* 113–4, 160–5, 625–6, 803–6). This shows that cursing was essentially an oral practice, as one would have imagined;⁶⁵ but there is also literary evidence that binding songs and magic curses were intoned in Athens at least fifty years before the date given to the first Attic tablets (fifth to early fourth century B.C.). For instance, literary parallels of magic love curses are found in tragedy, which are spoken out spontaneously and are sometimes addressed to someone on stage: in *Eumenides* (327–33) the Erinyes utter their own binding curse against Orestes.⁶⁶ In *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra's binding spell is sung on stage (958–

⁶⁴ R. Wünsch, *Defixionum Tabellae Atticae Inscr. Gr.*, vol. 3, pt. 3, (Berlin, 1887), ii–iii, A. Audollent, *Defixionum Tabellae* (Paris, 1904), xlvi, Eidinow (n. 42), 140–1. E.G. Kagarow, *Griechische Fluchtafeln* (Leopoli, 1929), 5–6 believes that the gesture (i.e. the piercing of the tablet) was the original ritual and that the verbal aspect was a later addition that reinforced and eventually replaced the action as people began to forget its original meaning. See also R. Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, 1992), 80 ‘curses, whether private or public, must date back long before writing was used for them, and the efficacy of the curse did not depend on its being written’.

⁶⁵ Cf. the public curses from the city of Teos (ML30) and the public display of later *defixiones* on temples and gravestones. See J. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York and Oxford, 1992), 176–8. See also Thomas (n. 79), 80–2.

⁶⁶ C.A. Faraone, ‘Aeschylus’ ὕμνος δέσμιος (*Eum.* 306) and Attic judicial curse tablets’, *JHS* 105 (1985), 150–4, Eidinow¹ (n. 42), 141.

74)⁶⁷ and addressed to Agamemnon in person (961 ἄναξ, 968 σοῦ μολόντος, 974 μέλοι δέ τοί σοι τῶνπερ ἂν μέλληις τελεῖν), in what is suggested to be a context of erotic competition, since Clytemnestra has just seen Cassandra. Moreover, comic writers were familiar with magic practices,⁶⁸ and Aristophanes, in particular, appears to parody a magical incantation that turns up repeatedly in Hellenistic and Roman-era charms for erotic purposes.⁶⁹ In this light, the curse in *Ecclesiazusae* is not uncommon, neither in terms of its orality nor of its appearance in a comic context.

I will now move on to the ‘love duet’ (960–76).⁷⁰ The song, as has been argued,⁷¹ borrows elements from the παρακλαυσίθυρον, the song sung by an excluded lover from

⁶⁷ See McClure (n. 20).

⁶⁸ Faraone (n. 32), 8–9.

⁶⁹ C.A. Faraone, ‘Aristophanes’ *Amphiarous* frag. 29 (Kassel-Austin): oracular response or erotic incantation?’, *CQ* 42 (1993), 320–7.

⁷⁰ As identified by C.M. Bowra, ‘A love duet’, *AJP* 79 (1958), 376–91. His thesis has been refuted by S.D. Olson, ‘The “love duet” in Aristophanes’ *Ecclesiazusae*’, *CQ* 38 (1988), 328–30, who gives a much more suitable interpretation of the scene. F.S. Halliwell, ‘Aristophanic sex: the erotics of shamelessness’, in M.C. Nussbaum and J. Sihvola (edd.), *The Sleep of Reason: Erotic Experience and Sexual Ethics in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Chicago, 2002), 120–42, at 133 suggests an affiliation with the low-life scenes of subliterary mime.

⁷¹ W. Headlam, *Herodas, the Mimes and Fragments*, edited by A.D. Knox (Cambridge, 1922), and Olson (n. 66).

the street to his beloved within. The song combines elements from both the παρακλαυσίθυρον song and the ἀγωγή spells. The ἀγωγή spells were a form of love-magic which have come down to us from a first-century B.C. papyrus handbook from Egypt and a second-century lead tablet from Carthage, but there is evidence that they were used in classical Greece from the time of Pindar and were indeed popular by the late classical period.⁷² According to Faraone,⁷³ these spells were used by men in connection with women and sought to bind the female victim and force her to come and make love to the male practitioner. Most of the extant ἀγωγή spells aimed at torturing the victim until she would be helplessly drawn to the practitioner's house and bed.⁷⁴

In *Ecclesiazusae*, both the girl's and the young man's linguistic choices evoke the vocabulary one encounters in the ἀγωγή spells; but theirs is a rather unorthodox spell: it is the girl who first applies it, in the presence of the young man, the intended victim, and then the young man picks it up and attempts to apply it himself. The girl uses the incantatory repetition of δεῦρο (951–3 δεῦρο δή, δεῦρο δή, / φίλον ἐμόν, δεῦρό μοι/πρόσελθε), asks that she is released from her torture, the torments of *eros* (958 μέθες, ἵκνοῦμαί σ', Ἔρως),

⁷² See Faraone n. 33, 55–95, 133–60 and *passim*, who discusses the cases of Xenophon *Memorabilia* 3.11.16, Aristophanes *Clouds* 996–7, Lucian *Dialogues of the Courtesans* 4.1 and Theocritus' second *Idyll*. For an early appearance of magic incantation in fr. 1 of Sappho, see J.C.B. Petropoulos, 'Sappho the sorceress: another look at fr. 1 (LP)', *ZPE* 97 (1993), 43–56.

⁷³ Faraone (n. 32), 83.

⁷⁴ See Winkler (n. 24), Faraone (n. 32), 58.

and then uses the magic incantation to draw her lover to her house and bed (959–60 ποίησον τόνδ' ἐς εύνὴν / τὴν ἐμὴν ικέσθαι). One may compare this line to Simaetha's refrain in Theocritus' second idyll, where Simaetha performs an ἀγωγή spell to drive her former boyfriend, Daphnis, away from his current lover and bring him back to her: Ἰνγξ, ἔλκε τὸ τῆνον ἐμὸν ποτὶ δῶμα τὸν ἄνδρα (17, 21, 26, 37, 41, 43, 56, 62). The formula finds also parallels in the *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, such as the inscription on *PGM* 7.462–6 which reads 'cause her, NN, to love me' and on *PGM* 19b.1–3 'may he [bring] him, NN, to her, NN'.⁷⁵

What is important here is that the magic process which the girl initiates was most commonly applied by young, unmarried males.⁷⁶ Any women who had recourse to it were either prostitutes, bored married women or perhaps widows, but respectable unmarried girls were hardly credited with practising magic.⁷⁷ Faraone has argued that the courtesan who

⁷⁵ See also *PGM* 36.69–101 '[...] as you are in flames and on fire, so also the soul, the heart of her, NN, whom NN bore, until she comes loving me, NN, and glues her female pudenda to my male one, immediately, immediately; quickly, quickly'. A similar formula is repeated in *PGM* 36.102–33 and 1334–60. Cf. *PGM* 36.187–210 'Hecate, you, Hecate, triple-formed, since every seal of every [love spell of attractions] has been completed, I adjure you by the great name of ABLANATHANA and by the power of AGGRAMARI, because I adjure you, you who possess the fire, ONYR, and those in it, that she, NN, be set afire, that she come in pursuit of me, NN [...]'.

⁷⁶ Dickie (n. 41), 580.

⁷⁷ Faraone (n. 32), 150–4, Dickie (n. 41), 580–1.

was often forthright in her pursuit of men through various magical practices was a traditional literary stereotype.⁷⁸ Thus Aristophanes may present the four women in a situation that would have been instantly recognizable to his ancient audience as typical of courtesans who try to get a lover by performing the sort of aggressive erotic magic that was otherwise typical of men.⁷⁹ Indeed, the young girl who advertises, by singing in public, her attractiveness and availability, who declares openly how she waits and longs for her boyfriend (912) and advises her rival to order a dildo (915–17), adopts the way of prostitutes.⁸⁰

The young man, following the girl's lead, repeats the incantatory words (971–2 and 975 ἄνοιξον, ἀσπάζου με / διά τοι σὲ πόνους ἔχω) and gives a fuller account of his sufferings (966 Κύπρι τί μ' ἐκμαίνεις ἐπὶ ταύτῃ;, 969–70 καὶ ταῦτα μέντοι μετρίως πρὸς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάγκην / εἰρημέν' ἔστιν). The part where the practitioner wishes for the victim's torture is comically replaced by the young man's promise of sexual violence (963–5 ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ σῷ / βιούλομαι κόλπῳ / πληκτίζεσθαι μετὰ τῆς σῆς πυγῆς).⁸¹ However, the magic refrain with which the young man addresses the girl (*ποίησον (τόνδ')τήνδ' ἐς εύνὴν / τὴν*

⁷⁸ Faraone (n. 32), 1–2, 149–54.

⁷⁹ For the social construction of gender in magic see Faraone (n. 32), 146–60.

⁸⁰ The same goes for the three old women who wear heavy make-up (887–9, 929, 1072) and are all dressed up (879 *κροκωτόν*) like the old *hetaira* in *Wealth* (962–3, 1064–5). See Halliwell (n. 70), 126–42 and Sommerstein (n. 10), 248–50.

⁸¹ See J. Henderson, 'Sparring partners: a note on Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazusae* 964–965', *AJPh* 95 (1974), 344–47.

έμὴν ικέσθαι) is not appropriate for the situation: it makes sense for the woman who is within her house, but not for the man who is on the street. The futility of the young man's attempt to gain control through magic practices over the young woman is accentuated by his subsequent submissiveness to the will of the old women. One could imagine that the young man's spell, instead of attracting the young girl, worked on the old woman, who indeed appears in front of him, but wants to drag *him* into her house. Moreover, if Faraone is right in arguing that the majority of attractions spells were based on the model of bridal theft, that is, using violent means to extract a woman from her existing family or relationship and forge a new one,⁸² the young man's attempt becomes even more inappropriate: the institution of marriage has been abolished and he is no more in a position to choose the woman he will have sex with; old and ugly women have the right to choose *him* instead. This is painfully obvious in the scene with the old women: as each one of them attempts to snatch him, the magic vocabulary persists. The rivals use various forms of the verbs ἄγω and ἔλκω (1001 ἐγὼ δ' ἄξω σ' ἐπὶ τάμᾳ στρώματα, 1036–7 ποῦ τοῦτον ἔλκεις; / εἰς ἐμαυτῆς εἰσάγω, 1050 ἔλκεις, cf. 886 προσάξεσθαι), which are most common in the

⁸² Faraone (n. 32), 83. By contrast, Dickie (n. 41) argues that it is not clear that the spells were written with the intention of achieving marriage, since most of them are directed not at untameable young women, but at women experienced in sex and who sometimes are involved in marriages with someone else. In this case, the man's attempted magic practices would be more appropriate, since his target is not a young virgin secluded in the house and guarded by her relatives.

ἀγωγή spells,⁸³ while the man exclaims in fear and disgust that he is being ‘dragged’ (1055 ἐλκόμενον, 1066 οὐκ ἔγωγ', ἀλλ' ἐλκομαι, 1093–4 ἔγγὺς ἥδη τῆς θύρας / ἐλκόμενός εἰμ').

Thus, the violent dragging around of the young man by the sexually aroused women is assimilated to the effect that an ἀγωγή spell would have, if the women cast it on the man.

The use of the magic vocabulary in this case offers an ironic comment to the situation of the young man, who has turned from an aspiring magic practitioner and most ardent lover to a sexual victim and most unwilling partner in the hands of the old women, who have to suggest the use of aphrodisiacs in order to make some use of him (1091–2). The young man experiences the agonies which the target of the ἀγωγή must feel and be pained with⁸⁴ and is, finally, dragged, against his will, to the house and bed of the third old woman.

3. CONCLUSIONS

We may now proceed to an evaluation of Praxagora's new world. The abolition of marriage and the new sexual laws lead to an exuberance of female desire, which finds its outlet through the aggressive stance of the old women against the young man and the application of love-magic. On the one hand, the men of Athens are weak, emasculated and let

⁸³ Faraone (n. 32), 151 notes the use of the verb ἄγω to describe the effect of the spell.

⁸⁴ ἀγωγή spells frequently refer to the torment experienced by the lover. Cf. Sappho fr. 1 with Petropoulos (n. 72). See also Winkler (n. 24), 225–6 who argues that the ἀγωγή ritual worked as a therapy for the invasive forces of *eros* through behaviour modification: the practitioners take on the aloofness of the victims, while they transfer their torment to them, and thus gain control over the situation.

themselves be led by their women; on the other hand, the women assume male roles and are transformed into aggressive prostitutes and sexual predators. Most importantly, the inversion of the men's and women's gender roles, and the overturn of the normal social order, bring about the infertility and the (figurative) death of the young and vital forces of the city. The end of the play is marked by a forced, sterile union between a young man and an old woman.

This brave new world has a lot to say about the socio-political circumstances at the time of the play's creation and production. First of all, it attests to male anxieties about the changing status of women in the fourth century and their more frequent presence outside the realm of the *oikos*. There are indications that the exclusion of women from male-dominated spheres was much less extensive as the fifth century gave way to the fourth.⁸⁵ Due to the continuous warfare in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., a good number of women who were left without direct male support would have to fend for themselves and, thus, be employed more than before in agricultural tasks and petty commerce.⁸⁶ Stories from the orators also show that women were handling much larger sums in financial transactions as household managers⁸⁷ and that widows had sometimes the freedom to

⁸⁵ Rothwell (n. 4), 19–23.

⁸⁶ See M. Golden, 'Demography and the exposure of girls at Athens', *Phoenix* 35 (1981), 316–31, R. Cudjoe, *The Social and Legal Position of Widows and Orphans in Classical Athens* (Athens, 2010). See also Eidinow² (n.42), 307–8.

⁸⁷ Dem. 27.53–5 and [Dem.] 36.14–16. See L. Foxhall, 'Household, gender and property in classical Athens', *CQ* 39 (1989), 22–44.

decide whether they would stay in their paternal or their husbands' *oikos*.⁸⁸ This potential for freedom would have been viewed as dangerous to the status quo and may have instigated male fears about the repercussions of (unstable and irrational) women gaining power over men.

Second, the demolition of the *oikos* and the subsequent conversion of all women into *hetairai* betrays a concern about the blurring of social categories between citizens and non-citizens, also attested in other literary sources of the time.⁸⁹ As Eidinow has shown,⁹⁰ the forensic corpus is haunted by the figure of the dangerous *hetaira*, whose ambiguous position compromises the integrity of the household and, subsequently, the health of the whole community. The evidence for charges of supernatural activities brought against such

⁸⁸ Dem. 27.13–15 and 29.26, Hyp. 1 fr. IVb.3 and 7, Isae. 9.27–9 and 6.51. See Ø. Andersen, ‘The widows, the city and Thucydides (2.45.2)’, *Symbolae Osloenses* 62 (1987), 33–49.

⁸⁹ Isae. 12.2 and Dem. 57.25 mention how people were forced by poverty to adopt foreigners. Cf. the case of Phano in [Dem.] 59 with D. Ogden, *Greek Bastardy in the Classical and Hellenistic Periods* (Oxford, 1996), 124. Concerns about citizenship become, of course, much more prominent in Menander’s New Comedy. See S. Lape, *Reproducing Athens: Menander’s Comedy, Democratic Culture, and the Hellenistic City* (Princeton, 2004).

⁹⁰ Eidinow² (n.42), 312–35.

women⁹¹ shows that the practice of magic played an important role in the formation of the cultural stereotype of the dangerous woman in the fourth century. The charges expressed a moral panic, ‘a scare about a threat or supposed threat from deviants or folk devils’.⁹² These issues resonate in *Ecclesiazusae* too and they encapsulate the nightmares of the Athenian citizen imaginary: magic becomes a foil for the formulation of civic identity and a threatening expression of female sexuality.

Finally, the shift in social attitudes from the fifth to the fourth century B.C. explains the different character of the gynaecocracy between *Ecclesiazusae* and the earlier *Lysistrata*. Already in *Lysistrata* of 411 men view the women’s rebellion in sexual terms: gynaecocracy translates as women on top in the sexual sphere (671–9). Yet the sex-crazed women of *Lysistrata* operate within the marital framework and, under the contemporary socio-political circumstances, could not but function as symbols of peace and fertility. The sterility scenario was simply not appropriate for the dark times of the Peloponnesian war and could not have been enacted: it was too close to home to be funny. In 392, however, the socio-political environment was different. Perhaps, as Sommerstein⁹³ has argued, the

⁹¹ Eidinow² (n.42) discusses three four-century *graphai* trials against women who were charged with the practice of magic, as well as other incidents that involve women notorious for claiming special influence with the gods or using poisonous *philtira*.

⁹² Eidinow² (n. 42), 10.

⁹³ Sommerstein (n. 1) and A.H. Sommerstein, ‘An alternative democracy and an alternative to democracy in Aristophanic comedy’, in A.H. Sommerstein (ed.), *Talking About Laughter and Other Studies in Greek Comedy* (Oxford, 2009), 204–22.

change in tone in Aristophanes' last extant plays must be sought in Aristophanes himself; but it may also be that the ground was more fertile (pun intended) for such a dystopian alternative to be appreciated for its comic splendour.

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