

Although the dramatic illusion of Aristophanes' comedies is frequently ruptured through direct address or reference to the audience, no one has yet investigated what this pattern can tell us about the new Athenian order established by Praxagora and her co-conspirators in the *Ecclesiazousae*. Indeed, when compared to the pattern of illusion breaks in the rest of his surviving corpus, Aristophanes' use of audience address and audience reference reveals that the women's newly-gained control of the Athenian assembly is neither as incredible nor as unreasonable as it might seem.

Some scholars have discussed the metatheatrical aspects of the *Ecclesiazousae* in great detail (e.g., Slater 2002, Taaffe 1987); others have investigated the rupture of the dramatic illusion in the Aristophanic corpus in general (e.g., Chapman 1983, Muecke 1977, Slater 1995). However, none have yet compared the patterns of illusion-breaking language in the *Ecclesiazousae* to those of Aristophanes' other surviving comedies. Indeed, within the Aristophanic corpus the likelihood of any given character addressing the audience directly or otherwise revealing his or her awareness of his or her existence as a character on stage is inversely proportional to the social status of the role. (Moodie 2007) Investigation of the patterns of illusion breaks in Aristophanes is especially valuable when coupled with the work of political scientist James C. Scott (1985, 1990), who studies the indirect means by which subordinate groups of people attack and otherwise subvert the authority of their political and social superiors. These ruptures in the dramatic illusion by low-status characters can then be read as the means by which a character may leave behind the stage world in which s/he lacks status and instead create a connection with the spectators that gains him or her the audience's approval and support. Thus Aristophanes' presentation of the possibility of women in political power is not the only politically or socially subversive move he makes in this comedy. Indeed, it is the women of the *Ecclesiazousae* who form the closest connections with the audience by breaking the dramatic illusion most often. These moments thereby gain the approval of the male spectators for characters who are their social and political inferiors, at least according to the current laws and customs of Athens. However, given the specific circumstances of the *Ecclesiazousae*'s performance—in an Athens monetarily, intellectually, and emotionally depleted by continued conflict with Sparta—the male audience's identification with the female protagonist and her fellow women must have made Aristophanes' otherwise comical and preposterous suggestion of female political leadership seem slightly more possible than it had before.

Since the pattern of disruptions in the dramatic illusion by primarily low-status characters extends through the Aristophanic corpus (and indeed throughout ancient comedy as we have it), the lack of variation in the illusion-breaking characters in the *Ecclesiazousae*—even after the women have assumed control of Athens—indicates that these female roles are especially important to Aristophanes. For example, female disruption of the dramatic illusion before the women gain political power occurs at 21-23 and perhaps 169-188, and at 167-68 (Praxagora and Woman A, respectively). Then, after the assembly has voted power into the hands of the women the dramatic illusion is broken at 580-85 (Praxagora and the Chorus of women), at 888-92 (Young Girl and perhaps Old Woman A), at 1112-15 and 1140-43 (Slave Girl), and at 1154-60 (Chorus). In contrast, male characters only break the dramatic illusion at 439-40 and perhaps at 1144-48. Thus the persistence of illusion-breaking language amongst the female characters, coupled with the paucity of illusion-breaking language from the male characters, reveals that Aristophanes renders both the comedy's unusual political solution and its female characters more appealing to his male spectators than has previously been recognized.