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# Medea



When Annette Bening, playing Medea for the first time at UCLA, finally undertakes the climatic action in dramatic fashion, she stutters in her speech, pausing in a gesture of unspeakable love before hoarsely whispering that "I gave them life, and I can give them death." Bening's combination of inner love and outer destructiveness in "Medea" befits Lenka Udovicki's new production of the Euripides play for UCLA Live, which explores gender conflict with a fresh look at ancient Greek psychology, speech, and music.

The story of "Medea" takes place after much of the main action associated with the classical Greek myth, namely, the story of how Jason (Angus Macfadyen) is prompted by King Pelias to accomplish the impossible task of retrieving the Golden Fleece. Jason was helped in this endeavor of King Aeetes' daughter Medea (Annette Bening), who used her magical potions to betray her own father and save Jason, then manipulated the daughters of Pelias in getting them to chop up their own father upon their return to Iolcus.

As the play begins in Corinth, however, Jason has abandoned Medea and her two sons for Glauke, the daughter of King Kreon (Daniel Davis) of Corinth. Fearing revenge, Kreon decides to exile the dangerous Medea, but gives her until the very next day after her pleading. Jason comes to speak to Medea, claiming that he had married Glauke not for the marriage bed, but rather to provide brothers for Medea's sons. Aged King Aigeus (Hugo Armstrong) of Athens arrives after Jason leaves, swears to Medea that he will give her a place to stay if she can use her magical potions to provide him with a son.

At this point, Medea does the unthinkable, and asks Jason for forgiveness before sending her sons to Kreon so that they can be raised as princes. To cement this deal, Medea sends a gift to Glauke that turns out to be a poisoned robe. When the tutor (Joseph Ruskin) later informs Medea of Glauke's excruciating death, she fetches her sons from the palace to take revenge on her husband Jason by doing the unthinkable before fleeing in her grandfather Helios's chariot for Athens. Jason is left to grief on his own.

Such a solemn tragic tale as the Euripides play requires a good deal of manipulation of the staging outside the script, and director Lenka Udovicki provides this first and foremost in the form of a fluid, moving, musical chorus. Instead of a static chorus as intended by the Greeks, Udovicki allows the all-female crew to move around with Medea, as if they are supporting, judging, and commenting on her actions. When Medea complains that she'd rather go to war three times rather than enduring child birth once, the chorus moves alongside her in a V-formation, commenting that women are the most wretched beings, having to pay first for dowry to have their husbands accept them, and then to endure divorces when their husbands tire of them. When Medea is so enraged by Jason that she takes off her vest to wash herself, the chorus follows by each member taking off their own vest.


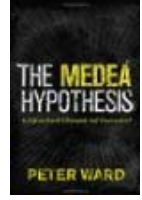

The chorus also sings some songs based on Nigel Osborne's music. Both the voice and instrumental music in the play serve to situate it in some undetermined time in a city by the beach. The setting is completely filled with sand, giving it an almost science fiction feeling, as if we're watching the movie "Dune." Kreon looks like a commando, and his minions look like they're from "Star Trek." The music matches that atmosphere of

indeterminacy. Perhaps the play serves as a warning to us about what can happen in any time, in particular the future.

Annette Bening is perfect for this role. She has both the passion that led her to sacrifice, as well as the motherly love that evokes pity. "Medea" demands of her a sort of severity as well. In the scene where the impotent and lame Aigeus visits Medea, hoping for sons to take over his kingdom of Corinth, Bening demands an oath from Aigeus as if her kingdom was on the line. She makes the crippled Aigeus attempt to walk pitifully without his walking sticks, and never shows a sign of affection in a situation that demands one. Bening's single-mindedness shows through, as she demands the promise of the exodus much as a businesswoman negotiates a lease.

Angus Macfadyen gives a great rendition as the hypocritical Jason. His declaration that "we need us another way to make some sons" is satirical, and his handling of the children shows his loving side. He's also very good at making excuses, like sleeping with Glauke because he wants to see his sons succeed the kingdom. He is that much more pitied at the end after Medea flies away, and everything that he possessed, lost. The sadness seems to have never left him until the very end when he sees his dead children.

"Medea" is produced by UCLA Live ([link](#)), and runs at UCLA's Royce hall until October 18.

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