

In The Trojan Women and Medea by Euripides and in Lysistrata by Aristophanes the harsh and debasing treatment of women is portrayed by the playwrights' use of the chorus's commentary. In all three plays, women are shown, in the conventional attitudes of the time, as beings made for the household and subordinate to men. In The Trojan Women, the captive women become hopeless slaves to the Achaean captors after the fall of Troy and in Medea, the husband appears as the dominant force in marital decisions in a play when Medea murders her children and the new wife of the adulterous Jason. Accordingly, Aristophanes shows that women are unfit to leave the protection and controlling hands of their husbands through Lysistrata whereas the women revolt against the men in a war of the sexes. In general, these three plays emphasize that Greek men are unjustly more important to society as women hold a lower stature.

In the first of the three Greek tragedies, The Trojan Women takes place in front of the sacked city of Troy, which has been defeated by the Achaeans and the husbandless Trojan women are waiting to be enslaved. The chorus in this play is composed of the Trojan women who uniformly despise the Greek captors and wish to return to Troy and their husbands. Euripides uses the chorus to reveal the horrible treatment of the fearful and hopeless women who have lost their city, their husbands, and their children, and are awaiting slavery to their enemies. For example, the leader of the chorus blatantly describes how "shuddering fear grips the hearts of the Trojan women within, who are bemoaning their slavery" (Euripides, The Trojan Women 260). Their hope is lost and their lives are lost; according to these women, they are being hurled into their worst nightmare. In addition, they have no idea who their new masters will be and where they will be taken. Discomfiting, the chorus laments, "At the gates a multitude of children

cling to their mothers' skirts, weeping and wailing. A young girl cries: 'Mother, ah me! The Achaeans are taking me away from you, away to the dark ship; over the sea the oars will carry me, either to sacred Salamis or to the peak at Isthmus'" (Euripides, The Trojan Women 281). These helpless women are left "blind" by the Achaeans, unable to see where they will conclude their sorrowful lives. However, they remain goodhearted and caring as is clear when the leader announces, "Look, here are your women bringing in their arms from the spoils of Troy, adornments to wrap the corpse in" (Euripides, The Trojan Women 284). As such passages show, women, in spite of their own troubles and sorrows, still have a caring and loving spirit for others even in times of war and trouble, a desirable quality to all human beings. Through the chorus, Euripides shows the audience that women are treated unfairly and harshly in a sense that they are more worthy than the unjust treatment given to them by men and more specific, their captors.

In another play by the same playwright, Euripides shows a similar relationship between men and women in Medea. The relationship is similar because women are still subordinate to the will of the men. In this play, Medea is a wife who suffers tremendous pain and sadness because of her adulterous, unintelligent husband, Jason. She is controlled by the selfish actions and desires of her husband and eventually kills her children as a result of the unbearable pain caused by Jason who has found another woman to wed. In contrast to The Trojan Women, where the chorus plays the character of the women of Troy, the chorus in Medea, also women, takes a sympathizing role, emphasizing the base treatment by her husband when he pursues another woman. The chorus tries to comfort Medea by stating: "If your husband worships a new bride, it is a common event; be not exasperated" (Euripides, Medea 193). The chorus offers advice to

try to dissuade Medea from inconceivably killing her children at the end of the play and also shows how women could have held little importance to men in Greece. If husbands normally found new brides, then the previous brides must not have had much significance, illustrating again the concept that women were lower in society than men. The chorus also reveals the women's feelings about men, bemoaning that "the hearts of men are treacherous; the sanctions of Heaven are undermined. The voice of time will change, and our glory will ring down the ages. Womankind will be honored. No longer will ill-sounding report attach to our sex" (Euripides, Medea 199). According to the chorus, women do not want to be second to men anymore but equally important and valued. Women do not want to be the unequal companion that is tossed aside when the man finds another like Jason did to Medea. Also, this passage shows Euripides telling the audience how he believes women should be treated. Instead of a world full of obedient, suffering women, Euripides wants a strong-willed female population and he uses the chorus to help introduce this idea. Again, women have been depicted as treated unfairly and unjustly in another play, adding more evidence to suggest maltreatment of women in Greek society.

Furthermore, in Lysistrata, Aristophanes creates a conflict between men and women in which the women are rebelling in order to coerce the men to stop the war. Contrary to their lowly status in Euripides' plays, women in this play show their power by refusing to have sex with their husbands until the war is over. However, this use of power surprises the men because of their low conception of women and their abilities. In response, the Koryphaos of Men refers to women as "mere women" and vows to "light a spark of justice under every woman who brewed this scheme" and to "burn them all"

(Aristophanes 37). Through such, Aristophanes reveals a bitter conflict between men and women and, in this, he shows that men view the women as lesser beings; they think that women are not sophisticated or perseverant enough to start a war against men. The Koryphaios of Men also says later that he has “never been confronted with such backtalk. Can’t allow it. Somebody pick up a log and pulverize that brass” (Aristophanes 42). The men are not accustomed to a revolt among women who normally obey and cause very little trouble at all. In addition, they are accustomed to using an alarming level of violence against women to quell their imperfections and rebellions. They normally use “a few sharp jabs” to “stop that jawing,” which implies that women were expected to follow whatever order the men gave at a single threat by their man or husband (Aristophanes 42). Further revealing the Greek man’s hostility towards women, the chorus advocates to “put every woman in her place – stick her in the stocks” (Aristophanes 67). Aristophanes uses the Koryphaios of Men, or the male chorus, here to show how men thought that women should be at home doing a woman’s chores. Aristophanes satirizes how basely women were treated by basically saying that their place was cooking food or washing clothes. However, later, Aristophanes also alludes to an old proverb that says, “Life with women is hell. Life without women is hell, too” (96). Ironically, although women were considered less than men, Aristophanes adds that they still held some power in society in the fact that they were women and therefore unique and special to men. Women could give men what men couldn’t give themselves, which gave them some leverage to stand on according to Aristophanes. Nevertheless, women were still subordinate to men and especially during times of war and suffering,

they were expected to support and aid men in battle instead of possibly participate themselves.

In conclusion, all three plays develop the idea that women are subordinate physically and socially to men through the use of the chorus. Euripides used the chorus in his two plays, The Trojan Women and Medea, to play the special character of the hopeless women and to deepen the morality of the women's treatment in the plot while Aristophanes used the chorus in Lysistrata to show the conflict between the two sexes and the war that developed between them. Both of the playwrights used a chorus of women to portray the defiling treatment of women to the effect that only a chorus of women could establish. Finally, both playwrights held similar views towards society and the maltreatment of women, and they both alluded to a necessity to change the way the social ladder was constructed.