

CLAIRE ARCHER: A TRAGIC HEROINE ON THE VERGE

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ABSTRACT: This article discusses the notion of the tragic heroine in relation to the contemporary female character Claire Archer, the protagonist of Susan Glaspell's 1921 play *The Verge*. The notion of the heroine is mentioned for the first time by the poet Pindar (522–443 BC), and has been discussed by classicists only in the recent decades. In addition, despite the presence of tragic heroines in Greek cult and myth, the concept of the tragic heroine is missing in Aristotle's definition of the tragic hero in his dramatic studies in *Poetics* (335 BCE). Therefore, this study aims to create a dialogue between Aristotle's definition and the particularities of the tragic female heroic character, through the examination of the character, using the prism of feminist literary criticism with the theoretical framework of Deborah J. Lyons (2014) and Jennifer L. Larson (1995). The character of Claire Archer fits this study, since she chooses a route that goes against the traditional feminine view of women's lives as family-centered and dedicated to the needs of others. She abandons everything and everyone in favor of the creation of new life forms, and the outcome, her downfall and tragic end, characterized by insanity, crime and possible imprisonment guide the examination of this contemporary female character as a tragic heroine.

Keywords: Tragic hero; Tragic Heroine; Gender; Aristotle; Susan Glaspell; *The Verge*.

RESUMO: Este artigo discute a noção de heroína trágica a partir da personagem feminina contemporânea Claire Archer, protagonista da peça “A Beira” (*The Verge*), escrita por Susan Glaspell em 1921. A noção da heroína é mencionada pela primeira vez pelo poeta Píndaro (522-443 a.C.), mas tem sido discutida apenas nos últimos anos por acadêmicos classicistas. Apesar de sua presença no culto e no mito grego, o conceito específico da heroína trágica está ausente na definição do herói trágico elaborada por Aristóteles em seus estudos dramáticos em *Poética* (335 a.C.). Portanto, este estudo visa criar um diálogo entre a definição de Aristóteles e as particularidades das características da heroína trágica, examinando a personagem Claire Archer através do prisma de crítica literária feminista, com a estrutura teórica sugerida por Jennifer L. Larson (1995) e Deborah J. Lyons (2014). A personagem de Claire Archer cabe nesse estudo por escolher uma rota que contraria a visão tradicional da vida das mulheres como existência centrada na família e dedicada às necessidades dos outros. A escolha da personagem de abandonar tudo e todos em favor da criação de novas formas de vida, e o fim trágico, caracterizado por insanidade, crime e possível aprisionamento, orientam o exame dessa personagem feminina contemporânea como uma heroína trágica.

Palavras-chave: Herói Trágico; Heroína Trágica; Gênero; Aristóteles; Susan Glaspell; *A Beira*.

INTRODUCTION

The study of contemporary female characters in relation to Greek mythological heroines introduces a challenge. The concept of the heroine does not exist conceptually in ancient Greek before its mention by the poet Pindar (522–443 BC) and has not been discussed by classicists until the past decades, as Deborah J. Lyons points out in her 2014 book *Gender and Immortality: Heroines in Ancient Greek Myth and Cult* (LYONS, 2014, p. 8, 28). Nevertheless, heroines are

present in Greek cult and myth, as established by contemporary academics such as Lyons and Jennifer L. Larson (1995). This recent scholarship combines classic studies with feminist literary criticism in order to better understand and reconstruct the historical meaning of Greek heroines. Therefore, this article advances the reading of contemporary characters such as Claire Archer in Susan Glaspell's 1921 play *The Verge* according to the notion of a heroine based on a dialogue between Aristotle's definition and the particularities of the tragic female heroic character and an examination of the character through the prism of feminist literary criticism and feminist dramatic theory.

Narrowing the heroic to the tragically heroic, an all-male definition exists in *The Poetics*, or simply, *Poetics*, the c. 335 BCE work of dramatic studies written by Aristotle. While the tragic female heroic character has its particularities in comparison to the male hero, the dramatic theory of Aristotle is helpful in determining the basic requirements for its definition as such. Fundamentally, Aristotle's definition of a hero refers to a mortal human being, driven by goodness and justice (ARISTOTLE, 335 BCE, OXFORD translation, 1994, p. XV.1). However, once a female character demonstrates "cleverness" and "valor" Aristotle deems the cleverness "unscrupulous" and the valor "manly" (ARISTOTLE, 335 BCE, OXFORD translation, 1994, p. XV.2) because such advantages for a male hero are considered inappropriate for a woman. Challenging this gendered definition reveals the "extra mile" required from women and represented by female characters. Beyond the male's heroic journey, a female also acts against the traditional social notion of gender. Thus, female characters, tragic heroines, develops particular ways of defying social roles in her time and place in the name of their heroic journey. Claire Archer, the critically controversial character studied in this light, is a fitting example.

This female character is a member of an upper-middle class North American family in the early 20th century. She rebels against the feminine roles available to her, mainly those of a

loyal, docile wife and a devoted mother, and embarks on a personal journey with a noble idea in mind: the creation of new life forms embodied in plants. Claire's decision to impede anything and anyone that might interrupt the creation of an alternative to existing forms of life, offering other characteristics and notions of the world, leads her to insanity, crime, and probable imprisonment. The development of Claire's endeavor and its tragic end in a downfall suggests that she is a tragic heroine in the vein of the Aristotelian tragic hero, once the category is stretched to include females.

Based on this assumption, this study investigates parallels between the tragic hero as defined by Aristotle and Claire Archer and discusses the correspondence of this contemporary female character to ancient definitions of tragedy based on *Poetics* and on some works by contemporary classic scholars.

BACKGROUND

The protagonist of *The Verge*, Claire, is passionate and active in her resistance to social conventions and values. Opposed to the dutiful motherhood expected from her, she passes on to her sister, Adelaide, the care of her daughter, Elizabeth. She disdains both Adelaide's and Elizabeth's commonality and shows no affection to any of them. In addition, she disregards her marriage vows to Harry Archer, takes a lover, Dick Demming, and considers taking another, Tom Edgeworthy, with whom she may be falling in love. In an ironic twist, she resists being locked-up in her life and follows her need for freedom, creativity and imagination by locking herself up in the greenhouse. As she goes in, she shuts everyone out, except her assistant, Anthony, trying to maintain the ideal conditions for her revolutionary plants. Subsequently, she averts the electric power and all the heat of the house to the greenhouse. Clearly, she cares more about the plants than about the feelings and the well-being of the people around her. As the plot develops, she tries without success to fight the pressure imposed by each of the other

characters to share her space and her life. When she realizes that her plants are incapable of changing the usual pressures and expectations she abhors, their merit diminishes in her eyes, and she destroys them. Ultimately, as she advances toward a total shedding of social codes and morals, she goes as far as murdering Tom, her lover, because he, too, has not fulfilled her high expectations. The murder can be read as a result of an intensifying mental illness, an attempt to stop Tom from attracting her back to the same old mold, or a compassionate attempt to release him from his limited life. Either way, it is the end of the road to her aspirations, hopes, and probably freedom.

TRAGIC HEROINE

In order to establish whether Claire is a tragic heroine in the sense of Greek tragedy, indeed, the concepts of “heroine” as well as “tragic heroine” are established based on the definitions of the aforementioned scholars.

According to Lyons, flexing the notion of the heroic in Greek myth to include the feminine may challenge traditional definitions of the hero, which have been largely constructed without reference to heroines. In the categorization of women who have been fashioned in some relation to heroism, Lyons and Larson introduce two main categories. The vast part of the so-called heroines refers to females that are the relatives of heroes, as Lyons writes,

Early texts such as the Hesiodic Catalogue of Women, as well as passages in Homeric epic, provide us with a working definition of a heroine *avant la lettre*, who is called “wife or daughter of a hero,” and who is frequently also the mother of a hero. These figures are clearly set apart from other women and at the same time are distinguished from goddesses. (LYONS, 2014, p. 7)

Larson exemplifies the inferior position of such a heroine, saying, “*Hippodameia*’s cult can be considered ‘dependent’ on that of Pelops because she is honored precisely in her capacity as wife to him, and not because of some separate achievement” (LARSON, 1995, p. 83). The

second category is the divine heroine. Larson gives Helen as an example since, “[...] the Planes cult, with its tree worship, suggests that its Helen was a goddess” (LARSON, 1995, p.81).

In these categories, the divine heroines are set beyond the possible category of mortal heroines, while the female relatives of heroes appear to be less than heroines. Certain variations include all these characteristics. For example, as Larson writes, “The heroine impregnated by a divine lover in a one-time episode has a single son or perhaps twins—circumstances that make it inevitable that she will be associated with her son” (LARSON, 1995, p. 89).

Because of the vast field of research and the complex definition, Larson narrows her working frame in *Greek Heroine Cult* to “a cult recipient who, according to her devotees, was at one time a mortal woman” (LARSON, 1995, p. 3). The scholar points out that “the body of epigraphic evidence from Attica shows how heroine cult is present in every organizational level of the Attic society” (LARSON, 1995, p. ix). Lyons uses the word heroine “to mean a heroized female personage or recipient of heroic honors, and secondarily, as a female figure in epic, myth, or cult” (LYONS, 2014, p. 7). As examples, she suggests “the wives and daughters of the best men” whom Odysseus meets in the underworld, and the heroes’ mothers whom Zeus lists are examples of heroines who can be defined as such based on their own merit and not only because of their relation to heroes or heroic families (LYONS, 1995, p. 15). The examples are numerous. Fundamentally, the conclusion that there are heroines in Greek myth and cult is the basis for this study. Once the concept of “heroine” is accepted, the concept of a “tragic heroine” will be studied in relation to Claire Archer.

THE TRAGIC HEROINE IN *THE VERGE*

As stated earlier, Aristotle's definitions of tragedy are helpful for the study of *The Verge* and its protagonist. In order to analyze the definition, Charles H. Reeves's 1952 essay "The Aristotelian Concept of Tragic Hero" informs that the meaning of each concept and adjective in Aristotle's work has caused a debate among editors such as Bywater, Gudeman, and Rostagni. Apparently, the ancient Greek words have no exact English equivalents. However, there seems to be a middle-line to follow while viewing the possibilities of interpretation.

Stating the fundamentals of tragedy, Aristotle determines that "For the finest form of Tragedy, the Plot must be not simple but complex; and further, that it must imitate actions arousing pity and fear, since that is the distinctive function of this kind of imitation." (ARISTOTLE, 335 BCE, OXFORD translation, 1994, p. XIII). If a play imitates the world, *The Verge* does so by illuminating the angle of women's situation, and more precisely, the side of a woman disturbed by the endless repetition of behavioral and relational patterns that trap her. The concept of performativity, as developed by feminist philosopher Judith Butler in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble* is the social disciplinary pressure set at the heart of Claire's anguish. According to Butler, "Identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (BUTLER, 1990, p. 24–5). Thus, the interactions of a person with others create and recreate the existing set of values, universalizing a binary gender identity. The repeatedly performed acts normalize an attributed gender and, therefore, gender roles. It is clear that Claire fights against the limits imposed on her by the mechanism that repeats and re-establishes the same social patterns. In this light, seeing her as a representation of women struggling for equality and liberation becomes a part of the analysis of the character and a basis for the study of categories of pity and/or fear in the public acceptance of the character.

While the play takes on the complex objective of innovation, challenge, examination of social patterns, and questioning the meaning of life, there is a controversy among critics

regarding the complexity of the play. In 1921, after the first production, by the Provincetown Players, Robert A. Parker of *The Independent* says that “If it was Miss Glaspell’s intention to satirize the type of erotic, neurotic, ill-tempered and platitudinous hussy who dramatizes herself as a ‘superwoman’ and even puts it over on her gentlemen friends [...] she has admirably succeeded” (qtd in NOE, 1995, p.129). The respected critic’s review suggests that while the play and its characterization of Claire have not generated pity in him, they might have provoked fear of change in women’s roles. Alexander Woollcott, the critic of the *New York Times* regards the same production, and determines that Claire is “a neurotic and atypical woman,” and that “the average playgoer will be offended by Miss Glaspell’s abject worship of the divinity of discontent” (qtd in BEN-ZVI, 1995, p. 97). Years later, a more favorable critic, Michael Billington of *The Guardian*, writes after Auriol Smith’s the Orange Tree revival 1996 production that “[Glaspell] cross-breeds American realism and European symbolism and in the process, produces something both original and strange.” However, he questions the inner logic of the play and argues that Claire’s murder of Tom “is not theatrically plausible” (qtd in BOTTOMS, 1998, p.147). Christopher Bigsby, a British literary analyst, comments on the play itself that it is “a remarkable, if imperfect work,” which attempts a “radical revisioning of all aspects of theatre” (qtd in BOTTOMS, 1998, p.127). Gerhard Bach (1995), the literary critic who analyses the play through the prism of philosophy of the Provincetown theater and the playwright’s contribution to it, sees the play itself as an “expressionist work” (BACH, 1995, p. 251), or, like Steve Bottoms, the director of the 1998 Glasgow production as a hybrid work in which the play “constantly deviates from its baseline naturalism toward not only expressionism and symbolism, but also melodrama and outright farce” (BOTTOMS, 1998, p.129-30). In any event, the debate regarding the play’s concept and value and regarding the character’s meaning and plausibility proves the play’s multi-faceted appeal and its thought-provoking nature.

The better reviews allow more depth to the character, since Claire does not only represent an idea and a message but is capable of having a wide range of characteristics. In this regard, literary scholar Marcia Noe points out that, while the critics diverge regarding the question whether Glaspell criticizes Claire's conduct or writes Claire as an expression of feminine triumph, it is more productive not to see the play as either a celebration of feminism or an illustration of male oppression but as "a representation of the female experience" (NOE, 1995, p. 131). In addition to this plausible argument, it is important to mention that seeing Claire as a one-sided character, as Parker's critic suggest (among others the scope of this study prevents me from mentioning) does not sit well with Glaspell's body of work¹. The playwright has treated the subject of the situation of women in *The Verge* and in her other works without compromising her female characters' complexity or turning her into a caricature. While the names Dick, Tom and Harry imply, rather humorously, that these male characters are a sketch of conventional men--and these roles have been interpreted in different conceptual approaches and gained life in Bottoms's production--Claire keeps revealing her passion, her struggle, and her layered personality throughout the play.

Aristotle goes on with the classification to say that a tragedy "must imitate actions causing pity and fear since that is the distinctive function of that kind of imitation" (ARISTOTLE, 335 BCE, OXFORD translation, 1994, p. XIII). This reaction, he says, will bring catharsis to the public. In this regard, if we attempt to set a dominant line in the public acceptance, assuming that the critics represent the public, then analyzing *The Verge* becomes impossible. Therefore, the assumption that the play provokes pity and fear is proved or disproved based on the writing itself and its correspondence to Aristotle's definitions. The philosopher explains that three forms of plot to be avoided by the creator:

¹ See BEN-ZVI, L. 1995, p. 6, 97.

(1) A good man must not be seen passing from happiness to misery or (2) a bad man must not be passing from misery to happiness. The first situation is not fear inspiring or piteous but simply odious to us. The second is the most untragic that can be [...] it does not appeal either to the human feeling in us, or to our pity, or to our fears. Nor, on the other hand, can a (3) extremely bad man be seen falling from happiness into misery. Such a story may arouse the human feeling in us, but it will not move us either to fear or pity; pity is occasioned by undeserved misfortunes and fear by that of one like ourselves, so there will be nothing piteous or fear inspiring in the situation. (ARISTOTLE, 335 BCE, OXFORD translation, 1994, XIII)

The definition of Claire's character in these terms may be considered debatable, since the original words do not have a conclusive meaning in translation. If we take the concepts of good and bad to signify a just and likable person as opposed to an evil, detestable one, as in the case of a charitable person dedicated to healing others, or, conversely, a mass murderer, for instance, then Claire is neither. She is not a consensually likable protagonist, as the previous section points out. She rejects her husband, daughter and sister, has lovers, and dedicates herself obsessively to plants that represent an infringement to all conventions. Furthermore, in the process of shedding off all existing morals, she goes as far as murdering a man. However, she is not an "utter villain" (ARISTOTLE, 335 BCE, OXFORD translation, 1994, p. XIII.2-3). While she may not be a positive person by any common sense, once her desperation becomes clear, and her relationships are not judged according to realistic standards but as expressions of great anxiety, she conveys a struggle to break through all limitations, a battle that has long been part of human condition and human progress. Seen that way, the audience is able to sympathize with the character's wrestling with everything that binds her soaring spirit. Due to this struggle, Claire is not evil either. She is driven by ideas and hopes and not by bad intentions. Hence, in light of this interpretation, the conclusion can hardly be definitive.

Most importantly, Claire's complexity along with her indefinite categorization as "bad" or "good" in absolute measures brings her closer to us, readers and public. This intimacy goes hand in hand with Aristotle's placement of pity and fear at the basis of tragedy, as he says, "pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune and fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves." In fact,

Claire is closer to Aristotle's intermediate kind of character than to any of the two opposites. She is, as Aristotle writes, "(a man) not preeminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune is virtually brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by an error of judgment" (ARISTOTLE, 335 BCE, OXFORD translation, 1994, p. XIII. 2). The play unfolds, revealing that her downfall is the result of "error or frailty" (ARISTOTLE, 335 BCE, OXFORD translation, 1994, p. XIII.3). In fact, her error of judgment indicates Claire's tragic flaw, her *hamartia*. In fact, she commits several errors of judgment while consumed by her idea of creating a new form of life. She sets her expectations high, and is shattered when they do not solidify. She kills Tom in an attempt to save him. She assumes that by killing him she will be also saving herself from his grip. Notably, though Claire may be judged negatively in her present state, her character might have been judged differently in an earlier stage. After all, the process has already started in the beginning of the play, and she is different from the more compromised type of person she used to be. Although she has left behind her original personage, it should be taken into consideration, since her downfall is measured against it.

The error of judgment, a fundamental element in Aristotle's definition, is present in Claire's story, and lies in the heart of her definition as a tragic heroine. She is wrong in thinking she can change the way of the world by creating an alternative sort of life via plants, and in regard to her capacity of control. Boldly, her error involves her belief that her experiment creates newness in other ways than the botanical. The life-bearing plants do not hold a new type of life in them, and thus, they are bound to disappoint her. Both in their role as an expressionist expression of a thwarted soul in search of its liberty, and as a realistic experiment, they do not represent a ground-breaking alternative in human life. Indeed, Claire ends up rejecting her most marvelous plant named Breath of Life although it represents an astounding achievement. The family's acceptance of it proves to her that nothing has changed. Their reaction brings out despair and violence that she takes out on the plant and later on a man.

Claire's error regarding the power of her actions to change life is closely connected to her fatal belief in her freedom to do anything to open her way to change. In her desperation, her acts grow more acute and dangerous, a sign of a downfall. When she rejects the people crowding her life she still acts within the law. Her attitude evokes negative emotions and harsh reactions but does not have severe consequences as far as she is concerned. However, her relationships with Tom, the man with whom she hopes to live in a completely new way, set a moment of relief and a test, as she invests herself in their possible escape together. For a while, she believes that he appreciates freedom and creativity, and that they have an opportunity to live according to these values. This hope disappears as he offers her a parallel way of life to the one she previously had. Now she is driven to madness. According to Bottoms, who conveys the explanation of Judith Milligan, an actress who played Claire, Claire murders Tom in order to release him. "By giving him the 'gift' of oblivion embraced by her son, she seeks to free him from the all-too-adult temptation to assume that he has understood; free him, that is, from becoming Elizabeth" (qtd in *BOTTOMS*, 1998, p. 143-4). Be that as it may, it is a murderous attack of madness of the kind that exists in Greek tragedy in the cases of heroines such as Medea (though she also murders her own children.) Claire's disregard of the entailed punishment of her actions may result from an error in judgment as well. She either ignores or does not see the possible consequences of her isolation, aggression or murder.

Continuing Aristotle's instruction, apart from being a bearer of a fatal error of judgment, the tragic hero, and therefore heroine, has an "enjoyment of great reputation and prosperity" (*ARISTOTLE*, 335 BCE, *OXFORD* translation, 1994, p. XIII). Claire fits these categories at least to a certain extent. Her significant prosperity can be assumed from her social class. Her situation is comfortable, obviously better than average.

Aristotle goes on to say that the perfect plot must have a single and not a double issue. In this regard, Claire's single-mindedness about her venture creates a focused dramatic tension

that never strays from the single storyline. Quite clearly, the direction of the storyline, too, follows the characteristics determined by Aristotle in these words, “The change in the hero’s fortunes must not be from misery to happiness, but on the contrary, from happiness to misery” (ARISTOTLE, 335 BCE, OXFORD translation, 1994, p. XIII).

In addition, “the cause of misfortune must lie not in any depravity, but in some great error on his part the man himself being either as we have described, or better, not worse, than that” (ARISTOTLE, 335 BCE, OXFORD translation, 1994, p. II.6). The question of what “happiness” means has more than one answer in every culture. It is also related to the question of what “good” means, as the following explanation demonstrates. According to Reeves, who bases it on the above-mentioned editors, “good” is not necessarily an ethical term, but also a reference to a noble or prosperous person. Based on this notion, it is likely that Claire’s privileged social, familiar, and economical status predominates over her satisfaction or the lack of it, or the fulfillment of her emotional needs. Her status in society represents happiness for lower classes for which her fortune is desirable.

Starting with her safe and steady position, her way from happiness to misery, from safety to danger, and from sanity to insanity is portrayed throughout the play. As soon as she reaches out to the stars, longing for a better place than the one she occupies, she is on the slide. The way Aristotle’s definition dictates, there is a moment in which it appears that things will settle. Indeed, it seems that she may find love and fulfillment with Tom, but the moment passes, she commits the murder, and her misery is unavoidable. She will end up as a locked-up criminal or a hospitalized mentally sick person. The possibility she has finally reached clarity and transcendence exists, but is equalized to madness in society’s terms, and therefore, she has no escape. Fundamentally, she tries to accomplish more than she possibly can. Hence, her fall is brought upon her because of her error of judgment, the so-called hamartia. Furthermore, the public is aware of the upcoming misfortune since Claire’s choice to follow her quest at the

expense of everything and everyone is flawed, it is clearly an error of judgment. To strengthen the suspicion, the possibility of failure is foreshadowed by Glaspell long before Claire turns her back on the plants. The playwright uses linguistic forms in order to show the impossibility of abandoning the familiar. Exactly when Claire tries to transcend old ways of self-expression and convey to Tom the importance of newness she uses poetic lines and familiar patterns and not the original form of communication she seeks. She says,

I do not want to work,
I want to be;
Do not want to make a rose or a poem –
Want to lie upon the earth and know. (closes her eyes)
Stop doing that! -- words going into patterns;
They do it sometimes when I let come what's there.
Thoughts take pattern -- then the pattern is the thing.
(GLASPELL, 1921, Act 2, p. 88)

Lastly, the subject of immortality and divine powers, an inseparable part from the Greek tragedy is the only point where *The Verge* diverges completely. Claire's attempt to rise beyond the spiritual world of the other characters, trying for new horizons, ends in her stumbling over the verge of the conventional world into madness. It does not bestow her any divinity, though she is a creator, since her rise or fall remain within human constraints. However, since Claire is mostly an extraordinary example of a modernized concept of a tragic heroine, it seems plausible to suggest that the adaptation of the concept to contemporary literature exclude its ancient context involving the divine and the immortal. The parallels between literary tragic heroines of the past and those of the present outline an interesting historical and literary development, and the context of their creation, should be taken in account.

CLAIRE AND OTHER TRAGIC HEROINES

The similarity of Claire's passion and story to these of heroines in Greek mythology appears once Claire disregards the strong opposition to her pursuit, determined to complete her undertaking, much like Sophocles's Antigone and Euripides's Medea. It should be noted here

that Antigone may not fulfill the requirement of an Aristotelian tragic heroine since she does not have a flaw neither commit an error of judgment the way it happens with Oedipus Rex, the classical example of a hero. However, she is considered a tragic heroine by Lyons due to the cult of Antigone's followers in ancient Greece, and she is, in any case, a heroine. Like Claire and Medea, she breaks the law in the name of reparation of human injustice or threat. She buries her brother despite the clear prohibition given by their ruling uncle, since she believes that this is her duty.

In all three stories there is a sense of the protagonist's profound faith in the inevitability of her action. Medea, for instance, is inconsolable when her husband, Jason, announces that he cannot miss the opportunity to marry a royal princess, a better match than the barbarian Medea, and that he intends to join the families and make Medea his mistress. Medea expresses her indignity. She reminds Jason that she has left her own people for his sake, carried his children, and saved him from the dragon she slew. Since he is not convinced, she prevents his new marriage by killing his future wife and the bride's father, Glauce and Creon. Worse, in her insanity, she makes a further decision to murder her own sons, despite her pain, as a remedy for the injustice done to her.

Beyond the issue of insanity, Medea's rage is an expression of bitterness against her vulnerability in the face of the society that gives men the power to dictate her destiny. In this sense, too, there is a parallel line running with Claire's rebellion against her situation and her limitations. Claire's transgression, like Medea's, is in itself a downfall and a transformative act into further misery. Her misfortune starts with her disillusionment regarding the power of the plants, goes on to committing the act of murder, and ends with the upcoming punishment or hospitalization. Like Medea, she performs amoral actions and thus attracts a lot of attention (though mostly of negative critics). As Lyons writes, "If she does something really horrible-- kills her children or husband, for example, she will be remembered" (LYONS, 2014, p. 42).

In view of the tragedy, the public of *The Verge* may resort to stories of former heroines, in order to digest the horror and the price of the heroine's quest. The audience may recall Antigone or Medea in the same way the women of the chorus of Antigone recall the fates of Danae, Lykourgos, and Kleopatra when the heroine is arrested in the tomb.²

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the notion of the ancient Greek tragic heroine in relation to Claire Archer, the protagonist of *The Verge*, a play written by Susan Glaspell in the 1920s. Since there is no conceptual mention of a heroine in ancient Greek until the time of Pindar, contemporary sources rescuing the notion from the analysis of Greek myth and cult have been employed in order to sustain the basis of this study. After establishing the existence of the concept of a heroine in ancient Greece, the term of a tragic heroine has been studied. This notion is based on Aristotle's definitions of tragedy and the tragic hero in *Poetics*. Moreover, his definition, an innovation in dramatic theory at the time, has been stretched to include the female heroic character.

Subsequently, Claire has been studied in relation to the conditions required from a character in order to be considered a tragic heroine. Based on her social status, it has been recognized that she possessed fortune, happiness, and credibility before embarking on her journey to "otherness". Her privileged social status, according to Aristotle's notion, is bound to evoke a strong emotional response from the public since it places her on a pedestal from which she is seen falling. In addition, Claire, commits an error of judgment which indicates a tragic flaw, the hamartia. When she fails to create a new form of life, she takes a person's life, as if

² It should be noted that in other versions Antigone does not die but marries Haimon, who is supposed to lock her up in a tomb, and she bears a son, Maion (cf. Iliad 4.394 where she is not named, and Euripides).

killing him was the way to spare him a life of mediocrity and to save herself from sharing such a life with him. Her downfall becomes unavoidable.

Another indicator of a tragic heroine, the emotions of pity and fear her trajectory evokes in the public. The diverse critiques mentioned here reveal that the acceptance of the play and of the character of Claire has been controversial. There is a wide agreement regarding Claire's madness. However, early critiques, especially, interpret it as a cry of war, or a triumph of a one-dimension character, a caricature. The fear does not result from identifying with the character's low prospect but from the possibility of threat by the women she represents. Pity does not occur at all in this sort of view. For a different public and other critics, however, the tragic journey from an unwavering belief in change to the feeling of defeat, madness, and doom does generate pity and fear. As a complex person of great desires, she inspires fear in the hearts of people who tend to follow ideas, and pity in the heart of those who sense her failure and feel for her.

In Greek myth, in which the divine is constantly present, higher forces accompany the hero as his hamartia takes over his life. There is also a fair chance that the hero will become godly upon his doom. *The Verge*, however, as a modern dramatic work is contextually distant from any divine interferences and incarnations. However, it has been suggested that for the sake of the possibility of comparison, the issue of divinity and immortality should be overlooked.

Finally, Claire has been compared with Antigone and Medea. Though the definition of each of these characters as an Aristotelian tragic heroin may be in debate, all three female characters share tragic characteristics. Claire, like Medea and Antigone, rises in an attempt of resistance, having a strong belief in her right for justice. *The Verge* should be remembered for its illustration of a heroine who is suffocated by her available roles, tries to set herself free, and is doomed for wildly, uncontrollably tearing herself apart.

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