

Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* & Greek Drama

Timeline

- 534 Thespis first distinguishes the actor from the choral group: this is the basis of tragedy.
- 472 Earliest surviving Greek tragedy
- 427 First performance of one of Aristophanes' plays
- 425 Earliest surviving Greek comedy (Aristophanes' *Archarnians*)
- 422 Cleon (enemy of Aristophanes) dies; focus of Aristophanes' early satires & political comedies changes.
- 405 Latest surviving Greek tragedy
- 388 Latest surviving Greek comedy (Aristophanes' *Plutus*)

Political Context for Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*

1. 421-415 Aristophanes experiences is a change in mind about politics
 - a. Already exhausted chief objects of satire in early plays
 - b. Cleon falls in 422: Aristophanes loses a formidable enemy and the focus of his earlier critiques.
 - c. After Cleon's death, no one rules assembly; foreign policy is influenced by alternating advocates of peace and instigators of war and adventure.
2. Change occurs in Aristophanes' comedies
 - a. Before, comedy demanded something distinct vigorous, and consistent as an object of attack. No longer available.
 - b. As a result, in general during this period comedy lost its general application and philosophical value and became more personal (attacked families, well known people).
 - c. Not so with Aristophanes' work.
3. Questions towards a political reading
 - a. What does Aristophanes value--war or peace? How do you know?
 - b. Who are the political mouthpieces of the poet? Why?
 - c. What unites the women? Does Aristophanes value their ideals?
 - d. What political model does Aristophanes propose for Athens? Compare this to the models proposed by Thucydides, Cleon, and Pericles.

Mythical/Ritual Context for Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*

1. Other matriarchies (gynecocracies) in Greek Mythology
 - a. the Amazons
 - attack the Acropolis & fail: signals victory of cosmos over chaos
 - b. Sauromantae in Herodotus 4.110-17
 - reject traditional roles as wives
 - c. Lemnians
 - Aphrodite afflicted the Lemnian women with a bad smell when she was angry with them
 - their husbands left them for slave women
 - women massacre all men except the King, who is saved by his daughter when she disguises him as Dionysus and hides him in a coffin.
 - women set up a matriarchy
 - marry new men from outside their land. Balance restored after fire ritual.

2. Ritual Symbolism

a. bad smells vs. good smells

--bad smells suggest that normality has been destroyed or that something unusual is afoot.

--spices/perfumes (good smells) are used to communicate with the gods.

3. Questions about Gender and Myths

a. Aristophanes comments upon Euripides' misogyny. What is Aristophanes' view of women?

b. In legends like that of the Amazons and Lemnians, women are a disruptive force. How do they act here? How do men act?

c. Compare the final reconciliation of men and women to the end of the *Oresteia*.

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