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### Reading Response 5: Euripides' Medea

*Prompt: In this module, I'd like you to continue that debate. Essentially, some people see Euripides' portrayal of Medea as deeply misogynistic, a woman who couldn't handle being cast aside and who did some pretty awful things because of it. Other people see Euripides' portrayal of Medea as highlighting the difficulties that women had to endure, especially within male dominated relationships, in daily life in ancient Greece - and not only that, Euripides has Medea do something about it! Basically, you could view the play from a rather progressive and feminist perspective. What do you think of Euripides' Medea? Are we looking at protofeminism? Or simply another story highlighting the unpredictability of women? Remember that I'm not looking for a particular 'right' answer here; just make sure to back up your perspective with evidence from the text.*

Euripides' *Medea* is a complex play that has sparked debate over its portrayal of women and the role of Medea herself. Some view the play as deeply misogynistic, portraying Medea as an irrational woman who resorts to extreme measures because she cannot handle being cast aside by her husband, Jason. Others argue that Euripides' portrayal of Medea is more progressive, highlighting the injustices women face in a male-dominated society and showcasing Medea's agency in addressing these injustices.

One argument for the play being seen as protofeminist is Medea's strong and independent character. Medea is not a passive victim; she is intelligent, articulate, and assertive. She challenges the patriarchal norms of ancient Greek society by refusing to accept her subordinate status as a woman and a foreigner. Her decision to take revenge on Jason is not just a personal act of vengeance but can also be seen as a broader statement against the injustices faced by women. In this sense, Medea can be seen as a protofeminist figure, asserting her independence and challenging the power dynamics of her society (Euripides, *Medea*, lines 489-493).

However, the play also contains elements that can be interpreted as misogynistic. Medea's actions, particularly the murder of her children, can be seen as reinforcing negative stereotypes about women being irrational and unpredictable. The chorus, which often represents the voice of societal norms, expresses sympathy for Medea but also emphasizes the idea that women are a source of trouble. This duality in the portrayal of Medea creates a tension between viewing her as a victim of a patriarchal society and as a perpetrator of blatant acts (Euripides, *Medea*, lines 32-35).

The play's ending further complicates the interpretation of Medea's character. Her escape in a chariot provided by the sun god Helios suggests divine approval of her actions, yet it leaves the audience with a sense of unease. The gods' endorsement of Medea's revenge can be seen as a critique of the existing social order. Still, it also raises questions about the morality of her actions and the implications for the role of women in society (Euripides, *Medea*, lines 418-421).

In conclusion, Euripides' *Medea* can be interpreted in multiple ways, and its portrayal of women is complex. While there are elements of the play that can be seen as protofeminist, highlighting the struggles and agency of women, there are also aspects that reinforce

misogynistic views. Ultimately, the play invites the audience to reflect on the role of women in society and the nature of justice and revenge.

### Bibliography

Euripides. *Medea*. Translated by Michael Collier and Georgia Machemer, New York ; Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006.

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