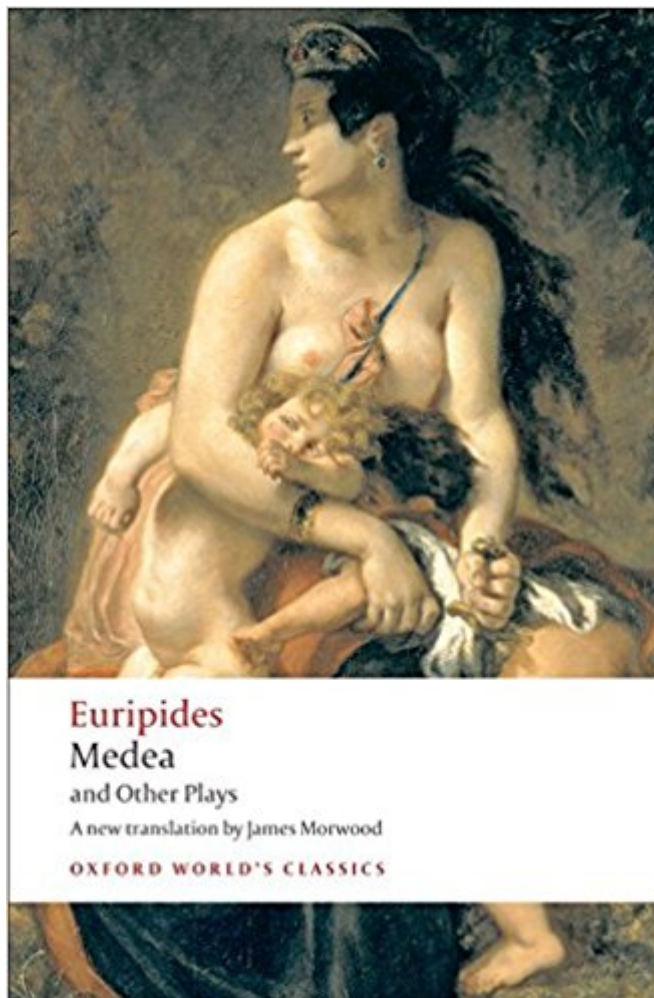


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# Medea And Other Plays (Oxford World's Classics)



## 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

About the Series: For over 100 years Oxford World's Classics has made available the broadest spectrum of literature from around the globe. Each affordable volume reflects Oxford's commitment to scholarship, providing the most accurate text plus a wealth of other valuable features, including expert introductions by leading authorities, voluminous notes to clarify the text, up-to-date bibliographies for further study, and much more.

## Book Information

Series: Oxford World's Classics

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; Reissue edition (February 15, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0199537968

ISBN-13: 978-0199537969

Product Dimensions: 7.6 x 0.7 x 5.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 7 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 12 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #26,756 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #38 in Books > Literature & Fiction > Dramas & Plays > Ancient & Classical #46 in Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Movements & Periods > Medieval #125 in Books > Deals in Books

## Customer Reviews

Hellenists and generalists alike have reason to rejoice ... adds to our understanding and appreciation of a poet-playwright who has never ceased to be controversial ... comprises four major plays that are wonderful to have together. Edith Hall's introductory essays ... are eloquent and informative, deftly highlighting each play's chief issues ... several new insights into the texts, and sound explanations of the mythical background and ongoing action ... James Morwood's translations ... are extraordinary. In crisp prose ... these may be the easiest-to-read accurate

versions that we are likely to see and, in the inexpensive World Classics edition are quite a bargain. No others ... lend themselves to such a ready reading ... The sheer clarity of the English is a considerable achievement.' Victor Castellani, *The Classical Outlook*/Fall 1999, Volume 77, no 1

James Morwood is Grocyn Lecturer at Wadham College, Oxford.

I like modern, readable translations and these are great. There are some very nice and helpful footnotes provided which were very much appreciated. I teach Ancient Philosophy, among other topics, and I was very happy with these translations of profound works of art. *Medea*, for instance, is a truly alarming and impressive creation.

I bought this book for a class, but the stories were actually interesting and very messed up

*Medea and Other Plays* is a collection of plays: *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, *Electra*, and *Helen*. It begins with *Medea*, whose husband has married the daughter of Creon, the king. Medea and her children are banished from the land, so Medea concocts a plot to kill the king, her husband, his new wife, and the children in revenge against her spouse. She then tricks the daughter of Creon into wearing cursed robes so that she is killed, and the king with her, and then she kills her children, much to her husband's dismay. Then the next book is *Hippolytus*. *Hippolytus* begins with the banished king of Athens and his illegitimate son Hippolytus, who is not favorable towards women, so he garners the hate of Aphrodite, who concocts a plot against him. A woman claims to love him, and in secret wants to see him, but he exclaims to the world the evils of women, and with her secret out, she hangs herself. Then the king of Athens returns and thinks his son is guilty and so allows him to be punished by Poseidon, but later finds this is not true, so Hippolytus is freed, and he forgives his father before he dies. The 3rd book is *Electra*, the daughter of Agamemnon and Clymnestra, who marries a poor farmer by order. The son, Orestes, was also sent away but soon returns after he is grown, and ends up staying with the farmer. Orestes then embarks to revenge his father's death, and kills Clymnestra and her lover Aegisthus. The 4th and final book is *Helen*, in which Helen fears that Menelaus didn't return safely from Troy, only to meet him in person at a later date. Then they must escape from Egypt where they are, which they do by tricking Theoclymenus into giving them a boat. These 4 Greek plays are excellently written, Euripides, after all, was one of the greatest Greek playwrights of all time, and his plays are a wonderful collection of stories. James Morwood translates them very well, so that they are fluid and easy to understand. The book is slightly over 200 pages

and is an easy and enjoyable read. It is a recommendable book to anyone looking to get a copy of these plays or any Greek play.

Outstanding edition

Joining a class, with an excellent retired professor, guiding us, helped me get much more out of my readings. The books I purchased at , depict the wars, power struggles and human interactions that led to the fall of the circa 430 BC era Grecian civilization that are plaguing our world today. Wars and human suffering seem endless....Sherry Roberts...

Very fast shipping ! I didn't expect it to come so quickly with standard international shipping. Besides, the book is brand new as described on the site. I am very pleased, thanks.

But I love it anyway. This is a hilarious play, and I wish that more focus would be put on classroom study of hilarious texts written long ago.

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 the traumatic impact of the play. Medea's violence toward her offspring continues to shock

modern audiences out of complacent assumptions about the naturalness of maternal affection; perhaps the play is especially salutary in an age in which motherhood is once again being invoked to justify women's distinct and subordinate position in the household. It is not surprising that later versions of Euripides's "Hippolytus", beginning with Seneca's, most often have taken the name of the heroine, Phaedra, as their title. Here is another woman -- a stepmother this time, rather than a natural mother -- who brings about the death of her husband's son, after having committed the equally egregious offense against the patriarchal home of falling helplessly in love with him. Hall takes pains to remind the reader of the social context in which these tragedies were performed; as she notes: "In a society where childbirth was extremely hazardous, and widowers remarried, there were proportionately more families in which a new wife was introduced to stepchildren often no younger than herself" (p. xviii). It was also a society, I would add, in which one of the few unregulated festivals of the year was the Adonia, in which women identified with the goddess Aphrodite and publicly mourned the loss of her young beloved, Adonis. There may have been -- and may continue to be in our culture as well -- more to the fantasy of a mature woman's erotic desire for an adolescent child, and his violent death when he is on the point of passing into adulthood, than meets the eye. Euripides's *Electra* is a maddeningly ambivalent character; as Hall remarks, she "implicitly subverts the gender hierarchy she explicitly endorses" (p. xxii). What is clear, however, is that she is deeply resentful of her mother, not only for the assassination of her father, Agamemnon, but also because of the humiliating treatment she has suffered in the years since the crime. Euripides has transformed Aeschylus' high drama of divinely ordained revenge into a sordid story of a daughter so embittered as to have lost all compunction against matricide; it is as though the characters of the play had stepped out of the heroic age and found themselves driven to perform their mythic exploits by the mundane concerns of the workaday world. Like "Electra", Euripides's "Helen" has not found much favor with modern critics or producers, at least until quite recently. Stesichorus' fiction that a simulacrum of Helen eloped to Troy, while the real Helen was carried off and deposited safely in Egypt for the duration of the war, offers the dramatist a splendid opportunity to meditate on the puzzle of reality and illusion, which lies, after all, at the very heart of the theatrical experience. Hall notes the play's emphasis on "the impossibility of cognitive certitude," and the "ontological paradoxes" that it mobilizes (pp. xxiv-xxv), and suggests that the Athenian audience may have caught the implication that their own losses in the Peloponnesian War also resulted from the pursuit of phantoms. I would add that the play simultaneously offers its public a sanitized rerun of the Trojan War: this time around, a chaste Helen is held captive by a barbarian husband, and Menelaus is offered the opportunity to play the courageous Greek hero and rescue singlehandedly

his loyal and loving wife. At the same time, Euripides characterizes Helen as twice as clever as her doughty but somewhat doltish husband. Among all of Euripides's tragedies, this one stands out for allowing everyone to read it as he, or she, pleases.

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