



Euripides IV: Rhesus / The Suppliant Women / Orestes / Iphigenia in Aulis

Euripides , David Grene (Editor) , Richmond Lattimore (Editor, Introduction) , William Arrowsmith (Translator, Introduction) , Frank William Jones (Translator, Introduction) , Charles R. Walker (Translator, Introduction)

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Karl says

Orestes.

Keith says

Orestes *** This has a rather modern feel for a 2,500 year old play. I'm not sure if that's in the original or if it is Arrowsmith's translation. In the play, Euripides moves the ancient story of Orestes to what for him was modern times. Unlike Aeschylus' Orestes, Euripides's Orestes must face contemporary legal punishment. It's all a rather odd take on the tale. There's a good bit of posturing and melodramatic dialogue that gets a bit dull, but the odd tone is rather interesting.

Mark Woodland says

What can I say? All of the well-known Greek playwrights are important reading, both for their historical significance as well as the fact that they're excellent plays. They haven't remained famous for 2,400 years because they're not worthy of it.

Lori says

And another great collection of Greek tragedies that have also influenced modern writers.

Taka says

Pretty good--

This is another uneven collection of Euripides' plays, *Rhesus*, *The Suppliant Women*, *Orestes*, and *Iphigenia in Aulis*, the last two of which are, I think, substantially better than the first two.

Rhesus takes place dead in the middle of the Trojan War, based on the night sortie episode from Homer's *Iliad* where Dolon the Trojan spy meets his unlucky death at the hands of Odysseus and Diomedes, who, the Achaean spies themselves, skulk to the Trojan camp and slaughter those who are sleeping and defenseless, and scramble back home in a stolen chariot - in short, a hell of a heroic episode. Euripides remolds this pathetic episode into tragedy by making Rhesus - some obscure, minor character in Homer's epic - mightier than Achilles and Ajax and having Athene announce to Odysseus and Diomedes that if he doesn't die tonight, he'll single-handedly exterminate the Achaeans the next day. So Odysseus and Diomedes kill him

while sleeping (which is really not *that* tragic, but well, considering that the Trojans would've wiped the Achaeans in a rout and ended the war if Rhesus had survived, it is, in a way, tragic).

The Suppliant Women is a better play than *Rhesus*, but still weak in that the protagonist is the suppliant women represented by the chorus, rendering it difficult to sympathize with what's happening (Adrastus does come close to being a principal character, but not quite), although it is still tragic in that the "happy" ending of Theseus bringing back the dead soldiers for proper burial is not really a "happy" ending, even though the suppliant women's wishes are fulfilled, for their husbands and sons are, after all, dead.

Orestes is far superior to the above two in that it is an exciting play with quick actions and escalating conflict. Orestes and Electra are condemned to death for matricide while their uncle, Menelaus basically refuses to help them. Pissed off at their uncle, they decide to kill his wife and daughter who happen to be visiting the palace. With the help of their ultra-loyal friend Pylades, they round up Helen's servants and try to kill Helen only to see her disappear into thin air. Forced to give the first murderous scheme up, they take hostage of Herimone and threaten to kill her and raze the palace to the ground unless Menelaus bails them out AND restore Orestes to the throne. Hearing this outrageous demand, Menelaus in turn gets pissed off, and tries to storm into the palace with the whole Argos population at his heel when Helen's literally divine brothers, Castor and Pollux appear and solve everything in an incredibly lame ex deus machina way. So the play had everything right up till the very last moment, I think.

Finally, *Iphigenia in Aulis* is quite excellent in the treatment of Agamemnon, who has to sacrifice his beloved daughter against his will, and his daughter and wife, who are, understandably, aghast to learn that their husband/father is intending to kill his daughter. Menelaus comes off almost comically as a jackass when he demands that his brother sacrifice his daughter so that he can bring back his adulterous wife, Helen. Seeing Agamemnon bawling his eyes out, he relents and they make up and everything seems to be going well until Clytemnestra arrives there with Iphigenia, intending to marry her daughter off to Achilles. Clytemnestra meets Achilles and learns that it was her husband's ruse to get Iphigenia there so he can sacrifice her.

Blowing up (not literally) at this revelation, they confront Agamemnon, and grill and roast the shit out of him (again, not literally), but he runs away. Then Achilles, who swore that he'd protect his alleged betrothed, comes fumbling in and tells them that the WHOLE Greek army is against him (even his good ol' Myrimidons) and wants to see her die (but of course he can, being Achilles, tak'em all out singlehandedly if his beloved betrothed would just give him a token nod of go-ahead). Being the saintly child that she is, Iphigenia gives up her life and volunteers to be sacrificed. Pretty sad, I know, but a good story.

Eric says

Of all the books of Euripides' plays, this is the easiest to skip over. His treatment of Orestes in the days after the murder is interesting in the way that he seems to extend the characters he created in *Electra*, but it is an unsatisfying play dramatically. The *Rhesus* isn't particularly good, nor is it thought to be authentically by Euripides. It's a story better told in the *Iliad*. *Iphigenia in Aulis* is interesting as one of the last known works of Euripides, but again, it is not a terribly compelling play to read. I would come to this book last of all the plays of Euripides.

Yanniey says

. The loeb translation makes no sense to me. Lattimore's is always the best.
