

A Framework of Women in History:  
A Satire of a Satire, a Modern Retelling of *Lysistrata*

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The Greek comedy *Lysistrata* written by Aristophanes has been considered a feminist encounter among many academic centers. My own high school presented the play as an early set example of such due to the modern definition of progressive and open views on women having sex. However, recalling some of the most prolific philosophers of the time like Aristotle and Galen, the views on women influenced how gender interacts with societies even beyond its time. Although this course is on women and gender in Medieval Europe and this playwright is clearly Greek, it demonstrates the impact these philosophers had as the framework of the control and perspective of women's anatomy. Aristotle believed that male semen provided the matter and women were deformed men as they provided nothing but the womb.<sup>1</sup> Although Galen let women be an attributing factor in pregnancy but still found men to be perfect as he believed in the four humours.<sup>2</sup> So what does this have to do with *Lysistrata* and why is women having sex considered bad? Although Aristophanes was sex-positive as he exposed the raunchy duality of femininity; according to many secondary sources, he failed to provide depth to women beyond sex and actually objectified the female body much like these philosophers.

To contextualize these articles, *Lysistrata* is set in Athen during the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta where the women miss their husbands and sons and most of all sex. Gathering all the women from Athens and Sparta, Lysistrata devises a plan where the women decided to tease their men while going on a sex strike to force the war to end. In the modern context of this play, this seems like a feminist anecdote where women are using their bodies as the agency in a world where their only commodity is themselves. This is a wonderful representation of how women are considered societally useless yet able to break free from that

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, and A. L. Peck. 1943. *Generation of Animals*. London: William Heinemann.

<sup>2</sup> Galen. *Galen on the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body. Peri Chreias Moriōn [Romanized Form] De Usu Partium*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968.

misconception; however, the same idea fails to realize how Aristophanes downplays women's roles within society and war. In addition, Sarah Culpepper Stroup (2004) exposes the nuances of Greek traditions and plays—women were not allowed to perform in plays creating a mockery of Greek women as the exaggerated and explicit scenes were all men dressed as women.<sup>3</sup> In scene 1, Lysistrata and some of her other companions begin to objectify and grope the other women, the audience is then shown the naked pelvic region as the women comment on it (13-15)<sup>4</sup>. Lambert (2018) does note that it was possible that some of the naked scenes could have been prostitute-slaves, thus further taking away the agency and power that is seemingly demonstrated in this play<sup>5</sup>. When looking at terms like misandry and misogyny the difference lies in the hate for men stems from trauma and oppression while the hate for women results in the death of women. This is where the nuance of the play comes in, the mockery of women in the context of this society is a male product that comments, critics, and sexualized the female body and interpersonal relationships. Stroup's article exposes Aristophanes' implication as the wives drink wine and swear on a bowl that is only for prostitutes. Stroup (2004) notes "Married women did not participate in symposia, and they did not drink from kylikes. Hetairai, however, did; and, indeed, we have hundreds of red-figure representations of such drinking from the kylix..." (48)

This is the very reason why I chose to focus on this play, as it showcases the institutional misogyny that has been gilded as feminism such as the classic novel *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott or Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. In my retelling of this story, I took this idea and expanded on the concept of how deeply men hate women, femininity and their agency in their own lives. By changing the setting to a modern satire of fratboys in their "Greek life", the previous criticism on

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<sup>3</sup> Stroup, Sarah Culpepper. 2004. "Designing Women: Aristophanes' "Lysistrata" and the "Hetairization" of the Greek Wife." *Arethusa* 37 (1): 37-73.

<sup>4</sup> Aristophanes. *Lysistrata*. New York: Dover, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> Lambert, M. 2018. "Mapping women's Bodies and the Male 'gaze' : Reconciliation in Aristophanes' Lysistrata." *Akroterion* 63 (1): 35-56.

why satire of the oppressed is just bullying is fixed. Frats are the epitome of privilege, white supremacy, homophobia, and toxic masculinity which is why the groping scenes are emphasized. Further diving into the meaning of my retelling, the concept of hating women draws a very thin line between repressed homosexuality and the desire for control heavily portrayed in the groping, compliments, and the sex strike. These details were to imply two things— that the control over women is more important to men than the desire for women because they are seen are more of an object than a partner. On top of that is how sex is portrayed in the eyes of men; to touch, to grab, to take away as it is considered a commodity exchange.

The most important and interesting part of this retelling is the lack of plot change and language structure as it showcases how the perspective and social implications turn misogyny into a commentary. In addition, the reader can see how the comparison of the different displays of misogyny, ancient Greece and the “Greek life” hasn’t changed. Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* is a greek play that disguised itself as a feminist narrative but after Stroup (2004) and Lambert (2018) exposed the true intent and mindset, I was able to create a satire of Aristophanes’ work that recounted the misogynistic issues that are still prevalent today. Not only did the greek philosophers influence the public opinion on the female body but it become the foundation of how society continued to use these ideologies and viewpoints despite the progress that has happened. Women are able to vote and get divorces and win trials but there are still many issues ingrained within our modern society that I was able to showcase within the comparison of *Lysistrata* and *Liam*.

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