

THE RECEPTION OF ARISTOPHANES' *LYSISTRATA*
FROM A CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE:
DAVID STUTTARD'S *LYSISTRATA, OR LOOSE STRIFE*

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyse the theatrical version that David Stuttard published regarding the famous comedy by Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. Considering the definitions provided by Lorna Hardwick (2003), it will be proposed a reading of David Stuttard's play as an adaptation rather than a new version. In addition, the article will focus on the female characters in Stuttard's play, as well as on the means used by the author to achieve the humorous aspect that characterises the play. Finally, there will be focus on the contemporaneity of this play and provide some critical assessment of it.

KEYWORDS: adaptation, David Stuttard, *Lysistrata*, contemporaneity.

LA RECEPCIÓN DE LA *LISÍSTRATA* DE ARISTÓFANES
DESDE UNA PERSPECTIVA ACTUAL:
LYSISTRATA, OR LOOSE STRIFE DE DAVID STUTTARD

RESUMEN

Este artículo pretende analizar la versión teatral que David Stuttard publicó de la famosa comedia de Aristófanes, *Lisístrata*. Considerando las definiciones aportadas por Lorna Hardwick (2003), se propondrá una lectura de la obra de David Stuttard como una adaptación más que como una nueva versión. Además, el artículo se centrará en los personajes femeninos de la obra de Stuttard, así como en los medios utilizados por el autor para conseguir el aspecto humorístico que caracterizan a la misma. Por último, se destacará la contemporaneidad de esta obra y se ofrecerá una valoración crítica de la misma.

PALABRAS CLAVE: adaptación, David Stuttard, *Lisístrata*, contemporaneidad.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this article it is proposed to carry out a study of the reception of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* in contemporary theatre, in particular with David Stuttard's, *Lysistrata, or Loose Strife*. As such, it is highlighted the adaptations regarding the translation of humour, the relevance of the female characters and its transplant to our contemporary world.

Moreover, it is made a use of the schools of thought dealing with Classical Tradition and Reception Studies¹. There will be a distinction between «classical tradition» and «reception» in keeping with Lorna Hardwick's definitions. According to her (2003: 2), Classical Tradition studies «the transmission and dissemination of classical culture through the ages, usually with the emphasis on the influence of classical writers, artists and thinkers on subsequent intellectual movements and individual works.» As per her definition of Reception (2003: 4),

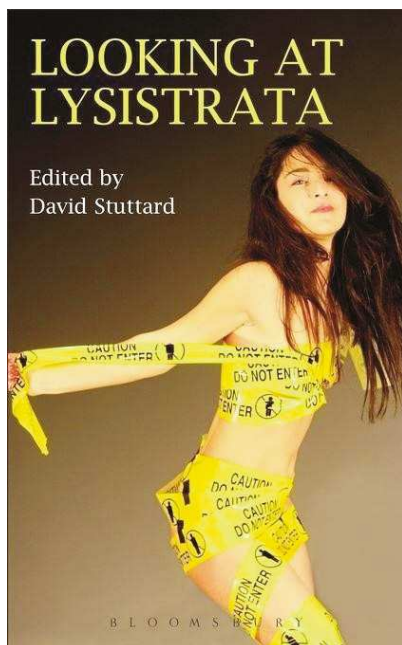
reception is concerned with the relationship between ancient and modern texts and contexts. (...) Reception studies therefore participate in the continuous dialogue between the past and the present and also require some 'lateral' dialogue in which crossing boundaries of place or language or genre is as important as crossing those of time.

Furthermore, Lorna Hardwick (2003: 65) shows us how the text of a play and its staging are related: «a play is only created for performance and its existence as a written text is subordinate to its primary form and function as a live, shared experience between actors and audience.» As such, in this paper it will be always considered theatrical texts as vehicles for performance. It will be taken into account not only the characters and plot of *Lysistrata*, but also the settings, costumes, props, and other paralinguistic elements, such as movement, music, etc. All these features can be retrieved from the texts by Aristophanes and Stuttard and will therefore be examined in detail in this paper.

Finally, as Lorna Hardwick (2003: 52) remarks, «posters and programmes often include useful visual printed evidence about design, production values, the approach taken by the director and translator.» With the cover of Stuttard's book the reader can get an idea of how the author has adapted Aristophanes' play into something much sexier and modern.

Additionally, as Lorna Hardwick has soberly put it, there is a big difference between «adaptation,» «translation» and «version.» relying on the definitions provided by Lorna Hardwick (2003: 9-10) for this study of Stuttard's *Lysistrata*. According to the former, an adaptation is «a version of the source developed for a different

¹ On the reception of *Lysistrata* on contemporary stage, see, among others, Hardwick's chapter entitled «Lysistrata's on the Modern Stage» in Stuttard, 2010: 80-89.



Picture 1. Cover of the book of Stuttard's adaptation. © Bloomsbury. Available at <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/looking-at-lysistrata-9781472519962/> (03.06.2020).

purpose or insufficiently close to count as a translation,» whereas a version is «a refiguration of a source (usually literary or dramatic) which is too free and selective to rank as a translation,» and can be contrasted with the following definition of the Merriam-Webster dictionary² «an adaptation of a literary work,» so the differences between the concepts of «adaptation» and «version» can be seen as very similar when comparing the two definitions.

In this regard, throughout this work it will be considered Stuttard's *Lysistrata* as an adaptation and not as a version. Though Stuttard's subtitle literally says: *A New Version of Aristophanes' Provocative Comedy*, the changes made by Stuttard are not surprising enough to be considered as the result of a new version. Throughout this paper, Stuttard is rather 'close' or 'faithful' to the original play by Aristophanes, focusing on slight strategies of adaptation, such as updating as well as translating cultural references making a modern play but being faithful to Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*.

² Merriam-Webster dictionary, *s.v.* URL: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/version> (11/10/2022).

As Lorna Hardwick (2003: 64) aptly says, «the problems about the differences in the cultural frame of reference between ancient and modern audiences are particularly acute in comedy because humour uses contemporary references as well as exploitation of the human situation for its effects.» Bearing this in mind, it is easy to imagine the difficulties David Stuttard faced in adapting Aristophanes' comedy.

2. DAVID STUTTARD: SCHOLAR, PLAYWRIGHT, AND THEATRE DIRECTOR

David Stuttard is «a writer, lecturer, theatre director, dramaturg and Fellow of Goodenough College, London³.» The most remarkable thing in relation to his studies is that he managed a MA in Classics from St. Andrews University, being twice president of the Classical Society. Moreover, he was the first person who twice won the HJ Rose Memorial Prize for essay writing and remained attached to University in order to work on a PhD on Plutarch's *Symposiaka*.

Stuttard's field of expertise is ancient history and literature from early Greece to the fall of Rome. Hence, he has translated, adapted and rewritten a huge variety of Greek dramas for performance. Described by *The Spectator* as «an impresario of great energy and enterprise», David translates, adapts, reconstructs and directs Greek tragedies, comedies and satyr plays, as well as staging readings from Greek literature.»

His writing is mainly devoted to ancient history and literature. However, among all his books, this paper is going to focus on *Looking at Lysistrata*. This book was published in August 2010 and is a collection of eight essays and an adaptation of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. David Stuttard's aim with this book was «to seek to set Lysistrata firmly in its historical and social context, while exploring Aristophanes' purpose in writing it and considering the response of modern audiences and directors.»

In order to better understand this particular book, David Stuttard's relation with Athenian drama and theatre should be emphasised:

David founded the theatre company, Actors of Dionysus (aod), to perform productions of Greek drama throughout the UK and beyond, and for which he directed his own translations and adaptations of Greek tragedies, remaining with the company as Joint Artistic Director until 2004. His work has been broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and 4, his translation of Aeschylus' Agamemnon was adopted as an Open University set text and his scripts have been performed throughout the world, as well as published by Bloomsbury (Stuttard, 2021).

Furthermore, Stuttard produced a huge diversity of works trying to carry the classical Greek tradition around the world. «David's translations and adaptations

³ All this section is based on the information available at the author's personal website, included in the bibliographical section of this paper.

of Greek tragedies and comedies have been highly acclaimed by critics and performers alike and have been produced throughout the UK by Actors of Dionysus, as well as by other companies in the UK, USA and Australia.»

Actors of Dionysus is one of the most important things in his career. With this theatre company Stuttard staged Greek tragedies in various Graeco-Roman theatres throughout the Eastern Mediterranean. «Over the past twenty-five years, no-one has done more than Stuttard to keep classical Greek drama alive on the English stage. Stuttard's translations of *Medea*, *The Bacchae* and *Lysistrata* are among the best contemporary performance texts of Greek plays.» (Thonemann, 2018).

Nowadays, David Stuttard has been working at the scholarly collection of *Looking at...* series on Greek Drama. Since 2010 there are four volumes of this series (*Lysistrata*, *Medea*, *Bacchae* and *Antigone*) and each one includes essays of important scholars, together with David's introductions and translations.

In addition to this, Stuttard also holds workshops related with Greek drama at schools and universities. The most recent ones have taken place at the University of Edinburgh, The Open University and University College, London (Stuttard, 2022).

3. DAVID STUTTARD'S ADAPTATION: *LYSISTRATA, OR LOOSE STRIFE*

3.1. STRATEGIES OF ADAPTATION

3.1.1. Title of the play and historical context

According to the title of the play, *Lysistrata, or Loose Strife*, there is a close relation between *Lysistrata* and *Loose Strife*. As it is known, Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* probably was based on the real character of Lysimache, the priestess of Athena Polias⁴. Also, *Lysistrata* is «a 'speaking' name with an easily discernible etymological meaning: she who dissolves armies.» «Loose Strife» all together (*loosestrife*⁵), is the name of a type of plant that comes from the *Lysimachia* family⁶. In addition, according to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, Native Plant Information Network (NPIN), the name of *Lysimachia* make reference to «the genus name honors Lysimachus, a king of ancient Sicily who is said to have used a member of the genus to pacify a maddened bull⁷.»

⁴ See, among others, Cartledge, 1990: 33-34; Hall, 2010: 32-34; and Kanavou, 2010: 149.

⁵ Merriam-Webster dictionary, *s.v.* URL: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/loosestrife> (25/05/2020).

⁶ Merriam-Webster dictionary, *s.v.* URL: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Lysimachia> (25/05/2020).

⁷ «*Lysimachia quadrifolia*». URL: https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=LYQU2 (11/10/2022).



Also, the common name of «Loosestrife» can be defined «botanically, purple loosestrife is *Lythrum salicaria*. The name of the genus, *Lythrum*, is from a Greek word meaning blood or gore, alluding to the magenta-purple of the flowers⁸.»

Another more likely possibility can be that Loose Strife means something like ‘dissolve wrestling’ and this, related with *Lysistrata*’s etymological meaning (*lysis*, ‘loose’, *strata* ‘army, military forces’), lends itself to making a pun with the title of the comedy.

As per the historical context of Stuttard’s play, this *Lysistrata* is rather modern, although it maintains striking similarities with the original *Lysistrata*. The author of this new version affirms that «I have created a parallel world, the foundation of which is fifth-century Athens, but which is inhabited by characters with an experience of early twenty-first-century British history and *mores*.» (Stuttard, 2010: 9).

3.1.2. Setting and other scenographical details

Stuttard’s adaptation is set in contemporary Athens as a modern-day Greek city of the 21st century. In essence, Stuttard is faithful to the original setting in Aristophanes’s play, namely Athens; however, everything in this city is noticeably modernised. Minor scenographical changes in the settings of the different scenes are specifically indicated by the author in the stage directions regarding Stuttard’s book.

Enter Fanny, with a camp-bed.

(...)

Enter Fanny, with mattress.

(...)

Enter Fanny, with a pillow.

(...)

Enter Fanny, with a blanket.

(...)

Enter Fanny, with a jar.

(...)

Enter Fanny, with a larger jar.

(Stuttard, 2010: 136-138)

But if it is compared with Actors of Dionysus’ representation⁹ the public can see an interesting difference between Stuttard’s book and the staging. As it is seen in the image the stage is a construction site which has nothing to do with Athens.

⁸ Lopez Begg, 1985, explication of the common name «Loosestrife» by *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/08/18/arts/pros-and-cons-of-a-well-known-perennial.html>.

⁹ Actors of Dionysus representation at URL: <https://vimeo.com/402257276?login=true#>.



Picture II. First seconds of *Lysistrata*'s representation.

© Monica Padilla. Retrieved from the stage version available at <https://vimeo.com/402257276> (11.10.2022).

3.1.3. Props and Costumes

Stuttard's modern-day adaptation of Aristophanes' original play is vividly perceived in the costumes which the characters are wearing. It is important to highlight how the female characters are dressed in order to carry out their sex strike. The main point is to dress sexy to tantalise men and the women in this comedy make it. It is essential for the restoration of peace in Athens that women succeed in tempting their husbands to such an extent that they cannot resist their charms. In Stuttard's adaptation, the costume is thus adapted to a contemporary stage action, and the clothes the women refer to are absolutely modern and fashion-like.

- Nikki Oh, yeah – like you expect us women to come up with some smart idea or something 'prudent', when all that most of us are interested in's the latest way to do our hair, or wear our mini party-dress or do our make-up, or maybe sport a sexy cocktail dress with strappy high-heeled shoes...
- Lucy Yup, you've got it. That's how we'll save Greece. With our mini party-dresses and our perfume and our make-up and our sheer lingerie and sexy heels ...
- Nikki But how?
- Lucy So that from today no man will raise his weapon in anger against another ...
- Nikki Raise his weapon? I'm getting my party-dress right now!
- Lucy ... or need protection ...
- Nikki Need protection? Make that my sexy cocktail dress!
- Lucy ... nor grapple hand-to-hand.
- Nikki Bring on the high-heels! I could do with some grappling.

(Stuttard, 2010: 95)

Another significant detail regarding Stuttard's adaptation can be seen in the scene of the swearing the oath. In Aristophanes' play, Lysistrata proposes to swear on a shield whereas in Stuttard's play Lucy suggests a modern weapon.

The Registrar steps forward.

Lucy (to Nikki) What are you looking at? (to the Registrar) Place your weapon on the ground and hand me the necessary.

The Registrar places her weapon (perhaps a pistol) on the ground and hands Lucy a book on which to take the oath.

(Stuttard, 2010: 101)

The Scythian slave steps forward. She's holding a small shield]

Why stare like that?

Put down your shield, the hollow part on top

Now, someone get me a victim's innards.

(Nimis & Hayes, 2017: 180-185)

Stuttard's stage directions allow the reader to imagine how the characters would actually perform, as in the scenes in which both choirs are involved, which are visual reminders of Aristophanes' original stage-version. When the Chorus of Old Men appears in scene, the reader can know that they are «weighted down with massive burdens of damply smouldering wood, some with smoky braziers.» (2010: 104-105) Also, the reader can conceive how the position of the characters takes place on stage. «During the speech which follows, they form a circle round the braziers, and place the wood into them. As the prayer is made, they stand to attention, remaining as a tableau as the Old Women enter.» (2010: 107) The same thing happens when the Chorus of Old Women appears on stage. Thanks to Stuttard the reader know that «They are all carrying jugs or pails of water.» (*ibid.*).

The encounter between Fanny and Dick, a hilarious adaptation of Aristophanes' scene with Myrrhine and her husband Cinesias, is the most important one in terms of theatre show as well as comic effects. Here there can be observed a lot of props in the scene when Fanny is trying to seduce her husband. However, the vast majority of these props were actually used in Aristophanes' play¹⁰, as mentioned above, Stuttard's scenographical changes are minor in the book:

Exit Fanny. In the increasingly slapstick scene which follows, she keeps rushing off and on to bring in the various bedroom items referred to in her speeches.

(...)

Enter Fanny, with a camp-bed.

(...)

Enter Fanny, with mattress.

¹⁰ See, among others, Sommerstein, 1990: 200-204.

(...)
Enter Fanny, with a pillow.
(...)
Enter Fanny, with a blanket.
(...)
Enter Fanny, with a jar.
(...)
Enter Fanny, with a larger jar.

(Stuttard, 2010: 136-138)

(...)
[Myrrhine reappears carrying a small bed]
(...)
[Myrrhine reappears with the mattress]
(...)
[Myrrhine returns with a pillow]
(...)
[Myrrhine returns with a blanket]
(...)
[Myrrhine returns with the perfume]
(...)
[Myrrhine goes back to the Acropolis to get the right perfume]
(Nimis & Hayes, 2017: 920-950)

3.1.4. Main Female Characters

LUCY (A.K.A. LYSISTRATA)

Lysistrata is turned into Lucy in this play, obviously due to the similar phonetics of both names in ancient Greek and contemporary English. Moreover, most characters refer to her as Luce, a pet name. As in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, Lucy is the principal character in this comedy.

Our protagonist, according to David Stuttard (2010: 92), is the «Leader of the Athenian Women's Resistance to the War.» Also, the author gives to us the following description of the character: «she is the most (apparently) demure of all the women we will meet, classy, as if she had been educated somewhere like Roedean.» (2010: 93) Here, Stuttard is trying to maintain Lysistrata's prestige, since Roedean is a school for upper-class teenage girls and, although he does not characterise her as a possible priestess as in Aristophanes, as mentioned above Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* probably was based on the real character of Lysimache, the priestess of Athena Polias¹¹, here Stuttard gives her more class, knowledge, and culture than the rest of the women in the play.

¹¹ See, among others, Cartledge, 1990: 33-34; Hall, 2010: 32-34; and Kanavou, 2010: 149.



As in Aristophanes' original version, our protagonist is an intelligent person, so Stuttard gives us a scene where Lucy says: «I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I'm not a fool. I have my own intelligence.» (2010: 146) This scene is virtually a translation and a powerful reminder of the scene which also appears in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (vv. 1124-1127), where the protagonist makes it known that not because she is a woman, she is less intelligent than a man¹². As such, Stuttard's Lucy is a remarkably modern adaptation of the ancient *Lysistrata*, being depicted as an intelligent woman but with a 21st century savvy.

FANNY (A.K.A. MYRRHINE)

The character of Myrrhine is performed by Fanny in this play. She can be considered, as in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, the second protagonist of this play. As Stuttard (2010: 92) briefly puts it in the introduction to the cast of the play: she is «A yummy mummy» and she is described also as «young and sexy, from down the road» (Stuttard, 2010: 96). That's because she and her husband Dick star in the most erotic scene in the comedy.

Her name 'Fanny' is a vulgar slang term in British English that refers to women's genitals. As Kanavou (2010: 132) explains, in Aristophanes' play, the etymological resonances of Myrrhine's name are also significant as Myrrhine «is related to μύρτος, a plant that was sacred to Aphrodite and traditionally associated with the sexual sphere.» Her name speaks volumes of the role she will play in the comedy and Stuttard has adapted this perfectly well in his own way. Fanny and Dick, with their pun names, make us imagine the role they will perform in the play. Dick¹³ is a wonderful translation of Cinesias. As Kanavou (2010: 139) explains, Cinesias' name is «the most prominent: it is mentioned four times, while no other masculine name receives more than a single mention.» Probably, the audience would hear in the name of this character the sexual connotations of *kineîn*, which can mean 'copulate' in ancient Greek. Moreover, etymologically speaking «a sexual joke is further guaranteed by Παιονίδη, a real demotic name (from the deme Paionidai), arguably chosen for Kinesias for the sake of its similarity in sound to παίειν 'strike', but also 'copulate'» (*ibid.*).

Moreover, this character, as Lampito in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, plays one of the most important parts in the play because, without her assistance, Lucy's plan would not work.

Fanny I'll do just that. I'm taking off my shoes. Oh, darling, do say you'll vote for peace! Promise?
Dick Yes, yes – I will. I promise!
Fanny (triumphantly) Yes!

(Stuttard, 2010:138)

¹² See Sommerstein, 1990: 212.

¹³ See also López Férez, 2008: 152.



Picture III. In this image it can be seen Myrrhine, Lampito and Lysistrata at the moment of the prologue when the women meet.

© Monica Padilla. Retrieved from the stage version available at <https://vimeo.com/402257276> (14.05.2020).

CLAIRE (A.K.A. LAMPITO)

Aristophanes' Lampito is performed in this play by Claire. According to David Stuttard's (2010: 92) description, this Spartan woman is «a rather butch lady from Sparta Pompous frail geriatrics, proud of their past military prowess.» She is characterised as «a somewhat masculine lady, possibly sporting short hair and tattoos.» (Stuttard, 2010: 96) The author keeps close to the characterization of this Spartan woman in the ancient playwright's *Lysistrata*, endowing her with some masculine and athletic aspects.

- Lucy My dearest Claire, sweet Spartan sister – you're looking lovely, very lovely, very sweet – and healthy, well-toned – you look like you could throttle a bull with your bare hands!
- Claire Spend a lot of time at the gym. Pelvic thrusts.
- Nikki God, I wish I had breasts like yours.
- Claire Whatcha think you're doing? Not a piece of meat, you know.
(Stuttard, 2010: 96-97)

In the stage version of the play, it can be seen how the theatre company Actors of Dionysus impersonated the character of Claire¹⁴. Her Spartan physicality is characterized by a man who acts like a woman in cross-dressing. This image illustrates

¹⁴ See the stage version of the play available at URL: <https://vimeo.com/402257276?login=true#>.

the exact moment of the above-mentioned scene, where it can be observed how Nikki is touching Claire's breast.

As in Aristophanes' play¹⁵, Claire here is the only one who has supported Lucy from the very beginning. She is in charge of the Spartan women, compliant with the sex strike so that peace will be possible. It is for this reason that her role in Stuttard's adaptation and also in Aristophanes' play, is so important for the eventual union between Athens and Sparta. In both representations the Spartan woman follows faithfully her role.

- Lucy Frailty, thy name is woman! Those playwrights have got us just about summed up – have our own way and bugger the consequences. (to Claire, seductively) But you, sweet Spartan sister – you're still with me, aren't you? And between us we can save the day. What do you say?
- Claire Well, it's not easy for me to sleep alone without my Willy in bed with me. But as things stand ... We must have peace!
- Lucy You absolute brick! You're the only real woman here!
- (Stuttard, 2010: 99)

Lysistrata

What a debased race we women are!
It's no wonder men write tragedies about us.
We're good for nothing but screwing Poseidon in the bath tub.
But my Spartan friend, if you were willing, just you and me,
we still could pull it off. So help me out.

Lampito

By the twin gods, it's hard for women to sleep all by themselves
Without a throbbing cock. But we must try.
We've got to have peace.

Lysistrata

O you're a true friend!
The only real woman in this bunch.

(Nimis & Hayes, 2017: 140-145)

MOLLY FICATION

The role of Reconciliation is played by Molly Fication in this play. As in the original play, she is «a stunning naked girl, the personification of Reconciliation.» (Stuttard, 2010: 92)¹⁶. Remarkably, the reason why Stuttard calls the new Reconciliation this way is because Molly Fication is an intended pun, 'mollification' meaning to 'pacify' and 'appease'. Therefore, there is a close similarity between Reconciliation and Molly Fication, both being allegorical figures in the play.

¹⁵ See *Aristophanes' Lysistrata: A Dual Language Edition*, by Nimis & Hayes, 2017.

¹⁶ For Reconciliation in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, see Sommerstein, 1990: 212.





Picture IV. In this image it can be seen how Molly Fication is talking in the moment in which the peace deal between Athens and Sparta is being struck.

© Monica Padilla. Retrieved from the stage version available at <https://vimeo.com/402257276> (14.05.2020).

This character appears at the end, as in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, and her performance has the purpose of despairing the Athenian and the Spartan in order to achieve peace as soon as possible. A difference between Aristophanes' play and Stuttard's adaptation is that in the former's the reader does not know if Reconciliation is naked or not, as the latter ironically remarks in this play: «Many scholars like to think of her as being played by a real naked girl.» (2010: 146) but Stuttard actually fantasises with this idea in his stage adaptation due to the fact that when Molly Fication appears on stage, she does so from behind a prop, simulating her nudity, but in reality, the audience does not know whether she is naked or not¹⁷.

As such, in the staging by the Actors of Dionysus, Molly Fication appeared as a distorted image of the very *Lysistrata*, imaginatively and rather grossly 'naked'. This shocking, though funny device is coherent with the distorted and farcical world of the comedy, both ancient and modern.

It could be possible that Stuttard does not want an integral naked in order to maintain the humorous aspect of the play but also by not offering full nudity, the actress who plays Molly Fication can play the character without any kind of modesty and equally convey the meaning of Molly Fication's role.

¹⁷ See the stage version of the play available at <https://vimeo.com/402257276>.

3.1.5. How does Stuttard adapt humour resources?

Throughout the play it can be observed how Stuttard introduces references to contemporary situations from the time he was writing this new adaptation, marking those moments with asterisks (*), namely: «*Substitute the name of a current female politician or celebrity as desired.» (Stuttard, 2010: 105), «*Substitute the location of a current military campaign as desired.» (Stuttard, 2010: 107), «*Feel free to substitute references to whatever political scandal is current.» (Stuttard, 2010: 115), «*Substitute as necessary a current famous gay celebrity and reference.» (Stuttard, 2010: 144).

As such, David Stuttard gives the opportunity for the work to be further updated. Another example of humour translation, though not marked by asterisks, but which is very important to note in terms of modern adaptation, takes place when women make excuses to leave the Acropolis and go home to their husbands:

- Woman A I must get home. I left the washing in the machine – it'll go cheesy.
Lucy Well, let it! Come back here!
Woman A Just let me spread it on the bed – I'll come as quickly as I can.
Lucy You're not coming anywhere.
Woman A You mean, I've got to let it go all cheesy?
Lucy Yes.
Enter Woman B
Woman B Look, I'm in the middle of fixing the car. The engine – I need to strip it down ...
Lucy Not the old 'I'm fixing the car' routine again ...
Woman B Yes, and when I'm totally stripped down, and everything's well lubricated, I'll find a nice straight shaft, one that fits snugly, and I'll slot it in tightly, and ...
Lucy That's enough. If I let you go, they'll all want shafting.
(Stuttard, 2010: 126-127)

Another revealing example is when the author cites Churchill in Lucy's persuasive speech. In order to engage the British audience into the political humour of the play, Stuttard pokes fun at a famous political speech by Churchill:

- Lucy Well, I did shut up. And things went from bad to worse. And if I asked my husband how anyone could make such a mess of things, he'd look at me in that patronising way of his and tell me if I didn't keep my mouth shut, he'd give me the blackest eye that anyone had ever seen. And then he'd strike a pose and put the patriotic music on and go on about how 'we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender'!
(Stuttard, 2010: 118)

Changes are made to adapt the play to an audience no longer Greek and unfamiliar with ancient Greek culture, so one way to make viewers feel that this



comedy is about things they know is to evoke the Peloponnesian War as if it were World War II.

Indeed, David Stuttard (2010: 9) remarks that:

Comedy ages at an alarming speed, and topical jokes quickly become stale. Should anyone (subject to observation of performance rights) wish to stage the version contained in this volume, they are encouraged to make such alterations as necessary to the few references which I have included in it to characters or events of the early twenty-first century. Furthermore, should they wish to remove references and jokes which appear to them to be too Anglocentric and replace them with others more appropriate to their own setting, they are welcome to do this, too, if during the process they consult me. (This can be done through the publisher.)

With these indications, Stuttard is giving the reader the opportunity to change the play and make it suitable for any time, keeping *Lysistrata* alive.

Indeed, the author adapts the humorous resources of the play in various ways. One way in which Stuttard adapts the humorous resources of Aristophanes' play is in relation to sexual references. He adapts the sexual humour of Aristophanes to perfectly contemporary sexual humour in terms of vocabulary, double meanings, puns, etc.

Nikki Lucy, darling – what's with the mystery? Why have you asked us all round to yours? Is it something big?
Lucy Yes, very big.
Nikki And hard?
Lucy Yes, very hard.
Nikki And juicy?
Lucy Very very juicy, yes.
Nikki So what are we waiting for? Bring it on!!!
Lucy No, not that kind of something big and hard and juicy! Talk about a one-track mind! You're right, though. They'd have had no problem coming if it had been that!!! No, I've hit on something, and it's been keeping me awake at night, tossing and turning and tossing and turning and ...
(Stuttard, 2010: 94)

In order to see a comparison with the Spanish version¹⁸ of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* here it is the same scene than above:

CLEONICE. ¿De qué se trata, querida Lisístrata, el asunto por el que nos convocas a nosotras las mujeres? ¿En qué consiste, de qué tamaño es?

¹⁸ See Aristófanes, *Lisistrata* by Ed. librodot.com.



LISÍSTRATA. Grande.
 CLEONICE. ¿Es también grueso?
 LISÍSTRATA. Sí, por Zeus, muy grueso.
 CLEONICE. Entonces, ¿cómo es que no hemos venido?
 LISÍSTRATA. No es eso que piensas: si no, ya nos habríamos reunido rápidamente. Se trata de un asunto que yo he estudiado y al que he dado vueltas y más vueltas en muchas noches en blanco.
 (Aristófanes, 2010: 3)

As it can be appreciated, there are some adaptations made it for Stuttard that makes the modern Lysistrata juicier and more humorous than the Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*.

Lucy Something delicate, yes, but so, so simple. You see, we women have our country's future in our hands.
 Nikki Our cunt ...? In our ha ...? We women? Not much hope there, then!
 (Stuttard, 2010: 94)

Nikki Little cunt-ry girl, is she? I bet her meadow's nicely mown ...
 (Stuttard, 2010: 97)

Nikki I swear I shall allow no man, either lover nor husband ...
 Lucy ... to come near me with a hard-on.
 Nikki ... to come near me with a hard-on. Oh, Luce, I'm feeling faint already!
 Lucy I'll behave like a nun ...
 Nikki I'll behave like a nun ...
 Lucy ... though looking like a whore ...
 Nikki ... though looking like a whore ...
 Lucy ... until my man is crazy with desire for me ...
 Nikki ... until my man is crazy with desire for me ...
 (Stuttard, 2010: 103)

CLEONICE. «Ningún hombre, ni amante, ni marido»...
 LISÍSTRATA. ... «se acercará a mí descapullado». Dilo.
 CLEONICE. ... «se acercará a mí descapullado». ¡Ay, ay!, se me debilitan las rodillas, Lisístrata.
 LISÍSTRATA. «En casa pasaré el tiempo sin mi toro»
 CLEONICE. «En casa pasaré el tiempo sin mi toro»...
 LISÍSTRATA. ... «con mi vestido azafranado y muy bien arreglada»...
 CLEONICE. ... «con mi vestido azafranado y muy bien arreglada»...
 LISÍSTRATA. ... «para que mi marido se ponga al rojo vivo»...
 CLEONICE. ... «para que mi marido se ponga al rojo vivo»...
 (Aristófanes, 2010: 9-10)

Comparing both scenes, it can be seen how Stuttard adapts the original text to something much more modern and with a vulgar vocabulary rather than only translate from one text to another.



So, it can be said that the above-mentioned examples where sexual humour is present in the play, are crammed with puns and linguistic games, allowing this play to remain highly comical today.

3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, David Stuttard manages to adapt Aristophanes' play successfully. With only minor changes, he adapts to all cultural levels an ancient piece of comedy for a contemporary audience. Even a person unfamiliar with ancient Greek theatre may understand the play perfectly well and engage with the story.

Among the various techniques of adaptation, modernisation is of paramount importance, even opening the text with asterisks that show the moments in which you can change a reference within the play to make it more and more contemporary. Similarly, the use of language, props and costumes are radically modern, compared to any other aesthetically classic or archaeological performance of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*. In a nutshell, the constant updating which is shown throughout the play makes it seem written for the present, though recognisably Aristophanic.

As Stuttard has brought this performance to the stage, these are some of the opinions of the press and the public¹⁹:

Greek at school was never as naughty and so much fun as this.

What's On Stage

A slick, hilariously funny show, which rattles along at high speed on the strength of fine ensemble work from its cast of five... Timeless stuff.

The Stage

A passionate and intense piece of physical theatre.

British Theatre Guide

An incredibly sexy performance.

The Stage

RECIBIDO: marzo 2022; ACEPTADO: octubre 2022.

¹⁹ See 'Productions' at actorsofdionysus.com.



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