

Euripides has met the conventions of Attic Tragedy up to a particular extent. Although he was often criticised for his work, he followed the structure and cycles of the traditional tragedy. However, his stance on the themes and ideas set him apart from the other writers.

It is unreasonable to compare Euripides with the traditional writers of Attic tragedy without understanding his attitude and the reason for this attitude. Although he was only fifteen years older than Sophocles, he belonged to a whole different generation. Between them lay the chasm of the Sophists' moment. The Sophists were professional teachers who applied new methods of criticism to all aspects of life.

Euripides was a child of this time. It made him a septic and a critic. It affected his whole attitude towards life and made it impossible for him to accept the presuppositions of tragic art as his predecessors had done.

As well as this, there were several ideas which set apart Euripides from others. To modern audiences, other tragic heroes often seem removed from flesh-and-blood men and women. But Euripides' characters are always immediately recognisable. He approached tragedy from the point of view of man, and was interested in human beings.

Today, Euripides' plays are read by far more than those written by Aeschylus and Sophocles. His brilliant portrayal of human nature has enticed readers for countless generations.

One of the most prominent surviving plays of Euripides in the present day era is *Medea*. In it, he depicted the struggle between a mother's love for her children and a flouted wife's desire for revenge on her husband. Like much of Euripides' work, it is a tale which sometimes abandons, and sometimes, emphasises the age-old conventions of Attic tragedy.

Attic tragedian plays traditionally follow a predetermined structure and cycle. This convention was used to characterise the play. In Euripides' *Medea*, we see this tradition upheld. Essentially, the play was split into five cycles, consisting of the *Olbos*, *Hubris*, *Pythos*, *Até* and *Nemesis*. In *Medea*, the ideas run parallel with these cycles and conventions are maintained.

However, in the *Pythos* cycle, rather than focusing on the gods' divine envy, he focuses on an all too human aspect – jealousy. *Medea* is overcome with jealousy after Jason takes another woman as his wife. Once again, Euripides has abandoned the conventional ideas and replaced it with his own thoughts.

On the other hand, Euripides maintains the structure of the play in traditional convention, and his play follows closely with the *Prologos*, *Parados*, *Episodia*, *Stasima* and *Exodus*.

But, to analyse the play, we must look closely at what conventions Euripides has used, as well as how he has used them.

The Chorus was an essential part of every play. As such Euripides has used a chorus in his play to represent the Corinthian women. However, in other tragedies, the chorus played a much more detached role. They were important as narrators or commentators to what was actually occurring. But in Euripides' play, they have a more prominent interaction with the main characters, especially that of Medea. Medea and the chorus engage in long conversations concerning her plight and her plan of revenge. Thus, we can see that Euripides sometimes followed conventions.

The tragedian stage convention in Attic theatre also followed a specific rule. There were never more than three characters on the stage at one time. By studying Medea, we can see that Euripides never has more than three actors on stage and upholds the tradition.

Therefore, we can see that Euripides' Medea only somewhat follows the conventions of Attic tragedy. Although he has maintained the traditional structure, cycles, and actors, he has replaced some age-old ideas and themes, including the prominence of gods and the role of the Chorus.

But throughout these uses and changes in convention, what really is Euripides trying to express?

Well, one of the main purposes of Euripides' play was to reflect the role of women in Greek Society.

The play is designed to reinforce Athenian stereotypes of women's nature. These are explained by Aristotle's theory that unlike men, women were 'unbounded' and incapable of controlling themselves, and need to have boundaries imposed on them. Women in Medea are bounded by being kept as possessions of husbands and fathers, and by being held within the codes of a society.

In the play, Medea, as a foreigner, does not represent women in general, but is rather portrayed as an exaggeration of an average woman.

Even so, the generalised woman, as exemplified by the Chorus and minor female characters, is portrayed as jealous, persuasive, dishonest, and overly emotional.

Jason believes that Medea's desire for revenge is due merely to 'sex-jealousy' and accuses her of murdering the children merely because *'He no longer slept with her'*, and Medea retorts *'And is that injury/ A slight one, do you imagine, to a woman?'*

Thus, there tends to be a view of women as overly sexual. Jason again emphasises this when he suggests that all women are sex-crazed - *'you women/ Have reached a state where, if all's well with your sex-life,/ You've everything you wish for; but when that goes wrong,/ At once all that is best and noblest turns to gall.'*

Women are also portrayed as overly emotional, rather than rational, in their responses to situations. For all the Chorus' protests about Medea killing her children, when they

actually hear her murdering them, they lament *the miserable mother , cursed, miserable woman* , but are effectively so overcome with their emotions that they do not stop her, as perhaps men would have.

Women, in the play, are also seen as persuasive, having the ability to achieve their means by begging or supplicating men. Medea is shown as having perfected this ability - every time she is shown attempting to persuade anyone in the play, she succeeds.

Women are portrayed as inherently dishonest. This is further emphasised when Medea tells the Chorus: *'We were born women - useless for honest purposes,/ But in all kinds of evil skilled practitioners'*.

In conclusion, from the play we must assume that women were viewed as sex crazed, overly emotional, and persuasive beings. However this was the view of Euripides. It is impossible to say what others, particularly women's; views were on women from just this source.

The universe in which Euripides existed was not benevolent, or just. Hardship fell on all, the wicked and the good. The gods were not only powerful, but often impulsive, cruel and blind to justice. Needless to say, these positions made Euripides unpopular. He was the unwanted voice of conscience in his age, a man unafraid to point out the lies with which a civilization comforts itself. Sophocles gives us heroes, and Aeschylus gives us a vision of history and teleology; Euripides gives us real men and women with all-too human weaknesses, and his visions are often nightmares.