

# Good essay on lit370

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



## **Women in Ancient Greece**

### OUTLINE

#### I. Introduction

Thesis: Plato's Symposium, Euripides' Medea and Lysias' Murder of Eratosthenes demonstrate that women had no place in Ancient Greek culture, other than to produce children and run a household.

#### II. Plato's Symposium

A. Pausanias begins his speech describing two types of love: heavenly and common. Common love is a physical type of love, something to be had between a man and a woman.

B. Aristophanes, a comedian, gave a speech about humans being split in two by Zeus and because of this we are always looking for our other half. Men who want women, and likewise, are natural adulterers. There are also women who seek other women. But the men who seek other men are the ones who will become statesmen. Men only wed when they must because of the law.

#### III. Medea

A. Medea, a play written by a man, shows a woman taking matters into her own hands when she is slighted by her husband. The problem with this is, Medea is a foreigner with no rights and that is the reason all of this, the exile and Jason leaving her, is possible.

B. Similar concepts of the speeches from Plato's Symposium slip into Euripides' writing when Jason is speaking to Medea. Jason believes if there were other ways for children to be created, without women, the world would be better off.

#### IV. The Murder of Eratosthenes

A. Euphiletus describes his wife, not in beauty, but instead in how she runs the household; adding that he only trusted her after a son had been born to them.

B. Even if a woman cheats on her husband, a lawsuit is brought upon the seducer, or the seducer can be killed by the husband if caught in the act; the husband is allowed to deal with his wife outside of the courts, if at all.

#### V. Conclusion

##### I. Introduction

Ancient Greece is a civilization best known for its liberal production of knowledge reflected via its literature. Some of the most influential Greek figures best known in the field of philosophy and reputed for their enduring literary influence include Lysias, Plato and Euripides. Whereas said Greek thinkers have become largely accounted for portraying the advancements made in Ancient Greece, their works are nonetheless nowhere near liberal works of art wherein there is an understanding that gender relations are treated in a rather balanced and impartial manner. In other words, women are not equal to men in Ancient Greece, where they are regarded as inferior. In brief, one could provide a prudent assertion that Ancient Greece, through the works written by Plato and Euripides and oration by Lysias, have treated women as second-class citizens. This study, via a close evaluation of the foregoing, asserts the premise noting that Plato's *Symposium*, Euripides' *Medea* and Lysias' *Murder of Eratosthenes* demonstrate that women had no place in Ancient Greek culture, other than to produce children and run a household.

## II. Plato's Symposium

Plato has presented Symposium as a dialogue on love, in what many would describe as part of the goings-on in his Academy situated in Athens. The entire dialogue refers to a dinner party held in the house of Agathon in praise of his prowess as a tragedian. During the dinner party, the different guests, Plato and Socrates included, reveled in discussing a topic that is of rather philosophical importance to them - love. Each of the guests at the dinner party relayed their perspectives on love, many of which are based on mythological assertions (Plato 5). Pausanias provided his perspective on love that serves a window to the general regard of Ancient Greece towards women – that of second-class citizens compared to men. Aristophanes shared a comic speech about how Zeus divided humans in half, entailing them to always look for their other half; men seeking for other men, he regards, are those who become statesmen, an implication that women do not grant the same benefit in any way.

Pausanias began discussing his perspective on love by discussing that it has two kinds – heavenly and common. Heavenly love, according to Pausanias, focuses on “ a noble purpose, and delights only in the intelligent nature of man” (Plato 6), which means to say that it prioritizes the acquisition of virtue by a young boy from his wise master, who in turn demands sexual gratification from him in exchange, in what is called “ a voluntary service to be rendered for the sake of virtue and wisdom” (Plato 7). For Pausanias, heavenly love is true love, which “ is akin to intellect and political activity” (Plato 19). Common love, on the other hand, is emphasized by Pausanias as “ a love of the body rather than the soul” (Plato 6), which he basically

deduces as one focused on physical pleasure than a yearning for intellectual virtue. According to Pausanias, common love “ is apt to be of women [] is of the body rather than of the soul — the most foolish beings are the objects of this love which desires only to gain an end, but never thinks of accomplishing the end nobly” (Plato 36). In asserting the foregoing, Pausanias expressly regarded women as persons devoid of intellect, compared to young boys who acquire intellectual virtue from their experience on heavenly love.

Aristophanes detailed his perspective on love by telling a story of Zeus splitting humans in half. Aristophanes described that “ the two parts of man, each desiring his other half []did not like to do anything apart; and when one of the halves died and the other survived, the survivor sought another mate” (Plato 44-45). From the given passage, Aristophanes adequately explained the adulterous nature of humans, noting that men, “ when they reach manhood they are lovers of youth, and are not naturally inclined to marry or beget children — if at all, they do so only in obedience to the law” (Plato 46). Thus, it is only by law when men enter into marriage, as they become statesmen when they seek other men for love, even though they are wedded to women. Women may seek other women as well, although that would not result to becoming statesmen. Therefore, Aristophanes emphasized that while humans seek love from one another, men who seek for men become imbued with wisdom and nobility, while the same does not befall for women, henceforth their implied inferior status (Plato 46).

### III. Euripides' Medea

Medea is a play written by Euripides about a woman named Medea, whose

marriage with Jason ended in disaster after he abandoned her and their children. Both Medea and Jason became prominent figures in Corinth, where they settled after having been refugees from a foreign land named Colchis (Euripides 1). However, the abandonment of Jason because of his pursuit of the daughter of Creon, the king of Corinth led Medea to plan for revenge against him. Lines 19 to 22 of the play notes the foregoing in the following wise: “ And Medea, in despair, rejected by her husband, / howls out " the oaths he swore" and calls upon the right hand, / a potent symbol of fidelity, and invokes the gods / to witness Jason's treatment of her” (Euripides 2). Clearly, Medea is trying to defying a prominent norm in the foregoing – that is, the inferior status of women like her to men like Jason. The fact that Medea was a refugee in Corinth also made her all the more disadvantaged when Jason left her and their children. From there, one could imagine that the intersection of gender and refugee status left Medea with no choice but to desire for revenge, as a matter of taking matters into her own hands, as he has lamented in lines 254 to 257 of the play: but, alone and without a city, I am abused / by my husband, carried off as plunder from a foreign land, / I have no mother, no brother, no relative / to offer me a safe haven from this disaster (Euripides 7).

The situation of Medea is indicative of the general experience of women in Ancient Greece, which is greatly characterized by their inferior status to men. Jason further emphasized on such an attestation, noting that the world would have been better off without women and that it would be for the best if children are brought to birth without the need for them to exist. Lines 572 to 574 of the play, spoken by Jason, attest to the foregoing: “ There should

be some other way / for men to produce children. Women would not have to exist at all. / And then humanity would be saved a lot of trouble” (Euripides 14). Such resembles key concepts found in the Symposium, where Plato laid out the male-centered dialogues of love articulated by the guests during a dinner party held in the house of Agathon – women as humans bereft of intellect and are only as good as objects of lust (Plato 36, 46).

#### IV. Lysias’ Murder of Eratosthenes

Lysias orated the Murder of Eratosthenes in light of the act of Euphiletus in murdering the seducer of his wife, Eratosthenes. In Ancient Greece, specifically in Athens, the household is an extremely integral part of society, wherein women are tasked as principal caretakers and guardians of the children therein. One could thus deem in that sense that women hold inferior status to men, as they are deemed good only in terms of keeping the household in place. In the case of Euphiletus, he described his wife not in terms of her physical appeal, but more in terms of her capability to operate the household, noting that his trust towards her was only borne out of the fact that he had a son with her. Given that wise, Euphiletus remarked the following: “ But when a child was born to me, thence-forward I began to trust her It is true that in the early days, Athenians, she was the most excellent of wives; she was a clever, frugal housekeeper, and kept everything in the nicest order” (Lysias 4-9). Whereas Euphiletus admitted that he is nowhere near as good as his wife in terms of being a good housekeeper, he strongly implied that her role is merely restricted to such.

The adultery committed by Eratosthenes justifies his eventual murder by Euphiletus, given that the law enables him to kill anyone who commits

adulterous deeds to his wife, particularly when caught in the act. In fact, such applies even if it is the wife herself who commits such adultery, but it is only because of the fact that her importance as a housekeeper is recognized in Athenian society. At best, an out-of-court settlement is allowed for Euphiletus in dealing with his wife on issues concerning adultery, particularly if she has a certain degree of culpability. Euphiletus remarked the following to Eratosthenes prior to the murder: “ It is not I who am going to kill you, but our city’s lawchoosing rather to commit this foul offense against my wife and my children than to obey the laws like a decent person” (Lysias 22-29). The fierce defense of Euphiletus towards his household is in keeping with the revered image of women as housekeepers in Athenian society, although their inferiority arises from the fact that it is only in that aspect where they are good at.

#### V. Conclusion

Symposium, Medea and Murder of Eratosthenes all provide sufficient accounts justifying the inferior status of women in Ancient Greece, where their worth is only considered in terms of taking care of children and running their households. Symposium provided connotations that women are merely objects of desire and, resultantly, necessary for procreation. Medea showed lamentations towards the need for women in procreation, stressing that it would have been better had there been other ways to have children other than pregnancy, which is a female-exclusive phenomenon. Murder of Eratosthenes emphasized the need to protect women only in terms of their roles as housekeepers and caretakers of children.



## **Works Cited**

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