



# Mythology and Misogyny: The Social Discourse of Nineteenth Century British Classical-Subject Painting

*Joseph A. Kestner*

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19th century British classical subject or mythological paintings have traditionally been viewed as little more than decorative canvases. In this work, the author claims these paintings are something more - an integral part of a broad-based value system that reinforced patriarchal dominance by inculcating misogynistic and gynophobic attitudes among the broad public. Kestner examines the work of many major artists - Leighton, Burne-Jones, Poynter, Moore, Waterhouse, and Alma-Tadema, as well as that of lesser known figures. He contends that these painters deployed classical legends to reinforce a legal, medical, educational, religious, and marital fabric that supported all the prerogatives of patriarchal power. Early in the book, Kestner uses the evidence of archaeology, sociology, politics, medicine, and law to reveal the function of myth in classical-subject art. Particularly powerful, he finds, are ideas that define men as heroic figures and females as helpless victims - often of despair or madness - concepts that permeated the codes of 19th century society.

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