

# Greek civilization essay samples

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



## **Literature as a socializing force**

Literature texts have been used throughout the centuries as a socializing tool. This is because it generally describes customs of the time which includes social behavior expectations. While today we have Internet and movies, there were times where these did not exist. The form of entertainment was solely through literature. The way it was exhibited was in the form of plays that the general public could participate. This was the case of the Greek Civilization. Literature of that time describes how everyday life was, how women and men behave and how different groups of society behaved.

Because of the large scale that these literature texts and plays reached, they were used to promote political or social ideas. It was not done during the Ancient Greek times but throughout the history. Many revolutions started through literature such as the French Revolution.

People who wrote plays and books did it because there was something deep and striking they wanted to say. It is always the case, and it was directed to the public as it has more strength and reaches a larger scope. In this way, literature can reinforce certain social customs, or challenge these. The Ancient Greek were living at a time where not all areas were civilized and belonging to the areas that were civilized gave them more power and social status. This theme is reflected in many literature texts. Also women and men had different rights. This particular theme is very strong in many literature texts. Descriptions of everyday life of women and men, emphasizing the injustices and different viewpoints. Through literature, people of that time were given a mirror of how they life was, and an alternative behavior of how

to react to them, in the cases where they were living in an oppressed way. A good example can be seen in the text from Euripides, *Medea* (431 BC). There are several outstanding themes. A very powerful theme is how women live entirely for their husbands, and they have no say in what their husbands do to them. They have little to say and a lot to hope for. Women have to do everything to please their husbands; they give their body and life to them almost as a slave. And then they must hope that their husbands are good enough. They cannot divorce as a woman is not well respected in society if she has divorced her husband. However, men can. *Medea's* husband Jason has left her for another woman. It is seen as correct to leave *Medea* and her children. It also shows how women want a good and faithful husband. For Jason on the other hand, there is nothing wrong with leaving her wife for another woman. Men are allowed to do that. He even thinks that he is doing her a favor as he has brought her out of a barbarian country to a more civilized one with laws. This one is another message beside the one about different gender roles. There is the message about belonging to the higher status of society by living in a more civilized country rather than to a barbarian one.

Euripides is not the only example of how a literature text can express support of social and cultural custom and at the same challenges these. Another example of a literature text that shows these social forces being expressed and challenged is a text from Aristophanes: *Lysistrata*. The same topics are being expressed.

Let us look into more details and explore these two texts and give examples of them to show more clearly how literature plays an important role as

socializing force.

The text of Aristophanes is about a group of women trying to stop a group of men from going to war. Women meet to try to stop them and bring peace to Athens. This text starts by placing the readers into the moment they were living. Women do not have time for anything else but their husbands and children. But mainly their husbands (10). The message it sends to women is that whether they realized or not, that is how they are living, not for them but their husbands. This message is very clear from the very beginning.

Another message that comes through this play is how women are not taken seriously by men because of their devious character. This topic about women's character is also present in Euripides (330). Men treat women as less than men, and one important reason is their character. Both plays show how women do terrible things. Euripides killed many people for his husband benefit (560) and the women in *Lysistrata* also behave in an acceptable way (10). However, both plays show more than clearly that women have reasons to behave like that. The reasons are that men are worse than them. In Euripides, his husband leaves her for another woman and abandons her without even accepting that it is wrong (570, 630). In *Lysistrata* what women are worried about is peace and men behave also horribly (480, 490).

*Lysistrata* also shows a very clear message about women just being at home playing with their jewelry and their makeup, at the service of the sexual needs of the husbands and that they are not useful for much more than that (50, 160). This message is linked directly to women's decision to do something about the war and how they can plot a plan to stop it and bring peace. It is giving the female public the idea that indeed women can change

something despite their situation of being there only for men. Women are strong; they can do something against men rather than being wives in total disposition of their husbands (150).

What this play is saying is that women have to get together, that together they can indeed be stronger than men. It is a very strong literature text, especially during the part when they confront men directly and use very aggressive languages. It is directly insinuating to women to rebel against men.

Euripides message is not as direct in terms of inspiring women to react against men, however it has a very strong message about women not being able to divorce and seen as very negative socially while men have their right to divorce. It shows how men do not have even the conscience that they do something bad. Even the king has no problem in Jason marrying his daughter and leaving another woman. This play is very explicit in showing the message about women having fewer rights than men. Also, that women are at the service of men, and men can dispose of them if they want. Women have to work to find a husband, and expect they got a good one.

In conclusion, we can say that literature texts play an important part in civilizations. They are very influential in forming and transforming entire societies. The two examples we have seen are based on the Greek Civilization 430 BC. They describe the society of the time, in particular of social groups, in these cases women vs. men and their expected behaviors. Euripides has the extra theme of belonging to a higher class by being able to live in a more civilized society (630). Both literature texts demonstrate how explicit messages about social expectations, potential revolutions or

potential alternative behaviors that those social groups could do to change the disliked way of living. Because both texts are done in the form of play, they are meant to be performed in public and thus they reach a large part of the population, and so the message can easily reach the people to make a difference.

This way of reaching the people aiming to change entire group behaviors has been done since the Greek throughout the whole history until now. IT still happens. Now it is in the form of literature that can be transformed into videos, websites, blogs, and of course books. But at the time when there were now internet and no movies they did it through literature and then performed in plays to the public.

### **Cited Work**

Euripides. *Medea*. Trans. Ian Johnston. Malaspina University-College, Nanaimo, British Columbia, 431 BC.

Aristophanes. *Lysistrata*. Trans. Ian Johnston. Malaspina University-College, Nanaimo, British Columbia.