

**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST**

**REFLECTIONS OF FEMINISM IN THE PLAYS OF EURIPIDES AND  
ARISTOPHANES**

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**2013.**

**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST**

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AND ARISTOPHANES**

**BY**

**STELLA ANTWIWAA**

**Thesis submitted to the Department of Classics and Philosophy of the  
Faculty of Arts, University of Cape Coast in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for award of Master of Philosophy Degree in Classics.**

**MAY, 2013.**

## **DECLARATION**

### **Candidate's Declaration**

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this University or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature: .....

Date: .....

Name: Stella Antwiwaa

### **Supervisors' Declaration**

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

Principal Supervisor's Signature: .....

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## **ABSTRACT**

The works of Aristophanes have caused some modern writers to refer to Euripides as a misogynist and, at the same time, Aristophanes has not been taken seriously when it comes to the presentation of women in a misogynistic or feministic perspective because he is a comic writer. Due to this, scholars have refused to put these two writers on the same platform to see the underlining intentions of their presentations. Even though Aristophanes' works are comedies and every depiction cannot be taken as factual, his presentation of women cannot be ignored since, in fact, the laughter is directed quite as much against women themselves as it is against Euripides and also because his work has a basis on societal happenings of his time.

This work used feminism as a modern concept to analyze Euripides' and Aristophanes' presentation of women. The main emphasis is on the primary aim of feminism in the classical Greek context – to point out features of inequalities, disadvantages and marginalization among the genders. This is because during the classical period, the concept of feminism as an advocacy was apparently non-existent; however, due to some characteristics in their writings, the concept of feminism is used as a pillar in analyzing their works. Also, even though literature books are used, literary devices are discussed only when their relevance is important to the discussion of the work.

Firstly, the work analyzed the poets' presentation of female characters, revealing whether they gave feministic or otherwise

interpretation to the characters. Secondly, from a feminist perspective, the work analysed the speeches made by the characters. Thus, the main aim of this research is to bring out the feminist projections in Euripidean and Aristophanic literature. It concludes by showing that the poets' plays contained elements of feminism. Euripides can be called a feminist but Aristophanes cannot due to his mockery of women.

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## **DEDICATION**

*This work is dedicated to my parents for their unconditional love and support, and to my beloved son, Henry Nana Bayin Antwi.*



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background to the study**

Literature deals with linguistic works of art, which may exist orally or in written form, but invariably existed orally long before they were written down. Greek literature began in the Mycenaean period as stories told aloud. When Greece became literate by the eighth century, some of these stories or legends were reduced to writing. The first of these to be published, dating to the period between 750 and 720 B.C., were the exciting poetry of Homer, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*. The *Iliad* celebrates the heroic defeat of the Greek speaking Trojans in the thirteenth century by a coalition of Mycenaean forces. The *Odyssey*, on the other hand, recounts the heroic adventure of Odysseus' ten year return home from Troy. The *Theogony* and *Works and Days* show how the universe and the things in it came into being, and how justice was the proper guide for life in business and farming, respectively (Ackah, 2004).

Greek literary innovations in drama were produced in Athens in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. This began with Thespis who is credited with the introduction of oral passages from an actor to complement the lyric utterances of the chorus, followed by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes. Literary pieces started on a misogynist bend with Hesiod in the Archaic age but during the classical period, its increase was immense; and in drama, the most critical writers who wrote on women in praise or blame were Euripides and Aristophanes. Aristophanes, in his *Thesmoporiazusae* is known to have criticized Euripides and referred to him as a hater of women because the latter presents women in a negative and destructive perspective. But writers, like Jennifer March (1990), have refuted that assumption and have presented Euripides to have supported women, and therefore have called him a feminist while Aristophanes has been referred to as a hater of women (misogynist) (Redmond WA; Microsoft 2009). But, is Aristophanes really a misogynist because he criticizes Euripides for his (Euripides) presentation of women? And is Euripides a feminist because modern writers have found reasons to believe so? These questions and other related matters shall be addressed in the study. It is against such background that the Greek dramatic plays of Euripides and Aristophanes shall be analyzed from a feminist perspective, looking at their presentation of women.

Throughout much of the history of Western civilization, some cultural beliefs and practices allowed women only limited roles in society. Many people believed that women's natural roles were as mothers and wives. These people considered women to be better suited for childbearing

and home keeping rather than for involvement in the public life of business or politics. Until the 18<sup>th</sup> Century AD, the denial of equal rights to women met with only occasional protest and drew little attention from most people, because most women lacked the educational and economic resources that would enable them to challenge the prevailing social order, women generally accepted their perceived natural status as their only option.

Organized efforts by women in modern society to achieve greater rights occurred during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century AD when some feminist movements were formed. The term 'feminism' tends to be used for the women's movement which began in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. and continued to campaign for complete political, social and economic equality between women and men (Mitchell & Oakley (eds.), 1986:15; 30). The word 'feminism' originated from the French word 'féminisme' in the nineteenth century, either as a medical term to describe the feminization of a male body, or to describe females with masculine traits (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004:48). When it was used in the United States, it was only used to refer to one group of women: the group which asserted the uniqueness of women, the mystical experience of motherhood and women's special purity. Since then the term has taken on the sense of one who believes that women are subjugated because of their sex and that women deserve at least formal equality in the eyes of the law (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004). In the end of the mid-1800s the term "feminism" was used to refer to "the qualities of females," and it was not until after the First International Women's Conference in Paris in 1892 that the term was used regularly for

a belief in and advocacy of equal rights for women based on the idea of the equality of the sexes (Mitchell & Oakley (eds.), 1986:15). During this period, the terms femaleness, feminine or femininity became crucial. 'Femaleness' denoted the qualities (as a form, physiology or behavior) that distinguish an animal that produces large, usually immobile gametes from one that produces spermatozoa or spermatozoids. Here, it is a matter of biology that differentiates a male from a female. 'Femininity' or feminine refers to attributes associated with life-giving and nurturing qualities of elegance, gentleness, motherhood, birth, intuition, creativity and biological life-cycle or it is a set of culturally defined characteristics (Evans, 1994).

In some parts of Africa, 'feminism' means a fight against female genital mutilation. In the middle ages, it would have meant a fight for witches' right to live; a hundred years ago, in the Western world, it meant a fight for women's right to hold property, to divorce, to vote, and to be recognized as adult legal subjects (Meghan 2000). In the Western world today, it means a fight against tacit and institutionalized collectivist and misogynist belief derived from gender roles and other sex based prejudices (Mitchell & Oakley (eds.), 1985:10). The common thread running through these different periods and places is captured by the idea that it involves a theory about and a commitment to men and women being equals in all spheres of life; equals in standing, possibilities, freedom and range of choice.

Defining feminism can be challenging but a broad understanding of it includes the acting, speaking, writing, advocating and defending women's issues and rights, and identifying injustices to females in the

society. It is a general term covering a range of ideologies and theories whereby some people pay special attention to women's rights and women's position in culture and society. It could also be defined as "the belief that women are oppressed or disadvantaged by comparison with men, and that their oppression is, in some way, illegitimate or unjustified (Kemp & Squires (eds.), 1997). Thus, feminism is an umbrella term for a range of views about women's rights and injustices against them. Some writers use the term "feminism" to refer to a historically specific political movement in the United States and Europe; other writers use it to refer to the belief that there are injustices against women though there is no consensus on exact list of these injustices. Feminism could further be defined as both an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks equality and justice for women and to end all forms of sexism. It could also be defined as the belief that women and men are and have been treated differently by our society and that women have frequently and systematically been unable to participate fully in all social arenas and institutions and a desire to change that situation (Kemp & Squires (eds.), 1997:23).

A feminist, however, is someone who sees the gender system currently in operation in our culture and other cultures as structured by a basic opposition – masculine or feminine – in which one term, masculine, is always privileged over the other term, and that this privilege has had a direct effect of enabling men to occupy positions of social power more often than women, and thinks this is wrong and should be changed and thus strives to help the situation improve (Jackson & Scott (eds.), 1996). A

feminist, thus, is a person who shares a common view that women's position in society is unequal to that of men and that society is structured in such a way as to benefit men to the detriment of women in social, political and economic matters (Mitchell & Oakley (eds.), 1985). Feminists are committed to bringing about social change to end injustices against women. They are not simply those who are committed in principle to justice for women; they take themselves to have reasons to bring about social change on women's behalf (Kelly Weisberg, 2007).

There are many theories of feminism and they include liberal, radical, socialist, Marxist, existentialist feminism among others.

Liberal feminists believe that the main cause of female subordination is a set of informal rules and formal laws that blocks women's entrance and success in the public world. Women cannot reach their potential when excluded from places like the academy and forum. Liberal feminism seeks individualistic equality of men and women through political and legal reforms without altering the structure of society. Liberal feminists see prostitution as an inherent political right (Bacopoulou-Halls, 2006). Pateman (1995:202) shows that a prostitute is not a wage laborer but rather an independent contractor who has it within her means to start or stop a transaction.

Radical feminists claim that the primary causes of women's subordination are women's sexual and reproductive roles and responsibilities. They consider the male-controlled capitalist hierarchy as the defining feature of women's oppression and the total uprooting and reconstruction of society necessary (Rogers 1998). Radical feminists



demand an end to all systems and structures that in any way restrict women's sexual preference and procreative choices like the right to have or not to have children and to love or not to love men. The radical feminist believes that a prostitute does not act out of free choice but is a victim of coercion in both its most subtle and direct forms (Pateman 1995). Because oppression is so entrenched in people's thinking, changes in the structuring of society alone are not sufficient to overcome it. The attitude of men must change and a state of equality must manifest in the power dynamic between men and women.

Marxist feminism arose out of the doctrines of Karl Marx. The Marxist feminists base their arguments of moral right and wrong in reference to the corruption of wage labor that is in it an expression of class distinctions (Weil 1955:61). Marxists are opposed to any social and political action that perpetuates the enslavement and oppression of members of the workplace. The only effective way to end women's subordination to men is to replace the capitalist system with a socialist system in which both women and men are paid fair wages for their work. Women must be men's economic as well as educational and political equals before they can be as powerful as men. The Marxist believes that prostitution represents a corruption of wage labour and it is therefore degradation and oppression.

Socialist feminists see oppression as having psychological and social roots (Tong 1989:211). Social feminism connects oppression of women to exploitation, oppression and labour just like Marxist feminism. They share a genuine concern for women that transcends politics; their

focus is on people, not profits. To the socialist, a prostitute is a victim of corruption of a society which accompanies class distinction (Tong 1989: 192). The oppression of class in a materialistic society degrades people by categorizing them in a particular class and objecting them so that they are merely parts of a mechanism that can be replaced by other parts of the same description.

Existentialist feminism is derived from the school of thought of Simone de Beauvoir. In her worldview, a woman is not always powerless and does not always need to be dependent in a male-female relationship (Evans 1994). In the existentialist view, the power of a competent woman over a man is not an illusion. A man may think he is in charge of a situation by virtue of his power to degrade and subdue a woman, but with a woman of competence and spirit, this power is not incontrovertible (Fricker & Hornsby 2000). To Pateman (1995:201), a prostitute is not a fallen and oppressed victim, rather a “quintessential liberal woman”. She believes that women are oppressed by an inequality between the sexes and that there is an escape by economic means.

It is noteworthy that my specific topic for research is situated in an era when gender issues on women are not as they pertain today and the sources of information on women were mainly male-authored or male-crafted legal, historical and dramatic literature, and when these feminist ideas were not so much the fundamental concerns of the people. Nevertheless, I hope to establish that although feminist ideas and activist movements prevalent in our era were not the concerns of the ancient authors, there were reflections of feminism in some of the works of

Euripides and Aristophanes, though the authors did not present their ideas as modern advocates of the concept would do.

Euripides and Aristophanes are chosen among all the dramatists because, firstly, Aeschylus does not give much attention to women in his plays, though there are glimpses of the issue in some of them. His surviving plays that featured women; the *Suppliant* and *Agamemnon* for instance, presented women as weak and helpless who were always at the receiving end, unlike Euripides' women who were in total control of affairs. Clytemnestra, who was presented as a strong-willed woman, could not pursue her revenge alone but needed the help of Aegisthus. Also, Cassandra, who was able to know the future was presented as a helpless woman and could not defend herself against her death because of Apollo's pronouncement. Aeschylus does not create his women to be the protagonists and they do not claim challenging roles.

In the same way, Sophocles did not concentrate much on women in his writings; his concentration was mostly political, the interference of the gods or some other issue. It is generally assumed (Watling, 1987 and Redmond, 2008) that, Sophocles' two surviving plays on women; *Electra* and *Antigone*, did not show the attitudes of angry and desperate women but rather weak women. In *Antigone*, for instance, the play owes much of its significance to the conflict between the individual conscience and the decrees of the state, a bit of a philosophical incline reflecting the conflict between *physis* and *nomos*. Antigone disappears from the action early and most critical opinion tends to consider Creon as important to the play as Antigone. In *Electra*, the vital issue that appears is whether matricide can

ever be justified. Even though Electra and Antigone flout the orders of society and law, Sophocles presents them as good women and does not show their impulsive actions and reflection of emotions like anger and hatred, especially their vulgarness in desperate situations. Thus, Sophocles presents his characters mostly in situations where things go right but not situations where things turn sour whereas Euripides brings both on board.

On the other hand, Euripides, among Sophocles and Aeschylus, is the only tragic poet who has written many plays on women, putting them on top of affairs (mostly the protagonists). Out of his eighteen surviving plays, Euripides has about ten of them on women, both Greek and foreign. His women who are also at the receiving end are presented as strong-willed, and he reveals the trauma and trouble they go through during battles, especially in the Trojan War, in which few or none of the writers of the period concentrated on. Secondly, Euripides is chosen because among the three tragedians, he presents the most subtle analysis of human psychology, and that is why Sophocles is quoted as saying that he portrays people as they ought to be, whereas Euripides portrays them as they are (Redmond, 2009). Euripides takes his plots from the same general source as the other Greek dramatists (myths and legends), but he interprets and modifies the traditional legends so that the heroic figures lose their heroic quality and are driven mostly by violent emotions which make the audience neither able to sympathize with them nor admire them (Geer, 1973:282).

Also, Euripides often shows people of lower status in ancient Greece – women, peasants and slaves as able to rise above the ordinary in

courage, loyalty and self-sacrifice, which makes him present people in a realistic fashion (Geer, 1973:283). Lastly, the tragic dramatists had different views on the cause of suffering and disasters. For Aeschylus, it was divine punishment for sin, for Sophocles, it laid in the conjunction and clash of human pride and stubbornness with absolute mischance, which was allowed rather than ordered by the gods. But in Euripides, the cause was human nature. Our own lives and those of others are wrecked by ignorance and foolishness, uncontrolled passions and emotions, greed, ambition and cruelty. Even though the gods and goddesses are always there in his plays or in the background, they do not cause the disaster, neither do they prevent it (Geer, 1973). Thus, Euripides makes us the cause of our success or failure.

Aristophanes is selected because of his reactionary and conservative nature. He finds a ready target in the politicians, poets and philosophers of his day. Secondly, he presents women in some of his works and is known for criticizing Euripides about his presentation of women as naturally violent and destructive in his plays. Even though Aristophanes' works are comedies, his presentation of women cannot be ignored since, in fact, the laughter is directed quite as much against women themselves as it is against Euripides, and also because his work has a basis on societal happenings during his time. Aristophanes suggests that the women deserve Euripides' slanders that they are, in fact, angry simply because he has exposed truths that they would rather have kept concealed. It can also be said that Euripides' choice of plots and characters has been quite enough to raise in Aristophanes' mind the comic idea of

Aeschylus' condemnation in the *Frogs* and of the women's rage in the *Thesmophoriazusaie*.

Since the presentation of women in classical literature had its basis on the status and position of women in society, it is important to note the roles and status women occupied in society. There were three classes of women in ancient Greece – the wives, concubines and the *hetaerae* (prostitutes) – and their work, status and freedom eminently depended on the class they occupied (Dickinson, 1962:155). Wives were people who produced and cared for legitimate children and heirs. They were considered respectable women and their position was to stay at home and manage the house. They were confined to their homes and were expected to stay out of sight if the husband invited guests to their home. The wife was in charge of raising the children and making the family clothes. She supervised the daily running of the household. In rich families, plentiful numbers of female slaves were available to cook, clean and carry water from the fountain and do other household activities. Only in the poorest homes was the wife expected to do these duties by herself. They were not allowed to go anywhere except for religious ceremonies (Seltman, 1955).

The *hetaerae* class was the women who offered more than just a warm body and they were a lot more educated than the other classes. Some could sing or play a musical instrument and others were talented, knowledgeable conversationalists. The Symposium was a gathering of men for eating, drinking and especially conversation, and *hetaerae* were often as important an ingredient in the success of such an occasion as was the food and drink. They were hired for their ability to entertain

intellectually and their charges reflected these talents, not their physical attraction. Some *hetaerae* were so successful that they owned their own homes and entertained guests there as they pleased. In other words, they were companions to men, only if men paid an expensive price (Gomme, 1925). They met the men at parties or festivals and they moved freely throughout society, with basically no rules restricting them. Thus, they did not lead a sheltered, restricted life. Prostitutes were maintained by men, or worked in brothels and on the streets. The *hetaerae* were not only men's sexual companions but also their social and intellectual companions. Sometimes these women developed monogamous relationships with men, but their children were classified as illegitimate and had no rights. They were also obviously trained and skilled in the art of pleasing men. The most famous *hetaera* was Aspasia who was born in Miletus, graduated to being a controller of other *hetaerae* and finally became a mistress of Pericles (Lacey, 1968).

At the bottom were the concubines. Most of them were slaves, widows and poor women or girls that were left out to die by their parents when they were babies. They generally had a fairly miserable existence. Between customers it seems that many were expected to spin and weave to provide additional revenue for the brothel's owner. Concubines were women in a reasonably permanent relationship with one man; however, they were considered prostitutes (Cary & Haarhoff, 1961). Women slaves, usually the result of the spoils of a foreign war, worked in private households as maids, nurses, cooks, or in industries such as cloth making. Sometimes a favourite prostitute (if she were a slave) might be purchased

by a wealthy client and set up as his concubine, as in the case of Neaera, a prostitute in Corinth who had been bought by two young men. Mostly, prostitutes had no rights and were at the mercy of their master or mistress (Lacey, 1968).

Females were less valued than men and they received the feminine forms of names given to boys (Blundell, 1995). In their upbringing also, girls were treated less generously than boys. They received no formal education and they stayed at home with their mothers, learning how to perform household tasks like spinning, cleaning, cooking, and weaving. Girls from rich families sometimes learnt simple facts from mythology, religion and occasionally musical instruments. They had fewer opportunities for socializing with members of their own sex than did boys, who, in addition to school, also went to the gymnasium and to athletics and festivals. As girls neared puberty, segregation would have become a concern; however, surveillance of girls of the lower classes may have been less strict since they would have to take care of domestic affairs themselves without even the accompaniment of a slave (Blundell, 1995).

A Greek woman was controlled all her life; if unmarried she was in the *kyrieia* (protection) of her father, brother by the same father, or her paternal grandfather and by her husband after she was married, or her male adult son if her husband was dead. A Greek woman was conceived to be inferior to men and was regarded as a means and not as an end and therefore was treated in this manner (Kitto, 1965:79). A woman, whatever her status as daughter, sister, wife or mother, and whatever her age or social class, is in law a perpetual minor, and throughout her life she was in



the legal control of a male *kyrios* (master) who represented her in law (Cohen, 1955:3). Women could not go out except they were attended by slaves and unless they were attending the *Thesmophoria*. Xenophon puts it more bluntly through Ischomachus: “so it is seemly for a woman to remain at home and not to be out of doors” (*Oeconomicus*, 7.30); and according to Plato (*Laws* 781c), women are a race “accustomed to underground and shadowy existence.”

Not only were women treated as minors, they were also secluded from most public spheres. Women were not allowed to watch the Olympian Games or participate in it. Chariot racing was the only game women could join. The *Thesmophoria* and *Haloa* were significant religious events that women were expected to attend (Seltman, 1955:199). There were cults to which women might belong and it was possible to socialize on occasion with other women, but women and men, however, did not socialize together – at least, respectable women and men did not. The market place was apparently included in the public locations deemed unsuitable for respected females, for it seems to have been common for husbands or slave girls to do the shopping. The Symposium, the party where men drank and talked with friends, was not an event for citizen women, although mistresses and female entertainers might attend and prostitutes as well. For a woman of the lower class, complete confinement to the home was impossible. Where there were no slaves, the woman had a lot more freedom but a lot more work to do because she would clean, carry water, cook and work in the fields. In a democratic society, Aristotle asks, “who could prevent the wives of the poor from going out when they

want to?” (*Politics*, 1300a) Lower class women also worked outside their homes and some were employed as grape-pickers, market-sales women and ribbon sellers (Cary & Haarhoff, 1961).

Girls in Athens were normally married soon after puberty between fourteen and sixteen years to men who were typically in their late twenties or early thirties. Society demanded that fathers choose husbands for their daughters – for most Athenians marriage was basically living together. It was regarded as a slight on his excellence if he refused to do so (Schmitt Pantel (ed.), 1992). Love and affection played little or no part in Greek marriages and citizenship and wealth were important considerations. It was difficult for a woman to divorce her husband even though women had as much right to divorce their husbands as their husbands had to divorce them. Most divorces in ancient Greece were by the husband. If he chose to divorce her he would reject her in front of witnesses or merely send her back to her family home. After divorce, the dowry would be returned and the children (if any) would remain with the father. Women would lose all rights to their children. If, however, the woman had committed adultery the husband did not have to return the dowry. For a woman to divorce her husband she would have to endeavor to find an archon (Athenian official) and provide good reasons for a divorce to be granted (Cohn-Haft, 1995).

Athenian women could not own property in their own right. If they were married, complete control over their property went to their husband or male sons if their husbands had died. If they divorced, control and rights over any property went back to their father or nearest male relative (Seltman, 1995:120). Athenian law tried to ensure that women could not

easily accumulate large estates. It would not allow a woman to participate in a business transaction involving anything whose value exceeded a sum of money roughly equivalent to that needed to feed a family for five or six days, which would be enough to account for petty trading activities such as selling vegetables and ribbons (Blundell, 1995).

Daughters were excluded from inheritance. If a man had a son, either natural or adopted, then he inherited his property. If a man had no sons but did have a daughter, then the property and the *oikos* were transmitted via the daughter to his grandsons. Thus, a man's *oikos* could be perpetuated through a daughter. Such a woman is called an *epikleros*. According to Sue Blundell, (1995) the word *epikleros* literally means "with the property" and not "heiress" as translated by many writers. An unmarried *epikleros* could be passed along with the property to the next of kin in order of succession. If the *epikleros* were already married, a willing candidate could force her to divorce and marry him, and a claimant who was already married would have to divorce his first wife in order to marry the *epikleros* and inherit the estate. It should be noted that an *epikleros*' husband kept the estate and enjoyed its income only until her son reached maturity, at which time the estate is passed to him. An *epikleros* could be a great asset to her husband but it is clear that her true function was to supply her deceased father's *oikos* (household) with an heir and thus ensure its continued existence (Lacey, 1968).

Women had very few rights, let alone legal and political rights. They had no rights to vote or take part in the operation of the state. Thus,

they were not allowed in the *Ecclesia* (assembly), did not take part in decision making and had no voting rights. Women did not take active part in courts. It was only men who could provide evidence, prosecute or defend in the law courts. Even when women had cases in courts, it was the male guardians or husbands who were responsible for all cases or defend the women. It was only in arbitration that women could defend themselves (Cohen, 1955).

It must be noted categorically that the above presentation on the position and status of women applied mostly to Athenian society. Legally, socially and in general estimation, women occupied a low place in Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries, lower than in most other Greek cities of the time, especially the Dorian cities. Spartan women had a lot more freedom in the society. In Sparta, the upbringing of girls, to a certain extent, paralleled that of boys. Spartan women were more educated than their Athenian counterparts and their system of education included compulsory instructions in the arts as well as athletics (Blundell, 1995). Physical fitness was considered to be as important to females as it was for males, and girls took part in racing and trials of strength such as chariot-racing, running, wrestling, throwing of discus and javelin. The stress on physical fitness was perhaps responsible for the great reputation which Spartan women earned among other Greeks for a muscular style of beauty, and it is referred to in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (78-82) when the Spartan woman, Lampito, joins the Athenian women in their sex strike. Lampito's

conversation with Lysistrata also shows that it was not only men who pride themselves on their intellectual culture; women did the same.

Spartan girls married at eighteen when they were in their prime and fully matured to men in their thirties, they had no say in the choice of husband; marriages were arranged by their fathers. Presumably this was to guarantee healthier and stronger babies rather than a large number, but it meant that most girls were emotionally stronger when they married (Cary & Haarhoff 1961). As dowries, wealthy men could give to their daughters gifts of landed property and other moveable items.

Spartan women could own property – and did, in fact, own more than a third of the land in Sparta – and they could dispose of it as they wished. Daughters inherited along with sons. Daughters may have inherited half of what a son inherited; it is also possible that if you combine dowry with inheritance daughters ended up with a full share of the estate. If she had no natural or adopted brother(s), she could inherit the whole estate and was not, if betrothed by her father prior to his death, obliged to marry the next of kin. Thus, a Spartan woman had the right to inherit, manage, control and use her property without the supervision of anyone (McAuslan & Walcot (eds.), 1996). However, they did not have a vote in the assembly but seem to have had a lot of influence behind the scenes.

The reasons why Spartan women were more dominant in society than Athenian women were; firstly, Spartan girls were given a good education in both the arts and athletics, were encouraged to develop their

intellect and they owned more than a third of the land. Secondly, there was less difference in age between husbands and wives, and girls in Sparta married at a later age than their sisters in Athens. Also, husbands spent most of their time with other men in the military barracks; since the men were rarely home, the women were free to take charge of almost everything outside of the army and mothers reared their sons until age seven and then society took over. Fathers played little or no role in child care. However, both Athenian and Spartan women were not given voting rights, could not hold any political position and most importantly, their main aim was to produce legitimate children for the continuance of the society.

It is against this background that Euripides and Aristophanes apparently wanted to address the issue of women's inferior status in society. The two poets might have disagreed with the societal attitudes towards women and have written their plays to address the issue. There are indications that the poets were yearning toward the emancipation of women.

## **Objectives of study**

The main aim of this work is to:

1. Draw feministic ideas out of Euripides' presentation of women in the selected plays.
2. Draw feministic ideas out of Aristophanes' presentation of women in the selected plays.
3. Search for passages or speeches in the poets' plays that clearly reflect feminism.

Thus, the purpose of this work is to bring out the feminist projections in Euripidean and Aristophanic literature. Firstly, I shall analyze Euripides' presentation of women and the ideas behind his presentation. Secondly, the research seeks to analyze Aristophanes' portrait of women and find out the feminist projections, if any, in his work.

Nevertheless, the reasons for Aristophanes' criticisms of Euripides shall not be a matter of concern here and there shall not be a concentration on the attacks on Euripides. Secondly, since the concept of feminism as we have it today was non-existent in the classical period and there was not a conscious projection of the female gender in the literary themes of the period, the work shall not be seen as a feminist movement or advocacy during the era.

## Scope and Methodology

The work is limited to only the selected plays of Euripides and Aristophanes. However, references from other poets like Aeschylus and Sophocles and Homer are used where necessary. It is important to stress that the work is related to only the female characters and speeches that have feminist underpinnings in the selected plays. Secondly, not much emphasis is given to the theories and history of feminism; the main emphasis is on the primary aim of feminism in the classical Greek context – to point out features of inequalities, disadvantages and marginalization among the genders. This is because during the classical period, the concept of feminism as an advocacy was apparently non-existent; however, due to some characteristics in their writings, I have used the concept of feminism as a framework in analyzing their works. Even though literature books are used, literary devices are not discussed unless their relevance is important to the discussion of the work.

Information for this research was gathered from both primary works in translation and secondary sources. These primary sources include; Euripides' *Medea*, *Hecuba*, *Alcestis*, *Electra*, and the *Thesmophoriazusaie*, the *Ecclesiazusaie*, and *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes. References from the works of Homer, Herodotus, Aristotle and Plato are also used. The secondary sources include commentary books on the above listed works, articles and journals and inscriptions relevant to the subject. Thus, the research is purely library based.



## **Theoretical framework**

The work uses feminism as a pillar in analyzing Euripides' and Aristophanes' works. However, the work will not concentrate much on the theories of feminism. It concentrates on the primary aim of feminism – to point out features of inequalities, disadvantages and marginalization among the genders and that women and men should have equal possibilities and these include the right to education, to participate in politics, business, law courts, right to vote, to move freely, hold property and legal rights and choices in marriages. Thus the work uses liberal feminism as a framework in analyzing the poets' presentation of women and the speeches in the poets' plays.

The other theories of feminism are less considered because during the classical period, the concept of feminism as an advocacy was apparently non-existent and feminist ideas and activist movements prevalent in our era were not the concerns of the ancient authors. However, due to some characteristics in their writings, the concept of feminism or liberal feminism is used as a pillar in analyzing their works.

## **Organization**

The research is organized in five chapters.

Chapter One is an introductory chapter which attempts to locate the entire work into its proper structure. It basically looks at the general idea of feminism, why Euripides and Aristophanes are the dramatists chosen for this research and why the above selected plays are used. It also mentions the position and status of women in classical Greece and sets out the objective of study.

Chapter Two concentrates on the literature review which looks at authors both ancient and modern and their ideas or comments on women.

Chapter Three looks at Euripides' presentation of women in some of his plays, bringing out their traits and thoughts as reflected in their speeches and behaviours or manners. Through this the work strives to reveal whether he wrote in defense of women or not or whether he gave a feministic or otherwise interpretation to the characters.

Following the same pattern as the preceding chapter, Chapter Four also assesses Aristophanes' presentation of women in his three women plays.

Chapter Five consists of the analysis of the data from a feminist perspective, themes in the plays, critical comments and findings. Secondly, it looks at how real or biased the poets' presentations of the characters were due to the roles, attitudes and speeches they put into the

mouths of their characters, then draw out any relevant conclusions from the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The ancient sources on the status of women in ancient Greece can be conflicting as they are diverse and indefinite. While some, like Homer, present women in a better light and would want them to be regarded in high esteem, most sources (like Hesiod and Simonides) put them in a subordinating position, prescribing for them no other duty than keeping the home and having babies for their husbands. Among the Greeks, the majority of men believed in their own superiority. Greek literature abounds in references to men's view of the dangers of women's sexuality.

Homer's presentation of women is one of goddesses, princesses, and queens and also of nursemaids, spear-won concubines and household slaves. The view about women in Homer is based not on the external details of their lives but on the part they play in the story, their virtues, character, general status, and the interest shown in them. Homeric women had extraordinary dignity, intelligence, power and vigorous personalities, and Penelope is the best example even though Helen cannot be ignored.

The roles of the female characters in the *Iliad* are used by Homer to comment on the world of war and the values of the fighting men. The function assigned to them in both the narrative and the society which it represents is not necessarily downgraded, but they are nevertheless seen as peripheral to the real business of life. Women provide causes and rewards, encouragement or restraint, they reflect the suffering of warfare and represent the social ties which form the background to the battle scenes. In the *Iliad*, women make very few appearances and as far as the action is concerned, they seem insignificant but actually are crucial to the poem's plot. The abduction of Helen by Paris, for instance, has caused the war as a whole, and the taking away of Briseis from Achilles by Agamemnon, forms the basis of the specific events of the *Iliad*, since the wrath of Achilles, when Briseis is taken from him, is its principal theme. Women exist only in relation to their menfolk and although they are implicated in life's most serious transactions, they do not take active part in them.

Homer's women are not portrayed as entirely home-keeping; the shield of Achilles showed housewives standing at their doors to watch a wedding and women assisting in the defense of the city wall. Also, in the *Odyssey*, when Telemachus visits Menelaus to inquire about his father, Helen sits amongst them and treats Telemachus with one of his father's exploits (4.259-61). Penelope also exerts authority in a more direct fashion; she rebukes the suitors for their violent behaviour and their schemes against the life of Telemachus (16.409-47); she reproves her son for allowing a guest in the palace to be insulted (18.215-25); and she

receives and cross-examines this same guest, the disguised Odysseus (19.96-599). She seems to be a very independent woman of considerable authority and is presented as having the power to remarry.

However, Homer does not provide a picture of equality between the sexes or the possibility of women's participation in public life. Penelope's power which arose out of the unusual circumstance of Odysseus's long absence began to be restricted; his son grew and started to assert himself. In Book 1, 356 – 9 and 21, 350 – 3, we witness Telemachus asserting his control over Penelope and the house on two occasions; the first when he decided to call an assembly, and the second when he asserted his rights to the disposal of the bow – “so go to your quarters now and attend to your own work, the loom and the spindle, and tell the servants to get on with theirs. Making decisions must be men's concern, and mine in particular; for I am master in this house.” (1, 356 – 9) Here, we see a clear division of roles and authority even in the household. Apart from several slaves whom Penelope mentions as having been given to her by her father, there is little indication that she herself has any claim to property of her own. According to Homer, an honourable woman is the one who has a household under a man. It can be said that, in the *Odyssey*, the poet's attitude towards the other girls who had been seduced was because they were not of the heroic class, and their lovers were not gods.

Moreover, a little misogyny is seen in the *Odyssey*. When Odysseus visits the Underworld, Agamemnon gives a bitter account of his

murder at the hands of his wife's lover, Aegisthus, and at the thought of Clytemnestra, he exclaims: "so there is nothing more deadly or more vile than a woman who stores her mind with acts that are of such sort ... she with thoughts surpassingly grisly splashed the shame on herself and the rest of her sex, on women still to come, even on the one whose acts are virtuous" (2.427-34). He also warns Odysseus never to tell his wife everything on his return because "there is no trusting in women" (2.456). Also, in order to achieve her objective, Penelope employs the weapons traditionally associated with females; the deceptive use of weaving and of words which makes her character ambiguous. Even though Penelope plays a man's role in the *Odyssey*, and shows great bravery, resolution, cunning and great heroism, she cannot prevent the disruption of the established social and economic structures.

Although a woman helps to determine the course of events in the *Iliad*, women feature as a piece of property rather than human beings. Briseis has been awarded to Achilles as a "price of honour" (9.344) and it is as a status symbol that she is valued both by him and Agamemnon. Later when Agamemnon tries to come to terms with Achilles, he offers as a mark of his goodwill to return Briseis and to send in addition "tripods, cauldrons, gold, horses, and seven women of Lesbos, skilled in weaving." (9.119-35). Also, when Achilles organizes funeral games in honour of Patroclus, his prizes for the wrestling match are;

a great tripod, to set over fire, for the winner. The  
Achaians among themselves value it at the worth of

twelve oxen. But for the beaten man, he sets in their midst a woman skilled in much work of her hands, and they relate her at four oxen (23.702-5).

It is clear that women are ticked off as one item in a list of valuables and it is surprising how a tripod is worth much more than a woman skilled in many works. This practice tends to invest women with a symbolic worth as sexual partners and as bearers of children. Also, Homer reaffirms the fundamental division between masculine and feminine when Hector says to his wife, “go therefore back to our house, and take up your own work, the loom and the distaff, and see to it that your handmaidens ply their work also; but the men must see to the fighting, all men who are the people of Ilion, but I beyond others” (6.490-3).

Hesiod presents a totally misogynistic reflection of women. He creates a world without women and presents women as a punishment from the gods. “From her comes all the race of womankind, the deadly female race and the tribe of wives who live with mortal men and bring them harm” (*Theogony* 590-92). In the *Works and Days*, a number of gods contribute to the woman’s ornaments and accomplishments: Aphrodite provides charm and painful, strong desire; Athena teaches her to weave and fits her out with a girdle and robes; Hermes gives her sly manners and the morals of a bitch; and the Graces adorn her with golden necklaces, while the Seasons crown her with spring flowers (65-68) and she is called Pandora. According to Hesiod, deceptiveness is one of her outstanding characteristics; she is a mere image and a trap, and Hermes has put into



her breast lies and persuasive words and cunning ways (*Works and Days*, 78). Women help to sustain human life but they are also, in Hesiod's view, potentially damaging. However, men need children to care for them in their old age, and to inherit their property when they die, so women must be endured.

Hesiod considers a woman as a 'beautiful evil thing' (*Theogony*, 585) and a 'sheer deception', her splendid exterior but corrupt interior matching the share of the sacrifice with which Prometheus had first deceived Zeus (*Theogony*, 535-55). She is necessary because of her essential role in the *oikos* and a man's only escape from mournful old age and has the mind of a bitch and a deceitful nature (*Works and Days*, 67), lies and stealthy words (78). In the Pandora narrative in the *Theogony*, a wife is seen as a financial burden whose only function is to produce an heir; women do nothing to alleviate men's poverty, but they are always ready to share in their wealth. They are like the drones in a beehive, who fill their bellies up with the products of the worker-bees' labour. In the *Works and Days*, the poet admits that "no price is better than a worthy wife" but "a bad one makes you shiver with the cold: the greedy wife will roast her man alive without the aid of fire" (702-5). Hesiod's attacks were directed at wives; to him a wife is both a partner and a competitor, giving the wife an economic competition. He states that a wife has an economic interest of her own; she's after her husband's barn, and has a mind of her own; the mind of a hussy and a treacherous nature, but is also the vessel in which resides the ambiguous spirit, Hope. "Don't let a woman, wiggling

her behind and flattering and coaxing, take you in; she wants your barn: woman is just a cheat” (*Works and Days*, 373-5). Hesiod also believes that a woman’s appetite for sex is voracious and pernicious.

Homer makes quite a more balanced presentation of women than Hesiod. However, his presentation of lower class women and some speeches he put in the mouth of his male characters bring to bear reflections of misogyny in his works. Even though Homeric women are quite free, they still do not actively participate in society. For both poets women are seen as producers of beings for the continuance of humanity.

In both tragedy and comedy, conflicts between male and female characters often form the focus of the action. The ideological separation of the masculine and feminine spheres in the fifth-century Athenian society made gender relations a fruitful base for the exploration of other differences. This transgression of normal sexual boundaries on the part of the females is sometimes seen to result in a partial feminization of the males. Sexual role-reversals of this kind are represented most explicitly in comedy, where they are accompanied by cross-dressing. But they are also present in tragedy, although the emphasis is usually on the female side of the process – on the women’s usurpation of masculine roles.

In Aeschylus’s *Oresteian Trilogy*, the queen Clytemnestra is repeatedly presented as having behaved in a masculine fashion during her husband’s absence; the watchman says that “that woman – she manoeuvres like a man” (*Agamemnon*, 11). She is identified as masculine because she chooses her own sexual partner, rules over Argos while

Agamemnon is away and finally secures for herself political power by murdering her husband. Agamemnon, on the other hand, identifies himself as feminine – when Clytemnestra urges him to walk on the carpet, he replies angrily “you treat me like a woman” (918-919). In the same way, Clytemnestra rebukes the chorus when they refer to her as a desperate woman and declares that she has the heart of steel (1401-3) while Aegisthus is taunted by the chorus as “you woman” (1625). This temporal reversal of roles heralds a more protracted disruption of the ‘natural’ order. In the *Libation Bearers*, this partnership of masculinised female and feminized male is brought to an end and the conventional sexual division of labour is restored – Orestes, supported by Apollo, murders her mother Clytemnestra and Aegisthus. Perhaps, Aeschylus brings an end to this situation because he and his society do not support the idea that women could be in control. Apollo’s support of Orestes’ action and Athena’s casting vote in the *Eumenides* could also mean that even the gods do not support the change in the societal structure (Vellacott 1959).

In Sophocles’ *Antigone*, the heroine rebels against the law of the state by attempting to perform funeral rites for her dead brother who, in a decree introduced by her uncle Creon, has been refused burial on the grounds that he is a traitor. Although Antigone is engaged in traditional areas of female activity; mourning the dead, defending the interest of the family, she asserts herself in a masculine fashion in order to do so. At the same time, Creon feels that his own manhood is being threatened: ‘I am not the man, not now: she is the man, if this victory goes to her and she

goes free ...' (484-5). He also justifies his refusal to pardon Antigone, urging that 'we must defend the men who live by law, never let some woman triumph over us' (677-8). Antigone's sister, Ismene, also pleads with her not to overstep the normal bounds of female behavior; 'remember we are women, we're not born to contend with men' (61-2). In the end, Antigone is condemned to a living dead – she is walled up in an underground vault, and she hangs herself. Sophocles' presentation of Antigone signifies that he does not support the situation whereby women are in control of affairs. First, even though he makes Antigone challenge Creon, he gives her feminine activities as stated above and provides Ismene to oppose or disagree with her sister's actions. Secondly, Antigone's defeat and death emphasizes Creon's statement that men should never let women triumph over them and shows that Sophocles agrees to the 'natural' phenomenon that women should be submissive to males and therefore should live under the laws and treatment provided by men. According to Gomme, it is not surprising that Sophocles presents women in this fashion because he had led a purely masculine life; he has met no women except his mother, his wife occasionally, and his sisters rarely and other few women whom he treats with contempt. (Gomme, 1925:5).

Also, in drama, sometimes male characters express their discomfort at seeing women engage in exchanges in a public place. Euripides' Achilles is desperately embarrassed when he is forced into conversation with a free-born woman, Clytemnestra, in the Greek camp

(*Iphigenia at Aulis*, 812-34) and Electra is warned by her husband that “it is shameful for a woman to be standing with young men” ( Euripides’ *Electra*, 343-4). In comedy, a woman who leaves the house may be suspected of having an assignment with a lover (Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazusae*, 520). Euripides’ *Andromache* reveals a contradiction between expectations about women and their actual behaviour when she says, “first, since a woman, however high her reputation, draws slander on herself by being seen abroad, I renounced restlessness and stayed in my house; refused to open my door to the fashionable chat of other wives” (*Women of Troy*, 648-52).

In both the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles, we see the masculine power overcoming the feminine even though the tragedians present women who flout the orders of men. This shows that the tragedians do not support the system of equality between men and women and, therefore, present that no matter the struggle women put up to challenge men on equality, they cannot be at par with men. Nonetheless, in the plays of Euripides, the writer tends to change the situation showing the hatred of men towards women by belittling the qualities of women, their true nature and their importance in society. In Euripides’ *Melanippe*, one character exclaims, “the worst plague is the hated race of women, except for my mother I hate the whole female sex” (frag. 496, 500). In the same play, a woman responds:

women manage homes and preserve the goods which  
are brought from abroad. Houses where there is no wife

are neither orderly nor prosperous. And in religion – I  
take this to be important – we women play a large part  
... how then can it be just that the female sex is abused?  
Shall not men cease their foolish reproaches, cease to  
blame all women alike if they meet one who is bad?

Herodotus hardly completes a chapter without talking about a woman or two of some sort in his *Histories* and thereby presents a wide variety of women, bringing out their nature, capabilities and the contributions they give to their respective societies yet he shares his propensity to rank children before women. Unlike Thucydides, he is interested in the role of women in the great events of history. Sometimes Herodotus is simply interested in women for the obvious purpose of titillation, gender-jokes, and light hearted fun. He starts his book speculating that the deepest cause of war between Asia and Europe was men's desire for women (I.1-3). Of the customs of the Babylonians he is only interested in two: the method of auctioning women as wives so that "the attractive girls helped the unattractive girls" get husbands (I.196), and the custom that required Babylonian women, at some point in their lives, to have sex with a strange man (I.199).

In his *Histories*, Queen Tomyris of Massagetae warns the Persian Emperor Cyrus against attacking her country and counsels contentment with what he already had. Cyrus doesn't listen and dies fighting his army (I.206, 214). Phaedymia, the young wife of another Persian Emperor, risks her life to expose a palace coup by using her Esther-like access so as to

feel for the emperor's ears (III. 67-69). Also, Atossa, the daughter of Cyrus and wife of Darius, in order to help her doctor, convinces her husband to lead the Persian Empire against the Greeks (III.133-134). From his own city of Halicarnassus, Herodotus hears the heroic stories of the Queen-Commodore Artemesia decisively saving her ship and crew as she leads them out of the debacle at Salamis (VIII.68, 87-88).

In The *Histories*, Spartan women act as mothers, daughters, wives and queens and sometimes they participate in the political and social arenas. One of the most notable of Spartan women was Gorgo, daughter of Cleomenes and wife of Leonidas. The reader can tell that Gorgo, though just a small child, is intelligent and diplomatic, possessing a keen ability to assess one's character (5.51). Aristagoras asks the King to send away the child so they could speak, but: "Cleomenes told him to say what he wished and not to mind the child" (5.51). The mere fact that a young girl is allowed to overhear and participate in an important conversation of the King is unparalleled. When Aristagoras continues to raise his offer for Cleomenes' support in the war, Gorgo speaks out to her father: "Father, you had better go away, or the stranger will corrupt you." Aristagoras leaves for good, and Cleomenes appreciates his daughter's warning. Gorgo's powerful statement stops the Spartans from participating with Aristagoras in Ionia.

Herodotus rooted the history of imperialism to a king who treated his wife's nakedness as his own property. The Lydian king, Candaules, convinced that his wife is the most beautiful of all women, arranges for his

bodyguard and chief advisor, Gyges, to view the queen naked. Candaules' purposes are not explicit, but if he intended to strengthen his position or authority in some way, he was disappointed. At the queen's instigation, Gyges murders the king and takes the tyranny and the queen herself for his own (I.8-14). This was socially unacceptable, even to Gyges, and though the king's wife had her revenge for this act, it was clear that men did what they pleased with their wives and were dominant in nearly all relationships and that women were treated like property.. In one of his stories, Herodotus writes of Pisistratus, a man who married in order to have sex with a woman in a socially unacceptable way. "...He did not want children from his new wife, and to prevent her from having any, refused normal intercourse and lay with her in an unnatural way" (6.61). It was common for men to lust after women (as in the story of Gyges) but never did a woman lust for a man. Women had an inferior place in ancient Greek society, and they mostly held the same subdued position in Herodotus' stories.

Thucydides, on the other, hand says nothing about women in his *Peloponnesian War*; "Thucydides' account shed no light on women's experiences during the 27 miserable years from 431-404BC or the responsibilities they were forced to assume in men's absence, on the impact on the shrinking marriage pool and on the measures the death of citizens husbands forced them to consider" (Blanco, 1998: xxii). He also makes Pericles say in his funeral oration that:



if I must speak of women's virtue, I will put the whole matter in a nutshell: great is their glory who can live up to the nature that Providence has given to women, and hers especially who is least talked of amongst men either for good or for evil (Thucydides, 2.46).

One wonders how Pericles speaks with so much confidence when there is a contradiction involved in saying that her fame is great who is quite unknown. If this speech is rightly attributed to Pericles, and it is not Thucydides' own, then it is absurd because these words were spoken by a man who was living with and was emotionally attached to a woman who was most talked about in Athens, both for good and for evil – Aspasia (Gomme, 1925:15).

Xenophon thought that girls up to the age of fifteen should be trained to see and hear as little as possible. In his *Oeconomicus*, (VII, 5-6), he writes that Isomachus' bride had lived

under strict supervision in order that she might see and hear as little as possible ... she knew only about the working of the wool herself and what could be expected of a slave ... but she also had had a really good training in management of the food, which seems to me to be the most important accomplishment to have, both for a man and his wife.

In this work also, a man named Critobulus tells Socrates that there are few people to whom he talks less than he does to his wife (*Oeconomicus*, 3.11). Xenophon expounded a view of the sexual division of space and labour, focusing on the dichotomy in which the outdoor, public world belonged to men, and the domestic and private interior was the sphere of women (*Oeconomicus*, 7.22-23). He claims that men, by their very natures, are suited for the outside and women for the inside, adding that it is shameful for a man to remain around the house during the day. Men are associated with commerce and politics, marketplace, café and fields, women with the home (*Oeconomicus*, 7.30-31). Xenophon describes that the outer door of the house is the boundary for the free woman, segregated from women of other households, with only female relatives by marriage and slaves for company (*Oeconomicus*, 7.35).

He emphasized that the dichotomy was not merely a human convention, but was part of the natural order of things: ‘activities designed by God in such a way that one sex naturally excels the other are set down as honourable by the law’ (*Oeconomicus*, 7.29-30). He states that a good wife is the one who has been taught by her family to be self-controlled. According to Xenophon, sexual enjoyment was not the object of marriage; men acquired wives in order to raise a family, not to satisfy their lusts, which were amply catered for in the streets and the brothels. A husband might also prefer a young wife whom he could educate to run the household in the way that he wished (*Oeconomicus*, 7.4 – 5). When Xenophon refers to a dying man’s desire to find a trustworthy person to

look after his son's education and protect his daughter's virginity (*Memorabilia*, I.5.2), he is probably highlighting a common dichotomy in the upbringing of males and females.

However, Xenophon criticizes the Athenians for making girls sit still all the time working wool, and bids his young wife not to sit still at home herself all day, but to take part in the housework and keep her youthful beauty by getting some exercises, mixing flour, kneading dough, shaking the blankets and standing at the loom demonstrating, and learning herself from other slaves who do something better than she; it improves the appetite and makes her more attractive to her husband than the slave girls (*Oeconomicus*, 7.42-43). The disparity in the ages of husband and wife helped to foster the notion of the intellectual inferiority of the female and reinforced patriarchal attitudes towards women.

To Simonides, different types of women were fashioned out of different animals – the sow, vixen, bitch, donkey, weasel, mare, monkey and the bee while there were some made out of elements, the earth and the sea and they display a whole host of failings – dirtiness, nosiness, inconstancy, thievishness, vanity, extravagance and most important of all, greed, laziness and sexual insatiability. Other women may be obsessed with sex and the donkey-woman, for example, accepts any partner when it comes to sex. To him, the only worthwhile character is the woman made from the bee, who is beautiful, affectionate and hardworking, increases the prosperity of the house, grows old and dear to a husband, is the mother of splendid children and never sits around with the other wives gossiping

about sex (Akaah- Ennin, 2003:49-55). In his seventh poem, Simonides shows that the good wife was also like the bee in her indifference to sex (McAuslan & Walcot, 1996:99-100). What he forgets is that the bee can also be the most dangerous insect when it is threatened. To him, most men marry one of the other types, and have to endure poverty, backbiting and humiliation. Simonides, like Hesiod, sees a wife as a disastrous economic burden but essential to a man's existence.

If we are following Simonides' idea of women and taking into consideration his virtuous woman being similar to the bee, then a virtuous woman could be bad since a threatened bee can react furiously to its attacker in the same way a virtuous woman can change when circumstances are unfavourable.

In *Lysias* III, 6 and I, 22, a speaker claimed that his sister and nieces in the women's quarters in his house had lived "with so much concern for their modesty that they were embarrassed even to be seen by their male relatives" and other speakers claim that wives do not go out to dinner with their husbands and do not even eat with their husbands when they are entertaining male visitors, unless they are relatives. *Lysias* tells us that "the lawgiver prescribes death for adultery ... because the man who gains his end by persuasion in this way corrupts the mind as well as the body of the woman ... and gains access to all a man's possessions and casts doubts on his children's parentage"(I.33).

*Lysias*, like the rest of the ancient writers discussed above, mostly talks about the separation of powers between men and women, the

seclusion of women and the negative attitudes of women. In situations where women's negative attitudes are revealed, the poets refuse to give a fair presentation and also ignore the reasons for their actions. In my view, these writers' presentation of women is influenced by their cultural context in which the men were raised and their personal encounter with women.

Plato believed more thoroughly than has any other political theorist in the essential similarity of the sexes, and the claim of women to equal rights and duties with men; it was absurd, he said, to divide the world into men and women for the purpose of public affairs or of education or of anything other than begetting and bearing of children (*Republic* Bk. V, 451d – e). He believes that the only innate differences between males and females are reproductive ones and that these offer no barrier to women's equal participation in the highest positions within the state. Socrates states that males and females have no distinct qualifications for particular pursuits, although men will, in general, display more natural aptitude for all tasks than women (*Republic* Bk. V, 452 – 455e). He says that there is no one function in society which should be reserved for either women or men; both sexes are equally eligible for selection as Guardians (*Republic* Bk. V, 456). Sue Blundell (1995), reacts to the claim of the natural male superiority inserted in this argument by pointing out that it does not suggest that all men are able to do everything better than all women but the same range of natural abilities are found in both sexes and that

different women have different aptitude for different things; while some love medicine, others love athletics, soldiering or philosophy, just as men.

Plato continues that men who lack the necessary strength, courage and philosophical temperament (*Republic* Bk. II, 375a – 376c) in terms of their natural abilities will not be admitted to the class and therefore will be inferior to women who do gain admission to the class. In terms of education, Plato states that the only way women can obtain equal opportunity to enter the Guardian class entails equality of education for both sexes within the class. In his ideal state, women should be given both physical and intellectual education. He states that women should be undertaking exactly the same duties as the men, including warfare; but since they are physically weaker they should be given a lighter share of the tasks (*Republic* Bk. V, 456b-457b). Plato's idea of female liberation in his ideal state is to convert women into honorary men. Hence, Plato sees the world without women as a theoretical possibility, since in his ideal state, Guardian women are in all but their child-bearing function, identical to men.

Since Plato's object in introducing female emancipation was to benefit the state rather than women, it is possible that his personal attitude to women was not feministic. In his presentation of the ideal state, he states that the Guardians are to own no private property apart from the most basic essentials (*Republic* Bk. III, 416d-e); all things, including women and children, are to be held in common (*Republic* Bk. IV, 423-424). This statement could mean that the philosopher sees women as

objects and therefore classifies them as property. He puts together women, children and servants, and states generally that there is no branch of human industry in which the female sex is not inferior to the male (*Republic* Bk. IV, 431; 455c). According to Plato (*Laws* 781c), women are a race ‘accustomed to an underground and shadowy existence’. He states unequivocally his view that a woman’s capacity to learn is less than that of a man (*Republic* Bk. V, 454d-456c). To Plato, as noted by H.D.F. Kitto (1965:80), the theatres were for men, and women found in the audience at a performance were the morally depraved and had no reputation to lose. In marriage, the power which a well-dowered woman might possess within the marriage is suggested by Plato’s comments that as a result of his proposed abolition of dowries, ‘there would be less arrogance among women, and less servility and abasement and lack of freedom among men on account of money’ (*Laws*, 774c).

Aristotle matched his concept of the inherent physiological inferiority of females by his belief that women differed fundamentally from men in their psychological characteristics and social competence. According to him, women are capable of achieving the virtues of self-control, courage and justice, but whereas in males these qualities are associated with the ability to command, in females they involve a capacity for subordination (*Politics*, 1260a). He states: “a man would be considered a coward who was only as brave as a brave woman and a woman as a chatter box who was only as modest as a good man” (*Politics*, 1277b). He held that women are systematically inferior to men in every aspect –

anatomically, physiologically, intellectually and morally and that this inferiority is a consequence of their metaphysical passivity (*Politics*, 1260a – b). Aristotle mentions that the goodness of the state depends in part on the goodness of its women, and therefore they should be given training in community values (*Politics* 1260b) but it should equip them to perform their traditional role in accordance with the needs of the community.

Again, in his *Politics*, Aristotle distinguishes between the rule of a master over his servants (the rule of superior over inferior), that of a parent over his children, the rule over persons free and equal, and the rule of husband over wife. He says whereas among citizens a man rules and is ruled in turn, the rule of husband over wife is permanent (1259b). In his *Poetics*, when Aristotle talked about character in tragedy, he states:

there are four things to aim at. First and foremost, that they shall be good. ... Each type of personage has his own goodness; for a woman has hers, and a slave his, though the former's is perhaps less than a man's or inferior and the latter is wholly worthless. The second point is to make them appropriate. The character before us may be, say, manly; but it is not appropriate in a female character to be manly, or clever" (*Poetics*, 1454a).

To him, the man rules by virtue of merit, however, if a woman rules then she is an heiress and her rule is based on wealth and power and



not merit, therefore, a wife can never take over her husband's office and assume control of the household. Thus, the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; the former rules and the latter is ruled; this principle of necessity extends to all mankind (*Politics*, 1277a – b). Like Xenophon, Aristotle believes that men and women complement each other within the private relationship of marriage. To him, human beings cohabit not merely to produce children but to secure the necessities of life. He also associates women with the left, darkness, cold, evil, softness, weakness and lack of self-control and men with the right, good, hot and light (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1150b12-16). When Aristotle analyses the differences between men and women, he concludes that women are more passionate, shameless, deceitful and false of speech. Aristotle blamed the failure of the Spartan system on the lawgiver's failure to control the women; they comprise half of the free population and in the time of the Spartan empire, between 404-371, they controlled many things, including their husbands and it was their independence in managing their money and the unevenness of the distribution of private property which contributed to the Spartan' acquisitiveness in the age (*Politics*, 1269b – 1270a). Aristotle informs us that women have the nature of children; they are constitutionally retarded and for this reason they cannot produce semen.

Both Plato and Aristotle wanted women to be educated because the women are half of the free population. However, their education was to enhance them in performing their traditional duties and not to be equal in standing with men. Literacy was regarded as a dangerous accomplishment

in a woman. Female ignorance would have been viewed by some people as an important part of the barrier erected between women and the outside world. Plato and Aristotle who had written after Euripides and Aristophanes might not have recognized their predecessors' intentions and had not understood them. Even if they had, it is possible that Plato and Aristotle had not agreed to the emancipation of women, that is why they followed the old negative writings on women. Secondly, even though they agreed that women should be educated, it is obvious that they believed in the seclusion and inferiority of women, that is why they felt women should be educated only to train children and slaves at home.

The question is, how could Homer exist in the same period with Hesiod and both have totally different presentations? Perhaps Hesiod's unsuccessful life (as he claimed) was affected by a woman (if it was not caused by her). In the same way, Herodotus and Thucydides have different opinions about women as well as Sophocles and Aeschylus, Plato (who was less abusive) and Aristotle who would wish the world exists without women. When Odysseus visited Hades and met Agamemnon (*Odyssey*), Agamemnon's criticisms of women were generalized, affecting even the honourable Penelope, because of Clytemnestra's actions. This could mean (though debatable) that some of these ancient writers might have met one or two bad women in their lives and therefore have generalized their ideas, making literature have a misogynist approach while some perhaps were just following the normal trend of writing. In drama, men portrayed women as they might be and, in philosophy, they constructed theories

about how they ought to be. In both cases, beliefs about the essential nature of women were brought into play.

If Athenian men and women never met, love between them would be impossible; if men despised women, romantic sentiment on the part of the former, at least, would be unthinkable, therefore there would be no romantic sentiment in Greece between women and men. Secondly, adultery would be impossible due to the secluded nature of women in the society. If Andromache's description of her life in Euripides' *Trojan Women* is taken as a typical case, one wonders why and how adultery happened at all, let alone achieved its pre-eminence in the pantheon of sexual misconduct:

I made good reputation my aim ... as Hector's wife I studied and practiced the perfection of womanly modesty. First, if a woman does not stay in her own house, this very fact brings ill-fame upon her, whether she is at fault or not; I therefore gave up my longing to go out, and stayed at home; and I refused to admit into my house the amusing gossip of other women ... Before my husband I kept a quiet tongue and modest eye; I knew in what matters I should rule, and where I should yield to his authority.

Such seclusion would have made it impossible for a woman to have attracted a man or otherwise.

The effect of the system of separation and seclusion of powers were that many wives were dominated by their husbands, many were neglected and others were discontented with their lot, some reacted by taking to drink, some to lovers and some became scolds – Socrates is said to have been nagged by his wife, Alcibiades' wife walked out on him because he brought courtesans to the house while she was at home (Lacey, 1968:172).

In *A woman's place in Euripides' Medea*, Margaret Williamson (1990), discusses the different spheres – private and public, ascribing to them the group of people associated to each. She argues that there is a gap between the female private sphere and the male public sphere and this gap is never to be bridged, therefore the bridging of this gap or the movement of Medea from the private to the public brought about the violence in the play. She sees Medea's coming from the house to meet the Corinthian women (*Medea*, 1.214ff), her transaction with Aegeus (*Medea*, 1.661ff), her meeting with Creon to plead for a day with the excuse of providing an asylum for her sons – a man's responsibility (*Medea*, 1.268ff), her marriage with Jason, which is contracted by herself and the oath taking which is normally done in public, as a movement into the public sphere. To Williamson, Medea's activities make her perceive herself to be Jason's equal which as a result pushes her to take the revenge. Here, Williamson does not acknowledge Medea's suffering and does not sympathize with her since she believes that it is the consequence of Medea's action of shifting into the public sphere. Thus, she does not support Medea's role of

a woman in control, and believes that the public – private sphere ‘is the gap – never to be bridged’. Due to this, Williamson refuses to appreciate Euripides’ effort at projecting women in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century and, therefore, does not see him as bringing about a change in Athenian society but Euripides’ effort of supporting women cannot be ignored.

In Jennifer March’s *Euripides the Misogynist?*(1990), she asserts that Euripides was not a misogynist by concentrating on plays where Euripides puts bad women on stage, the kind of females who actually earned him his reputation for women-slander and demonstrates that there was no misogyny at all. She does this by centering on Euripides’ manipulation of myth and on the innovation that he makes in translating a traditional story into acted drama. Thus, she uses Euripides’s plots and structure of his plays to refute the assumption that Euripides is a misogynist. Even though the writer refutes Euripides’ misogynistic status, she does not assert or categorically state that Euripides’ works contain reflections of feminism and, secondly, the writer refuses to use the presentation of Euripides’ characters to prove her point, which my work seeks to do.

Sue Blundell (1995) makes an extensive collection on the history and status of women in ancient Greece, beginning from the creation of women which starts with the story of Pandora in Hesiod through to the classical period. She does not ignore the presentations of women by the poets, historians and philosophers. Thus Blundell makes a study of Greek women’s social reality and their place in literary and visual

representations. To her, the male view of women is worth studying and by examining the roles which men constructed for women and the system of gender differences into which they were incorporated, we gain a great deal of insight into the male-dominated society. Even though her work dwells extensively on women from birth to puberty and old age, on their socio-economic and political life, and provides a key to an understanding of one of the strands in the history of the subordination of women and, at the same time, broadens our knowledge of history of ancient Greece, the work seems to be a collection of scattered data on the lives of Greek women. Thus, Blundell puts together the pieces of information on women in the literary works, inscriptions and other sources. Moreover, she does not situate her collection in the modern concept of feminism, which my work strives to do.

Similarly, Gomme (1925) discusses the status of women in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century but concentrates more on the secluded life of women. But, unlike Blundell, Gomme states the consequences of this seclusion and subordination. He also points out the inconsistency of the Greek literary sources. He argues that if the sources provided on seclusion were true and therefore men and women never met, then “love between them was impossible” and if “men despised women, romantic sentiment on the part of the women was unthinkable”. This could mean that on the evidence there would be no romantic sentiment in Athens between men and women and adultery would have been non-existent.

MacDowell (1995) concentrates on the subject or themes of Aristophanes' plays and also on the historical circumstances of Athens during the time the plays were produced. He concentrates little on literary and theatrical features. He pays more attention on the relation the plays have on Athenian society in terms of politics and warfare. He hardly talks about social issues that are related to women. Thus, the writer hardly addresses Aristophanes' sympathy towards women but rather concentrates on the main issues the poet addresses – politics (democracy) and warfare (peace). He concludes that Aristophanes invite sympathy towards people including old men and countrymen who are affected by warfare in his plays. He also believes that Aristophanes fought for more democracy in Athenian society especially in the *Frogs* and *Thesmophoriasuzae*. In his work, MacDowell neither relates feminism nor put Aristophanes and Euripides on the same platform to see the underlining intentions of their presentation of women. My work strives to do these things which the author ignores.

In *Euripides and the instruction of the Athenians*, Justina Gregory (1991), concentrates on showing how Euripides' plays were intended for civic instruction and the tragedian's role of reconciling traditional aristocratic values with the democratic order. She treats issues like life and death and virtues such as *sōphrosynē*, *annanke*, *philia*, *euandria* etc. through literary and theatrical features. Thus, the poet gives more attention to the virtues, values and controversial issues Euripides puts in his plays. She believes (based on the *Alcestis*) that there is a distinct correlation

between a society's attitude towards death and the standard it upholds for its living. To her, a society's idea or vision of freedom, equality and privilege will affect how its members regard death and how they comport themselves in victory and defeat. Gregory agrees that Euripides gives voices to humanity – women, slaves, masters, girls and crones but he refuses to attempt a discussion on the perception of women or women in the ancient sources.

In David Cohen's *Law, sexuality and society: The enforcement of morals in classical Athens*, he focuses on the system of social and legal norms relating to adultery, incest, homosexuality, homosexual prostitution and impiety and the way in which these norms influence social behavior and the larger patterns of social practices in which these norms and behaviours are embedded. Thus, he concentrates on how Athenian citizens oriented their behaviours and expectations towards norms, how they reacted towards and characterized those who violated such normative expectations and the role which the law played in that process. In his work, Cohen answers questions like "What legal norms regulated homosexuality?" "In what way were these norms interpreted and enforced?" by adopting a comparative methodology in which he draws upon evidence from other societies and other legal system wherever this may serve to explain or clarify a particular work. Cohen discusses the public and private spheres in Athenian society and also discusses women but in relation to adultery and how upon all the seclusion, society saw women as capable of forming adulterous relationships. Even though he



talks about seclusion of women, the writer neither discusses the perception of women in the plays nor does he situate his writing in the modern concept of feminism.

Walcot, in *Women in antiquity*, aims the attitude of Greek men towards women. He concentrates on the issue of women in terms of seclusion, marriage, and the perceived attitude of women towards sex but situate his discussion in mythology. Thus, the writer focuses on stories on women (Amazons and Pandora are examples) in the works of Herodotus, Homer, Hesiod, Simonides, and Xenophon to reveal men's attitude towards women. To him, some of these stories undermine the sexuality of women and the Greek virtue of *sōphrosynē* (moderation) in women. Walcot does not situate his discussion in classical Greece and also does not discuss women in the tragic and comic plays. In situations where he does, it is in reference to the mythical story.

Cohen's discussions focus on the seclusion and separation of women in classical Athens but he takes a different trend. He agrees with most writers that women were confined to their homes, are excluded from social, public and economic life and did not operate in the public and political spheres in the way that men did. However, he points out that the fact that women were excluded from public and political spheres does not mean that they did not have public, social and economic spheres of their own or lived their lives in total isolation from all but their slaves and families. In his analysis, scholars have mistaken separation of spheres and roles for seclusion and isolation and this has happened partly because of

Euripides and Aristophanes – the Athenian poets have written more on the problem of women in their society. With evidence from the works of Aristotle, Plato, Demosthenes, Lysias and other writers, Cohen indicates or proves that Athenian women participate in a wide range of activities which took them out of their homes. To him, women engaged in activities like working in the fields, selling produce in the markets, acting as nurses and midwives, visiting husbands or relatives in prison, participated in funeral processions and attended public funeral orations. In short, Cohen concentrated on disproving that Athenian women were secluded and isolated but rather stressed on the idea that there was the separation of roles and spheres. He ignores the presentation of women in the classical period and their inferior status and also presentation of women in the works of Euripides and Aristophanes.

Like Cohen, Seltman (1955) in the *Status of women in Athens* disagrees with most writers on the seclusion and neglecting of women in the classical period. Unlike Cohen, he discusses his argument by relying on sculptural and vase-painting evidence. Seltman claims that women took conspicuous part in religious festivals and that Athenian women formed part of the audience at the theatre. He points out that the Parthenon and its famous sculpture emphasize the strong streak of feminism in Athenian religion. The Panathenaic procession which started outside the western city-gate was headed by a bevy of girls. To him, Athenian wives; mothers of children and keepers and managers of homes – held the deepest respect, regard, trust and affection of a man. He also argues that the paintings on

the vases show Athenian men and women, their children and their servants going about their accustomed occupations. There are scenes representing women's engagement in home-life, parties, weddings and funeral activities. Seltman stresses that it is when one begins to observe the scenes painted on Athenian vases during the sixth, fifth, and fourth centuries B.C. that one perceives the constant Greek preoccupation with the feminine. He completely ignores the presentation of women in works of the poets.

It is obvious that the above writers dealt extensively in their area of research and had generously added to the existing literature on women. However, in all these analyses and diverse contributions made by scholars, it is noticed that no scholar adequately addresses Euripides' and Aristophanes' presentation of women as one entity with the view that tragic and comic presentations are different; ignoring the fact that Aristophanes' comedies had their basis on societal happenings. Furthermore, most writers have not situated their presentations into the concept of feminism. This is what this research aims to capture.

This work therefore, discusses the above issues raised; the feministic presentation of women by both Euripides and Aristophanes and the passages in their plays that reflect feminism. The thesis concludes by showing that Euripides presents women in a better light and his plays portray a reflection of modern day feminism. Thus, even though the concept of feminism did not exist in the poet's time, it can be said that feminism was inherent in him. Aristophanes also addresses the injustices done to women in terms of intellectual abilities, freedom of movement and

unfair treatment in marriage. He also believes that women should be allowed to participate and occupy important positions in the state, however, majority of his presentations are also driven towards laughter and mockery of women and due to this, may not have sensitized his audience to reconsider the issues raised in the plays.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **EURIPIDES' PRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN SOME SELECTED PLAYS**

#### **Introduction**

Greek tragedy is characterized by women with different approaches and attitudes to life. While some are perceived as meek and submissive to men, others are dangerous, difficult and rebellious and always win in their encounter with men. The aim of this chapter is to give a feministic interpretation to Euripides' presentation of women. Thus, this chapter discusses the poet's portrayal of women in the *Medea*, *Hecuba*, *Alcestis* and *Electra*, which reflect issues of feminism. Thus, to prevent a biased illustration, this chapter tackles both the positive and the negative aspects of the poet's presentation, pointing out whether he wrote in defense of women or not. The chapter also gives room for the difference between Euripides' presentation of Greek and foreign women.

## Synopsis of plays

*Medea* was produced in 431B.C. at a time when a bitter hatred existed between Corinth and Athens, and since Corinth played a major role in the events which led to the opening of hostilities in the Peloponnesian War (Thucydides, Bk. 1. 23 – 31), it was an auspicious time to present an enemy of Corinth such as Medea, in a favourable light (Harsh, 1944:171). Stories about *Medea* have the features of romance, betrayals, acts of murder, revenge and passion, which overwhelm reason as they lead Medea onto a course of action inhumanely cruel and disastrous (Harsh, 1944:173). *Medea* is the grim story of a woman's revenge. Jason brings Medea with him when he returns to Greece in triumph with the Golden Fleece. They settle in Corinth and for many years live happily, though Medea is not Jason's wife by law because she was a barbarian and, under Greek law, a Greek cannot marry a barbarian (Bury & Meiggs, 1975:217). Thus, as a non-Greek, she could never be recognized by Greeks as Jason's wife because she was a foreigner and Greek law did not allow such marriage. Jason then decides to marry a Corinthian princess, Glauce. Medea, outraged by Jason's desertion of her, thinks of nothing but revenge. She succeeds in killing the princess and her father by the gift of a poisoned robe. Then, after a long struggle with her feelings of maternal love, she strikes her deadliest blow at Jason by killing their sons because male children are the pride of every Greek family and society, and Jason, having lost his sons and new bride who could have borne him other sons, suffers the worst punishment. Finally, from the

security of a winged chariot sent by her grandfather, the sun god Helios, Medea exults in the horror and misery of Jason who is denied even the satisfaction of touching and burying his children and punishing Medea for her crimes.

The *Hecuba*, produced in 425B.C, combines two themes; the complacent hypocrisy with which men justify cruelty in the name of military or political necessity and the tendency of revenge to be more wicked than the crime which provoked it, and thus to forfeit sympathy and the claim of justice (Vellacott, 1963:9). Throughout the action, Hecuba is the central figure. The legend says that after the destruction of Troy, the Greeks crossed over to the Thracian Chersonese. As the play begins, the fleet has been in Thrace for three days. Departure has been delayed by the appearance of the shade of Achilles, holding the fleet in check and demanding some honour; the sacrifice of Polyxene, Hecuba's daughter. Hecuba has already lost almost everything; her country, husband, children and wealth. Now her pain increases when she loses Polyxene but her suffering reaches its highest level and is driven by ruthless cruelty and the passion for revenge when she sees her son, Polydorus' body. To save Polydorus' life during the war between Greece and Troy, his father, King Priam, had sent him with some gold to the king of Thrace, Polymestor, so that when Troy falls there would be enough money to ransom the surviving ones and refound the city. When Polymestor found out that Troy had fallen, he took the gold, killed Polydorus and threw his body into the sea, denying him a befitting burial. Due to this, Hecuba blinds Polymestor,

her son's murderer, and kills his two children to avenge Polydorus' death. The legend concludes that the accumulation of her suffering drove Hecuba mad and that she was transformed into a dog that shall die and her grave would be named Cynossema, the Dog's Grave.

*Alcestis*, produced in 438 B.C, is a fairy tale with a happy ending rather than a serious tragedy. The theme of *Alcestis* is the power of Necessity, and the story presents this theme in two aspects; the absolute impact of death and the insoluble dilemma of marriage (Vellacott, 1974:16). Unlike Medea's marriage which was a problem marriage, Alcestis had a particularly successful marriage in which husband and wife, each as loving and virtuous as the other, after establishing a model home and a promising family, are confronted with necessity in the form of sickness which threatens the life of Admetus. The story has it that Apollo, in return for Admetus' kindness during his year of servitude, persuaded the Fates to allow someone else to die in his (Admetus) stead. Admetus accepts this offer and asks his aged parents and other relatives to die for him. When they refuse, his wife Alcestis offers herself. She dies and is buried. Soon afterwards, Heracles, who has been a guest of Admetus at the time of Alcestis' death, after hearing the news, goes to the tomb, wrestles with the god of death and brings back Alcestis and restores her to life.

Produced in 415B.C, *Electra*, like the *Medea* and *Hecuba*, focuses on the obligation and indulgence of revenge, which has played a constant part in Greek literature. The story runs that an old slave, fearing that Aegisthus would murder Orestes because Aegisthus and his lover



Clytemnestra had murdered Agamemnon, Orestes' father, and Aegisthus feared that Orestes would grow, avenge his father's death and claim his father's throne, had sent him far away from Argos to be brought up by Strophius, king of Phocis. As soon as he reached manhood, Orestes was commanded by the Delphic oracle to go to Argos and avenge his father by killing Clytemnestra, Agamemnon's wife and Aegisthus, Thyestes' son who had planned and murdered Agamemnon on his return from Troy. Orestes reached Argos in disguise, revealed himself to his sister, and with her help accomplished his mission. As a shedder of kindred blood, he was then pursued and tormented by the Furies. In the play, both Orestes and Electra are far from heroic. This is because the murder of Aegisthus is shown as inglorious and that of Clytemnestra as revolting. Euripides here shows the revenge as conceived and executed in fear and weakness because of Orestes' lack of courage to commit matricide. Orestes, faced with his dilemma – the conflict between the divine command of Apollo and his moral instinct of committing matricide – trusts the oracle because he has not the strength to trust his own moral instinct; but neither has he the strength to trust in the rightness of what he has done at Apollo's command. Thus, Orestes being weak, preferred sin under authority to the risks of moral independence (Vellacott, 1963:11 – 12).

## Presentation of women

Euripides uses his characters to give the background of the story to his audience. In the *Medea*, he uses the nurse; a slave and caretaker of Jason's house who happens to have an insight into whatever goes on in his house. Euripides uses the nurse to give readers an insight, especially, the background of the lives of Jason's and Medea's, which do not feature in the play. Through the nurse's utterances, we know where they come from; Jason from Iolcus and Medea, a barbarian from Colchis; circumstances that led to their exiles and the crimes Medea had committed. This is shown in the nurse's speech:

If only they had never gone! if the Argo's hull  
Never had winged out through the grey blue jaws of rock  
And on towards Colchis! If that pine on Pelion's slope...  
To fetch the golden fleece! Then neither would Medea,  
My mistress, ever have set sail for the walled town  
Of Iolchus, mad with love for Jason; nor would she  
When Pelias daughters, at her instance, killed their father  
(*Medea*: 1 – 9).

Not only does the nurse give us information on the background of Jason and Medea, she also provides information on the marriage between them and how Jason has betrayed Medea and how suffering, enmity and evil have surrounded her:

But now her world has turned to enmity and wounds her  
Where her affection's deepest, Jason has betrayed

Her own sons, and mistress, for a royal bed (*Medea*: 15 – 17).

It is important to understand Jason's actions to avoid partiality. Jason is a Greek and a man of respectable ambitions but Medea presents obstacles to these ambitions. Firstly, she involves him in murder before he comes to Corinth; the murder of her brother and initiating the murder of Pelias at the hands of his daughters. Secondly, as a non-Greek, Medea can never be recognized by Greeks as Jason's wife (Bury & Meiggs, 1975:217). For Jason to achieve his ambitions, he has to take the chance of marrying the king's daughter and redeem his Greek identity since he is a stateless exile due to the murder of Pelias. His marriage will help him gain a social standing, wealth and political recognition and also give his sons a better future (ll. 560 – 568). Medea also commits these murders based on justifiable reasons. She kills her brother to prevent him from retrieving the Golden Fleece and prevent the capture of Jason. She kills Pelias for sending Jason on a deadly voyage hoping for his death so that Jason cannot claim the throne which rightfully belonged to him (Rieu, 1971:35).

Euripides' women are mostly sympathetic. In the *Medea*, the nurse shares in her mistress's agony.

...an honest slave

Suffers in her own heart the blow that strikes her mistress.

It was too much, I couldn't bear it; I had to come

Out here and tell my mistress's wrongs to earth and heaven

(*Medea*: 53-56)

As a woman, she seems to know best the feeling and plight of a rejected woman, and therefore, shares Medea's plight with her. She is surprised that Jason has betrayed Medea without considering the services and obedience Medea gives him (*Medea*: 22). Her sympathy almost drives her to curse Jason. Due to her sympathy for Medea, she condemns Jason without hearing his side of the story:

My curse

On – no! No curse, he is my master. All the same,

He is guilty; he has betrayed those near and dear to him

(*Medea*: 83-85)

Euripides makes it plain to his audience right from the beginning that his sympathies are more inclined towards women in his work. The chorus, even after hearing Jason's excuses, condemns him. One might say that it is not surprising that the chorus and the nurse take the side of Medea since they are women. And Aegeus, a man, also expresses his sympathy and regards what Jason did as shameful. Euripides makes the tutor show his sympathy to Medea and he passes the comment "What man's not guilty? It's taken you a long time to learn" (l. 85). This statement supports the idea that Euripides is out to defend women, not men; it also demonstrates that women are mostly the victims of men behaviour. Euripides, if he is a misogynist, would never put into the mouth of his characters, including his male characters, these statements. Such statements make him a feminist since he brings out the pains women go through when they are victims of betrayal, denial and rejection.

Even though the chorus sympathizes with Medea for what she is going through, they also advise her not to pray for death but to accept her fate that way since it is common in Greek society. They advise her thus:

Do not pray that prayer, Medea!  
If your husband is won to new love –  
The thing is common; why let it anger you?  
Zeus will plead your cause  
Check this passionate grief over your husband  
Which wastes you away (*Medea*: 154 – 159).

But we should note that Medea is not a Greek woman and therefore, she does not heed to such advice. Though the chorus agrees that Medea's desire for revenge is just, they advise her to be moderate in inflicting her punishment. The plans of Medea are plans that appal the chorus; the sympathetic neighbours, who had said earlier in the play that honour has come to womankind, now show their disapproval when they learn that Medea is planning to kill her children to serve as a punishment to Jason. Their passion and sympathy for Medea and the children lead the chorus to plead and advise Medea (*Medea*: 851 – 855). In Greek society, it is an unpardonable sin to shed kindred blood and the disapproval of the chorus to this act shows that Euripides does not agree to the act of Medea. The fact that Medea rejects this advice and kills her sons does not mean Euripides is a misogynist or tries to present women in a bad light but the death of Jason's sons serves as a punishment for Jason and a protest against the injustice done to her. To a radical feminist, this might not constitute a misogynistic presentation but rather a fair deal.

Medea's quest for revenge is not only because she cannot control her sex jealousy but partly because she has to fight for her right in her marriage. She puts it thus:

A woman's weak and timid in most matters;  
The noise of war, the look of steel, makes her a coward.  
But touch her right in marriage, and there's no bloodier spirit  
(*Medea* ln. 261 – 264).

If Jason serves as a paradigm for men, then Euripides is calling for punishment for Jason. The poet sees Medea's revenge as justifiable because she is denied what is rightfully hers, therefore, there is the need to fight for it. Just like a liberal feminist, Euripides calls for the appraisal of women's rights.

In *Hecuba*, though the chorus and the old slave attendant find themselves in a similar situation, they care, support and show sympathy towards Hecuba, who was once a queen but now a slave, a mother but now childless, cityless and friendless. as a result of the destruction of Troy in which she lost her children and wealth. Instead of crying for herself, Polyxena cries and shares in her mother's misery:

Poor mother! Poor, unhappy mother,  
How you have suffered! .....  
For your unhappiness, mother,  
I weep and mourn with all my heart;  
But, for my own life,  
Which is nothing now but shame and misery,  
I do not weep (*Hecuba*: 197 – 213).

In *Alcestis*, the slaves and the chorus both share their sympathy, love and care in the misery that has befallen the house of Admetus. They acknowledge Alcestis' noble ancestry (*Alcestis*, 85), pity her situation and admire Admetus' kindness (*Alcestis*, 74). The chorus express their sympathy towards Admetus (*Alcestis*, 369 – 370) and this sympathy pushes them to pray for him (*Alcestis*, 221 – 225). The male servant's speech shows how much Alcestis' death had been a loss to the slaves:

... while in the servants' room

We were all weeping for our mistress...

While she, Alcestis, has gone out of the house; and I

Did not follow her body, or even stretch my hand

To say good-bye, nor join in the lament for her.

To me and to all the servants here she was a mother.

... So, this guest who comes

Bursting in on our trouble – I hate him; and I'm right!

(*Alcestis*: 764-776).

Euripides shows the cleverness, eloquence, imaginative and persuasive power of his women. In the *Medea*, the nurse is portrayed as a woman who possesses persuasive power. In spite of her reservations about Medea's unwillingness to meet the chorus, she does her best and finally succeeds in bringing her before the chorus (180 – 214). Medea is also presented as persuasive, clever, eloquent and imaginative. She uses these qualities to deceive everyone in the play, bending them on her frightful purpose. She uses her cleverness, imagination, eloquence and persuasiveness to trick Creon into giving her one day's grace and he

admits her cleverness and puts it as; “You’re a clever woman, skilled in many evil arts” (*Medea*: 285).

Aegeus is also tricked by these qualities into promising Medea asylum in Athens. Aegeus admits Medea’s intelligence and puts it:

Certainly; a brain

Like yours is what is needed (*Medea*: 676 – 677).

Likewise, Jason also falls completely by her assumption of the role of a repented wife and says: “I admit you have intelligence.....” (*Medea*: 530). If even the men in the play admit Medea’s intelligence and cleverness, then Euripides is telling his audience that the societal perceptions of women being good for housekeeping and bearing children are wrong. In my view, the poet is educating his audience that women’s intelligence should be appreciated and recognized and therefore women can participate in the running of the society. Just like the liberal feminists who seek for equality of men and women through political and legal reforms without altering the structures of society, Euripides believes in the equality of men and women and agrees that women should maintain their natural roles but this should not prevent them from entering the public sphere of politics, law and business.

Hecuba is also presented as someone who possesses the power of persuasion and eloquence. She uses these powers to convince Agamemnon to support her cause. Her eloquence is made manifest when she says:

It is by Law that we believe the gods exist;



By Law we live; by Law distinguish right and wrong.  
If Law stands at your bar and is dishonoured there,  
If men kill guests, rob temples and are not condemned  
And punished, there is no more justice on the earth.  
Then let shame guide and honour stir you to my cause  
(*Hecuba*:799-804).

Here, Agamemnon represents Greek society and its legal system. He serves as a judge between Hecuba and Polymestor. If Agamemnon allows Hecuba to carry out her revenge and also rules in Hecuba's favour, then Euripides supports Hecuba's cause. To Euripides, women are also capable and able to defend themselves and their loved ones. The statement above shows that Hecuba is not ignorant but is aware of the laws of nature and the laws of Greek society which protect guests, honour the gods and protect mankind; with these she is able to win Agamemnon to her side. Euripides also shows Hecuba's eloquence and cleverness which his society refuses to see about women when she defends herself against Polymestor who was trying to justify his action (*Hecuba*: 1189 – 1196). Again, Hecuba and also Electra (ll. 624 – 629, 937 – 943) speak about serious issues that involve deeper questions and understanding and, most importantly, that little or nothing could be done to solve it. If Hecuba and Electra understand issues of nature and things that are part of the human existence, then Euripides is drawing his society's attention to the inbuilt qualities of women and their intelligence.

Therefore, if Euripides believes that women are not ignorant of the laws in the society, then my view is that the poet wants his society to

revisit the issue of women being barred from the law courts to defend themselves. To me, the poet thinks that women should be allowed in the courts to either file a complaint or defend themselves because if they are all the time represented by men, then they could be misinterpreted or misunderstood by these same men who believe in women's seclusion. If liberal feminists believe that the main cause of female subordination is a set of rules and laws that block women's entrance and success in the public world, then Euripides is suggesting that it is necessary to abolish the laws that prevent women from entering into the law courts allowing them to gain grounds in legal issues.

In the *Electra*, during the argument between the old man and Electra (ll.521 – 550), Electra disbands the weaker arguments raised by the old man. First, she disbands the issue of the lock of hair by saying that unlike a man's hair, a woman's hair has been softened with combing. Secondly, she proves that the footprint of a man and a woman can not be the same because at most times, a woman has smaller feet and, finally, that a dress woven for someone when he is a child cannot be worn by the same person when he is old because a dress cannot grow larger on the body. This shows Electra's intelligence and eloquence in the play. Here, it is obvious that Euripides showcases women's potential and capability in the act of persuasion and cleverness using the art of sophistry and proof in argumentation just as Athenian politicians employ at the Assembly and law courts. Implicitly, women's exclusion from Athenian politics and law courts should be discarded.

The poet again reveals women's ability to be trustworthy and secretive. After Medea discloses her plans to the chorus (*Medea*; 772 - 808), she asks the chorus for their support by keeping silent. The chorus, unlike Jason, keep their words. Thus, the poet uses the chorus to show that women can be trusted with secrets.

... I'll wait a little.

If some strong tower of help appears, I'll carry out

This murder cunningly and quietly (*Medea*: 388 – 390).

Medea's speech portrays women as cunning and secretive in planning evil, while the choral acceptance of complicity by their silence goes to confirm the bad impression of women even though the choral women are at first repulsed by Medea's plans.

The nurse is also so trustworthy that Medea discloses her secrets to her and she is able to keep them until the deed is accomplished. The nurse is not only trustworthy in the play but someone who is good at keeping secrets and she admits that in her conversation with the tutor when she says: "is it so great a secret? I can hold my tongue" (*Medea*: 65), that is why Medea trusts her with the task of summoning Jason. The statement below is evident to that:

Let be. Until it is done words are unnecessary.

Nurse! You are the one I use for messages of trust.

Go and bring Jason here. As you're a loyal servant,

And a woman, breathe no word about my purposes

(*Medea*: 819 – 822).

The chorus in the *Electra* also prove to be secretive and trustworthy to the plans of Electra and Orestes. Due to their sympathy and care towards the children of Agamemnon and their desire to see the wrongs done to the house of Agamemnon corrected, they keep the plans of both Electra and Orestes safe by being trustworthy and secretive, and Electra puts it as; “they’ll keep our counsel faithfully” (l. 73). Women are mostly seen as natural gossips, but, for Euripides to show women as secretive and trustworthy, then, the poet is out to give a different interpretation to disband his society’s view on women. In my view, the poet believes that if capable women are selected as part of the decision makers in the state, these women could keep their counsel faithful.

Euripides’ women are mostly passionate. In the *Medea*, Euripides presents Medea as a woman who is passionate, that is, she cannot be controlled when she is in love or hate; her passions are stronger than her reason. Her passions are known through the chorus’ speech:

Zeus will plead your cause  
Check this passionate grief over your husband  
Which wastes you away (*Medea*: 157 – 159).

The above speech characterizes her passion of love while the chorus’ speech which says,

Hurry, before she does harm to those in there;  
This passion of hers is an irresistible flood (*Medea*: 182  
– 183)

expresses her passion of hate for her enemies including even her children. It is this uncontrolled passion of love and hate which drives her to commit all the crimes. Kitto agrees to this fact and adds; “that is why Euripides shows her blazing away through life, leaving wreckage behind her” (Kitto 1963:196). Due to Medea’s passion, she torments herself and causes suffering to others; thus, she deceives her father, deprives her country of the Golden Fleece, murders her brother when he comes between her and her love for Jason, and kills Pelias. Medea exhibits a similar excessive passion to plan and carry out a murderous revenge of killing Glauce and Creon. This passion leads her to destroy her family; Jason and her children.

Hecuba, in the same way, is driven by an uncontrolled passion of hate which makes her commit outrageous crimes and clouds her mind to ignore the fact that committing such crimes on an enemy camp could be dangerous. When she discovers that Polymestor had murdered his son, the love and friendship between her and Polymestor turns into hatred and she cannot think of any other thing than revenge and this drives her to form an alliance with her enemy, the Greek, Agamemnon. This is seen in the chorus’ speech thus:

Strange how in human life opposites coincide;  
How love and hate change with the laws men recognize,  
Which can turn bitter foes to friends, old friends to foes  
(*Hecuba*:846- 848).

We also witness Hecuba's compassionate nature in her argument with Odysseus where she explains how Odysseus had come to Troy as a spy and when Helen had seen him, she (Hecuba) had saved his life due to subsequent pleadings (*Hecuba*, 236 – 258). This nature is revealed for a purpose – women give their best in many activities they set out to do, therefore in allowing women to participate in outdoor activities will help in the progress of the nation.

In the nurse's speech, we note Medea as a strong-willed woman and one who does not put up with disgrace. She is not a soft woman who will countenance infidelity on the part of Jason, and the nurse points to her strong-will power thus:

Some dreadful purpose is forming in her mind. She is  
A frightening woman; no one who makes an enemy  
Of her will carry off an easy victory (*Medea*: 37- 39).

We should also note that it takes a strong-willed woman and bravery to betray her country, deceive her father, kill her brother when he becomes a threat, her enemies who include Pelias, Glauce and Creon and even her own children. This strong-willed character is also seen when she says:

... no one of them  
Shall hurt me and not suffer for it! Let me work:  
In bitterness and pain they shall repent this marriage,  
Repent their houses joined, repent my banishment  
(*Medea*: 396 – 399).

... the mind of a queen  
Is a thing to fear, a queen is used  
To giving orders, not obeying them;  
And her rage once roused is hard to appease  
(*Medea*: 119 – 122).

The stress on queen is to remind us that Medea is not an ordinary woman and she will not allow herself to be walked over by anyone. This shows that she is a strong-willed woman who cannot, and would not, countenance any marriage on the part of Jason. In spite of her emotions and commanding nature, she becomes calm and courteous when she comes out to meet the chorus and expresses sentiments of a civilized woman.

Medea, again, is someone who does not countenance disgrace, and we see it in her own speech:

Yes, I can endure guilt, however horrible;  
The laughter of my enemies I will not endure (*Medea*:  
796 – 797).

Similarly, in *Hecuba*, Hecuba and Polyxena are seen as strong-willed women. Even though Hecuba is a slave and finds herself in the enemy camp, she does not give up her revenge, knowing very well that her enemy, Polymestor, is a friend of the Greeks and she does not hesitate to tell Agamemnon of her plans against Polymestor. Polyxena's bravery to die and not being afraid of death also exhibits her strong-willed character. Polyxena is also presented as a woman who does not countenance

disgrace. The tragic change in her status makes her fall in love with death; this is seen in her speech thus:

Now I am a slave. That name  
Alone, being new to me, makes me in love with death.  
Then, chance might give me a harsh-minded master, who,  
Having paid money for me, would send me to his kitchen –  
Sister of Hector and many others royally born –  
To make bread, sweep the house, stand weaving at the loom:  
Day after day of bitterness! And some bought slave  
Would claim my bed, soiling what kings once sued to have.  
Never! I will yield up this daylight from free eyes;  
Hades shall have my body (*Medea*: 359 – 368).

It is for a reason that Euripides presents his women in such commanding, strong-willed manner. His women characters are at par with that of men and it is in a sharp contrast to the perception of women in his society that women are feeble-minded, lack courage and cannot meet or stand the challenges of outdoor life as men do. It is obvious that he presents women this way so that his society might reconsider their low opinion about women. A liberal feminist will accept that a compassionate and strong-willed woman has the potential of occupying respectable positions in society or being equal and respected by men in society, therefore can and should be allowed in public and outdoor life.

Women in Euripides' plays are devoted and faithful, caring, supportive, tender and possess maternal instincts. In the nurse's speech, Medea is seen as a woman with a great sense of devotion and faithfulness



to her husband (*Medea*: 11 – 13). Until Jason's betrayal, Medea had not only helped Jason to retrieve the Golden Fleece but also born him two sons and performed her duties as a wife. This shows her devotion and faithfulness to Jason.

Euripides brings out women's support and care for each other; the nurse is loyal to Medea who is also supported by the choral women. Women also express solidarity with their fellow women, as seen in the chorus' protection of Medea's secret plans of revenge.

The poet also appreciates women's tenderness and maternal instincts for their children. The nurse expresses her fear and concern for the safety of Medea's children because she sees her distraught and eyeing the children with threatening eyes. The chorus of Corinthian women pleads with Medea to spare her children's lives by appealing to her maternal spirit, and Medea herself undergoes an emotional turmoil as she battles with herself on whether to kill her children or not. This is seen in her speech:

Oh, what am I to do?

Women, my courage is all gone. Their young, bright faces

I can't do it. I'll think no more of it. I'll take them

Away from Corinth. Why should I hurt *them*, to make

Their father suffer, when I shall suffer twice as much

Myself? I won't do it. I won't think of it again...(*Medea*:

1041 – 1046)

Hecuba also shows her motherly love and worries about her children. It is due to the love and care she has for her children that turns her friendship with Polymestor into hatred, forms alliance with the Greeks and increases her desire for revenge. We see her love for her child when she says:

I implore you, do not tear my child from me, do not  
Kill her. There is enough death. In her lies my joy,  
In her I forget troubles, and find comfort for  
All I have lost. She is my city now; my nurse,  
My staff, my guide (*Hecuba*: 277 – 281).

She is even willing to lay down her life to save her Polyxena's (*Hecuba*: 382 – 386). Similarly, Polyxena shows great love and care for her mother; she pities her and cries for her instead of herself when she is told the news of her sacrifice.

Like Medea, Alcestis is a devoted, faithful, caring, supportive and a tender woman who also possesses motherly love. Her love, devotion and faithfulness do not only make her perform her duties as a wife and bore her husband children but also drive her to sacrifice herself to save the life of her husband. In the play, all the characters testify to her devotion and faithfulness to Admetus; the female servant of Alcestis puts it:

Truly she is the noblest; who can question that?  
What must the woman be who could surpass her? How  
Could any wife give clearer testimony that she

Honours her husband, than by freely dying for him?

(*Alcestis*: 152 – 155).

She prays for her children and asks for a brighter and better future for them. As a mother, she also secures her children's happiness and future by persuading Admetus not to take another wife. She says:

... keep them, then,

Inheritors of my house, give them no stepmother

To envy my royal birth and vent her jealousy

In harsh oppression of these children, yours and mine.

... What will your father's wife be to you? Might she not

Put evil slanders on you in your flower of youth

And blight your marriage? Your own mother never will

Arrange your bridal veil, be there to hold your hand

In childbirth, when her comfort is your deepest need

(*Alcestis*: 302 – 315).

Alcestis' love and care also extends to the servants in her house and this makes the servants share in her misery and the misery of the house (*Alcestis*: 767 – 770).

In the *Electra*, Clytemnestra, though cruel, has compassion and love for her children and her lover, Aegisthus. To her, it is the love for Iphigenia that drives her to take revenge on her husband. Secondly, when Aegisthus tries to kill Electra, Clytemnestra saves her daughter's life because of her motherly love (*Electra*: 26 – 27). In addition, in the *Electra*, the chorus made up of Mycenaean women is shown to be caring

and kindhearted. They offer Electra gold and dresses to adorn herself for the festival and, above that, pray and wish that the enemies of Electra and Orestes are crushed (*Electra*: 483 – 486). Similarly, Electra possesses a huge amount of love and compassion for her dead father and brother and they are dearer to her than anything in her whole life. This drives her to take revenge on Clytemnestra and Aegisthus.

Euripides' women are cunning, deceitful, manipulative and bloody-minded. Medea is seen as cunning, deceitful, manipulative and also able to earn people's sympathy. When Creon banishes Medea and her children, she cunningly wins Creon over and she obtains from him one day's grace during which she plans the murder of her enemies and accomplishes her mission. She also earns the sympathy of Aegeus through her continuous plea and after her offer to cure his childlessness. She exploits Aegeus sympathies for her concealed plans and secures a promise of refuge from Aegeus, and thus, assured of safety from pursuit and vengeance by the Corinthians and Jason, goes ahead to murder her children. She again succeeds in deceiving Jason into believing that she has changed and therefore accepts his new marriage as beneficial to herself and her children. She sends Glauce poisonous gifts under the guise of friendship and finally, condemns her own children to death by making them the couriers of the deadly gifts, besides 'all is fair in love and war'. It is not only these characters that she succeeds in deceiving to sympathize with her; she also earns the sympathy of the nurse, the tutor and the chorus.

The same resourceful character is seen in Hecuba. She deceives Polymestor with promises of some hidden gold treasure by Priam's family and lures him further to enter the tent. She admits her cunningness when she says "numbers and cunning joined are irresistible" (*Hecuba*: 884) and goes on to state the cunning attitude of some women;

Did not women kill Aegyptus' fifty sons?

Was it not women who stripped Lemnos clear of males?

(*Hecuba*: 886 – 887).

The above statement does not mean that Euripides is projecting women as bad but he wants his society to know that cunning is a human behavior and it exists in both sexes. It is possible that his society just refuses to accept and understand women as they are because of men's domineering attitude, and Euripides is being an eye opener to these issues. Besides, security gives way to conspiracy. How different would Athenian women behave when there is so much suppression, denial of natural or human rights and seclusion from outdoor life in the society? – a radical feminist point of view.

Electra and Clytemnestra also possess the same power of deceptiveness – the only means by which they could achieve their objectives. Clytemnestra uses this in killing her husband (Agamemnon) and Electra uses it to summon her mother (Clytemnestra) to her death. Their deceptiveness is seen in Electra's words:

You're not to lose your nerve and play the coward now.

You're going to use the same deception that she used

When with Aegisthus' help she struck her husband  
down (*Electra*: 982-985).

Euripides also shows that women can be careful planners and have thought before taking any action. This comes from the manner in which Medea critically weighs the possibilities of her intended revenge; she considers the options open to her and rejects those which are not likely to succeed. She realizes that at least the preferable plan will enable her to achieve her aim; to eliminate her rival and Creon and also escape with her life. She speaks:

I have in mind so many paths of death for them  
I don't know which to choose. Should I set fire to the house,  
And burn the bridal chamber? Or creep up to their bed  
And drive a sharp knife through their guts? There is one fear:  
If I am caught entering the house, or in the act,  
I die, and the last laugh goes to my enemies.  
The best is the direct way, which most suits my bend:  
To kill by poison (*Medea*: 377 – 385).

Medea's revenge is a matter of life and death; the survival of the fittest and since her main aim is to survive, not leaving the 'last laugh' to her enemies, it is normal and necessary for her to be conscious of her plans and weigh her possibilities before taking the venture, like men at the helm of affairs do. Here, the poet shows women's ability to rule and take charge of affairs.

In the same way, Hecuba possesses such ability and we see it in her conversation with Agamemnon when he did not want to be associated with the plan. She speaks:

I will release you from all danger in my project...

If the Achaeans raise

A riot, or gather to his aid, hold them in check.

For the rest, don't worry; I will see to everything

*(Hecuba: 880 – 885).*

Euripides shows his audience that being noble does not only come from being royally born or about prestige but it should also come from within the individual's attitude of courage, and must earn respect; as Hecuba says, 'the price of nobleness is heavy' (*Hecuba*, 1.383). This virtue is clearly seen in Polyxena; her courageous and heroic nature, and Talthybius attests to this fact when he says:

Hers was the most courageous, noble heart of all.

So that is how your daughter died. Of all women

You have the noblest children, and the cruelest fate

*(Hecuba: 579 – 581).*

Also, Euripides shows Alcestis as the noblest woman ever seen. He does not only reveal her royal birth but also her generosity, faithfulness, courage and above all, her perfection as a mistress to the slaves, mother to her children and a wife to her husband, which is seen through her self-sacrifice. Alcestis' virtue is recognized and appreciated by all the characters in the play and the chorus puts it thus:

In my belief, and in everyone's,  
She is the noblest wife a man ever had (*Alcestis*: 84 – 85).

Alcestis' heart was open to all and the pureness of her heart was incomparable and, due to this, the chorus wishes for her nothing but being revered as a god as shown in these sentiments:

Loved while she was with us,  
And dead, to be loved forever,  
The noblest of all women  
Was she who shared your marriage-bed, Admetus.  
Let not Alcestis' monument  
Be in men's eyes as the graves of mortals.  
Let her tomb be honoured like a god's,  
Where the passer-by stops to worship; ...  
Such are the prayers that will be said to her (*Alcestis*:  
988 – 100).

We see where the poet's sympathy lies when he gives this portrait to women. The male characters in *Alcestis* and *Hecuba* agree to the noble attitudes of women and their support and defense of these women shows that Euripides is sympathetic towards women. For the chorus to suggest that Alcestis should be revered like a god, it is obvious that the poet wants his society to appreciate women's good and exceptional qualities. The poet is therefore seeking for equality for women. Women with these qualities can fit in all aspect of life.

In *Hecuba*, Polyxena shows a heroic, courageous and brave attitude contrary to men's perception of women because of which women



are excluded from outdoor life such as politics and war. First, she shows no fear when she is told of her impending death but rather she shows courage and embraces her fate: an attitude of courage and fearlessness and also pities her mother who would be left childless and this is seen in her own speech:

You need fear no embarrassing appeal from me.  
I'll come with you – because I must, but also because  
To die is what I wish. If it were not, I should  
Be known for a coward, pricing life beyond its worth.  
For what is life worth to me? (*Hecuba*: 342 – 346).

Secondly, Polyxena's heroic death is witnessed by a whole Greek army who stands in shock, awe and admiration and even goes ahead to honour her body. It is clear that Euripides wants to show that his female characters could possess such virtue. We see from Talthybius' speech and the passion in which he speaks that Polyxena's bravery is rare and it amazes the whole army when he says:

... I die willingly.  
Let no one lay hands on me; I will give my neck  
Steadfastly to the sword. So, in the name of God,  
Let me stand free, and kill me; then I shall die free.  
... Son of Achilles,  
Here is my breast, if that is where you wish to strike;  
Or if my throat, my neck is ready here; strike home."  
He with his sword – torn between pity and resolve –  
Cut through the channels of her breath. A spring of blood

Gushed forth; and she, even as she died, took care to fall  
Becomingly, hiding what should be hidden from men's  
view (*Hecuba*: 546 – 564).

Before the identity of Orestes is revealed, Electra proves to Orestes that she is resolute and steadfast in whatever plans that shall be taken in avenging the death of Agamemnon. She also possesses greater courage and bravery in the murdering of her mother than Orestes. When the time came for the killing of Clytemnestra, Orestes grows soft and weak and almost changes his mind to finish the task but Electra shows so much bravery and practically pushes Orestes to complete the deal. The poet's portrait of Electra as being more courageous than Orestes signifies where his sympathy lies.

Euripides reveals the wickedness of women in his plays. Euripides shows Medea's wickedness when she commits the treacherous act by killing her two sons in her pursuit for revenge on Jason and, in the *Hecuba*, we see Hecuba's wickedness in her desperation to avenge her son's death by killing the children of Polymestor. In the *Electra*, Clytemnestra's wickedness is spoken of by almost all the characters in the play. She first commits a perfidious act by killing her husband, then allows her children to live miserable lives; Orestes, a fugitive running from country to country and Electra, pushed to have a disgraceful marriage and lives in poverty. Euripides is just being objective. This does not show that he is presenting women in a bad light; he is just revealing both the good and bad sides of women, which his society ignores. The poet is probably

showing that a man would have done a similar thing, so, for a woman to do so, it depicts tenacity of purpose: a sort of equalness to men, even if in a negative fashion – something which a radical feminist sees no problem with.

Euripides presents women as a weaker vessel who cannot match their strength with that of men. In the *Hecuba*, we see this in Polyxena's address to her mother:

Dear mother, force is on his side; don't fight with him.

Do you want to be thrown prostrate on the ground, wounded,  
Dragged, hustled, pushed? Dishonour done to your old age

(*Hecuba*: 404 – 406).

Even when Hecuba outlines her plans for revenge to Agamemnon, he feels it is impossible for a woman to commit such an act against a man until Hecuba gives examples of women who have committed outrageous acts. Electra is also presented as a weak person who cannot take revenge on her own but pities her situation and hopes for the future when Orestes will return to avenge the wrongs done to her and her father. Also in her argument with the old man, Electra admits that women are a weaker sex when she says; 'and if there could, brother's and sister's feet would not be the same size; the weaker sex has smaller feet' (*Electra*: 538 – 539). Perhaps Euripides wants his audience to see that even though women can possess great qualities like courage and bravery, they can hardly match their strength with men; that women will forever be under the shadows of men. Women can be brave but the strength of a man can hardly be

compared to that of a woman. It is important to note that it is the physical strength that Euripides refers to, not intellectual capabilities. Most importantly, in a society where women are secluded and cannot take active part in any strong activity while men engage in physical training, women cannot, under normal circumstances, match their strength with men.

Euripides' women are presented to have good and strong characters such as bravery, nobility, faithfulness, caring, devoted, strong-willed, passionate, trustworthy, secretive, imaginative, eloquent, persuasive, sympathetic and careful planners. Some of his women are also wicked, weak, manipulative, deceitful, cunning, jealous, greedy and dull. He also shows that most of these characters, either good or bad, can be found in one person depending on how the person is treated.

It is, however, important to note the difference between Euripides' presentation of Greek and foreign women. Firstly, in the *Electra*, women are presented as weak in their encounter with men. Unlike Medea and Hecuba, Electra and Clytemnestra cannot act by themselves; they are aided by men in their revenge. Euripides also shows the revenge in *Electra* as conceived and executed in fear and weakness, and both avengers are far from heroic (Vellacott 1963:12).

Secondly, Euripides presents his foreign women, Medea and Hecuba, to be extremists. It would have been enough for Medea to kill her enemies and taken her children away with her to Athens but she goes to the extreme to kill her own innocent children. However, Hecuba's actions:

blinding a man and killing his two sons was quite extraneous; something which Greek women would not dare to do.

On the other hand, Greek women are presented in a better light. They know their place in the society and they refuse to go to the extreme. Electra, though not content with her marriage to the peasant, does her duty as a wife (*Electra*, ll. 74 – 77).

But in the case of Medea, her anger and rage towards her husband makes her lie in her bed, curse and insult her enemies. She does not even go close to her children and she looks at them with contempt and does not accept the idea that “if your husband is won to a new love – the thing is common” (*Medea* ln.155) as the chorus advises. Thus, if Medea has found herself in the place of Electra, she would refuse to do her duties as a wife, not recognizing the kindness shown to her by the peasant.

Alcestis is presented as the modest and noblest of all women – a perfect wife. If her husband had been like Jason, it would have been highly probable that Alcestis would not have died for him. Alcestis, presented as a faultless woman, does not mean she never had a bad time in her marriage; she never got angry at her husband, shouted at the slaves or spanked her children. If that is so, then the people around her are almost faultless and never gave her a reason to act differently. I am not trying to say that Euripides was not realistic in his presentation of Alcestis but I am saying that every person has his or her good and bad sides and so far as things go accordingly, our negative behaviours do not usually manifest. Therefore, if Admetus had not been as noble as he was and had been like

Jason or any unfaithful man who would also not treat her wife with respect, Alcestis would not have died for him.

Even though, Euripides has been objective and realistic in his presentation of his characters, he is quite harsh towards his foreign women than Greek women because he knows that the behaviours of his foreign women would be intolerable in the Athenian society due to the fact that women in the Athenian society are insignificant and inferior to men in every aspect of life.

### **Conclusion**

It is not for nothing, I think, that Euripides gives us such a presentation. He wants his society to perceive women in a different light. When Medea, Hecuba and Electra come out victorious in their plans especially when Medea come out successful in her encounter with the king, Creon, we know then that the poet is advocating a change in the attitudes of men towards women. The fact that Euripides reveals women's obnoxious behaviours does not mean that he is a misogynist, but he tries to create conditions that would make women act honourably. He probably aimed at getting his contemporaries and society to be more of realists than idealists. The poet is presenting real life situations as they are and, moreover, wants to draw his society's attention to the fact that women are also human beings with their good and bad sides.

I assert that the idea of feminism was inherent in Euripides' mind and he uses these plays to bring out the plight of women and his support for them. Due to his appraisal of women's right and his sympathy on women's plight, Euripides can be called a feminist.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ARISTOPHANES' PRESENTATION OF WOMEN

#### Introduction

Greek comedy in which women are the eponymous heroines, began with Aristophanes and his three women plays – *Lysistrata* (January–February, 411), *Thesmophoriazusae* or *Women at the Thesmophoria* (March–April, 411) and *Ecclesiazusae* or *Women at the Assembly* (392) (Bury and Meiggs, 1975:308). Taking the same pattern as Chapter Three, this part of the work discusses Aristophanes' presentation of women in his three women plays, giving a feminist interpretation to the characters and revealing Aristophanes' intentions behind such presentation through comments made by the characters. Thus, to prevent a biased illustration, this chapter tackles both the positive and negative aspects of the poet's presentation, pointing out why the poet gives such presentation and whether he writes in defense of women or not.



## **Synopsis of plays**

*Lysistrata* is a dream about peace, conceived at a time when Athens was going through the blackest and most desperate crisis she had known since the Persian War (Sommerstein, 2002). At the beginning of 411B.C. the war between Athens and Sparta was going badly for Athens. The peace of Nicias, made in 421, had not lasted; various infringements of its terms had occurred and in 413, after the overwhelming naval catastrophe in Sicily, fighting was renewed in mainland Greece and in the Aegean. Athens held Pylos in the Peloponnese and Sparta, Decelea in Attica. Many of the cities around the Aegean which formed the Athenian Empire such as Chios and Miletus revolted. The Athenians had to build a whole new navy and they made use of the emergency fund set aside and kept in one of the temples on the Acropolis (Bury and Meiggs, 1975:301 – 308). Since by 411, the possibility of a negotiated peace between Athens and Sparta was truly remote, it may be that what Aristophanes is advocating is expressed in *Lysistrata*'s metaphor of wool working; a cleansing of the corruption and factionalism in the city, a drawing together of Athens and its allies under equitable terms, and the establishment of internal peace to strengthen the city for whatever follows (Smith, 2006). The main theme in the play is peace. In the comic play, *Lysistrata* is the central figure. In the play, the Athenian woman *Lysistrata* persuades the women of all Greece to force their menfolk, by means of a sexual boycott, to end the war. At the same time, the women of Athens occupy the Acropolis to cut off funding for war purposes. The action is entirely

successful and the men, reduced to helpless appendages of their own phalli, make peace. Six years after the performance of the *Lysistrata*, the remnants of the once great Athenian navy were destroyed at Aegospotami in the Hellespont. Athens capitulated to Sparta in the spring of 404B.C. (Smith, 2006).

The *Thesmophoriazusae* or *Women at the Thesmophoria* was produced in 411B.C. at a time of political upheavals and uncertainties but the play is neither political nor produced to stop the war (Bury and Meiggs, 1975:308 – 309). The Thesmophoria, from which the play derives its name, is a Greek festival in honour of Demeter and her daughter Persephone, and was held on the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth day of Pyanopsion. The festival was exclusive to women and it took place on the Thesmophorion, situated on the Pnyx (the hill upon which the Athenian Assembly held its meetings). The women performed various rites on the first and third days of the festival and fasted on the third day. It was on the day of the fast that the action of the play took place (Storey & Allan, 2005). The main theme in the *Thesmophoriazusae* is a clash between Euripides and the women of Athens. At the all-women festival of the Thesmophoria, the women of Athens have decided to punish Euripides for his alleged slanders against women. With the help of Agathon the poet, Euripides dresses up his relative, Mnesilochus, to infiltrate into the meeting, disguised as a woman, to plead his case. With the help of Cleisthenes, Mnesilochus is discovered and sentenced to death for sacrilege. Euripides tries unsuccessfully to rescue him by adopting roles

from various recent plays of his; eventually, he succeeds by disguising himself as an old bawd, promising not to slander the women anymore and using a dancing girl to decoy the Scythian archer guarding the condemned man (Zeitlin, 1981).

The *Ecclesiazusae* was performed in 392B.C. when Athens was fallen and impoverished; the hardest and most humiliating periods in the history of Athens – the defeat and loss of the navy, the loss of the Empire and its tribute, the siege and the capitulation to Sparta, the suppression of democracy, the oligarchic regimes of the Thirty and the Ten, followed by counter-revolution and the restoration of democracy, with executions and exiles. All these events must have had a devastating effect, both materially and psychologically, even on the ordinary Athenian who took little part in politics (Bury and Meiggs, 1975:343–347). In the play, Praxagora has organized a scheme that involves the women of Athens. Since male politicians are leading Athens to ruin, Praxagora organizes the women to pack the Assembly, disguised as men, with the intention to propose and vote that power should be handed over to the women. Once this is achieved, she announces the foundation of a new society based on communism (which is elaborated later in the BK V of Plato's *Republic*) both in property and sex. The effects of this double revolution are explored in the second half of the play – a young man sends his goods for the common pool and the other man refuses to give anything but wants to enjoy the dinner, followed by three old hags who quarrel over and maul a

young man who is trying to make his way to his sweetheart in the balcony and an invitation to the inaugural dinner (Storey & Allan, 2005).

### **Nature of heroines**

I agree with MacDowell's assertion that "it is over-simple to assume that if a play is a comedy, everything in it must be a joke" (1995:5). The characters of *Lysistrata*, *Lampito* and *Praxagora*, for example, are serious and they are treated as mature, prominent citizens with reputations of their own. They are known to all the male characters and are neither addressed by their husbands' names nor associated explicitly with a man. They do not show any of the typical comic weakness for wine and sex displayed by the other women (Foley, 1982:9). Rather, *Praxagora's* husband *Blepyros* is excited and pompous because his wife is the new leader and he says, "I want the men to point at me and murmur: 'there goes the husband of our Governess'" (Hades, 1962:444). Both *Lysistrata* and *Praxagora* perform tasks unusual for females, calling other women together for a meeting rather than a festival, possessing a certain amount of will power and formulating ideas (Taaffe, 1993); and, in the *Lysistrata* and *Ecclesiazusae*, the women's movement into public life comes as a response to men's failure to fulfill their own responsibilities. There are passages and scenes in which Aristophanes is not just trying to make the Athenians laugh but is making some serious points which are intended to influence them.

Several writers have argued that the character Lysistrata is an imitation of the most important priestess in Athens, the priestess of Athena Polias, Lysimache, who held office for sixty-four years in the late fifth century because the name 'Lysimache' meaning 'dissolving battles', is synonymous with Lysistrata 'dissolving armies'. It is also said that a woman, named Myrrhine, served the temple of Athena Nike, and Lampito was a name used in one of the royal families in Sparta (MacDowell 1995:240 – 241). According to Henderson (1980:187), "Lysistrata is portrayed as essentially different from and superior to both her allies from among the Attic wives and her Spartan counterpart, Lampito. She possesses superior charm, will, vision, political insight, strategic and diplomatic abilities. She is free of the stereotyped weakness of her sex: inability to resist the need for sexual and other pleasures; ignorance of and lack of concern about anything outside the home; preoccupation with trivial matters". Taaffe (1993:62) agrees to this explanation and adds that:

Lysistrata is separate from the other women not only because her character alludes to the priestess Lysimache but she also bears many of the standard identifiers of masculinity. She has ideas and is concerned with the future of the city, not with sex, drinking, and domestic intrigue.

However, he argues that "Lysistrata is an imitation of a woman (Lysimache) who represents Athena, who is herself a male creation". In my view, Taaffe sees Lysistrata as a male's (Aristophanes) creation because a man plays that role. My argument is that because women were

secluded and were not allowed in the theatre, we understand that men played all the roles (male and female characters) on stage both in tragedy and comedy. If characters like Medea, Hecuba and Lysistrata are all played by men and are representations of women and their emancipation, then we should not isolate Lysistrata and assume that she is not a woman after all. I believe that if Aristophanes gives such manly qualities to Lysistrata, then the poet agrees with Euripides on the issue of women's capabilities, and wants his audience to rethink or change from branding their women inferior even though the poet neither opens up nor stresses women's participation in the outer space or politics.

In the *Ecclesiazusae*, the first half of the play directs criticism at the Athenians. It is mostly expressing Aristophanes' views of Athenian politics in the late 390s. Praxagora's speech is a serious one (Hades, 1962:424 – 426). She complains that the Athenians choose the wrong men as leaders and this results in their failure to make peace. Here, Praxagora's statements seem to be expressions of exasperation at the Athenians' failure to agree on any consistent policy. They lead up to an accusation that the citizens themselves are to blame. The speech becomes more serious when she says that the Athenians fail to support a consistent policy to attain peace and prosperity, and just vote for anyone or anything that will enable them to make a little money for themselves, especially those who get three *obols* for doing nothing. The women respond not to a direct betrayal of the *oikos* and family concerns but to the male failure to conduct political and particularly economic affairs of the 'polis' as they should. The men are not

using the state money or the assembly for the public good or to meet foreign threats to Athenian security, but to meet the needs of greedy individuals. They are making a living primarily from the pay that had been introduced for the assembly and jury duty; as a result, they are continually distracted from attending to the public good by competing for their share of the state dole (Foley, 1982:14). All these are criticisms directed towards the men and Praxagora goes on to give advice by suggesting that because of the men's failure to do the right thing, the state should be handed over to the women. Praxagora implies that the changes which have occurred have been changes for the worse, and that life was better in the olden days, and since the continuation of olden customs is attributed to women, the argument logically leads to the conclusion that women are better than men at organizing life (Hades 1962:425). The man who refuses to give out his properties but wants to take part in the dinner (Hades, 1962:445) shows the greed and hypocrisy of men – they always want to receive and never to give.

The arguments near the end, about saving the lives of soldiers and sending them extra rations (Hades, 1962:426) are arguments about benefit to men. Praxagora does not forget that her audience in the assembly is male, neither does Aristophanes forget that the theatre audience is male, too. But it cannot be disputed that Praxagora makes a wise suggestion and the women are finding ways to save the state. Women are sympathetic and compassionate and because they give birth to sons to go to war, they wish to avoid war altogether to save the state and their sons. Praxagora does not

propose that men and women should have equal political rights. Her plan is that women should take over and rule men; and she sums up as follows; the slaves do the farming, the women make the clothes and cook the meals and the men will have a marvelous easy life. But this it does not involve any change in the distribution of other functions. Foley (1982:18) argues that “in Praxagora’s household utopia, men are reduced to leading a drone-like life of pleasure” and that the scheme is intended to degrade men. MacDowell (1995:315) disagrees, pointing out that the poet did not write his play for modern women, he rather wrote it for ancient men who would be too delighted to have ‘a drone-like life of pleasure’. To the writer, if the poet had shown the men doing the domestic tasks, that would have seemed to his male audience to be unpleasant rather than comic. He continues by saying that “Praxagora’s plan would not have succeeded, in their eyes, unless it established a life of blissful ease; and an important part of utopia is having women to provide you with food and clothes, so that you do not have to provide them yourself” and ends asserting that the *Ecclesiazusae* does not show women becoming equal or superior to men. It is possible that Aristophanes’ main intention was to propose that women should be given some rights, if not equal to that of men, but he feared criticisms from his audience and fearing to be persecuted like Euripides, he made the play a comic fantasy and, as such, government by women seemed impossible. However, he appreciated women’s qualities and capabilities.

The women’s reforms impose social and economic communism on the state; all property including women and children will be held in



common. To accomplish this goal, Praxagora plans to impose *oikos* values and practices on public life. Women deserve power because they handle the affairs of the household efficiently (Hades, 1962:425), and they can cure the *polis* by making it one (Hades, 1962:438). Everyone will move freely. Public buildings will be domesticated to serve as dining halls. The women will produce clothing and organize the cooking, storing and dispensing of food, as they do in the household, for all alike. The slaves will take care of agriculture, leaving the men free to enjoy themselves since there will be no more public businesses. Lawsuits, assemblies and foreign policy will be irrelevant, as in the household (Hades, 1962:441 – 443). The new state, like the household, needs no complex legal structure. Women borrow and lend between households without contracts or deceit (Hades, 1962:433). No law enforcement will be required because all basic needs will be met and all will be relatives. Women have no interest in anything but peace; hence the new state can preserve the socio-political and spatial isolation of the household as it was formerly constituted (Taaffe, 1993:132).

Praxagora, in order to construct her argument for female rule convincing, makes the *polis* an *oikos* by creating a world amenable to such female management. She equates domestic and civic management only by eliminating foreign policy and the legislative and judicial functions of the city. By handing over agricultural production to slaves, she confirms her capacity to rule. It can be argued that the women's ability to govern Athens is simply an extension of their economic rule of the household. It

does not mean that the women are taking over the political rule of the man since the male has political authority over his wife and children (*Politics*, 1252a2). However, if Aristophanes makes this happen, then he is drawing his audiences' attention to the political maturity of women; that women are knowledgeable in civic responsibility.

### **Presentation of women**

Aristophanes shows his women as cunning and deceptive in achieving their aim in the *Lysistrata*. First, the women scheme a sex-strike; Lysistrata's plans were that while the younger women stage the sex-strike, the older women, no longer attractive to men, will control the treasury (*Lys.* 176 – 179). Even though it does not quite work out like that, her plans are complementary. In real life, the scheme would be open to both logical and practical difficulties: men who were away on campaigns would not be affected by their wives' abstinence at home, and there also existed other forms of sexual activity like prostitution, pederasty and masturbation (MacDowell 1995: 231). However, Aristophanes ignores these difficulties because he wants his women to achieve their aim.

Myrrhine and Lysistrata also exhibit deception to make Cinesias think that he is loved and talked about by his wife. When Cinesias goes to the Acropolis to look for his wife Myrrhine, Lysistrata lies and makes Cinesias believe that his wife has been talking about him all the time and, on top of it, she receives bribe before allowing the desperate man to meet

his wife. In the same way, Myrrhine, pretending to be talking to someone about her husband, utters words of love about her husband to win his affection to be able to delude him. She also leads him on and, at the end, leaves him more frustrated and desperate than he was (*Lys.*841ff). Here, Aristophanes shows how women can deceive, lie and pretend till they achieve what they want.

In this scene, Cinesias is presented as a stupid and desperate man in need of sex. Due to this, he refuses to see through the act of his wife and Lysistrata. If his wife misses him so much and ‘cannot live without him’, as she declares, she would not keep herself away from him. This reveals how men can sometimes be stupid and dumb, thus, Aristophanes rates the intelligence of women higher than that of men. Aristophanes also uses Cinesias to show the importance of women; he complains about food, emptiness in the house, his inability to take care of the child and the house and ‘the rites of Aphrodite’. The poet believes that aside the above mentioned importance, their intelligence can be used to benefit the state. If he rates the intelligence of women as higher than men, then, he believes that with such capabilities, women can participate in outdoor activities which would help in the progress of the nation.

In the *Thesmophoriazusae*, the women also scheme and plan Euripides’ end, and the first woman, after a long speech, concludes by saying: “ladies, I feel that somehow or other we have got to devise a nice sticky end for him: perhaps poison might be a suitable method” (ln. 427 – 429). To Taaffe (1993), the women’s reason is not that Euripides

misrepresents them; rather, it turns out that he has been telling the truth. The representation of women by Mnesilochus does not follow this pattern. In masculine style, 'she' tells the truth and that representation identifies 'her' as an unsuccessful trickster, for women are usually good at lying.

The women in the *Ecclesiazusae*, in order to achieve their aim, plan carefully in the middle of the night how to take over the state. The women, with Praxagora as the leader, steal and wear their husbands' clothes in the middle of the night to remain uncovered, meet and plan how to swindle the state from the men. On top of that, they have a well concocted lie to tell their husbands on their return, and we see how Praxagora outwits his husband Blepyros, when he questions her (Hades, 1962:436). Even though Blepyros is suspicious, he is not smart enough to see through his wife's plans. In Praxagora's speech on why the state should be handed to women, she mentions women's cunningness and deception and she puts it thus:

For finding a way there's no one like a woman,  
And there's no danger now that they'll be fooled  
Once they're in charge, being adepts at that game  
themselves (Hades 1962:426).

After Praxagora leaves with his husband's cloak, Blepyros enters wearing his wife's clothes. The first man the audience sees has lost his clothes to his wife and that metaphorically is what the play is about – the men losing their assets to the women. While Blepyros is lamenting on-stage, the men of Athens are being bereft of their powers in the Assembly, off-stage. I

believe that the poet thinks that careful planning and secrecy is one way to build a nation, therefore, if these women adopt this plan, then they are capable of building the nation by breaking the barrier of seclusion and participating in politics.

Throughout the *Lysistrata*, women win in their encounters with men, both physically and verbally. Firstly, the women win against the chorus of men, drenching them with water leaving them wet (ln. 383). Secondly, Lysistrata wins against the magistrate, and the other women against the Scythian policemen. In line 658 – 705, the women share their frustration and engage in fist fights with the men who are defeated and retire down stage:

These damn decrees will never stop, until we make a frontal  
Assault on you and grab your legs and make you horizontal.  
(ln. 704 -705)

It is funny how the women could think that they can change decrees with fist fights. In my view, Aristophanic women winning in their encounter with men is to create humour. The poet wants his male audience to laugh because women are not physically stronger than men and, in Athens, where women hardly exercise, they can definitely not win against men. But the underlying fact is that Aristophanes makes his women win against men, mentally, intellectually and physically. It also shows the emptiness of men if women could do better than them (men).

Aristophanic women exhibit great intelligence, common sense and eloquence (MacDowell, 1995:234). In the *Lysistrata*, women's cleverness

comes to bear when the women arrive with buckets of water to extinguish the fire which the old men are trying to light in order to burn the closed wooden gates of the Acropolis. They throw the water all over the men, leaving them comically wet (ln.383). This shows that the women have thought of the possibility and therefore had planned against it. Lysistrata's eloquence and intelligence is seen in the *Lysistrata* ln. 420ff. when the magistrate and the chorus of men are forcing the gates of the Acropolis open. Here, Lysistrata makes us understand that when there is intelligence there is no need for violence and she puts it thus: "What's the use of crowbars? It's intelligence and common sense that we need, not violence." (ll. 433 – 434) Later, we witness the intelligence of the women in Lysistrata's argument between her and the magistrate in which Lysistrata gets the better of him when she proposes how she would save the state (ll. 568 – 613). She declares that the women will look after the money just as they always look after housekeeping money for their husbands. Women can sort out the whole tangle of the war, just as they untangle wool at home (ll. 567 – 570). The magistrate is comically dressed as a woman and then as a corpse, and he runs away, leaving the women still in control of the Acropolis. Thus, the women succeed against the men, and when Lysistrata is negotiating peace between Athens and Sparta, Lysistrata speaks:

I am a woman, but I am not brainless:

I have my share of native wit, and more (ln.1146 – 7).

Here, Lysistrata quotes a line from Euripides' *Melanippe* (frag. 483) and this shows that Aristophanes agrees with Euripides on the issue of women's cleverness. A woman capable of negotiating peace should be able to depict eloquence and cleverness, and if Lysistrata achieves this, then, Aristophanes is revealing women's intelligence which his audience and society want to conceal. If Aristophanes reveals women's intelligence as equal to that of men, then the poet suggests that women are capable in participating in outdoor activities such as politics, law, business and education. Thus, just like the liberal feminists, Aristophanes believes that women should maintain their natural roles and, in addition, engage in outdoor activities.

In the *Thesmophoriazusae*, the chorus praises the first woman and later the second woman for their eloquence:

I've never heard a woman speak  
With such assurance, such technique:  
Such fine felicity of phrase  
Is worthy of the highest praise.  
It was no negligible feat  
To think of arguments so neat;  
She said exactly what was fitting,  
No aspect of the case omitting. (ln.432 – 239)

Praxagora also exhibits a great deal of wit and eloquence in her speech (Hades 1962:437 – 438). In Chremes narration of what took place at the Assembly, Blepyros, having no idea of who delivered the speech, praises a woman's speech (Hades, 1962:444 – 445). Chremes, in the same way,

appreciated the speaker's eloquence (Hades, 1962:458 – 460). Ignorant of the women's plan (dressing as men and taking over the Assembly), Blepyros and Chremes give their candid opinion on the speeches made, and this shows that the women are really eloquent and the men's appreciation of these qualities shows Aristophanes' position on the issue.

In the fight against the magistrate and the chorus of men, the women support each other to defend themselves. When the magistrate commands the policeman to tie Lysistrata up, Calonice interposes herself between Lysistrata and the policeman, and Myrrhine and Stratyllis also intervene in their turn to prevent the policemen from succeeding. Later, more women come in to defeat the men (*Lys.* 437ff). Due to the women's love and care for the state and their determination to protect her, the women support each other to win against the men. The poet appreciates women's tenderness and motherly love towards their children even though he shows it comically. In the second scene, Cinesias goes to the Acropolis to look for his wife, Myrrhine, who refuses to see him but when reference is made to her child, she comes down saying; "how powerful motherhood is! My feelings compel me. I will come down" (*Lys.* 881 – 882), even though it was part of her plan to delude her husband.

In Chremes narration of what took place at the Assembly, he mentions women to be caring and always ready to give; one reason why the state should be handed over to them. Chremes puts it as:

And women, he said, are always ready to lend  
Dresses, jewelry, cash or drinking cups



To one another, when they're quite alone  
(Hades 1962:433).

Even though this is not Chremes' own statement, and therefore one can say that the women are praising themselves, Blepyros, a male, agrees saying, "that's true enough" (Hades 1962:433). Aristophanes' point is clear – women's virtues should be one main reason why they should participate in the running of the state.

In *Lysistrata's* statement, while Aristophanes shows women to be gentle and civilized, he brands men to be brutes:

Don't be rough or brusque;  
Handle them very gently, not in the brutal way men lay  
Hold on us. But the way a lady should – very civilized  
(*Lys.* 1123 – 1125)

Because Athenian men disrespected and disregarded women, they quite treated them harshly and for Aristophanes to reveal this attitude of men and contrast it with women's mildness and politeness, then, he is criticizing men and, on the other hand, appreciating this virtue of women and showing sympathy towards them.

Aristophanes reveals women's smartness and wisdom which his society conceals (MacDowell, 1995:235). In the conversation between *Lysistrata* and the magistrate, where *Lysistrata* discusses how the women will save the state, the men disagree, saying that it is impossible for women to talk politics, especially in public, because if the women are given the chance they will take over everything:

If once we let these women get the semblance of a start,  
Before we know, they'll be adept at every manly art.  
They'll build a navy, quickly master strategy marine,  
And fight against the City's fleet just like that Carian queen.  
And if to form a cavalry contingent they decide,  
They'd soon be teaching our equestrian gentry how to ride!  
(ln. 670 – 675)

The men admit that women are fast learners, smart and wise but they fail to acknowledge this in the positive way and always see these qualities of women as a threat and a challenge which they have to suppress. For Aristophanes to bring out these qualities and make women fight and bring about peace, then one can argue that he is trying to make his audience understand, accept and appreciate these qualities.

At the beginning of Act Two of the *Lysistrata*, five days after the seizure of the Acropolis, some of the women invent ridiculous lies to return home because of sex. According to *Lysistrata*, some of the women try to escape from the Acropolis and while she was discussing this with Stratyllis, First Woman comes with the excuse about fleeces and moths. Second woman also plans an escape using flax; the most ridiculous is Third Woman's pregnancy (ln. 706 – 800). In my view, these bizarre scenarios are invented by Aristophanes just to create humour because jokes on women about wine and sex were considered normal. It would also be blatantly stupid for one to use such stories as an escape plan in real life. However, Aristophanes mocks women's naivety, their preoccupation with trivialities and their use of weak excuses (MacDowell, 1995:246).

Women naturally possess the seductive power but in Athens it was not much seen due to their seclusion. But Aristophanes openly uses the seductive nature of women in his work. In the *Lysistrata*, Myrrhine uses this power to beguile her husband (904ff) and Lysistrata also uses Reconciliation to confuse and distract the Negotiator and the Ambassador (l. 1122). Similarly, in the *Thesmophoriazusae*, Euripides uses the dancing girl to seduce and distract the attention of the Scythian (ln.1182). Here, women are able to achieve what they want with the power of seduction. It is not clear why Aristophanes reveals this nature of women; perhaps, he wants his audience to accept women as they are rather than trying hard to conceal an unavoidable part of women.

Aristophanes reveals the faithfulness and loyalty of women in the *Lysistrata*. After a series of quarrels between them, in the conversation between the two choruses, (*Lys.*1011 – 1042) Stratyllis says and proves that women could be faithful friends; she helps the leader put on his coat, removes a gnat that has been biting his eye for hours, and wipes his tears with a handkerchief (ln.1032). The poet shows that if women are treated well they also reciprocate. This is similar to the statement made by Euripides's *Medea*:

... let them understand  
I am of a different kind: dangerous to my enemies,  
Loyal to my friends. To such a life glory belongs.  
(*Medea* 806 -808)

We cannot condemn the women for defending their needs and beliefs. This is an act of reciprocity and it exists among humans, both men and women, unless we are being hypocritical about the matter. In ancient Greece, where this was a natural philosophy, it was completely normal to love your dear ones and hate your enemies and, like Euripides, Aristophanes is making the issue clear and pointing out to their society that women cannot be judged wrongly due to this act.

Aristophanes also shows women to be faithful in their deals and always keep their promises or their agreements. Chremes puts it thus:

And not a witness by; and yet they always  
Redeem their words and make a full payment  
But men are always quarreling over deals (Hades,  
1962:433).

In the *Thesmophoriazusae* and *Ecclesiazusae*, the women are seen as secretive. After many years of performing the Thesmophoria, the women have kept secret the rites they perform. Men are excluded from the festival and the proceedings are kept from them. Euripides' relative, Mnesilochus, is questioned about the rite of the Thesmophoria and, because he is not a participant, fails eventually to give the right answer (*Thes.* 619ff). Perhaps, it is a joke that the beardless Cliesthenes is allowed access to the grounds (ln.581) because he is the women's representative and even he is asked to excuse them when the First Woman demands answers from Mnesilochus (ln.630 – 633). Thus, the only male given access to the festival grounds does not even have a clue about the rites

performed. This shows how women are good at keeping secrets. Also, in the *Ecclesiazusae*, Blepyros admits to women's secretive nature when Chremes said:

Smiling mum over her Thesmophorian secrets  
While you and I blurt out anything about the state's (Hades,  
1962:433)

In all the three plays, Aristophanes brands women to be fond of sex and wine. Lysistrata herself admits that this stereotype will be the saving grace for their cause:

But don't you see. That's exactly what I mean to use to  
save Greece. Those saffron gowns and slippers and  
see-through dresses, yes, and our scent and rouge as well.  
(*Lys.* 46 – 48)

Lysistrata recognizes and more or less confirms the comic stereotype of women through her plans. Instead of denying the inherent weaknesses of women and asking the wives to pretend to be the way that their husbands believe that they are, she simply accepts the characterization and determines to use it to her own advantage. Thus, Lysistrata does not deny that the wives are frivolous and inferior but emphatically says that these inherent weaknesses can be used as strengths when properly employed or not employed. It can be said that after her admission, the women take advantage of it to reveal those weaknesses: when the proposal is made to abstain from sex, all the women are reluctant and we see their desire for sex (ln.124 – 154). The women are seen as wine-bibbers when they use

wine to confirm the oath which Lysistrata administers to them; Kalonice and Myrrhine, after regarding the plan with reluctance suddenly become enthusiastic when they see what form the oath is going to take (ln.197 - 209). In later scenes, some of the women concoct ridiculous lies in order to run back to their husbands (ln.718ff). The women's keenness on sexual intercourse, their reluctance to give it up, their eagerness to rush to their husbands and their uncontrolled desires, in my view, are jokes to create humour and make the audience laugh.

In the *Thesmophoriazusae*, when Euripides' relative, Mnesilochus, is questioned about the activities of the festival, he guesses that it is drinking and, hilariously, his guess turns out to be right (ln.632 – 636). This does not mean that it was so in real life. Aristophanes wants to create humour. Although it was known that the women fasted, it does not mean that Aristophanes knew the proceedings of the Thesmophoria (Meineck, 2005). Wine appears in the women's curse against their enemies at the start of the meeting: their enemies include wine-sellers who give short measure (ln.348). The woman who makes the first speech complains that nowadays husbands, taught by Euripides to distrust their wives, lock up their stores of food and drink with keys and seals difficult to copy (ln.420 – 423). The climax about wine comes when Mnesilochus, caught by the women, seizes the baby of one of the women as a hostage and threatens to kill it if he is not released. The 'baby', when unwrapped from its clothes, turns out to be a wineskin full of wine, and as he plunges his knife into it, the mother is desperate to catch its blood in a bowl (731ff).

The *Thesmophoriazusae* shows the solid superiority and nobility of women over the hypocritical inconsistency and corruption of men. A feminist interpretation may thus argue that the poet uses the image of women to criticize the behavior of men rather than to exculpate the comic stereotype of women and that all the trappings of theatre aid him in exposing the tricks of men (Taaffe, 1993:78).

Also, in the *Ecclesiazusae*, one woman's excuse for lateness is that her husband is an oarsman on the Salaminia and has been rowing her in bed all night (Hades, 1962:420). One woman has been looking forward to the Assembly because she thinks there is plenty to drink (Hades, 1962:423) and the speech which one woman makes for practice is a proposal to make it illegal to have water-tanks in taverns (Hades, 1962:423).

In all three plays, jokes about women on wine and sex are prominent. Clearly, it was a standing joke among men that women were constantly having drinks in secret. Perhaps, some women drank but there is no evidence that alcoholism among women was common in ancient Athens. The sex jokes are not about marital intercourse between wives and husbands but about wives having secret affairs with other men; husbands bar and seal the women's rooms and keep dogs to keep lovers away (*Thes.*, 417 – 419), when they come home, they look suspiciously at their wives and search for a hidden lover (*Thes.*, 401 – 403). The relative says 'we' are cunning enough to have lovers all the time (*Thes.*, 467ff). This story is outrageous, told by a character who is not actually a woman and

who is a relative of Euripides who was seen at that time as a slanderer of women. The notion that wives are always having it off with lovers is a comic hyperbole (MacDowell, 1995: 264). Athens was a place where most marriages were arranged by a girl's father with a man who was considerably older than she was and women have little or no contact with men, therefore, keeping lovers would be impossible or rare. Perhaps, because girls marry men older than they were, it may have been the case that a young wife had no romantic feeling towards her husband and because of her attitude, the men would have some cause to suspect her (MacDowell, 1995: 264).

The above does not mean that women cannot control their sexual desires and that Aristophanes sees women as bad. Even if it is so, the men are also portrayed as such, therefore, it cannot be deduced that the poet's attack is on women. However, Aristophanes' audience is not encouraged because of all these jokes about wine and lovers to think that women should be free to drink wine when they wish or, that it is hard on them to be plunged into an arranged marriage with an unloved husband or, that they should not feel threatened if no male baby is born. It is assumed that it is their duty in real life to conform to their husbands' requirements. In the *Thesmophoriazusae*, Aristophanic women accuse Euripides as a slanderer of women, if it is assumed that it is true then Aristophanes is no different from Euripides since Aristophanes follows or writes more damaging things about women.



It can be argued that the defeat of the magistrate in the *Lysistrata* is not due to the strength of Lysistrata's arguments but he is simply overpowered by the number of women (*Lys.* 567ff.). If Lysistrata's boast that the women will untangle war easily as a wool, sending envoys here and there, is not real and cannot help any real life negotiator, we can neither ignore her advice to the state about membership of the citizen body; first, the city must be cleansed, like a fleece, by having the bad men removed from it like dirt and burrs, then just as good wool is collected for spinning and weaving, the worthy should be gathered in. To Lysistrata, the men who ought to be expelled from the citizen body are the politicians who collaborate to get one another elected to office (*Lys.* 580 -583). Here, Lysistrata clearly implies that democratic elections ought to be more open than they are. The men who ought to be given citizenship are the metics – people who have permission to reside in Athens permanently (ln.585); any alien who is friendly to you (ln.585), people owing money to the public treasury (ln.586) and colonies (ln.587). So Lysistrata is urging changes in the roll of citizens to exclude individuals whose loyalty is only to a small group and whose aim is to obtain offices for themselves and to include all who are loyal to Athens, whatever their origins. Lysistrata excludes slaves and women in the Athenian citizen body. If one considers the notion of female participation in politics a fantasy, it can be said that Aristophanes is making a serious practical proposal that is why he omits women because in reality women were not included in decision-making in Athens. However, he does not completely ignore women because Lysistrata maintains that women are capable of giving men good advice. Therefore,

if the poet thinks women can give good advice to the state, then, a feminist would conclude that Aristophanes believes that women should be enfranchised, have liberty, civil rights and better education, so that their participation in the running of the state can be immense.

Also, when the men argued to defend the city against their so-called new enemies; the women, the old women defy them and claim the right to advise on Athenian policy not only because women contribute men to the city and young women miss their chance of getting husbands while those already married lose their husbands and sons (*Lys.*594 - 600), but also because of women's participation in Athens' religious rituals. So, Lysistrata and her supporters represent not just a feminine attitude to war and politics but also Athenian religious traditions (MacDowell, 1995:239). Lysistrata points to the Athenian and Spartan emissaries for peace that the war is not necessary, seeing that they all worshipped the same gods, partook in the same Pan Hellenic games and bearing in mind the fact that they shared a common destiny and purpose, and that is, to drive away Persian imperialistic tendencies (Grant, 2004:35). Aristophanes reveals that women are not ignorant about politics and policies of the state and they possess brilliant ideas that can contribute a lot and perhaps, save the state, if considered. Also, Aristophanes points to the role that women, long denied a say in Athenian politics, play in bringing the war to an honourable end for both sides (Grant, 2004:34). Like Euripides, Aristophanes also shows sympathy for women when he reveals women's situation in times of war which most writers like Thucydides ignores.

Praxagora also advises her people to hand the state to the women;

But trust my counsels and you may yet be saved,  
For I propose this law: that we put at once  
The city's entire rule in the women's hands.  
Do they not manage households efficiently?  
(Hades 1962:425)

Here, Praxagora's advice is that the main function of government is to control the use of resources and the spending of money. Since women do that on a smaller scale for each household, they should be able to do it on a large scale for the whole city. When she argues that women are more conservative than men (Hades, 1962:425 – 426), we clearly see where the poet's sympathy lies.

In the *Lysistrata*, the Magistrate displays a bitter attitude towards women. He says while men were in the assembly debating the Sicilian expedition, women were celebrating the Adonia and shouting from the rooftops (ln.389 – 402). Here, the magistrate draws our attention to the wide difference between male and female public behaviour: men debate in the assembly about serious matters of war while women sing and shout in religious festivities. He reminds us that women have no voice in public affairs. To him, these are actions necessary to the health of the city but not of serious daily importance. Also, he stresses on Lysistrata's remarks at the onset of the play: women would rather celebrate in drunken festivals than discuss serious civic business (ln.1 – 4). The magistrate's comments reveal his society's stereotyped ideas about women.

When the magistrate declares that women have no share in the war, Lysistrata retorts that it weighs more than twice as heavily on them as on the men (*Lys.* 594 -596). She says the women give birth to sons and send them out as soldiers and wives have to sleep alone because the men are away on campaigns or some become widows. Also, girls lose the chance of getting husbands because they grow too old before the war ends (ln.598-601). When the magistrate tries to respond, Lysistrata's comments are;

... a man comes home – he may be old and grey – but he can get himself a young wife in no time. But a woman's not in bloom for long, and if she doesn't succeed quickly, then no one will marry her, and before long she's going round to the fortune-tellers to ask them if she's any chance  
(*Lys.* 603 – 608).

Here, Aristophanes invites men's sympathy for women and also addresses the issue of Athenian marriage: young girls between the ages of fourteen and sixteen were giving to men in their late twenties or early thirties for marriage. If a woman becomes old and cannot afford the dowry requested, then she might remain unmarried forever and become a burden on her father (Seltman, 1955). When the magistrate is not allowed to make a reply, Aristophanes is seriously inviting his male audience to view the situation from a woman's rather than a man's viewpoint. Also, like Euripides, Aristophanes wanted perhaps to portray the suffering women go through in war; something which Thucydides and most ancient writers have ignored. To Taaffe (1993:13), Aristophanes considers the feminine to

be an essential element of the *polis*, yet one controlled and represented by men. Just like a liberal feminist, the poet believes that there should be an improved legal rights in marriages for women. There should be the right to divorce, choose partners and take decisions in their family life. He believes that there should also be a change in the social system that allows young girls to marry men twice their age, with or without love.

The Acropolis which belonged to the patron goddess, Athena, had one political use of greatest importance: the safe keeping of funds. The Athenians' treasuries were placed under the protection of the Goddess. Thus, when the women seized the Acropolis, their act was a symbol that they were taking control of Athens and, in practical sense, it obstructs the men's access to public money.

In the *Thesmophoriazusae*, Aristophanes' defense of women is seen when the chorus leader says:

... That's all very well, but tell me this: if  
what you say is right, What makes you so  
anxious to marry a plague, and saddle yourselves  
with a blight? You won't allow us to leave the house,  
or even peep out of the door, And if ever you find your  
wife is out, you bellow, you rage, and you roar, When  
what you should do if your taunts are true, and women  
are all that you say, Is go down on your knees and give  
thanks to the gods for taking your burden away...

(786– 845)

The chorus leader continues with praises for women and their superiority over men whilst criticizing men and their actions. However, it has been argued that this is just a mockery of women because every Athenian man knew that women were inferior; thus, Aristophanes knew perfectly well that he was addressing his male audience. But to a modern reader, Aristophanes, perhaps, wanted his audience to review their perception of women.

The terms of the peace between Euripides and the women can be considered as misogynistic (Steen, 2002). Euripides' terms are that if his relative is released, he will not criticize the women in future; but if they do not accept these terms, he will reveal their surreptitious activities to their husbands. The women agree immediately. First, I believe the women are the ones to pronounce the terms of the agreement since they are the ones who hold Euripides' relative hostage. Secondly, the women, accepting the terms quickly, show that what Euripides says about them is true and, in order to avoid their secrets being exposed, quickly agree to the terms.

In the *Ecclesiazusae*, women carefully plan the sexual disguise, and carefully learn the rules for behavior and the act of speaking in the assembly to gain political power in Athens. If the women change their costumes, then it means it takes masculinity to rule. It can be argued that if the women are dressed as males and are able to win in the *ecclesia*, then women possess the features of masculinity and can participate in the affairs of the state. On the other hand, if women are dressed as males, in order to disguise themselves, then Aristophanes is stressing the point that

women cannot appear in the assembly, take part in decision-making or rule the state because their feminity is at bay and it cannot allow them to take decisions for the state (we should not forget that ancient Greek men believed in the superiority of the male and the inferiority of the female). This means that as long as one appears masculine, he or she could possess political power.

Praxagora and the First Woman admit that women have “gossiped into natural speakers” (Hades, 1962:422). Gossiping often characterizes women as creatures who, among other things, talk incessantly. The first woman and Praxagora identify themselves with the accepted male representation of comic women. Taaffe (1993:116) believes that the joke gains humour at female expense while its view is male. First Woman’s error jars our perceptions, making blatant the difference between a smart woman who can speak like a man, a dumb woman who cannot succeed at the imitation and the difference between men and women (Hades, 1962:423). Men speak consistently and about civic issues; women babble, drink and ramble on about other topics. But the speech criticizes men’s act and if Aristophanes believes that Athens has failed in its policies, then the First Woman’s speech is in the right direction.

## **Conclusion**

Considering the above presentation, Aristophanes' plays are neither feminist manifestos nor misogynist jeers. Aristophanes sometimes laughs at women and sometimes supports them. The poet is sympathetic towards women and appreciates women's cleverness, eloquence and other qualities and believes that these qualities can be used in outdoor activities. However, he does not clearly advocate that women should be given political responsibility or power but he is generally inducing the men to take action. Unlike Euripides, Aristophanes makes use of the stereotypical ideas about women, and this does not induce his audience to rethink their perception of women. In my view, Aristophanes does not believe in the seclusion of women but believes that women's capabilities can be used for the betterment of the political, social and economic wellbeing of the society. However, he does not believe in women's participation in politics, let alone their total governance of society. Perhaps, he feared his society's criticisms and therefore decided to play alongside what they desired to hear and see but took a step further to point out women's importance and qualities.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION**

#### **Introduction**

The aim of the Chapter Three and Chapter Four was to draw feministic ideas out of the poets' presentation of women. So far, I have tried to show that Euripides and Aristophanes' presentation revealed that they were apparently yearning for the equality of men and women in terms of politics, law, business and social equity. The poets also believed in the capabilities of women and held that their virtues – intelligence, eloquence and strong-willed nature are enough for them to participate fully in every sector of nation building.

The aim of this chapter is therefore to bring out the idea that these poets have traces of feminism in the plays by looking at passages that clearly give the hint that the poets even though unaware of the term 'feminism' have advocated for the equalization of Greek men and women. The work also finds out whether these poets deserve the title 'feminists'. Thus, the chapter analyzes passages in the poets' plays that address issues on women in political, social and economic situations, inferring their

communicative intentions from the words they put in the mouth of their characters.

### **Reflections of feminism in Euripides' plays**

Although he presents a tragedy, Euripides fashions into his work a splendid defense of women. I will call him a feminist, taking into consideration the societal perception of women as it existed in his day.

Firstly, if Euripides breaches the inner circle or private life of women and the outer circle or public life of men, then the poet does not believe in the seclusion of women. Also, how is it possible that the chorus who are citizens of Corinth support an outsider (Medea) and betray their own princess (Glauce)? This reveals Euripides' intentions – deploring the act of Jason and supporting Medea. This shows that Euripides recognizes Jason's actions as bad, therefore, an injustice against Medea. He, therefore, draws his society's attention to the injustices done to women.

This statement made by Medea:

Let them understand  
I am of a different kind: dangerous to my enemies,  
Loyal to my friends. To such a life glory belongs.  
(*Medea*, ln. 806 – 808)

is a natural tendency of vengeance which existed in the poet's time. This statement does not show Medea as a wicked woman. We should not judge Medea according to our modern or Christian concepts. Looking at the

literature of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C., for example, Aeschylus' *Oresteian Trilogy* and Sophocles' *Electra* which was full of vengeance, one major moral principle that existed in Greek society before the introduction of Christianity was 'an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'. Leaving harm without retaliation or vengeance was regarded as cowardice or a sign of weakness. The principle of forgiveness, as held today, is a modern concept which seemed not to have existed or which was not prevalent during Euripides' time. Medea, therefore, is not wrong in being loyal to her friends and dangerous to her enemies. It is also based on this perception that she seeks vengeance on Glauce, Creon and Jason, which ends in their destruction. We should, therefore, not accuse Euripides as a misogynist because of this statement. Medea is, therefore, justified in her actions.

Secondly, Medea's killing of her children comes about because she realizes the importance of children. She feels that the children can serve as the best tool in punishing Jason. Creon in his speech says that Glauce comes first before his nation (ln.329), he, therefore, shows Medea his weak point, and she uses it against him. Aegeus visits the Delphic oracle to seek a cure for his childlessness and accepts Medea's offer due to his problem (ln.661ff). Her cleverness leads her to deduce that if Creon prefers his daughter to the state, and Aegeus is anxious because of childlessness, then, denying Jason of his sons would be the most costly punishment. We should also note that her other motive, preventing her children from falling into the hands of her enemies, is reasonable and justifiable. One might say that Medea is a woman who lacks motherly

instincts but we should bear in mind the circumstances that led to her actions. This attitude also shows that she is able to rise above the weaknesses associated with her sex. This however reflects Euripides' disapproval with his society's conception that women have no thinking capabilities and therefore cannot participate in politics and other outdoor activities associated with men. The poet, therefore, advises his society that before a woman is judged as bad, they should take into consideration the events that led to her actions.

In Medea's speech:

Surely of all the creatures that have life and  
will, we women are the most wretched.  
When, for an extravagant sum, we have  
bought a husband, we must then accept him as  
Possessor of our body. This is to aggravate  
Wrong with worst wrong. Then the great  
question: will the man we get be bad  
or good? For women, divorce is not  
Respectable; to repel the man, not possible (ln. 228 –  
234).

Euripides addresses the social aspect of Greek life and the fundamental issues in Greek marriages. First, he addresses the issue of foreigners not allowed to marry Greeks (221 – 222, 239). Because Medea is a foreigner, the marriage between her and Jason is not recognized under Greek law and therefore her children cannot be recognized as Greeks. In 451/450B.C., Pericles introduced a decree that; "in future the name of no child should be

admitted whose father and mother were not Athenian citizens legitimately wedded” (Bury & Meiggs, 1975:217).

This law affected Cimon, Cleisthenes and Themistocles because their mothers were foreigners. This law was passed to cut down on the Athenian citizenry and also to disqualify sons from such marriages from participating in politics so that only true Athenians could inherit or enjoy such privileges. This is part of the reason why Jason wanted to marry Glauce; so that his children can have a worthy descent (*Medea*, 562 – 563). Secondly, the poet addresses the issue of dowry paid by the woman. A woman pays for a man to share her bed, but that man has absolute control over her life, property and movement. The worst part is, the woman cannot know whether the man is good or bad and if the man is bad, she cannot ask for a divorce because it is considered a disgrace, it is frowned upon and it will stain her reputation forever, and above all, she cannot reproach the man. We should not forget the issue of some women not being able to get husbands; women from wealthy homes get husbands quickly because they can afford the fat dowries demanded, but women from poorer homes might not be able to afford the dowries, therefore, it makes it difficult for them to get husbands (Kitto, 1965). Thirdly, the poet tackles divorce and men’s ability to go out of their homes and have fun with prostitutes, or their ability to take concubines while women are forced to stay with their husbands, whether good or bad, and most importantly, without love. If the poet, through his work, draws his society’s attention to all these issues, then we can rightly say that he is

defending women and, out of that, he can be called a feminist. The poet fights for improved legal rights within marriages for Greek and foreign women. He believes that the social system is unfavourable to women, therefore, the need for a change in the society – an issue that feminists address.

Creon's order of exile (ln. 274 – 7) shows that those in power have control over the poor, and this happens in all societies. However, Medea's success in securing refuge from Aegeus shows Euripides as being against tyranny and against the order of Creon. It also supports the psychology in Euripides' writings: presenting the weak, peasants, slaves, women, children and the poor in society to rise against or stand up to the rich and the powerful.

In this statement:

The weak shall be too strong for you,

The unwarlike shall overcome you (*Hecuba*, ln. 1034 – 1035)

it becomes obvious that Euripides is out to defend women. This statement shows how women are considered weak in society and how Euripides makes the 'weak', thus these women, rise and defend themselves, showing that women have some capabilities that help them to succeed and overcome difficult situations. He is, however, informing his society to appreciate and recognize women.

The nurse's speech:

The men of old times had little sense;

If you called them fools you wouldn't be far wrong.  
They invented songs, and all the sweetness of music,  
To perform at feasts, banquets, and celebrations;  
But no one thought of using  
Songs and stringed instruments  
To banish the bitterness and pain of life  
(*Medea* ln. 190 – 197).

should not be seen as a mere theatricality but that the poet is telling his audience that women have a mind of their own too to express their frustrations and intentions which may include evil ones. Literature, before the 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. (like the works of Homer and the Lyric poets), presented women more frankly. They possessed power and vigorous personalities, intelligence and extraordinary dignity, with Penelope as the best example even though Helen cannot be ignored (except the works of Hesiod and Simonides' *Essay on Women* which attack women). But by the fifth Century B.C., literature had taken a misogynist bend (beginning with the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles) and women were presented as unfaithful and treacherous, among others, but, in the nurse's speech, it is the men who are presented now as unfaithful and traitors. Euripides points out that men who claim to have intelligence cannot ban the bitterness and pains of life but they claim to have intelligence. Perhaps, the thought has not even crossed their minds. This means that there is more to intelligence than what men think and Medea brings them out; eloquence, imagination and persuasiveness. There is no doubt that Euripides is out to support

women and, therefore, he brings out the good qualities in women and points to the mistakes of men.

If there is this speech in the play:

Streams of the sacred rivers flow uphill;  
Tradition, order, all things are reversed:  
Deceit is men's device now,  
Men's oaths are gods' dishonor.  
Legend will now reverse our reputation;  
A time comes when the female sex is honoured;  
That old discordant slander  
Shall no more hold us subjects.  
Male poets of past ages, with their ballads  
Of faithless women, shall go out of fashion; .....

(ln. 413 – 423)

I wonder why some writers think of Euripides as a misogynist when there is this speech in the *Medea*. Here, the poet seems to be prophesying about what will happen some time to come: the female sex will be honoured. In this passage, we seem to hear and see the poet's main thrust of defense for women, rescuing their names from discomfiture to bring back honour to the women race, and demanding that women's voices be heard and their due given to them.

In Medea's speech;

We were born women – useless for honest purposes,  
But in all kinds of evil skilled practitioners (ln. 411 – 412)



I will say that Medea is forced into doing what she did. The words do not necessarily make Euripides a misogynist, he is a realist with deep insight into the psychology of women. He is presenting an undeniable fact about human nature, that is, if you wrong someone and the one feels it very deeply, the one will retaliate in a like manner. The poet wants to show his society that everyone has their limit of tolerance and has a part of their being where they are hurt most and Medea expresses it in line 261 – 264.

The statement below is made by a man who is shamelessly defending himself; rubbing his wickedness with sweet words.

If only children could be got some other way,  
Without the female sex! If women didn't exist,  
Human life would be rid of all its miseries  
(*Medea*, ln. 573 – 575).

Neither the statement nor the man could be taken seriously. Here, Euripides reveals men's ideas about women. When a woman stays loyal and does not rebel against the actions of her husband, then the woman becomes the most honourable of women. But when a woman rebels against her husband because of maltreatment, men do not only see the woman as bad but the whole female race becomes bad too.

In the same way, when Polymestor made the statement:

All the abuse that men have heaped  
On women in time past, all they are saying now  
Or ever will say, I can sum it in one phrase:

No monster like a woman breeds in land or sea;

(*Hecuba*, ln. 1176 – 1179)

he was just uttering words out of anger and desperation. When everything is going on well for him, despite his wicked act, he does not see either himself or Hecuba as wicked but when the tables turn around, he now remembers the wickedness of the whole female race and their unbearable nature. But then the chorus respond by saying;

Because you suffer, why should you so arrogantly

Include all women in one general reproach? (ln. 1181 – 1182)

Euripides here informs his society to avoid generalizing women as bad and, that because some men have come into contact with some bad women does not mean women are generally bad. His play *Alcestis* deals with the issue. By revealing Alcestis as noble and courteous, the poet wants his society to understand women's nature and, that as there exist good and bad men so are there good and bad women. He wants his society to understand that if they view things in an unbiased way or avoid being stereotypical, they will be able to understand and appreciate women more and see them as treasures to behold. Here, the poet's feminist nature comes to bare.

In Hecuba's statement:

Custom too is partly my excuse,

Which requires women's eyes not to be raised to men

(*Hecuba* ln. 973 – 974).

I do not think Euripides' aim is to make the audience feel that the inferiority of women is right. I think Hecuba uses her society's customs as an excuse to avoid her plans being revealed. Hecuba rises against Odysseus, trying to prevent him from taking Polyxena; she also is able to convince Agamemnon to support her plans. Therefore, I believe her reason for such statement is to prevent Polymestor from seeing the anger and hatred in her eyes.

This passage by Hecuba also reveals Euripides' support for women:

And not only here; but by the dear Eurotas  
Some Spartan wife is sitting in her house  
Lost in tears and groans;  
And a grey-haired mother beats her head  
In grief for her dead sons,  
And tears her cheek till her nails are stained with blood  
(*Hecuba*, ln. 649 – 654).

Unlike many ancient writers such as Thucydides who ignores the plight of women in his *Histories*, Euripides does not ignore the issues of women and, most importantly, what women go through in times of war. It is assumed that war and other outdoor activities are for the man and childbirth and indoor activities are for the woman. Euripides believes that war and all other activities in the state affect women as much as they affect men; mothers go through childbirth to give birth to sons only to be killed during war, and wives sit at home waiting for their husbands only to hear bad news. Some women become widows in their prime and might not

be able to remarry, leaving them to ponder if their children will have the same fate as their husbands and if they might be childless in time to come and die in grief. If Euripides, again, does not ignore these issues, then he supports and defends women and he is trying to be an eye-opener to his generation to be more affectionate and compassionate towards women, and they should, sometimes, see things from a woman's point of view.

In Clytemnestra's speech;

Well, women are frail, I grant you. But when, knowing this,  
A husband looks elsewhere, and slights his lawful wife,  
She'll copy him, and find herself another friend.  
And then the glare of public censure lights on us;  
The husbands are to blame – but they're not criticized.

(*Electra*, ln. 1036 - 1048)

Euripides again reveals men's stereotypical behaviours. The poet condemns men's attitude and justifies Clytemnestra's actions to some extent. He uses Clytemnestra to point out that his society should be objective in analyzing issues instead of being gender biased and always guarding their authoritarian positions. Clytemnestra points out here that men are aware of the fragility of women but they ignore this because they do not want their authority to be challenged. Here, the poet draws men's attention to the fact that there is nothing wrong about discussing issues with women or wives. If Agamemnon had discussed his intentions of killing Iphigenia with his wife, perhaps, Clytemnestra would not have taken the issues too much to heart or would not have harboured so much pain to act the way she did. Secondly, like Medea, Clytemnestra felt

threatened with the presence of another woman in Agamemnon's life and, therefore, acted the way she did even though not justifiable because she planned Agamemnon's death before the arrival of Apollo's prophetess, Cassandra.

If in a society which ignores, subdues and recognizes women as inferior, Euripides writes this statement and wants a woman to be revered like a god, not even the most noble of men;

Let not Alcestis' monument  
Be in men's eyes as the graves of mortals.  
Let her tomb be honoured like a god's,  
Where the passer-by stops to worship; .....  
(*Alcestis* ln. 992 – 1000)

then we clearly notice the poet's sympathy towards women. In my view, it is not only for Alcestis' act that the poet expects that women should be revered but also in all situations where women have been able to handle, control and overcome issues such as childbirth, widowhood, losing children in war, seclusion and endurance of bad marriages.

This speech;

The prizes given were horses, in the lesser events;  
The first prize for the greater, boxing and wrestling, was  
A team of oxen, and the girl with them ..... (ln. 1026 –  
1029)

does not show that Euripides supports the idea of women being objects or regarded as objects. Even though women were regarded as inferior to their

male counterpart, there is no evidence that Greek women were sold or given as gifts in events. Women who were sold or given as gifts were slaves and perhaps children of debtors. Therefore, it cannot be argued that Euripides believes and supports women's inferiority.

If after Admetus' nobility and the pain he is going through for losing his wife, this statement is made;

He does not know how good she is; but suffering  
Will teach him. (ln. 142 – 143)

then Euripides is again stressing the point that his society does not know the essence and importance of women. The statement that 'we do not cherish what we have until we lose it', goes on to explain that Admetus and, in fact, all men do not know and understand the female symbol and necessity of the existence of women.

The poet criticizes Admetus' parents and their act of cowardice and praises Alcestis for her nobility:

A wretched pair,  
Both lacked courage to rescue their own son, .....  
Love of such quality – in this world a rare occurrence;  
But I know that, to me, such a partner  
Would bring perpetual content (ln. 462 – 472).

If Euripides puts Admetus' parents at one side and Alcestis on the other and judges by condemning the man's parents and praises Alcestis, then, he wants his society to know men's hypocritical behavior in claiming to love

and their inherent cowardice when it comes to serious issues. He also wants his society to understand the extent of women's act of sacrifice and their ability to go an extra mile not only to say how much they love but to demonstrate the extent to which they can show their love.

### **Reflections of feminism in Aristophanes' plays**

Presenting a comedy, Aristophanes is one of the first, if not the first comic poet, to write a complete play on women. This part of the work also examines Aristophanes as a feminist by critically looking at the words he puts in the mouth of his characters.

The statement below is made by a chorus leader who is frustrated and desperate because the women have occupied the Acropolis.

There is no beast stubborn than a woman,  
And neither fire nor leopard is more shameless  
(*Lys.* ln. 1012 – 1013)

He says this because of his inability to subdue the women, therefore, unable to protect his authority. Generally, when a man feels that his authority is threatened by the presence of a woman who is regarded as inferior, then that woman is branded as a wicked person. Aristophanes afterwards retorts his own statement by making Stratyllis put on the chorus leader's coat and removes a gnat in his eye. This kind gesture that

Stratyllis shows automatically changes the perception of the men and their statement, to;

Damn you, you wheedlers! Still the saying's true –  
We can't live with you, we can't live without you!  
Let us make peace, that's what we ought to do;  
You won't hit us, we promise not to flout you.  
(ln. 1037 – 1040)

Here, the men are not still convinced about women but they accept them as what they are and promise to make peace with them. This statement does not clearly make Aristophanes a feminist. He partly believes that women are a burden and difficult to live with and, on the other hand, because of the importance of women, men cannot live without them either.

When Lysistrata makes the statement, 'all our husbands think we're such clever villains' (ln. 10), the poet fails to correct such misconception, therefore, leaving the issue hanging. The poet's failure to comment on the issue shows the possibility of him agreeing to the statement, besides, he puts it in the mouth of Lysistrata anyway. However, are we to associate these women with real Greek women? They are theatrical, comic women whose gender identity is determined by what men think, by exaggerated fears and fantasies. They are female figures completely created by men, on stage and in their imaginations (Taaffe, 1993: 54).

This is clearly a defense of women:

It's time we women stood up for ourselves,



And glorified the name  
Of a sex that nobody praises much,  
And everyone seems to blame.....  
(*Thees.* ln. 788 – 800)

In these lines, Aristophanes seems to be following Euripides' pattern. In a society where no one recognizes the importance of women, it is necessary for the women to rise and defend themselves. Aristophanes puts the most obvious question that may have run through his mind and that of his society to bear; 'why do you keep us if we are so evil?' This part of the statement talks about women's married life and their afflictions. It also draws us to the main purpose of a Greek marriage – for the production of children, and most importantly, male children. Therefore, it is only important for the man to keep the woman for the bearing of legitimate children. Perhaps, the men feel it is out of necessity and not a desire or a want. The poet is fighting for a change in the social order which does not favour women.

The next part of the passage (ln. 801ff) is quite feministic even though it might have rather induced the laughter of the audience rather than to open their eyes to recognize women more. In Athenian society, where women do not have any physical training, it is impossible for women to surpass men in any physical activity except, to some extent, in moral virtues. The chorus afterwards shows the wickedness of men; bandits, kidnappers and thieves and the chorus leader then criticizes society's attitudes towards women. In general, the above passage is not a

serious defense of women because it mocks women. Perhaps, the poet's main intention is to let his society recognize the importance of women and their intelligence as capable of participating well in outdoor activities

From this statement;

Or tells a woman's husband that the baby's not her own;  
The maid who 'knows the very man' when Mistress wants  
Some fun (*Thest.* ln. 340 – 341)

the baby has neither been the woman's nor the man's but the main point is the substitution of one baby with another. This reveals the social problems that women go through in marriage. When there is no child, the problem is the woman's, not the man's, and if the woman fails to produce one, the woman is sent away or another woman joins the family to produce children. It also shows that husbands are free to have concubines or to have sex with their slaves. First woman also adds:

Supposing a woman finds she can't bear her husband  
a child – she's got to produce one from somewhere,  
hasn't she ..... (ln. 412 – 419)

Even if Aristophanes has been sympathetic towards women, these statements make it difficult to recognize the poet as a feminist. These statements do not encourage his audience to view women differently but the audience gets more suspicious with their women. It does not make men understand that it is all right if a woman cannot bear a child or if she is unable to get a male child. It does not encourage men to treat women with respect and love but makes them more suspicious and jealous. It

makes men believe that seclusion of women is right because it prevents women from committing more evil.

The statement below is similar to the one made by Medea in lines 414 – 431;

The audience is rather sick  
Of plots antiquely patterned: so  
Produce one new and striking – quick  
Before they go (Hades 1962:438).

Aristophanes requests a change in the presentation of plots, perhaps, just like Euripides, in the change of the presentation of women. But one wonders if Aristophanes' women plays are driven towards a feministic approach or show a change in the presentation of women, considering the mockery of women in his plays.

In the passage below, Aristophanes mocks women's so called drinking ability but he also seriously criticizes men and their inability to take adequate decisions for the state.

But I'm sure they do,  
By Artemis, I am! and strong stuff too  
Only look at the laws they pass and it's obvious  
They'd never pass such things unless  
very drunk.....  
And when one of them gets outrageously drunk  
The rest call order and the Archers lug him out.  
(Hades 1962:423)

First woman points out that the laws they pass at the assembly are so outrageous that she believes they drink before these laws are passed. This means that Aristophanes believes that men lack the ability of governing the state and taking the right decisions towards the development of the nation. Therefore, it is necessary to leave the administration of the state to women – the only thing not tried. Aristophanes continues criticizing men, calling them scoundrels, thieves and sycophants, while he is all praises for women (Hades, 1962:423). In my view, Aristophanes does not think women are as worthless as his society always portrays them but he believes women have the ability to participate in the decision-making process of the state but only as advisors to the men (*Lys.* 630).

This speech may have induced the laughter of the audience rather than to make them reflect and think of women as superior;

That they're superior in everything to us

I soon shall demonstrate to you. Now firstly: .....

They nag their husbands biddable, as of old.

They hide lovers under their beds, as of old .....

They don't like wine in water, as of old (Hades 1962:425).

First, the audience does not even see or think of women as equals, not to talk about women being superior to men (Powel, 1990). Secondly, as Praxagora explains women's method of doing things, we see a mockery of women about sex and wine which do not give a clear defense for women or show the poet as a feminist. Even though Euripides presents women as superior to men just like Aristophanes, Euripides writes a different genre

(tragedy) in which its themes and presentations are loftier and more intense than comedy in which its main aim is to induce laughter, therefore, Euripides' themes would sink more into the minds of the audience rather than those of Aristophanes.

## **Conclusion**

The central aim of this study has been to argue and try to assert that the poets' apparently yearned for the equality of women to men through;

1. The presentation of women in the selected plays
2. The speeches that reflect feminism in the selected plays

The work has been able to show that, these poets, having written in an era where seclusion of women was the norm, did not believe in the seclusion of women. They rather believed that the intellectual capabilities and virtues of women can play a major role in the progress and stability of any nation.

There is no reason to think that Euripides is misogynistic in his presentation or was a misogynist in real life because he is said to have married twice (McDowell, 1995:252). He just gives a more penetrating analysis of women's motives than the earlier tragedians had done, and shows women being led by love or other emotions into wrong conduct.

Therefore, it is true that Euripides reveals some murky aspects of female psychology which had previously received little attention.

Secondly, considering the kind of presentation Euripides gives to his female characters, it will be fair to consider him as a feminist. Considering the discussions in Chapter Three, the poet shows that women are brave, noble, faithful, strong-willed, eloquent, and trustworthy, as against the above mentioned negative presentation, it is clear that the better sides of women that the poet reveals completely outweigh the bad sides. Also, taking into consideration the statements Euripides puts into the mouth of his characters, there is so much reason to consider the poet a feminist.

Above all, Euripides' stories deal with narratives taken from the traditional body of myth that had been passed down the generations and would have been familiar to his audience. Euripides' innovations are minor, except for Medea's deliberate murder of her children. I do not think the poet made this change for his society to see women in a bad light but rather, perhaps, because he wants his audience to witness the conflict of love and necessity that takes place within Medea before she kills her sons. It is necessary for Medea because if she leaves the children behind, Creon's family and the people of Corinth will avenge his death; if she takes them away, the King's family will forever pursue them, and she does not want to leave the last laugh to her enemies. We should not forget that the killing of the children is the only and most painful way of punishing Jason.

The poet believes that it is necessary for women to perform their duties as wives and bringer of lives. His female characters perform these duties but these are not the only things they do. Euripides understands that women must do these duties but they should be given equal opportunities as men and that they could do better. Therefore, I assert again that the idea of feminism is inherent in Euripides' mind and he uses these plays to bring it out. Because of his appraisal on women's rights and sympathy on women's plight, there is no doubt about the intentions of the poet; he can be called a feminist.

I believe Aristophanes does not agree to the seclusion of women and wants his society to involve women in the running of the state. He believes that women possess some potential that could be useful to the administration of the state and that his society should make good use of these capabilities rather than secluding them and wasting their abilities.

Therefore, if we believe that feminism is the belief that women and men are and have been treated differently by our society and that women have frequently and systematically been unable to participate fully in all social arenas and institutions and a desire to change that situation, then, the plays discussed reflect feminism and the poets' inner desires (Euripides to a greater extent than Aristophanes) to draw their society's attention to the inferior status given to women. The poets therefore seek for women's participation in outdoor activities such as politics, business, legal aids and freedom to move and participate in social activities. Due to these, I can again affirm (and a modern reader would agree) that the poets

have feminist intentions in their writings. If we also believe that a feminist is committed to bringing social change to end injustices against women, then, Euripides can be called a feminist.

However, the consistent mocking of women by Aristophanes about wine, sex and food in all three plays does not give a modern reader any evidence to believe that the poet might have written in defense of women. Also, in the second part of the *Ecclesiazusae*, we witness the loopholes in Praxagora's foundation of a classless state and the difficulty in maintaining such establishment, but most importantly, the poet again mocks women in terms of sex and annoyingly shows desperate old women with little feminine attraction fighting over young men to satisfy their sexual urge. Praxagora's regime causes some women to look like monsters. In my view, the terms of peace between Euripides and the women in the *Thesmophoriazusae* (ln. 1170 – 1185) are not driven towards a feministic presentation. The women accepting the terms immediately shows that what Euripides says about them are true and, in order to avoid their secrets being exposed, quickly agree to the terms. I also believe that the women are the ones to pronounce the terms of the agreement since they are the ones who hold Euripides' relative hostage. The poet here is having fun at the expense of both Euripides and women. In the *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriazusae*, the poet's refusal to answer Calonice's question (*Lys.* ln. 15) and the admission by First and Second women to be drinking, exchanging babies and pretending to their husbands to have given them male children (*Thes.* ln. 337 – 456) does not



show Aristophanes' intentions to be driven by the equalization of women. These comments might have rather induced the audience's laughter or might have increased their suspicion of their wives more than what he claimed Euripides did. If like Euripides, Aristophanes could not push his society a little further to change their attitudes towards women, then, it will be difficult to give the title 'feminist' to him.

To conclude, from the above presentations and discussions, it is obvious that Euripides presents women in a better light than Aristophanes and, again, Euripides' plays portray a reflection of modern day feminism more than the plays of Aristophanes. Also, considering the fact that Euripides wrote more plays on women than Aristophanes, the credit of feminism should be given to the former.

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