

Women in Athens (part 2)



Socrates on Women

Socrates: “There is no aspect of the administration of a state that should be reserved to a woman **just because she is a woman or to a man just because he is a man**. Natural gifts are found in both alike ... The case is rather, I think, that **one person has a natural disposition (*phusei*) of a physician and another not, and one may be naturally musical, and another not**.

Glaucon: “Surely.”

Socrates: “**Can we then deny that one woman may be warlike or athletic, and another not?**”

Glaucon: “I think not.” (*Republic* 455d-e, tr. Pomeroy)

Judith Butler – *Gender Trouble* (1990)



“... [G]ender proves to be performative — that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, **gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed** ... [gender] identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (p. 34).

Cultural Performativity

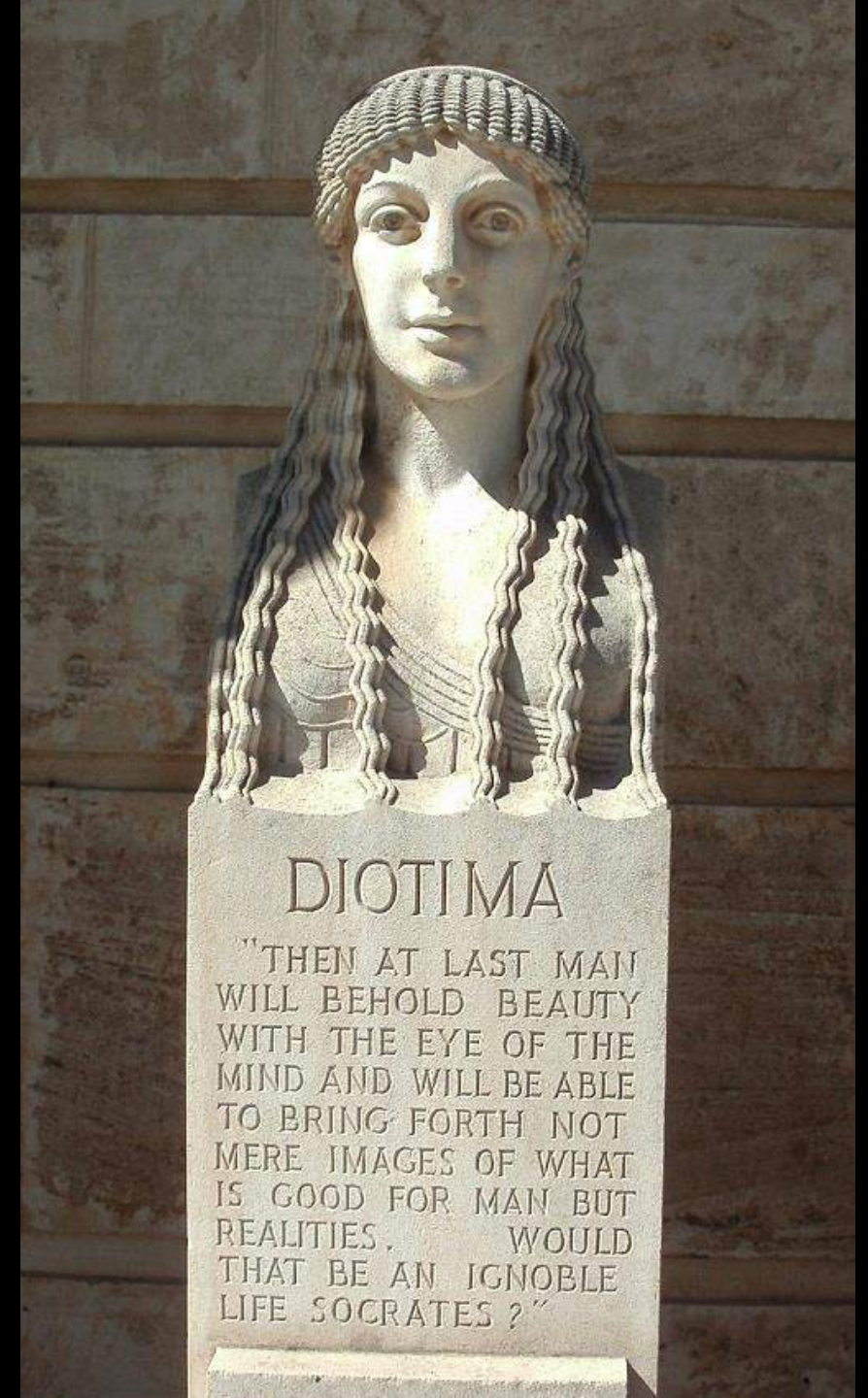
Herodotus, *Histories* 2.35:

“Among the Egyptians, the women buy and sell, the men stay at home and weave ... Women urinate standing, men sitting.”



Performative “Roles”

- Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves (Sarah Pomeroy, 1975)
- Priestesses
- (The muse)
- (Unofficial advisors – ex. Aspasia)
- (Roles in the Greek male imagination → ex. Diotima?)



Aspasia (revisited)

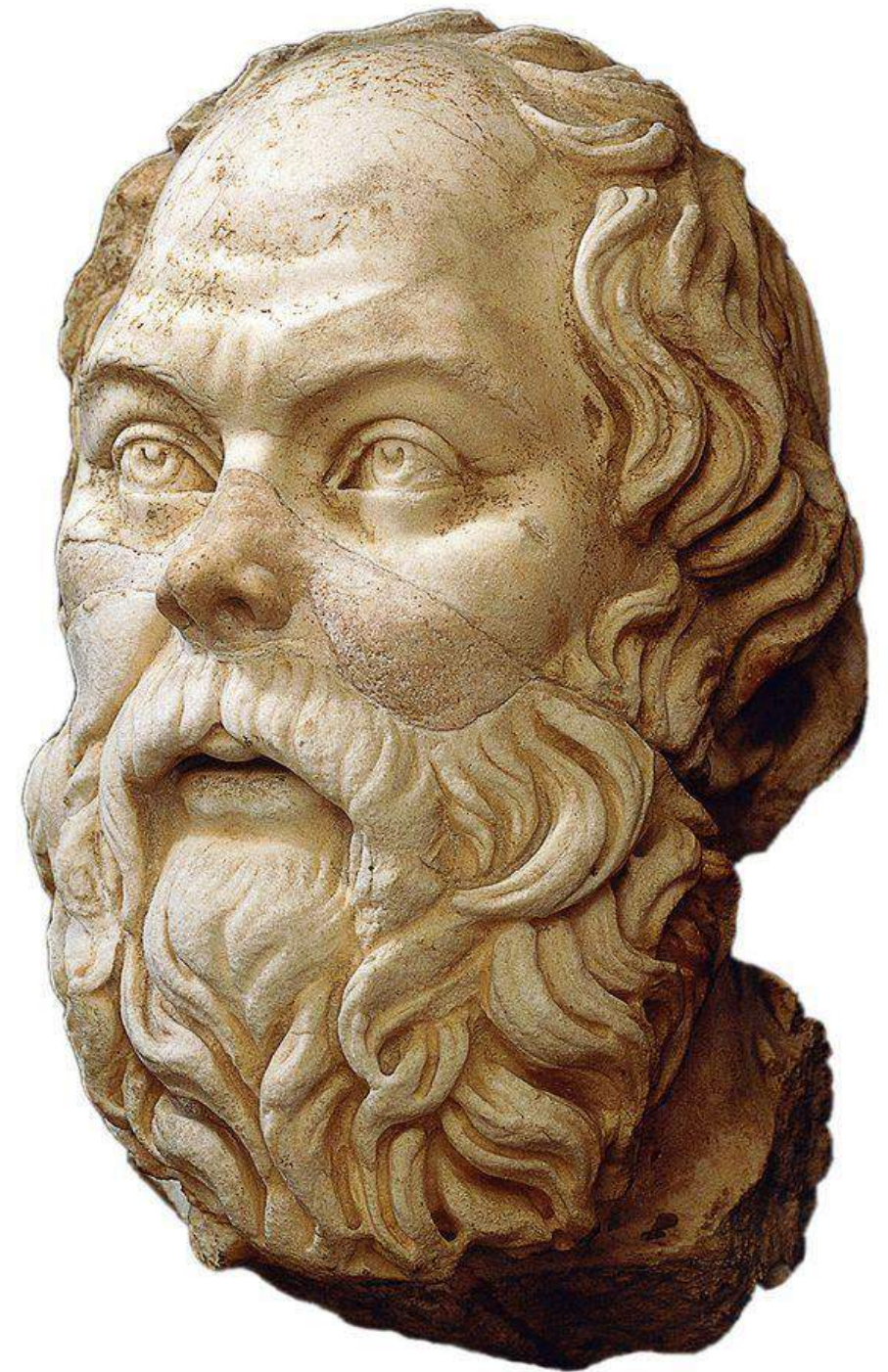
- Concept of *hetaira* as “courtesan” has been questioned, esp. by scholar Rebecca Futo Kennedy (2014)
- Argument is that the term should be translated strictly as “companion” but not necessarily in a sexual sense
- Further suggestion that supposed sexual activity represents not reality but rather a slur by men who disliked Pericles and/or the perceived power of Aspasia
- The view potentially leaves unresolved the question of why we should *trust* sources that state that Aspasia was influential and philosophically astute, but *distrust* those same sources when they associate her with being a “courtesan”



Aspasia ... like Socrates?

“Aspasia was put on trial for impiety, Hermippus the comic poet being her prosecutor. He alleged further against her that she received free-born women into a brothel for Pericles. And Diopeithes brought in a bill providing for the public impeachment on the charge that she did not believe in gods, or taught doctrines regarding the heavens ... The people accepted with delight these slanders.”

(Plutarch, *Life of Pericles* 32, trans. Perrin, adapted)

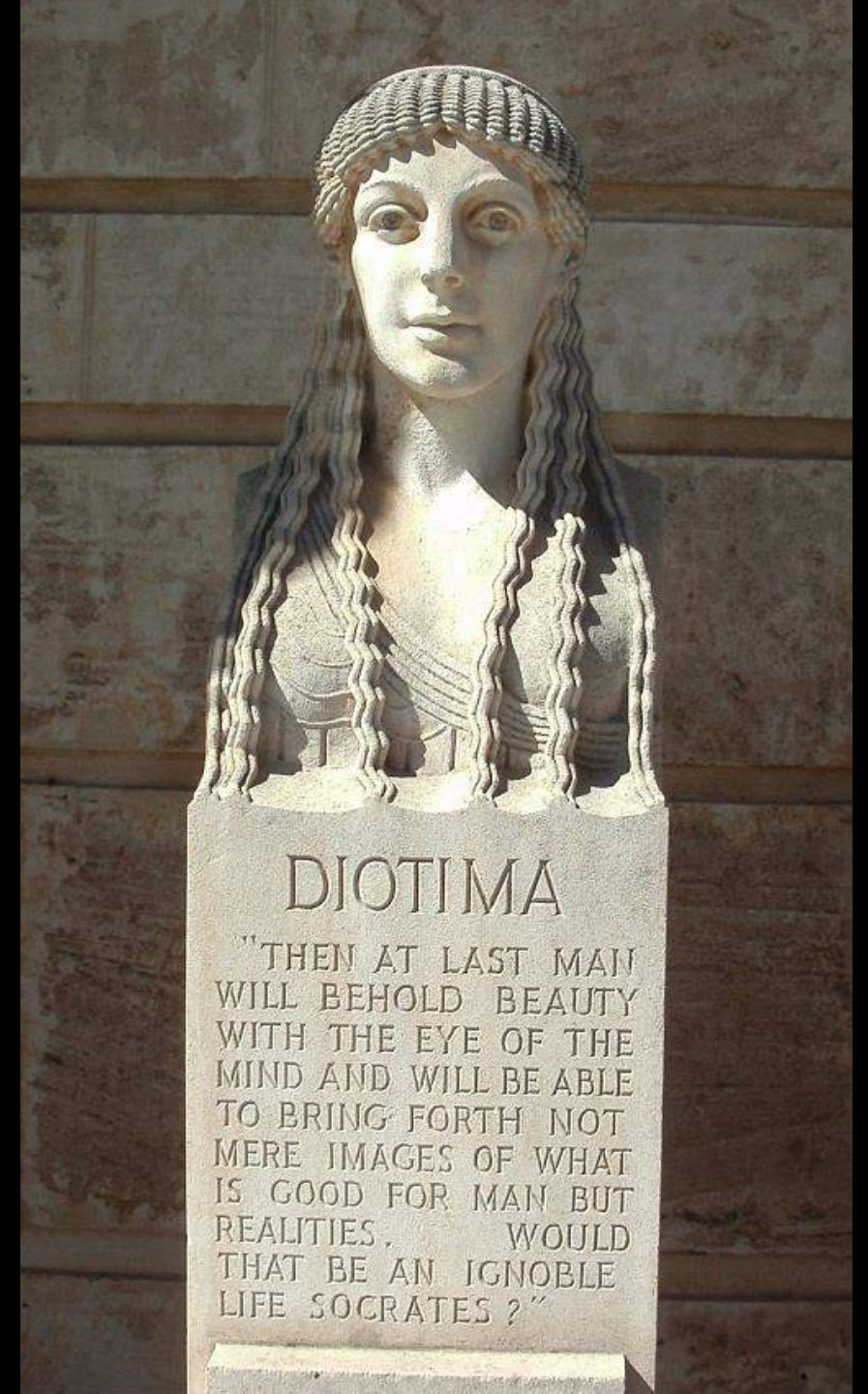


Diotima

Gives (though Socrates)
climactic speech in
Plato's *Symposium*

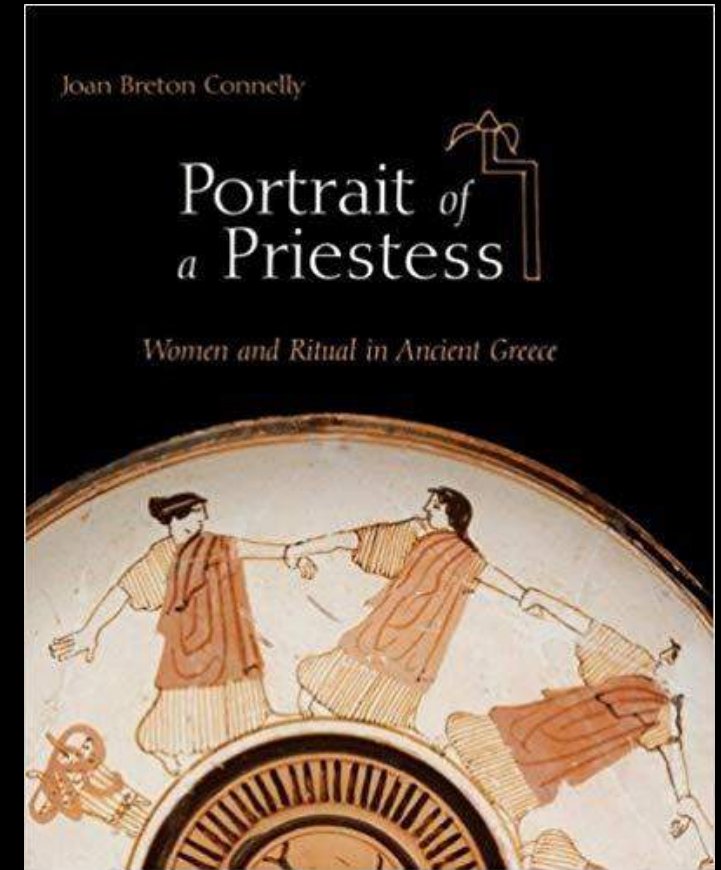
Socrates gives up his
speech to quote Diotima

Diotima = Aspasia?



Priestesses: An Area of Apparent Equality?

Joan Breton Connelly: “... the equality of men and women as priests and priestesses in ancient Greece was nothing short of remarkable. In a world in which only men could hold civic office and enjoy full political rights, it would have been easy enough for cities to organize their priesthoods on the model of magistracies. But the power of gender in the analogy between sacred servant and deity was so strong that it warranted a category of female cult agents who functioned virtually as public-office holders.”



Joan B. Connelly, 2007

Priestesses

“But in the fifteenth year, **being the forty-eighth of the priesthood of Chrysis in Argos**, Aenesias being then ephor at Sparta and Pythadorus, archon of Athens, having then two months of his government to come, in the sixth month after the battle at Potidaea and in the beginning of the spring, three hundred and odd Thebans led by Pythangelus the son of Phyleides and Diemporus the son of Onetoridas, Boeotian rulers, about the first watch of the night entered with their arms into Plataea, a city of Boeotia and confederate of the Athenians.”
(Thucydides 2.2)



“The temple of Hera in Argos was also burnt down the same summer, by the negligence of Chrysis the priestess, who, having set a burning torch by the garlands, fell asleep.” (Thuc. 4.133)

Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (411 BCE)



Performing Roles

LYSISTRATA: “We’re going to occupy the Acropolis this very day, **pretending to be up there for a sacrifice.**” (175, trans. Henderson)

LYS.: “We’re going to have to give up – cock. Why are you turning away from me?” ...

MYRRHINE: “**Anything you want from me. I’m even ready to walk through fire. But not give up what you said. There’s nothing like it, Lysistrata.**” (128; 138; trans. Henderson)

Women Rebuking Men

LYSISTRATA: (to the men breaking into the Acropolis) “It’s not crowbars you need; it’s brains and sense.” (414)

LYSISTRATA: “We’ll manage the war funds. Don’t we manage the household finances already?”

MAGISTRATE: “That’s different. This is war!”

LYSISTRATA: “But there shouldn’t even be a war.” (482-5)

The Wise (and Unheeded) Advisors

LYSISTRATA: “Too many times we’d hear in our homes about some bad decision you made on some great issue of state. Then, **masking the pain in our hearts, we’d put on a smile** and ask, ‘How did the *ekklêsia* go today?’” (512-14)

Chorus: “Hail, manliest of women!” (line 1129)



Essentialist Stereotypes



Essentialist Stereotypes

LYSISTRATA: “If Eros of the sweet soul and Cyprian Aphrodite imbue **our thighs and breasts with desire, and infect men with sensuous rigidity and club-cock, then I believe all Greece will one day call us Disbanders of Battles.**” (554-6)

[Lysimache (“Battle-Loosener”) priestess of Athena Polias for 64 years]

LYS.: “At this moment, all around the market, in pottery shops and grocery stalls, men are walking around with weapons.”

MAGISTRATE: “**By Zeus, a man’s got to act like a man.**”

LYS.: “**But it’s totally ridiculous to take a shield with Medusa on it just to buy sardines.**” (562-5)

Lysistrata's "Medea Moment"?

LYSISTRATA: "The quota we women bear is double. First, we delivered our sons to fill out the front lines in Sicily ... Next, the best years of our lives were taxed away. We sleep alone. But it's not the matrons like us who matter. I mourn for the virgins ... with nothing to do but grow old ..."

"A man, even an absolute antique, comes back from war and he's barely doddered into town before he married the truest nymphet. But a woman's season is brief; it slips, and she'll have no husband, but sit out her life groping at omens – and finding no men." (lines 587-97, tr. Parker)

Cultural and Biological Binary Collapsed

LYSISTRATA: “I have a stake in our community.
My contribution is men.” (line 655)

Ritual, Release – and Containment

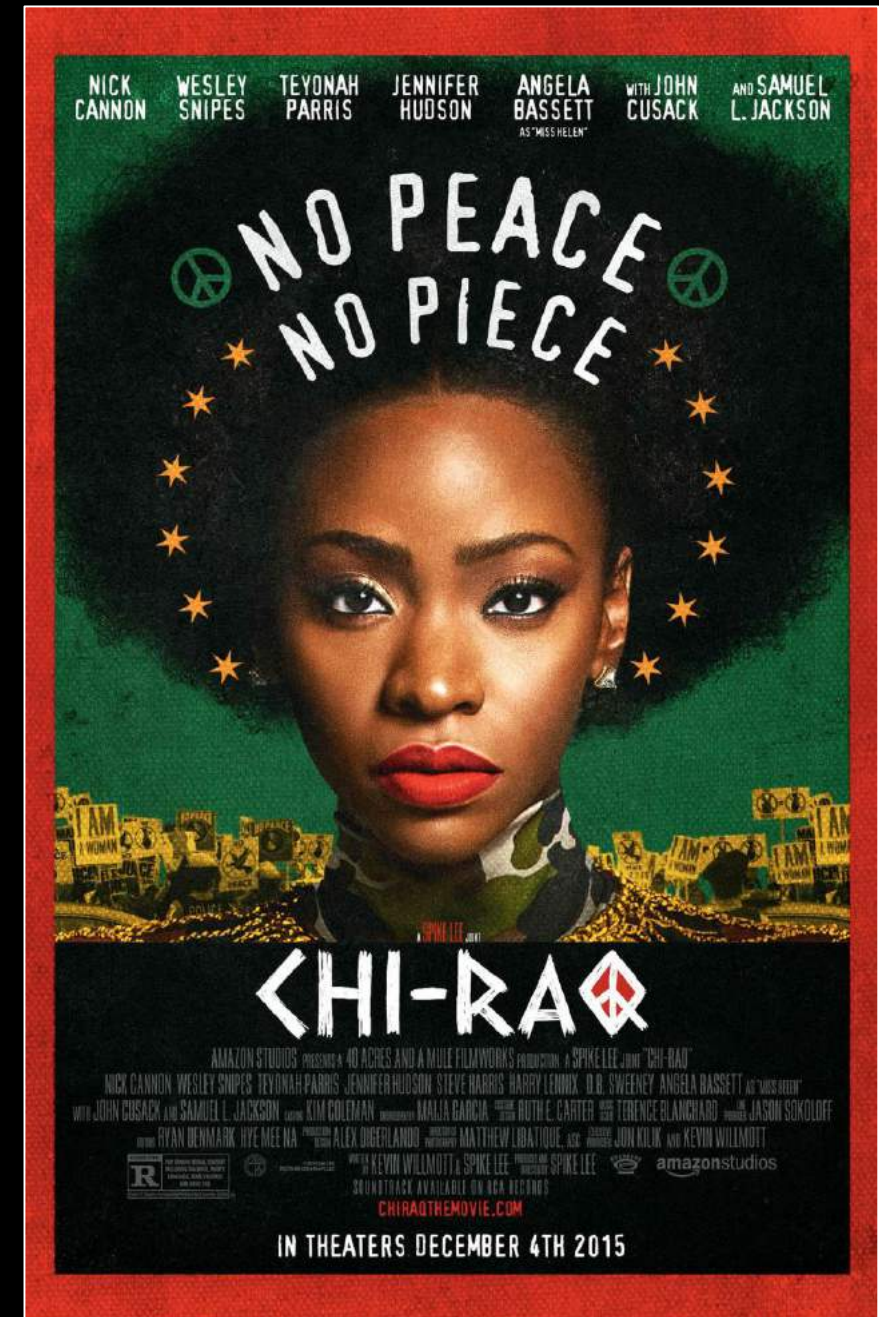


LYSISTRATA: “Everything has been wrapped up so nicely ... Let’s have husband stand by wife and wife by husband; then to celebrate our great good fortune let’s dance for the gods ... Let’s sing a hymn ... like maenads waving their wands and playing with Leda’s daughter pre-eminent, their chorus leader pure and pretty.” (1296; 1325; 1329-32)

Chi-Raq (dir. Spike Lee, 2015)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bCOH9ZmuA>

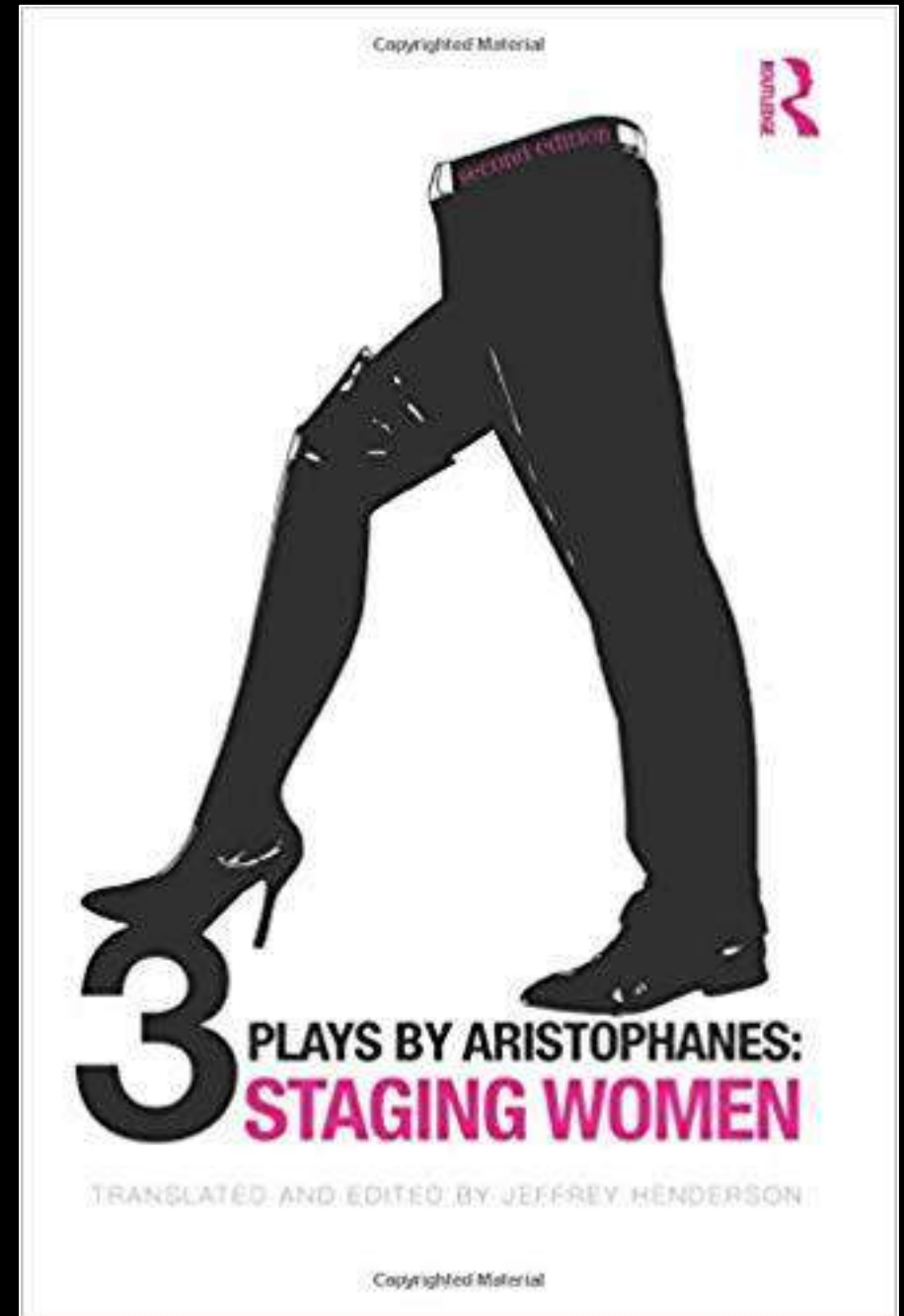


Aristophanes, *Women at the Thesmophoria* (411 BCE)



“Why do we keep blaming Euripides if all he did was reveal two or three of our faults **when we are guilty of thousands? I’ve done plenty of bad things.** But the worst was when I had been married only three days and my husband was asleep. I had this friend – he was my first lover when I was seven – and his passion for me had gotten the better of him. I heard him scratch at the door, and I snuck downstairs to meet him.”

– Old Man Disguised as Woman,
Women at the Thesmophoria, lines 466-82



Cross-Gendered Anxiety

“They [the school-boys in my day] were not permitted to entice older lovers with effeminate voices or seductive looks, or mince around pimping themselves to all and sundry! ... **It grieves me ... to have to see these wimpy lads who can barely lift a shield, embarrassed at the sight of their own manly meat!**” (*Clouds*, 978-80)

Agathon, in *Women at the Thesmophoria*: “My clothing always matches my thoughts. **To be a poet a man must suit his *fashions* to the requirements of his *plays*.** If he’s writing a play about women, he must partake of women’s ways.” (166-70)

Essentialism and/or Performance?

“And have you not heard how refined Phrynichus was and how careful in his dress? For this reason his pieces were also beautiful, for the works of a poet are copied from himself.”

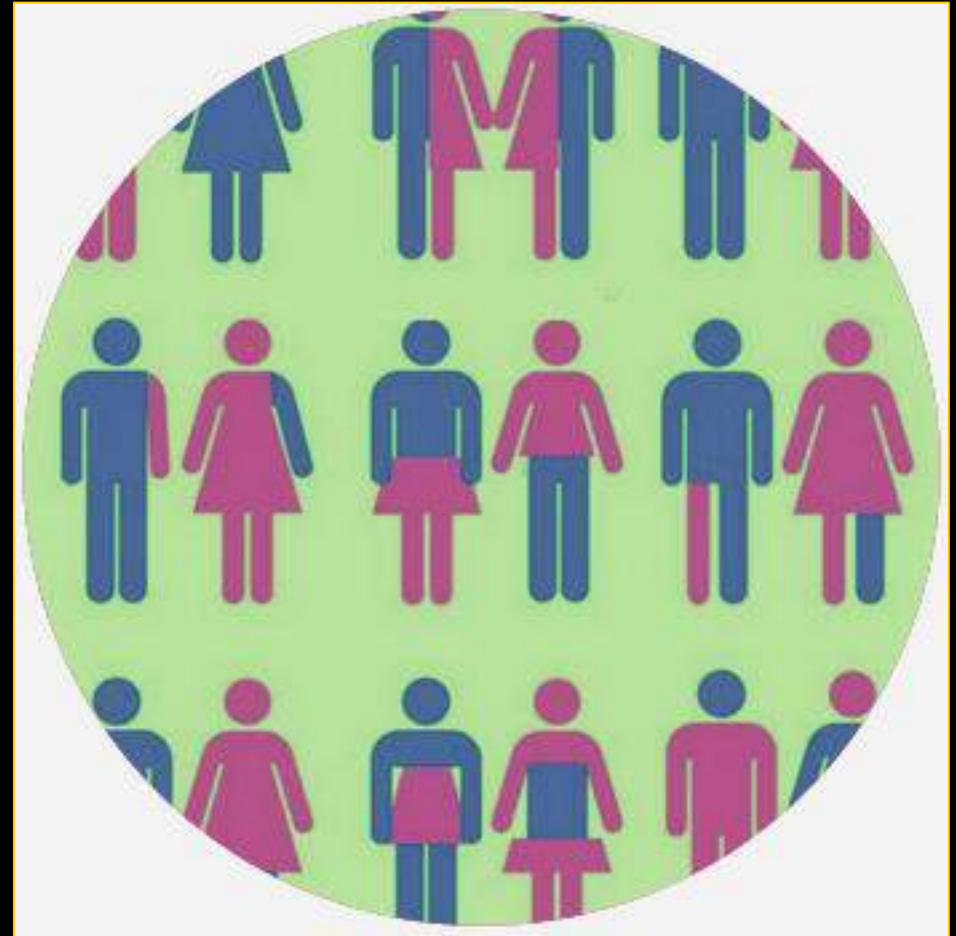
(*Women at the Thesmophoria*, 165-67, trans. O'Neill, adapted)

What is (Greek) Self?

Butler (1990) critiques the “metaphysics of substance” (a phrase associated with Nietzsche, p. 28).

the self, the “I,” as a “fictitious” unity (1990, p. 29)

Walt Whitman (1819-1892): “I contain multitudes.”



An irresolvable tension

Attic-style red-figure
kylix, Vulci (Italy), ca.
480 BCE
Macron painter

Scene: Maenad and
Satyr

