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TRANSVESTITE DISGUISE IN ARISTOPHANES' COMEDIES

Aristophanes often resorts to the transvestite disguise of his characters to make a comical effect. Such disguise involves fusion of the opposite – male and female – elements and represents a powerful comical device owing to the discrepancy and the sexual theme.

Admittedly, transvestite disguise was a typical element in the ritual practice of many different peoples. In the archaic Greek community, like other peoples of the archaic epoch, transvestite disguise as a part of a ritual implied preparation for the assumption of a new role. According to Plutarch, two young men dressed in women's clothes led the procession at the festival of Oschophoria.[1] This served to dramatize the young men's readiness to assume the age of manhood and marriage. Another element in Greek festivals is the so-called symmetric inversion – men and women would swap their dresses and imitate each other's appearance and behavior. The exchange of roles and clothes among young men and women in initiation and bridal rites is explained through the ritual logics: at the threshold of assuming the steady male or female identity (as it was provided for by the cultural ideology) each sex was given the last opportunity to play the part of the opposite sex.[2]

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[1] Plutarch, Life of Theseus, 23.

[2] Its classical example in Greek mythology is the story of Achilles: Achilles, dressed as a girl, hides away on the island of Scyros among the daughters of Lycomedes until he asserts his manhood upon seeing a weapon or hearing the sound of a trumpet. About different forms of transvestism in Greek mythology and ritual, see Delcourt M., Hermaphrodite: Myths and Rites of the Bisexual Figure in Classical Antiquity, trans. by J. Nicholson, London 1956, 1-16; Burkert W., Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual, Berkeley 1979, 29-30; Zeitlin F. I., Playing the Other: Theatre, Theatricality, and the Feminine in Greek Drama *In* Nothing to Do with Dionysos? Athenian Drama in Its Social Context, ed. by Winkler J. J., and Zeitlin F. I., Princeton: Princeton University Press 1989, 63-96; Vidal-Naquet P., The Black Hunter and the Origin of the Athenian

A large number of cultures associate festivals with the performance of ritual roles and the exchange of the roles. Therefore, transvestite performances are historically a traditional phenomenon.[3] Transvestite disguise, an ancient form of fun making, is the central element in Dionysian dramas.[4] At the Athens drama festivals, men played every single part, whether tragic or comic. Unlike tragedies, comedies accentuate this fundamental aspect of performance through intentionally imperfect and discrepant disguises. The few pieces of vase painting that picture comic dresses show the theatrical 'androgyny' of a comical body, e.g., the Apulian red-figure bell-krater (IV B.C.) pictures an old man who plays or is to play Antigone's part. He holds a hydria in his left hand and, presumably, a female mask in his right hand.[5] The symbolic 'double mask' and the phallus visible beyond his transparent clothes accentuate his theatrical disguise.[6] Comic costumes both in comedies and on vases imply close links with the context of a play.[7]

Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*, which presents the first instance of transvestite disguise, is fostered by Euripides' tragedies. Through presenting a man in female clothes, Aristophanes touches the most 'painful' point of the tragic (as well as comic) illusion – a male person (actor)[8] plays a female part;

Ephebeia & Recipes for Greek Adolescence *In* Myth, Religion, and Society, ed. Gordon R. L., Cambridge 1981, 147-85; Vernant J.-P., The War of the Cities *In* Myth and Society in Ancient Greece, trans. by J. Lloyd, New York: Zone Books 1988, 29-54; Brisson L., Sexual Ambivalence, Androgyny and Hermaphroditism in Graeco-Roman Antiquity, trans. by J. Lloyd, Berkeley: University of California Press 2002, 61-64; Burkert W., Greek Religion, trans. by J. Raffan, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1985, 260-64; Vidal-Naquet P., The Black Hunter: Figures of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World, trans. by A. Szegedy-Maszak, Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press 1986, 116.

3 For the social history of transvestism, see Ackroyd P., Dressing Up, Transvestism and Drag, New York 1979.

4 Cf. Philostr., Imag. I.2.

5 Taplin O., Comic Angels and Other Approaches to Greek Drama through Vase Painting, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1993, fig. 21.22.

6 Foley H., The Comic Body in Greek Art and Drama *In* Not the Classical Ideal, Athens and the Construction of the Other in Greek Art, ed. Beth Cohen, Leiden: Brill 2000, 275-311.

7 Cf. Seeberg A., From Padded Dancers to Comedy *In* Stage Directions: Essays in Ancient Drama in Honour of E. W. Handley, ed. A. Griffiths, London 1995, 8.

8 See Aristophanes and the Comic Hero, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1964, 223; Zeitlin F. I., Travesties of Gender and Genre in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae In* Reflections of Women in Antiquity, ed. H. P. Foley, New York: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers 1981, 169-217; Rau P., Paratragodia: Untersuchung einer komischen Form des Aristophanes, Munich: C. H. Beck 1967 & Das Tragödienspiel in den 'Thesmophoriazusen' *In* Aristophanes und die alte Komödie, Wege der Forschung, ed. H. J. Newiger, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1975, 339-56; Gibert J., Falling in Love with Euripides (Andromeda), ICS, 24-25, 1999-2000, 75-92; Compton-Engle G., Control of Costume in Three Plays of Aristophanes, AJP, 124, 2003, 515-24.

the playwright presents what according to dramatic norms remains beyond the stage. Thus he violates theatrical constructions and creates the so-called dramatic illusion. The play, which is inspired by other plays and represents their comic adaptation, is meta theatrical; and meta theater is 'notorious' for mixing up the parts of the spectator, the actor and the playwright. The spectator is entitled to what normally is the privilege of the playwright – watch the working process beyond the stage, observe costumes and the art of acting. The characters become actors within the play as they reject their parts and take on different ones. Comedy presents transvestite disguise as an illusion that serves as the basis for the theater and the comedy itself.[9]

At the same time, transvestite disguise is a dramatic device used by a playwright to develop the action within the play. The emphasis either on the adequacy between the character and the costume or on sex ambiguity is what frequently accounts for the comical effect of the action and serves to implement the artistic intention of the play. Besides, transvestite disguise (like any other disguise) is related to the identification of the character's status in the comedy. It is interesting to identify the characters with whom transvestite disguise is so 'successful'. The decisive role should be assigned to the very nature of ancient comedy. Agonism as its intrinsic property 'compels' the characters to take over their rivals and show their superiority. This is clearly attested by the scenes involving disguise, which at the same time specifies the status of the characters. In fact, with a dominant and active character, transvestite disguise is associated with success.[10]

The theme of transvestite disguise is essential in Aristophanes' two comedies: the *Thesmophoriazusae* and the *Ecclesiazusae,* which abound in swaps of costumes and parts.

The costume in a comedy was consistent with the character's age, sex and social status. In the *Thesmophoriazusae* this condition is fully violated; almost all male characters look like women: Agathon wears a white mask without beard (191), woman's clothes (136-38, cf. 97-98, 250-51, 257-58) and does not have a stage phallus (142); Cleisthenes has no beard (575) and probably wears the same white mask (cf. 571-73); in the final part of the comedy, Euripides enters the stage dressed as a woman and the Scythian takes him for a woman (1194); Mnesilochus (the protagonist) wears a female

[9] Bobrick E., The Tyranny of Roles, Playacting and Privilege in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae In* The City as Comedy, Society and Representation in Athenian Drama, ed. Gr. W. Dobrov, Chapel Hill & London, The University of North Carolina Press 1997, 177-97.

[10] Considering the specificity of the genre, success or failure of a character's scheme is rather conventional. Disguise can be regarded as successful or unsuccessful only with respect to its dramatic function.

costume almost throughout the whole play (cf. 137-38, 257-58). Evidently, transvestite disguise was at the same time funny in the eyes of spectators and embarrassing for the characters.[11] Aristophanes presents in detail how Mnesilochus acquired a female shape (213-68) and how his true sex was revealed later (636-51). The scenes abound in indecent humor.[12]

In the comedy, Mnesilochus' disguise is important for the implementation of Euripides' scheme: the women gathered at the festival of Thesmophoria[13] are furious with Euripides and have decided to punish the tragedian. After Agathon's refusal, Mnesilochus agrees to penetrate the festival of Thesmophoria under female disguise and make a speech in favor of Euripides. Hence the protagonist resorts to transvestite disguise in order to implement the scheme. However, it is clear from the very start that he is not the initiator of the transformation; he only acts according to Euripides' wish and order, and therefore has a passive part in the disguise. Although Mnesilochus says himself that he agrees to participate in Euripides' scheme, the way he tells about his readiness suggests he yields to another person's control:

ἐμοὶ δ' ὅ τι βούλει χρῶ λαβών. (212)[14]

With these words, Mnesilochus admits to Euripides' superiority and his own subordinated status from the very start. Mnesilochus' passive part is also emphasized by Euripides' imperative tone (213-78). Euripides makes it clear from the very start that Mnesilochus has submitted himself to him. (213). And in the second part of the comedy, Mnesilochus says several times that it was not of his own will that he stole into the festival under the female guise (1043-46; cf. 766-67).

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[11] Cf. *Eccl.*, 311-727.

[12] Aristophanes, Thesmophoriazusae, ed. C. Austin and S. D. Olson, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press 2004, lxix-lxxi.

[13] The Thesmophoria was a women's festival widely celebrated in Mediterranean ancient Greek polises in honor of Demeter and her daughter Pherrephatta/Persephone/Kore. See Nilsson M. P., Griechische Feste von religiöser Bedeutung mit Ausschluß der attischen, Leipzig 1906, 313-16; Farnell L. R., The Cults of the Greek States, Oxford 1907; repr. New York 1977, 328-32; Burkert W., 1985, 242-46; Brumfield A. C., The Attic Festivals of Demeter and their Relation to the Agricultural Year, New York 1981, 70-103; The Cuisine of Sacrifice among the Greeks, ed. M. Detienne and J-P. Vernant, Chicago and London 1989; originally published in French in 1979, 129-47; Versnel H. S., Transition and Reversal in Myth and Ritual, Leiden, New York, and Cologne 1993, 235-60; Dillon M., Girls and Women in Classical Greek religion, London and New York 2002, 110-20; Tzanetou A., Something to Do with Demeter: Ritual and Performance in Aristophanes Women at the Thesmophoria, AJP, 123 2002, 331-35. Men's attendance at the festival was strictly prohibited and the assembly was regarded as a secret ceremony. Cf. Thesm., 363-64, 627-28, 1150-54; Eccl., 442-43.

[14] *Deal with me as you please.* All translations are by B. B Rogers, Loeb Classical Library, Aristophanes III, 1963.

Mesilochus has to give up all exterior signs of manhood in order to be accepted as a woman. Under Euripides' direction, he first of all takes off his himation (214), which is followed by a burlesque scene of his shaving. Mnesilochus should get rid of his beard and the hair on his body. Euripides himself shaves off his beard (215) and even removes hair from his genital (216), which was obviously practiced by women and which Mnesilochus went through as part of his physical 'transformation into a woman'.[15] The protagonist's words are another proof of the fact that such an act is humiliating for a man:

τίς δ' οὕτως ἀνὴρ
ἠλίθιος, ὅστις τιλλόμενος ἠνείχετ' ἄν; (592-93)[16]

According to Euripides, Mnesilochus, half shaved, looks ridiculous (καταγέλαστος, 226). Mnesilochus looks in the mirror and says he sees Cleisthenes instead of himself (235).[17] He feels himself as an offered swine,[18] and regrets he has agreed to go through the transformation. He groans with pain and even attempts to run away (222-42), which indicates that the disguise process is forcible and unacceptable to him.

Euripides borrows from Agathon all the items necessary for the disguise and puts on him female clothes. These items are ἱμάτιον (250), κροκωτόν (253), στρόφιον (255), κεκρυφάλου καὶ μίτρας (257), ἔγκυκλον (261), ὑποδημάτων (262). Remarkably, Euripides borrows all these things from Agathon, who himself was clad as a woman as the play started, and whose appearance Mnesilochus found humiliating (98; 134-45).

The terms which Mnesilochus uses to address Agathon ὦ νεανίσχ' (134) – a young man who is neither a child (παῖς), not a man (ἀνήρ), ὁ γύννις (136) – a female man,[19] point to the opposition of archetypical male (βάρβιτος,

[15] Beard and hair on the body as masculine signs are discussed by Stone L. M., Costume in Aristophanic Poetry, New York: Arno Press 1981, 28-31; Saïd S., Travestis et travestissements dans les comédies d' Aristophane, Cahiers du GITA, 3, 1987, 227; Taaffe L. K., Aristophanes and Women, London: Routledge 1993, 83-84.

[16] *No man would let himself be tweezered so.*

[17] Cleisthenes was a prominent political figure frequently mocked at by Aristophanes as a womanish man. Cf. Ach. 117-21; Knights, 1373-74; Clouds 355; Birds, 829-31; Lys., 1091-92; Frogs, 57, 422-24. About Cleisthenes as a kinaidos (i.e. of irregular, unnatural build) see Winkler, J. J., The Constaints of Desire, The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece, New York, London, Routledge 1990, 193-94.

[18] δελφάκιον γενήσομαι (237). δέλφαξ – a grown-up pig (antonym for χοῖρος). δελφάκιον is its diminutive. About the swine in the context of the festival of Thesmophoria, see Bowie A. M., Aristophanes: Myth, Ritual, and Comedy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993, 215-17.

[19] This term is borrowed from Aeschylus' Edonians, where it is used by Lycurgus to address Dionysus as he inquires about his appearance. According to one interpretation, Agathon (ὁ

λύρα, λήκυθος, ξίφους) and female (κροκωτῷ, κεκρυφάλῳ, στρόφιον, κατόπτρου) traits in Agathon's appearance. Agathon's epithets – εὐπρόσωπος, εὐπρεπής, λευκός, ἐξυρημένος, γυναικόφωνος, ἁπαλός (191-92) – underline his female nature. Likewise, according to Euripides, shaved Mnesilochus is εὐπρεπής (233). Agathon sings a brief dialogue in a female voice and with appropriate gestures (101 ff.); in the same way, Mnesilochus under female guise is to speak as a woman at the festival (268-69).

So, Mnesilochus has to borrow from Agathon his 'female part'[20], although he finds it humiliating to fuse it with his male being. Unlike Agathon, he wears men's clothes and mask in the comedy prologue. And later he has to fit on female guise right on the stage, facing the audience. Mnesilochus as a man is embarrassed with the necessity to put on woman's clothes and manners. His forcible visual feminization in the first half of the comedy serves as a pretext to the collapse of his scheme in the second part.

Mnesilochus' dressing up is over when Euripides says the following words:

ἀνὴρ μὲν ἡμῖν οὑτοσὶ καὶ δὴ γυνὴ
τό γ' εἶδος· (266-67)[21]

The female mask, which the protagonist was forced to put on, fails to assist him as he tries to mislead women and carry out the scheme. When disguised Mnesilochus addresses the women gathered at the festival with a speech in favor of Euripides, instead of persuading them, he incurs their mistrust (although at first they seem to notice nothing extraordinary about his female appearance). The women decide to catch and punish him (536-39). It is suggested to tear his hair out as a way of punishment. This stresses the fact that Mnesilochus has already gone through such humiliation. Mnesilochus once again becomes a 'victim'; his passiveness and subordination becomes even more conspicuous in the comedy. Cleisthenes tells the women about Euripides' intention:

ἀφεῦσεν αὐτὸν κἀπέτιλ' Εὐριπίδης,
καὶ τἄλλ' ἅπανθ' ὥσπερ γυναῖκ' ἐσκεύασεν. (590-91)[22]

γύννις, like Dionysus) is the god of theater (or its imitaton, which, according to Agathon's theories, is the same). See Zeitlin, 1981, 196-98; Riu X., Dionysism and Comedy, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC, 1999, 191-201.

[20] Cf. Zeitlin, 1981, 178.

[21] *There then, the man's a regular woman now, at least to look at.*

[22] *Euripides has tweezered him, and singed him, and dressed him up, disguised in women's clothes.* Cf. *Ach.,* 121, 739; *Frogs,* 523; Hdt. V. 20. 3.

The way the information is put to words once again suggests that Euripides is the 'agent'; the driving force while Mnesilochus is the 'patient'. Such distribution of parts accentuates the Inlow's passive part in the disguise scene. The women start to remove clothes from Mnesilochus (636-40).

Mnesilochus' divestiture also suggests the passiveness of his part. Some of his clothes are removed by force (ἀπόδυσον αὐτόν· 636; and ff. 636-40). The women notice that he does not have breasts (640). Despite his hard efforts, he fails to hide his phallus (643-48). So, Mnesilochus is passive as concerns both disguise and divestiture: the female costume is put on and later taken off him against his will.

Mnesilochus' transvestite disguise is not successful. In the *Thesmophoriazusae,* the failure is associated with a subordinate status.[23] The protagonist, who is deprived of the authority over his own dress, is altogether humiliated and neglected. In the comedy, such a state is rendered through the loss of masculine properties and feminization.

Mnesilochus is unable to take off his female dress himself when he wishes to do so. Tied to a board like Andromeda, he asks Prytanis to undress him:

γυμνὸν ἀποδύσαντά με
κέλευε πρὸς τῇ σανίδι δεῖν τὸν τοξότην,
ἵνα μὴ'ν κροκωτοῖς καὶ μίτραις γέρων ἀνὴρ
γέλωτα παρέχω τοῖς κόραξιν ἐστιῶν. (939-42)[24]

Mnesilochus, doomed to death (938), wishes to avoid the shame of being laughed at. He is appalled at the thought of becoming an object of ridicule for the crows that have gathered to torture his flesh. And the cause of shame is his appearance: an old man clad in woman's dress.[25] After he is unmasked, Mnesilochus prefers to be humiliated through being stripped naked rather

[23] Saïd, 1987, 233. At this point, a parallel is drawn with Euripides' *Bacchae*, whose links with comedy is commonly admitted: Dodds E. R., Euripides: Bacchae, 2d ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press 1960, 192; Seidensticker B., Comic Elements in Euripides' *Bacchae*, AJP, 99, 1978, 303-20; Foley H. P., The Masque of Dionysus, TAPA, 110, 1980, 107-33; Segal C. P., Dionysiac Poetics and Euripides' *Bacchae*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1982, 254-59; Muecke Fr., 'I Know You – by Your Rags': Costume and Disguise in Fifth-Century Drama, Antichthon, 16, 1982, 17-34; Gruber W. E., Comic Theaters: Studies in Performance and Audience Response, Athens: University of Georgia Press 1986, 26-27.

[24] *Don't expose me thus; do tell the Scythian he may strip me first; don't let a poor old man, in silks and snoods, provoke the laughter of the crows that eat him.*

[25] The contrast is essential for the visual humor of the comedy. For the role of shame in the Athens community, see Cairns D. L., Aidos, Oxford 1993, 178-431. κροκωτοῖς καὶ μίτραις (941) denotes a complete set of woman's clothes worn by Mnesilochus. Cf. 945, which mentions only κροκώθ', as the most conspicuous disgracing item; also 1044.

than to endure even greater dishonour of wearing female clothes,[26] which once again attests that the loss of masculine symbols and feminization is extremely humiliating.

Apparently, the forcible transvestite disguise of the protagonist in the *Thesmophoriazusae* is associated with the degradation of his status and a passive part, which leads to the failure of the scheme involving the disguise.

Remarkably, Euripides in the end of the comedy successfully uses the practice of dressing up as a woman, which failed with the protagonist. It was he who initiated Mnesilochus' transvestite disguise as the play started; and it was he who gave orders to Mnesilochus and Agathon regarding costumes. Consequently, he asserted himself as a dominant character. In the second part of the comedy, Euripides' strategy that targets the liberation of Mnesilochus again involves a role-playing: he plays several roles (that of Menelaus, Perseus, and Echo presumably) from his own tragedies. Eventually, as they fail, the tragedian decides to act as a comical character. Disguised as an old woman, Euripides enters the stage in the company of a dancing girl. The Scythian guard is so amused with the girl's dance that he fails to identify Euripides under the old lady's guise. The tragedian manages to release Mnesilochus. He himself takes off the female mask from Mnesilochus' face and lets him reacquire his masculine role by telling him to run away in a manly manner (1204-5). Euripides, who unlike Mnesilochus, is never subjected to physical manipulations, eventually manages to make good use of disguise.[27] This may also imply that the comedy links success with an active and dominant character.

Transvestite disguise is the central theme in Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* as well. However, unlike the *Thesmophoriazusae*, here women are dressed up as men:[28] Athenian women, worried about the fate of their city, decide at the

[26] See Sommerstein A. H., The Comedies of Aristophanes: vol. 8, Thesmophoriazusae, Warminster: Aris and Phillips 1994, 217, which cites *Lys*., 1019-24 and Tyrtaeus l0. 21-30 and points out that the plural form κροκωτοῖς, μίτραις, 941 puts even stronger emphasis on the humiliation and derision Mnesilochus is afraid of because of his clothes. When Prytanis rejects his reuest, Mnesilochus expresses his worries with respect to his clothes: ὦ κροκώθ', οἷ εἴργασαι(945).

[27] The failure of tragic plots and the success of comical ones imply the 'advantage' and 'victory' of comedy over tragedy. See Slater N. W., Spectator Politics, Metatheatre and Performance in Aristophanes, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2002, 168-79; Compton-Engle, 2003, 523-24.

[28] The transformation works at two levels in the comedy as the men who acted as women were dressed up as men.

festival of Scira[29] to pave their way to the public assembly through dressing up as men and to take authority in their hands.[30]

The visual play on a costume and identity starts in the very prologue of the comedy. The spectator sees a character dressed as a man – 'he' wears Laconian shoes and himation in a manly manner and holds a staff in 'his' hand. Later it will become clear that the character is Praxagora (124), the protagonist of the comedy. She wears a white female mask but is clad as a man. Undoubtedly, the discrepancy in her appearance used to cause laughter among the audience. (Let us recall another woman's words that such a behavior (i.e. women's putting on men's costume) seems to her very funny (καταγέλαστον, 125) right because of its discrepancy (125-27).[31]

The protagonist's speech in the beginning of the play clearly points to the decisive role of a mask in her scheme. Praxagora's, as the initiator's, role in the disguise is highlighted from the very start. After her female co-citizens enter the stage, the protagonist, already dressed as a man, checks if the women are loyal to the decision taken at Scira (58-60). The scene of women's dressing up as men holds quite a sizable place in the comedy (24-279). Throughout this scene, Praxagora is the person who gives out directions, takes decisions, sets the order in the dressing-up process and chooses the appropriate time.

First of all, the women should give up outer female signs and acquire masculine ones. It was mentioned above that in the *Thesmophoriazusae* the first thing a man's 'transformation' into a woman (215-45, 589-90, 1042) involved was shaving hair off his body. Hence, in the *Ecclesiazusae*, the first thing to do is to 'acquire' more hair on the body. The following items were necessary for this: ἐρραμμένους... πώγωνας (24-25), τὰς μασχάλας... δασυτέρας (60-1). Lack of hair on one's body is a feminine property while abundance of hair – is typically masculine.[32] Rejection of female properties and acquisition of masculine ones is also marked with a symbolic gesture:

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[29] The women take the decision to dress up as men at the festival of Oschophoria. The festival involved the procession from the temple of Dionysus to the temple of Athena Sciras. Similarly to the Thesmophoria, Scira was a women's festival in honor of Demeter. On that day, women were allowed to leave their homes and take part in the procession from Athens to Scira. Scira was the festival of inversion as women left homes and held the procession outside Athens. So, the event was an appropriate place to design such a scheme. See Burkert, 1985, 230; Burkert W., Homo Necans, trans. by Bing P., Berkeley & Los Angeles 1983, 45; Parke H. W., Festivals of the Athenians, London 1977, 77-80.

[30] In the Greek world, politics and power was associated with the masculine domain (cf. Aristot., *Pol.*, I. 5. 7. 1254a 13-14; I. 12. I. 1259b 1-2). Women had to 'transform' into men in order to penetrate it (121).

[31] The characters' understanding of the discrepancy in their appearance compels to pay more attention to the theme of costumes and disguise. Cf. *Birds*, 804; *Wasps*, 1309.

[32] Cf. *Ach*., 120-21; *Wasps*, 476; *Lys*., 800-804, 1072; *Thesm*., 33, 190, 191-92, 214-35, 575, 583; *Eccl*., 24-25, 68-71, 118, 121, 126-27, 145, 273, 493-94, 501-2.

women throw away razor – an item associated with female appearance (65).[33] The next step is to acquire darker complexion (64) – another masculine property.[34] One of the women makes quite a remarkable comment: μηδὲν εἴην ἔτι γυναικι προσφερής (67).

Women are to fit on men's clothes in order to play men's part: θαἰμάτια (26), which they stole from their husbands, ἐμβάσιν (47) (Λακωνικαί cf. 269), βακτηρίας (74) – which their husbands used to wear at the Assembly.[35]

The women are to fit on the necessary items with the ritual order Praxagora sets for them (268-79). The women are obedient to the protagonist's will and order, which marks the admission of Praxagora's dominant position.

Apart from acquiring physical masculine properties, the women are to imitate men's speech and behavior (148 ff),[36] which is very important for the success of the scheme. It is again Praxagora who gives the women appropriate training.

The Assembly has its own 'protocol' (e.g. the speaker should have a garland on his head when delivering a speech (131);[37] and it is essential that the women know the rules – otherwise, their true identity will be exposed. They are to speak worthily, in a manly language (ἀνδριστὶ, 149)[38], and lean on their staff with dignity (150). Such a way of speaking primarily involves phrases and swearing formulae appropriate for men (cf. 155, 158, 165, 189, 204).

Although the women have difficulties in acquiring masculine skills for speech making, Praxagora herself shows surprising ability, which is illustrated through her words. She is capable of all that makes up the so-called masculine speech type starting with the traditional way of word-building and manly evaluation of events, and ending with the aptitude to discuss appropriate themes and swear by gods appropriately.[39]

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[33] See Aristoph. Fragm. 332, where it starts the list of women's 52 accessories.

[34] Cf. *Eccl*., 699; *Birds*, 667; *Frogs*, 1092. *Thesm*., 31, 191. See Henderson, J., The Maculate Muse, Obscene Language in Attic Comedy, London 1975, 211.

[35] The *Ecclesiazusae* accentuates the importance of a staff as a necessary item to imitate men (cf. 150, 276, 509). Some even believe βακτηρία means phallus. See Rothwell K. S., Politics and Persuasion in Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*, Leiden 1990, 84.

[36] Cf. Mnesilochus, dressed up as a woman, has to learn how to imitate female speech (*Thesm*., 267-68).

[37] Cf. *Birds*, 463.

[38] ἀνδριστι may denote 'in a male voice'. See The Comedies of Aristophanes: vol. 10, *Ecclesiazusae*, ed. Al. H. Sommerstein, Warminster: Aris & Phillips 1998.

[39] Some scholars suggest that Praxagora's character was modeled to a traditional figure of ῥήτωρ. See Rothwell, 1990, 82-92.

The women address Praxagora the way they would address a man: ξυνετὸς ἀνήρ (204). They call her their strategus (στρατηγὸν, 246),[40] which is the formal recognition of Praxagora's superiority (Praxagora being dressed as a man), her control over the rest of the women (who also wear men's clothes) and her leading role in agon. The whole first scene is the rehearsal and preparation for the coming dispute. The women's chief weapon is their disguise, and Praxagora dominates the process. Remarkably, later it is Paxagora's husband, Blepyrus, who calls her the strategus, the same way as the women do it in the first scene, and by that time, Praxagora has already taken off the masculine guise. Blepyrus' words once again accentuate his wife's active and dominant role against his own passive and subordinated status (725-27).[41]

Praxagora is accepted as a man at the Assembly. This is attested through the epithets εὐπρεπὴς νεανίας (427), λευκός.., ὅμοιος Νικίᾳ, (428).[42] The women's scheme enjoys success. The protagonist wins the agon. The city governance goes to women. Unlike Mnesilochus, nobody can detect a woman beyond the protagonist's guise. Praxagora herself speaks about the success of her scheme:

ταυτὶ μὲν ἡμῖν, ὦ γυναῖκες, εὐτυχῶς
τὰ πράγματ' ἐκβέβηκεν ἀβουλεύσαμεν. (504-5)[43]

Remarkably, Praxagora, who initiated and managed the disguise scheme, decides herself on when and how the women should take off their masks. Her tone is likewise imperative (506-9).

It is also important that the protagonist, unlike Mnesilochus, takes off the mask of her own will – the mask that enjoyed success in the agon:

ἐγὼ δὲ βούλομαι,
εἴσω παρερπύσασα πρὶν τὸν ἄνδρα με
ἰδεῖν, καταθέσθαι θοἰμάτιον αὐτοῦ πάλιν
ὅθενπερ ἔλαβον τἄλλα θ' ἁξηνεγκάμην. (510-13)[44]

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[40] ὁ στρατηγός does not always imply military power. See Liddle H., & Scott R., A Greek-English Lexicon.

[41] Cf. Robson J., New Clothes, a New You: Clothing and Character in Aristophanes *In* The Clothed Body in the Ancient World, ed. L. Cleland, M. Harlow and L. Llewellyn-Jones, Oxford: Oxbow Books 2005, 70-75.

[42] Agathon and Mnesilochus in the *Thesmophoriazusae* have similar epithets. Evidently, Praxagora's complexion was not dark enough, which is implied in her epithet (428) (cf. also 385-87). See The Comedies of Aristophanes: vol. 10, *Ecclesiazusae*, 1998; Taaffe L., The Illusion of Gender Disguise in Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*, Helios, 18, 1991, 100.

[43] *So far, dear sisters, these our bold designs have all gone off successfully and well.*

[44] *I myself will steal into the house, and ere my husband see me, put back his overcloak, unnoticed, where I found it, and whatever else I took.*

The text accentuates Praxagora's own intention to take off man's clothes and retrieve her natural role. So, she never acts as a 'patient'; on the contrary, she is the 'agent', the person who can exercise power over others. The deeds by Praxagora and her followers (they have stolen their husbands' clothes) compel Blepyrus (as well as other men) to put on a woman's dress. Blepyrus loses the exterior sign of his male being (man's clothes), which equals to the loss of power: he stays at home (the female domain) and despite his wish is unable to join the Assembly (354, ff). Blepyrus' status is degraded, which is caused by his feminization. He has to accept woman's items: ἡμιδιπλοίδιον (318) (sc. κροκωτίδιον (332) and χιτώνιον (374), Περσικὰς (319) (sc. ἐμβάδες (74) and κοθόρνω (346). Blepyrus unwillingly puts on the costume which resembles Agathon's female clothes in the *Thesmophoriazusae* (136-39) and which proves sufficient to dress up Mnesilochus as a woman (250-63).

Remarkably, Blepyrus (similarly to Mnesilochus) finds it disgraceful to wear woman's clothes. Clad in his wife dress, he is ashamed of his appearance. This is how he comments on his 'unusual attire' as he addresses Chremes:

ἐν τῷ σκότῳ γὰρ τοῦτ' ἔτυχον ἔνδον λαβών. (375)[45]

Leaving Blepyrus without man's clothes is also associated with death (the same way as Mnesilochus' failure in the *Thesmophoriazusae*: the women sentence him to 'capital punishment') (938).[46] Blepyrus reproaches Praxagora:

εἶτ' οὐ τὸ σαυτῆς ἱμάτιον ἐχρῆν σ' ἔχειν;
ἀλλ' ἔμ' ἀποδύσας', ἐπιβαλοῦσα τοὔγκυκλον,
ᾧχου καταλιποῦσ' ὡσπερεὶ προκείμενον,
μόνον οὐ στεφανώσας' οὐδ' ἐπιθεῖσα λήκυθον. (535-38)[47]

Evidently, Blepyrus used his himation as a blanket as well (cf. 334). Praxagora takes it away and in return puts on his husband her own mantle (ἔγκυκλον). Blepyrus says his wife left him as a corpse ready to be buried. πρόθεσις – laying the dead in the house – was an essential element of the ancient Greek burial ritual.[48] A lecythos and a garland were regular attributes of πρόθεσις. A garland made from natural or artificial (waxen or metal) flowers or leaves was either put on the head of the dead or laid beside him.[49]

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[45] *'Twas dark indoors: I caught it up by chance.*

[46] Cf. *Lys.,* 599-614.

[47] *Is that the reason why you did not put your mantle on? You threw it over my bed and took my overcloak, and left me lying like a corpse laid out; only I'd never a wreath, or bottle of oil.*

[48] See Garland R., The Greek Way of Death, London 1985, 23-31. Cf. the ritual of πρόθεσις (with garland and lecythos, which is later described in the comedy (1030 ff.)).

[49] Cf. 1034-35; *Lys*., 602; Eur., *Tro.,*1223.

A lecythos is also an important attribute of the funeral ritual. In the course of πρόθεσις, lecythoi were placed around the dead body. During the funeral and later as well, they were put on the grave.[50] Through her deeds (taking her husband's things and stealing away at night) Praxagora denies Blepyrus' existence. In the comedy, loss of male clothes is equaled to death.[51]

Hence, Blepyrus' forcible disguise is linked to his passive status, feminization and defeat (loss of power, death), while Praxagora's dominant position in the course of dressing up is associated with her active status, masculinization and success (she usurps power). Interestingly, the opposition of their names (Praxagora – actor, and Blepyrus – viewer) suggests the active part of the former and the passive state of the latter.

Links between the forcible disguise of a male character and his failure and feminization are evident through one passage in the *Lysistrata*.[52]

Lysistrata and her supporters forcibly put woman's clothes on Proboulos as he approaches the rebellious women (532-37). They put a veil (κάλλυμα) on him (530), which they normally wear when they leave home[53] and have him carry a basket – καλαθίσκον (535), in which they put items necessary for carding the wool.[54] Proboulos' previous words indicate that woman's role was associated with a lower status:

ΠΡΟ. σοί γ', ω κατάρατε, σιωπῶ'γώ, καὶ ταῦτα
κάλυμμα φορούσῃ
περὶ τὴν κεφαλήν; μή νυν ζώην. (529-31)[55]

Evidently, keeping silence in the face of women is the same for Proboulos as accepting death. However, now the women take off and put on him their female attributes. Proboulos' failure to resist their 'assault' points to his passive role. He remains on the stage in the female attire almost throughout 100 lines (532-613). Proboulos' status is degraded through his dressing up as a woman. Now Lysistrata, the protagonist with masculine qualities, can keep

[50] See Garland, 1985, 36-37.

[51] Cf. 994-97, 1030-33, 1105-11; *Lys.*, 599-607. Remarkably, forcible disarmament and loss of control over weapons is unambiguously linked to death in epics where weapons are taken off the defeated warriors. Interestingly, in epics beaten and divested heroes are identified with women (Il. 22. 124-25). See Compton-Engle, 2003, 507-35.

[52] In general, the appearance and costume of a character is very important in Lysistrata's scheme (46 ff., 149-54, 219-21).

[53] See The Comedies of Aristophanes, vol. 7, Lysistrata, ed. Sommerstein A. H., Warminster: Aris & Phillips 1990, 180; Stone 1981, 202-3.

[54] Cf. *Eccl.*, 88-92.

[55] *Silence for you? Stop for a wench with a wimple enfolding her? No, by the Powers, may I DIE if I do!*

him silent as if he was a woman.[56] Lysistrata has the dominant position – she can assert her superiority, which is expressed through her making Proboulos put on female clothes against his wish. The dispute between Lysistrata and Proboulos ends in Lysistrata's favor. Women drive Proboulos out. His failure is associated with feminization and death (as in the case with Mnesilochus and Blepyrus) (599-607).[57]

Women see Proboulos off as if he was dead and get prepared for the funeral ritual. Lysistrata makes a honey cake for him (601) – traditionally, such a cake was put with a dead person so that he could cajole Cerberus in the Underworld.[58] Proboulos, as a dead man, is 'embellished' with a garland (602, 604).[59] He is given stripes (603), which are often tied around the dead body in the course of πρόθεσις.[60] More than that: Charon awaits Proboulos (606),[61] and the women promise to bring an offering to the tomb on the third day from Proboulos' death (612-13).

Proboulos' transvestite disguise and later, his ritual death is linked to the loss of power: he who is the city authority by the law is deprived of his power (Lysistrata and her supporters dominate over the Acropolis). The women let Proboulos go humiliated and defeated.

Evidently, the transvestite disguises of an active and dominant character in comedy is associated with success while forcible dressing-up implies passiveness, subordination and disgrace and marks the failure of a character.

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[56] See Taaffe, 1993, 48-73.

[57] Daniel Levine says that the practice of putting women's dress on men antagonists by their opponents (to make them feel disgraced) was the imitation of preparation for a death ritual. With Euripides' Pentheus, as well as with Proboulos, the practice marks the preparation for either direct or symbolic death. See Lysistrata and Bacchae: Structure, Genre, and Women on Top, Helios, 14 1987, 29-38. Cf. Seidensticker B., Comic Elements in Euripides' Bacchae, AJP, 99, 1978, 318; Aristophanes, Lysistrata, ed. J. Henderson, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1987, 136.

[58] Cf. Verg. *Aen*., 6. 420. Other sources present it as an offering to chthonic powers. Cf. Aristoph. *Clouds*, 507-8; Hdt. 8. 41. 2-3; Paus. 9. 39. 5. See The Comedies of Aristophanes, vol. 7, Lysistrata, 1990, 185; Aristophanes, Lysistrata, 1987, 147.

[59] A garland is related to the funeral ceremony. Cf. Eccl. 537-38, 1034-35. Proboulos, as if truly dead, is decorated with a wreath of flowers (natural or artificial) (602) as well as with a metal (probably gold) crown (604). Vase painting scenes frequently picture a dead person with a metal crown. The Comedies of Aristophanes, vol. 7, Lysistrata, 1990, 185; Aristophanes, Lysistrata, 1987, 147.

[60] Cf. *Eccl*., 1032.

[61] This passage is the reminiscence of Euripides' *Alcestis* (252-57).