



# Sex and War on the American Stage: Lysistrata in performance 1930-2012

By Emily Klein

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American adaptations of Aristophanes' enduring comedy *Lysistrata* have used laughter to critique sex, war, and feminism for nearly a century. Unlike almost any other play circulating in contemporary theatres, *Lysistrata* has outlived its classical origins in 411 BCE and continues to shock and delight audiences to this day. The play's "make love not war" message and bawdy humor render it endlessly appealing to college campuses, activist groups, and community theatres - so much so that none of Aristophanes' plays are performed in the West as frequently as *Lysistrata*.

Starting with the play's first mainstream production in the U.S. in 1930, Emily B. Klein explores the varied iterations of *Lysistrata* that have graced the American stage, page, and screen since the Great Depression. These include the Federal Theatre's 1936 Negro Repertory production, the 1955 movie musical *The Second Greatest Sex* and Spiderwoman Theater's openly political *Lysistrata Numbah!*, as well as Douglas Carter Beane's Broadway musical, *Lysistrata Jones*, and the international *Lysistrata Project* protests, which updated the classic in the contemporary context of the Iraq War.

Although Aristophanes' oeuvre has been the subject of much classical scholarship, *Lysistrata* has received little attention from feminist theatre scholars or performance theorists. In response, this book maps current debates over *Lysistrata*'s dubious feminist underpinnings and uses performance theory, cultural studies, and gender studies to investigate how new adaptations reveal the socio-political climates of their origins.

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## **Editorial Review**

### **Review**

**"When Lysistrata has been put in an African-American context, blackwomen's sexuality is often interpreted through the lens of racist stereotyping and sexism rather than with the subversive and satirical possibilities afforded white female counterparts. [...] "When you read the script, you really see how Theodore Brown positioned the female characters as these dangerous, sexual and yet godly and morally righteous bodies of change," said Emily Klein, author of *Sex and War on the American Stage: Lysistrata in Performance 1930-2012*." -Salamishah Tillet, *The New York Times***

**"Klein's carefully researched examination of a variety of understudied adaptations of Lysistrata makes a strong case for the play's continued relevance both in performance and on the page, as well as for addressing complex questions relating to the cultural performance of gender." - Helene P. Foley, *Theatre Journal***

### **About the Author**

Emily Klein is Assistant Professor of English and Drama at Saint Mary's College of California. *Sex and War on the American Stage: Lysistrata in performance 1930-2012* traces a history of twentieth and twenty-first century American adaptations of Aristophanes' most popular comedy. Other recent publications include "'Danger: Men Not Working': Constructing Citizenship with Contingent Labor in the Federal Theatre's Living Newspapers" in *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*. Her article "Anti-War Activism and The Structures of Trauma in the Plays of Eve Ensler and Kathryn Blume" appeared as a chapter in *Political and Protest Theater After 9/11: Patriotic Dissent*, 2012 edited by Jenny Spencer.

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