

AN ARISTOTELIAN APPROACH TO
ARISTOPHANES' *LYSISTRATA*

*Nilay ERDEM AYYILDIZ**

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ABSTRACT

Comedy, which developed as a literary genre after tragedy, is a popular dramatic form in ancient Greek literature. In accordance with the periods of time through which it differs, comedy as a genre is divided into three types; Old Comedy, Middle Comedy and New Comedy. Regarded as a surviving manuscript of Old Comedy, Aristophanes' Lysistrata provides evidence about the features of Old Comedy. Therefore, the aim of the study is to examine the play by focusing on the features which Aristotle seeks in a tragedy, which he regards as the best dramatic form. Through an Aristotelian reading of the play, the study reveals that although the play as comedy shares a lot of features with tragedy, it differs from tragedy in terms of content, language and characters.

Keywords: Aristotle, Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, Old Comedy, Tragedy.

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* Dr., Firat University, School of Foreign Languages, Elazığ/Turkey.
nerdem@firat.edu.tr

ARİSTOPHANES'İN LYSİSTRATA OYUNUNA ARİSTOTELESÇİ BİR YAKLAŞIM

ÖZ

Edebi bir tür olarak trajediden sonra gelişen komedi eski Yunan edebiyatında popüler olan bir tiyatro biçimidir. Komedi, bir tür olarak, farklılık gösterdiği zaman dilimlerine göre Eski Komedi, Orta Komedi ve Yeni Komedi olmak üzere üçe ayrılmaktadır. Eski Komedi'nin yaşayan bir eseri sayılan, Aristophanes'in Lysistrata'sı, Eski Komedi'nin özellikleriyle ilgili kanıt sağlamaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı Aristoteles'in en iyi tiyatro biçimi olarak gördüğü trajedide aradığı özelliklere odaklanarak Lysistrata oyununu incelemektir. Oyunun bir Aristoteles değerlendirmesiyle, çalışma, bir komedi olarak oyunun trajedi ile birçok özelliği paylaşırsa da, içerik, dil ve karakterler açısından trajediden değişiklik gösterdiğini ortaya çıkarmaktadır.

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Anahtar Kelimeler: Aristoteles, Aristophanes, Lysistrata, Eski Komedi, Trajedi.

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INTRODUCTION

As a dramatic form, comedy was as popular as tragedy in ancient Greece. It is not possible to have an exact information about how the ancient Greek comedy was originated and developed. It seems that we do not have a concrete evidence about the origin and development of Old Comedy in the early fifth century until it became a significantly political and topical comedy. The single solid proofs about it come from various sources. Basically, its literary evidence is obtained by some commentators and through Aristotle's *Poetics* written nearly a century and a half later, whereas the ancient vases and sculptures provides the physical evidence about comedy. In addition, we can also draw some conclusions from the surviving comedies, the play-titles and major fragments (Storey, Allan, 2005: 170).

According to Aristotle's report, comedy was born in Megara and Sicyon, and Susarion, and the earliest Athenian comic poet, might have been from Megara. Also, Aristotle associates the origin of comedy with popular phallic songs, and claims that comedy became known in Athens later than tragedy (2007: Part III). According to Storey and Allan, comedies were first performed in Athenian outdoor competitions at two major festivals organised in honour of Dionysus, the god of wine. The festival known as the City Dionysia would be held in March in 487 BCE, and comedies were admitted for this organisation, while the other one called the Lenaea festival, held every January, included competitions of comedies in 432 BCE. In these two festivals, five comic poets would stage a single play, even though sometimes programs would be reduced to three poets for a period because of the financial drawbacks of the Peloponnesian War. According to Storey's and Allan's account, the term "comedy" derives from the Greek words "komos", referring to "revelling band", and the verb "aeido", meaning "to sing" (2005: 169-171). Moreover, according to Aristotle, comedy was originated by those who sang "the phallic songs," and resulted in a shift from improvisation to formal performance. Although they became staged performances, the number and division of the stages are not known. Comedy also shared much with *iambos*, which can be defined as the poetry of personal insult, and it was divided into plots later. (2007: Part IV).

It is likely that the Alexandrian grammarians and particularly Aristophanes of Byzantium were the first to divide Greek comedy into three separate periods as Old Comedy, Middle Comedy, and New Comedy. Old Comedy was not known much, as its works did not survive today, but it survives largely in eleven plays of Aristophanes (c. 445-c. 380), while New Comedy is known primarily from Menander's works. And Middle Comedy is almost lost, that is to say, preserved only in relatively short fragments of some writers (Scott, 2005: 41).

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Until the Old Comedy, ancient dramatists such as Sophocles focused on tragedy and they made many contributions to it. As confirmed by Aristotle in *Poetics*, the ancient comedy playwright, Aeschylus was the first to increase the number of the actors from one to two by limiting the role of the chorus and giving priority to the dialogue. Then, Sophocles augmented the number to three, introduced a painted scenery for stages and shifted the content from religious to more philosophical issues. Moreover, the ancient Greek tragedian, Euripides contributed to comedy with theatrical innovations having a deep impact upon comic drama until today. He represented traditional, mythical heroes as ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances in drama. This new approach was adopted by later comedy writers, as well (2007: Part IV).

1. ARISTOPHANES AND OLD COMEDY

When we consider the ancient Greek drama, we can infer that there was not much overlap between tragedy and comedy. Many ancient writers wrote mostly either tragedy or comedy. It can also be claimed that the most significant ancient tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides are seen as correspondence to the Old Comedy writers Aristophanes, Kratinos and Europolis, who changed the route of drama from tragedy to comedy by making some contributions to it. The most important Old Comedy writer is Aristophanes on the works of whom we are dependent while studying Old Comedy.

Aristophanes was born in "about 450, although some have interpreted a reference at *Clouds* as suggesting that he was not yet eighteen when he produced his first comedy in 427" (Storey, Allan, 2005: 209). Old Comedy is mostly defined by mentioning his plays, but it looks

problematic to focus only on his surviving works to generalize the features of Old Comedy. His surviving plays are *The Acharnians* (425 BC), *The Knights* (424 BC), *The Clouds* (423 BC), *The Wasps* (422 BC), *Peace* (421 BC), *The Birds* (414 BC), *Lysistrata* (411 BC), *Thesmophoriazusae* (411 BC), *The Frogs* (405 BC), *Ecclesiazusae* (392 BC), *Wealth* (388 BC). The aim of this paper is to study Aristophanes' comedy, *Lysistrata*, according to Aristotelian principles of tragedy and comedy. Although Aristotle does not state much about comedy, instead, focuses on tragedy, *Lysistrata* can be studied considering the six elements (plot, character, thought, diction, spectacle and song), which Aristotle regards as compulsory parts of tragedy to find out to what extent the play as a comedy conforms to or contrast with the Aristotelian tragedy characteristics.

The comedy concept of Aristophanes is extremely political, topical, and full of personal humour and jokes about actuality and politicians. Considering the fact that "[t]he 440s were a crucial time for Athens (the peace with Persia, hostilities and truce with Sparta in 446, the ostracism of Thoukydides, the revolt of Samos)" (Storey, Allan, 2005: 191-192), it is understandable that the chosen themes in Aristophanic comedies reflect Athens of that day. The common themes portraying Athenian conditions of Aristophanes' day are the "peace with Sparta, political leadership at Athens, the Athenian legal system, ideas and intellectuals of the day, Euripides and other dramatic poets, the position of women in a male-dominated society" (Storey, Allan, 2005: 211). Set in Athens, *Lysistrata* is also an Aristophanic play that refers to the war between Greece and Sparta and includes the themes mentioned above.

2. ARISTOPHANES' LYSISTRATA AND ARISTOTELIAN CONCEPTS OF TRAGEDY AND COMEDY

In *Poetics*, Aristotle defines comedy as "an imitation of characters of a lower type- not, however, in the full sense of the word bad, the ludicrous being merely a subdivision of the ugly. It consists in some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive. To take an obvious example, the comic mask is ugly and distorted, but does not imply pain" (2007: Part V). From his definition, it is obvious that Aristotle underlines that the genre represents ridiculous actions, in contrast to tragedy, which, he emphasizes, is "an imitation of an

action that is serious” (2007: Part VI). It is obvious that serious action in tragedy is replaced by the ridiculous one in comedy. In other words, comedy lowers the elevated level of tragedy to the level so that the audience will laugh. Therefore, the action in comedy is formed with physical humorosity and expressed by an informal and bad language. It cannot be denied that the main action in Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*, which is to stop war by means of sex strike exemplifies the imitation of the ridiculous.

A typical comedy follows the stages as follows: the formulation and presentation of the main idea in prologue, the debate to execute it, its comic results, and a happy end (Scott, 2005: 22). Accordingly, *Lysistrata* starts the prologue with the dialogue of the title character with a married Athenian woman Calonice and her effort of bringing all women together to end the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC) between Athena and Sparta. As a way out, she seeks to convince the Greek and Spartan wives to stop having sex. *Lysistrata*’s efforts to make the women keep their promises, the sexual struggle between Myrrhine and her husband Cinesias, the fight between old men and women choruses, the dialogue between *Lysistrata* and Magistrate are the comic consequences of the idea. Then the women achieve stopping the war and the peace is restored in the cities, thus, the play ends happily.

It is obvious that the play revolves around one action taking in a single place, Athens, and nowhere else, and lasting for one day. According to the Aristotelian theory of tragedy, “plot, being an imitation of an action, must imitate one action” (2007: Part VIII), and although Aristotle does not state explicitly that the action must last for a single day, his expression that “[t]ragedy endeavors, as far as possible, to confine itself to a single revolution of the sun, or but slightly to exceed this limit...” (2007: Part V) are interpreted as an implication that the action should be completed in a single day. Moreover, the play is not divided into acts, and it is not too long just like an epic or too short. The action is complete in it, and the plot has a proper beginning, middle and an end just like a good tragedy in which Aristotle emphasizes, “[a] well constructed plot...must neither begin nor end at haphazard” (2007: Part VII). There should be unity in a play. Moreover, comic action proceeds in necessary and probable sequence, and no matter how it concerns itself with the Athenian issues, it speaks somehow of universal. In terms of these qualities, the

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play as a comedy seems to have common with the Aristotelian tragedy. However, in terms of content, characters and language, comedy draws contrast to the qualities of the Aristotelian tragedy. As detailed above, in the content of the play *Lysistrata*, the ridiculousness of the action in comedy runs counter to the seriousness of the action in tragedy. Besides, Aristotle favours tragedies ending with the protagonist's bitter suffering, which is "a destructive or painful action, such as death on the stage, bodily agony, wounds, and the like" to evoke pity and fear, but comedies end happily to evoke positive feelings with the solution of a funny problem in the play (2007: Part XI).

Another basic element is character in a play. In *Poetics*, Aristotle differentiates tragedy from comedy by stating that the former is about imitation of noble people while the latter concerns itself with "inferior" ones, the ordinary and lower-class people (2007: Part V). That is to say, instead of kings, Gods and many other royal class people in tragedy, comedy revolves around common people on the street. The title character in *Lysistrata* is the protagonist, an ordinary woman on the street, and not from a noble family. As speaking for herself and all women as a woman in ancient times, in fact, she can be claimed not to be much ordinary. Henderson claims that "there are no earlier examples of a female protagonist like Lysistrata...[even though she is not one of the] figures from mythology...or relatives of prominent men" (1987: 108). Her difference from the other women in the play is implied many times. For example, when she says to Calonice, who is a mature married woman in the play: "My heart's on fire, Calonice- I'm so angry / at married women, at us, because, / although men say we're devious characters..." (Aristophanes, 2007: 10-12), Calonice interrupts her and says: "Because by god we are!" (Aristophanes, 2007: 13). It is so obvious that Calonice is one of the women internalizing inferiority of women to men. Regarding the existence of this type of women today all over the world, even the character Calonice indicates the universality of the play. Thinking different from her, Lysistrata seems to be an extraordinary woman who does not accept the inferiority of women.

In *Poetics*, character is given the second place after plot in significance in a tragedy, as the purpose of tragedy by means of the purgation of negative feelings such as pity and fear is based on the protagonist's suffering resulting from his tragic mistake because of his tragic flaw.

Thus, character has an important place in tragedy. In contrast to tragedy, which aims by catharsis, comedy teaches and delights through laughter. Especially in ancient times when “it was not at first treated seriously” (2007: Part V), comedy was just for fun. Therefore, tragedy presents events including pity and fear to accomplish catharsis, as Aristotle argues “it must imitate actions fear and pity, since that is the distinctive function of this kind of imitation” (2007: Part VI). However, comedy is composed of humour and comic events to provide laughter for the audience.

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Character is the agent of all imitated actions. *Lysistrata*, who is the protagonist of the play *Lysistrata*, sets out to solve the problem she is disturbed with. She is wisdom enough to find a funny, but a reasonable solution to stop the war. Although she is implied to be single, not married, it is obvious that she is so aware of men’s weakness related to sexuality: she wants women to seduce their husbands with “the saffron dresses, ... perfume, sandals, rouge, and see-through robes” (Aristophanes, 2007: 46–48) and forbids the women to go to bed with them. For her, this will madden the men and they will feel forced to end the war and return home. Storey and his friend note: “Comic protagonists stand up as individuals against a situation that they find intolerable, find a brilliant and fantastic solution, and keep the comedy bubbling to the end of the drama” (2005: 175). In this sense, *Lysistrata* fits well with their description of protagonist. However, considering her ‘brilliant and fantastic solution,’ it can be claimed that *Lysistrata* disregards women’s possible sexual weakness while making use of the one of men. Some female characters seems as weak as men in terms of sexuality. This also results in comic scenes in the play:

LYSISTRATA. We must abstain from...

MYRRHINE. From what? Tell us.

LYSISTRATA. So you’ll do it?

MYRRHINE. We will, even if we must die.

LYSISTRATA. Well then, we must abstain from...sex.

MYRRHINE. I can't do that. Let the war continue. (Aristophanes, 2007: 122-127)

Obviously, Aristophanes characterises some women as addicted to sex for comic effect. At this point, that she struggles to persuade unwilling married women who make up excuses to go home to have sex with their husbands creates laughter. Woman A says: "... I've got bolts of Milesian cloth, and worms are eating them" (Aristophanes, 2007: 729), Woman B says "I've left my wretched flax back in my house unstrapped" (Aristophanes, 2007: 779), and Woman C puts a helmet under her dress and pretends to being pregnant, so wants Lysistrata to send her home to give birth to her child at home (Aristophanes, 2007: 780-785). Thus, it is clear that the other women are representatives of ordinary women on the street in accordance with the character description for comedy.

Thought, which is the third element in terms of significance for Aristotle, is "the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances" (2007: Part VI) and it is revealed through the speeches and actions of the characters in a play. Therefore, diction, which is "the modes of utterance" has a significant function in its revelation (2007: Part XIX). The ridiculous subject matter, ordinary characters and the colloquial language they speak are in a harmony in comedy. Tragedy, which is heroic and serious in subject matter, is based on high-class characters and thus written in high and dignified language "embellished with each kind of artistic ornaments" (Aristotle, 2007: Part VI). However, the vulgar and colloquial language of comedy contributes to the ridiculous action. Colloquial and obscene vocabulary in comedy evokes laughter as Storey and Allan note: "The bizarre and the incongruous naturally provoke a humorous reaction..." (2005: 177). For instance, the words such as "penis, sex, bitch, idiot, erection, prick" are just some of the obscene and colloquial words commonly used in *Lysistrata*. Even the chosen names of the characters are related to the subject matter and connote terms of sexuality. For instance, as noted by Proveti, 'Lysistrata' refers to "dissolver of armies". 'Myrrhine' is "a vulgar name for the female genitalia, something like "Miss Kitty" or another feline-derived term." 'Cinesias' is also "a vulgar name for sexual intercourse" (1).

In *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explains as one of the underlying reasons of the humour of Old Comedy with vulgar language which he calls "aischrologia" including both the obscene language and the abuse of people outside the drama - for which he uses the term, "komodoumenoi," referring to "those made fun of in comedy" (2015: Book IV- Part VIII). About this point, Storey and Allan claim that anyone watching Old Comedy for the first time is shocked by some jokes about real persons of the time, even about the ones sitting among the audience. These jokes, for Storey and Allan, can be "just a quick cut-and-thrust, barely disturbing the flow of the action..." (2005: 193). To illustrate, in *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes refers to the misogynist comedy writer of the period, Euripides in the comic squabble between two choruses in the play. Leader of Chorus of Old Men says: "These women, these enemies of / Euripides and all the gods, / Shall I do nothing to hinder their inordinate insolence?" (Aristophanes, 2007: 398-400), and he also adds: "Euripides is such a clever poet- / the man who says there's no wild animal / more shameless than a woman" (Aristophanes, 2007: 407-410). In his another play *The Clouds*, Socrates is ridiculed. Also, in *The Frogs*, composed after the deaths of both Euripides and Aeschylus, they are told to be debating who is the better poet. Storey and Allan state about this point that Aristophanes uses three main characters in his comedies. They are Kleon, Euripides, and Socrates. Storey and Allan note: "In the case of the first we do seem to have hostile satire...With the other two figures satire is less likely. What comes through again and again is Aristophanes' appreciation for and fascination with Euripides. He is well steeped in the works of this tragedian, alludes to and parodies him repeatedly..." (2005: 212).

In contrast the high level in tragedies, *Lysistrata* operates largely at a low level. The prologue is full of sexual innuendo For instance, Calonice "fondling Lampito's bosom" (Aristophanes, 2007: 89) says: "What an amazing pair of breasts you've got!" (Aristophanes, 2007: 90). Also, when explaining her plan to the women, Lysistrata says: "All right then-we have to give up all male penises" (Aristophanes, 2007: 133). The women debate about upon what they should swear to keep their promises; on a shield or a white horse. Then they decide on a bowl of wine. Lysistrata says the oath and the women holding the bowl repeat the words:

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LYSISTRATA. No man, no husband and no lover...

... will get near me with a stiff prick...

At home I'll live completely without sex...

...wearing saffron silks, with lots of make up...

...to make my man as horny as I can.

...

If I do all this, then I may drink this wine.

If I fail, may this glass fill with water. (Aristophanes, 2007: 210-230)

The words in the oath the women have on trivial, but supposedly serious matter create laughter in the reader and the audience. Another example is about the efforts of Cinesias to persuade his wife Myrrhine to have sex and Myrrhine's efforts to seduce him. She seduces him to a great extent and then leaves him at a crucial moment by making him wait with some trivial excuses such as bringing bed, pillow and blanket one by one and looking for a sexy cream, however dabbing another thing to smell badly. All these create laughter in the audience.

Low-level humour is produced by means of bodily functions besides colloquial language. For instance, Lysistrata behaves in a manner that cannot be expected from a citizen towards a magistrate of the city. She argues with Magistrate representing patriarchy in the Greek culture and authorities abusing the male citizens by sending them to war, but not by letting them making use of the money they have won in the war (Aristophanes, 2007: 555-559). She says: "...is it your belief that mere women have no spirit in them?" (Aristophanes, 2007: 524), because Magistrate does not believe even in the possibility that women can protect Acropolis by setting barricades against the Spartan soldiers. When Lysistrata says that they will stop "men hanging around the market place / armed with spears and acting up like fools" (Aristophanes, 2007: 553-554), Magistrate advocates heroism and patriotism of men by saying: "...it's what brave men should do" (Aristophanes, 2007: 558). It is obvious that he abuses such

values as patriotism and heroism. He is a misrepresentation of authority and leadership, as he cannot control his anger; he says to Lysistrata: "It's hard for me to hold back my temper" (Aristophanes, 2007: 580). It is clear that Aristophanes aims by means of humour at a political satire by mocking the politician in the play. As seen, comedy, as Aristotle points out, represents people worse than they are, rather than better than they are or as they ought to be in tragedy (2007: Part II). Lysistrata behaves as if she forgot that she were speaking to a magistrate and she addresses to him by saying: "You idiot!" (Aristophanes, 2007: 606). She "takes off her scarf and wraps it over the Magistrate's head" (Aristophanes, 2007: 525) and "throws some water over the Magistrate" (Aristophanes, 2007: 725). All these funny dialogues and farcical behaviours between a citizen and a magistrate are the sources of laughter, instead of a serious tension. From the beginning till the end, every detail in the play has comic effect. Here is the dialogue between Cineasis and A Spartan Herald, who is sent for the peace with Athens:

CINEASIS. [looking at the Herald's erection] Are you a man, or some phallic monster? (Aristophanes, 2007: 1144)

...

CINEASIS. ... What that thing there, sticking from your cloak? has your journey made your groin inflamed? (Aristophanes, 2007: 1151-52)

...

SPARTAN HERALD. It's a Spartan herald's stick. (Aristophanes, 2007: 1155)

That the Spartan herald disguises his erected penis under his cloak and says it to be a stick is a low-level humour.

Besides prologue, episode and exode, choric song is another element, which is essential for a tragedy according to Aristotle (2007: Part XII). He states: "The Chorus too should be regarded as one of the actors; it should be an integral part of the whole, and share in the action, in the manner not of Euripides but of Sophocles" (2007: Part XVIII).

Similarly, in Aristophanic comedies the chorus is included as a significant part, which, in some plays, contradicts the main characters and their main idea, in others, is main supporter for them (Storey, Allan, 2005: 176). There are seven men and four women plus five choruses acting in *Lysistrata*. The choruses are the groups of young women, old women and men, Athenian and Spartan men. These choruses, usually consisting of townspeople, are also characters in the play. Women choruses are sympathetic to the protagonist. For instance, they support her against Magistrate. The choruses also break the play into separate episodes, each of which is separated from one another by a choral song. The opposing choruses of men and women produce laughter in the play. For instance, while the chorus of old men are trying to climb the Acropolis, they are thrown water by the chorus of women. Lysistrata sends the old women of Athens to take the Acropolis as she believes that they will be useless in the sex strike. Ironically, the chorus of old women becomes more useful than the younger sex striking ladies. They both take the Acropolis and can defend it against the chorus of men. The action and relationship between the choruses are in parallel with the action of the story. Accordingly, when tensions between men and women increase, the choruses also fight. When peace is declared, the choruses come together, as well. Like Sparta and Athens, like Myrrhine and Cinesias, like the other men and women, the choruses also reach a harmony when the peace is declared. Thus, as a comedy, the play ends happily unlike a tragedy, which ends with sufferings and deaths.

In the play, beside the references to such Greek gods as "Zeus" (Aristophanes, 2007: 99), "Poseidon" (Aristophanes, 2007: 452), "Artemis" (Aristophanes, 2007: 449), "Eros" (Aristophanes, 2007: 645), "Aphrodite" (Aristophanes, 2007: 645), the personification of the goddess Reconciliation appears in the play. The naked goddess takes two Spartans by their penises, and Athenians to Lysistrata. Then, she makes a reconciliation speech between two groups. The groups, then, uses the body of the goddess to point the places they want. Considering the 'holy' mythological goddess in this position, it can be claimed that the respected and dignified mythological characters in tragedy is ridiculed as ordinary characters in unserious circumstances.

Song is another essential part of the play, which, for Aristotle, "holds the chief place among the embellishments" (2007: Part VI). As mentioned above, the episodes are separated by choral songs. The

chorus may tell about an unfolding action, personal abuse, or can have a lyric dialogue with an actor (Storey, Allan, 2005: 185-186). For instance, after the reconciliation in the city, two choruses become together and sing a lyric song, while people are dancing and drinking at the end of *Lysistrata*.

As mentioned by Corrigan in the introduction of his book, *Lysistrata* is a lyric poem in the form of a play (1987: 8). Especially in the choral interludes, it is clear that the iambic trimeter is used in this comedy. Aristotle also finds iambic most suitable to tragedy (2007: Part IV). Thus, it can be claimed that comedy shares with tragedy in terms of preferably using the iambic meter.

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CONCLUSION

Considering the principles of tragedy as a genre in *Poetics* by Aristotle, Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* seems to exemplify the genre of comedy which differs from tragedy in some aspects, even though both of them are written in dramatic form and imitation of action, and they represent a complete and whole action with magnitude and have the same constitutive elements in common. While tragedy represents the imitation of people of higher type; men as they ought to be and better than they are, comedy represents people of lower type, men as worse than they are. Thus, noble and serious action of tragedy is contrasted with ridiculous and humour in comedy, and the language draws parallelism with the subject matter; elevated and dignified language in accordance with the heroism and nobility in the former and colloquial language and obscene, slang words in accordance with low-level, farcical actions in the latter. Accordingly, although both of the genres aim at teaching and giving pleasure (but the earlier comedies were just for entertainment); tragedy arouses pity and fear and frees the audience or the reader from these emotions, whereas comedy evokes laughter and ridiculous.

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ÖZET

Komedi, Eski Yunan edebiyatının trajediden sonra ikinci en yaygın tiyatro türü olarak karşımıza çıksa da, trajediye kıyasla günümüze kadar hakkında elimize daha az bilgi ulaştığı için araştırılmaya değer bir türdür. Bu nedenle, bu çalışmada, öncelikle Eski Yunan edebiyatında komedi türünün gelişimi ile ilgili literatüre yer verilmiştir. Daha sonra, Aristotle'ın, *Şiir Sanatı (Poetics)* yapıtında komedi türüyle ilgili verdiği ayrıntılara değinilmiştir. Fakat, Aristotle, trajediyi en iyi tiyatro biçimi olarak gördüğü için yapıtında söz konusu türden daha çok bahsetmiştir. Bu çalışma, Aristotle'ın iyi bir trajedide olması gerektiğini düşündüğü ilkelere yer vererek Aristophanes'in kendi döneminde en iyi bilinen ve günümüze kadar ulaşarak Eski Komedi türünün bize en iyi örneğini olan *Lysistrata*'nın trajediyle paylaştığı ve trajediden ayrıldığı yönlerini açığa çıkarmıştır. Dolayısıyla, çalışma; *Lysistrata* oyununu inceleyerek sadece Eski Komedi'nin belirgin özelliklerini açığa çıkarmaz, aynı zamanda bir komedi türü örneği olarak bu oyunu Aristotle'ın gözünden trajedi türü özellikleriyle de kıyaslamış olur.

Aristotle'ın trajedide aradığı temel özellikleri göz önünde bulundurduğumuzda, Aristophanes'in *Lysistrata*'sı her ne kadar Aristotle'ın dilettiği gibi tamamlanmış bir eylemin temsili olarak dramatik formda bütünlük içinde yazılmış ve trajedi ile aynı tamamlayıcı öğeleri paylaşırsa da, bazı açılardan trajediden farklılık gösteren Eski Komedi örneğidir. Trajedi, üst sınıftaki insanları olması gerektiği gibi ve olduklarından daha da iyi gösterse de, komedi alt sınıftaki insanları olduğundan daha da kötü gösterir. Böylece, trajedinin soylu ve ciddi içeriği, komedinin absürt ve mizahi içeriğiyle ters düşmektedir. Ayrıca, türlerdeki diller de konularla uyum içindedir; trajedideki süslü ve saygın dil kahramanlıkla örtüşürken, komedideki samimi dil, hatta kullanılan açık saçık ve argo ifadeler, düşük seviyedeki absürt eylemlerle uyumludur. Buna göre, her iki tür de öğretme ve eğlendirme amacını gütsede - ki ilk komedi oyunları sadece eğlendirme amacıyla yazılmıştır- ikisi de bunu farklı yollarla gerçekleştirir; komedi; kahkaha ve komikle, trajedi ise seyircinin empati duygusuyla korku hissetmesine ve daha sonra bu duygulardan kendini rahatlatmasını sağlayarak. Sonuç olarak, Aristophanes'in günümüze ulaşan Eski Komedi türü örneği olarak *Lysistrata*, Aristotlesçi bir yaklaşımla değerlendirildiğinde, iyi bir trajedide bulunması gereken birçok özelliği içerse de, Aristotle'ın çok önemsemediği içerik, karakterler ve dili açısından trajediden ayrılmaktadır.