

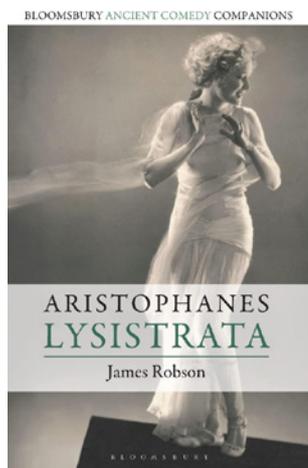
Book Review

Aristophanes: *Lysistrata*

Robson (J.), Pp. xiv + 184 ills. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023. Paper, £17.99. ISBN: 978-1-350-09030-9

Chloë Barnett

Bishop Luffa School, Chichester, Hampshire, UK
thenoblercat@gmail.com



One of the *Bloomsbury Ancient Comedy Companions*, James Robson's short book runs to just under 150 pages, excluding notes, an excellent 'further reading and works cited' list and the index.

Overtly intended for 'anyone and everyone interested in exploring what the *Lysistrata* has to offer', Robson has succeeded in his aim. Using transliterated technical terms which are always carefully explained, the text is lucid, not patronising, and highly accessible for any A level student. Disappointingly, there is however, no glossary to allow for revision or clarification.

The book starts with a helpful 'Timeline of Ancient Events' from the murder of Hipparchus (514 BCE) to the death of Aristophanes in 386 BCE. There are also maps showing the Aegean world in 432 BCE and the city of Athens in the late fifth century BCE.

The meat of the book comprises five chapters covering: 'Lysistrata in Context'; 'The Action of the Play'; 'Places and Politics';

'Laughter, Language and Logic'; and 'Lysistrata in the Modern world'.

The prose is clear and elegantly explores the controversies on staging as well as placing *Lysistrata* firmly in the context of Old Comedy and its historical and political background; all of which could be very helpful to a student studying the Greek Theatre component of the OCR A level Classical Civilisation.

'The Action of the Play' functions as a non-linguistic commentary and would prove useful to any teacher covering the Greek text and looking for a broader overview as Robson analyses the play in some detail. Unless studying the play in depth (as additional material), this section would be of less use to the A level student of Greek Theatre under the current OCR Classical Civilisation specification.

Robson periodically repeats information, which could be very helpful for a teacher setting a specific section for study. It makes reading the book occasionally less fluid, but broadly, I think the benefits outweigh the aesthetics in this case.

There is also a helpful rundown of the scholarship, particularly in 'People, Places & Politics' that gives an overview of some of the underlying ideas and debates on the political aspects to *Lysistrata* as well as explorations of the putative relationship between the contemporary Priestess of Athena 'Lysimache' and Lysistrata. Robson's analysis of humour includes an extensive section on specific and explicit sexual language which might well restrict this book in A level teaching.

I found myself most fascinated, though, by Robson's chapter 'Lysistrata in the Modern World' which explores the reception of *Lysistrata* from the Victorian era to modern performances. This chapter vividly demonstrates the cultural relationships and distortions the play was subjected to right up to today, and includes the fact that an arrest warrant was drawn up in 1930s America for the arrest of Aristophanes himself!

If you have been searching for a single volume exploring *Lysistrata* in some depth that won't upset the budget, this is your book. It is true that Stuttard's 2010 collection of eight essays provides an excellent exploration of different facets of the play, but as with all essay collections, it leaves gaps. Robson's volume has the benefit of being clear, short, readable and comprehensive.

doi: 10.1017/S2058631024000096