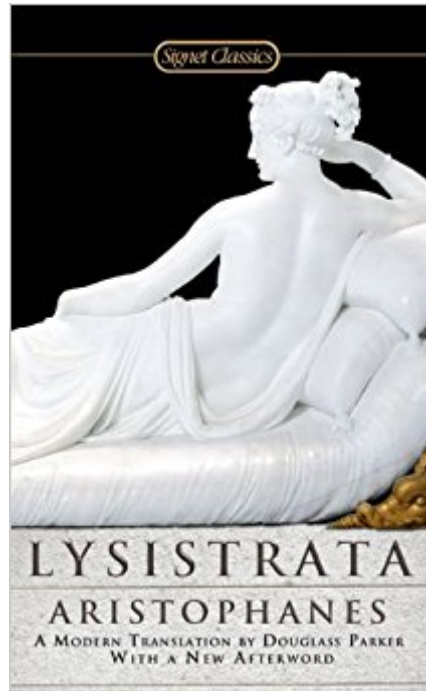




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# Lysistrata (Signet Classics)



## Synopsis

In *Lysistrata* a band of women tap into the awesome power of sex in order to end a war.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

a[Full of] delirious and scabrous wit.a a"New York Times"?[Full of] delirious and scabrous wit.?  
?"New York Times"

Aristophanes was born, probably in Athens, c. 449 BC and died between 386 and 380 BC. Little is known about his life, but there is a portrait of him in Plato's *Symposium*. He was twice threatened with prosecution in the 420s for his outspoken attacks on the prominent politician Cleon, but in 405 he was publicly honored and crowned for promoting Athenian civic unity in *The Frogs*. Aristophanes had his first comedy produced when he was about twenty-one, and wrote forty plays in all. The eleven surviving plays of Aristophanes are published in the Penguin Classics series as *The Birds and Other Plays*, *Lysistrata and Other Plays*, and *The Wasps/The Poet and the Women/The Frogs*.

Well, then, this play should resonate— including the effective method of bringing it to an end. During yet another long war — the American involvement in Vietnam — I became aware of this play, but regrettably never saw a production of it, nor read it. Proving that numerous “classics” are never “out-of-date,” Spike Lee’s latest

movie – CHI-RAQ – is based on this play. So I figured a read was long overdue. There are a number of versions available on Amazon, and I would have preferred to have read it on my Kindle. However, after reading a number of reviews, I was lead to purchase the paperback version with was translated by Sarah Ruden. In addition to the play itself, there is a most informative preface that provides the context and setting for the play, plus four 10-page each commentaries, concerning: Athenian Democracy. Ancient Greek Warfare, Athenian Women, and Greek Comedy. Aristophanes was a Greek playwright, most famous for his comedies, who lived from about 450 to 385 BC. For the greater part of his adult life the Peloponnesian Wars (431-404 BC) were being fought. These wars were mainly between Athens and Sparta, a Greek civil-war of sorts, after the unifying effect of the wars against Persia was removed by a final peace treaty in 448 BC. More than 25 years of war, particularly in one’s adult life, can seem

endless. Lysistrata literally means “Dissolver of Armies.” She is the principle character in Aristophanes play, who decides the most effective way of bringing peace is to deny men what they most desire. And goes to great lengths to unite the other women in denying their men their accustomed “conjugal pleasures” until they lay down their arms and make peace.

Ruden’s translation is wildly bawdy, even raunchy at times, with numerous double entendres. It is filled with the slang of today. Naturally there is a play on the homophones peace/piece. Some other reviewers objected to the bawdy language, and/or the “hip style” but it certainly worked for me. Translations from one language to another can be quite difficult, since often the cultural nuances and meanings of one setting and culture are not properly conveyed in the other. Literal translations across different languages and two and a half millennium are virtually impossible. Thus, I felt Ruden’s “sense of the passage” style was much more appropriate, and allowed me to laugh, and even snicker, as the ancient Greeks did. Seemingly new-found truths were so well understood 2500 years ago. Lysistrata’s advice to the “sisterhood” if their husbands force themselves upon us: lay still. The reason? “No husband’s going to like to screw” Unless he knows his woman likes it too. I found numerous insights in Ruden’s commentaries. For example, she effectively compared tragedies with the comedies, and said of the latter: “that comedy could be nasty, hilarious, and sublime at the same time.” She summarized the Greek playwright’s outlook: “Gandhi Aristophanes was not. But he made an important case for an end to

hostilities. For a constant proponent of drinking parties, he had a sober understanding of what war was doing to his homeland. *Do we?* 5-stars, at least for raising the question, yet again.

Let me start by saying that I am not a classics scholar. I have no knowledge of Greek, and the last time I studied Latin was as a high school sophomore thirty five years ago. I am, however, a student of rabbinic literature, and anxious to understand the Greco-Roman milieu from which Rabbinic Judaism emerged. I also am anxious to know how these plays were performed orally, in front of a live audience. To that end, I have always preferred colloquial translations to more formal ones. And this translation certainly fits the bill, providing lots of "colorful" language. While I suspect that purists will find this approach off-putting, I personally find it exhilarating. Remember that we are talking about a comedy show, performed in front of a largely illiterate audience, and perhaps accompanied by imbibing copious amounts of wine. Bawdy? Yes. Off color in places? Yes. But a rollicking good time - yes! No wonder that in Providence, not far from my son's school (URI), they did a series of performances of *Lysistrata* - which audiences loved. I hope they used this text, or one which is very similar.

After reading five other translations, I chose Ruden's translation to direct at our local community theatre. Yes, it was profane and bawdy but it was the most "performable" of all the translations I read. The footnotes and essays helped actors (and the director) to "get it" and the colloquial language made it accessible to contemporary audience members and those who are just reading the script. The actors and audience loved it! My favorite version...fun and scholarly!

Love this play. It's a short fun read, that for the time period isn't too difficult to comprehend.

Good translation. Perhaps the best part of it, is it's historical appendices. Probably comes as close to capturing what we know of Athenian "humor" as any translation I've read. There are some allusions that are just lost to history, but still the story and the sharp dialogue is great.

I ordered this bc my high school honors class is going to read it. The translation is fabulous and totally modern and understandable, however, be warned that it is quite sexually graphic. I know the story is the same, but I guess it seems more raunchy in this version as compared to a more classical translation. Regardless of this, I personally LOVED the story as portrayed here and even

read excerpts to my classes to help them understand different parts. This is a great and hilarious read, but definitely for adults :)

Excellent!

A classic, obviously! Great play, with some awesome commentary and translation. This is a preferred version for me, and I would recommend for class or personal use!

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