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HIST1011

Paper 1

What the Father of Comedy Said

During his time, Aristophanes was dubbed the Prince of Ancient Comedy. Through his satirical plays, Aristophanes delivered in ancient time what modern society now refers to as free speech. Although often comical, his satirical plays and observations of Greece’s politic, philosophy, and religion were much more convincing than any of his peers as he disregarded authorities. This analysis determined Aristophanes’ purposes and effectiveness of criticizing the political programs and the cultural developments by examining his satirical plays as evidence.

The analysis had two categories. The first category identified Aristophanes’ purpose and effectiveness in criticizing the political developments by examining his views on the Peloponnesian War from the play, “Lysistrata”. Subsequently, the second category identified his purpose and effectiveness in criticizing the cultural developments by examining his views on the rise of sophistry from the play, “The Clouds”.

In the first category, Aristophanes’ play, “Lysistrata”, mocked the political programs, specifically for its commitment to the Peloponnesian War. He mocked the programs because he had a disinclination for wars and wanted the states of Greece to make peace. This disinclination for wars and yearn for peace was evident by the characters from the play. The women of the play, yearning for peace, were willing to do anything to “rescue” Greece from going to war. They were willing to put on their “fancy little dresses, [their] perfumes and [their] slippers, [their] rouge and [their] see-through underwear” to tease and abstain their husbands from sexual intercourses. They were even willing to collude to a treaty among themselves in attempt to prevent their husbands from going to war and create peace.

Aristophanes’ criticisms of the political programs were effective. This conclusion was drawn under the assumption that his purpose of criticizing the war was because he despised wars and preferred peace as shown throughout, “Lysistrata”, which painted the war as foolish. This was evident by many serious discussions from the play that transitioned to something foolish. For example, when the women discussed about their lovers going to war and “vanish[ing] without a trace”, another character would render a serious conversation to something foolish by stating, “Ever since the Milesians revolted from us, I haven’t seen a six-inch dildo, which might have been a consolation, however small”.

In the second category, Aristophanes’ play, “The Clouds”, mocked the Greek’s cultural development, specifically the rise of sophistry. His purpose for mocking Sophistry was because he believed it was not proper education. Sophistry was depicted by Aristophanes as knowledge that was not practical and lacked tangibility necessary for work in the real world. This conclusion was drawn from the entire play when a father, Strepsiades, decided that the best way to dilute the family’s debt was to “beat” the creditors in court. To “beat” the creditors, Strepsiades inducted his son, Pheidippides, into the Thinkery to learn values of Sophistry. Ironically, after Pheidippides graduated, he did “beat” the creditors, literally and physically. Subsequently, he beat his father as well and before beating his mother, Strepsiades resorted to convincing his son to redirect his anger towards the Thinkery.

Aristophanes’ criticisms of the cultural development in Greece were effective. This conclusion was drawn under two assumptions. The first assumption was that his purpose of criticizing the Sophistry was because it was not proper education. The second assumption was that educational values like Sophistry was useless on the battlefields and the farmlands. This conclusion and the assumptions were evident by the exchange between Socrates and Strepsiades. Socrates initiated the exchange stating, “Damn your quarts, you stupid peasant. Let’s try rhythms, perhaps you’ll understand better”. Strepsiades replied, “I will if they’ll help me sell my corn.” The statement made by Strepsiades was a representation for many of the non-believers of Sophistry. The non-believers’ thought process was that if men read books all day then who would feed the family and who would win the wars?

Based on his plays, the analysis concluded that because Aristophanes was fearless of the authorities and was willing to say things that the majority want to say but couldn’t, his criticisms of the developments in Greece were often effective. This conclusion was true when he represented the timid housewives in “Lysistrata”. This conclusion was also true when he represented the non-believers of the Sophistry, the farmers, or the soldiers from “The Clouds”. This conclusion was even more true and effective when paired with facts from history through the falling of the Sophistry and the transfer of domination in Greece from Athens to Sparta.