

Women in greek tragedy. analyze phaedra in the hippolytus and clytaemnestra in th...

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



Athens, Patriarchal Societies, and Phaedra and Clytaemnestra Upon first examination, it would seem that the two female characters of Greek drama Phaedra and Clytaemnestra are far removed from one another. Phaedra is seemingly a love-struck character that embodies pathos and a pathetic nature while Clytaemnestra has a cold and calculative nature to her.

However, both characters are at the whim of the patriarchal Athenian society which makes these two seemingly diverse characters closer in design than most would initially assume.

With both characters, it is relationships with men that are seemingly at the root of perceived character flaws. In Greek society, " Unless extreme poverty compelled them to work, citizen women rarely ventured from the house... In this way they could avoid encounters with strange men who were not their relatives and might compromise their respectability. " (Pomeroy) Within the plays, it would seem thematic issues of a woman's downfall will commonly be connected to a relationship with a man. In HIPPOLYTUS, Phaedra is not presented in the most flattering of lights.

She is presented as a lovesick and somewhat " lust sick" character that has an unnatural love for Hippolytus. This ultimately leads to her downfall but not until after she is presented as an unstable character that lacks the ability to control her own emotions. In many ways, she is also a very reactive character that only can act in relation to how other characters treat her. For example, she is at the complete whim of the manipulative Aphrodite and she seemingly only exists to please Hippolytus despite the fact that his feelings for her seem nonexistent.

Despite the facts that her actions are more harmful to the self (Blind loving devotion to someone that does not love you back is not helpful), the character of Phaedra seemingly continues on a very dangerous path towards self-destruction. The greater significance here is that Phaedra remains a female character in a very patriarchal society. There are few strong female role models other than the many goddesses who have a tendency to be presented as manipulative and calculating as evidenced by the way Aphrodite is presented in the work.

Phaedra's relationship with men is a dysfunctional one showing her to be completely dependent. She is in love with Hippolytus and when she cannot have a union with him, she kills herself. In essence, this is reflective of the overall thematic notions of Athenian life being a patriarchal society. The change of this character through the play is for the worst as she goes from being an independent character reflected through her somewhat casual relationship to her husband to one of total reactive dependence.

The character of Clytaemnestra seems quite removed from that of Phaedra. The reason this is so is because Clytaemnestra is presented colder and more self-justified and driven. Rather than remaining a female in the background of her play, she takes a much more active role. In particular, the role that she plays is seemingly a very independent one as evidenced the fact she is a Queen and the prime protagonist.

Unfortunately, her actions entail her committing murder which does not exactly endear her as a character which could ever be considered a positive

one. Additionally, the character's commitment of an act of murder reveals she is somewhat of a slave to her own emotions. Rational people do not commit acts of violence. Clytaemnestra has no problem doing so. This characterization of Clytaemnestra reveals her to be another female character in Greek works that is flawed, emotionally manipulative, and one that is not easy to trust.

This is because she plans to kill Agamemnon. While it may be seemingly justified to plot the killing since this would be a revenge killing, the mere fact the character plots a killing shows emotional weakness. Due to such a characterization, the seemingly excessive patriarchal society of Athens permeates into *AGAMEMNON*. Within the themes of the play, it can be noted that those who give into emotions are slaves to them no matter how just the motivating actions may seem to be.

As such, Clytaemnestra becomes a character who suffers due to her emotional attachment to a male figure. In many ways, the characters of Clytaemnestra and Phaedra share flawed similarities with one another. Both are reactive to their emotions and their emotional overreactions are connected to their relationships with flawed male characters. This would further promote the overarching Athenian patriarchal culture that drives the crafting of the play. The depiction of women in Athens does not always present a trusting nature. For example, The association of women with foreigners and animals and the notion that Greek male identity could be and should be asserted by setting oneself against them would be repeated in Greek art and thought throughout the classical period. " (Pomeroy) This

would indicate a sense of distance between the sexes which is promoted via the two plays and their female characters. Both characters have erratic plotting natures although at far different degrees. However, their presentation of being overly emotional and slaves to said emotions further promotes patriarchal themes of Athenian society.

Athens was a male centric society and the characterizations of Phaedra and Clytaemnestra reveal many of the attitudes present towards women at the time. While Phaedra and Clytaemnestra are greatly diverse in terms of their overall personal strength, both are presented as vulnerable to their emotions which would be a traditional stereotype found in patriarchal societies. Such stereotyping does find its way into works of classical drama of the time.

Reference Pomeroy, S. (1999). Ancient greece: A political, social, and cultural history.