

Split decision on Euripides tragedy

by Stan Beeler

On the bus home from the Neptune production of **Medea** last Friday night I sat behind two very odd characters. One was tall and thin and wore a rather haughty expression on his long pale face. The other was short and had rather shaggy long hair. He wore a somewhat stained, purple leather university jacket. As the bus pulled away from the stop the short one turned to the other and said: "Hey, you were sittin' in front of me at that play, weren't you?" The taller one replied: "I believe so. You were the person who insisted upon placing his knees in the center of my seatback, were you not?"

Short: Yeah, that was me. What did you think of the play? That Victoria Snow, the broad that played Media (sic), is somethin' else eh?

Tall: That is **Medea**, not Media. Yes, she did fulfil the requirements of her role. But, of course, all that she had to do was express accurately what Euripides intended.

Short: Horseshit! Those guys at Neptune did a real great job with that old turkey. Who'd go see a thing like that if it wasn't a rock musical?

Tall: I certainly would. In fact, I almost didn't go when I heard about the music.

Short: Well excuooooose

me! Y'know it's too bad about the music, it didn't seem to fit the play too good.

Tall: I certainly agree with you on that point. The Greeks had musicians accompany the choral parts of their plays, but I assume that it was more appropriate to the mood of the action.

Short: Yeah, I think I heard that somewhere. Greeks invented chorus girls. These ones were really great eh?

Tall: I will grant you that the dancers and the musicians were good, but the material that they were given to present was, to say the least, mediocre.

Short: Boy you sure are a hard guy to please. How about all that stuff on the stage? Sure knocked your eyes out didn't it?

Tall: The stage design was absolutely marvelous. Stark white contrasting with black and the mirrored ceiling: it managed to express graphically the central theme of the play. Think of how it concentrated the attention upon the messenger as he reported the death of the king and his daughter.

Short: Yeah, that guy, Walter Borden, was fantabulous.

Tall: He was what?

Short: He was real good;

don't you speak English? The way he told his stuff you could really see what was goin' on.

Tall: A role like that is the true test of an actor's ability. He must be able to build the whole scene with words.

Short: Yeah, that's what I said. They turned out a pretty good show without even one slow motion blood and guts scene. If that sort of thing catches on, the special effects people will go out of business.

Tall: I hardly think that it will. The modern audience appears to have a taste for explicit violence.

Short: Well those Greeks got all that stuff with the gladiators.

Tall: I believe you are thinking of the Romans.

Short: Same difference.

Tall: Not really.

Short: Was this Euripides character a woman? The play sure sounds like some women's lib type wrote it.

Tall: It does seem to be socially relevant doesn't it? Euripides was one of the first authors to consider the problems of a woman in a patriarchal society, and it seems that they haven't changed a lot in the past two thousand years. Medea truly resents her dependency upon her husband.

Short: Not much wonder, that guy was a real klutz.

Tall: True, in this production Jason appeared to be a weakling, but I somehow doubt that Euripides intended that it be so extreme.

Short: Yeah, I wondered why all the guys in this thing were such jerks. Those two kings, Freon and Agnes, were funny.

Tall: Those were Creon and Aegeus, and again I would suggest that their presentation was modernized.

Short: What d'ya want; that they should keep it just like the Greeks had it? Who would go to see somethin' like that?

Tall: I suppose that one must adjust to the times, but should a play be totally at the mercy of the director?

Short: Nah, that's why they have copyright laws. Too bad Euripides is dead.

Tall: How true!

It was at this moment that the bus arrived at my stop, so I reluctantly got up and left. From the discussion that I had already heard, it was plain to me that there was more than one way of looking at the play that we had just seen. There is a lot to be said for the approach that takes the intention of the playwright as absolute. To write is to attempt to convey certain

thoughts to an audience and any attempt to reinterpret may in one sense be considered an insult. However, though some basic concepts and emotions may justifiably claim to be eternal, the tastes of the audience change. The problem that the director of a modern production of a "Classic" must face is to distinguish the unchanging from that which must be altered in order to maintain public interest. As my two informants have suggested, Neptune's production may have leaned slightly towards the modern. On the other hand, no one but a few specialists would have been interested in an absolutely authentic production of **Medea**. The thought of spending ten hours on a hard seat holds no particular charm even for a dedicated theatre buff such as myself.



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