

## Condemning Clytemnestra: Exploring the Tragic Heroine in Art and Culture

The extant canon of Greek tragedy features female protagonists extensively; of the surviving plays, only one fails to feature a heroine as one of its major characters. Given what we know of the role of women in the home and their limited role in society, the prominence of women in tragedy begs the question why they feature so prominently and how their portrayal reflects or diverges from their treatment and existence in everyday life. While much work has been done on the role and gender dynamics of women in the tragedies, and a significant corpus is dedicated to the place of women in society and the reality of their lives (Pomeroy) , little work has been done on the representation of the Tragic Heroine in Greek art; their existence, their portrayal, their purpose. The heroines are divided into numerous categories, distinct and opposite from one another, serving different purposes and variously portrayed as noble or evil depending on the schemata in which they fall. Women in tragedy are portrayed at odds to women in life; the worth of a μητηρ is determined by how she lived, quietly at home, while a man's was determined by the death he died. In tragedy we find the boundaries obscured and women made worthy of note, while simultaneously condemned, by taking on the masculine qualities that the society adored. Furthermore, the natural order of the world was restored by the continued subjugation of the heroine and her return to the acceptable practices of a woman in society.

This paper seeks to briefly delve into this phenomenon of masculinizing the feminine in both literature and its contemporary art; attempting to determine why a woman is only worthy of mention or portrayal when she has taken on the characteristics of her male counterpart, as well as the inevitable and cathartic return of her feminine characteristics and subsequent domination beneath the patriarchal hegemony. Additionally , it will seek to open discussion as to the forms of art in which we see these characters. Is it significant that we see them primarily portrayed in

pottery, a marker of the woman's domain, and not in statuary, an art of the masculine public sphere? Are these aimed towards high-born women rather than the common folk? Who purchases these objects? Is it the matriarch of the home that decides upon the decoration or the husband- in which case, how does this impact the themes chosen for portrayal? How does the decision to feature a murderous mother or a suffering sister inform us of consumption and consumerism in the Classical Attic world? How were these images then used, if the purchaser and the viewer were not always the same; as a warning, as pure decoration, as a fantastical foray into a world of folly akin to satyr dance? How does this differ from the role of women in the Greek world? What can these works tell us about the role of women in society- how they are viewed, how they are expected to act, how they react, what it meant to be a woman- and a respectable one at that. In a world where women were rarely seen and hardly heard, what is the significance of giving a voice to the voiceless, a face to the faceless, and a name to the shadows in every home?

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