

The role of women in "medea" and "twelfth night" term paper examples

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



" Medea" and " Twelfth Night" are all examples of how the role of women has changed throughout society. Women in these plays stood up against oppression and took their lives into their own hands. These works offer insight into the strength of women characters and the struggle for women's rights in today's society.

The Role of Women in Medea

If one line could describe the play, it would be 'hell hath no fury like a woman scorned'. Ideas about complex relationships remain the theme of the play.

The plot revolved around Medea who is credited with helping Jason retrieve the Golden Fleece and portrayed as a witch. The play takes place upon Jason returning to Iolcus with the Fleece. Jason attempting to separate himself from witchcraft, and marries Glauce, the daughter of the Corinthian king. Angered and hurt by Jason's actions, Medea exacts revenge by killing the king and his daughter with a poisoned robe. Her vengeance includes the killing of her own children (Euripides).

The play describes flawed characters and their descent into madness. This alone makes this play worthy of its praise. Often works based on myth present perfect god-like ideals that render them un-relatable to modern society. Though the audience is horrified by the actions of Medea and Jason, the idea of violence as a result of a love triangle gone wrong could just as easily be ripped from the headlines of today. Complex characters set Euripides' work apart from others. Medea is not a noble character, as she poisons Jason's wife and father-in-law, and then murders her own children. Jason is not a noble man either, taking advantage of Medea when it suits his agenda and denying her attention when it goes against his agenda. The

relationship was tainted by both Jason and Medea's lack of morality.

The play is also instrumental in its unique portrayal of women. Euripides states, " Surely, of all creatures that have life and will, we women/ Are the most wretched. When, for an extravagant sum,/ We have bought a husband, we must then accept him as/ Possessor of our body. This is to aggravate/ Wrong with worse wrong. Then the great question: will the man/ We get be bad or good? For woman, divorce is not/ Respectable; to repel the man, not possible." (Euripides) These lines help describe what life was like for women in Ancient Greece. Euripides was sympathetic to the plight of women, but it is obvious women of the time period often lived a miserly existence. Greek playwrights of the time are men, yet Euripides is different from the others in that he stands up for the woman in his work. The embodiment of such cruelty in a female figure also differs from previous depictions of women as soft, motherly stereotypes. Greek literature usually portrays strong men and weak women. Euripides was making a powerful statement about family, women and children, the figure of the helper maiden, and male betrayal throughout his work (Euripides). One interested in the study of gender roles can find the play as an enlightening look at the portrayal by many Greeks of the time and worthy of reading. Though " Medea" is a work of fiction it also highlights important historical evidence in the determining of gender roles in Greek culture.

The theme of marriage throughout " Medea" almost reads like a modern day soap opera. " Medea" is an extreme depiction of the destruction of a marriage. With nearly 10% of today's population divorces, the plot is still clearly relevant (" Divorce statistics"). The play doesn't have a very

optimistic outlook on matrimony. Not only do Medea and Jason suffer, but their children also pay for the sins of their parents, almost like a modern divorce gone wrong. A new study about child murders reveals that men and women are equally capable of killing children, but their motives for killing are very different (" New study --"). Men are more likely to kill their children in order to take revenge on ex-partners and to make them suffer, obviously the role is reversed in " Medea".

The pain of Medea is intense. Through her acts, she loses both her homeland and her family all for the love of a man who in turn betrayed her. As she says, a Greek woman still has family and friends, whereas she has nobody. The emotional roller-coaster of love and relationships make " Medea" a though provoking work.

" Medea" remains as important work even through modern times, because it forces the audience to analyze duality. Good and evil is examined through Medea's acts. It is a matter of personal belief whether Medea is essentially a good woman driven to evil by the evil she experiences, or if her unspeakable acts are the result of a natural born character flaw (Nicolson). The work also examines the duality of feminine nature that of a trusting, loving, weak woman transformed into a powerful woman capable of great deviance (Nicolson). Duality exists all around us, every day we are forced to examine what we consider right and wrong as well as the gray areas in between. In a literary sense, an ironic pattern is revealed as the traditional male is presented as a hypocrite (" Medea background"). The traditional woman is presented as a woman who rebels and takes action against what she perceives as injustice. Greeks see their hero brought low by a woman

transformed into a villain. Medea is used as a representation of Jason's downfall, and so stands as an object lesson for the men in the audience to consider in relation to their attitudes towards women. It is perhaps only by making her such a shocking character, that Euripides can achieve this effect. Euripides' use of irony, contain basic fundamentals of literary elements worthy of anthology and study on a technical sense.

The Chorus consists of women, giving their viewpoint and making it unique among Greek drama (" Medea background"). The play can be performed in the traditional Greek way of allowing for only two actors who take on several roles (" Medea background"). The idea of giving a voice to women has been a theme that has been carried on in literature to this time.

Role of Women in “ Twelfth Night”

William Shakespeare's “ Twelfth Night” is a wonderful example of strong women who felt oppressed by the society in which they lived. Not only did they pursue their love, but also stood up against societal roles. Despite the restrictions these ladies faced, they were determined to achieve their goals. Gender confusion is prevalent within this play. Viola, pretending to be a man, falls in love with Orsino but can't profess her feelings because of her act. Olivia, though adored by Orsino, falls in love with Viola who she thinks is a man. This ongoing confusion is meant to be entertaining in a comedic scene but it also is a revelation in the exploration of gender identity.

“ Twelfth Night” mixes love and comedy to explore concepts of gender roles. This insight into women opens our minds to what factors make a relationship work (Shakespeare) Despite the fact that very few females were allowed to

act in Shakespeare's time and faced strict standards, he preferred to write strong, willful, and intelligent heroines into his works.

Even though these women were not the typical Elizabethan ladies, the theme of women as property runs throughout the play. We see how fathers, not the ladies, get to choose their daughter's husbands, much to their dismay (Shakespeare). Society recognizes these women as property, and has laws that can put them to death should they disobey. Women were not given a much of a choice, however both Olivia and Viola decide to take their fate into their own hands thus bucking societal norms. Rebellion remains a major theme throughout the play. This shows just how far society has come in accepting that women should have a choice in their life changing decision. If one could use one word to summarize "Twelfth Night" it would have to be "love." Love is displayed with all its trials, triumphs, and heartbreak. We see two ill-fated crushes with Viola and Olivia, neither of which is free to act upon them. The relationships are complex, and gender confusion leads one to wonder if they are in love with the male or female versions of the characters. The idea that "love" is not exclusive to opposite sex couples is a concept that is more in keeping with today's societal acceptance. Shakespeare seemed to be foretelling a time were gender did not matter in regards to love.

Conclusion

William Shakespeare gives a unique insight into gender roles during Elizabethan times as Euripides's did in "Medea". I see these works as a prime example of change for females in the civilized world. One could also

surmise that Shakespeare and Euripides envisioned a feminist movement for their characters and thus shone a light on the pitfalls of how society regards women of the time. These ladies showed uncharacteristic traits and showed their strength by standing up against societal norms.

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