

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Nottingham
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA 31
<b>Title of case study:</b> Bringing ancient Greek comedy into the public eye
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Alan Sommerstein's research on the comedies of Aristophanes, published in the form of authoritative translations, together with articles and book chapters on Aristophanes, have</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enabled large numbers of <b>readers</b> (including <b>new audiences with little prior knowledge of ancient drama</b>) to appreciate better both the comic and social/political aspects of the plays</li> <li>• helped <b>theatre directors and performers</b> to adapt the plays for productions which brought out for <b>audiences</b> how "accessible, funny and relevant" they could be</li> <li>• assisted the <b>National Theatre</b> to create a rounded presentation of Greek theatre for a wide-ranging <b>online audience</b></li> <li>• enabled <b>schools and colleges</b> to teach and study Aristophanes in versions that combine scholarship and approachability</li> <li>• increasingly informed the content of <b>university courses in Greek comedy</b> and enriched <b>students' learning experience</b>.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Prof. Alan Sommerstein's research on Aristophanes since 1993 (throughout which period he has been Professor of Greek at Nottingham) has been embodied (<i>inter alia</i>) in the studies referenced in section 3 below, which have offered numerous new insights on various aspects of all Aristophanes' eleven surviving comedies and in particular of the three plays – <i>Acharnians</i>, <i>Clouds</i> and <i>Lysistrata</i> – of which he had published translations in the Penguin Classics series in 1973. The key insights can be grouped as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater precision in <b>establishing the stage action</b> in many passages of the plays from the implications of the bare script (3a and 3g, with detailed stage directions inserted throughout the translations, and many discussions in the commentary to 3a; 3c, chapter 8, on the debate scene in <i>Clouds</i>; 3c, chapter 12, on undressing and re-dressing in <i>Lysistrata</i>; these publications between them cover seven of the eleven plays, the remainder having been dealt with in earlier work)</li> <li>• Definition of the <b>limits on comedy's freedom of speech</b> in Aristophanes' time, establishing through an analysis of types of utterance known to have been restrained by law (3d) and of ancient accounts of attempted prosecutions of Aristophanes or his producers (3e) that comedy was bound by the same legal constraints as all other forms of public speech, neither more nor less</li> <li>• Evidence and arguments supporting the much contested view that Aristophanic comedy reflects a definite (and distinctly "right-wing") <b>political orientation</b>, and identifying the main features of this orientation: opposing public pay for non-military activities, "malicious" prosecutions of the rich, and war against Sparta (but not other wars) (3c, chapters 10 and 11), and singling out for satirical attack those politicians who were perceived as cultivating the support of the poor, while sometimes referring favourably to their opponents (3b; also 3c, chapter 13)</li> <li>• Studies of <b>gender-related features</b> of the comedies, in detailed commentaries on the female-dominated plays <i>Thesmophoriazusae</i> and <i>Ecclesiazusae</i> (3a) and in articles on particular linguistic usages exclusive to women or to men (3c, chapter 1), on the use by women of nudity and obscenity as symbols of defiant assertiveness (3c, chapter 12), on the far from pacifistic attitudes of the celebrated <i>Lysistrata</i> (3c, chapter 11), and on the fantasy of a city ruled by women (3f).</li> </ul>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

**3. References to the research**

- (a) A.H. Sommerstein, *The Comedies of Aristophanes. Vols. 8-11: Thesmophoriazusaе, Frogs, Ecclesiiazusaе, Wealth* (editions with translation and commentary; Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2001) (available on request).
- (b) A.H. Sommerstein, "How to avoid being a *komodoumenos*" (journal article, 1996), *Classical Quarterly* (peer-reviewed journal) 46: 327-356 (available on request).
- (c) A.H. Sommerstein, *Talking about Laughter and Other Studies in Greek Comedy* (book; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) (14 collected papers, either new or updated, all but two originally published since 1993), especially chapters 1 ("The language of Athenian women", 1995), 8 ("The silence of Strepsiades and the *agon* of the first *Clouds*", 1997), 10 ("An alternative democracy and an alternative to democracy in Aristophanic comedy", 2005), 11 ("Lysistrata the warrior", new), 12 ("Nudity, obscenity, and power: modes of female assertiveness in Aristophanes", 2000), and 13 ("Kleophon and the restaging of *Frogs*", 1993) (available on request).
- (d) A.H. Sommerstein, "Harassing the satirist: the alleged attempts to prosecute Aristophanes" (book chapter, 2004), in I. Sluiter and R.M. Rosen ed. *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill) 145-174 (available on request).
- (e) A.H. Sommerstein, "Comedy and the unspeakable" (book chapter, 2004), in D.L. Cairns and R.A. Knox eds. *Law, Rhetoric and Comedy in Classical Athens: Studies Presented to Douglas M. MacDowell* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales) 205-222 (available on request); previously published in German as "Die Komödie und das 'Unsagbare'" in A. Ercolani ed. *Spoudaiogeloion* (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2002) 225-254.
- (f) A.H. Sommerstein, "*Nephelokokygia* and *Gynaikopolis*: Aristophanes' dream cities" (book chapter, 2005), in M.H. Hansen ed. *The Imaginary Polis* (Copenhagen: Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab) 73-99 (available on request).
- (g) A.H. Sommerstein, *Aristophanes: Lysistrata and Other Plays* (revised edition) (translation with introduction and endnotes; London: Penguin Books, 2002) (available on request).

*Evidence of research quality:* The Aris & Phillips volumes (a) have received favourable reviews in many journals; in particular, all four of them were reviewed (one, unusually, was reviewed twice) in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* (1995.02.21, 1997.07.28, 2000.11.17, 2002.02.27, 2002.08.43) and three in the *Classical Review* (45 [1995] 431-2; 50 [2000] 272-3; 52 [2002] 245-6), while in *Greece and Rome* 49 (2002) 242 Stephen Halliwell spoke of the series as "the best complete set of commentaries on Aristophanes in any language" whose "cumulative importance ... cannot now be doubted". *Talking about Laughter* (c) has likewise received favourable reviews in (for instance) *CR* 60 (2010) 357-9 and *BMCR* 2009.09.20; and (d, e, f) were favourably noted in reviews of the books in which they appeared – see, respectively, *BMCR* 2006.01.12; *BMCR* 2003.10.20 (on the 2002 publication of the paper in German); and *CR* 58 (2008) 184-6.

**4. Details of the impact****1. Bringing new audiences to Aristophanes through accessible translations**

The research described in (2) above was disseminated through a "revised edition" (actually, an almost complete rewrite) of the 1973 Penguin translation of *Acharnians*, *Clouds* and *Lysistrata* (3g). This work was designed especially to provide a closer translation which, together with the introduction and annotations, would incorporate advances in scholarship since 1973, including Prof. Sommerstein's own contributions, among them the ideas published previously or subsequently in (3b-f). In the five years 2008-2012 **this volume sold a total of 46,668 copies** across all parts of the English-speaking world and beyond (more than 85% of them outside the UK, including 3,646 in India: see 5.1). On the book recommendation site [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com), from 1.1.2008 to 16.7.2013, the 2002 Penguin has received an average rating of 3.81 out of 5 (5.2), and most of the comments indicate that both the **comic and political aspects of the plays have been successfully conveyed, often to readers who previously knew little or nothing about ancient drama**. For more advanced students, the Aris & Phillips editions of four other plays (3a), completing a series covering all Aristophanes' eleven surviving comedies, also provided a freshly constituted Greek text and detailed commentaries.

## **2. Helping directors, performers and audiences to “engage with history and the present day” through theatre productions**

The Penguin translations have been selected as the basis of numerous **theatre productions** (there were at least ten applications for permission to perform them between January 2008 and July 2013), most notably a production of *Lysistrata* at the University of Nottingham’s Lakeside Arts Centre Theatre in April 2013 to which Prof. Sommerstein acted as consultant, providing important background information to the director and offering “a useful sounding board [for his] initial explorations into the text and concepts for it” (5.3). The director had chosen Sommerstein’s translation from ten he had read because its “language was the **most accessible** to the modern actor and audience ... whilst all the time managing to stay **faithful to the spirit of Aristophanes**; ... its] sense of fun and play and incredible attention to period detail ... helped us to **engage with history and present day at the same time.**” (5.4)

The six performances drew an audience of 1,222 (over 50% above the expected numbers: 5.3) from across the East and West Midlands, and attracted significant media attention (e.g. from the *Nottingham Evening Post* and the *Guardian Online* education section: 5.5). Feedback from the many school and college teachers and students who attended was exceptionally enthusiastic: of 38 teachers who answered the question “How would you rate tonight’s theatre education experience?”, 36 replied “excellent” (5.6), and their detailed comments showed that (as the production team reported to the University afterwards) the production had “**proved ... that classical Greek drama most definitely could be accessible, very funny, and extremely relevant to audiences of today**” and truly “**fit[ted] well with Lakeside’s core aims of presenting access to excellence across the visual, performing and participatory arts**” (5.3).

In addition, Prof. Sommerstein recently **assisted the National Theatre (NT) to create a rounded presentation of Greek theatre for a wide-ranging online audience** by contributing, as one of three speakers, to a short film on ‘Greek Comedy and Satyr Drama’, published by the NT in March 2013 on its YouTube *Discover Theatre* channel (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-BvMbfkxcc>) and aimed especially at “students and teachers of English and Drama”. As of 16.7.2013, this video had been viewed 2,120 times by a wide audience of teachers, school children, theatre audiences, undergraduate students and lifelong learners, thereby fulfilling “the objective of the National Theatre to create content that is rich with information and available to all”. According to the NT’s digital content producer, “The contribution of Alan Sommerstein was invaluable... as his particular knowledge on Greek Comedy... illuminated that it was a vibrant, popular and important aspect of Greek Theatre despite the greater prestige given to Greek Tragedy. It was our objective to create a collection that presented Greek Theatre fully and thanks to Alan’s knowledge this objective was satisfactorily met” (5.7-8).

## **3. Contributing defining texts to curricula in Classics and Theatre Studies throughout the English-speaking world**

Both the Aris & Phillips editions and the 2002 Penguin translations are also now used as prescribed or recommended texts in several units of the OCR and AQA AS and A-level Classics syllabi: OCR AS Unit AH1, A2 Unit G3, & A2 Unit CC9 (cf. 5.9a); and AQA AS Unit 1 Civ 1 & A2 Unit 4 Civ 4: (cf. 5.9b). These texts give sixth-formers the opportunity of studying versions of the plays which are much **more accurate, and reflect more up-to-date scholarship**, than those previously in use (including the same translator’s 1973 Penguin), without sacrificing **intelligibility or approachability**. A teacher at Loughborough Grammar School wrote that the Aris & Phillips *Thesmophoriazusae* “proved invaluable for the students ... [and] brought the comedy alive” (5.10). They have also proved an inspiration to teachers and students of Drama and Theatre Studies, for which the Penguin translation of *Lysistrata* has since 2009/10 been designated as a set text within sections A and B of the “Theatre Text in Context” compulsory unit in the Edexcel A-level, A2 syllabus (5.9c). A teacher of Drama at Barking Abbey School wrote that this translation had helped students to “come up with some really excellent concepts about how they would realise their concept of the play” (5.10).

## Impact case study (REF3b)

In addition, the Aris & Phillips editions are now widely used as course texts in HEIs throughout the English-speaking world (as evidenced in 5.11 by statements and course descriptions from the UK, USA and New Zealand), and they often inform course content along with the key articles listed above (especially 3b) and with Sommerstein's *Greek Drama and Dramatists* (London: Routledge, 2002) in the role of a reference textbook. One course convener (Victoria University of Wellington) writes that "**it would be impossible to teach Aristophanes without Sommerstein**" and that in three different Greek literature courses "reading any works [of his] significantly influences the students' understanding of the plays they study". Another (University of Manchester) requires students, in preparation for a seminar on *Lysistrata*, to "look at one of the articles by Sommerstein listed in the bibliography and consider how [his] views may have changed/developed since [1990]". These details, together, reflect the degree to which Sommerstein's texts and translations have become the authoritative version of Aristophanes for educational purposes – the "gold standard" as a third course convener (Loyola University of Chicago) puts it – and is benefiting students and teachers alike through access to up-to-date scholarship.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

1. Penguin Books sales statements (available on file)
2. Vox pop reviews of Penguin translation: *Lysistrata and Other Plays by Aristophanes*, Goodreads, 2007-13 [viewed 16.07.13], available from <[http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1567.Lysistrata\\_and\\_Other\\_Plays](http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1567.Lysistrata_and_Other_Plays)> (also on file)
3. Grant feedback report by Director, Lakeside Arts Centre (available on file)
4. Factual statement from Director of *Lysistrata* production team, April 2013 (available on file)
5. Articles in *Nottingham Evening Post* and *Guardian* education section (available on file)
6. *Lysistrata*, evaluations from schools and colleges, June 2013 (available on file)
7. Factual statement from National Theatre filmmaker (available on file)
8. Factual statement from Digital Content Producer, National Theatre (available on file)
9. A-level (AS & A2) syllabi:
  - a) OCR Classics specification, *AS/A Level GCE Classics*, OCR, version 6 – January 2013, see pages 29, 30, 41 and 50 (document available on request)
  - b) AQA *GCE AS and A Level Specification, Classical Civilisation, AS exams 2009 onwards, A2 exams 2010 onwards*, AQA, 2007 (accessed 16.07.2013), available at <<http://filestore.aqa.org.uk/subjects/AQA-2020-W-SP.PDF>>, see pages 8 and 22 (also available on file)
  - c) Edexcel Drama and Theatre Studies (*Specification: GCE Drama and Theatre Studies*, Issue 5, Edexcel, 2010, see pages 47 and 84 (document available on request)
10. Dossier of testimonies from UK schools (available on file)
11. Dossier of testimonies, synopses and bibliographies from HEIs in UK, USA and New Zealand (available on file)