

Title: Redefining “Electra” and “Medea”: Euripides, Aristotle, and the Revolution of Hellenic Drama

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The most credited attempt to designate the genres of Hellenic drama and the elements that separated them, Aristotle’s *Poetics*, defined tragedy as the changing fortunes of a virtuous man (Aristotle 21). Since comedy is only indistinctly outlined in what remains of *Poetics*, we can use Aristotle’s previous theory to assume comedy follows the changing fortunes of someone “unheroic”, and subsequently redefine Euripides’ *Electra* and *Medea*, as comedies.

Euripides is generally regarded as one of the most distinctive writers of his time. His focus on complex female characters is especially significant in separating him from playwrights like Sophocles and Aeschylus (Arrowsmith 15). As such, the classification of his works requires more nuanced thought. For example, *Medea* and *Electra* involve some elements of tragedy, but don’t fit the genre entirely. Both protagonists experience a change in fortune, but their plots supersede Aristotle’s idea of tragedy because being female stipulates they can never be “good” (Aristotle 26). Lacking the lamentable quality of tragic murders, deaths in each play are not only justified but celebrable. And distinctly anti-tragedy is that no events in *Electra* or *Medea* result from a mistake or miscalculation (Aristotle 22). Their actions are deliberate even when brutal. Thus, *Electra* and *Medea* are better classified as comedies.

Understanding Hellenic ideas of literature is paramount to understanding the discipline as a whole. Continued analysis of their foundational dramatic principles is key to unlocking previously overlooked conclusions—like the idea that the works of Greece’s “most tragic” playwright are actually full of comedic potential. What else might have been missed?

Works Cited

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