



“BY THE END OF HIS PLAYS, EURIPIDES LEAVES THE AUDIENCE WITHOUT ONE CHARACTER TO FULLY SYMPATHISE WITH.” DISCUSS TO WHAT EXTENT YOU AGREE WITH THIS STATEMENT WITH REFERENCE TO AT LEAST TWO PLAYS.

CLASSICAL CIVILISATION ESSAY
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EURIPIDES, BY HIS VERY NATURE OF CHARACTERISATION, CREATES VERY complicated characters. He creates them so fully that we get their good points, their bad points and their downright ugly points. This makes it very hard to sympathise with any of them. However, there are some characters we can sympathise with in Euripidean literature.

As the reader or the audience we can fully sympathise with Alcestis. The play ‘Alcestis’ is an exploration and detailed analysis of how much of a noble sacrifice the title character made. Alcestis gave her life so that her husband could continue to live. There is no greater a sacrifice that one can make for another. When she dies in the play, she does so in such pain that we really feel for her. To put herself through all of this suffering for the man she loves. When she dies and we see the gratitude and the suffering of those who her touched, it really is upsetting. However, her noble and ultimate sacrificed is rewarded as the hero Heracles rescues her spirit from he underworld and she is restored back to life. Alcestis is a character that we can sympathise with fully.

‘Electra’ is a play where we find it hard to sympathise with anyone. Electra bullies her brother into murdering their mother. Orestes seems noble but actually does kill Clytemnestra and Clytemnestra had seemingly good reason to kill Agamemnon but it all could be discovered excuses for wanting to be with another man. A play where all the characters are at fault, some would interpret as. This means that there aren’t any characters to sympathise with just elements or past situations that we can sympathise with if we think them through fully enough.

In ‘Hecabe’, we can sympathise with the title character when she is grief stricken and has to watch and allow her daughter to go off and be sacrificed to Achilles. However, Hecabe, then turns slightly mad, actually she does go mad and turns into a raving savage when she orders Polymestor’s eyes to be scratched out.

The only character in ‘Hecabe’ that we can fully sympathise with is Polyxena. She dies as a sacrifice to Achilles but she dies with honour, respect and dignity. Qualities that are incredibly hard to be revered for, but she does and she is one of my most favourite characters in not only Ancient Greek tragedy, but in all theatre.

The play ‘Heracles’, one could argue that one could sympathise with the entire family of Heracles. Heracles was so pleased to be aback home with his wife, Megara and his three sons. Then Hera makes him go mad and kill them all. To serve him right for this, the Delphic Oracle tells him to go into service under the tyrannical Eurystheus as a slave. Heracles then completes his twelve labours. For this reason, we can fully say that Heracles had no conscious want to murder his own family and is deeply upset when he finds out that he did. As it was the work of an immortal god, her action makes us hate Hera, not Heracles. If anything, we can sympathise with him, which makes the description of his mad bout that much harder to read or hear.

In ‘Hippolytus’, the title character comes across as a very ‘holier than thou’ arrogant little man that actually we’re not all that sad to see him dead. Harsh, but true in a lot of peoples minds. However, some would argue that it is Theseus that is the



character that we can fully sympathise with. He acts as any angry and hurt man would when he finds his wife hung holding a note accusing his son as the man who raped her. He acted irrationally and understandably so. What makes him so human is the fact that when he finds out he was wrong, instead of wallowing in self pity, he begs the wronged Hippolytus for retribution and the two's relationship when Hippolytus dies was one of a loving, sorry father and a wronged but forgiving son.

In 'Medea', the title character and her husband, Jason, both evoke a very unsympathetic reaction from the reader or the observer through their actions, Medea especially. We do however feel sorry for Medea's children. They are helpless and used as pawns in Medea's premeditated murder of Glauce, the princess that Jason has just married. They are then killed by Medea to enact revenge on Jason. Their feelings nor individuality are never considered and then they are brutally murdered by their mother. They are whom we can fully sympathise in this famous play.

We can sympathise with Hektor in 'Rhesos' as despite his pride, he allowed the Thracian king to aid him and his Trojan army against the Greeks. The play also ends with him going out to fight after his main ally has been murdered hoping for victory, which we know, won't come as the Greeks eventually sack Troy.

In the same play, we can sympathise with the title character. The king of Thrace has come with his army to help out Hektor. In order to come he has had to battle another army and fight against strong winds and storms. Yet his loyalty fuelled his determination to get there. However, when he does and he goes to the sleep on the same night, Odysseus and Diomedes from the Greek camp murder him.

We can also sympathise fully with the Thracian charioteer who was murdered after Rhesos. He only woke up as he forgot to feed the horses and was murdered while doing it.

In 'The Children of Heracles', we can fully sympathise with Macaria (known as Maiden in the play) she is the daughter of Heracles, who is now deceased. She is a minor form of Polyxena and dies for the good of others although not much emphasis is based on this fact.

As you can see, Euripides did create characters that we can sympathise with and what they all have in common is that they all seem human. They're not just characters in an ancient play, they have qualities that we can relate to. Alcestis and her undying love for her husband, Theseus and his irrational and angry attitude after the death of his wife and Rhesos with his loyalty to friend in need. All of these characters and those mentioned above, enhance the plays as if there is nothing in a play we can relate to, then we can't feel the emotions that the characters feel making our reading or viewing pleasure less interactive with what the playwright is trying to get across. The basic human emotions, Euripides puts across brilliantly in his plays which make them that much more successful.