

## Watching the Girls Go By: The Wife of Ischomachus and Theodote the Courtesan

This paper addresses Xenophon's depiction of female experience and agency in his Socratic works when it comes to the two poles of Athenian womanhood: the citizen wife of *Oeconomicus* and the non-citizen working girl of *Memorabilia* (cp. Murnaghan 1988, Gini 1993, Pomeroy 1994, Goldhill 1998, Too 2001). I first address the tension between the explicit framing of the portraits as focalized through males gazes, the possibility that (male) civic metaphors are especially persuasive in revealing women's contribution (by contrast with Menexenus' skepticism about the courtesan Aspasia's agency at the end of Plato's dialogue of that name, Xenophon's interlocutors are won over), and the possibility that the technique of focalization represents an appropriate way to portray female experience while reminding readers of the problem of limited access (access to citizen women requires imagination). Xenophon's narrative strategies prompt a shift of perspective in his readers: each dialogue overturns traditional imagery associated with wife or courtesan, spotlighting positive kinds of female agency and deconstructing the polarizing stereotypes. The conceit of the prostitute as hunter of prey, for example, is reimagined in the idea of a noble huntress of friends, her expertise in *eros* (lust) not opposite to but the extension of her expertise in *philia* (friendship) (the key component of Xenophontic ideal human relations).

Both dialogues spotlight the theme of appearance and reality, and both turn out to be important sites for reevaluating the nature of Xenophontic irony. Thus irony is engendered by the presence of competing perspectives in how Ischomachus' ideal household is described against the backdrop of extratextual knowledge that it would later be torn apart by scandal (his wife's infamous affair with her son-in-law: *Andocides* 1). In Theodote's case we confront Xenophon's extraordinary move (baffling at first sight in a work usually regarded as a defense of Socrates against the charges that led to his trial and execution) of setting the philosopher in parallel to the courtesan as a 'hunter of friends': but the strategy becomes

intelligible in light of the politically-charged dimension of Xenophon's representations of women. The sustained conceit of prostitutes being more valuable than sophists thus contributes to the defense of Socrates (whom Xenophon joins Plato in figuring as the opposite of a sophist). The affinities between Xenophon's Theodote and other women across his literary oeuvre enable us to recognize here, *pace* the widely accepted view that she reflects *realia* of fourth-century social history (Davidson 1998, Kurke 1999), the distinctly Xenophontic essence of Xenophon's portrait, and a richer aspiration for *Memorabilia* than only defending Socrates.

Finally, a brief cross-genre comparison of these portraits with that of the (non-Athenian) wife of Alexander of Macedon brings out the shared philosophical character of Xenophon's historiographical as well as more obviously 'philosophical' works: the interest in probing women's experience and more generally exploring the morality and character of individuals represents a sea-change from Thucydides' focus on *poleis* and communities, and is in line with Xenophon's philosophic tendencies as well as his response to the changed power dynamics of the brave new world of the fourth century. Where Thucydides completely excised from his history the agency of Aspasia, and his Pericles advocated for the complete invisibility of widows in particular (Thuc. 2.45), throughout Xenophon's oeuvre we find women made visible, given a voice, and even serving as arbiters of (male) morality.

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