

Aristophanes, Gender, and Sexuality

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Introduction

Of all the qualities of Aristophanes' plays, it is their risqué content for which they are perhaps best known in the modern world. Certainly, for commercial theaters and student productions alike, Aristophanes is regularly marketed as a “naughty” playwright, with sex—and a hint of controversy—used to pique audience interest and sell tickets. A 2013 poster of a production of *Lysistrata* at Austin State University portrays a strident, naked women with one sash across her breasts bearing the name of the play, while a second sash covering her genitalia carries the wording: “This play contains strong adult content and language” (a warning presumably designed to maximize the play’s appeal while also keeping the faint-hearted away).¹ To advertise their 2014 *Lysistrata*, Chicago’s (re)discover theatre used the image of a woman’s vanity mirror onto which a penis had been scrawled in lipstick. As this image might suggest, this production, billed as an “anti-war sex farce,” chose to put gender politics center stage. According to their publicity material, “[t]o spice things up, a male and female actor will alternate the roles of Lysistrata and the Magistrate every other night, giving a unique dual perspective on gender.” Audience members were also invited to “pick their gender” for the night. Those choosing to be women were charged \$15 for their ticket, while those opting to be men paid \$20—a pricing policy which, the theater claimed, reflected the pay differential between men and women in the US at the time.²

The marketing of these two productions of *Lysistrata* usefully highlights three key themes in the play’s modern reception: the push and pull of its “adult content”; its ability to be exploited as a “sexy” play; and the potential it offers to those staging or adapting the play to explore not only gender politics but also

1 <www.apsu.edu/news/apsu-area-theatre-and-dance-present-lysistrata-april-17-21> accessed 15 January 2016. For more on representations of *Lysistrata* in modern visual media, see Mitchell in this volume.

2 According to their website, in the same time it takes for the average man to earn a dollar, the average woman earns only 77 cents. <<http://rediscovertheatre.com/discover/>> accessed 15 January 2016.

topics that are especially pressing for women (such as equal pay). In this chapter, I explore these three topics in turn, largely—though not exclusively—through the lens of *Lysistrata*, arguably the best known of Aristophanes' comedies and certainly the most staged of his plays in English-speaking countries over the last 100 years. While other cultural traditions and time periods are touched on, too, the focus of this chapter is on the Anglophone reception of Aristophanes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—in translations, adaptations, on the page, on stage and on screen. The overall aim is by no means to provide a comprehensive account of gender and sexuality in the modern reception of Aristophanes, but rather to paint a broad picture of historical developments and to expose to view some important and thought-provoking case-studies. In the first section, I examine the changing treatment of Aristophanes' sexualized and obscene language. In the second section, I look at the ways in which those staging and adapting the plays have explored and exploited female sex and sexuality over the years. Finally, in the third section, I home in on *Lysistrata's* legacy, with particular regard not only to how it has been staged as feminist play, but also to how feminism—seen through the lens of *Lysistrata*—has come to be aligned with pacifist and anti-establishment stances.

Sticky Issues: Obscenity, Sex, and Sexuality

The scurrilous language and sexualized content of Aristophanic comedy are rarely in evidence in pre-twentieth-century versions of the plays. Indeed, while the nineteenth century witnessed something of a boom in Aristophanic translation in Britain—and even the beginnings of a modern performance tradition—Victorian translations typically conformed to contemporary notions of taste and decency by “eras[ing] all traces of obscenity or indelicacy.”³ Similarly, staged versions of the plays either made use of sanitized translations and adaptations or—in the case of student productions performed in the original Greek—used edited versions of the plays from which “[d]irect sexual references had been entirely excised.”⁴ This tradition of eschewing obscenity continued into the twentieth century, too, as exemplified by

3 von Romberg (n.d.). For more on Frere, see Hall (2007a) 77–9; and Walsh in this volume.

4 Wrigley (2007) 142. While Wrigley's focus is on the Oxford University Dramatic Society, the best known original-language productions are no doubt those staged at Cambridge. These Greek plays, while more often tragic than comic, nevertheless boasted a notable early success with the production of *Birds* in 1883 (see Easterling (1999) 37; and Stray (1998) 157–61). On the nineteenth and early twentieth-century expurgation of Aristophanes, see Ruffell (2012).

the work of B.B. Rogers in his editions of Aristophanes' eleven extant plays. While Victorian in style (his first translation, *Clouds*, appeared in 1852), Rogers' translations remained "the one and only version of Aristophanes" for many English speakers in the twentieth century, not least because they went on to form the basis of the Loeb Classical Library editions of Aristophanes (only superseded by Henderson's Loeb editions, published between 1998 and 2002).⁵ In Rogers' translations, obscenities are either avoided, "cleaned up," or replaced by euphemisms. Indeed, Rogers chose to leave out some of Aristophanes' more scurrilous passages altogether: for the Loeb reprint, parts of *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae* were anonymously translated and reinserted into the text.⁶

While the general trend in the twentieth century was for translators of Aristophanes to become increasingly bold with their use of obscenity—and for readers and audiences to become more tolerant of it—there is, of course, no single watershed moment when views about the acceptability of Aristophanic obscenity suddenly changed in the English-speaking world. Indeed, one significant moment in the reception of Aristophanic sexuality even comes from Victorian England itself, with the publication of the famous 1896 edition of *Lysistrata*, with its suggestive translation by Samuel Smith and its erotic illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley.⁷ This *Lysistrata* may have been self-consciously counter-cultural, but its private publication nevertheless betrays an interest in some quarters at least in exploring the sexuality and obscenity of Aristophanes' plays.⁸ A further sign of such interest can be found in 1935, with the staging of an unexpurgated version of *Lysistrata* at Norman Marshall's Gate Theatre, one of a small number of theaters in London which operated as "theatre clubs" in order to avoid censorship by the Lord Chamberlain.⁹ In Britain, it would

On the broader reception of Aristophanes in nineteenth-century Britain, see Walsh in this volume.

5 Agar (1919). A further Loeb edition of Aristophanic fragments was published by Henderson in 2007.

6 Sommerstein (2006) 130.

7 For more on Beardsley and his illustrations of *Lysistrata*, see Walsh in this volume.

8 Hall calls this edition "important as the first faithful and unexpurgated translation of *Lysistrata* into the English language," adding that it also "provides notes exactly specifying the nature of the sexual positions mentioned in the Greek text" (Hall (2007a) 91 n. 120).

9 The Gate production made use of what Walton stresses was an "adaptation" of the play, penned by Reginald Beckwith and Andrew Cruikshank (Walton (1987b) 342). In the UK, *Lysistrata* had recently been staged by Terence Gray at Cambridge in 1931, using the translation by Arthur Way (Walton (1987b) 341–2). It had also been performed as a ballet, *Lysistrata* or *The Strike of Wives*, at the Mercury Theatre in London in 1932 (Beta (2010) 250 and (2014)

be another generation before there was a genuine shift in the legal climate, ushered in by events such as the collapse of the Lady Chatterley Trial in 1960 and the passing of the Theatres Act in 1968, which put an end to censorship on the British stage.¹⁰ Before these more permissive times (and, to a certain extent, afterwards, too) the salacious and risqué elements of Aristophanes had to be carefully handled if they were to be accepted by readers and audiences and tolerated by the authorities—a situation reflected across the English-speaking world. Tellingly, this period of shifting social mores saw the number of published English translations of Aristophanes grow steadily: notable versions of *Lysistrata* published from 1950s through the early 1970s include those of Alastos (1953), Dickinson (1957), Fitts (1960), Parker (1964) and Sommerstein (whose Penguin *Lysistrata* first appeared in 1973).

When it comes to the handling of Aristophanic obscenity, published translations provide a neat way of tracing shifts that have taken place during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The most climactic obscenity of *Lysistrata*, the *πέος* (*peos*) uttered by Lysistrata as she reveals what she is asking the women to give up, has changed from “the joys of Love” in B.B. Rogers’ verse translation (first published in 1878) to Alastos’ “copulation and concubinage” (1953), Dickinson’s “SLEEPING WITH THEM” (1957), Sommerstein’s “sex” and “cock and balls” (1973 and 1990), Henderson’s “cock” (1996), Halliwell’s “prick” (1998), Kennedy’s “letting our husbands lay us” (1999), Ruden’s “penises” (2003) and Roche’s “*phallus*” (2004).¹¹ While there is, then, a tendency for the translation of *πέος* to become more direct over time, it is interesting that many modern translators still choose to avoid outright obscenity when rendering the word. Of course, much of the explanation here lies in the fact that translators have their own diverse objectives and sensibilities and are often aiming to appeal to particular audiences. The translator of Aristophanes who is proudest of the directness of his expression is no doubt Henderson, who states in the introduction to his 1996 *Staging Women* volume:

837). The play was brought to wider public attention in 1957–8 under Minos Volanakes’ direction at the Royal Court (using the translation by Dudley Fitts), a production which subsequently transferred to the Duke of York’s Theatre in London’s West End (Van Steen (2000) xiv).

¹⁰ Regina v Penguin Books, who were prosecuted under the Obscene Publications Act 1959.

¹¹ Alastos (1953) 95; Dickinson (1957) 112; Sommerstein (1973a) 184 and (1990) 29; Henderson (1996) 48; Halliwell (1998a) 100; Kennedy (1999) 100; Ruden (2003) 9; and Roche (2004) 12. In a similar vein to Dickinson, Fitts opts for “sleeping with our men” (Fitts (1960) 11). In his Loeb translation of the play, Henderson translates *πέος* “prick” (Henderson (2000) 285), as does Ewans (2011) 59.

In my translation I have . . . made no attempt to spare the modern reader by censoring or translating around potentially disturbing material; instead I have tried to render each of Aristophanes' linguistic registers by using the nearest English equivalent.¹²

Perhaps it is no surprise that Henderson singles out his full-blooded approach to translating obscenities: after all Halliwell was still able to comment in 2000 that there are “few [translators] who shirk nothing in this area.”¹³ It is worth noting that British translators often seem less inhibited than their American counterparts—with the obvious exception of Henderson.¹⁴ More uninhibited still are the translations of Aristophanes' plays published online between 2000 and 2008 by the Greek Australian George Theodoridis, who freely includes expletives and four-letter words in his translation even when there is no equivalent the Aristophanic text.¹⁵

So much for translations of Aristophanes on the page: how do his obscenities and sexual language play out with modern theater audiences? As highlighted in the introduction, when it comes to staging Aristophanes, sex is often a key ingredient of selling a production to potential theater-goers. At the mild end of the spectrum is the Actors of Dionysus' 2010 *Lysistrata*, marketed as “riotous, irreverent and even a little naughty”,¹⁶ more provocatively, the website advertising the version of the play staged at Stone on a Walk Theatre, Cincinnati, in 2015 suggests that “[y]ou won't look at war the same again after *Lysistrata*

12 Henderson (1996) 30.

13 Halliwell (2000) 78.

14 Henderson's comments in the Preface to the 1991 re-issue of *The Maculate Muse* (originally published in 1975) are hugely revealing about the attitudes towards obscenity that still persisted in US universities as late as the early 1970s. He relates that he met resistance from a number of academics when he embarked on his doctoral research on obscenity, including advice to write in Latin and the indignant question from one professor, “How could you do this to Aristophanes?” (Henderson (1991) vii). On the reception of Henderson's book by contemporary reviewers, see Robson (2014) 29–30.

15 To give a flavor of some of his milder additions, his *Clouds* begins with Strepsiades muttering, “Bugger it, bugger it, BUGGER it! Dear Lord Zeus! How long must this bloody night drag on? It's bloody endless!” (Theodoris (2007)). This is a far cry from the more literal version of Sommerstein: “Ough! Lord Zeus, what a length of night-time! It's unending!” (Sommerstein (1982) 15).

16 Actors of Dionysus marketing pack <http://www.actorsofdionysus.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/Marketing_Pack_final-.pdf> accessed 15 January 2016.

shows you how hard the last few inches to peace can be.”¹⁷ Reviewers, too, are often quick to emphasize the sexual themes of Aristophanes’ plays: “All present and erect” was the headline of one review of Peter Hall’s *Lysistrata*, staged at London’s Old Vic’s in 1993.¹⁸

Aristophanic “naughtiness” may help to get bums on theater seats, but it is also worth bearing in mind that even in the twenty-first century, obscene and sexual content still has the power to shock and offend. Henderson, for instance, calls the “reluctance of performers to enact, and audiences to come out for ‘obscene’ material” an “occupational hazard” for theater producers, citing the headline-grabbing case of the musical adaptation of *Lysistrata*, due to be staged in in 2002 by the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts, but pulled during rehearsal for being “too bawdy.”¹⁹ Mary-Kay Gamel’s engaging account of the reworking and staging of *Thesmophoriazusae* as *The Julie Thesmo Show*—staged in Santa Cruz, California in 2000, and Cleveland, Ohio in 2001—similarly reveals anxious reactions to sexualized and obscene content. During rehearsals in Cleveland, she reports that “the vulgarity, obscenity, cross-dressing, and homoerotic elements were so shocking to some actors that they resigned from the show.”²⁰ She also documents how the warning on the posters advertising the play—“*The Julie Thesmo Show* contains obscene language and offensive content”—helped to increase attendance in Santa Cruz, but to deter audiences in Cleveland.²¹ As these diverse reactions underscore, if directors, translators, and/or adaptors want their Aristophanes to be sexualized, outrageous, or offensive, there are complex cultural factors to negotiate if audiences are to be kept on their side.

As is already hinted at in Gamel’s account of her actors’ reactions to *The Julie Thesmo Show*, it is not just obscene and sexual vocabulary that can be found challenging: the sexuality of Aristophanes’ plays—with what Stephen Halliwell has described as their “erotics of shamelessness”—regularly finds itself at odds with the contemporary sexual mores of the culture for which

17 Stone on a Walk Theatre website <<http://www.stoneonawalk.com/lysistrata/>> accessed 15 January 2016.

18 Taylor (1993). The play had transferred to London from the Liverpool Playhouse.

19 Henderson (2002) 508. The version in question, a musical called *Lysistrata: Sex and the City-State* by Gelbart Menken and Zippel, was substituted for a tamer version of the play penned by the ART’s artistic director, Robert Brustein. Brustein is reported as saying that the original musical was “ferociously obscene—much more than Aristophanes” (see Jones (2002)). It was so obscene that the leading lady, Cherry Jones, refused to perform it (see Traister (2002)).

20 Gamel (2002a) 489.

21 Gamel (2002a) 494.

they are being translated or staged.²² Gina Sheeran, the director of a student production of *Wasps* at the University of Kent, UK, in 2013 has articulated the discomfort of the cast when faced with one particularly challenging passage, for instance, namely the allusion in lines 607–9 to Philocleon's young daughter stealing the coins that her father keeps in her mouth by kissing him using her tongue.²³ And whereas some of Gamel's actors found the “homosexual elements” of *The Julie Thesmo Show* disturbing because of their frankness, the pillorying of figures like Agathon and Cleisthenes in the plays also has the potential to strike modern audiences as offensive and homophobic.²⁴ Similarly challengingly to square with modern western values is the treatment of women in Aristophanes, from the Old Comic stereotype of the wine-loving and deceitful sex-mad housewife to the focus that we find, especially at the end of many Aristophanic plays, on male-centered, sexual wish-fulfilment, often involving the objectification of young women.

Exploring and Exploiting Female Sexuality: Adaptation and Titillation

To trace the way in which female sex and sexuality have been explored and exploited by translators, adaptors, and directors of Aristophanes, let us first turn to late nineteenth-century Paris, where—as scholars such as Van Steen have shown—*Lysistrata's* potential to titillate was routinely exploited in various French-language adaptations of the play.²⁵ Of particular importance is the version of *Lysistrata* by Maurice Donnay which premiered at the Grand-Théâtre in Paris in 1892.²⁶ A composer for, and performer at, the celebrated *le chat noir* cabaret in Montmartre, Donnay radically reworked the play, eroticizing it in the style of a contemporary French revue. This tradition of the classically-themed revue, which was already well-established in late nineteenth-century Paris, is characterized by Van Steen as one which “objectified mythical or legendary women for the sake of male voyeuristic pleasure,” bringing on stage

22 Halliwell (2002) 124.

23 Interviewed in Robson (2013).

24 Gamel (2002a) 489. Gamel states that she made a conscious decision in her version of the play to preserve what she calls the Kinsman's “obscenity, homophobia and misogyny” (Gamel (2002a) 472; see also 484–5).

25 Van Steen (2000) 110–1, (2014a) 442, and (2014b) 755–6. See also Kotzamini (1997).

26 The script of Donnay's *Lysistrata* was reworked for further productions of the play in 1896 and 1919 (see Beta (2010) 246).

figures such as Aphrodite, Helen of Troy, or famous *hetairai* (“courtesans”) to titillate the audience.²⁷ Donnay’s *Lysistrata*, which also featured a classical courtesan figure in the form of Salabaccho, was reconfigured as a comedy of sexual manners and marital duplicity. Perhaps the most striking feature of this adaptation is that *Lysistrata*—who is married in this play to an Athenian named Lycon—breaks the oath of sexual abstinence she has sworn by sleeping with her lover, Agathos (and in so doing, symbolically overturns a statue of Artemis in the temple where the tryst takes place). This *Lysistrata* was both popular and influential, spawning further productions and imitations of the play both in Paris and beyond.²⁸

Where Aristophanes’ “women” plays were to enjoy a particularly curious reception during the early twentieth century was in Greece itself, where the first Modern Greek productions of *Ecclesiazusae*, *Lysistrata*, and *Thesmophoriazusae* were staged in 1904, 1905, and 1914 respectively at the Municipal Theater in Athens.²⁹ Female spectators were forbidden from attending these plays, which were also performed by all-male casts, the lead roles taken by established transvestite actors (“imitateurs” or “metamorphotes”).³⁰ As Van Steen outlines, these productions formed part of a broader tradition of erotic and transvestite cabaret in contemporary Athens (sometimes advertised as “soirée noire”) that had itself been inspired by Parisian cabarets and revues. Versions of *Lysistrata* in particular continued to be performed in Athens throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, providing all-male audiences with a distinctively sexist and voyeuristic form of entertainment loosely based on Aristophanes’ plays. Certainly Van Steen is unequivocal in her views about these shows which, she claims, “sustained an atmosphere of antifeminist hostility toward women and fostered male fraternization around the uninhibited, sex-based humor and spectacle of a (proclaimed) kindred male, Aristophanes.”³¹

The reception history of Aristophanes on the US stage in the first half of the twentieth century is somewhat dominated by Bel Geddes’ *Lysistrata*, which enjoyed considerable commercial success on Broadway in 1930–1. This play was itself influenced by a notable Moscow Art Theatre production of *Lysistrata*, directed by Nemirovich-Danchenko and first performed in Moscow in 1923.

27 Van Steen (2014b) 756. Donnay had recently enjoyed a modest hit at *le chat noir* with *Phryné* in 1891.

28 For a summary of the play’s plot and discussion of its influence, see Van Steen (2000) 110–1 and (2014b) 441–2; and Beta (2010) 246–7.

29 Using the prose adaptations of Demetrakopoulos (see Van Steen (2000) 102–6).

30 Van Steen (2000) 78–9 and (2014a) 412.

31 Van Steen (2002) 413.

This Russian, musical version of *Lysistrata* had garnered considerable public interest and critical acclaim when it was brought to the USA in 1925–6.³² The man who had co-translated the Russian script of the play into English (which was made available to American audience members) was Gilbert Seldes, a theater critic, author and book reviewer, with a particular interest in popular entertainment. Seeing the potential of the play to appeal to contemporary audiences, Seldes went on to write his own American version of *Lysistrata*, into which he injected modern, popular elements such as song, dance, farce, and burlesque.³³ It was Seldes' version, directed by Bel Geddes, which became a big Broadway hit, running for 256 performances at the Forty-Fourth Street Theatre, New York, and spawning further productions which toured throughout the USA.³⁴

From the point of view of gender and sexuality, what is most noteworthy about Seldes' version of *Lysistrata* is the way in which the female roles are reworked. In contrast to *Lysistrata* and the older women, who are deeply earnest in their concern about the war and other social issues, the younger women are frivolous, ineffectual, and even less able to meet the challenge of the sex strike than the women in Aristophanes' original play. They engage in extensive squabbling about *Lysistrata*'s plan, and, during the swearing of the oath, two of the women even become hysterical. The themes of sexual temptation and adultery are also dwelt on at length in the play. Not only is the Kinesias scene expanded to take in three more couples, but Kalonika also appears onstage at one point in a disheveled state, having apparently given in to temptation. Interestingly, too, in common with many adaptations of the play, *Lysistrata*—a young woman in Seldes' version—has a husband, again named Lycon, whom we meet briefly towards the end of the play.³⁵ As Kotzamani and Klein both note in their discussions of the production, when it came to costumes, Bel Geddes' attentions were firmly on the young stars of his production—particu-

32 On which see Kotzamani (2005); and Given (2015) 304–9.

33 Kotzamani (2014) 809.

34 Kotzamani also sketches the remarkable influence that this play exercised in the USA for the next 30 years, which witnessed numerous productions based on Seldes' play script and very little interest in the staging of any other play (Kotzamani (2014) 819–20).

35 In the Moscow Art Theatre version of the play, for example, *Lysistrata* is married to Kinesias, and it is she, not Myrrhine, who plays out the temptation scene. In the 1961 musical *The Happiest Girl in the World*, *Lysistrata* is involved in a singular love triangle with her husband, the Athenian general, Kinesias, and the goddess Diana. See Beta (2010) 254 and (2014) 840; and especially Given (2015) 309–12. As Beta shows, the tradition of providing *Lysistrata* with a husband in adaptations of the play extends back to at least the beginning of the nineteenth century (Beta (2010) 243).

larly the women, whose sexual appeal he sought to maximize by having them “dressed in transparent drapery” that provided “ample peeks at the bodies beneath.”³⁶

This engagement with sexuality and sexiness required some careful handling if *Lysistrata* was to stay on the right side of the censors. As Kotzamini records, the authorities in Philadelphia, where the play was first staged, did cut some lines and threatened to cut more, leading the play’s producers to take pre-emptive action in New York by defending the play’s morality in a note in the program.³⁷ But as Seldes remarks in his foreword to the visually stunning 1934 edition of the play, which contains a series of etchings by Pablo Picasso, the censor did put a stop to one performance of the play in Los Angeles, where police stormed the stage, arresting 53 members of the cast. Indeed, a warrant even drawn up for the arrest of Aristophanes himself.³⁸

Aristophanes’ plays can certainly boast their fair share of risqué stagings and brushes with the censors in the mid-twentieth century. For example, a much-discussed 1936 version of *Lysistrata* performed by an all-black cast in Seattle, Washington, sponsored by the Federal Theatre Project (an offshoot of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Works Progress Administration) was closed after only one performance, allegedly for being “indecent and bawdy.” The charged events surrounding this act of censorship seem to point to race playing an important role, however, with a number of modern commentators highlighting white anxieties about black female sexuality as one key factor.³⁹ There is, however, also a strong tradition of *Lysistrata* successfully avoiding censorship in mainstream theaters both in the USA and UK. While the proven appeal and performability of the Seldes version of the play no doubt accounts in large part for its wide use in mid-century American productions of *Lysistrata*, the fact that it had previously survived its skirmishes with censorship must also have made the play a reassuringly safe bet.⁴⁰

36 Kotzamini (2014) 815; and Klein (2014) 29.

37 Kotzamini (2014) 817–8, who also discusses the role played by the press in “discouraging interference” by the censor. See also Klein (2014) 23–4 and 31–2 on reactions towards, and the censorship of, this play.

38 Seldes (1934) 5. See also Kotzamini (2014) 818 n. 45; Klein (2014) 31; and Given (2015) 303.

39 See Witham (2003) 72–4; Klein (2014) 43–7 and 57; Whetmore (2014) 787–91.

40 Kotzamini (2014) 819 notes that “[t]here was at least one production of [Seldes’ *Lysistrata*] per year throughout the United States in the 1930s and through most of the 1940s and 1950s and into the early 1960s.” One noteworthy—if short-lived—Broadway revival of Seldes’ text was staged at the Belasco Theatre in 1946, with an all-black cast that included a young Sidney Poitier. See Arnott (1987) 361; Klein (2014) 42; and Whetmore (2014) 791–2. Seldes’ version was not the only translation of the play staged in American theaters

Of course, one way to sidestep issues of censorship altogether—and to extend the appeal of the play to new audiences—is to adapt *Lysistrata* in such a way as to avoid explicit references to the sexual sphere. This was a tactic employed by Universal Studios' 1955 film *The Second Greatest Sex*, a musical-comedy western very much in the mold of the box-office smash *Oklahoma!* (released earlier the same year).⁴¹ The action of the movie takes place in the Wild West of the 1880s where—instead of a war—the menfolk of the district abandon their women to engage in a petty squabble over which town should be the county seat.⁴² While the film certainly provided physically attractive leading actors (in the form of girl-next-door Jeanne Crain, screen siren Mamie Van Doren, and the burly George Nader), the script and lyrics were carefully crafted to be family friendly. The sexuality of this 1950s *Lysistrata* lies very much under the surface, confined within a series of figure-hugging dresses and the occasional knowing line.⁴³

There can be little doubt that the classical pedigree of Greek comedy has sometimes played a role in allowing relatively salacious content to be published or staged: or in other words, the respect afforded to classical Greek culture has historically lent a certain respectability even to its more risqué products. It is this latitude afforded to classical material which perhaps explains Walton's observation that the Royal Court/Duke of York *Lysistrata* staged in London in 1957–8—employing the far from Bowdlerized translation by Fitts—“was treated with leniency” by the censor.⁴⁴ The play, although not universally praised by reviewers, was a big hit with the public. 1957 also witnessed a BBC radio broadcast of *Lysistrata*,⁴⁵ which was followed by a television version in

during this era. In 1940, for example, *Lysistrata* opened at the Irving Place Theatre in New York in a new translation by Eric Arthur (see Arnott (1987) 361).

41 On this film, see Winkler (2014) 907–15; and Klein, who talks of the film's promotion of “a deeply conservative feminine ideal” (Klein (2014) 65).

42 The debt to *Lysistrata* is acknowledged more than once in the play. Introducing her proposal that the women should not to allow men to “hug” or “kiss” them, for example, Liza sings: “I can give you all the data/ on the girl named Lysistrata,/ so you'll know what a riot she began . . .”

43 The tight dresses and one-liners are largely the preserve of the buxom blonde character, Birdie (played by Mamie Van Doren). Admiring Liza's wedding dress, she remarks: “Oh, if I had a white satin wedding dress, I'd never take it off. Well, hardly ever.” On musical versions of Aristophanes' plays, see Beta (2010) and (2014); and Given (2015). On appropriations of Aristophanes in film, see Winkler (2014).

44 Walton (2007) 161.

45 Adapted for radio by Patric Dickinson and starring Googie Withers (see Wrigley (2014) 865–7).

1964, *Lysistrata; or Women on Strike*, starring Diane Cilento in the title role. Although Patric Dickinson's version of the play had been severely trimmed for the TV version so that "it did not offend the sensitive mass audience,"⁴⁶ it still contained what one critic described as "dirty jokes . . . put over . . . unblushingly by most of the cast."⁴⁷ Responses to the broadcast were mixed, with some viewers finding the play "full of cheek" and "fun," others considering it "disgusting and coarse."⁴⁸ Greek comedy, with its veneer of classical "respectability," provided a vehicle for artists and audiences to explore and push the boundaries of acceptability in other cultures, too. In her article "Greek Drama in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe," for example, Jessie Maritz discusses a performance of *Lysistrata* which also took place in 1964—this time in Salsbury (modern-day Harare). In this production, the girls wore bikinis: a daring move, she notes, since these had been banned at public swimming baths four years earlier.⁴⁹

As we have seen in the case of *The Julie Thesmo Show* and the ART's musical production of *Lysistrata*, adaptors and directors of *Lysistrata* in the twenty-first century have continued to test the limits of public taste when it comes to sexualized and obscene material. But along with this increased exposure of Aristophanic sex, both on the page and stage, has come an increased tendency to question the nature of the plays' sexual ethics. Feminist critiques have long since exposed the "masculinist" nature of Aristophanes' plays, of course, with their misogynist stereotypes of women and their inclusion of "mute, nude female characters" whose main function is to fulfill men's sexual needs.⁵⁰ But what do modern directors do when faced with the challenge of staging scenes featuring ostensibly nude, objectified women—figures like Reconciliation in *Lysistrata*; the flute girl, Dardanis, in *Wasps*; or Theoria in *Peace*? One common choice is to cast men in these roles, often opening up real comic potential in the form of travesty acting at the same time as avoiding some (if by no means all) of the uncomfortable gender politics with which the original play confronts them.⁵¹

46 *The Times*, January 16, 1964.

47 *The Listener*, January 23, 1954.

48 Quoted in Wrigley (2011b), who provides a useful overview of the production and reactions to it. See also Wrigley (2014) 867–70.

49 Maritz (2002) 205.

50 Zweig (1992).

51 On Reconciliation, see below. The flute-girl of *Wasps* was played by a male actor in skin-colored leotard in the University of Kent's 2013 production, for example. On film I myself have played Θεωρία ("Festival," from Aristophanes' *Peace*), dressed in a wig and an apron bearing the design of a naked, female body. See Robson (2013).

Other directorial decisions are more radical still. Evenden recounts his experience of staging a rehearsed reading of *Acharnians* at Emory University, Atlanta, in 1991, where the female actors' discomfort at playing girls dressed up and sold as χοῖροι, "piglets" (also Greek slang for "vagina") was so acute that a parallel scene was added to the play in which two boys were sold as "cocks." As Evenden comments, he ultimately "found it easier (or more urgent) to stage the problems rather than, simply, the play."⁵² A 2010 staging of a scene from *Lysistrata* at East Carolina University in 2010 followed the convention of using a male actor in a padded body suit to play the mute, nude character of Reconciliation, but then delivered a devastating twist. In an attempt to convey what the director, John Given, describes as "the dramatic and thematic functions" of the original scene, namely "the restabilization of [the] political world order and its gender roles," *Lysistrata* first ordered the actor playing Reconciliation offstage, then stripped to reveal a modest slip, and proceeded to play the role of Reconciliation herself. The strong female character at the heart of *Lysistrata* was thus reduced to a sexual object as she was groped and prodded by the Athenian and Spartan delegates. This staging was aimed not just at highlighting and heightening the act of objectification itself but also at stressing the consequences of the successful negotiation of peace with which the play ends.⁵³ That is to say, once the war ceases, the play's women surrender the power they previously exercised over men and return to their roles as subordinate housewives.⁵⁴

While Given's staging sought both to draw attention to the sexual politics of the original text and to cause a modern audience a certain amount of discomfort, other reworkings of Aristophanes' plays look entirely to reconfigure their gender dynamics. In the final scene of *The Julie Thesmo Show*, for instance, where the original play has a Scythian Archer seduced by a dancing girl, Gamel's audience instead witnessed the figure of Judy Jody being distracted by a male stripper, Fabulo (a solution that Gamel finds "more risqué" than a younger woman seducing an older man—and presumably one that a modern American audience would find less sleazy, too).⁵⁵ She also created for her play the scapegoat figure of Dick Dickerman, a "sexist [who] speaks to and about women in the most vulgar and degrading terms."⁵⁶ Gamel's aim was to recast

52 Evenden (1993) 101.

53 Given (2011) 189.

54 On the pedagogical experience of performing a live *Lysistrata*, see Given and Rosen in this volume.

55 Gamel (2002a) 474.

56 Gamel (2002a) 473.

Thesmophoriazousae as biting, feminist satire, yet one with genuine humor, too. As she playfully states, “[c]omedy is especially tricky for feminists, who are well known for our sober scrutiny of mainstream/malestream jokes . . . My co-director, cast and I hoped to create a show in which the audience could have their feminism and its laughter, too.”⁵⁷

Other self-consciously feminist productions of Aristophanes include the anarchic and experimental *Lysistrata Numbah!*, staged in New York in 1977. As Klein records, Spiderwoman Theater’s distinctive “patchwork aesthetic” allowed the all-female cast to combine parody and clowning with scenes of violence and loss, all interspersed with often intimate stories taken from the actors’ own lives (the show’s content ranged from bungled dance routines through simulated masturbation to a personal account of abortion).⁵⁸ “Too raunchy and slapstick to be feminist and too rough to be good theatre,” *Lysistrata Numbah!* not only used *Lysistrata* as a springboard to launch a feminist critique of how little society had changed in the last 2,500 years, but also directed its biting satire at other targets, including contemporary feminism itself.⁵⁹

Gendering Dissent: Feminism, Pacifism, and the Legacy of *Lysistrata*

In the case of *Lysistrata*, two important developments in particular have helped to shape its reception history in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, namely the association of the play with two causes: pacifism and feminism. Arguably, both of these connections represent a misreading of Aristophanes’ original play. As Sommerstein has shown, *Lysistrata* is far from being a “pacifist” play in the strict sense of the word: Aristophanes’ heroine may be interested in bringing the current war to an end, but she is neither opposed to war in general nor does she shy away from violent means to achieve her aims.⁶⁰ A number of factors likewise stand in the way of *Lysistrata* being read as a whole-heartedly proto-feminist play. As we have seen, Aristophanes’ women are hardly feminist role models, after all: with the exception of Lysistrata, they generally conform to misogynist stereotypes, exhibiting deceitfulness and a lack of self-control—along with an insatiable appetite for alcohol and sex. And

57 Gamel (2002a) 467.

58 Klein (2014) 87–107.

59 Klein (2014) 93 (quotation), 102.

60 Sommerstein (2009b) 223–36 and (2010b).

Lysistrata's central character may be a strong woman who ultimately succeeds in her goal, but what she also achieves in securing peace is a return to the traditional social structures that prevailed before the war. In peacetime men will once again govern the city and head up its households, while women will resume their conventional domestic (and sexual) roles.⁶¹

The potential of *Lysistrata* to be read as a feminist play has nevertheless proven hugely significant in its modern reception history, not least because it led directly—in the early twentieth century—to the play's first staging in the English-speaking world. Prior to this, the sexual themes of *Lysistrata* had resulted in its being largely sidelined in Britain and North America along with Aristophanes' other "women" plays—a situation which contrasts strongly with the plays' reception history in France during the nineteenth century where, as we have seen, the risqué content of these plays, with their sexualized portrayal of female characters, had led to their exploitation for their erotic potential. But the seeds of an alternative performance tradition had been sown elsewhere in continental Europe, namely in Germany, where a more serious-minded, political treatment of the "women" plays had begun to emerge with the production in 1895 of both *Ecclesiazusae* in Berlin and Wilbrandt's *Frauenherrschaft* ("Women in Power") in Cologne, a play inspired by *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae*.⁶² As Holtermann outlines in his study of the reception of Aristophanes in Germany, in the early twentieth century, Aristophanes' women plays began to attract the attention of supporters of female emancipation, and it was not long before a similar interest was sparked in the English-speaking world.⁶³ And so *Lysistrata*, chosen for its potential to bolster the cause of women's suffrage, was first produced in the UK at the Little Theatre in the Adelphi,

61 See Revermann (2010), who usefully expands on these issues and explores the way in which the play has been "productively" misread in modern times. Dutsch frames this phenomenon in a different way: she talks of the "deterritorialization of the *Lysistrata*—turning away from the play's topical ancient Greek implications—and its subsequent reterritorialization, [the] recasting of the *Lysistrata* in terms of modern ideologies" (Dutsch (2015) 576).

62 On Wilbrandt's play, see Holtermann (2004) 263–4.

63 Holtermann (2004) 261–3; and Kotzamini (1997). Early twentieth-century German *Lysistratas* were not uniformly vehicles for promoting a feminist cause, however. The play was famously staged in Berlin by Max Reinhardt in 1908 in what Van Steen describes as a "bawdy" version with a notoriously wild and pantomimic finale (Van Steen (2014a) 439). Moreover, Lincke's operetta, which premiered in Berlin in 1902, not only sees *Lysistrata* break her oath of sexual abstinence (in an echo of Donnay's version), but she also does so by sleeping with a Spartan prisoner whom her Athenian husband has brought back from the war. See Beta (2010) 248 and (2014) 843.

London, in 1910. As Hall states, “the London theatregoing public had become accustomed to women of the theatre, who had long been prominent voices in support of female suffrage, performing in ancient Greek dramas that gave women shocking things to do and say,” and so in one sense this production of *Lysistrata* was not revolutionary. Rather, it sat firmly within—yet, importantly, also served to extend—a tradition of Greek drama being used as a vehicle to support the case for votes for women.⁶⁴ Gertrude Kingston, an experienced actor of Greek drama, took the title role in the play, performed in a free translation by Laurence Housman (the brother of the poet A.E. Housman), himself a founder member of the Men’s League for Women’s Suffrage in England (the script even included a number of suffrage jokes). This same translation of the play also went on to be performed in support of the cause of women’s suffrage in the United States.⁶⁵ Needless to say, the Anglophone appropriation of *Lysistrata* as a feminist play in this era stands in stark contrast to the anti-feminist uses to which Aristophanes’ women plays were put in early twentieth-century Greece.⁶⁶

The use of Greek drama to promote a pacifist agenda also has a long history in the English-speaking world and beyond. This is true not just for Greek tragedy—*Trojan Women* has an especially rich tradition here—but for comedy, too.⁶⁷ The anti-war stance of *Peace* has proven particularly attractive to audiences in France in particular, where it enjoyed a number of landmark productions in the twentieth century.⁶⁸ *Acharnians* has similarly been exploited

64 Hall (2007a) 86.

65 It had been published in the UK in 1911, but not copyrighted in the USA and hence freely available for use. See Tylee (1998) 149; Day (2001) 159–76; and Hall (2007a) 87–8. Interestingly, *Lysistrata* is also the name chosen by Anthony Ludovici for an anti-feminist tract published in the UK sometime in the early 1920s.

66 On early twentieth-century stagings of Aristophanic drama by all-female student casts at Oxford and Cambridge, see Wrigley (2007) 140.

67 The first UK production of *Trojan Women*, staged in the translation by Gilbert Murray at the Royal Court in London in 1905, promoted what Hall and MacIntosh describe as a “bold ‘pro-Boer’ political stance,” a result of Murray’s “increasing revulsion against the events of the Boer War” (Hall and MacIntosh (2005) 510 and 508). Other notable pro-peace/anti-war stagings of *Trojan Women* include Granville Barker’s 1915 production, performed at Eastern US colleges (once again using Gilbert Murray’s translation) and the Chicago Little Theatre’s touring production of the same year, both responses to the unfolding events of World War I; Lewis Casson’s Oxford production of 1918, staged in Oxford to coincide with the Versailles negotiations; and Cacoyiannis’ 1963–4 New York *Trojan Women* protesting the Vietnam War (later filmed in 1971). See Walton (1987b) 339; Hartigan (1995) 16; and Foley (2012) 40–2 and 60–3.

68 Bastin-Hammou (2007).

for its anti-war themes, such as in an intriguing-sounding version called *Drum and Guitar* penned by the Aristophanic scholar Kenneth Reckford in 1967 (as Reckford ruefully explains, this “free adaptation,” featuring the war-mongering General Winemoreland—as well as General Dynamics and General Motors—fell short of both of its author’s ambitions: namely, reaching Broadway and putting an end to the Vietnam War).⁶⁹ Of course, *Lysistrata*’s plot also makes it an obvious candidate for staging or adapting as a “peace” play—a point made particularly forcefully by the title of a short-lived French-language musical adaptation of the play, *Faites l’amour, pas la guerre!* (“Make Love, Not War”), staged in Ottawa in 1969.⁷⁰

This use of *Lysistrata* as a vehicle to promote an anti-war message continues to the modern day, but perhaps is most developed in the adaptation of the play by the British playwright Tony Harrison. In *The Common Chorus* (first published in the USA in 1988) Harrison relocated the action of the play to Greenham Common, the military airbase in Berkshire, Southern England, where a Women’s Peace Camp was famously established in 1981 to protest against the deployment there of American cruise missiles. While raw its emotions and forthright in its expression, *The Common Chorus* was never performed at its time of writing. Production delays intervened and, as its author relates, “the tension of a topical present . . . leached away into oblivion . . . [T]he Cold War . . . ended and my play [was] marooned in its moment.”⁷¹ This was not Harrison’s first attempt to pen a contemporary, anti-war *Lysistrata*, however: *Aikin Mata*, his first version of the play (co-written with the Irish poet James Simmons), was performed at a time of growing national tensions at Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria.⁷²

A more recent adaption of the play, *Lisa’s Sex Strike* by Blake Morrison, which premiered in Bolton, England in 2007, also wore its anti-war message

69 Reckford (1987) 166. Not that this was the first use of *Acharnians* in the English-speaking world to promote an anti-war agenda. The staging of the play at Oxford in 1914, for example (in a production supported by Gilbert Murray) had distinct anti-war overtones. See Hall (2007a) 86; and Wrigley (2007) 149–50. On the staging of *Lysistrata* as an anti-Vietnam war play, see Klein (2014) 2.

70 See Given (2015) 303. The production closed after just one performance. See also Beta (2014) 840–1; and on Robert Fink’s opera, *Lysistrata & the War*, written (though ultimately never staged) in the 1960s, see Dutsch (2015) 583.

71 Harrison (1992) xvi.

72 Padley (2008) 4. In the introduction to the UK edition of the play, Harrison stresses the need for a modern adaptation of *Lysistrata* to play off potent, contemporary tensions: “[i]f I wanted to do *Lysistrata* now I might have to begin again with a third and totally different version” (Harrison (1992) xvi).

on its sleeve. The fighting between whites and non-whites in Blackhurst, the fictional Northern English mill-town in which the play is set, is successfully quelled by Lisa (forcefully played in the original production by Becky Hindley). In *Lisa's Sex Strike*, the new enemy against which both sides unite is the local industrialist, Prutt (a figure inspired Aristophanes' Prytanis), whose factory turns out to be secretly manufacturing weapons components for use in the Iraq War. In addition to an anti-Iraq War agenda, this adaptation contained a clear anti-establishment undercurrent (there was extended mockery of the supposed incompetence of the British police, for example)—a theme which has also surfaced in other recent treatments of the play. Gaggle's re-working of *Lysistrata*, staged at the Almeida Theatre, London, in 2015, even went as far as foregrounding an anti-establishment angle at the expense of the anti-war theme for which the play is so well known. Instead of peace, the main concerns of the women protesters—the Vigilantes of Justice—are those of sexual consent and the iniquities of the current “money system.” Their leader, the former MP Hannah Brown (played by the singer Charlotte Church), who assumes the name Lysistrata in an attempt to conceal her real identity, dies at the end of the play while symbolically trying to break into Parliament.⁷³ Not that it is the plot that takes center stage in this play, since the episodes are regularly punctuated by riot grrrl songs delivered by a feisty all-female chorus. The vision presented by Gaggle's *Lysistrata* play may be pessimistic and anarchic, but the central idea of female solidarity in the face of a system that is broken is clear enough.⁷⁴

Topping any single translation, staging or reworking of the play in terms of its scale and scope is the Lysistrata Project, which played out in 2003. The brainchild of two US actors, Kathryn Blume and Sharron Bower, the initiative harnessed the new-found power of the internet to perform what they described as “a theatrical act of dissent” in protest at the imminent invasion of Iraq by American-led allied forces.⁷⁵ As recorded on the Lysistrata Project website, their appeal to women around the world to “[d]o a reading of *Lysistrata*

73 There is a reference in the first scene of the play to Hannah Brown having left the government because of her anti-war stance, but the details are not fleshed out.

74 Staged as part of the Almeida Theatre's Greeks series (May–November 2015). For an interview with Gaggle's Deborah Coughlin, see Mackay (2015). For a review of the production, see Healey (2015).

75 Severini documents the background to and origins of the project, noting that, in a telephone interview (54), “Blume describe[d] the choice of the play *Lysistrata* itself as accidental” (Severini (2010) 54). Yet Blume has also said that “[w]e couldn't have picked a better play if we'd tried” (quoted in Klein (2014) 120).

on March 3rd was taken up in fifty-nine countries, involving some 300,000 participants worldwide, with events ranging from high-profile readings in New York and Athens to clandestine events in counties like China and Iraq itself.⁷⁶ In New York, for example, Blume and Bower took part in a reading at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Harvey Theater, a carnival-like event which benefited from the participation of famous actors like Kevin Bacon and Kyra Sedgwick. The adaptation of the play used was that of Ellen McLaughlin who "condensed [*Lysistrata*] in order for it to be as quick-moving and as funny as possible."⁷⁷ In Athens, a reading took place on the Pnyx, a venue which, as Hardwick notes, "proclaimed the confidence of modern women in occupying and using a public space that in ancient Athens was the territory of men."⁷⁸ In London a group of actors stood opposite the Houses of Parliament wearing gags, which they tore off before reading a section of the play. In Columbus, Ohio, a father and his home-schooled son created *Lysisaurus*, a version of the play they staged in their basement using plastic dinosaurs.⁷⁹

For a project that ostensibly began as a protest against the Iraq War, it is noteworthy that the agenda of the creators of the Lysistrata Project—as projected by their website at least—was avowedly feminist, as well as pacifist, with these feminist and pacifist agendas closely aligned. What is also strongly evident is the organizers' powerful belief in the need to take *action* if peace and women's rights are to be secured. Seen in this light, the readings of *Lysistrata* are fruitfully understood as a form of active protest in and of themselves—as well as a catalyst for further action. Sue-Ellen Case has even gone as far as suggesting that this belief in action draws inspiration from the ancient world in that reclaims from Greek antiquity the "unruly practice" of women's lament.⁸⁰

One intriguing piece of afterlife that the Lysistrata Project enjoyed was a project organized by the Greek academic and dramaturg, Marina Kotzamani. In 2004, inspired by the readings of *Lysistrata* that she learnt had taken place in the Arab world as part of the project, she invited theater practitioners, playwrights, and theorists from across the Arab Mediterranean to write about how

76 The Lysistrata Project is the subject of Michael Patrick Kelly's 2008 documentary *Operation Lysistrata*.

77 Severini (2010) 67–8.

78 Hardwick (2010) 83.

79 For further accounts of individual readings, see Kotzamani (2006); Hardwick (2010) 82–4; and Severini (2010) 67–72 and 75–6, who also includes a full list of venues and organizers of readings in an appendix. For an account and pictures of *Lysisaurus*, see <<http://www.geocities.ws/lysisaurus/>> accessed 15 January 2016.

80 Case (2007) 126. For Blume's reflections of the project and on her subsequent play, *The Accidental Activist* (2005), inspired by her experiences, see Klein (2014) 108–26.

they would stage *Lysistrata* in their own countries. While the results, which were shared in a 2005 conference in Morocco, show a rich range of perspectives, certain themes emerged, such as globalization, US imperialism, and the inadequacy of the model of war offered by Aristophanes to capture the complexity of modern conflicts.⁸¹ What is striking once more is the way in which some participants integrated the play's themes of gender-conflict and peace in their treatments of the play. Ghada Amer, an Egyptian visual artist based in New York, and Riad Masarwi, a Palestine playwright and director, both saw men as fueling war through their natural, masculine aggression—a situation perpetuated by the patriarchal structures of contemporary society. In contrast, they credited women with a genuine desire for peace.⁸² Another contributor to the project, the Egyptian playwright and film director, Lenin El-Ramly, was inspired to write a full play, *Salam El-Nisaa* (“A Peace of Women”), which was staged in Cairo in December 2004.⁸³ In El-Ramly's version, the women's gender ultimately causes their plan to fail since, as Kotzamini summarizes, “decisions about war and peace rest with the powerful . . . who closely monitor the women's movements overtly, through brutal oppression, or covertly, through propaganda and spying.”⁸⁴ The gender politics of El-Ramly's play did not come through successfully for some critics, however, owing to the decision to cast men in some of the female roles.⁸⁵

Lysistrata is that rare example of an Aristophanic play known beyond academia—something it owes not only to its relatively popularity in British and US theater (as well as its prominence in school and university syllabuses), but also, no doubt, to its memorable central conceit.⁸⁶ Put simply, *Lysistrata*

81 Kotzamini (2007). The conference was titled “The Comic Condition as a Play with Incongruities” and held at the University of Tetouan, Morocco (April 27–May 1, 2005).

82 Kotzamini (2007) 16, who also includes an interview with Amer about her treatment of *Lysistrata*.

83 El-Ramly (2005a). For an English extract of the play, see <<http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/from-a-peace-of-women>> accessed 15 January 2016.

84 Kotzamini (2007) 15. See further El-Ramly (2005b) and (2008); Kotzamini (2007) 26–9; and Hardwick (2010) 85–7. The idea that the peace offered by *Lysistrata* is an untenable fantasy recurs in other stagings—e.g., the Peter Hall production of *Lysistrata* at the Old Vic (1993), the ostensibly celebratory ending of which was interrupted by the lights going out and the sound machine-gun fire. See Goetsch (1993).

85 See Selaiha (2005).

86 For a discussion of Aristophanes' place in US college and university curricula, see Given and Rosen in this volume. In recent years, *Lysistrata* has featured as a set text in the UK both for A level Classics (OCR) and A Level Drama and Theatre Studies (Edexcel).

is the play about the sex strike.⁸⁷ The play's fame in this reductive formula has led to another intriguing form of reception, as studied by Helen Morales: namely the evocation of *Lysistrata* in press coverage of contemporary attempts by women to use abstention from sex as a means to effect social and political change. Morales cites a number of examples of such campaigns, but her particular focus is on the reporting of the "sex strike" that took place during Liberia's civil war in 2002, led by Leymah Gbowee, who went on to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011 for her sustained efforts in furthering peace and women's rights in the country. In the press reports cited by Morales, Gbowee is described as "a modern day Lysistrata"⁸⁸ and someone who "persuaded many Liberian women to withhold sex from their warring menfolk unless they came to the negotiating table, a devastatingly successful campaign inspired by . . . Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*."⁸⁹ In fact, Gbowee later claimed to have been unaware of *Lysistrata* at the time of the "sex strike," her first contact with the play being a copy bought for her as a gift some years later.⁹⁰ In making comparisons between the Liberian situation and *Lysistrata*, however, journalists set two distinct (if complementary) processes in play. First, and most obviously, they invite their readers to view modern events through an ancient lens. But importantly, too, these press reports tacitly signal how *Lysistrata*—the ancient lens itself—is to be understood: namely as a play which is reducible to the formula of an "anti-war sex-strike" and one which can be comfortably aligned with modern causes such as twenty-first-century feminism and contemporary campaigns for peace.⁹¹

87 Borrowing a term from movie-making, Dutsch describes this reductive, abstract and ultimately saleable formula as the play's "high concept" (Dutsch (2015) 580 and 582).

88 Weinreich (2008).

89 Blomfield (2011). Note that Weinreich's and Blomfield's press reports were not strictly contemporary with the events in Liberia, but rather appeared in the USA and UK respectively in 2008, at the time of the release of *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* (a film documenting women's protests during Liberia's civil war); and in 2011, at the time of the joint award of the Nobel Prize to Gbowee.

90 Morales (2013) 295; and Kenty (2015).

91 It should be stated that Morales finds the equation between the Liberian situation and *Lysistrata* "crass and unhelpful," ultimately labeling it as an "irresponsible use of the classical, in which an ancient text is deployed in a manner that trivializes the modern political debate and silences modern political agents" (Morales (2013) 287, 294). See also Dutsch (2015) 585–6.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on just three themes—obscene language, female sexuality, and the “gendering” of dissent—but there are, of course, many other stories to be told about the modern reception of Aristophanes in terms of gender and sexuality. One such story concerns the changing treatment of men and male sexuality, for example. To date, little attention has been paid by those studying the reception of Aristophanes to men and male sexuality, yet factors such as changing social attitudes towards homosexuality in the western world over the last fifty years, the rapid growth of ancient sexuality studies as an area of academic interest since the 1970s, and the increasing gap between modern liberal ideals of masculinity and the conduct of Aristophanic men (especially when it comes to their behavior toward women) certainly suggest that this is a potentially rich area of study.

Another story which has only be touched on in passing in this chapter is the changing nature of feminist scholarship on Aristophanes’ plays. This is an area where both *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Lysistrata* have enjoyed particular prominence.⁹² What is interesting to note in academic debates about these plays is the central role that reception has played, one key point of contention being the extent to which they deserve to be studied and performed. In 1988 Sue-Ellen Case took a particularly provocative stance in regard to what she calls “the values of . . . patriarchal society . . . embedded in [classic] texts,” by stating her hope that “feminist practitioners and scholars may decide that such plays do not belong in the canon.”⁹³ Mary-Kay Gamel offered a different viewpoint in a 1999 response to Case: for her as a translator and theater director, the modern performance of ancient drama is an important way of unlocking readings which both examine and challenge the patriarchal subtext of the plays.⁹⁴ More radical still, perhaps, in the context of a modern performance is to offer a reading which ostensibly *confirms* the patriarchal values of the text, thus challenging audience members to reflect on the values embedded in the play for themselves. Such was the staging decision of *Given*, for instance, who in 2010 made *Lysistrata* rather than *Reconciliation* the sexual object ogled and prodded by the Athenian and Spartan delegates.

Whatever one’s personal reactions are to the stances adopted by these three scholars-cum-theater practitioners, this debate neatly demonstrates the

92 For thoughtful overviews of scholarship, see Gamel (2002b) and Henderson (2002).

93 Case (1988) 18–9.

94 Gamel (1999) 41–2.

symbiotic relationship that performance reception and Aristophanic scholarship often enjoy: each can meaningfully inform the other. The arc of this debate also shows how views on Greek drama in general, and Aristophanes in particular, regularly shift over time, with different academic and artistic approaches emerging. Indeed, this is perhaps no more true than in the case of gender and sexuality, as the discussion in this chapter has shown. As social attitudes and behaviors change, so do the ways in which scholars, translators and artists approach, understand, and exploit the Aristophanic texts. And what is special about studying reception history, of course, is the dual focus it provides. Not only does a study like this allow us an insight into how these ancient plays have been variously understood, used, and occasionally abused in the modern world; but we also gain a unique glimpse of changing social attitudes towards gender and sexuality in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries viewed through a distinctively Aristophanic lens.