KAITI DIAMANTAKOU – AGATHOU

FROM ASPASIA TO LYSISTRATA

LITERARY VERSIONS AND INTERTEXTUAL DIFFUSIONS OF THE FEMININE OTHER IN CLASSICAL ATHENS

ABSTRACT: If the Peloponnesian war burst out because of three prostitutes, two of them belonging to Aspasia, according to Aristophanes' (mis?)information in *Acharnians* of 425 BC, by contrast, in 411, Aristophanes assigned to a woman, Lysistrata, the extraordinary mission to end the Peloponnesian War, using once more the power of sex. Is (the fictional, Athenian, socially and morally respectful) Lysistrata of 411 BC a cryptic reverse image of (the real, non-Athenian, socially and morally ambiguous) Aspasia, who both employ the power of sex, the one to set off the war, the other one to end it? Using the figure of Aspasia as a *par excellence* "case" of the Other in ancient Greek society, this paper reviews her obvious and latent traces in extant fifth- and fourth-century literature, focusing on Aristophanes' overt or allusive references in his *Acharnians*, *Peace* and, last but not least, *Lysistrata*.

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THE WELL-KNOWN and ongoing debate regarding the means and the aim of the representation of femininity by male writers and artists of classical antiquity still thrives and ignites controversies between scholars from the different fields of Humanities. Within this large scope of consideration, which includes various aspects even within the confines of the same

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theoretical direction,[1] we shall focus on the emblematic case of Aspasia of Miletus, in order to overview how the figure of a "real" woman is constructed in quite an ambivalent way through the gaze and testimonies of specific male writers of the era. These men, despite their age difference and literary specialization, were born, grew up and wrote under the echo of that female "key figure in the intellectual history of fifth century Athens",[2] "one of the most striking, eloquent, and controversial women of her age, perhaps the most extraordinary woman in all of classical antiquity",[3] who lived there from around the mid-fifth century BC until the end of the fifth century and before the death of Socrates in 399 BC, when her own death has been conjectured.[4]

THE LITERARY IMAGE OF ASPASIA AND ITS MULTIPLE FACETS

While, obviously, she was not like "all other women" of classical Athens, but also without possibly being "a singular case",[5] Aspasia is surely the only historical female person on whom there is so much information deriving from various and often quite contradicting literary sources, which give evidence of a particularly polyphonic and conflicting male attitude against the specific multiple otherness that this (non-Athenian, of aristocratic Ionian origin, educated, socially extrovert and sexually alluring) *δεινὴ* — formidable and terrible alike — woman condensed within her.

One of the ways to deal with Aspasia, and perhaps with Athens's resident women in general, was by completely disregarding and silencing her. This is the case of Thucydides (c. 460 – c. 400 BC), who, in his *History*,

1. Regarding the various tendencies of the academic critique on that topic, see Griffith (2001); Sampatakakis (2005: 94-99); Mossman (2005); Zaidman and Pantel (2007); Foxhall (2013), to name but a few.
2. Henry (1995) 3. We shall not consider sources of late antiquity — which, in general, convey a rather positive view on Aspasia, at least as far as her intellectual and rhetoric abilities are concerned — limiting ourselves to writers who, regardless of their age differences, have been Aspasia's contemporaries and whose readings would be refracted, in a way or another, in the later ones. For a survey of the sources of Post-Classical, Hellenistic, Roman and Late Antiquity (Clearchus of Soli, Hermesianax, Didymus, Plutarch, Lucian, Athenaeus, Quintilian, et al.), see, for instance, Henry (1995) 57-82.
3. D'Angour (2019) 123.
4. About this specific dating of her death, which is primarily based on the structure of the Socratic dialogue *Aspasia* by Aeschines, see Nails (2000) 58-59, among others.
5. As the following references to the historic figures of Athenian priestesses Lysimache and Myrrhine would indicate.

which he presumably started writing at the beginning of his twenty-year exile around 420 BC, makes absolutely no reference or any kind of allusion to Aspasia, and does not ascribe to her a role either as a third-person narrator or as a first-person intermediary between his male protagonists. Aspasia and the personal-familial sphere in general are consciously omitted from the narration of facts that occurred during the male-dominated military and diplomatic period of reference.[6] Therefore, if our only existing source on the Peloponnesian War and the second half of the fifth century had been Thucydides' *History*, on one hand, the existence of Aspasia would have been completely unknown, and on the other hand, our knowledge on the public status of women in ancient Athens would have been limited to the "honour" of being unseen and silent, to which Pericles himself urges the widows of war, in the famous short ending of the two chapters dedicated to the consolation of the living in the Funeral Oration (Thuc. 2.45.2):

> *εἰ δέ με δεῖ καὶ γυναικείας τι ἀρετῆς, ὅσαι νῦν ἐν χηρείᾳ ἔσονται, μνησθῆναι, βραχείᾳ παραινέσει ἅπαν σημανῶ. τῆς τε γὰρ ὑπαρχούσης φύσεως μὴ χείροσι γενέσθαι ὑμῖν μεγάλη ἡ δόξα καὶ ἧς ἂν ἐπ' ἐλάχιστον ἀρετῆς πέρι ἢ ψόγου ἐν τοῖς ἄρσεσι κλέος ᾖ.*
>
> On the other hand, if I must say anything on the subject of female excellence to those of you who will now be in widowhood, it will be all comprised in this brief exhortation. Great will be your glory in not falling short of your natural character; and greatest will be hers who is least talked of among the men whether for good or for bad.[7]

This is the only long speech where Pericles addresses a mixed audience, the one assembled at the Kerameikos cemetery in the summer of 430,[8] among which the companion of the "first man" of that time — and mother of their son, Pericles Junior, born not later than 437 BC[9] — must have been most probably present (Thuc. 2.34.4):

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6. For the typically Thucydidean "deliberate exclusion of the personal, the private, the individual's life outside the city" in his "attempt to create a military-political historiography founded on non-personal causation — cities and armies and money, not people", see Grobble (2011) 455-486 (441: citation).
7. Transl. R. Crawley.
8. On that specific passage of Thucydides' / Pericles' Funeral Oration, cf. significantly Loraux (1981) 179-211; Wiedemann (1983); Bennett and Tyrrell (1999).
9. D'Angour (2019) 128.

ξυνεκφέρει δὲ ὁ βουλόμενος καὶ ἀστῶν καὶ ξένων, καὶ γυναῖκες πάρεισιν αἱ ἐπὶ τὸν τάφον ὀλοφυρόμεναι.

Any citizen or stranger who pleases, joins in the procession: and the female relatives are there to wail at the burial".

Clearly more eloquent than silencing is the choice of masking and disguising Aspasia under the comic mantle of a mythological woman, always within "sexual, sexualized and sexualizing context".[10] In that kind of context, Helen, Omphale, Hera, Deianeira, Leda are some exemplary mythic parallel facets of Aspasia that have been employed by Old Comedy in order to criticize the — presumed or real — personal addiction and even political dependency of Pericles (i.e. Paris, Heracles, Zeus, Cronus), who is the main target to be attacked.[11] In the tragic field, much more backhanded and controversial as a potential intertextual reflection of Aspasia is the figure of the Euripidean Medea — a non-Greek in Greece, with a disputable marital status and civic identity — who eventually, just like Aspasia, comes to perturb the established cultural, social and gender order, at the City Dionysia of 431 BC, right at the peak of the negotiations between Athens and Sparta (Corinth, the place of action in Euripides' *Medea*, being a major ally of the latter) and shortly before the outburst of the Peloponnesian War.[12]

One more aspect that can be related to the genre of Old Comedy is that the satiric masking and disguise can easily turn to unambiguous and nominal outcry. In a fragment from *Cheirones* (fr. 259 K-A: *Ἥραν τέ οἱ Ἀσπασίαν τίκτει Καταπυγοσύνη παλλακὴν κυνώπιδα*) Cratinus (c. 485; – c. 422 BC) equates explicitly Hera with Aspasia, the "dog-eyed concubine", who is the cause for the "extreme voluptuousness" of Pericles; in *Demoi* (fr. 110 K-A: *ὁ νόθος δέ μοι ζῇ; — καὶ πάλαι γ' ἂν ἦν ἀνήρ, εἰ μὴ τὸ τῆς πόρνης ὑπωρρώδει*

10. Henry (1995) 19.
11. For the comic — most probably, extravagant and distorted — testimonies on Aspasia and Pericles, in plays which did have a strong political element alongside the mythical, see Stadter (1989) 240; Henry (1995) 19-25; Powell (1995); Bowie (2000) 324-327; Henderson (2000) 139-140; Rusten (2006).
12. Cf. Konishi' s suggestion (1986) for this identification and its refutation by Wilkins (1987). We keep here solely to Medea and do not include other riskier intertextual correlations of female dramatic characters (e.g. Phaedra, Creusa) with Aspasia, which, nevertheless, have been suggested and thus have entered the field of being considered as possible; see Vickers (2000) 10; (2014) 299-318.

κακόν)[13] by Eupolis (c. 446 BC – c. 411 BC) the son of Pericles and Aspasia is called a "bastard" and his mother a "whore", an unfortunate fact for her son's life. Hermippus, another playwright of the Old Comedy who flourished during the Peloponnesian War, is credited (Plut. *Per.* 32.1 = T 2 K-A) with the — real or fictional? — summons of metic Aspasia to a trial for "impiety" (*asebeia*),[14] while in an obscure fragment (21 K-A), probably by the playwright Callias and from his comedy *Pedetai*, Aspasia is supposed to have been the language tutor of Pericles, in a comic reasoning that aims at exposing both the tutor and the apprentice, the woman and the man, the one through the other.[15] Nevertheless, such manifestations are also found in other genres: the minor Socratic Antisthenes (c. 446 BC – c. 366 BC), who fought against excessive hedonism, devotes a complete — yet lost nowadays — dialogue to Aspasia, focusing on her libertinage and the intense erotic passion between her and Pericles, apparently considered as a direct evidence of the morbid decadence and degeneration of the former healthy male democratic body.[16]

Conversely, probably as a reaction to Antisthenes' negative illustration of Aspasia, Aeschines of Sphettus (c. 425 BC – c. 350 BC), a follower and interlocutor of Socrates, counter-proposes at the beginning of the fourth century BC the philosophic dialogue *Aspasia*, which — most probably having been enriched with abundant fictional elements[17] — focuses, in a positive view, on Aspasia *per se* and her strong oratorical abilities, rather than on her relationship to some important male figure, mainly Pericles: a (literary and existential) emancipation which "may represent a particular moment in the history of consciousness, namely, an early attempt to create a female subject", as Madeleine Henry notes.[18] Almost of the same age as Aeschines, Xenophon (c. 431 BC – c. 370 BC), also a follower of Socrates, refrains from mentioning Aspasia in his *Hellenica* which continues Thucydides' *History*,

13. On this fragment and for further bibliography, see Storey (2000) 177 and 185 n. 7.
14. On the much controversial question of the historicity of this prosecution, cf. Stadter (1989) 297-298; Henry (1995) 24-25; Gilula (2000) 76; McGlew (2002) 53; D'Angour (2019) 126.
15. For a succinct recapitulation of the explicit scurrilous accusations of comedy towards Aspasia, see, to cite just a few, Henry (1995) 19-28; Tsitsiridis (1998) 163-164; D'Angour (2019) 125-126.
16. On Antisthenes' attack to Aspasia, see Henry (1995) 31-32; Kahn (1997) 33-34; Loraux (2001) 20-21; Hakkert and Prince (2015).
17. On Aspasia' s portrayal by Aeschines of Sphettus, see, among others, Kahn (1994) 96-99; Loraux (2001) 20-30.
18. Henry (1995) 45.

yet makes positive references to her both in his *Memorabilia* (2.6.36) and in his *Oeconomicus* (3.14), although in both instances Aspasia's unusual eloquence and expertise — as "a relationship coach and matchmaker"[19] — are principally related to the interests and needs of male dominant discourse.[20]

If Xenophon's Aspasia is interested in private matters related to companionship and marriage, in Plato's *Menexenus* (235 el – 236 d3, 249 dl-e7) Aspasia not only is presented as a public political orator and Socrates' "tutor" — a unique case in Plato's voluminous work, where a relationship between Socrates and Aspasia is mentioned explicitly[21] — but is also credited with the composition of the famous Funeral Oration of Pericles, while the latter only delivered the speech rather obediently.[22] In this openly anachronistic, hence deliberately self-subverting and deeply ironic, if not playful and parodical, platonic dialogue of two "ghosts" (Aspasia and Socrates, who were already dead when this fictional dialogue was supposed to take place around 386 BC)[23] as well as of two "ghost-writers" (Thucydides and Plato),[24] the divergence between, on one side, the political and rhetorical practices of the male-oriented Athenian society, and, on the other, the respective skills and capabilities of ancient women of the time — even if their representative is here the 'exceptional' Aspasia — is artfully and blatantly eliminated, so that the constructed female Other becomes at the same time the strongest evidence and a powerful means of criticism of the degenerated

19. D'Angour (2019) 127.
20. On Xenophon' s Aspasia see again Henry (1995) 45-52; Loraux (2001) 30-35. The "respectful references" to Aspasia by the ancient writers (Aeschines of Sphettus, Xenophon and Platon below) — "in a manner that is far more respectful than they would have had she been a hetaera" — are also summarized more recently by D'Angour (2019) 126-127.
21. D'Angour (2019) 123, 129.
22. On the authenticity of Pericles' Funeral Oration ("a careful reconstruction of a speech actually delivered by Pericles or Thucydides' own free composition?"), regardless of Aspasia's contribution to its composition, see Rusten (1989) 16.
23. On *Menexenus*' references to historical events (which fell many years after both Socrates' and Aspasia's death) as well as on its thematic relation to the platonic *Symposium*, whose dating (384 BC or slightly later) may be considered as a terminus ante quem for *Menexenus*' controversial date of composition, see Tsitsiridis (1998) 41-52.
24. Petre 162 : "Dans le *Ménexène*, où il s'agit aussi de l'art oratoire et de ses effets, l'éloquence est ironisée et 'mise-en-abyme' par une double parodie. L'oraison recitée par Socrate imite — ainsi que le signalent tous les exégètes du dialogue, à commencer par Denys d'Halicarnasse, dans son traité *De admirabili vi dicendi in Demosthene* (23) — le discours attribué par Thucydide (II, 34-46) au même Périclès, la fameuse oraison funèbre de 430. De surcroît, Socrate ne ferait que réciter un collage bricolé avec des restes des oraisons composées par Aspasie et reproduites jadis par Périclès (236b). Le 'dialogue des fantômes' devient ainsi, si l'on peut dire, un 'dialogue de ghost-writers' ".

and fragmented Athenian male Self, in the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War, the Corinthian War and the Peace of Antalcidas.[25]

THE CASE OF ARISTOPHANES: ASPASIA'S TRACES FROM *ACHARNIANS* TO *PEACE*

Just like the much older Thucydides, Aristophanes, during his childhood and adolescence, experienced the radicalization of democracy, the incubation and the outbreak of the War in 431, the evacuation of the entire population of the Attic region and its concentration within the walls of Athens; he attended Pericles' Funeral Oration (in winter of 431–430), honoring the Athenians who died for their city; he survived the epidemic disease that broke out in the summer of the same year and devastated the Athenians; he witnessed Pericles' re-election as general (*strategos*) in 429, the death of both his legitimate sons from his first wife in the epidemic, as well as Pericles' own death (by the plague) in the autumn of 429 and Athens' sinking into the abyss of political turmoil and demagogy, since Pericles' successors proved to be well below the complicated and exigent circumstances of the time (Thuc. 2.65). By contrast and unlike Thucydides, who started recounting retrospectively the first decade of the Peloponnesian War c. 420, and who observed most of Athens' suffering from a temporal and spatial distance,[26] Aristophanes experienced the war facts in the heat of the moment and transcribed them into his comedies from an engaged citizen's point of view, who, nevertheless, had never been actively and officially involved in politics until the end of the War and who seems to have never left Athens for military or other reasons.

Under these circumstances, Aristophanes, a full-time Athenian comic playwright, who lived the facts always on the side and at the site of Athens, may have reverted more than once to Aspasia, through the devious by nature distorting prism of the comic satire, thus bequeathing his own

25. For different approaches to that enigmatic dialogue, the ambiguous role of Aspasia and her intimate relation to Socrates, cf. Henry (1995) 32-40; Allen (1997) 9-30; Tsitsiridis (1998) 52-92; Monoson (2002) 182-186; Trivigno (2009) 29-58; Engels (2012) 13-30; D'Angour (2019) 120-130; and very recently, with a wide overview of the existing bibliography and the diverging considerations, LeMoine (2020) 133-160.

26. Since he was sent as a general to Thasos in northern Greece in 424 BC, and shortly afterwards, because of his failure to save the allied Greek city of Amphipolis from the Spartan control, he was sentenced to exile (Thuc. 5.26.5).

ambiguous — in themselves and with regard to the whole extant literature of the classic era — testimonies.

In a mood similar to that of his quite aggressive comic colleagues, Aristophanes' first (and only) overt reference to Aspasia is explicitly negative: it is in the *Acharnians* of 425 BC, which was presented during the sixth year of the Peloponnesian War, when Pericles had already died and while the second official companion of Aspasia, the politician and general Lysicles, to whom she also bore a son, was killed in action in Asia Minor, in 428 BC.[27] In the pivotal scene of the comic *agon* (*Ach.* 515-625) — at the peak of the comic *crisis*, involving the confrontation between the warmongering Chorus, composed by aged farmers and charcoal burners from the attic deme of Acharnae, and the peace-loving, middle-aged peasant Dikaiopolis — the comic hero, without a single reference to any other military or diplomatic episode, like the ones that a few years later Thucydides would consider important and would record in the first book of his *History*,[28] chooses to put forth, as triggering events that caused "Olympian", Pericles' decision for the Megarian Decree: first, the kidnapping of the Megarian prostitute Simaitha by some young drunken Athenians and, subsequently, the retaliatory capture by some, driven garlic-mad, Megarians of two anonymous Aspasia's charges (*Ach.* 515-540):

τί ταῦτα τοὺς Λάκωνας αἰτιώμεθα;
ἡμῶν γὰρ ἄνδρες, — οὐχὶ τὴν πόλιν λέγω·
μέμνησθε τοῦθ', ὅτι οὐχὶ τὴν πόλιν λέγω, —
ἀλλ' ἀνδράρια μοχθηρά, παρακεκομμένα,
ἄτιμα καὶ παράσημα καὶ παράξενα,
ἐσυκοφάντει· "Μεγαρέων τὰ χλανίσκια."
κεἴ που σίκυον ἴδοιεν ἢ λαγῴδιον
ἢ χοιρίδιον ἢ σκόροδον ἢ χόνδρους ἅλας,
ταῦτ' ἦν Μεγαρικὰ κἀπέπρατ' αὐθημερόν.
καὶ ταῦτα μὲν δὴ σμικρὰ κἀπιχώρια,
πόρνην δὲ Σιμαίθαν ἰόντες Μεγαράδε

27. Henry (1995) 10-17; D'Angour (2019) 126.

28. Very briefly: the struggle between the two mother cities of Epidamnos, Corcyra and Corinth; the herein intervention of Athens in favor of Corcyra and the decisive participation of the former in the battle of Sybota between Corcyra and Corinth; the intervention of Athens in Potidaea's diplomatic relations with Corinth, the subsequent Potidaea's revolt from Athens' alliance due to Corinth's encouragement and, finally, Potidaea's military blockade by Athens; Aegina's continuous subordination to Athens, against the terms of the Thirty Years' Peace (445 BC), which stipulated Aegina's autonomy to be restored.

525 *νεανίαι ᾽κκλέπτουσι μεθυσοκότταβοι·*
κᾆθ᾽ οἱ Μεγαρῆς ὀδύναις πεφυσιγγωμένοι
ἀντεξέκλεψαν Ἀσπασίας πόρνα δύο·
κἀντεῦθεν ἀρχὴ τοῦ πολέμου κατερράγη
Ἕλλησι πᾶσιν ἐκ τριῶν λαικαστριῶν.
530 *ἐντεῦθεν ὀργῇ Περικλέης οὐλύμπιος*
ἤστραπτ᾽, ἐβρόντα, ξυνεκύκα τὴν Ἑλλάδα,
ἐτίθει νόμους ὥσπερ σκόλια γεγραμμένους,
ὡς χρὴ Μεγαρέας μήτε γῇ μήτ᾽ ἐν ἀγορᾷ
μήτ᾽ ἐν θαλάττῃ μήτ᾽ ἐν ἠπείρῳ μένειν.
535 *ἐντεῦθεν οἱ Μεγαρῆς, ὅτε δὴ ᾽πείνων βάδην,*
Λακεδαιμονίων ἐδέοντο τὸ ψήφισμ᾽ ὅπως
μεταστραφείη τὸ διὰ τὰς λαικαστρίας
οὐκ ἠθέλομεν δ᾽ ἡμεῖς δεομένων πολλάκις.
κἀντεῦθεν ἤδη πάταγος ἦν τῶν ἀσπίδων.

[…] who do we blame it all on the Laconians? For it was men of ours – I do not say the city, remember that, I do not say the city – but some bent, ill-struck pieces of humanity, worthless counterfeit foreign stuff, who began denouncing the Megarians' little woolen cloaks, and if they saw anywhere a cucumber or a young hare, or a piglet, or some garlic or lump-salt, it was declared Megarian and sold up the same day. Now that, to be sure, was trivial and purely local; but then some cottabus-playing young rakes went to Megara and stole a whore called Simaetha. After that, the Megarians, garlic-stung but the smart, stole two whores of Aspasia's in retaliation. And from that broke forth the origin of the war upon all the Greeks: from three prostitutes. Then in his wrath, Olympian Pericles lightened and thundered and threw Greece into turmoil, making laws worded like drinking songs, 'that no Megarian should remain on land or in Agora, on sea or on shore'. After that, when they were starving by inches, the Megarians asked the Spartans to procure a reversal of the decree caused by the prostitute affair; but we refused, though they asked repeatedly. And after that it was clashing of the shields.[29]

Aspasia, after being a "prostitute" and a "concubine" in the eyes of Aristophanes' comic colleagues, becomes here expressly a procuress, if not a brothel-keeper, who gets involved, in a decisive and fatal way, in Pericles' crucial political decisions and in current political tensions between Athens and Megara, which are thus flagrantly and once again "sexualized".[30]

29. Transl. Sommerstein (1980) 85-87.
30. MacLachlan (2012) 95.

Is this reference to Aspasia and her — sexual somehow — involvement in political-military affairs a genuine fictional invention made up exclusively by Aristophanes himself? Or is it a more or less exaggerated perpetuation of an already widespread "motif", at least among the comic poets? Should it be read as a mere parodical intertextual reference to the mythological *topos* in the introductory part of Herodotus' *Histories*, where abducting each other's women appears to be the cause of continuous warfare between Greeks and barbarians? Or is it, maybe, a reminiscence — and, by analogy, a shift to a new context — of an earlier probable intervention of Aspasia during the conflict between Samos and Miletus (441–439 BC), that led to Athens' decisive involvement headed by Pericles in favour of the latter city?[31] Is it merely a piece of slanderous and outrageous "fake news" or does it conceal a real dose of truth regarding the actual influence of Aspasia on Pericles' political decisions (also) during the Peloponnesian War?[32]

At any rate and despite this obviously far-fetched and preposterous account, there are more than one reasons why we should perhaps take seriously what Aristophanes — hidden behind his dramatis persona and mouthpiece Dikaiopolis (*Ach.* 499-508) — adduces as far as Aspasia's crucial 'mediating' role in the sphere of politics is concerned. First, with Dikaiopolis' account of the war, the dramatic action reaches to a peak, inasmuch as it will determine the endurance or the evanescence of the hero's utopian comic idea: to bring back peace, even a private one, since collective peace seems for the time to be impossible. Actually, after Dikaiopolis' heated reasoning has finished, half the Chorus is won over, and a short interfering episodic scene with the Athenian vainglorious general Lamachus, who is questioned and ridiculed by Dikaiopolis, suffices for the other half of the Chorus to be also won over by Dikaiopolis' pro-peace argumentation. This major confrontation having come to a wishful end, in the subsequent *parabasis* the whole Chorus renders unanimously praise to the author, while the (whole) post-parabatic rest of the play comprises a succession of episodic farcical scenes leading to the *exodus*, which develop the contrast between the former war-dominated state and the new, hereinafter, peaceful status quo of the *polis*.[33]

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31. Aspasia's alleged role in promoting "Pericles' remorseless and disproportionate assault on Samos" is supported recently by D'Angour (2019: 34-37) in connection with Plato's choice to hide the "stained" Aspasia behind Diotima so as to "avoid such a taint negatively influencing readers' views of Diotima's doctrine of love in the *Symposium*".
32. On Aspasia's ambivalent political role during this era cf. Sommerstein (1980) 181-183; Henry (1995) 25-28; Olson (2002) 206-212.
33. On this antithesis between war and peace which imbues the two parts of *Acharnians*,

Second, Dikaiopolis' long speech to the Chorus (*Ach.* 496-556), where Aspasia's whorish milieu is stressed repeatedly, four times within fifteen verses (*Ach.* 525-540, see supra), is set and mis-en-scène in a lengthy, intertextually dense and visually impressive paratragic, "serious" and "didactic" context. After the Acharnian elders' aggressive persecution in the *parodos* and Dikaiopolis' subsequent recourse to the — probably famous by then — tragic "hostage-scene" from Euripides' *Telephus* (438 BC), in order to blackmail the furious Acharnians and gain the right to address them a speech (*Ach.* 325-346), the comic hero, before finally addressing the Chorus, recourses once more — via a personal visit this time — to Euripides and gets dressed from top to bottom as the lame (*χωλός*) Mysian King Telephus. Telephus, in the lost Euripidean title play, had disguised himself as a pathetic beggar, in order to enter the Greek camp in Aulis, blackmail the commanders and be healed by Achilles, who had wounded him in the remote past, during another war conflict.

> The hero retains his connections to the universe of comedy, explicitly acknowledging them both before his visit to Euripides (377-382) and at the beginning of his oration (599-408), where he practically identifies himself with the comic poet. But he is enclosed in the world of war and must therefore disguise himself as a tragic personage. He has to cover his comic identity under a tragic hero's costume and wear the persona of tragedy in order to speak about the war —*par excellence* a tragic theme.[34]

"Dressed up in ragged, lacerated clothes [which] may be read as an allegory of the war condition",[35] the comic hero Dikaiopolis — just like the tragic hero Telephus who had argued before the assembled leaders of the Greek expedition against Troy — addresses now not only the Chorus of the Acharnians, but the whole contemporary audience in the Theatre of Dionysus of 425 BC, which is invited to take account of all the latent and obvious analogies between the comic and the (para)tragic, the real and the fictional, state of things. Under these terms, Dikaiopolis' double use of the very peculiar and rare word *τρυγῳδία* (trugedy), which, regardless of its etymology,

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before and after the *parabasis*, and which is further marked out through the continuous contrast between tragedy and comedy, see Konstantakos (2012) 121-166, esp. 154-157.

34. Ibid., 155.

35. Ibid.

recalls — semantically and sonically — the sister genre of *τραγῳδία* (tragedy),[36] as well as his persistence at the very beginning of his long speech towards the Chorus that he will "speak before the Athenians about public affairs in comedy [trugedy]", because "even comedy [trugedy] is acquainted with justice" (*μέλλω περὶ τῆς πόλεως, τρυγῳδίαν ποιῶν. / τὸ γὰρ δίκαιον οἶδε καὶ τρυγῳδία*, v. 499-500),[37] implies not only that contemporary tragedy had a serious and self-conscious ethical agenda, but also that contemporary comedy could equally provide guidance (and not just outrageous entertainment) to the city. Tragic hero, comic hero, and comic playwright are thus concentrated into a single complex figure, which assumes the crucial political-intellectual role of instructing (*didaskein*) the Athenian citizens, either the fictional or — and foremost — the real ones.

Only four years after *Acharnians*, in *Peace* of the City Dionysia 421 BC, where Nicias' treaty, believed to have ended the war, was celebrated, Aristophanes welcomes Peace, the long-lost goddess, back to earth. Although in that optimistic context the investigation of the causes of the war didn't need to take any precedence, Aristophanes, through Hermes this time, looks back on the Megarian Decree and Pericles' responsibilities for the Peloponnesian War. This time, however, he does not mention Aspasia's involvement, considering the commercial blockade of Megara as some kind of "decoy" set up by Pericles aiming to misdirect the public opinion and to abate the public outcry that was caused by the "evil deeds" (*πράξας κακῶς*) of the sculptor, painter and architect Pheidias — another notable (and probably notorious for some Athenians) person from the first statesman's close environment of that past era (*P.* 603–611):

> *ὦ σοφώτατοι γεωργοί, τἀμὰ δὴ ξυνίετε*
> *ῥήματ', εἰ βούλεσθ' ἀκοῦσαι τήνδ' ὅπως ἀπώλετο.*
> *πρῶτα μέν γ' ἄτης ὑπῆρξε Φειδίας πράξας κακῶς.*
> *εἶτα Περικλέης φοβηθεὶς μὴ μετάσχοι τῆς τύχης,*
> *τὰς φύσεις ὑμῶν δεδοικὼς καὶ τὸν αὐτοδὰξ τρόπον,*
> *πρὶν παθεῖν τι δεινὸν αὐτός, ἐξέφλεξε τὴν πόλιν*
> *ᾗ 'μβαλὼν σπινθῆρα μικρὸν Μεγαρικοῦ ψηφίσματος*
> *ἐξεφύσησεν τοσοῦτον πόλεμον ὥστε τῷ καπνῷ*
> *πάντας Ἕλληνας δακρῦσαι, τούς τ' ἐκεῖ τούς τ' ἐνθάδε.*

36. On the broad scope of parody in Aristophanes' work see Tsitsiridis (2010) while on the function of paratragedy specifically in the *Acharnians* see Karamanou (2020).
37. Transl. Sommerstein (1980) 85.

> O wisest peasants, mark well my words, if you want to hear how it was that she vanished. What started it all in the first place was Pheidias getting into trouble. Then Pericles became frightened he might share Pheidias' fate — for he was afraid of your character and your hard biting temper — and before anything terrible could happen to *him*, he set the city ablaze by dropping into it a tiny spark of a Megarian decree; and he fanned up so great a war that all the Greeks were in tears with the smoke, both those over there and those over here.[38]

Why is Aspasia not mentioned at all in that new comic context, where "Pericles again stirs up the war for purely personal motives"?[39] Is it because the outrageous 'joke' from *Acharnians* had already been exhausted comically — and politically — and needed to be replaced by a new one? Or because Aristophanes' opinion about Aspasia's personal life and public influence had changed in the meantime, due to the discovery or realisation of new facts and the revision of the old ones? Or even because the real danger posed by Aspasia and her (supposed) tremendous political intervening disappeared after the death of her two companions, Pericles and Lysicles, and the probable withdrawal of the middle-aged widow (and mother of two boys, respectively) from the public sphere?

What is more certain, from our point of view, is that there might not be any kind of 'acquittal' or 'oblivion' on behalf of Aristophanes regarding Aspasia's both existence and action. Most probably, the different account given in *Peace* of 421 BC serves rather as 'complementary' hard evidence about Pericles' responsibility for the outbreak of the War. Aristophanes, enhancing his political critique against Pericles, which he had initiated in *Acharnians* of 425 BC, procures four years later a further accusation to be added to the — quite recent (and still a vivid memory) — previous one that had focused on Aspasia's crucial part in the first statesman's decision-taking during the

38. Transl. Sommerstein (1985) 61-63 , with minor adjustments. On this aristophanic passage, which is the first literary record of Pheidias' accusation by the Athenians (aiming most probably at Pericles himself) and the second literary hint (after the quite different account in the earlier *Acharnians*) of the 'conspiracy theory' on the origins of the Peloponnesian War, which seems to have flourished at the time, see Henry (1995) 27-28; Olson (2002) xxxv; Sidwell (2009) 147-153; and especially Sommerstein (2016) 35-36. For the trials of Pericles' friends, and especially of Pheidias, as these are imprinted in Plutarch's *Pericles* (31.2-32.6), see Stadter (1989) 284-305; Braun (2000) 215-216.

39. Sommerstein (2016) 35.

fragile political and diplomatic pre-war period.[40] The possibility that Aspasia's personality and action continued to survive in the personal (Aristophanes') and collective (Athenian audience's) conscience alike, in *Peace* of 421 BC and henceforward, may be supported by another (cryptic this time, in comparison with the overtly derogatory reference in *Acharnians*) dramatic echo of hers, this time in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, which was staged fifteen and ten years later than *Acharnians* and *Peace*, respectively.

ASPASIA – LYSISTRATA : HISTORICAL AND LITERARY DIFFUSIONS

Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, staged most probably in the Lenaia of 411 BC,[41] allows us to assume that possibly Aristophanes returns to Aspasia in order to substitute her not with another of Pericles' close associates, like Pheidias, but with another, better say an alternative — this time positive and, thus, completely reverse — example of another "exceptional" woman. Many years after Pericles' and his successors' critical political decisions and military movements, and in the immediate aftermath of the disastrous Sicilian Expedition and the controversial moves of another prominent member of the Alcmaeonid family, Alcibiades, Aristophanes once again makes dramatic use of the power of sex. Nevertheless, this time sex power does not indicate abundance or abuse, as was the case with Aspasia and her fellow-prostitutes, who set off the Peloponnesian War, but deprivation and abstinence as the supreme and most successful manipulative weapon within legal marital relations for the cessation of war. Aristophanes will not assign the plan of this 'positive' use of sex for the achievement of peace to a woman of controversial moral and social identity (a prostitute? a procurer? a whorehouse owner? a concubine? a courtesan? a metic? a non-Athenian wife or partner?) like Aspasia,[42] but to a woman of undoubtful Athenian ancestry, who is lawful, morally irreproachable and resistant to erotic abstinence; in

40. Cf. Vickers' (1997) argumentation that, if dead Pericles is the principal target of the *Acharnians*, in the plays of the latter 420s BC (including *Peace*) Alcibiades comes increasingly to the fore and Aristophanes begins to employ Periclean imagery in a slightly more positive light.

41. On the date and the Festival of *Lysistrata*' staging, see (with further bibliography) Henderson (1987) xv-xxv; Sommerstein (1990) 1-3.

42. The uncertain marital status of Pericles' and Aspasia's relation (being husband and wife "in effect, if not in name") is commented upon, more recently, by D'Angour (2019) 124 and n. 5.

short, to a woman radically different from the "absolute race of nymphomaniacs we are, the lot of us", which Lysistrata herself reproves (*Lys.* 137: *ὦ παγκατάπυγον θῆμέτερον ἅπαν γένος*)[43] and to which, according to Cratinus (fr. 159 K-A), Aspasia also belonged (*Ἥραν τέ οἱ Ἀσπασίαν τίκτει Καταπυγοσύνη παλλακὴν κυνώπιδα*).[44]

Beyond their differences, though, both women, the real as well as the fictional, not only do they equally structure their lives and actions on exactly the same social and gendered model of heteronormative sexuality and mutual love,[45] but they equally do not represent the dominant stereotypes of the female social gender of classical Athens:[46] besides defending the house and knowing about interpersonal relationships, they do have rhetorical, political and even strategic skills that they employ not in a strictly female space but in an area of male dominance, which even transcends the borders of Athens and reaches the broader Greek-speaking diplomatic and military territory. Nevertheless, here too the gap between the two 'paradigms' is still enormous: unlike Aspasia — who would be presented without a male mentor, is intellectually autonomous and the one "teaching" oratory to men[47] — Aristophanes' Lysistrata emphatically declares that she owes her intellectual and rhetorical ability to her father and to older men (*Lys.* 1124-1127):

> *ἐγὼ γυνὴ μέν εἰμι, νοῦς δ' ἔνεστί μοι.*
> *αὐτὴ δ' ἐμαυτῆς οὐ κακῶς γνώμης ἔχω,*
> *τοὺς δ' ἐκ πατρός τε καὶ γεραιτέρων λόγους*
> *πολλοὺς ἀκούσασ' οὐ μεμούσωμαι κακῶς.*

> I am a woman, but I have got a mind: I am not badly off for intelligence on my own account, and I am not badly educated either, having heard a great deal of the talk of my father and of other elder men.[48]

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43. Transl. Sommerstein (1990) 31.
44. On the contrary, Culpepper Stroup (2004) argues for the progressive "hetairization" of all the sexually active wives of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, by means of distinctly sympotic visual imagery and linguistic implications.
45 Although Lerner (1993) 222 comments, as far as the relationship of Pericles and Aspasia is concerned, that "such heterosexual mutually supportive relationships, while they do occur, are rare in the historical record".
46. On the position of women in the fifth and early fourth centuries, beginning with the old classic study of Gomme (1925), the literature is enormous.
47. Henry (1995) 130.
48. Transl. Sommerstein (1990) 132.

This literary and social 'deviation' that may be presented by a woman-orator-saviour of the city in Aristophanes' work,[49] is explained and supported here by the probable identification of the fictional Lysistrata with the real Lysimache, the (most) renowned ("and the subject of much scholarly controversy"[50]) priestess of Athena of the late fifth and early-fourth centuries, who bore important public duties, but was also favoured with significant rights and privileges, of which the ordinary women of that era were deprived. This most prominent and respected priestess of ancient Athens,[51] who had already been associated by Trygaeus with the ideal of universal peace in Aristophanes' *Peace* ten years earlier (*P.* 987-992),[52] is also recalled in *Lysistrata* by the comic heroine, "a special case of superimposition" as Sifakis notes.[53] The Aristophanic heroine foresees the spread of the name of the priestess to all those women who will achieve the sacred purpose of peace-making by fostering the erotic desire of men (*Lys.* 551-554):

> *ἀλλ' ἥνπερ ὅ ‹τε› γλυκύθυμος Ἔρως χὴ Κυπρογένει' Ἀφροδίτη*
> *ἵμερον ἡμῶν κατὰ τῶν κόλπων καὶ τῶν μηρῶν καταπνεύσῃ,*
> *κᾆτ' ἐντέξῃ τέτανον τερπνὸν τοῖς ἀνδράσι καὶ ῥοπαλισμούς,*
> *οἶμαί ποτε Λυσιμάχας ἡμᾶς ἐν τοῖς Ἕλλησι καλεῖσθαι.*

> If the sweetness of Love and Aphrodite of Cyprus aid us and we are successful in our plot, I think that the Greeks will call us all 'Dissolvers of Battle' or the Greeks will call us Lysimaches.[54]

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49. Pappas (2019) 130.
50. Fantham et al (1994) 93.
51. Lysimache the priestess is clearly depicted by Georgoudi (2003) and Connelly (2007).
52. Trygaeus addressing the statue of Peace: *μὰ Δί', ἀλλ' ἀπόφηνον ὅλην σαυτὴν / γενναιοπρεπῶς τοῖσιν ἐρασταῖς / ἡμῖν, οἵ σου τρυχόμεθ' ἤδη / τρία καὶ δέκ' ἔτη·/ λῦσον δὲ μάχας καὶ κορκορυγάς, / ἵνα Λυσιμάχην σε καλῶμεν.* Transl. Sommerstein (1985) 99: "No, indeed; rather reveal thyself fully and generously to us thy lovers, who have pined for thee these thirteen years: and resolve our fight and our broils, that we may call thee Lysimache". On Lysimache in *Peace* see, indicatively, Storey (2019) 83.
53. Sifakis (2006) 35.
54. Transl. Lewis (1997: 187-202). Regarding the suggestion that Lysistrata was modelled on the — contemporary of Aristophanes — priestess of Athena Polias, Lysimache, a suggestion articulated first by D. M. Lewis (1955), cf. among others, Henderson (1987) xxxviii-xl, Sommerstein (1990) 1-6, Sidwell (2009) 255-257. From Lewis (1997: 187-202) I borrow the above (condensed) translation of that specific passage, which keeps the name "Lysimache" and also explains it. Besides this — much debatable — parallelism, it has also been suggested (first, by I. Papademetriou 1948/1949) that the Aristophanic Myrrhine was also modelled on an actual person, the priestess of Athena Nike (cf. Henderson 1987a: xl-xli; Sommerstein 1990: 5, n. 31; Lougovaya-Ast 2006), while for some

If Plato's Aspasia from *Menexenus* and Aristophanes' Lysistrata from the comedy of the same title have already been correlated as the two unique exceptions to the ancient male conviction that women have no rhetoric abilities,[55] and if Plato's Diotima — the only woman in the male-dominated *Symposium* and one of the two women (along with Aspasia) who get a voice in the entire Platonic corpus — who has already and repetitively been read as the "fictional intellectualised substitute" of Aspasia,[56] then, the connection of the historical figure of Aspasia with the theatrical character of Lysistrata is probably an intertextual suggestion not entirely incongruous or unlikely.[57] If this is the case, then in *Lysistrata* we would have, on one hand, a second reference (indirect this time, contrary to the direct one in *Acharnians*) by Aristophanes to Aspasia, and also, on the other hand, an additional, intermediate literary trace of hers, between young Aspasia of Old Comedy and the older Aspasia in Plato's *Menexenus*.[58] And perhaps, beyond a response to the idealised Aspasia by Aeschines,[59] the "serious" Diotima from the *Symposium*, combined with the "parodical" Aspasia from *Menexenus*, consists also in a philosophical double reply to the earlier theatrical — both real and fictional, comic and serious — amalgam of Lysistrata/Lysimache proposed by Aristophanes, in an amazing literary 'vicious circle' of continuous intertextual and intergeneric diffusions of life and fiction, drama and philosophy of the time.[60]

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more imaginative readers "it is possible, though we have no evidence for this proposition, that Calonice too was associated with a civic cult": Sidwell (2009) 257.

55. Rothwell (1990) 22.

56. On Aspasia's disguise as Diotima and Plato's probable motivation through this mirroring, cf. recently, Halperin (1990) 113-151, 190-211; Boyarin (2006) 52-60. Much more recently, D'Angour (2019: 32-45, 127-130) returns to that long-lasting idea that Diotima is a version of Aspasia, through his own interpretation of the conjecture.

57. A suggestion moreover briefly proposed — without any further substantiation — by Kedric (2010: 281) in the entry for "Aspasia", where it is mentioned that Aristophanes may have had her in mind when composing *Lysistrata*. Enlarging the field of the probable identifications, Michael Vickers (2015) in his second Chapter ("Wordplay; Pericles, Alcibiades and Aspasia on Stage") saw many more traces of Aspasia in the Aristophanic corpus (behind Myrrhine — playing opposite a Periclean Kinesias — in *Lysistrata*; behind Praxagora in the first half of the *Ecclesiazusae* and behind the Old Hags in the second; even behind Poverty and the Hag in *Plutus*).

58. Cf. D'Angour (2019: 126): "Thereafter [after Lysicles, death, in 428 BC] we hear little more about Aspasia's activities, until her appearance as an older woman in Plato's *Menexenus*. […] The exception to the silence is Aristophanes' comedy *Acharnians*".

59. Kahn (1997) 26-27.

60. Taking moreover into account Plato's literary loans from Old Comedy; see Kalfas (2008). Cf. the "working hypothesis that Aristophanes intended to address Socrates' thought

From an — expressly considered as — whorehouse madam in *Acharnians*, fourteen years later, in *Lysistrata* Aspasia has been transformed into a latent and cryptic counter-image of the idealised namesake heroine and of her underlying historical model, pious priestess Lysimache — perhaps an exceptional case of a (double) "allegorical", "symbolical" representation of historical figures (Aspasia and Lysimache) by a dramatic figure in Old Comedy (Lysistrata), which projects both the negative role of the former and the positive role of the latter.[61] Nevertheless, Aspasia from *Acharnians* — and from Old Comedy in general — lurks, and all the ambivalence against her reaches its peak in l. 1108-1111, where the united Chorus greets Lysistrata with the following contradictory words and adjectives:

> *χαῖρ', ὦ πασῶν ἀνδρειοτάτη· δεῖ δὴ νυνί σε γενέσθαι*
> *δεινὴν ⟨μαλακήν,⟩ ἀγαθὴν φαύλην, σεμνὴν ἀγανήν, πολύπειρον·*
> *ὡς οἱ πρῶτοι τῶν Ἑλλήνων τῇ σῇ ληφθέντες ἴυγγι*
> *συνεχώρησάν σοι καὶ κοινῇ τἀγκλήματα πάντ' ἐπέτρεψαν.*
>
> Hail, Bravest of all women! Now you must show yourself formidable <and gentle>, noble and down-to-earth, haughty and tender, a woman of the world: because of the leaders of the Greeks, captivated by your magic.[62]

In sum: Constantly critical towards (dead) Pericles' (past) political attitude, influences and decisions, Aristophanes in his early *Acharnians* of 425 BC includes the vengeful abduction of Aspasia's two whores by some Megarians in the triggering events that led Pericles to the enforcement of the Megarian Decree and, consequently, to the beginning of the disastrous Peloponnesian

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in some manner in all of his feminine play and that Plato and Xenophon wrote partly in response to Aristophanes' analysis" by Bonnette (2014) 303-327 (310: citation).

61. Be that as it may, we still keep always in mind the strong reservations that Konstantakos (2017-2018: 15-16) expresses regarding the various indirect ("allegorical" or "symbolic") identifications of Alcibiades with many different comic characters, proposed by various scholars, which are "in principle erroneous, since Old Comedy didn't have to hide her targets under any allegoric masks and complicated allusive correlations. When comic authors wanted to satirize any Athenian man, they brought him fearlessly on stage" [my translation].

62. Transl. Sommerstein (1990) 131. Cf. Faraone's reading of *Lysistrata* (2006), who takes the ambivalence of female leadership therein to (interesting) extremes, suggesting that Aristophanes' comic heroine "embodies alternately — and at some points simultaneously — two very different figures of female authority, the pious priestess and the brilliant and sophisticated courtesan" (209), an example of the latter being "the famous paramour and (eventually) wife of Pericles", Aspasia (220).

War. Even if this outrageous and most probably fictional information could not and still cannot be taken seriously as a political argument, nonetheless, it introduces in the historic frame — and leaves it in a state of hermeneutic limbo — the potential role of Aspasia, who, even if she was not involved in the public and political life of Athens, was an undoubtedly real (although enigmatic and obscured) person involved in Pericles' personal life.

Four years later, in his *Peace* of 421 BC, the comic poet puts forward a slightly different account of the causes of the Peloponnesian war, also tracking it to a decision Pericles took for personal reasons (with the sculptor Pheidias being now in the line of fire) and also giving prominence to the importance of the Megarian Decree, but without referring, neither directly nor indirectly to Aspasia. Aristophanes omits Aspasia from his new theatrical narration but doesn't forget her or exempt her from her responsibility, the memory of which was most probably as vivid to the Athenian public of 421 BC as it were four years ago.

In *Lysistrata* of 411 BC, the reminiscence of the still alive Aspasia is perhaps still alive too, permitting us to detect a probable reverse image of hers onto the central comic figure, dynamic Lysistrata, most likely the first female leading role in the classic and universal theatre ever since and the sole protagonist after whom an extant Aristophanic comedy has been named: the former causes the outbreak of a war through her pursuit of sex business, while the latter, conversely, uses sex in order to put an end to the same war.

Along with Aristophanes — shortly before, in parallel with or shortly after his own dramatic, more or less apparent or allusive, testimonies — many more male writers of the fifth and early fourth centuries (comic poets, Thucydides, Antisthenes, Aeschines of Sphettus, Xenophon, Plato) give their own evidence about *δεινὴ* Aspasia, who dared and most possibly managed to transcend the limits of the traditional feminine role and become active in a sphere of male dominance (politics and war). From one literary genre to the other, from one writer to the other, from one piece of work to the other of the same writer, the 'constructions' of Aspasia glide and diffuse successively, in a contradictory and polyphonic male era, which seems to sway between acceptance and rejection, assimilation and marginalisation, idealisation and demonisation of the female Other. The fluid signifier "woman" is under construction and men's plans for its determination vary, contrast or merge, in a process of a controversial resemantisation that would not soon and easily end.

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NATIONAL & KAPODISTRIAN UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS
diamcat@theatre.uoa.gr