Marcus Lemke

Dr. Chip Rogers

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**Lysistrata and Medea: A Window into how Women Were Viewed in Ancient Greece**

Though vastly different, Lysistrata**,** a crude, **sexually** graphic comedy and Medea**,** a scandalous tragedy**,** **~~they~~** are both representations of life in ancient Greece. More specifically**,** they are solid views into the life of a woman in classical Greek times. Medea illustrates how quickly women can be **tossed** aside, how mistrusted they are, and low**ly** they are viewed. Lysistrata displays the gender bias and roles that women had **in** politics, and ultimately both Medea and Lysistrata provide a clear example of **the minimal rights women had in comparison to men.** In both Lysistrata and Medea, the women are depicted as good for very little, leading a primarily restricted life with no political rights, which was typical of Greece’s classical age.

Medea is a woman in ancient Athens who married the hero Jason. She sacrificed her homeland, her family and even her standing for and to be with Jason. However; Jason soon finds a way to increase his status and power by marrying into royalty. Jason**,** without any real adverse side effects or damage to himself**,** pushes Medea and her children to obtain this marriage. The nurse who is loyal to Medea provides these details by explaining**,** “Jason has betrayed them–his own children/and my lady for a royal bed” (22-23). Ultimately if Medea **fails to** punish Jason herself, there would be no consequence of casting Medea aside. The nurse continues**,** “Poor Medea, mournful and dishonored / shrieks at his broken oaths” (24-25). This casting aside to marry up was common in ancient Greece. The gender bias of a man leaving a woman for another woman was not exactly looked upon negatively. **Kofi** Ackah**,** in her article: **Euripides’ Medea and Jason: A Study in the Social Power of Love,** explains that “Medea speaks for all women in the patriarchal setting of Greek antiquity, when she laments: T10: For women, divorce is not respectable; to repel the man, impossible if a man grows tired of the company at home, he can go out and find a cure for tediousness. We wives are forced to look to one man only (236-246)” (37-38). She continues by stating “that by allocating or distributing power in an intimate relationship, patriarchal norms placed Jason in a position of power over Medea this includes relationship options favourable to him. In such a position, he was under no pressure to sustain his marriage by anything” (38). Simply stated**,** Jason could divorce Medea and his obligations to her and her children with no ill-will from society.

In Medea, it is depicted that women of the time earned their reputation and status by whom they married and not by their merit**.** **T**his **point** is clear when Medea laments:

First of all, we have to buy a husband.

Spend vast amounts of money, just to get

a master for our body - to add insult

to injury. And the stakes could not be higher:

will you get a decent husband, or a bad one?

If a woman leaves her husband, then she loses

her virtuous reputation (233-239).

There is an apparent gender disparity where women are depicted merely by whom the men are that surround them. When married**,** they are who their husbands are. When they are single, they are judged by whom their father is. Likewise for men**,** marrying is not always for love but to gain station in life. Jason leaves Medea and marries the princess not because he no longer love**s** Medea or because he **falls** in love with the princess**,** but because of who the princess’s father **is**, the king. He merely move**s** up in station as far as he **can** being with Medea. Jason says as much:

what more lucky windfall could I find

(exile that I was) than marrying

the king’s own child? It’s not that I despised

your bed the thought that irritates you most

nor was I mad with longing for a new bride,

or trying to compete with anyone

to win the prize for having the most children (567-573).

Women in ancient Greece were simply property or items for material **gain** and improvement **status**. Jason continues**,** “My motive was best: so we’d live well / and not be poor” (575-576). Medea sees right through Jason and knows full well that he is leaving her and marrying the princess to increase his prestige**:** “for an older man, a barbarian wife / was lacking in prestige” (616-616). **It was** commonplace in ancient times**,** especially in Greece**,** that men would barter with fathers and brothers for the hand of women to gain favor in life. Medea believes “My husband, who was everything to me” (229) truly lost everything **upon** losing Jason because for **women, everything they have, will have, and are is completely dependent on whom they are married to.**

However, **the one weapon women have** against men, and **women** are crazed when it is betrayed. **It is** more apparent in **Lysistrata,** where the entire topic is essentially sex**:** it is, however**,** mentioned in Medea. However, women are depicted as being most scornful when disloyalty leads into the bedroom in Medea. Medea mentions:

She’s worthless in battle

And flinches at the sight of steel. But when

she’s faced with an injustice in the bedroom,

there is no other mind more murderous (268-271)

Women are perceived to be sexual monsters during ancient Greek**,** times especially within these plays.

In Lysistrata, the women, are depicted more as sex-crazed people. Aristophanes wanted his women to need sex more so than the men. The play revolves around this scheme to get their men home, so they will no longer need to go without sex. The women even resort to the use of dildos in their men’s absence:

And since the Milesians deserted us

(Along with every scrap of lover here),

We’ve even lost those six-inch substitutes,

hose dinky dildos for emergencies. (107-110).

More so the women at the time were left with one piece of leverage, sex. Lysistrata knows that if they withhold sex from their husbands, they can obtain what they want, peace.

A lot, I promise you. If we

Sit in our quarters, powdered daintily

As good as nude in those imported slips,

And-just-slink by, with crotches nicely groomed,

The men will swell right up and want to boink,

But we won’t let them near us, we’ll refuse -

Trust me, they’ll make a treaty at a dash (148-154).

Though **it is** evident that women have no political leg to stand on to influence change, they are still depicted as promiscuous**,** manipulative beings. In fact**,** when Lysistrata presents the **withholding of** sex plan the women freak out and act **as thought it is** the worst idea ever. Even after declaring her willingness to die and walk through fire**,** Calonice gets upset: ANYTHING else for me. I’d walk through fire, / Bud do without a dick? Be Serious! / There’s nothing, Lysistrata, like a dick (133-135).

It does not get more explicit than that when discussing Aristophanes**’** theory that women are unrestrained in their desire for sex.

The men in Lysistrata make it clear that women are replaceable. In fact if not for Lysistrata convincing all the women not to allow the men to have sex with them, then the plan would not work at all. The men’s chorus leader provides this insight **by** explaining**,** “The adage says it all: that women are / Abomination indispensable. (1016). They have no political power or standing in society at the time. According to Mark Cartwright, author of **Women in Ancient Greece** “Women in the ancient Greek world had few rights in comparison to male citizens. Unable to vote, own land, or inherit, a woman’s place was in the home, and her purpose in life was the rearing of children. (1)” In fact, the women are so powerless to men that a valid fear in regards to their plan is the possibility of being raped. Calonice mentions, “Suppose they grab us, drag us into bed. / We’ll have no choice. (160-161). In comparison to the women, men have the power**,** especially politically.

Lysistrata and Medea are clear examples of how women were depicted in ancient Greece. Medea, a **B**arbarian wife, used up by Jason**,** no longer worth being married **to,** is left with nothing, not even a decent reputation**,** when her husband leaves her. Besides the womanly scorn handed out by Medea Jason effortlessly marries up. In **Lysistrata** sexual manipulation is the only chance women have at political change and peace. Mainly women are seen merely as good for very little and replaceable in the patriarchal society of classical Greece. Of course, the plays as most likely all of them were**,** written by men at the time. Women were seen as a means to sex, child-rearing and a path to increase status in life. Ultimately women were left with no political rights and undoubtedly limited leverage to change **the situation.**

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