Lysistrata Study Guide

Lysistrata by Aristophanes

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Introduction

Lysistrata is often produced in contemporary theatre. Modern audiences enjoy the sexuality and humor in Aristophanes' work, and they enjoy what appears as modern feminism and the depiction of strong women. Comedies were very popular presentations during the Greek festivals, and there is no reason to think that *Lysistrata* was not immensely popular. At the time of the play's initial production, Athens and Sparta had been at war for twenty years, and this play would have offered one of the few opportunities to laugh at war. The idea that Lysistrata could unite women to end the war would have set up the audience for a traditional battle between the sexes. However, there are also serious ideas to be found in Lysistrata's speeches. She reminds the audiences of the many men who have died during the Peloponnesian War, and the Chorus of Old Men emphasizes that there are no young men to take up their position. Aristophanes uses a woman to bring peace, but in doing so, he is pointing out to men that they have failed in their efforts to settle the war. With the failure of men, women are the only remaining hope for peace. There is no record that Aristophanes received any awards for *Lysistrata*, but the play's popularity in modern productions points to its probable success on stage. In 1930, *Lysistrata* enjoyed a successful revival in New York City, which lasted for several months. It has inspired an opera, *Lysistrata and the War*, which was written in the early 1960s and first performed by the Wayne State University opera workshop, as a protest to the Vietnam War. The theme of war and women's efforts to invoke love as a replacement for war works as well in the twenty first century as they did in the late fifth century B.C.

Author Biography

Little is known of Aristophanes, except that his father, who was from Athens, may have been a property owner. When Aristophanes was born, Athens was at its most glorious, both culturally and politically. Born at about 450 B.C., Aristophanes was a young man when the Peloponnesian war was fought between Athens and Sparta. This war (431-401 B.C.) provided some of the historical framework for Aristophanes' comedies. Athen's loss in this war affected Aristophanes, and in response, he used comedy to ridicule the political order responsible for the war and the city's loss. Aristophanes' sympathy with the aristocratic landowners and condemnation of the rulers of Athens makes him appear more revolutionary than many of his cohorts. Aristophanes is associated with the Old Comedy, or *comoedia prisca*, which is earthy and irreverent and willing to attack prominent people.

Aristophanes' comedies are the only ones to have survived from this period. Of the forty-four comedies he wrote, eleven have survived. The Athenian festival of Dionysis was the first festival, in 486 B.C., to officially include comedy. Aristophanes entered the festival and won three first prizes, which was less than either of his rivals, Cratinus and Eupolis. The themes of Aristophanes' eleven surviving comedies reflect the poet's dissatisfaction with the government of Athens. Aristophanes wrote many of his plays during the war between Athens and Sparta. The works that have survived include *Acharnians*, 425 B.C.; *Knight,* 424 B.C.; *Clouds,* 423 B.C. (revised c. 418 B.C.); and *Wasps,* 422 B.C. Other surviving plays include *Peace,* 421 B.C.; *Birds*, 414 B.C.; *Lysistrata,* 411 B.C.; *Thesmophoriazusae (Women Keeping the Festival of the Thesmophoriae),* 411 B.C.; and *Frogs,* 405 B.C. The remainder of Aristophanes' extant work includes *Ecclesiazusae (Assemblywomen* or *Women in Parliament),* 392 B.C.; and *Plutus (Wealth),* 388 B.C. A number of other plays have been lost. Three of these comedies *Lysistrata, Thesmophoriazusae, and Ecclesiazusae* depict women as the moving force in human society. After his death, Aristophanes' popularity ceased, and he was not rediscovered until the Renaissance, and it was not until modern times that Aristophanes reentered the Western literary canon. In the Byzantine world, however, Aristophanes always held the rank of a major author: he was assiduously copied, studied, and appreciated by scholars.

Plot Summary

The play opens with Lysistrata pacing back and forth as she waits for the other women to arrive. She is impatient and tells her neighbor, Calonice, that women have a reputation for sly trickery, but when they are needed for something important, they lie in bed instead of rushing to meet. Lysistrata tells her neighbor that the safety of all of Greece lies with the actions of the women of Greece. Soon, all the women arrive, and Lysistrata tells them of her plan to end the war between Athens and Sparta. But first the group enters into some ribald joking about their figures and about sex. Lysistrata asks the women if they would not rather their husbands were home instead of fighting elsewhere. When the women reply in the affirmative, Lysistrata relates a plan to have all the women deny their husbands and lovers their sexual favors until the men vow to stop fighting and end the war. The women are difficult to convince, but eventually they agree to the plan. Lysistrata also tells the women that if they are beaten, they may give in, since sex that results from violence will not please the men. Finally, all the women join Lysistrata in taking an oath to withhold sex from their mates.

With Lampito returning to Sparta to secure the agreement of the Spartan women, Lysistrata and the women who remain with her make plans to join the women who have seized the Acropolis and its treasury. Within moments, a group of old men arrive, planning to set the base of the Acropolis on fire and force the women out. The old men complain that the women they have nourished all these years have turned against them and seized a sacred shrine. But while the men are busy with their smoking logs, the women enter, carrying pitchers of water, which they will pour over the fires that the men have set. The old men and old women trade insults, but the women will not back down, and they empty their water over the heads of the old men. When the magistrate arrives, he tells the men that the women's behavior is the result of the men spoiling their women, treating them with gentleness when they do not deserve to be cherished. The magistrate orders that the men force open the doors, but he moves to a safe distance to watch.

When the doors are forced open, Lysistrata emerges. The magistrate orders her arrested, but the policeman is too intimidated by Lysistrata to arrest her. The other women join Lysistrata in defying the policemen, who are too cowed to follow the magistrate's orders to seize the women. The magistrate responds to the women's actions with a claim that they shall never lose to women, and the newly brave police attack the women, but they are soon beaten off and in retreat. When there is calm again, Lysistrata explains that the women have seized the Acropolis to keep men from using the money to make war and to keep dishonest officials from stealing the money. The women say they can administer the money, since they are used to administering the household money. Lysistrata also tells the magistrate that the women have been patient while the men mucked up the war and refused to listen to any advice, but now, the women have decided to take action, since there are few men left in Greece. When the magistrate continues to protest, the women dress him in women's clothing, and then they explain that they will approach the problems of state in the same way that they approach the carding of wool. When the magistrate continues to insult the women, the

women dress him as a corpse, and the man runs away. Left to continue the argument, the old men and old women turn to insults again. The old women meet each of the men's insults with rebuttals of their own. They remind the men that women bear children, but men make no contribution. The shouting and insults eventually turns to physical fighting, as both sides strip off their tunics and set upon each other.

Although there is no division of scene, it is understood that an interval of five days has passed since the previous action, and Lysistrata is now dealing with a possible mutiny. Many of the women are deserting and going to the men. Lysistrata tries to convince the women that the men are also miserable sleeping alone, and she pulls out an oracle from the gods telling the women they will win. The women are convinced, and the rebellion is soon ended, as they return to the Acropolis. A group of old men and old women soon enter singing, and Lysistrata calls their attention to a man, who is approaching. Cinesias is mad with passion, and in great pain and distress, since he misses his wife, Myrrhine. But she refuses to abandon her oath and join him, until the men stop the war. Through a succession of maneuvers, Myrrhine teases Cinesias until he is exasperated, and then she leaves him and returns inside. The chorus of old men sympathize with Cinesias, but it is not sympathy that he wants; he is now quite angry. Within moments a magistrate from Athens arrives and is joined by a herald from Sparta. Both are suffering from the women's absence, as are men everywhere. The two agree that something must be done, and the herald returns to Sparta with instructions to return with someone who can arrange a truce. While everyone awaits the peace envoy, the women seek to soothe the men. When the ambassadors arrive, Lysistrata is sent for, and the negotiations begin. But when it appears that neither group can reach an agreement, the men are invited inside to feast. The men's desire for their wives increases with the wine, and soon the treaty is signed, and both men and women leave for their homes.

Part 1

Part 1 Summary

Lysistrata paces, waiting for the women of Athens to arrive for their meeting. Her friend Kleonike arrives, and Lysistrata complains that if there's a festival women are there in a hurry, but for what she has in mind - nothing! Kleonike reassures her that the women will be there and then asks why she's called the meeting. Lysistrata says she's been thinking about the state of things for quite a while and has come to the conclusion that the only way Greece can achieve unity and peace is if the women take control. Kleonike tells her to be practical, saying that women are only good for being pretty, ornamental and sexy. She loses herself in thoughts of all her pretty clothes, but Lysistrata brings her back to reality by saying that's exactly her point, that salvation will be gained by women making themselves so pretty that their men will never want to go to war again.

Other women arrive, including pretty young Myrrhine and big strapping Lampito, leading a delegation from Sparta. Lampito introduces a well-off young woman named Boiotia and another girl from Korinth. The other women look them over and make crude double-entendres about their looks, but Lampito demands that Lysistrata tell them why she's called them together.

Lysistrata begins by asking the women how they feel about their men being at war. Kleonike, Lampito and Myrrhine all complain that since their men have been in the army they've hardly been home at all. Lysistrata then asks whether they'd support her if she came up with an idea to end the war. The others say they will, and Lysistrata explains her plan, that all the women will abstain from sexual relations with their men until they agree to end the war.

As soon as the women hear the plan they turn away, saying that there's no way they can give up sex. Only Lampito is supportive, and Lysistrata says she's the only woman there worthy of being called a woman. Kleonike asks for more details, and Lysistrata explains that for her plan to work, the women have to make themselves as beautiful and sexy as they can. They will lead their men on, and then at the moment the men are most aroused, the women will refuse to go all the way. She adds that if the men insist, the women are to put up with what the men want to do but make it clear they're taking no pleasure in it. Kleonike is still not convinced.

Lampito says that she has no concerns about making it work with the men of Sparta, but she wonders about the men of Athens. Lysistrata says she'll bring them around and that part of her plan involves taking over Athene's temple and the Akropolis. She adds that there's a group of older Athenian women waiting there now for her signal. Lampito is convinced, and Lysistrata suggests they take an oath to seal their bargain.

Lysistrata looks for a shield on which to swear the oath, but Kleonike tells her a peace oath can't be sworn on a soldier's shield. She suggests an oath sealed by sipping from

a cup of wine. Lampito agrees, and Lysistrata calls for wine and a goblet. After both are brought out, Lysistrata says a prayer over the wine. As it's poured, the women make jokes about the similarity of wine and blood, and Lysistrata says they need someone to represent all the women in taking the oath. Everybody but Kleonike steps away. Kleonike reluctantly takes hold of the goblet along with Lysistrata. Line by line, Lysistrata recites the vow, and line by line, Kleonike repeats it. Lysistrata and Kleonike drink from the goblet, and then as the other women pass the goblet between them, sounds of fighting are heard. Lysistrata announces that the women have taken control of Athene's temple and then tells Lampito it's time for her to head back to Sparta and spread the word. Lampito goes out, and Lysistrata leads the other women up to the Akropolis.

Part 1 Analysis

The comedy of this play arises first and foremost from its situation, which reaches its full potential for generating laughter as the action unfolds. The men become more and more desperate, and Lysistrata becomes more determined. Some of the women, including Kleonike, begin to waver. Comedy also arises as a result of the play's use of wordplay such as jokes, puns, wisecracks and particularly double entendres, in which ordinary statements can be heard as having a sexual meaning. Finally, there is also a great deal of visual comedy, particularly in the play's later scenes. The men's sexual frustrations are displayed in a very visual way, which will be discussed later.

The predominant comic style of this play, however, is satire, an approach used to ridicule frailty, obsession, vice or habit. In this play, the main objects of ridicule are two male obsessions, war and sex. There are also elements of satire in the play's treatment of women, particularly characters like Kleonike, whose silliness and superficiality satirize traits commonly seen as being typical of women. Lysistrata alone among the characters has wisdom and perspective, and it's interesting to note that she makes no reference at all to having a man in her life, unlike the other women.

Finally, elements of self-satire appear in the play's use of language. Classical Greek theatre is spoken in verse, generally rhyming verse but sometimes blank verse as well. In Classical Tragedy in particular, characters speak in highly poetic language and exaggerated emotions. On several occasions this play satirizes, or mocks, the extravagance of the language in more serious plays by using similar language in a way that makes its use seem ridiculous.

Placing elements of the play into its historical context helps define them. For example, Lysistrata represents Athens, a city that sees itself as intellectual, sophisticated and cosmopolitan. Lampito represents Sparta, a city that is militaristic, minimalistic and rough around the edges. The two cities are in many ways cultural, political and military rivals. By making their representatives allies and by having them agree at the climax to end war, the play suggests that there's a deeper truth beneath their differences, the need for peace, which ties the communities together. This deeper truth, which is

essentially the play's theme, applies not only to the differences between the cities but to the differences between the sexes as well.

The Akropolis is also important since it is geographically and spiritually the heart of the city of Athens. Built on the top of a hill at the center of the city, the government is headquartered there. At the center of the hill stands the Temple of Athene, the focus of Athenian spiritual life. Lysistrata's plan to seize control of both the Akropolis and the Temple therefore represents and manifests her determination to get and maintain control. Her actions can be likened to those of a crowd of peace demonstrators taking control of the White House, the British Houses of Parliament, Red Square in Moscow or Mecca.

Part 2

Part 2 Summary

A Chorus of Men appears, each carrying a pot containing fire and branches of wood. The Male Leader urges them to keep moving as they speak a verse of complaint about the behavior of the women. The Male Leader says they've got to get up to the Akropolis, regain control of the Temple and teach the women a lesson. The men vow that they will fight the women the same way they fought in the wars, even though their bodies ache and the smoke from the fires is making them choke. The Male Leader reminds them of their plan to put the wood in front of the door to the temple, light it with the fires from their pots of flame and smoke the women out.

As the men stack the wood and arrange themselves for their attack, a Chorus of Women appears, all carrying pitchers of water. The Female Leader notices the smoke from the men's pots and tells the other women to stop. They have to make some plans. The women urge themselves to have courage, complain how difficult it was to fill their pitchers, complain that the old men are loose and pray to Athene for strength and guidance as they fight for peace. The Female Leader notices the Chorus of Men just as the Male Leader notices the Chorus of Women. The Choruses advance on each other, and the Male and Female Leaders go toe to toe. They threaten each other, challenge each other's right to speak and ridicule each other. The Male Leader urges the Chorus of Men to grab their pots of flame and rush the women, but as they do the women fling their pitchers of water at them, dousing their flames and their aggression.

Part 2 Analysis

For the most part, Classical Greek theatre follows a traditional format, beginning with a scene between characters, followed by a scene with the chorus, followed by another character scene, followed by another chorus and so on. This play essentially follows that same format, although scenes are occasionally interjected that don't follow tradition. This is an example of the way structure reinforces substance and vice versa, since the women in this play are themselves not behaving traditionally.

The Chorus, another traditional element of Classical Greek theater, is usually composed of a group of individuals who speak as one, representing the attitudes of society and either commenting on the action or acting as confidantes to the central characters. Rarely does the Chorus actually participate in the central conflict. Tradition is again broken in this play when the Chorus takes part in the action. Specifically, the way that the women douse the men's flames can be seen as a symbol of what Lysistrata is doing, dousing the flames of male passion with calculated, goal-oriented determination. Meanwhile, the Chorus Leaders become characters in their own right, and their arguments reflect the larger societal and cultural conflict on a more personal scale.

Part 3

Part 3 Summary

A Commissioner appears with four police officers. He condemns the Chorus for fighting in the public square, going into a long and self-important story illustrating his view that women fighting for their rights brings moral chaos. The Male Leader tells him to be quiet and look at the injuries that have been done them, but the Commissioner tells them that as males they're responsible for what's happening. He says that they've allowed their women too much freedom. He gives a long comic speech about the various ways that women use their sexual wiles and then complains that he's just made a deal that will outfit the Athenian fleet with wood to make repairs. He can't complete it because the women have seized the Treasury! He orders his officers to use crowbars to pry open the doors to the Akropolis, but Lysistrata appears, armed with a spindle and blocking the way.

The Commissioner orders the officers to arrest her, but Lysistrata threatens them with her spindle. They back off. One by one the Commissioner urges his men forward, but the women, now including Kleonike, Myrrhine and others armed with household implements, fight back. The Commissioner commands his men to charge as a group, but Lysistrata commands the women to charge back. They pour out of the temple and overwhelm the Commissioner and the officers. The officers run off, leaving the Commissioner alone and dazed. Lysistrata reminds him to not underestimate the power of women.

The Male and Female Chorus Leaders argue about who has the right to violence, men or women. The Chorus of Men asks in rhythm what right the women have to rebel, and the Male Leader urges the Commissioner to arrest Lysistrata and the rest of the women in the name of male honor. The Commissioner asks Lysistrata what she plans to do with the money in the treasury. She explains that withholding the money means the men will be unable to go to war and that the women will budget the money properly. The Commissioner becomes angrier and angrier as Lysistrata talks about rescuing the men, finally shouting that he and the men don't want to be rescued! He demands to know how the women became so concerned about peace. Lysistrata delivers a long speech, occasionally interrupted by the Commissioner, about the way that women have sat by for years watching men make mess after mess in the wars and in the city. She says that when the women offered any suggestion or opinion they were told to be quiet. The women have finally had enough and have agreed that the time has come for women to unite and set the men right. The Commissioner protests and Lysistrata tells him to be quiet, but he refuses to be told to be quiet by someone who wears a veil, the symbol of the submissiveness of her sex. Lysistrata and the other women gang up on him and dress him in their clothes.

As Kleonike and Myrrhine mock the Commissioner, Lysistrata speaks to the Chorus of Women, urging them to arise and claim their power. The Chorus of Women then speaks

in the same rhythm as the men spoke earlier, celebrating the gifts and powers of women. The Female Leader urges the Chorus of Women to attack, but Lysistrata urges them to be calm and wait for the spirit of love to fill their men so that the attack can really begin.

The Commissioner asks what the women plan to do once they have control. Lysistrata says they'll begin by clearing the marketplace of soldiers so that the women can shop in peace, a proposal Kleonike loudly supports. Lysistrata then talks about unraveling the political and military situation of the city and the country the same way as she would unwind a tangled skein of wool, carefully, slowly, patiently and strand by strand. She compares the life of the city to a fleece newly shorn off a sheep, saying that the process of civic administration is like the cleansing, sorting and weaving of wool. The Commissioner says that's a ridiculous idea, but Lysistrata lists all the ways that men have ruined both the city and the lives of its women. The Commissioner turns to the audience and shouts to the men to rise up, but Lysistrata urges him to curl up and die, wrapping him in her wool to represent a shroud. Humiliated, the Commissioner hops off to present a report to the city's board of commissioners. Lysistrata shouts after him to come back in a couple of days. They'll make sure he's properly buried. She and the women go back into the Akropolis.

Part 3 Analysis

The Battle of the Sexes again becomes individualized in this section as the Commissioner and Lysistrata go after each other. A director staging this play might suggest that in the case of both individualized arguments, between the Chorus Leaders and between Lysistrata and the Commissioner, some element of romantic attraction is at work in their relationships. That idea aside, at this point the battle also becomes the Battle of The Symbolic Props. The men with their crowbars (a phallic symbol if ever there was one) and the women with their household implements (Lysistrata's her spindle, representing the view that women's work should be confined to the home) attack each other.

This particular phase of the conflict climaxes with the women dressing the Commissioner in women's clothes, a visual image that foreshadows the way that the men of the play are forced to accept the women's demands. The references to death suggest that Lysistrata believes that the control of the men is dying, and she's telling the Commissioner to be ready to have his sense of authority and power buried.

Part 4

Part 4 Summary

The Chorus of Men takes off their cloaks, revealing that they're dressed and ready for battle. They slowly advance on the audience, saying in verse that the women's plot is a cover for a plan by Sparta to empty the Athenian treasury. The Male Leader says that by leading the men's attack, he'll take his place alongside the great heroes of Athenian history. He approaches the Female Leader, hits her and runs back to the men. The Female Leader then tells the women to prepare to fight, and they remove their cloaks in the same way as the men. They too are armed for battle. They speak in verse about they way they've grown from girlhood into full, powerful womanhood. The Female Leader speaks of having invested her sons in the life and worth of Athens, suggests that the men have wasted the funds invested in peace by their grandfathers and adds that they've left the city with nothing. The Male Leader threatens her. She hits him with her shoe and then runs back to the women.

The Chorus of Men removes another layer of clothes, saying they want to give the women a whiff of real manhood. They vow to fight with real, physical strength. The Male Leader grabs the Female Leader, who slips away and then tells the Chorus of Women to fight back. They too remove another layer of clothes, as the Female Leader mocks the laws passed by men. She grabs the Male Leader by the ankle, tips him over and runs back to the women.

Part 4 Analysis

This section marks a return to traditional structure after Part 3, in which the Choruses interject into the scene between Lysistrata and the Commissioner. The dialogue here is full of shouting and bravado, as the Choruses mock, challenge and disparage each other in language full of innuendo about women being mounted like horses ridden to war and the smallness of the men's assets. The repeated removal of more and more clothing, however, suggests that what we're watching is a prologue to making love, or at the very least the reunion of male and female that occurs at the end of the play.

Part 5

Part 5 Summary

Lysistrata runs out of the Akropolis, clearly upset. The Female Leader asks her what's wrong, and after a brief dialogue in highly formal language, Lysistrata returns to colloquial conversation and confesses that some of the women in the Akropolis "want to get laid." As she talks, one woman after another tries to run away, offering feeble excuses as to why they're needed at home. Lysistrata sends them all back inside, but then Kleonike and some of the others come out, complaining about being lonely and about the noise of the owls. Lysistrata says she understands that the women are lonely, but she urges them to be strong, saying that a prophecy has foretold that they will be victorious. She reads the prophecy, and the women see her point. They all go back into the Akropolis.

The Male Chorus speaks in verse and tells the story of a hunter who moves to the forest and lives the life of a hermit to avoid being tied to a woman. An Old Man from the Male Chorus advances towards an Old Woman from the Female Chorus, talking about how mighty the hunter is and how hairiness is a symbol of power. The Female Chorus then speaks in verse, rebutting the men's tale with one of their own about a man who hates all men, but loves women. The Old Woman then strikes out at the Old Man, saying that she may be hairless but she's still mighty.

Lysistrata appears in a tower, calling the women to be ready for battle. She says a man is coming, looking as though he's seriously in distress. Myrrhine recognizes him as her husband, Kinesias. Lysistrata tells Myrrhine that she must do her duty by getting her husband all hot and bothered then backing off and leaving him miserable. Myrrhine says she can handle him, but Lysistrata says she'll wait around to help. She tells the other women to go back inside.

Part 5 Analysis

This section shows us both sides beginning to weaken as the women feel lonely for their men and go to extreme measures to try to be with them, while at least one of the men tries to be with the women. The Old Man's efforts, feeble as they are, foreshadow both the efforts and the fruitlessness of Kinesias to be with Myrrhine in the following scene.

The comment about owls refers to the fact that owls are Athene's sacred animal, and they lived both protected and worshipped in her temple. Owls at the time represent wisdom, which suggests that because the women are taking refuge in a place full of owls, their attitudes and goals are wiser than the men's.

The Old Man's story about the hairy hunter and the rebuttal of the Old Woman are both filled with more sexual innuendo. The Old Man refers to "the mantrap below" in the Old

Woman, and the Old Woman refers to "down being out," presumably a reference to the Old Man's impotence. This coarseness of language is common in Greek comedies, often reinforced by visual coarseness of the kind that becomes apparent in the upcoming scene with Kinesias.

Part 6

Part 6 Summary

Kinesias comes in, followed by a slave carrying a baby. He wears a large phallus (artificial penis) to show how sexually frustrated he is. Lysistrata shouts down for Kinesias to identify himself. He does, and Lysistrata says that she and all the other women have heard about him, since Myrrhine talks about him all the time, especially what a "big" man he is. Kinesias pleads with her to allow Myrrhine to come out and see him, hinting that whatever he has would be at her disposal. Lysistrata disappears to get Myrrhine, and Kinesias talks about how "hard" things are without Myrrhine.

Myrrhine appears on the roof, saying that she loves Kinesias but he doesn't love her. He begs her to come down. She refuses, and then he takes the baby from the slave and says the baby hasn't been fed or bathed in a week. Myrrhine calls him a pitiful father and then agrees to come down. She joins Kinesias, takes the baby and talks to it lovingly. Meanwhile Kinesias tells her she should be ashamed of herself, leaving her child, letting her house become untidy and refusing her husband "the rites of Aphrodite." Myrrhine tells him that the only way she'll come back is after he stops the wars. Kinesias talks her into lying down with him and sending the baby home with the slave. He eagerly urges her to make love with him, but Myrrhine runs back and forth to the temple fetching a bed, a mattress, a pillow, a blanket, perfume and a nicer perfume. Each trip makes Kinesias more and more frustrated. She begins to undress and then asks Kinesias whether he'll vote to end the war. Completely out of patience, he shouts out that he'll think about it, and Myrrhine runs back into the temple to stay. Kinesias screams in frustration, and in mock-serious language, he joins with the Male Chorus in offering a prayer in verse to Zeus to end his pain and bring the dispute with the women to a close. After the prayer is finished, Kinesias goes out.

Part 6 Analysis

This scene dramatizes and individualizes the conflict between the sexes as we see how one particular marriage is affected by the women's strike. The comic technique in this scene is impeccable, with Myrrhine's repeated retreats into the temple creating more and more frustration in her amorous husband, leading to more and more double entendres and an almost orgasmic explosion of bad temper.

Kinesias' comment about the rites of Aphrodite refers to the act of sexual intercourse or making love. Aphrodite is the goddess of love, beauty and sexuality and is often one of the gods invoked in the religiously based, ritualistic mini-plays that are the forerunners of Classical Greek theatre. One of the ways in which these mini-plays represents sexual energy, the desire of Aphrodite, is by the male actors wearing overly large, exaggerated penises, formally referred to as phalluses. This is the origin of the phrase "phallic symbol," a term used to describe anything with a resemblance to an erect penis,

whether it is a cigar or a banana or the Empire State Building. The phallus was originally a symbol of male power, very seriously worshiped in early cultures. This play makes fun of that principle, the idea that the male sexual organ is a source of power, by showing how impotent that power can become when there's no chance to use it either in the bedroom or on the battlefield.

Scene 7

Scene 7 Summary

A Messenger from Sparta comes in, holding his cloak in front of himself to conceal the fact that he's in the same kind of phallic difficulty as Kinesias. He's met by the Commissioner, who's also wrapped in a cloak and who makes crude jokes about the Messenger carrying a concealed weapon. The Messenger tells him that Lampito has driven the men of Sparta away from their women and that the men are all doubled up in pain and frustration. The Commissioner realizes that the women's plot has spread across Greece, and he tells the Messenger to return to Sparta and tell the government to create a commission to negotiate for peace. He says that he'll do the same in Athens. The Messenger runs out, and the Commissioner goes off in the opposite direction.

The Male Leader complains about the immorality of women. The Female Leader suggests that because peace is at hand, the Battle of the Sexes should be ended. At first the Male Leader refuses, but then the Female Leader dresses him in his robes and tunic again. Even though the Male Leader says he doesn't think she's being sincere, the Female Leader says he looks more like a man than ever. She promises to free the animal in him. She pretends to find a bug in his hair and take it out. The Male Leader talks about how the bug has been bothering him for years and almost weeps because he's so grateful to the Female Leader for taking it out. She moves in to kiss him. He refuses, and she insists. Finally, he submits, calling for an end to the mischief they play on each other. The Chorus of Men then speaks in verse about how money is now available again, while the Chorus of Women speaks in verse about how they're ready to entertain again but says to keep the door locked, just in case.

The Spartan and Athenian peace commissions enter from opposite sides of the stage, both still obviously in pain. Kinesias comes in with the Athenians and demands to see Lysistrata. The Spartans make the same demand. Lysistrata appears accompanied by a beautiful girl called Peace.

The Male Leader tells Lysistrata that the men of Greece have all agreed to her terms. Lysistrata tells Peace to lead the Spartans to her and then the Athenians. Neither side can take their eyes off her, and the men continue to be distracted as Lysistrata speaks out about how men so often engage in wanton destruction. She reminds the men that Sparta and Athens were both saved at different points in their history with the help of the other, and she orders them to stop fighting and make peace (pun intended). The men negotiate which parts of the country each city will control, using Peace's body as a map. Lysistrata tells them that now that they've agreed, they need to purify themselves. The women will then treat them to a banquet and each go home with her husband. She and Peace go back into the Akropolis, and the men run off to get themselves ready.

In speeches that continue the rhythm of their earlier speeches, the Chorus of Women speaks about the bounty of beautiful things they have in their homes. Anyone looking for

such things is welcome to come in any time, but they add that such visitors might not actually be able to find anything. The Chorus of Men then speaks in verse about how much wheat they have and that anybody can come to collect it, but they warn that there's an angry eager dog in the house that will attack anybody.

Scene 7 Analysis

This section of the play contains even more jokes, double entendres and rude comments than any other. The men of Athens and Sparta are so desperate for release that anything and everything has a sexual meaning, especially Peace who is literally and metaphorically the embodiment of what they're so desperate for. The speech by Lysistrata and the agreement of the Spartan and Athenian delegations to her terms is the climax (pun not intended) of the play's action. The principal conflict is resolved, and the rest of the play chronicles the way that life begins to get back to normal.

In the middle of this section is the encounter between the Male and Female Leaders. It's another example of a larger relationship being dramatized and defined by the relationship between two individuals, in that the reconciliation between the Leaders both embodies and foreshadows the reconciliation between the communities of men and women. This scene also contains an extended (pun intended) double entendre in the conversation about the bug. This conversation is in fact a reference to sexual release now possible for the men and offered by the women. A director staging this play would likely include some element of sexual touching by the Female Leader with her one hand, while the other hand is removing the pretend bug from the Male Leader's head.

The verses from the Male and Female Choruses at the conclusion of this encounter and at the conclusion of this section contain metaphoric representations of the improved circumstances. The Male Chorus' comments about money and wheat symbolize that they're now able to expend their sexual energy, while the Female Chorus' comments about being able to entertain and having beautiful things in their home symbolize that they're now willing to accept the men's affections and attentions. The warnings at the end of the Female Chorus' speeches, however, suggest that entry might not be as easy as the men think, and the rewards not so great. The warning about the dog at the end of the men's second speech is actually a warning about the eagerness of their penises. All of this indicates that while the larger political issue has been resolved, the politics of sex are still on everybody's mind, as well as in their crotches.

Scene 8

Scene 8 Summary

The Male Leader bangs on the door of the Akropolis and demands to be admitted. The door opens, and the Commissioner comes out, drunk and belligerent. He orders the chorus to move along, saying that the Spartans need to pass. Kinesias comes out, also drunk. At first he speaks like a Spartan. Then he returns to his own language, saying that the negotiations have gone brilliantly. The Commissioner agrees, saying that because they've all had a lot of wine, everybody speaks freely and honestly instead of talking and thinking in terms of double dealing the way they do when they're sober. Meanwhile the Chorus has crept in closer to the door. The Commissioner moves them all away to make room for the procession coming out of the temple: Lysistrata, Kleonike, Myrrhine, the rest of the women, the Athenians and the Spartans.

One of the Spartans speaks a long poetic verse in praise of the Athenians. When he's finished, Lysistrata tells the Spartans and the Athenians to take their women back home, dance to the glory of the gods and thank them for the happy ending. She concludes by telling everyone to be careful and not let this situation arise (pun intended) again.

The Chorus sings and dances in joy, invoking the power and blessing of the gods.

Scene 8 Analysis

This scene is almost entirely falling action or denouement, showing the way life is getting back to normal. One notable point is the passing reference to the way that negotiations seem to go better when the parties involved are drunk, not sober. This is the play's secondary theme, suggesting that life and relationships are simpler and easier to manage when people deal with each other without pretext or game playing. It's possible that Lysistrata interprets the men's tendency to fight instead of talk as game playing and feels she has to resort to game playing of her own to get them to face up to the truth. Whether that's the case or not, she has accomplished her goal, and everybody, at least for the moment, goes home to live hornily ever after.

Bibliography

Aristophanes. "Lysistrata." Trans. by Douglass Parker. University of Michigan Press. Ann Arbor. 1964.

Characters

Calonice

Calonice (also called Cleonice) is a friend of Lysistrata, but she is at first reluctant to make the sacrifices that Lysistrata asks. Calonice is earthy and funny, especially in voicing her lust for her husband. She becomes one of Lysistrata's strongest supporters, but not without having first been browbeaten by Lysistrata.

Child

Cinesias brings his infant son to the siege in an attempt to convince Myrrhine to return home.

Chorus of Old Men

The chorus of old men leads an assault on the Acropolis. They try to burn the women out by setting fire to the base of the building. When action fails them, the old men engage in a war of words with the old women, who have seized the treasury. The old men are offended by the women's desire to control the treasury, but they are ineffective against the strength of the women.

Chorus of Old Women

The old women prove a formidable force, easily defending the Acropolis against the old men's attack. They pour water on the men, when they attempt to set a fire, and they prove themselves wittier and more effective in a war of words with the old men. The old women point out that men only pass useless laws that lead to disorder.

Cinesias

Cinesias is Myrrhine's husband. He suffers from unfulfilled lust and begs his wife to forget her oath and return to his bed.

Cleonice

See Calonice

Lampito

Lampito is a Spartan woman who agrees with Lysistrata and who helps to bring about peace between the two enemies. She is athletic and bold, and demonstrates that she is also loyal and resourceful. Lampito provides the Spartan equivalent to the Athenian Lysistrata.

Lysistrata

Lysistrata is an idealistic young woman who wants to bring a stop to the war. She decides that the most effective way to get the men to stop fighting is to deny them sex. She brings all the other women together and with some help from Lampito, convinces all the women to join in her in this plan. Lysistrata is smart and funny, a heroine with good analytical abilities, who is easy to admire. She helps the old women defend the Acropolis, thus controlling the treasury and preventing any more money being spent on war. When it appears that many of the women cannot hold out any longer, Lysistrata finds a prophecy that convinces the women to stick with the plan. She displays intelligence and the ability to be creative and convincing. When it appears that the peace talks between Athens and Sparta will end without an agreement, Lysistrata devises additional means to convince the men to find a peaceful solution.

Magistrate

The magistrate attempts to convince the women to return home, threatening them with silly and demeaning punishments. His attempts to disband the women fail, and his effectual control over the women illustrates how Aristophanes views the ineffectual government. This character is the target of Aristophanes' ridicule of the governing system and represents the foolishness of the leaders.

Myrrhine

Myrrhine is one of Lysistrata's strongest supporters and a willing captain in her service. When her husband tries to convince her to leave, Myrrhine denies him sexual favors and teases her husband with what he is missing. Her support of Lysistrata's scheme shifts the balance of power and marks the beginning of the men's defeat.

Spartan Envoys

It is the Spartan envoys who finally agree to a peace.

Spartan Herald

The Spartan herald is one of the men suffering without a woman.

Themes

Obedience

One of the most "shocking" aspects of the women's actions is their disobedience to men. When the men arrive with logs and the intention of burning out the women, they tell the audience that they are shocked that the women they have nourished, and through implication spoiled, have turned on the men. In short, the women of Athens are no longer obedient to the men of Athens. Moreover, the women are willing to trade insults and even to fight, if necessary. This behavior contradicts the expected demeanor of the women. The magistrate, who represents the legal and conventional expectations of women, finds that he has no control. The women first dress him in women's garb and then in the clothing of a corpse. The women have abandoned their traditional roles as obedient wives and daughters, and assumed a position of power.

Sex

It is sex that permits the women to seize control. The men are held captive to their carnal desires and are unable to deal with the women as they had previously. Sex is both the women's weapon and their prize to withhold. Sex gives the women a power they would not ordinarily hold; and with the simple banding together of the women, the desire for sex leads the men to capitulate. One of the women, Myrrhine, uses her sexuality to tease her husband, and to assert her power over him. Near the end of the play, as Lysistrata tries to negotiate a peace, she uses sex to motivate the men, by parading a nude representation of reconciliation in front of the sex-deprived males. When this maneuver fails to work, Lysistrata plies the men with wine, in a ironic reversal of the traditional male effort to seduce a woman. When the men begin drinking they become even more desperate for sex, and finally agree to a truce.

Strength and Weakness

Lysistrata correctly identifies the men's weakness and uses their weakness to create a truce. The women in this play are depicted as strong and brave. They willingly stand up to the old men and to the magistrate. They refuse to be intimidated or frightened from their oath. Instead, the women readily defend their choice and the Acropolis. They understand that a war cannot be fought without money, and that if for some reason the oath to withhold sex fails to work, they will have another tool with which to bargain. Where sex proves to be the women's strength, it is also the men's weakness, since they will promise anything to have sex.

War and Peace

It is war that has devastated Athens. The chorus is made up of old men because there are no young men left. Those who have not been killed in the war, now in its twentieth year, are off at war. The women remain behind and must manage children and property with little assistance. Young women have no one to wed. Lysistrata says that when men return from war, even the old ones can find wives. But once their time has passed, young women will never find a husband. This is one of the injustices of war, the abandonment of the women. The Peloponnesian War provides the background for this comedy, but the subject, the tragedy that this war brought to Athens, illustrates that war victimizes everyone.

Style

Audience

The people for whom a drama is performed. Authors usually write with an audience in mind. Aristophanes writes for an audience interested in drama as entertainment, but this is also an audience that would expect the playwright to include important lessons about life. In this case, the lesson is about an effective society and government that allows a war to continue after so many years. This comedy uses satire and humor to suggest to the audience that the men in power have not been effective in dealing with the war.

Character

A person in a dramatic work. The actions of each character are what constitute the story. Character can also include the idea of a particular individual's morality. Characters can range from simple stereotypical figures to more complex multifaceted ones. Characters may also be defined by personality traits, such as the rogue or the damsel in distress. *Characterization* is the process of creating a lifelike person from an author's imagination. To accomplish this the author provides the character with personality traits that help define who he will be and how he will behave in a given situation. As is usually the case in Greek drama, the character's names in *Lysistrata* suggest their function. Lysistrata's name means "she who disbands the army."

Chorus

In ancient Greek drama, a chorus consisted of a group of actors who interpreted and commented on the play's action and themes, most often singing or chanting their lines. Initially the chorus had an important role in drama, as it does in *Lysistrata,* but over time its purpose was diminished, and as a result, the chorus became little more than commentary between acts. Modern theatre rarely uses a chorus.

Drama

A drama is often defined as any work designed to be presented on the stage. It consists of a story, of actors portraying characters, and of action. Historically, drama has consisted of tragedy, comedy, religious pageant, and spectacle. In modern usage, drama explores serious topics and themes but does not achieve the same level as tragedy. *Lysistrata* is traditional Greek drama. Just as drama educates and warns, comedy can provide important lessons for men about how they govern. The laughter of the audience makes comedy a safer forum for criticism of the governing body.

Genre

Genres are a way of categorizing literature. Genre is a French term that means "kind" or "type." Genre can refer to both the category of literature such as tragedy, comedy, epic, poetry, or pastoral. It can also include modern forms of literature such as drama novels, or short stories. This term can also refer to types of literature such as mystery, science fiction, comedy, or romance. *Lysistrata* is a Greek comedy, in this case an Old Comedy, which refers to earthy and humorous sexuality.

Farce

Much of the action and most of the dialogue in this play is farcical, filled with nonsense and exaggeration. The action of the play is suppose to be divided over a period of five days, with the women organizing and seizing the Acropolis, and the meeting between Athenian and Spartan ambassadors occurring five days later. Periods of time are never exactly noted, but the time lapse is certainly not long enough to account for the state of misery that the men portray. The emphasis in the play is on their physical discomfort and the obvious signs of that discomfort. The humor is ribald and lewd, with risque references to just what it is that the women are denying the men.

Plot

This term refers to the pattern of events. Generally plots have a beginning, a middle, and a conclusion, but they may also sometimes be a series of episodes connected together. Basically, the plot provides the author with the means to explore primary themes. Students are often confused between the two terms; but themes explore ideas, and plots simply relate what happens in a very obvious manner. Thus the plot of *Lysistrata* is how women decide to withhold sex to force the men to stop the war. But the theme is how ineffective men have been in bringing an end to a war that has lasted twenty years and which will last another seven years.

Scene

Traditionally, a scene is a subdivision of an act and consists of continuous action of a time and place. However, Aristophanes is not using acts, and so the action, is contained in one scene, covering an unspecified period of time, perhaps a few days at most.

Setting

The time, place, and culture in which the action of the play takes place is called the setting. The elements of setting may include geographic location, physical or mental environments, prevailing cultural attitudes, or the historical time in which the action

takes place. The primary location for *Lysistrata* is Athens. The action spans a space of several days; five days is suggested in the text.

Historical Context

The Peloponnesian War was in its twentieth year when Aristophanes wrote *Lysistrata.* Athens and Sparta had been long-standing enemies, but they had finally negotiated an uneasy peace in 445 B.C. When Athens wanted to extend its empire, the uneasy peace was broken, and war erupted. When the war began in 431 B.C., Greece was not a country as we know it today. Instead it was a collection of small, rival city-states, located both on the mainland and on the surrounding islands. The war began after Sparta demanded certain concessions of Athens, and the Athenian leader Pericles convinced the Athenians to refuse, and instead, go to war. There was a short truce after ten years of fighting, when it appeared that the war was deadlocked between the two city-states; but soon the war resumed. Initially Athens seemed to be winning; in spite of having lost many people to the plague, they were winning some battles and appeared to be stronger than their enemy, Sparta. Sparta even suggested peace, which Athens rejected. But soon, the war changed, with Sparta in the stronger position. Athens had a stronger navy than Sparta, and the Athenian forces commanded the seas, but when the battle shifted, Sparta emerged as the stronger force. A major shift in the war occurred when Athens attempted to invade Sicily. This unsuccessful attack led to serious losses at land and at sea. These losses made Athens more vulnerable to Sparta's land forces, which had always been stronger than those of Athens. In addition, Athens' navy, which had always been its strongest force, had been destroyed in the ill-fated invasion of Sicily. Although Athens' navy was later rebuilt, it was eventually destroyed again by Sparta. By 405 B.C., the war was over and Athens had lost, having suffered near ruin. When Lysistrata reminds the audience of the terrible losses that the city has endured, everyone in the audience would have recognized the truth of her words. The chorus in *Lysistrata* is made up of old men because there are no young men remaining. Lysistrata laments the shortage of men because there are no grooms for the young women who seek husbands. The war, which has lasted twenty long years, shows no sign of ending, when Aristophanes is staging his play. The war will end in another seven years, but only after the Athenians are starved into surrendering.

The end of the war was a major defeat for Athens, one from which it could not recover. A peace agreement was signed in 404 B.C., and Sparta imposed severe penalties on Athens. In addition to surrendering almost all of their remaining ships, Athens was also forced to tear down the city walls, and adhere to the same foreign policy as Sparta. The Peloponnesian War was a catastrophe for Athens, leading to the destruction of her empire. The city continued to exist as a center for culture and wealth, but its political strength was never the same. The city treasury, which Lysistrata and the old women hoped to preserve, was laid waste by a war that lasted twenty-seven years. The government of Athens changed, as well. There were many political murders, most at the hands of the committee of thirty that Sparta placed in control of Athens' government.

Critical Overview

By 411 B.C., the Peloponnesian War had lasted twenty years, and Athens was in a state of turmoil. The plague of a few years earlier had decimated the population, killing anywhere from one-third to two-thirds of the people. At the time of the initial presentation of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata,* probably in January of 411 B.C., the political atmosphere of Athens was one of unrest. Within months, extremists would overthrow the democracy of Athens, and engage in open negotiations with Sparta. Although these extremists would soon be overthrown, their initial success indicates how unstable the atmosphere of Athens was at the time. But those events were still six months away at the time of Aristophanes' play, and there were other events that revealed how difficult life had become for Athenians. Athens had only recently suffered a significant and disastrous military loss in the attempted invasion of Sicily. With the destruction of their navy, the importation of food became a pressing concern for Athens, and serious food shortages and hunger were the result. Although there are many comedic moments in *Lysistrata*, there are many serious moments, such as when Lysistrata tells the magistrate that many of Athens' young men had died, and so, many of the city's young women will never have the chance to marry and have families. Lysistrata's actions will end the war, something that men had not been able to do in the past twenty years. Aristophanes gives important lines to his heroine, a woman, to point out to the audience just how inept their government had become. The Greek audience knew of women's weaknesses, but Lysistrata's strengths illustrate that one weak women can accomplish what men cannot. In Aristophanes' play, women are strong, and they are a force that can end a war.

Since there are no records of how this play was received, and since Aristophanes won no prize for its writing, it is difficult to reconstruct how the audience reacted to this depiction of women as heroic. However, it is possible to examine how well *Lysistrata* has endured by focusing on the play as source material for modern productions. It should not be surprising, given its antiwar motif and the depiction of women as strong movers of social change, that Lysistrata's story has continued to be a popular play in modern productions. Although *Lysistrata* was originally produced as musical comedy, most modern productions either eliminate the music or severely reduce its presence. Although there have been many productions of Aristophanes' play during the past one hundred years, there are two New York productions that offer contrasting views of this play's applicability to modern life. In 1930, *Lysistrata* enjoyed a successful and commercially profitable run on the New York stage. In an evaluation of the reviews from the period, critic Clive Barnes quotes 1930 reviews as pronouncing the play "a smash." Some of these earlier Broadway critics noted that this Greek comedy contained set designs that offered a "rich-hued, towering Acropolis," and that the actors helped to make the play "a delectable desert for Broadway palates." Subsequent productions have not fared so well, with a 1959 Broadway production earning mostly negative reviews. Among the reviewers, none were enthusiastic, but most simply found this new production of *Lysistrata* either dated or offensive. Robert Coleman described the play as "a bit shopworn," while John McClain labeled the play, "tasteless and revolting." Much of

McClain's ire was directed toward an attempt to modernize the play through revealing costumes and an emphasis on eroticism.

Aristophanes' audience was committed to the theatre, which was not a daily or even weekly occurrence. The festivals during which the plays were presented demanded something more from an audience than that which modern audiences are prepared to give. Since plays were only presented during the festivals, perhaps a couple of times in a year, Greek audiences arrived early and stayed late. Audiences sat on stone benches from sunrise to sunset, and in the large theatre at Dionysus, seventeen thousand, mostly men, sat to listen to the words of Sophocles, Aristophanes, Euripides, Aeschylus, and others. It would be difficult for today's audience to grasp the excitement that greeted *Lysistrata* when it first appeared on stage, and this is made more difficult in an atmosphere where theatre is readily available every day.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Metzger has a Ph.D., and specializes in literature and drama at The University of New Mexico, where she is a Lecturer in the English Department and an Adjunct Professor in the University Honors Program. In the following essay, she discusses Aristophanes' depiction of women and suggests that this depiction of women in Lysistrata misinforms the audience about the public forums available to women in 5th-century B. C. Greece.

The premise of *Lysistrata* is easy to understand: if men will not fix the mess they have made, then women must fix it for them. Aristophanes' comedy provides women with a strong incentive to, and an even stronger means to, create peace. The men of Athens have waged war for twenty years, and there appears to be no end to the war, in the foreseeable future. One woman, Lysistrata, decides that if men cannot end the war, women must do so, and so, she calls the women of Athens and a representative of Sparta together to form an alliance. This alliance of women will use the one bit of power that they possess their sexuality to control men. This plotting on behalf of the women is inspired, since men and religion most often criticize women for using their sexuality as a way to maneuver men into abdicating control. In this play, Aristophanes takes this criticism of women and turns a traditionally negative view into a positive depiction of women. Or does he? It is worth considering this depiction of women in two ways. The first approach to evaluating Aristophanes' portrayal of women is to examine the way in which men are depicted, but in this case, men have little to say about war. But the second, more illuminating examination is to compare the women of *Lysistrata* to fifth century Athenian women. It is this last inquiry that demonstrates how little strength Lysistrata and her cohorts really depict in this play.

On the surface, *Lysistrata* appears to endorse women as strong, decisive members of their society. After all, the Peloponnesian War is in its twentieth year, and men have not been able to bring the carnage to an end. Indeed, the war has brought unrelenting tragedy to Athens. In the previous twenty years, Athenians have endured a devastating plague, the depletion of their treasury, and a humiliating and tragic loss in the attempted invasion of Sicily. Their navy, once a source of great pride and strength, has been destroyed. To add to the overall feelings of despondency, the citizens of Athens are virtually prisoners in their city, forced to witness from within their walls how badly the war has been going. But Aristophanes' play never attributes the exact blame for all this mess, just that nothing is being done to resolve it. The author never suggests that it is men who have failed to end the war. But in placing the potential for resolving the conflict in the hands of women, he does imply that it is men who are responsible for the general feeling of disappointment that all the people are feeling. The implication is clear: women will do what men have not end the war. But although Aristophanes fails to condemn men, women are also left without any genuine endorsement. Moreover, men frequently attack the women, painting them as deceptive (lines 671-679), lustful (lines 130-137), and without merit (lines 369, 399-420). Actually, there is little said of women, either by women or by men, that is complimentary. Women do bring an end to the war, but in doing so, they reinforce traditional Greek constructs of women's lives.

Virgina Woolf observed in 1929 that women in fiction have an authority and voice that they lacked in real life. This is especially true for *Lysistrata,* in which the title character appears strong and brave, or as Woolf suggests, "a person of the utmost importance ... heroic and mean ... as great as a man, some think even greater." But this is only a fictional construct, and not the reality for women in ancient Greece. Thus as Woolf points out, women in literature exist in an imaginary, fictional world, where they are important, but in the real world, women are completely insignificant. In ancient Greece, women were not in control of their sexuality, and few men would have been willing to abdicate their desires to those of women. In the real Greek world, women were property, purchased through marriage or purchased through prostitution, but always, they were subordinate to men. In an examination of the sexual hierarchy present in 5th-century B.C. Greek life, Brian Arkin suggests that the way people behave sexually in a culture, is determined by what society finds acceptable. To illustrate, he notes that in ancient Greek culture, society was "organized to meet the needs of the adult male citizen," who dominated the way society functioned. This meant that males were in control of sexual expression, and as Arkin notes, "sex acts [were] not mutual," since "in masculine discourse sex is something that you do to somebody." To extrapolate from Arkin's work an application to Aristophanes' play, means that Lysistrata's actions had no basis in reality. To put it briefly, women did not deny men sexual favors. Aristophanes' audience would not see Lysistrata's actions as anything but broad farce or entertaining slapstick. Since women were routinely excluded from Greek society, and men, in general, had a low opinion of women's intelligence, there would have been no reason for Lysistrata to attempt reason; sex was the only weapon that Aristophanes could give her. But in giving her this weapon, he makes her choices, and those of the women who join her, laughable. Clearly that was his intention, but he might also have hoped to point out that men, who did have an authority denied to women, should be ashamed of their inaction, especially when faced by a fictional woman's attempt to bring peace. Arkin is also concerned, as was Woolf, that women lacked an authentic voice on the stage:

Greek men effectively silenced women by speaking for them on those occasions when men chose to address significant words to each other in public, in the drama, and they required the silence of women in public in order to make themselves heard and impersonate without impediment.

Women lacked a forum to speak out against the war, but Aristophanes could give voice to his own outrage by appropriating a woman's voice. Thus Greek women *appeared* to have an authority that they lacked in their own lives. In a sense, they were denied existence in their society twice, once by the cultural and societal rules that made males dominant, and once by the theatre, that usurped their lives, so that the playwright might give voice to his own agenda. On stage, Lysistrata might enter the world of men and conquer that world, but this could not ever happen in reality, as Arkin mentions. Women might grow tired of the deaths of their men, but they would never publicly protest the war.

There was only one forum available to women, where they might publicly comment on the war, and that was at the graves of their husbands, sons, and brothers. Women were expected to grieve properly, both as a sign of love and obedience to the men in their

lives, but also, as a signal that they supported their society, and by extension, their government. This determination of proper grieving was so important, that the Athenian general, Pericles, spoke of this obligation at the first of the public funerals held after the Peloponnesian War began in 431 B.C., in which he addressed his comments to the women who had come to mourn. The historian, Thucydides, reported that Pericles told the women:

If I must recall something about the excellence of those women who will now be widows, I will point out everything with brief advice. Great is the glory for you not to become worse than your innate nature, and hers is the great reputation whose fame, whether for excellence or blame, is spread among the males.

Thus, Pericles admonishes the women to grieve properly, but to remember that in their grief, they still must support their city's efforts to win the war. In an analysis of these lines, William Blake Tyrrell suggests that Pericles "was trying to fashion in the context of a funeral and mourning the dead the kind of women he needed for success." At the start of another long war, the women of Athens must have been worried about the effect war would have on their homes and marriages. Women in ancient Greece had a prescribed formula for mourning, which required that women give voice to their anguish. Women may be opposed to the war, but they could not voice that opposition, nor could they choose to protest silently. Tyrrell notes that "silence among women over the dead would be the worst of calamities." Women would be criticized if they did not mourn properly, but Tyrrell suggests that Pericles' words were not just intended for the widows who had come together to bury their husbands at this first funeral; instead, they were intended for the women, who would be called upon to repeat this ceremony over the course of many years of war. Mourning was women's work, and so it was appropriate that Aristophanes should have a woman grow tired of this work. Lysistrata tells the audience that there have been too many deaths, too many young men lying dead from this war. Her lament at all this death is the only recourse open to her. In expressing her grief, Lysistrata does come closest to depicting the real Greek woman of 5th-century B.C. Athens. In contrast, the women's lament at their sexual deprivation is little more than male fantasy. There is little in *Lysistrata* that tells the audience of women's lives; but, then, Aristophanes' audience would have little interest in listening to what women had to say. To get the audience's attention, the playwright needed to make the audience laugh at the war, and there is little about twenty years of war that can elicit humor. The bawdiness of sexual humor entertains the male audience, even if it creates a fiction of women's lives.

Source: Sheri E. Metzger, in an essay for *Drama For Students*, Gale, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

Michael Rex has a Ph.D. specializing in literature, poetry, and drama. In this essay he explores the ideology of Lysistrata's sexuality and how translators can affect this sexuality.

Without argument, Lysistrata is a play about sex. However, the attitudes of the translators often get mixed up in how the play expresses the sexuality of the title character. As an image of a traditional Greek woman, Lysistrata would not have behaved in the manner that she did because, according to history and respectable male philosophers, respectable Greek women did not engage in sexual activity. More recent studies, like Merlin Stone's *When God Was a Woman,* Pauline Schmitt's *A History of Women: From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints,* and Elaine Fantham's *Women in the Classical World* suggest that women had more control and took more of an active part in their lives, especially their sex lives. The play, while written by a man, with all male actors (although the musicians and choruses included women), and performed for a mostly male audience, was written for the yearly festival of Demeter, the Greek Goddess of agriculture, whose rites and religious services, especially those performed by women, are under explored and rather hazy. What we have left is the play. However, how the play is translated affects the way the audience and the actors interact with the play's title character. In five versions, the translator's attitudes toward Lysistrata's sexuality alter the way the audience sees the play's message about power, sex, and war.

In the last twelve years, two major new translations of Lysistrata have reintroduced the comedy to college and community theaters as well as classrooms. Both claim that "new" translations are needed to cut through the prudery of the 19th-century versions and the older American versions which seem to have problems with sex. Nicholas Rudall published his translation in 1991 and Alan Sommerstein published his in 1987. Both translators claim to be correcting a popular translation from the 1960s, the Donald Sutherland translation of 1961.

Sutherland's depiction of Lysistrata is not so concerned with sex, but with how comedy works. Sutherland suggests that comedy is very immediate and does not translate well over cultures. The use of proper names and the overwhelming local references that made the play funny to its first audiences gets lost on modern audiences even with large numbers of footnotes. For this reason, Sutherland suggests that power, sex, and war become much more important as the carriers of the comedy. Power and war go hand in hand for Sutherland and he goes to great lengths to suggest that these elements are subordinated to men's sexual desire when that desire goes unfulfilled by the women traditionally responsible for that fulfillment. Sutherland also tries to shift the focus of the comedy from the sexual to the social by giving the Spartans an American Southern accent and the Athenians a more Mid-Western speech pattern.

In terms of sex, Sutherland seems reluctant to mention the idea at all. Sex, sexual intercourse, reproduction, or screwing are not words used in Sutherland's translation.

Lysistrata could as easily be talking about cooking or cleaning house. In fact, Sutherland makes the Greek men more concerned about losing control over the money and having to do their own grocery shopping than whether or not they are getting sex. This treatment of sex in interesting, given that Sutherland was writing in the "sexually liberated" 1960s with a tone as repressed as a good Victorian.

It was this type of prudery that Alan Sommerstein and Nicholas Rudall argue against in their translations of Lysistrata. Sommerstein's translation, for Penguin Books, is full of sexual puns, contemporary jokes, people, and places. His translation oozes sex and he comes right out and uses all of the common words for the male and female anatomy as well as "vulgar" names for the sex act. Sommerstein argues that Lysistrata and the Greek women represent all women in their desire to control their own bodies and influence the course of political and social events. He also suggests that Lysistrata was more egalitarian in her movement including respectable women, whores, temple women, and slaves so as to cut off the supply of sexual release altogether. The women are portrayed as active sex partners, desiring sex in ways not traditional thought possible for Greek women. Sommerstein also plays down the money and the idea of fighting to emphasize the sexual elements of the play and the women's enjoyment of the men's discomfort. His translation suggest a solidarity among women that is lacking in other translations of the play.

While Nicholas Rudall reacts against the sexlessness of Sutherland's translation, he does not embrace the wholesale sexual freedom that Sommerstein suggests. Rudall is much more philosophical in his translation. He sees the play as much more about the fundamental biological differences in how the sexes see and use power. In his translation, peace, community and compromise are female attributes while war and destruction are "male phallic aberration[s]." He insists that the women withholding sex are respectable Greek married women. The idea that these women are married seems very important for Rudall and his interpretation of Aristophanes. Lysistrata and her comrades are not just refusing to have sex to stop a war; they are refusing to produce sons to be ground up as cannon fodder. Rudall removes sex from the physical realm and imbues it with spiritual and social power. However, Rudall's actual words tend to undermine his high-mindedness. Lysistrata talks about wanting to "get laid" and the "hardness" of her man's nights, while the men talk to their penises in stage directions.

Rudall may argue that the women are fighting on a philosophical plane and using sex (or lack there of) as a way to make a political point, but in modern performances, Lysistrata dwells much more with sexual politics than spiritual ones. Two recent college performances illustrate this point. The first, produced by Maureen Mclntyre at Sam Houston State University in 1990, used a chorus of nude male student actors (over the objections of local ministers) with clothed female actors as a way to argue against the overwhelming display of female nudity in American media while men are covered. In fact, most of the male actors in that production were nude or relatively so. This production argued for the power of women through the use of sex in a feminist manner which many men find uncomfortable.

The 2000 production of Lysistrata by Karen Sheriden at Oakland University developed along similar lines. While none of the actors were naked, the sexual politics still took prescience over the philosophical ones. The production used modern rock music and portrayed Lysistrata and her comrades as the Spice Girls, thus arguing for "Girl Power" and the right of women to make their own decisions about their bodies, their lives, and their futures. The poster for the production had a young man lying on the ground, shielding his face with his hand while Lysistrata, in a pair of six inch open toed sandals, stood over him, her foot on his chest. Again, the sexual politics are obvious. The male body is to be viewed as an object rather than the female body, as tradition would have it. All the picture shows of the woman is a foot and a bit of calf. Under the picture are the words, "Give Peace a Chance," yet the picture suggests that a different kind of war will be waged. Both of these productions, and most recent ones, as well, attempt to make men the "object of the *gaze*." In other words, making men sexual objects for women in the same way men have made women into sexual objects. This ideology of sexuality differs greatly from the ideology expressed in most modern translations of the play.

Most translations of Lysistrata are still done by men as scholarly exercises to get tenure at some American college or university. Therefore, they must justify producing a new version of one of the most translated plays in the English language. Each translator argues for the idea of peace over war, the harmony of feminine community, and the noise of phallic power, yet they all ignore the power of Lysistrata's character and her control of her sexuality. She is in control at all times. She is the first and the most steadfast of the women, going without sex for months, and forcing the peace treaty on all the delegations. Even without the shift in the gaze that modern, female directors give the play, Lysistrata's use of sex shows that more is at stake than most readers realize at first glance. Aristophanes seems to be arguing for women's control over their own bodies and lives in a way that fits into the religious festival of the play's first performance. His striking characterization of Lysistrata as a woman who claims the right to control when and with whom she will sleep threatens the establishment in ways that any other subject simply cannot do. So while the translators argue over philosophical ideas, the directors who emphasize the sex seem to be getting closer to what Aristophanes actually intended.

Translators, directors, and playwrights can never truly free themselves from the cultures in which they live. Lysistrata attempts to address the unequal nature of sexual relationships in Greece through power politics because the idea of sexual politics had not been articulated yet. Modern translators, generally men, have tried to gloss over the problems of sexuality in the play, arguing about the higher motives of the playwright and his culture, while ignoring the glaring problems of sexual relationships between men and women in that culture and in their own. However, Lysistrata is still a play much more about sex and its politics than it is a play about power and peace.

Source: Michael Rex, in an essay for *Drama for Students*, Gale, 2001.

Critical Essay #3

Presley is an M.A. specializing in Germanic Languages and Literature. In this essay she discusses the function of the chorus in Lysistrata.

Perhaps the element of ancient Greek drama and comedy that is most difficult for the modern reader to visualize is the chorus. We know that the chorus sang and danced, but unfortunately the original music and dance movements have not survived. Comedic choruses usually consisted of twenty-four men wearing elaborate masks, costumes, and especially important in Lysistrata, exaggerated phal-luses. There are two semi-choruses in Lysistrata, probably consisting of twelve performers each: a chorus of old war veterans and the other of old or middle-aged women. The choral members probably partnered up with a member of the opposing chorus and acted out the lines as they spoke or sang them. Each chorus would also have a leader who spoke or sang lines solo. At other times the whole chorus would perform lines in unison. Because so little is known of the actual movements of Greek choruses, modern directors of ancient Greek comedy are left a lot of room for individual interpretation.

The semi-choruses in Lysistrata play an essential role in the comedy. For one thing, they serve as a dramatic device that accelerates the time of the main action. While the choruses are bickering on stage, days pass for Lysistrata and the other women inside the Acropolis. But the choruses' main function is to react to and expand on the themes established by the main actors. The three main interactions that the semi-choruses have with each other mirror Lysistrata's plot as it moves from problem to conflict to resolution.

The premise of Lysistrata is well known. An Athenian woman, Lysistrata, proposes a sex strike to force the men to stop waging war. The Spartan and Athenian women have no problem uniting for a common cause, which forces their men to unite in their commonality as men. Lysistrata's plan shifts the conflict from Athenian versus Spartan to man versus woman. The chorus will dramatize this conflict to comedic affect by depicting the relationship between men and women as a war. Lysistrata's plan also redirects the human drive for death and destruction into the drive for birth and creativity. She calls on the power of Aphrodite to "breathe down over our breasts and thighs / an attraction both melting and mighty" so that men will only raise "their cudgels of passion." The men will therefore exchange their spears and arrows for "weapons" of love, that is, their penises. The actions of the chorus will show that the human impulse to make war and the desire to make love actually come from the same urge. As Anna Lydia Motto and John R. Clark explain, in Lysistrata "[e]pic heroism is humbled in the dust, for the psychological implications of this dramatic fiction are that male aggressiveness, realized in its penchant for swordsmanship, is nothing more than the sexual urge run wild."

The chorus makes its first appearance after the problem of the play has been established and the main characters have left the stage. At this point, the Chorus of Old Men enters, joined a few moments later by the Chorus of Old Women. The old men labor to carry logs up to the Acropolis in order to start a fire to force the women out. In a

play abounding with blatant phallic references, it is easy to suggest that the logs represent the phallus. The old men's struggle with the logs is a humorous reminder of their waning virility. They try to light a fire but only produce smoke; they have difficulty igniting flames, just as they have difficulty igniting their sexual ability. The Chorus of Women sneaks up behind the old men, ambushing them at the top of the Acropolis with jugs of water. The women dump water on the feeble flames that the men have managed to kindle, dampening what little virility the old men were able to muster.

This sexual metaphor of engulfing female wetness (water) that smothers male virility (fire) is framed by the parody of war that the two choruses enact. After each chorus sings its introductory song, they exchange violent threats and insults. The men compare their defense of the Acropolis now to their defense of it in a military siege one hundred years ago. The Spartan enemy has been exchanged for a female one. Now, however, the old men are reduced to ordering around pots of coal: "These are your orders, Colonel Pot," says one member of the male chorus. The women call on the warrior goddess, Athena, to help them carry water in their battle. The choruses exchange taunts like rival armies, the women daring the men to try physical violence on them. The women do not back off when the men reply in kind; instead they threaten that they will "chew your lungs out and your innards and your eyes." The themes of war and sex also combine in the old men's attempt to take back the Acropolis as a violent parody of sexual intercourse itself. They attempt to penetrate the citadel by force with logs and fire. But as Lysistrata said earlier, "they'll never bring against us threats or fire enough to force open the gates, except upon our terms." In the spirit of sexual double meaning that abounds in the play, the "gates" that she speaks of are the gates of the Acropolis as well as the entrance to the vagina.

The sight of the Chorus of Old Men laboring to carry logs and pots of coal also emphasizes the threat that war poses to the fertility and growth of the Athenian city-state. The Chorus of Old Women calls the men "tombs" and jokes that the men carry the fire for their own cremations. Then the women playfully call them "bridegrooms." Death and marriage are combined in the war-torn state. The death-making impulse of war overrides the life-producing impulse, resulting in a waste of fertility. Thousands of young and healthy men have died in the Peloponnesian war, and women produce sons only to sacrifice them to the war machine. Furthermore, the war takes men away from their procreative duties. Lysistrata speaks of the cruelness of this absence to young women when she says that "the season of woman is very short," and it is hard to find a husband for a woman once she is beyond childbearing years.

The second major exchange between the two semi-choruses occurs after the debate between Lysistrata and the Commissioner. The main characters again leave the stage to the chorus who continues the theme of the debate: whether women should be allowed a voice in governmental matters. The men express paranoid theories of conspiracy and treachery. Since the women seized the Acropolis and took over the male tools of power housed inside, money and the means of communicating with the gods, the normal possession of power has turned upside down. The women's chorus argues that they should be allowed a voice in government: "I've a share in this economy, for I

contribute men," they say. The old men, on the other hand, contribute nothing. They simply receive their military pensions and drain the resources of the state.

The rational debate soon breaks down. The Chorus of Old Men throws off their cloaks so that the women can smell their masculinity. "Every man with both his balls must make ready-take our shirts off, for a man must reek of male outright," they declare. The men, threatened by the women's boast of fertility, must give physical evidence of their own virility. The women respond by throwing off their own cloaks to release the smells of their bodies. "No woman smells ranker!" they boast. The choruses challenge each other with their bodies' smells, just as animals do to mark territory and signal aggression. Such a use of smell is also often a signal of sexual receptivity among mating animals. In this way, the themes of sex and territorial aggression (war) are again combined. Furthermore, the women threaten, "Say an unkind word, / I'll pursue you till you drop, / as the beetle did the bird." This line requires a footnote to reveal its full meaning. As Jeffery Henderson observes, "The old women allude to midwifery, a usual occupation of their age-group, and to a fable in which the lowly beetle avenge the loss of its young by breaking the eagle's eggs (here metaphorical for testicles)." Henderson's translation of the line reads, "Just give us a chance / to pull down your pants/ and deliver your balls by caesarian," which poses women's birth-giving power as a threat to male virility.

The final choral dialogue occurs near the end of the play, after the comic scene between Myrrhina and Cinesias. This scene underscores what is taken for granted in Lysistrata's plan: marriage and heterosexual relations therein are essential to the stability of the state. The chorus will pick up on the love exhibited by Myrrhina and Cinesias and carry this spirit of partnership to its happy conclusion. The men begin the choral exchange with now familiar invectives against women, but then the women begin to show nurturing by slipping the cloaks back on the men and dislodging painful bugs from their eyes. The men respond warmly and conclude that the old proverb is right: "There's no living with the bitches and, without them, even less." The chorus has introduced here the final theme of reconciliation, and in that spirit, it says it is not going to do what was traditional for Greek comedy. Usually at this point, the chorus would sing songs that made fun of prominent men in the audience. Instead, they sing an invitation to a banquet for the next night. The Chorus of Old Men regains their virility and is able to participate heartily in the dancing and singing that will follow. As Lois Spatz writes, "As is to be expected, the victory of Lysistrata's plan will bring about the defeat of old age. When these choruses lay aside their enmity, they will gain youthful vigor and sexual desire as well as peace."

At Lysistrata's conclusion, the fractured chorus has become a harmonious whole, just as Spartan and Athenian, and man and woman have reunited in partnership and love. The chorus plays an indispensable role in dramatizing this transition from enmity to friendship, while offering much comedic support along the way.

Source: Daniela Presley, in an essay for *Drama for Students,* Gale, 2001.

Critical Essay #4

In the following essay, Forrest illustrates the similarity between the principles being held by Leaina and Lysistrata.

In his admirable commentary, Jeffrey Henderson notes the significance of posture and of physical setting. He does not remark that the statue of Leaina near to which Lysistrata and Kalonike are standing on the Akropolis was intimately tied to the obscure story of the later years in the Athenian tyranny. With minor variations of detail or colour the story was that Leaina, a hetaira beloved of Harmodios or Aristogeiton, had been tortured by Hippias after the murder of Hipparchos but, brave girl, had preferred to die than say yes, or indeed say anything. She bit out her tongue. The Athenians set up a bronze lioness, the work of Amphikrates, to commemorate her martyrdom. . . .

It is towards this crouching figure that Lysistrata raises her hand as she asks her sorority to swear 'I shall not squat like a lioness [Greek text omitted!. ...]'. On what would the audience have expected that particular lioness to squat? On a cheese-grater? Hardly. On a tyrant, surely, or even more precisely, on a tyrant-slayer. An able actor would have had no trouble with a minor clash of stress or tone. A very alert auditor might have picked up an earlier suggestion of sex and politics at vv.59/60. But even the dumbest would be alive to an issue that had been tickling his fancy and his fears for nearly four years now.

Thucydides' petulant outburst at 6.53 owes much to his arrogance and something, no doubt, to his family tradition but the fact of popular panic was real enough and behind it lay two anxieties that were always lurking in Athenian minds, tyranny and Sparta; to give body to the former there was Alkibiades who, like another Olympic victor in the past, might have been thought to be 'growing his hair long with a view to tyranny.' By spring 411 the panic had subsided, *Lysistrata* is a confident play, but there was talk of Alkibiades' return, of being 'democrats with a difference,' and the Spartans were at Dekeleia. Sensitivity was there to be rekindled.

The events of 514-510 offered a perfect maze from which to tease out vice or virtue according to taste and purpose. Who freed Athens? The blameless young heroes, Harmodios and Aristogeiton, or the Alkmeonidai with the Spartans? Were the young heroes blameless or just erotically miffed? Were the Alkmeonidai supported by Apollo's will or Apollo's venality? Thucydides is better evidence for the existence of the arguments than for the facts behind them. But whatever the facts there was something here for every taste, intrigue in high places, violence, sex in many shapes. Small wonder that with Spartan alliance as part of his plot and the Akropolis as his setting, Aristophanes should exploit what lay to hand. The hint at 59/60 and the firm allusion at 231 are followed by a stream of titbits about tyrants, tyrannicides, Alkmeonidai and Spartans not forgetting a makeweight in Athens' aid to Sparta at 1137-48. All natural enough.

There may, however, be more to it. Between *Lysistrata* and earlier plays I sense a shift, both qualitative and quantitative, in allusions to Athens' past. Contrast the vagueness of the old men in *Achamians* or *Wasps* with the precision, however unreliable, here. I renew a suggestion made in *GRBS* 10 (1969), that some work of 'scholarship' had come to Aristophanes' attention and that that work might have been part of what later became-Hellanikos' Atthis. For me, following Jacoby, Hellanikos was in the Athenian democratic tradition; Sparta always needed foreign aid; Athens could solve its own problems. Hence Kimon's glorious mission to Messenia (1137ff.; contrast Thuc. 1.102), hence emphasis on the tyrannicides at the expense of Sparta and the Alkmeonids: 231 (I believe), 621,630ff., 665ff. (perhaps); contrast Hdt. 5.55-65, Thuc. 6.53ff. Other Aristophanic oddities, notably the curious role of the old men at Leipsydrion, could be welded into a Hellanikan story, but it would scarcely be profitable to create it.

Better to conclude with a sort of parallel. The role of the monarchy in this country has been discussed for some time; recent activities of the royal family occasioned rumour and more debate; it was the appearance of Andrew Morton's book which added a pretence of scholarly accuracy. Hellanikos could well have given a lecture or two on Hippias, Aristogeiton and Leaina, the girl who kissed but would not tell.

Source: W.G.Forrest, "Aristophanes, 'Lysistrata' 231," in *The Classical Quarterly,* Vol. 45, No. 1, Jan-June, 1995, p. 240.

Adaptations

There are no filmed adaptations of this play. However, *Lysistrata,* was adapted as an opera in 1963-1967, to be performed by the Wayne State University opera workshop. There is a 90-minute cassette of the music available from Greenwich Publishers in Saskatchewan, Canada.

Topics for Further Study

How does the comedy in Lysistrata differ from the comedy of one of William Shakespeare's comedies, such as *Taming of the Shrewl*

Consider the ways in which *Lysistrata* attacks Athenian society and discuss the effectiveness of ridicule and irony in changing political decisions. Would such satire be effective in attacking politicians today? Or do modern politicians simply ignore satire?

How are the men's attitudes toward women depicted in this play, and how do the women respond to the men's attack? Who do you think demonstrates the stronger position?

Research the war between Sparta and Athens. Does Aristophanes' attack on Athenian society reflect the uselessness of this war? That is, is the playwright correct in having Lysistrata point out that both Sparta and Athens would be better off uniting to fight a common enemy?

Compare and Contrast

c. 411 B.C.: The democracy of Athens is overthrown by extremists, who are in open negotiation with Sparta. These extremists are soon overthrown, and the Athenian navy defeats the Spartan navy a few months later.

Today: Greece is a united country at this time, with no city-state attempting to seize control over the country.

c. 411 B.C.: The war between Sparta and Athens has continued for twenty years. The Peloponnesian War will end in 404 B.C., with Athens' defeat.

Today: Greece, which has been dominated by military coups and turmoil with neighboring Turkey since the end of World War II, is no longer considered a dominant military force.

c. 411 B.C.: In 429 B.C., a plague killed one third, and perhaps as many as two thirds of the population of Athens. Because of this plague, many Athenians ceased to believe in their gods, and much of the population fell into drunkenness, gluttony, and licentiousness. The effect of this change can be seen in the drama, *Lysistrata,* in which there is little mention of the gods-as there had been in many earlier Greek dramas.

Today: Medicine has helped to identify the cause of disease, and most modern populations no longer blame the gods for the plague. But occasionally, as was the case with the initial discovery of AIDS, a segment of the population will attribute the victims' disease to a punishment of god and a judgment on behavior.

c. 411 B.C.: The annual drama prizes at the Dionysus competition continue to draw the most talented dramatists. The prizes are sought after, and even in the midst of war, the leading dramatists of the period continue to challenge one another for prizes and recognition as the greatest playwright.

Today: Drama competition continues with prizes for film and theatre eagerly sought each spring. Winners of the Best Film at the Academy Awards or the Best Play at the Critic Circle Awards are assured of accolades and monetary rewards that will ease the production of subsequent work.

c. 411 B.C.: 25-35 percent of the population of Greece are slaves, many of whom work in the silver mines.

Today: Slavery has long since ended, but Greece is now dealing with severe poverty and a shrinking economic base.

What Do I Read Next?

Thesmophoriazusae, also by Aristophanes, was produced in 411 B.C. Like *Lysistrata,* this play also depicts women as an important force in society.

Peace, also by Aristophanes (421 B.C.), addresses the problem of war, with a stronger presence by the gods of Mt. Olympus.

Four Plays by Aristophanes: The Clouds, The Birds, Lysistrata, The Frogs, is a compilation of four of Aristophanes' plays. This New American Library paperback (1984) is an easy and inexpensive way to become acquainted with this author.

The Penn Greek Drama Series, *Aristophanes, 2: Wasps, Lysistrata, Frogs, The Sexual Congress,* (1999) provides a scholarly translation of four of Aristophanes' plays.

William Shakespeare's, *The Taming of the Shrew* (1592), offers a romantic examination at the war between men and women.

Menander, a later Greek playwright, also wrote comedy, including, *Samia* (c. 300 B.C.), a romantic comedy about confused identities. Menander represents the new Comedy, but only fragments of his plays are available.

Further Study

Bowie, A. M., *Aristophanes: Myth, Ritual, and Comedy,* Cambridge University Press, 1996.

This book uses the techniques of cultural anthropology to compare Aristophanes' plays with Greek myths and rituals. This book also attempts to reconstruct the probable reaction of the audience to these plays.

MacDowell, Douglas M., *Aristophanes and Athens: An Introduction to the Plays,* Oxford University Press, 1995.

This book provides information about the political background of Aristophanes' plays and is very helpful to new readers or audiences, who might lack an understanding of the political and social forces behind this writer's work.

Rehm, Rush, *Greek Tragic Theatre,* Routledge, 1994.

This book is helpful to readers who want to understand how Greek tragedy works. This author looks at performances of several plays and encourages readers to consider the context in which the plays were performed.

Strauss, Barry S., *Fathers and Sons in Athens: Ideology and Society in the Era of the Peloponnesian War,* Princeton University Press, 1993.

This text examines how social upheaval, especially during time of war, affects the family, especially the relationship between father and son. Strauss also draws connections between the problems that faced Athenian families and the dynamics of modern families.

Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War,* Penguin Classics, 1986.

Thucydides' great history of the war between Sparta and Athens remains one of the great histories of all time.

Walton, J. Michael, *Living Greek Theatre,* Greenwood, 1987.

This text focuses on the staging and performance of Greek theatre. The author attempts to integrate classical and modern theatre, while providing a great deal of information about a number of the most important plays from the classical Greek period.

Wise, Jennifer, *Dionynsus Writes: The Invention of Theatre in Ancient Greece,* Cornell University Press, 1998.

The author discusses the relationship between literature and theatre by examining the influences of a newly emerging literary world on drama. This text also provides some interesting ideas about the role of the oral tradition on theatre.

Zelenak, Michael X., *Gender and Politics in Greek Tragedy*, Peter Lang, 1998.

This book offers some insight into the status of women in Greek culture and theatre and provides interesting analysis of many women characters from Greek drama.

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Tyrrell, William Blake, and Larry J. Bennett, "Pericles' Muting of Women's Voices in Thuc. 2.45.2," paper delivered at the Kentucky Foreign Language Conference, 1999.

Woolf, Virginia, "A Room of One's Own: Shakespeare's Sister," in *The Lexington Reader,* D.C. Heath & Co., 1987, pp. 50-60, originally published in 1929.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Drama for Students (DfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, DfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of DfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of DfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in DfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by DfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

DfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Drama for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the DfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Drama for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Drama for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from DfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from DfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Drama for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Drama for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of DfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Drama for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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