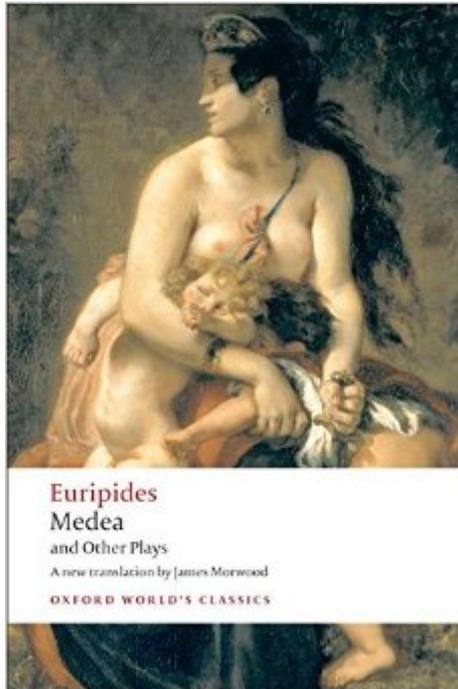


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Medea And Other Plays (Oxford World's Classics)



Synopsis

Euripides was one of the most popular and controversial of all Greek tragedians, and his plays are marked by an independence of thought, ingenious dramatic devices, and a subtle variety of register and mood. He is also remarkable for the prominence he gave to female characters, whether heroines of virtue or vice. This new translation does full justice to Euripides's range of tone and gift of narrative. A lucid introduction provides substantial analysis of each play, complete with vital explanations of the traditions and background to Euripides's world. Contains: Medea; Hippolytus; Electra; Helen

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Customer Reviews

Euripides seems modern. In her introductory essay, Hall points to his subversive and experimental treatments of myth, the ironic distance between his characters' rhetoric and their deeper (or conventional) motives, and the realism by which he converts a figure of high myth like Electra into a petty shrew, contemptuous of the humble but honest peasant she has been forced to wed. Above all, Euripides continues to fascinate for his heroines, and the way in which their raw power inevitably poses a challenge to protocols of male authority, even when the plot seems to punish women for

their autonomy and recontain them in domestic roles. The vitality of female lead in Euripidean tragedy has a great deal to do with the favor that his plays have found in recent decades among feminist directors. This translation by James Morwood under review offers four representations of forceful women. The source of "Medea"'s commanding presence on the stage from antiquity to today is obvious, although few critics have called attention to it as directly as Hall herself: Medea murders her sons, and gets away with it. Nothing could have touched a deeper nerve in Athenian society, which was dedicated above all to the preservation of the patriline. Abandoned by her husband, Medea coolly determines, not in passion but out of a proud sense of the injustice she has suffered, to destroy Jason's heirs, since, for all the love she bears for her children, they are in the end more his than hers. That Athens itself will provide a safe haven for Medea can only have increased traumatic impact of the play.

Euripides (~485 BCE - 406 BCE) stands with Sophocles and Aeschylus as the great playwrights of Greek tragedy. This volume collects four of the most famous plays by Euripides to come down to us (he wrote more than eighty, of which less than twenty have been transmitted from antiquity). They are given modern and accessible translations by James Morwood, who also contributes detailed and generally informative notes (some of the notes, though, are so obvious as to constitute minor insults to the reader's intelligence). In addition, there is an excellent Introduction by Edith Hall. The two most striking aspects of the plays are their focus on the plights of being a woman and their message that the gods are as fickle and unreliable as mortals. "Medea": "Medea" is not pleasant, but it is powerful theater. Medea is betrayed by her husband Jason (of Argonauts fame), who abandons her and their two sons for the bed of the daughter of the king of Corinth. In the words of William Congreve, hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. Medea eliminates all who mean anything to Jason. And she gets away with it, unlike in most Greek tragedies. She exits the play a demonic Fury, leaving a trail of blood and bodies. Even so, Euripides has rendered her a nuanced woman, deserving of a measure of sympathy if not understanding. Plus, early in the play she delivers what James Morwood says is "the most famous feminist statement in ancient literature" (which begins, "Of everything that is alive and has a mind, we women are the most wretched creatures."). "Hippolytus": Hippolytus is a prig. He is manly, a hunter extraordinaire, but he is disgusted by the notion of sexual intercourse. (He is a virgin.

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