

THE LIONESSE & THE CHEESE-GRATER  
(AR. *LYS.* 231-232)

When Lysistrata administers the oath of chastity to Kalonike in the first episode of the *Lysistrata*, she avers:

οὐ στήσομαι λέαινα' ἐπὶ τυροκνήστιδος. (vv. 231-232)  
I will not stand a lioness upon the cheese-grater<sup>1</sup>.

This line presents a vivid image which remains nonetheless opaque; like most jokes it is over-determined. In this image we find a conflation of the banal and the erotic, the domestic and the wild; while this is but one image among many in the *Lysistrata* (albeit a repeated one, given the nature of the oath-scene), it is no less rich for that reason. As Freud teaches us, jokes are keys to the unconscious, the shared values and assumptions, which define a culture; it is the nature of a joke to express an idea through “processes of condensation accompanied by the formation of a substitute” and these “point towards the formation of dreams, in the mechanism of which the same psychical processes have been discovered”<sup>2</sup>. Jokes, then, function like a collective dream shared by members of a culture. Aristophanes’ Chorus in the *Clouds*, 534-559 makes a similar claim to Freud’s (and so reveals the workings of this Freudian insight in ancient Greece), foregrounding the wisdom and novelty of the jests, as well as their importance and ability to persist, while finding fault with the comedic attempts of

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<sup>1</sup> I am following the text of WILSON 2008. As the scholiast writes, οὐ στήσομαι λέαινα: Ἄντι τοῦ ὡς λέαινα; see HANGARD 1966: 15. I have not translated this line “stand (as) a lioness upon a cheese-grater” in order to insist on the shocking foreignness of the line as it reads in the text. While such a rendering is appropriate for a predicate nominative, the scholiast’s comment makes clear that the ὡς must be implied.

<sup>2</sup> FREUD 1960: 88. This work dates to 1905.

those less ingenious playwrights who repeat one joke incessantly. So even if a joke is idiosyncratic, as is the case with the lioness upon a cheese-grater in the *Lysistrata*, it remains a potent image, informed by a culture and able to inform us about that same culture. As Carlo Ginzburg teaches us, even (if not most especially) the idiosyncrasies of a given historical moment shed light on the cultural imaginary; at the same time we face difficulties in interpreting this information. As Ginzburg observes, we face “the fear of falling into a notorious, naive positivism, combined with the exasperated awareness of the ideological distortion that may lurk behind the most normal and seemingly innocent process of perception ...”<sup>3</sup>. It is precisely such positivism we have fallen into with this passage of Aristophanes; guided by the scholia, we have assumed the scholiast was privy to more information about the ancient world than are we, and so we have deferred to that reading of the joke.

This essay is both an explication of Aristophanes’ text and an exercise in interpreting and evaluating philological information together with *Realia*. The practical goal is to decipher the image used by Aristophanes through an examination of the roles lionesses and cheese-graters played in ancient Greek life and, especially, in the ancient Attic imagination. The theoretical goal is to demonstrate how both textual and archaeological sources must be examined critically rather than using one to illustrate the other; only in this way can we arrive at a true picture of any aspect of ancient life. Combining what we learn from the archaeological and philological evidence, we will return to Freud’s understanding of jokes and tie these threads together to better comprehend Aristophanes’ joke.

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<sup>3</sup> GINZBURG 1982: xvii. I do a disservice to GINZBURG in applying these words to a study of Aristophanes; as he writes earlier on the same page of BAKHTIN’s reading of RABELAIS, “The protagonists of popular culture whom [BAKHTIN] has tried to describe, the peasants and artisans, speak to us almost exclusively through the words of RABELAIS”. Aristophanes is writing for public performance at Athens, so the words of this comedy both mark and were marked by the larger cultural imaginary of the audience. Literature can function as a clue for an understanding of a culture, as GINZBURG writes in a critique of Freud and an analysis of clues; see GINZBURG 1989: 123-124, 154.

## I

Faced with this image of Aristophanes, most commentators turn to the scholia for enlightenment. Attached to vv. 231-232 in the manuscripts we find these remarks:

σχῆμα δὲ ἐστὶν ἀκόλαστον καὶ ἐταιρικόν. τυρόκνηστις δὲ μάχαιρα. ἐπὶ δὲ ταῖς λαβαῖς τῶν μαχαιρῶν ἐλεφάντινοι λέοντες γλύφονται ὀκλάζοντες, ὅπως μὴ ἀποθραύοιτο αὐτῶν οἱ πόδες, εἰ ὀρθοὶ ἐστῶτες γλύφονται. λέγει οὖν, ὅτι οὐκ ἐπὶ ἀνδρὶ στήσομαι πορνεύουσα, ὡς λέαινα ἐπὶ τυροκνήστιδος.

The posture is licentious and meretricious. A cheese-grater is a big knife. Upon the handles of the knives are carved ivory lions crouching down; if they were carved standing upright, their feet might break off. Therefore it is said that not upon the man will I stand, behaving like a prostitute, like a lioness upon a cheese-grater<sup>4</sup>.

These comments are disjointed and leave open the question of whether their author had actually seen an ancient Greek cheese-grater. Common sense rubs against incomprehension, as the possibility of an animal carved on a utensil handle standing upright is ruled out and a grater is equated with a knife. Indeed, the reasoning seems to be of the *ex post facto* sort: in the absence of evidence to the contrary, the scholiast gave us an opinion which has now passed into the realm of dogma. In this regard, Sommerstein's comment on the verses in question can be read as typical:

[the position] is the same that is described in *Peace* 896a as 'standing on all fours': the woman stood bending forward (sometimes resting her hands on the ground or on a bed), in a posture reminiscent of a lion crouched to spring, and was penetrated from behind (either vaginally or anally). See

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<sup>4</sup> HANGARD 1996: 15 *ad loc.* As this edition notes, the comment is found in both the Codex Ravennas 429 (late tenth or early eleventh century) and the Oxon. Bodleian. Baroccianus 38B (late fifteenth century), being the only two codices with extant scholia for this section of the play. We may say, then, that this passage represents an earlier *communis opinio*.

Dover *op. cit.* 100 –1. The position seems to be alluded to in Machon fr. XII Gow ... The reference to a cheese-grater is due to the fact that the handles of such utensils were often made in the form of crouching animals (so the scholia)<sup>5</sup>.

Similar remarks can be found in the commentaries of van Leeuwen, Rogers, Turner, Henderson, and Halliwell<sup>6</sup>. Not all of these commentaries adduce the parallel of Machon, nor cite the work of Dover, but the general understanding of this passage remains consistent. Dover's *Greek Homosexuality* does not discuss this particular passage of Aristophanes but on the pages cited by Sommerstein we find this remark: "When heterosexual intercourse is portrayed in vase-painting, we very commonly see the woman bending over (sometimes with her hands on the ground) while the man stands and penetrates her from behind and below"<sup>7</sup>. Sommerstein, as did Jacobsthal almost sixty years earlier, assimilates the reference in Aristophanes to such vase-paintings as the kylix tondo by the Briseis Painter<sup>8</sup>. The Aristophanic parallel at *Peace* v. 896 (οὐ τετραποδηδὸν στήσομαι, I will not stand four-footed) is cited by Rogers and Henderson<sup>9</sup>; the earliest adduction of this parallel is by Brunck, whose comment is repeated by Dindorf and Wilamowitz-Möllendorff (the former with attribution to Brunck, the latter without)<sup>10</sup>. There is a further Aristophanic parallel, *Peace* v. 896b (considered an interpolated explanation of v. 896 just quoted), cited by Taillardat: εἰς γόνατα κύβδ' ἱστάναι, to stand stooping to the knees<sup>11</sup>. To stand κύβδα is, as Davidson writes, to be in the

<sup>5</sup> SOMMERSTEIN 1990: 166 *ad loc.*

<sup>6</sup> VAN LEEUWEN 1903: 37, ROGERS 1911: 30, WILAMOWITZ-MÖLLENDORFF 1927: 137 *ad loc.* (discussed below), TURNER 1982 *ad loc.*, HENDERSON 1987: 96 *ad loc.*, HALLIWELL 1997: 269 *ad loc.*

<sup>7</sup> DOVER 1979: 100.

<sup>8</sup> ARV<sup>2</sup> 408, 36 (from Tarquinia); see JACOBSTHAL 1932: 6-7 who incorrectly cites this image as ARV 194, 7.

<sup>9</sup> See the references in note 4 above.

<sup>10</sup> DINDORF 1837: III<sup>2</sup>, 770. This edition is partly DINDORF'S OWN comments and partly a compilation of earlier commentaries, as his repetition of BRUNCK'S error (*Peace* 996 for 896) makes clear. The same is true for the edition of BLAYDES, who does, however, correct BRUNCK'S typographic error; BLAYDES 1880: II, 189 *ad loc.*

<sup>11</sup> TAILLARDAT 1965: 107, § 202; I cite the Greek text from the edition of OLSON (1998). TAILLARDAT defines the image in *Lysistrata* by means of the one in the *Peace* ("i. e."); a

“bent-over rear-entry posture ..., the three-obol position at the bottom-end of a prostitute’s price-range”<sup>12</sup>. Consider finally the moderated view of Tremewan:

The actual position is uncertain. Either this is one with which the ancients would have been familiar, or, as seems more likely, it is a product of Lysistrata’s imagination having been suggested by a lion carved upon the handle of a cheese-grater ... The latter interpretation is nicely suggestive and it is perhaps to be imagined that, by contrast to the supine position of the woman in the previous line with her legs raised, this is a position in which the woman is like a lioness crouching ready to pounce<sup>13</sup>.

While repeating the now-common interpretation of the crouching or pouncing position for the λέαιν’ ἐπὶ τυροκνήτιδος, Tremewan is resolutely agnostic on this point, implying the impossibility of ever truly resolving this question. At the same time, Tremewan situates this verse in the context of the surrounding verses and allows for the machinations of creative imagination (on the part of Lysistrata in the first instance, and consequently too on the part of Aristophanes).

To summarize the argument thus far, our understanding of this passage of Aristophanes, and the meaning of the image which Lysistrata includes in this oath, has not advanced since the late eighteenth century. Consider Brunck’s note on οὐ κτήσομαι λέαιν’ ἐπὶ τυροκνήτιδος, which he, in his Latin translation, renders as *Non conquiniscam instar leaenae in cultri manubrio* (I shall not squat in the manner of a lioness on a knife handle)<sup>14</sup>.

Id est, οὐ τετραποδηδὸν κτήσομαι, ut est in *Pace* 996 [*sic*]. Est autem *σχῆμα* *συνουσίας*, quod *nebulones* nostri nomine e canino genere sumto

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clearer, although less literal, translation of the image in the *Peace* might be “to bend over at the knees”, as at *Peace* 896a – or indeed OLSON’s translation of τετραποδηδὸν as “doggy-style” (OLSON 1998: 241 *ad loc.* and also AUSTIN, OLSON on κύβδ’ at *Thesmophoriazousae* 489 *ad loc.*).

<sup>12</sup> DAVIDSON 1997: 170. The price derives from Plato Comicus 188.17 K-A, with support from Epicrates 3.18 K-A. Since the price derives from fragments of comedies, we should not construe these remarks literally, as positive evidence for the precise price of various sexual positions. The comedy may have derived from an inversion of the usual hierarchy of prices and positions.

<sup>13</sup> TREMEWAN in DOVER, TREMEWAN 1989: 71-72.

<sup>14</sup> BRUNCK 1823: III, 9.

indigetant. Adluditor ad morem summa cultellorum manubria leaenae figura ornandi submissis genibus subsidentis. De meretrice Λέαίνα dicta ne cogitandum quidem<sup>15</sup>.

That is, *I will not stand four-footed*, as in *Peace* 896. This, however, is a sexual posture, which the scoundrels of our age invoke by a name taken from the canine species. The handle-ends of knives are adorned in this manner, decorated with the image of a lioness crouching on its knees. We need not even think about a prostitute named *Leaina*.

Brunck's Latin renders the more colloquial, or vulgar, term for a sexual position into acceptable discourse. Only the *nebulones* – a Latin word associated, appropriately enough, with the satires of Lucilius and the comedies of Terence (but also used by Cicero) – call it “doggy style”<sup>16</sup>; that this position was conceivable in Antiquity can be argued from vase-paintings<sup>17</sup>. By rendering the passage in the *Lysistrata* as synonymous with that in the *Peace*, Brunck elaborates the ideas in the comments and glosses of the scholiast.

In his 1927 commentary on the *Lysistrata*, Wilamowitz-Möllerdorff repeats what was then, and remains today, largely the *communis opinio*. In the absence of a description of the sexual position, which he charmingly calls a *figura Veneris*, he reasons that “the animal described would be in a position ready to pounce, the hind legs high and the

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<sup>15</sup> BRUNCK 1823: I 18-19 *ad loc.* There is no additional note to *Peace* 896 concerning this interpretation.

<sup>16</sup> AS DO OLSON on *Peace* 896 (τετραποδηδόν) and AUSTIN, OLSON on *Thesmophoriazusa* 489 (κύβδ[α]). See further the discussion and illustrations in STROUP 2004: 54 and her figure 5; Stroup prefers “dorsal sex” to this “coarse sexual idiom”, and offers the reservation that the term “might refer more generally to an identifiably feline raised-rump posture associated with hunting, claw-sharpening, and sexual availability”. There is an additional reference to a prostitute being “four-footed” at Anaxilas 22.25 K-A, which might offer further support for STROUP's reservation; however the ancient Greek cultural associations of “lioness”, unlike those of “hetaira”, do not necessarily support this reading of the sexual position in question. I note the curious reversal of species, from feline (lioness) to canine, between the ancient and modern designations for sexual positions.

<sup>17</sup> The tondo in kylix by the Briseis Painter referenced earlier is one example; see further Boston 1970.233 (ARV<sup>2</sup> 444, 241), a kylix whose painting is attributed to Douris; Tarquinia (ARV<sup>2</sup> 408, 36); & Oxford 1967.305 (ARV<sup>2</sup> 408, 37) – the latter two by the Briseis Painter.

front legs low to the ground. Such a [sexual] position has a wide top, then the surface narrowing sharply”<sup>18</sup>. Wilamowitz-Möllendorff wrote that, “Eine Käseibe ist nicht erhalten”, so in the absence of extant ancient cheese-graters this would appear to be a rational, indeed unquestionable, argument. Over the last seventy years, a large number of ancient cheese-graters have been excavated and published; since the archaeological record does not match up with the philological traces, we need to assess the material evidence rather than invoking disparate objects to illustrate Aristophanes’ obscenity (as in fact Jacobsthal did)<sup>19</sup>. Now let us turn our attention to these cheese-graters, and the role they played in the ancient Athenian imaginary.

## II

We now possess a corpus of several dozen ancient cheese-graters in a variety of materials, the earliest dating from the ninth century BCE; thus we can trace the cultural significations of cheese-graters from Bronze Age to classical Greek periods and so shed light on this problem. Currently, the earliest extant cheese-graters are three bronze ones found in the Toumba burials at Lefkandi<sup>20</sup>. These artifacts of

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<sup>18</sup> WILAMOWITZ-MÖLLENDORFF 1927: 137 *ad loc.* The comment in its entirety reads: «Daselbe meint *τετραποδηδὸν ἐκτάναί* Fried. 896; man sieht es auf der anderen Schale ebendort. Eine Käseibe ist nicht erhalten. Der Scholiast hat keine Vorstellung von der figura Veneris und dem Bilde einer archaischen Löwin; die Tiere werden in der Stellung vor dem Losspringen dargestellt, also die Hinterbeine hoch, die Vorderbeine auf den Boden gedrückt. Eine solche Figur paßte auf eine oben breite, dann stark schmaler werdende Fläche». (This means the same as “to stand on four feet” at *Peace* 896; one sees this equally on other bowls. A cheese-grater is not extant. The scholiast has no gloss of the sexual position and the image of an archaic lioness; the animal described would be in a position ready to pounce, the hind legs high and the front legs low to the ground. Such a [sexual] position has a wide top, then the surface narrowing sharply).

<sup>19</sup> See especially JACOBSTHAL 1932: 6-7; in addition to the Briseis Painter kylix, he draws upon a bronze sculpture in the round of a crouching lioness (which sculpture has no relationship to cheese-graters) as an illustration of what Lysistrata, and thus Aristophanes, had in mind.

<sup>20</sup> The exact find spots are: Tomb 7B, SPG [=Sub-Proto-Geometric] II (c. 875-850); Pyre 13, SPG II; & Pyre 14, SPG IIIa (c. 850-800). See POPHAM, LEMOS 1996, pls. 78

ninth century reality were considered important enough to be buried with warriors in their tombs; in fact, most of the cheese-graters extant are found in either funerary or religious contexts<sup>21</sup>. The notable exceptions are from the Classical period, namely thirteen fragmentary graters found at Olynthus; eleven of these are bronze, two are lead<sup>22</sup>. As Robinson notes, it is not always clear whether the fragment in question derives from a grater or a strainer, or, more remotely, from decorative metal strips once attached to wooden chests<sup>23</sup>. In general, these cheese-graters consist of a metal plate pierced or punctured so that burrs extend from one side; this rough surface is then used for grating. The pierced metal plate usually shows nail holes along the outer edge, where the metal plate could be attached to a handle or backing. The absence of preserved handles does not rule out carved decoration, perhaps even carved ivory handles as Jacobsthal fantasized<sup>24</sup>. It seems

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no. B2 and 146d, 48 no. 8, 87 no. 18 and 146c, respectively; see also RIDGWAY 1997: 325-326. These finds have served as illustrations of the bronze grater (κνήστι χαλκείη) mentioned at *Iliad* 11.640 which Hecamede uses to grate goat's cheese over Nestor's cup of Pramnian wine. CURTIS 2001: 315 argues that these graters attest to the existence of "true cheese" in Greece "at least by the ninth century B.C." and that soldiers "could use this portable tool to grate hard cheese into dough to make bread or over meat or fish as a garnish". On these cheese-graters as evidence on the debate about the historical reality of Homeric epics, see RIDGWAY 1997: 329-330 for a concise and smart synthesis of recent scholarship.

<sup>21</sup> For details and references see the items enumerated at JACOBSTHAL 1932: 2-5 together with those mentioned at LYONS 1996: 110 note 19 (primarily Sicilian examples, including ones from Palermo and Solunto, adduced as close parallels to the example from Morgantina) and the catalogue of graters found in Italy at RIDGWAY 1997: 331-335.

<sup>22</sup> ROBINSON 1941: 191-194 item n<sup>o</sup>s. 600-612, pls. XLVIII-XLIX. Given the circumstances surrounding the destruction of Olynthus, these are most likely utilitarian objects in their use-contexts rather than objects deliberately placed. As we shall see, even objects deliberately placed retain their utilitarian appearance and use-function.

<sup>23</sup> ROBINSON 1941: 191-192. Votive terracottas can supplement these fragmentary small metal finds. JACOBSTHAL 1932: 5-6, Beil. 1 and SPARKES 1962: 125, 135-136, pl. VIII: 3 discuss the Boeotian votive terracotta (inventory n<sup>o</sup> 01.7783) of a woman grating cheese into a grinding bowl. JACOBSTHAL 1932: 1-2 discusses two mostly intact cheese-graters: the first, from Ialysos (c. 525-500 BCE) consists of an intact grating plate which was once attached to a handle (perhaps wooden); the second, from Kamiros (c. 450-425 BCE) consists of a grating surface with a plain handle attached to its back.

<sup>24</sup> JACOBSTHAL 1932: 7: «Das Modell λέαν' ἐπὶ τυροκνήστιδος muß 411 in Athen Mode gewesen sein; daß die Grifflöwin aus Elfenbein war, dürfen wir dem im übrigen insipi-



improbable, however, that there were ivory handles of which we now possess no trace; more plausibly the material support for the missing handles was wood. It is true that anthropomorphic and tieromorphic handles (some even in ivory) are preserved on objects such as ladles, lids, and knives<sup>25</sup>. The existence of such objects seemingly gave rise to the assumption that Aristophanes is referring to a lioness-shaped handle on a cheese-grater; we do not possess, however, any such handle on any extant cheese-grater. In fact, studying the graters found in South Italy which range chronologically from Orientalizing to third-century and geographically throughout the Etrusco-Italic areas and Sicily, Ridgway observes that “A constant feature of these graters is their uncompromisingly functional appearance”<sup>26</sup>. This functionality is not surprising in a daily-use object, and marks an important differentiation between cheese-graters and objects such as ladles, lids, or knives – all of which may be decorative service pieces as well as functional objects. The absence of any except utilitarian cheese-graters calls into question the assumption made by the ancient scholiast regarding the tieromorphic handle, even if it were made of carved wood.

The functional appearance of the cheese-graters is striking in the luxurious context of Italian “princely tombs”. Only the silver graters from the Tomba Bernardini in Praeneste and the Montetosto tumulus

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den Scholion vielleicht glauben». In addition to Jacobsthal, the following authors use Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* as their sole evidence for the existence of carved handles on cheese-graters: BRUNCK 1823: *ad loc.*; VAN LEEUWEN 1903: 37 *ad loc.* (carved ivory, again) ROGERS 1911: 30 *ad loc.* 231; HILTON 1982: *ad loc.* 231; HENDERSON 1987: 96 *ad loc.* 231; TREMEWAN 1989: 72 (citing SPARKES 1962: 132 as support when in fact it does not support the contention of carved handles on cheese-graters); SOMMERSTEIN 1990: 166 *ad loc.* 231; and CURTIS 2001: 316 note 112. Although not exclusive to philologists, it is clear from this list that they are more prone to adduce the existence of cheese-graters with a carved handle depicting a lioness than are the majority of archaeologists.

<sup>25</sup> One example of a Graeco-Roman bronze lioness handle is Boston MFA 01.8476, depicted in COMSTOCK, VERMEULE 1971: 146 as object 171. This (very clearly a) lioness is in a crouching position, forepaws atop a the head of an ass; compare the crouching lion, hindquarters raised, dating to c. 480 BCE (MFA, James Collection 10.163; COMSTOCK, VERMEULE 1971: 309, object 435), as well as the reclining lion, 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE or later (MFA 67.1035; COMSTOCK, VERMEULE 1971: 308, object 433A).

<sup>26</sup> RIDGWAY 1997: 331.

in Caere would seem to suit their find context<sup>27</sup>. Further, the Tomba del Duce in Vetulonia, another oft-cited example of a “classic Orientalizing *tombe principesche*” yields a fragment of a bronze cheese-grater – not unlike the Toumba burials at Lefkandi<sup>28</sup>. Here, despite the functional appearance of the domestic cheese-grater, there are clearly further social connotations which must be considered. Especially in light of the Tomba del Duce find, the cheese-grater serves less as a functional object than as a social signifier<sup>29</sup>. Based on the finds appearing in Italian tombs, Ridgway argues that the cheese-graters are a Greek import and attest to an imported interest in sympotic culture; at the same time, these are male burials and additional objects found in the tombs connote warrior status and culture. Indeed, the connection between warriors and cheese-graters has antecedents both in the literary record (*Iliad*) and the material record (Lefkandi); in the *Iliad*, hero-warriors partake of *kukeia* to revive themselves after returning from the battlefield<sup>30</sup>. We have no reason to argue that the warrior connotation of cheese-graters was cleft asunder during the archaic or classical period; indeed, the Italian *tombe principesche* would seem to attest to the continuity of connotations of sympotic contexts and elite status. The fact that utilitarian cheese-graters appear in *tombe principesche* attests to the perseverance of social connotations regardless of material of composition. We see then a nexus of social significations determining the position of utilitarian cheese-graters within social discourse: elite, male, heroic-sympotic.

Since, then, the archaeological and philological contexts conjoin warriors and cheese-graters, we can read cheese-graters as a sign or marker of heroic status; turning to other comedies by Aristophanes,

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<sup>27</sup> See RIDGWAY 1997: 335-338 on the princely tombs; on the silver graters see JACOBSTHAL 1932: 4 n° 8, and Ridgway 1997: 333 n° 6 (Tomba Bernardini) and n° 7 (Montetosto tumulus).

<sup>28</sup> RIDGWAY 1997: 335.

<sup>29</sup> RIDGWAY 1997 reads the presence of cheese-graters among the Etruscans as evidence of trade and exchange – the *kukeion* was the price of access to the mineral resources of Tuscany (338). The now-classic statement on the social significance of objects is APPADURAI 1986.

<sup>30</sup> WEST 1998 follows RIDGWAY 1997 in exploring the heroic implications of cheese-graters, although limited to the *Iliad*.

we see this signification at play. In the *Wasps*, Bdelykleon calls various kitchen implements as witnesses, including a cheese-grater (... τοὺς μάρτυρας γὰρ ἐσκαλῶ. / Λάβητι μάρτυρας παρῆναι τρύβλιον, / δοῖδουκα, τυρόκνηστιν, ἐσχάραν, χύταν, / καὶ τᾶλλα τὰ σκεύη τὰ προσκεκαυμένα, 936-939)<sup>31</sup>. Here we see the cheese-grater as one among a panoply of functional domestic objects; in contra-distinction there is the following passage in the *Birds* where cooking, politics, and heroes commingle. While Poseidon and Herakles bicker, Peisetaerus roasts a bird and demands τὴν τυροκνήστιν τις δότω ... (1579); as Dunbar notes, Herakles “becomes instantly fascinated by the cooking” undertaken by Peisetaerus the Athenian<sup>32</sup>. Herakles, a hero known for his insatiable appetite, becomes food critic to Peisetaerus’s chef while Poseidon’s embassy recedes backstage. This shift in priorities and reversal of the heroic for the domestic sphere marks the comic reversal in this passage (a reversal already embedded in the comic tradition of Herakles); this does not, however, obviate the heroic connotations Herakles brings to this passage (even if the main import of the character Herakles in Aristophanic comedy is precisely to lampoon such heroic connotations).

Rather than read non-existent, ornately carved handles into the cheese-graters – either the material ones or the imagined one referred to by Lysistrata – as does the scholiast, it is more profitable to pursue the nexus of warriors and graters in the context of Aristophanes’ comedy. We may wish to join Jacobsthal in dismissing the “insipide Scholion”, but it is time we move the discussion of the oath of chastity in the *Lysistrata* away from hypothetical *Realia* which the archaeological record does not support simply because an ancient reader scribbled nonsense in the margins of the text. Here we may return to Freud’s understanding of jokes; cheese-graters, as we have seen, serve as physical condensations of a series of cultural values. In the *Lysistrata* a reference to the cheese-grater is a substitute, condensing these

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<sup>31</sup> The text is from MACDOWELL 1971, whose comment *ad loc.* stresses the domestic context of this passage. The cheese-grater is called upon again as witness in v. 963. The cheese-grater is among a concatenation of tools in fragment 7.1 K-A and *Aio* fragment 4.1 K-A (both δοῖδουξ, θυῖα, τυροκνήστις, ἐσχάρα).

<sup>32</sup> The text is from DUNBAR 1995, and the quotation from her comment *ad loc.*

cultural connotations into one (admittedly domestic and quotidian) word. Having teased out the meanings of a cheese-grater, consider now the lioness.

### III

Like the cheese-grater, the lioness is both a physical object and a bearer of socio-cultural meaning: the word can designate an animal, a name, and a sexual position. Λέαινα is the feminine of λεών, and both words designate, in the first instance, the animal we know by the Linnaean designation *Felis leo*<sup>33</sup>. *Leaina* is attested as a proper name for a Greek woman, in both literary and epigraphic texts<sup>34</sup>. Perhaps it is from such proper names that the comic usage of lioness to designate a class of women derives<sup>35</sup>. The name also occurs for hetairai; as Headlam wrote, “Names from animals were given especially to prostitutes”<sup>36</sup>. Presumably the working woman so designated possessed some lion-like quality<sup>37</sup>. It is not just names for the courtesans which

<sup>33</sup> LSJ s. v. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Examples include *Epigrammata sepulcralia* n<sup>o</sup>s. 164 and 663 in the *Anthologia Graecae*. See also I. G.<sup>2</sup> ii/iii.11960, the tombstone inscription of a married woman. *Griechische Eigennamen* lists Inscr. 3, 4277, 4300, e, Add. See further the references at HEADLAM 2001: 97 *ad loc.* Herodas II.73.

<sup>35</sup> Anaxilas in his *Νεοττίς* writes: τίς γάρ ἢ δράκαιν' ἄμικτος, ἢ Χίμαιρα πύρπνοος, / ἢ Χάρυβδις, ἢ τρίκρανος Σκύλλα, ποντία κύων, / Φίγξις, ὕδρα, λέαινα, ἔχιδνα, πτηνά θ' Ἀρπυιῶν γένη, / εἰς ὑπερβολὴν ἀφίεται τοῦ καταπτύτου γένους; (fr. 22.3-6-ΚΟΚΚ).

<sup>36</sup> HEADLAM 2001: 97 *ad loc.* Herodas II.73. Perhaps most famously the name *Leaina* is given to the mistress of the Athenian tyrant-slayer Aristogeiton, according to Pausanias 1.23.2 (this is repeated by Polyaeos 8.45.1). Fictional examples include Machon 12 (which has its historical reference in a mistress of Demetrios Poliorcetes) and Lucian's *Dialogue of the Courtesans*. The grave of Lais (the name of more than one famous courtesan) had a lioness holding a ram in her fore-paws on it (Pausanias 2.2.4).

<sup>37</sup> KANNICHT 1966: 553 makes this point in reviewing Gow's edition of Machon. Add now the analysis of images of Homeric animals by SCHNAPP-GOURBEILLON 1981 who, at page 27, summarizes the issue thus: “l'analogie, mode de perception du réel, exprime de façon intelligible des caractéristiques communes, un certain rapport idéologique entre la symbolique de l'animal et le statut de l'homme”. And the status of women, too. Note that calling hetairai lionesses may have conveyed some further degree of censure for women who transgress the constraints of proper and decorous

derive from the animal kingdom. In the name *Leaina*, then, we can read a woman overtly sexualized, indeed reduced to this one aspect of her person<sup>38</sup>. Further, what may have begun as a specialty of one Leaina seems to give way to a lioness position. We find a textual reference to a *σχῆμα λεαίνης* in Euripides' *Helen*, when she recounts the tale of Kallisto<sup>39</sup>. In the absence of an ancient Greek equivalent to the *Kamasutra* which elucidates the exact sexual positions, we are left to decipher the implications of the name given to this sexual position in the hopes of understanding it.

There is another nexus of cultural associations the word *λέαινα* invokes, namely a degree of ferocity or wildness, as well as power. Like her male counterpart, the lioness is considered royalty among the animal kingdom, if more a consort than a queen; this is visible in a number of texts but, tellingly, is also prominent in Athenian dramatic texts<sup>40</sup>. Consider first the portrayals of lions in the fables attributed to Aesop; this is especially rich terrain if we wish to decipher the cultural signification attached to an animal. Here we find references to the length of gestation of a lioness, and other animals attempting to reproach her for this fact of nature, as in the two following fabulae<sup>41</sup>:

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behavior, since the symbolic equation from Homer onwards is between a male hero and a lion ("le lion ... dans *L'Illiade* ... qualifie exclusivement les héros guerriers dans leur attitude au combat"; SCHNAPP-GOURBEILLON 1981: 39-40). PINNEY 1984: 181-183 demonstrates how the animal's behavior can influence vase iconography and its interpretation.

<sup>38</sup> STROUP (*supra*, note 16) 54 similarly argues for the "hetairization" of the women in the *Lysistrata*; although ultimately I disagree with her reading of the lioness on a cheese-grater position, this does not obviate her larger point which I accept.

<sup>39</sup> *Helen* v. 379. AS DALE 1967: 92-93 *ad loc.* rightly notes, "Callisto should be changed into a bear, not a lioness", and this verse has posed problems for generations of Euripidean scholars, as KANNICHT 1969: II.119-121 *ad loc.* summarizes. DALE notes the conjunction of *γυνὴ λέαινα* seemingly in reference to another metamorphosed woman – namely the bovine Io – at Sophocles *Inachos* (P. Oxy. 2369 fr. I, col. ii, v. 14 = fr. 269a Radt); see the remarks of LOBEL 1956: 59 *ad loc.* If we understand this passage as a reference to a sexual position, we can account for the presence of lioness in the text rather than the expected bear.

<sup>40</sup> DUMONT 2001: 164-165 discusses the symbolic meaning of lions; he considers further the mortuary associations based on the presence of lions on Athenian grave-stele.

<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Herodotos 3.108 recounts the lioness' parturition; the story is repeated by Antigonos Carystios *Mirabilia* 21.3.

Λεάινα, ὄνειδιζομένη ὑπὸ ἀλώπεκος ἐπὶ τῷ διὰ παντός τοῦ χρόνου ἓνα τίκτειν, ἓνα, ἔφη, ἀλλὰ λέοντα. Ὁ μῦθος δηλοῖ, ὅτι τὸ καλὸν οὐκ ἐν πλήθει, ἀλλ' ἐν ἀρετῇ.

A lioness, being upbraided by a fox about all the time it took her to bear one cub, replied, “One, but a lion”. The tale makes clear that goodness does not exist in quantity but in virtue.

Ἐτάσις ἦλθε πᾶσι τοῖς τετραπόδοις, καύχημα κατέχουσα εἰς παίδων πλήθη. Καὶ δὴ ἔφασκον τῇ λεαίνῃ βοῶντες· εἰπέ καὶ σὺ τὸ, πόσους παῖδας τίκτεις; Ἡ δὲ γελοῶσα πρὸς αὐτοὺς ταῦτα λέγει· κύμνον μὲν ἓνα, ἀλλὰ γενναῖον πάνυ. Ὁ μῦθος δηλοῖ, ὅτι κρείσσων εἶς ῥώμῃ σώματος καὶ ἀνδρείᾳ καὶ φρονήσει, ἢ πολλοὶ δειλοὶ καὶ ἄφρονες.

A quarrel arose among all the four-footed animals concerning a boast about the numbers of children. So clamoring they asked the lioness, “Tell us, how many children do you bear?” She, laughing at them, said the following: “The whelp is one, but it is thoroughly noble”. The tale makes clear that one is stronger in strength of body and bravery and thought than many who are vile and witless<sup>42</sup>.

What these examples demonstrate is the association of a lioness not only with goodness (τὸ καλόν) and virtue (ἀρετή) but also with bodily strength (ῥώμη σώματος), manliness (ἀνδρεία), and wisdom (φρόνησις); implicit in these variants of the same tale is the lioness’ fiercely maternal instinct as well. Whether Aristophanes knew these specific fabulae is a moot question; he, like his audience, knew of the tradition of Aesopic tales<sup>43</sup>. We can thus approach the fabulous references to a lioness in the tales above as indicative of the values, qualities, and attributes Classical Athenian culture attributed to these animals.

To these positive values we must attach also the idea of savagery or ferociousness, qualities which are prominent in references to a lioness in Attic tragedy. It is not inappropriate, I think, to add here the famous reference by the Chorus in the third stasimon of Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, to the lion cub in the house; the referent is Helen even though the context strongly implies a secondary referent of Clytemnestra<sup>44</sup>. Clytemnestra

<sup>42</sup> Aesop fab. n°s. 240 & 240<sup>b</sup>-HALM. The former is n° 167-HAUSRATH.

<sup>43</sup> Aesop is named at Aristophanes *Birds*, v. 471 and *Wasps*, v. 566.

<sup>44</sup> *Agamemnon*, v. 717.

herself is called a lioness by Cassandra later in the play<sup>45</sup>. Similarly Medea, another transgressive female figure on the Attic stage, is referred to as a lioness – first by the Nurse for her maternal instincts, then later by Jason for her savage murder of the children<sup>46</sup>. Euripides also invokes the image of a woman as a lioness in his *Electra*, where the Chorus so refers to Clytemnestra<sup>47</sup>. In the *Bacchae*, with an elaborate sense of foreshadowing, the Chorus foresees the cross-dressed Pentheus being recognized by the Bacchantes not as the product of women’s blood but of some lioness or one of the race of Libyan Gorgones<sup>48</sup>. Helen, Clytemnestra, and Medea are all dangerous women who usurp a man’s role in the societal structure; all three are called a lioness in these plays. Just as these women transgress the bounds of proper behavior, so too does Pentheus who, under the spell of Dionysos, cross-dresses so as to spy on the Bacchantes in the mountains. While the lioness they refer to is Agave, mother of Pentheus, the aspersion is cast squarely upon Pentheus. So, too, in the final reference to a lioness in Attic drama, we face a cross-gendered simile; in Sophocles, *Ajax*, Teucer tells Tecmessa to bring Ajax’s body quickly, before an enemy snatch it away as someone would snatch a cub from a lioness<sup>49</sup>. In this instance, the shame of a husband dead by his own hand would rebound onto Tecmessa, making her in fact much worse than a barren lioness. Just as Ajax has acted outside the bounds of heroic behavior, thus Tecmessa is now called upon to help set matters right even if it means acting (momentarily) outside the bounds of gender-appropriate behavior. What we glean from these parallel passages is the association of a lioness with a transgression of normal societal conventions; it is usually women who “act out of place” and the comparison is usually negative.

Embedded, then, in the image of the lioness, we find two strands of cultural meaning. The idea of a lion, and consequently also of a lioness,

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<sup>45</sup> *Agamemnon*, v. 1258.

<sup>46</sup> *Medea*, v. 187 (Nurse speaking to Chorus), v. 1342 (Jason speaking to Medea), v. 1358 (Medea to Jason, accepting and dismissing his allegation of her leonine savagery), and finally v. 1407 (Jason to Medea).

<sup>47</sup> *Electra*, v. 1162.

<sup>48</sup> *Bacchae*, v. 989.

<sup>49</sup> *Ajax*, v. 987.

contains within it the notion of an active, at times violent, hunter<sup>50</sup>. The lioness can signify violence and attack as well; the clearest example is a fragment of Anaxillas's *Neortíc*, where the hetaira Leaina is listed along with other female monsters (Chimaira, Charybdis, Scylla, Sphinx)<sup>51</sup>. This comedic fragment stages, and so perhaps heightens, ancient misogyny; misogyny alone, however, does not deplete the sense of monstrosity or savagery in the name Leaina, or the reference to a lioness even if it is an attempt to socialize that self-same savagery<sup>52</sup>. At the same time these efforts at socialization point up the transgressive aspects of viewing a woman as a lioness: something is out of its expected place. Excellence and bodily strength, manliness, are not the usual attributes of a Classical Athenian woman – even if the savagery is exercised in defense of her young. As we have seen, it is not foremost the maternal aspects of a lioness which are staged at Athens; so when Aristophanes mentions a lioness (even in the mouths of a group of women), we see the daily world of ancient Athens shift. To understand this altered terrain, we must draw together these various strands of social meaning.

#### IV

From the warrior associations of cheese-graters we have moved to the transgressive value of calling a woman a lioness; in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* both strands of cultural associations merge. Within this one comic image, Aristophanes unites a host of significations. With what we have learned thus far, let us return to the *Lysistrata* and attempt to unpack the image of the lioness on a cheese-grater.

If we situate the cheese-grater in the *Lysistrata* within a context of warrior or heroic connotations such as we found in the *Realia* and elsewhere in Aristophanic comedy, this serves to reinforce a recurring theme in the play. The women in Aristophanes' comedy assume the

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<sup>50</sup> SCHNAPP-GOURBEILLON 1981: 40 makes this point with reference to Homeric epic; the idea remains present in later literary works as well.

<sup>51</sup> Anaxilas fr. 22.3-5 K-A.

<sup>52</sup> SCHNAPP-GOURBEILLON 1981: 63 makes this point nicely.



roles of their husbands precisely because the men are merely warring and no longer acting the part of warriors. Women's seductive clothing will stop the acts of war, as Lysistrata explains to Kallonike at vv. 46-53. Lysistrata and her followers use "womanly wiles" instead of the traditional (masculine) objects of warfare (spear, shield, knife) in order to become the salvation of Greece (ὅλης τῆς Ἑλλάδος / ἐν ταῖς γυναίξιν ἔστιν ἡ σωτηρία, vv. 29-30). These then are atypical as warrior-women. Building on this connection, in some ways, the women in the *Lysistrata* are assimilated to the mythic Amazons. As Bowie writes:

In Athenian mythology, the most famous attempt by women to take power was the attack by the Amazons, who seized the Pnyx, but were defeated when they tried to seize the Acropolis, by the Athenian culture-hero Theseus. ... By seizing the Acropolis, the women [in the *Lysistrata*] have achieved something the Amazons never did. They create a state of affairs that resembles those representations of the Amazons in which the women dominate politics and sexuality. For instance, Diodorus describes an Amazon society that reverses aspects of normal Greek life: the men do all the female tasks and have no freedom of speech, whilst the women rule and are the warriors<sup>53</sup>.

The female characters in the *Lysistrata* are associated less with the canonical domestic tasks of women (minding children, as Myrrhine does not do in vv. 845 ff.) and more with the typically male sphere of politics<sup>54</sup>. Aristophanes' vocabulary alludes to this reversal of gendered worlds. At v. 630 the Male Chorus-Leader describes the women's actions as weaving which aims at tyranny (ἀλλὰ ταῦθ' ὕφηναν ἡμῖν, ἄνδρες, ἐπὶ τυραννίδι); at vv. 574-586 Lysistrata describes her political actions as carding (ξάινειν, v. 579) and weaving (ὕφηναι, v. 586) to make a cloak (χλαῖνα) for the *demos*. The very idea of women in politics requires metaphoric extensions of the traditional vocabulary of feminine handicrafts. The goal of the sex-strike, recall, is to return to the *status quo*, so it is not surprising that Aristophanes

<sup>53</sup> BOWIE 1993: 184.

<sup>54</sup> The relationship between Aristophanes and Athenian politics is much debated; see McDOWELL 1988, HENDERSON in WINKLER *et al.*, 1990, and HEATH in DOBROV 1997 for an outline of the major points in this debate. I do acknowledge for the *Lysistrata* a political dimension even if it is more fictitious than historical.

does not invent new political metaphors for Lysistrata and her companions<sup>55</sup>. This does not mean that Aristophanes does not associate women and warriors to great comic effect. The reversal of gender roles which the Amazons represent and which Lysistrata embodies in this play means that these women are, in their own way, warriors; the principle difference is that Lysistrata and the women in Aristophanes' play are, paradoxically, warriors for peace<sup>56</sup>.

Under the leadership of Lysistrata, the women enact the sex-strike and so stake their place in the on-going war and Peloponnesian politics. While some of the women are uncomfortable in their newly-designated warrior roles, and would rather use a helmet as a ruse to return home to family than as an implement of warfare (as happens at vv. 742-759), others use their powers of seduction to further the women's agenda. We have already seen the explanation Lysistrata gives Kallonike of seduction becoming a tool of peace; this explanation finds its enactment later in the play with Myrrhine and Kinesias. From vv. 837-951 we witness Myrrhine postponing sex with Kinesias because she must fetch a mat (ψίαθος, v. 921), a pillow (προκεφάλαιον, v. 926), a blanket (σιγύραν, v. 933), and perfume (τὸ μύρον, v. 940). Myrrhine uses this process of delay to conquer Kinesias' warring ways and to instruct him to make peace (σπονδὰς ποιεῖσθαι ψηφιεῖ, v. 951). In so doing, Myrrhine makes Kinesias' life unbearable, and this is the women's peace plan in a microcosm<sup>57</sup>. Just as the lioness Clytemnestra seduces Agamemnon in order to subdue him, so too does Myrrhine seduce and subdue Kinesias. Myrrhine's dangerous seduction, however, is part of a collective plan as the oath-taking scene earlier in *Lysistrata* makes clear. The women take an oath of chastity which moves from passive to active forms of sexual abstinence; the oath begins οὐδεὶς ... πρὸς ἐμὲ πρόκεισιν ἐκτυκῶς, vv. 212-214 (no man shall approach me with his member standing at

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<sup>55</sup> The dramatic, reversed world of the *Lysistrata* reinforces the societal norms for historical, Athenian men even as the reversal in the play aims at re-establishing the social status quo; thus the *Lysistrata* is in many ways similar to the Kabyle house as analysed by BOURDIEU 1990: 271-283.

<sup>56</sup> BOWIE 1993: 182-183.

<sup>57</sup> WIT-TAK 1967: 69 discusses the use of seduction in *Lysistrata* more generally "voor de man volkomen onleefbaar te maken".

attention), then passes to a life of celibacy (ἀταυρώτη, v. 217) at home while dressed seductively (κροκωτοφορούσα, wearing a saffron dress, v. 219) yet never surrendering willingly to a husband (κουδέποθ' ἐκοῦσα τάνδρι τῶμῳ πείσομαι, v. 223). From here the oath passes to a plank promising stillness during sex if forced – “I will be passive and not rock back and forth” (κακῶς παρέξω κούχι προκινήσομαι, vv. 227-228) – then on to “Not towards the ceiling will I stretch up my two Persian ankle-boots” (οὐ πρὸς τὸν ὄροφον ἀνατενῶ τῶ Περσικά, vv. 229-230). We have traced a trajectory in this oath from passively avoiding intercourse while inflaming male desire to an active renunciation of pleasure (the woman's or the man's) and of the woman's “enthusiastic cooperation”<sup>58</sup>. With the reference to τῶ Περσικά, we find a note of decadent, eastern luxury together with intimations of those other women from the East, the Amazons. Now the women are swearing to actively engage in a war between the sexes precisely by being seductive and simultaneously remaining sexually passive. The next, and final, plank in this oath – οὐ κτήσομαι λέαιν' ἐπὶ τυροκνήτιδος. (vv. 231-232) – continues the active renunciation of sexual activity. As Tremewan observes, there is now a shift from the supine position in the previous plank to this one, where the woman literally stands<sup>59</sup>. There is, further, the transgressive use of sexual activity in the interests of a cessation of military hostilities. Seduction meets the sexual savagery of the Amazons; these luxuriously adorned women in their Persian slippers recall, too, those other Persians – the warriors who attempted to annex Greece. From a supine sexual position we should better imagine a more active, indeed ferociously dominant, position.

That this verse refers to a sexual position seems clear. This image is part of the oath of chastity and the comic variation on the sharing of a

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<sup>58</sup> HENDERSON 1987: 96 *ad loc.* 229. For depictions of this position, see ARV<sup>2</sup> 367, 93 & 94 (Tarquinia, no inventory n°), attributed to the Triptolemos Painter; photos in KILMER 1993.

<sup>59</sup> TREMEWAN 1989: 72 insists on the literality of κτήσομαι being the future of ἵκνημι (or, more accurately, the middle, ἵκταμαι). See note 16 above on the collocation of stooping and standing in κύβδ' ἵκάναι at *Peace* 896b; this highlights the difficulties of too literal a reading, but does not invalidate TREMEWAN'S point, as both the rhetorical structure of the passage in the *Lysistrata* illustrates (see next paragraph).

cup (τῆς κύλικος, v. 209) of friendship which binds the women together into a single, conspiratorial collectivity<sup>60</sup>. This statement is preceded by remarks such as “I will be passive and not rock back and forth” (κακῶς παρέξω κούχῃ προσκινήσομαι, vv. 227-228) and “Not towards the ceiling will I stretch up my two Persian ankle-boots” (οὐ πρὸς τὸν ὄροφον ἀνατενῶ τῶ Περσικά, vv. 229-230)<sup>61</sup>. Making like a lioness on a cheese-grater is the third, and rhetorically most emphatic, member of this tricolon crescendo, with the grater recalling aurally the rocking of vv. 227-228 (προσκινήσομαι, τυροκνήτιδος)<sup>62</sup>. Further, and returning to Freud’s analysis of jokes with which we began, the lioness (λέαιν’) simultaneously embodies wordplay. The noun aurally recalls the homonymous verb, λειάνω. The elision in this verse (λέαιν’ for λέαινω) increases, aurally and at first although not finally or definitively, the possibility for a mis-understanding of this line, construing the verse with a form of the verb, λειάνω, meaning “I smooth, polish”, “I triturate”, “I crush”<sup>63</sup>. This polysemous ambiguity disappears once we hear the sentence in its entirety and correctly construe it to understand “lioness”; by this point, the nexus of additional connotations has already been activated. Aurally λέαιν’ condenses and combines “lioness” and “grind”. The homophony of -κνη- reminds us of Aristophanes’ dexterity with words and their sounds; so while the λέαιν’ is not literally polysemous, it remains over-determined.

Once we renounce the unsupported connection of non-existent lionesses carved on the handles of ancient cheese-graters, we can see a convergence of connections packed into this image. The women are renouncing loose behavior even as they seductively incite lust in their men; they are, further, renouncing any motion during sex (recalling the opening point about προσκινήσομαι). Nor, they swear, will they crush

<sup>60</sup> DAVIDSON 1997: 269.

<sup>61</sup> We shall return to the Persian footwear at the end of this article; for now, I am following the comment of SOMMERSTEIN 1990: 166 *ad loc.*

<sup>62</sup> The words are not cognate; the former is related to κινέω, “I set in motion”, while the latter derives from κνάω, “I grate”. It is the aural repetition of the overlapping sounds between the two words which serves to tie together this tricolon.

<sup>63</sup> *LSJ s. v.* 1., 2., and 2.b. respectively. This verb is not attested in Aristophanes, but does appear in Homeric epic, Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle.

their men and grate them. In other words, the women pledge not to grind, even if bumped.

Let us then propose a sexual position to encompass the various significations teased out of this image, to wit a position in which the woman is on top, transgressing the normal bounds and roles of active and passive<sup>64</sup>. Nominally, the position with woman on top is referred to as κέλης, Greek for a small, fast ship or a riding-horse; we might summarize it as “jockey” position<sup>65</sup>. If we read literally the extant literary references to this sexual position, it is expensive and prized precisely for the fact that the woman is atop, and astride, the man<sup>66</sup>. Equating the lioness on the cheese-grater with the cheaper, more common positions of κύβδα or λόρδων (“bent-over rear-entry” and “rear-entry with the woman leaning back”) flies in the face of the associations and meanings we have teased out of the elements of Aristophanes’s image<sup>67</sup>. At the same time, the singular occurrence of such a descriptive image for this position may indicate that the name for this position is one of Aristophanes’s own invention. Scholars have debated whether the *Lysistrata* preserves traces of women’s language from the Classical period, or merely one man’s impersonation of such language;

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<sup>64</sup> This position was not unknown in Antiquity, as vase-paintings attest. Examples include: tondo in kylix by the Dokimasía Painter, ARV<sup>2</sup> 412, 10 (London E818); a fragmentary cup near Olto discussed at KILMER 1993: 40 and R117 (drawing); a type A kantharos, ARV<sup>2</sup> 132, [14] (Boston 95.61) by the potter Pamphaios (KILMER 1993: photo R223); ARV<sup>2</sup> 135 (Boston 08.30a) attributed to the wider circle of Nikosthenes (KILMER 1993: photo R227); & ARV<sup>2</sup> 1208, 1704 (Berlin F2412) by the Shuválov Painter (KILMER 1993: photo R970). There is some variation in position among these pots, but in each we see a woman atop a man.

<sup>65</sup> According to the Plato Comicus fragment 188 K-A quoted earlier, this is the most expensive position, and that trait is shared by all the comic fragments referring to the κέλης; see the discussion of this fragment at DAVIDSON 1997: 118, 196-197 and the discussion, with citations from Aristophanes and others, at HENDERSON 1991: 164-166, who notes the naughtiness implicit in this position. Kalonike refers to this position at *Lysistrata* v. 60, in response to Lysistrata’s inquiry about the absence of the Paralians and the Salaminians.

<sup>66</sup> Current writings in popular men’s magazines privilege the modern equivalent of this sexual position because the woman must do all the “work”. It’s not clear if the ancient interest in the κέλης sexual position derives from similar logic.

<sup>67</sup> Quoted translations are from DAVIDSON 1997: 196; see further the discussion at HENDERSON 1991: 178-180 with adduced parallels from the corpus of ancient Greek literature.

the “lioness on a cheese-grater” may equally represent the women’s name for such a position, or a man’s opinion of what sort of name women might give to this position <sup>68</sup>. From the Scholia to Brunck and beyond, misunderstanding confounds this image in the *Lysistrata*.

Even if – especially if – this image represents a nonce-formation, one perhaps explicated in performance with appropriate body language, the meaning cannot be wholly removed from the social significations teased out above. The position “lioness on a cheese-grater” might be a variation on the racehorse position, perhaps with more vigorous than usual “rapid pelvic motions” which simulate the ferocity and violence of the lioness and the back-and-forth movement of grating (as well as the homophonous meanings inherent in λέαιν’) <sup>69</sup>; alternatively we find here a synonym (perhaps even one used by or among women?) for the “jockey” position <sup>70</sup>. Recall, too, that Aristophanes refers to such a sexual position using an image derived from food. The collocation of food and sex is an ancient comedic commonplace; usually this serves to reiterate “the discourse of comedy [as] relentlessly a male discourse” <sup>71</sup>. In the *Lysistrata* the collocation of food and sex re-asserts male dominance indirectly; by positioning the woman on top of the man, the image of a lioness on a cheese-grater reinscribes the reversed world of the *Lysistrata* and thus reifies the *status quo* which exists outside the play and which the play seeks to restore (albeit a peaceful *status quo*) <sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>68</sup> On this scholarly debate, see most recently DUHOUX 2004: 131-145, who reviews earlier scholarship and holds that the language in the *Lysistrata* is less likely actual women’s language than Aristophanes’s comedic imitation of such language.

<sup>69</sup> HENDERSON 1991: 178 for the quoted phrase; such motions, he writes, are always a part of the position of λόρδων. Combining this movement with the κέληρ position (woman on top) would more than justify a new name or image to describe the resulting sexual position.

<sup>70</sup> In either instance, the use of a lioness clearly presents the image from the feminine perspective-albeit Aristophanes’s impersonation of women’s sexual parlance.

<sup>71</sup> WILKINS 2000: 38.

<sup>72</sup> STROUP 2004: 68-70 emphasizes the temporary empowerment of women resulting from the manipulation of social dissolutions attendant upon times of war, “But even in the fantasy world of the comic stage, our drama would argue, the specter of

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*To the memory of Michael H. Jameson*

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