



Ten Plays

Euripides , *Moses Hadas* (Translator, Introduction) , *John Maclean* (Translator)

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The first playwright of democracy, Euripides wrote with enduring insight and biting satire about social and political problems of Athenian life. In contrast to his contemporaries, he brought an exciting--and, to the Greeks, a stunning--realism to the "pure and noble form" of tragedy. For the first time in history, heroes and heroines on the stage were not idealized: as Sophocles himself said, Euripides shows people not as they ought to be, but as they actually are.

Ten Plays Details

Date : Published August 1st 1990 by Bantam Classics (first published -408)

ISBN : 9780553213638

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Format : Paperback 432 pages

Genre : Classics, Drama, Fantasy, Mythology, Plays

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From Reader Review Ten Plays for online ebook

kommunia says

The book is cheap and well translated; although at some points it's quite clear that it's supposed to be used as a theater script rather than a homely reading. The introductions are brief and nothing much to be mentioned in the book description.

Donna says

I enjoyed these plays...I read the 6 recommended by Clifton Fadiman - Alcestis, Medea, Hippolytus, The Trojan Women, Electra, The Bacchantes. All were highly readable. My favorites were the last 3.

This is book 7 of 133 books in Clifton Fadiman's The New Lifetime Reading Plan.

Lillian Wheeler says

Paul Roche's translations are very good: readable and often preserving elements of the original Greek. Pay attention to his footnotes, though, since that is where he notes problem lines and/or his own interpolations (in particular in the *Bacchae*).

I found his introductions not particularly useful, and the stage directions he inserted too heavy-handed and not allowing the reader to bring enough of his/her imagination to the text (not to mention that there aren't stage directions in the Greek). After reading one or two of the plays I simply skipped over them.

A final point is that the lack of line numbers makes these translations extremely hard to discuss or reference. Overall, I enjoyed the translations themselves and thought they were well done, but I had some trouble with other aspects of the book.

David says

I was hoping to find a simple copy of the classic *The Bacchae* but instead stumbled across this wonderful collection of ten Euripides plays. This English translation is easy to read and though there isn't much in the way of footnotes or long introductions, the text speaks for itself and rarely leaves you confused. Each play has a simple single-page introduction with an illustration and helps develop any historical background (ie, how old was Euripides when he made this particular play, was Greece starting a new military campaign that he was scorning with this play, etc). Other collections of Euripides plays focus solely on his tragedies, however this work is a mix of plays that end tragically or happily.

Euripides follows the common pattern of the Greek dramatists in picking a familiar myth or epic and either re-tells a portion of it or re-casts its characters into an original story. These dramatists are then able to inject perspective and raw emotion into what would otherwise be a fairly obscure bard's hymn, and Euripides in particular is quite skilled at finding story where one might not expect to find it. In the story of Iphigenia he is able to develop motive for Agamemnon's choice that make the audience empathize with him though those familiar with the back-story, if told, would have found it utterly impossible to do so. Similarly, in the stories of the Women of Troy, Andromache, and Iphigenia at Taurians, some fairly mundane setting is made fairly

interesting with a few interesting dramatic tricks.

I had a mixed feeling overall on the quality of these plays, some being mediocre, a couple being outstanding, and one in particular I felt was a sheer masterpiece. *Ion*, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, and *Hippolytus* all showed the height of Euripides situational "cleverness", and *Alcestis* was an unexpectedly moving display of romantic attachment between a husband and wife (something atypical for Greek culture from what I've read so far). That play in particular was very quotable, full of poetic exclamations of a man's love for his wife and on how short and sweet life is. One element of the story caught my attention, when Heracles - after rescuing Alcestis from death and back to the world of the living - is asked by the husband why she cannot speak, is told that her consecration to the powers below takes three days to pass, and she can be heard again.

The gem of this book though was *The Bacchae*, which is the story of Dionysus homecoming to Greece and marvelously depicts the conflict between man's intolerant fear of the irrational and uninhibited against his instinct and attempt to lose himself in ecstatic passion. Euripides draws on a Homeric theme in the Gods appearing in disguise and being overlooked or abused by the foolish, and on arriving in Greece, Dionysus finds himself an unrecognized, unacknowledged, and unwelcome guest by the city's stubborn king. The king embodies man's resistance to the passions, to any slight hint of inner effeminacy, and his unflinching iron grip on tradition. Though given numerous opportunities by Dionysus to change, he refuses and finds himself a tragic victim of the great god's power. Unlike some of Euripides plays that get by on sheer cleverness, this story has much more to it. At times it is sheer hilarity, at others tragically moving, but always it shows a keen awareness of human psychology symbolized in myth and story. It's even hard not see a precursor (and possibly heavy influence on) the gospel writings about Jesus that followed five centuries later.

Euripides strength is that he is clever, and he creates a drama where characters follow an inevitable logical unfolding of actions enforced on them by the rules of the particular story. His characters aren't superbly developed, his endings usually seem rough, he's no poet, and he often lacks the strength to emotionally move the reader the way Sophocles does. In Euripides plays, the logic of the story and the pattern it is to follow seems to be the central focus, and its characters are simply the tools he uses to communicate his thoughts. Euripides is able to make a good drama by sculpting an interesting story and possesses great insight on the human psyche.

Nicholas Bobbitt says

Roche's translation is really good, but I don't know that I love the source material like I did the Aristophanes collection.

Meghan says

ALCESTIS

If you were married and you knew your spouse was going to die and you also knew you could put yourself in his or her stead, would you? If the answer is yes, are you a good spouse? Would people honor you and revere your decision? Should you be able to ask your spouse to not remarry after you are gone?

On the opposite side, if your spouse chose to, would you allow your spouse to die for you? If the answer is yes, are you a good spouse? Would people honor you and revere your decision? Would it be right for another to die in your stead when it is your appointed time to die? Could you expect your parents who are elderly to step up? Should they offer themselves because they are old and have already lived life?

This scenario is reality in this play. I would not categorize this play as a tragedy. Usually in a tragedy people are left to suffer situations they have no control over, but while one character in this play has the power to stop the tragedy and chooses not to, another in the end saves the day after all hope has been abandoned. This 'tragedy' has a happy ending that leaves ethical questions in the mind of the reader.

HIPPOLYTUS

"Virtue is pitted against virtue, and by a twist of fate virtue is betrayed by virtue." (Euripides Ten Plays, by Paul Roche, pg. 47)

It is interesting to note that you should never cross a god. For when they are angry they destroy anything and everything for revenge. Aphrodite, the goddess of love, has been spurned by Hippolytus and means to destroy him. She will do this knowing it will also destroy Theseus and Phaedra who revere Aphrodite.

Aphrodite: "Phaedra, therefore, has to die,
Though she saves her good name.
Yes, she must die.
Her present agonies are not enough
To outweigh the penalty I must exact
From those who do me wrong."

Phaedra, the step-mother of Hippolytus, is hopelessly in love with him, but is determined to die rather to "give it rein" or let it be known:

Phaedra: "The moment love smote me
I cast about for a way to handle it.
I determined to keep quiet and hide my sickness.
One cannot trust the tongue:
So glib at bringing others to heel,
So bad at coping with troubles of its own.
Next, I made up my mind to master this madness
Through sheer self-control.
Thirdly, when this attempt to quell love's power failed,
I began to see that death was the only way out –
None can deny it.
I would rather have my virtue than my shame
Blazoned forth for all to see.
For the scandal, I knew, would be just as great
To own the passion as to give it rein.
Besides, I realized that as a woman
I was the ready butt for hate by all."

Given she failed at not loving him and is determined not to cause any problems I find it reprehensible Aphrodite would use her to get to Hippolytus. I also find the Nurse detestable. She promises Phaedra she will not tell Hippolytus, but then goes and does just that. Hippolytus is shocked and disgusted by the news. His response tells us just how much he despises the idea of love:

Hippolytus: "Great Zeus,
Why ever did you give a place to women under the sun:
That pestilent tribe, that curse to man?
....
Woman is a plague, and here's the evidence.
The father who begets her and brings her up

Then pays a gross dowry to get her out of the house
And be rid of the baggage.
The man who takes home this noxious package
Is then thrilled to bedeck his idol with every kind of frippery.
He dolls her up in expensive gowns.
He fritters away – poor fool! – his heritage...
The luckiest man is he who wins a nobody for a wife,
A brainless nincompoop who just sits at home.
A brainy woman I abhor,
And in my house, at least, I hope there'll never be
A woman of above-average brains.
It's the clever ones that go in for Aphrodite's fun and games.
The dullards are kept in check by their own ineptitude...
As it is,
Worthless women hatch their plots in closets
And their maids broadcast them abroad."

What he says is not beautiful, but he says it beautifully. Euripides says so much in so few words. I wonder how the ancient Greeks took this speech. Was it meant to be funny? Sadly, there is enough truth behind it to make it humorous. The rest of the play reads fast for as the reader I was anticipating how Aphrodite was to bring about her purpose.

ION

When a god bears a child from a mortal what happens to that child? What happens to the mother who bore the child? Ion is such a child. We see through the course of the play what is done by the God Apollo to steer the fate of his own son.

The chorus ends the play with the following:

Chorus: "Praised be Apollo, son of Zeus and Leto.
Those whom misfortune undermines
Should reverence the gods and take courage.
The virtuous in the end will win,
The wicked, by their nature, not:
Because of sin."

This seems to me a departure from the average theme of most tragedies – that men suffer in this life and we just have to deal. This exit chorus is a little more positive.

ELECTRA

Find my review of Electra in my review of "Electra and other plays by Euripides".

IPHIGENIA AT AULIS

It was Euripides last play and was unfinished at his death. It is thought that his son finished the play and produced it in Athens a short time later. This whole play has major similarities to the story of Abraham and Isaac. I wonder how much, if any, influence the Jewish traditions had on the people of ancient Greece.

First, in the story of Abraham he is commanded to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Abraham doesn't want to because he loves his son, but follows the commandment of the Lord. In Iphigenia at Aulis, Agamemnon is told a virgin needs to be sacrificed in order for the army to sail to Troy. He sends word to his wife to bring Iphigenia and waffles back and forth between stopping them or letting them come. In the end he is convinced by Menelaus his daughter must die.

Second, Isaac willingly allows his father to lie him on the stone having full knowledge he is about to die. Iphigenia learns what Agamemnon plans and also willingly goes to the sacrificial altar.

“‘Father, here I am,’ she said, ‘as you bid me.
Of my own free will I bequeath my body
for my state and for the whole of Hellas.
So lead me to the altar of sacrifice –
If that is the decision.
May it help you, if that is in my power.
May you be awarded victory
And return a winner to your native land.
Let no Argive lay his hand on me.
Silent, unflinching, I bare my throat.’”

Third, as Abraham is striking down with his weapon, an angel stops him. A ram is provided in a nearby bush as a substitute and Isaac is saved. In Iphigenia at Aulis, the priest took the final stroke, but Iphigenia had vanished and in her place was a deer.

“There is no doubt your child was wafted to the gods,
So cease from grief and resentment against your consort.
Mysterious to us mortals are the ways of the gods.
Those they love, they save:
This day has seen your child dead and alive.”

This play was interesting to read after reading all the Electra plays because Clytemnestra always used the sacrifice of their daughter as her reasoning for murdering Agamemnon. So after reading an account of what happened, is this enough justification for Clytemnestra to murder Agamemnon? There was no evidence of death, no body of Iphigenia, but her daughter was gone. Clytemnestra never saw her again. Did she believe the army lied to her? That the story of the deer was just that – a story? If she really believed Iphigenia was taken by Artemis would she have hated Agamemnon? Does it matter that Iphigenia willingly went to die? Should that take away the motive of Clytemnestra? Or, did she use this occurrence as an excuse to gain power and keep a lover?

A lot of commentary suggests Euripides was a type of feminist in his time because more than half of his plays are about women. I agree that his portrayal of the woes and trials of womankind are heartfelt and are probably accurate, but there are always the little sentences that undermine this theory. The following is from Iphigenia when she is telling her mother she will go with Agamemnon:

“It is unthinkable that this man [Achilles]
Should pit himself against the whole of Argos
For a woman’s sake.
A single man is worthier
To look upon the light than ten thousand women.”

IPHIGENIA AMONG THE TAURIANS

This play gives closure to both Iphigenia at Aulis and the story of Orestes. We find out Iphigenia was saved from sacrifice to serve in a foreign land in one of Artemis’ temples. Her main purpose is to prepare the victims for sacrifice. Iphigenia has an interesting perspective on her job:

“I am not impressed with Artemis’ subtleties.
She won’t let anyone come near her altar
Who has touched blood or a woman in childbirth or a corpse,

Because they are tainted,
Yet takes delight in human sacrifice.
No, I cannot bring myself to think
That Leto, Zeus's wife, could generate such absurdity.
Not do I believe what is said of Tantalus,
That he gave a banquet to the gods,
Regaling them with children's flesh.
No, I believe that the people of this land
Being murderers themselves
Have foisted their murderous instincts on the goddess.
I refuse to think that any god is evil."

Orestes, in his mad travels, finds himself in the same foreign land and becomes at the mercy of the people who want to sacrifice him to the goddess. When Orestes is taken to the temple he meets his sister. The sentiment above is juxtaposed with the following from Orestes:

Iphigenia: Dreams, dreams, goodbye! You were all a lie.
Orestes: And so are the gods – no better than dreams on wings,
And yet they say so wise!
Confusion reigns among the deities
Just as it does among us mortals.
The only thing one should regret
Is being ruined not by one's own folly
But by following some crackpot prophecy:
A ruin that exactly happened to someone
Whom those in the know know."

Little does Orestes know that by the end of the day he will be on his way to being free from the Furies and saved by Pallas Athena.

MEDEA

"Revenge is sweet, sweeter than life itself – so say fools." Seriously, this play is messed up. At most it portrays how one bent on revenge can ruin her own life; at the least it is a sadistic and shocking read.

Medea: "Of all creatures that can feel and think,
We women are the worst-treated things alive.
To begin with,
We bid the highest price in dowries
Just to buy some man
To be dictator of our bodies.
How that compounds the wrong!
Then there is the terrifying risk:
Shall we get a good man or a bad?
Divorce is a disgrace
(at least for women),
To repudiate a man, not possible.
So, plunged into habits new to her,
Conventions she has never known at home,
She has to guess like some clairvoyant
How to handle the one who shares her bed.
And if we learn our lesson well
In this exacting role,

And our husband does not kick against the marriage yoke,
Oh, ours is an enviable life!
Otherwise we are better dead.
When a man gets bored with wife and home,
He simply roams abroad to relieve the tedium of his spirit,
Turns to a friend or finds his cronies.
We women, on the other hand,
Turn only to a single man.
We live safe at home, they say.
They do battle with the spear.
How shallow!
I had rather stand my ground three times in battle
Than face a childbirth once....
Woman, on the whole, is a timid thing:
The din of war, the flash of steel, unnerves her;
But wronged in love, there is no heart more murderous.”

Medea is justified in thinking this because she learned her husband, Jason, has taken another wife. Not just any wife, the daughter of the King. This explains her motive, but after this rant Medea goes wrong. She plans and executes the murder of Jason’s new wife and also the murders of her two sons. The end is heartbreaking, but also genius. Euripides has shown himself to be a master in ‘agon’, where “violent emotion is channeled into formal argumentation: these interludes provide a sharper and sometimes chilling intellectual pleasure as callous acts are justified with alarming articulacy.” (Euripides: Electra and Other Plays by Penguin Classics, pg. xxxvii) The following argument between Medea and Jason is so believable and real:

MEDEA: “Zeus the Father knows
Exactly what you got from me and how you then behaved.
I refused to let you or your royal princess
Set our wedded life aside and make me cheap
So that you could live in bliss;
Or let that match-arranger, Creon,
Dismiss me from the land without a fight.
So call me lioness, if you like,
Or a Scylla haunting the Tyrrhenian shore,
I have done what I ought:
Wounded you to the very core.
JASON: [wheeling around to face her]
You are in agony too.
You share my broken life.
MEDEA: It is worth the suffering since you cannot sneer.
JASON: Poor children, what a monster fate gave you for a mother!
MEDEA: Poor sons, what a disaster your selfish father was!
JASON: It was not his right hand that struck them down.
MEDEA: No, it was his pride and lust for his new mate.
JASON: You think it right to murder just for a thwarted bed?
MEDEA: And do you think that a thwarted bed is trifling to a woman?
JASON: To a modest woman, yes, but you are sunk in vice.
MEDEA: [pointing to the two dead boys]
See, they are no more. I’ve stung you to the heart.”

THE BACCHAE

This play is advertized as Euripides finest work. This play is definitely the most violent, the most horrific,

and the most tragic. In my opinion it is not my favorite, but when is being popular taken into account when deciding what constitutes a masterpiece? This play demonstrates the power of the Gods, particularly Dionysus.

“The Bacchae asks the question: is there an equation between faith and reason, religion and fact, freedom of spirit and law-and-order? Euripides’ conclusion seems to be that too much law-and-order leads to social tyranny... , too much freedom of spirit to chaos, too much religion to fanaticism. In the play, the young King Pentheus, who is the same age as Dionysus (Bacchus), believes that law-and-order is the sole end of the state. For him freedom of spirit is tantamount to anarchy. So he goes out to suppress the new cult coming from the Orient promoting Dionysus. In the process he becomes a fanatic, and as fanaticism does with life, so it does with him – tears him to pieces. Dionysus tries to save him: make him see that there are many levels to life and that law-and-order is only one of them – Dionysus himself being both a constructive and destructive force, like a law of nature, against which it is perilous to hurl oneself.” (Euripides Ten Plays A New Translation by Paul Roche pg. 393-394)

I really liked this chorus verse:

“The braggart’s unbridled tongue,
The anarchical folly of fools
Leads to untimely demise,
But unshaken abides
The life of the quietly wise,
Holding the home together.
For the gods in the faraway skies
Still look upon men.
Mere cleverness is not wise.
Given immortal airs
Life quickens and dies. A man in pursuit
Of mere grand desires misses his time.
Oh that is the way of fanatically
Willful men, I surmise.”

THE TROJAN WOMEN

Find my review of The Trojan Women in my review of "Electra and other plays by Euripides".

THE CYCLOPS

This is a satyr play and is purported to be a comedy. It definitely is more crude, but funny? Maybe you have to be an ancient Greek to get the jokes.

Marquise says

This edition contains ten of the nineteen surviving plays & fragments by Euripides, all of which are his best tragedies (and one comedy). I'm aware that the translator for my edition, Paul Roche, has written in his own guesses and inventions to fill in the gaps where missing lines appear, but since I'm reading this alongside another edition of Euripides' complete plays for comparison, I won't be taking that into account and instead will review the plays themselves.

My ratings for each individual play go like this:

Alcestis = 3 stars.

Hyppolitus = 4 stars.

Ion = 3 stars.

Electra = 5 stars.

Iphigenia in Aulis = 4 stars.

Iphigenia amongst the Taurians = 3 stars.

Medea = 4 stars.

The Bacchae = 3 stars.

The Trojan Women = 5 stars.

Cyclops = 3 stars.

So five of the plays got 3 stars, three got 4 stars, and only two got 5 stars. I didn't like Euripides as much as I had believed I would from the plays I'd known before, and it had to do mainly with his style, but also with two things besides:

a. his propensity to abuse the *Deus ex machina* resource; for all that he likes to chalk up disgraces and bad outcomes to human foibles and human emotions instead of the gods, he is too fond of having the gods drop out of nowhere to "solve" the messes in the last scene. He's not the only one, of course, it's a feature of Greek drama; but because he advocates for human accountability, his too frequent resorting to the gods is contradictory and lessens his arguments for personal responsibility. At least, with the others that also use this technique, there's symmetry in having the gods own up to what they've led humans to do.

b. He's not always consistent thematically or with characterisation, especially when he deviates from the most accepted version of a story or invents new elements. The plays *Electra* and *Medea*, *Trojan Women* and *Andromache*, and the *Iphigenia* duology are perfect examples. More on that below.

ELECTRA and TROJAN WOMEN

My favourite plays, as you can see by the rating, were *Electra* and *Trojan Women*. I admire Euripides' guts in producing an anti-war tragedy in the middle of the Peloponnesian War, when Athens was rushing headlong towards disaster, and I admire the Athenians for their tolerance and not having good old Euripides thrown to the dogs for it. At least Aristophanes' anti-war comedy could be excused on grounds of being a silly romp (with a very serious message), but *Trojan Women* doesn't make any effort to hide its seriousness, nor its poignant message on what war does to people on both sides, especially to women and children of the vanquished side, raped, starved, and sold as slaves. And the victor's side aren't unaffected either, with huge scores of old men and old women left childless and unattended at home, as well as helpless widows and orphans.

I also liked this rendition of Hecuba's tragic end instead of her being transformed into a she-dog to howl for her lost city and children, because of how dignified and regal she is while she receives blow after blow in each scene. Same for Andromache. As for Helen... heh, Euripides makes no secret of his loathing for the Spartan queen, in every single play that touches on the Trojan War or people involved in it he makes sure everyone's reminded of just how rotten she is. In this play, Helen tries to escape just punishment by arguing it's not her fault she eloped with Paris, but Priam's fault for not killing the infant, and then Aphrodite for promising her as a prize, that she tried to escape Troy, etc. The rebuke she gets from Hecuba and Menelaus is worth reading.

As for *Electra's* story. My opinion isn't exactly mainstream, as far as I can see, but I believe she had more reasons for wanting her mother dead than Clytemnestra had for murdering Agamemnon. I know the mainstream interpretation focuses on her love for her father (she had Freud name the Electra Complex after her for this very reason) and then rush to point out how undeserving Agamemnon is of this love for all he's done. To me, that's too narrow, and misses key points. Because, once it's seen through *Electra's* experiences, by putting oneself in her shoes and looking at it from her side, it makes sense. Let's see:

1. When Agamemnon left for Troy, *Electra* was a little girl. At this point, Agamemnon had done none of the

things his wife argued for his murder, and by every account, even if he had done terrible things to Clytemnestra's former husband, he was a good father to his girls and was loved by them all, by Iphigenia in particular, his favourite. So, there was no reason for Electra to think poorly of her father, and that idealised image of him from her childhood had to persist.

2. The sacrifice of Iphigenia, the reason Clytemnestra has for killing her husband, isn't in *The Iliad* (surprise!). The legend is in other works, and has two outcomes, one in which the girl effectively dies on the altar, and another that has her surviving. Euripides chose the "she survived" version (and incurred into inconsistencies I'll comment on later), and Clytemnestra knows of it. What's more, Iphigenia herself begs her mother not to hate her father for this, since the sacrifice is god-ordained and not of his own devising and it's for the good of Greece (She'll change her tune in another play, another inconsistency). Electra seems to be aware of the sacrifice and the reasons for it happening, but I didn't see anywhere it's said she knows Iphigenia's destiny.

3. Cassandra is no reason to affect his daughters' opinion of Agamemnon. She's a prisoner of war, a slave, and as such can't choose what is done with her; it's a common practice of the time period and wouldn't reflect on someone's character to possess such captives. It'd be different if it were a free person in an affair with a married person, as is the case for Clytemnestra's lover.

4. After the murder, Clytemnestra allowed her lover, Aegisthus, to usurp the throne. Thus allowing her adulterous love to steal her children's inheritance. Electra was made to work like a slave in Aeschylus and Sophocles' plays, and is married off to a pauperised peasant in Euripides' play. In other words, her mother allowed her children to be robbed of their possessions and allowed her daughter to be enslaved. How's that for hating Clytemnestra?

5. Similarly, Clytemnestra allowed her lover to persecute and try to kill her son, Orestes. Why else would there be a need for the baby to be snatched from the palace and sent abroad to save his life? In some versions, it was Electra who saved her brother, in Euripides' it was the boy's tutor. So, if Clytemnestra allows her children to be dispossessed, allows a murder attempt on her son, and allows the mistreatment, enslavement and humiliating marriage of her daughter, all that gives the lie to her supposed maternal love and her vaunted maternal love for Iphigenia being the reason to kill her husband. It's just an excuse.

As you see, I do think Electra wasn't crazy. Yes, Agamemnon is still a questionable fellow, to say the least, but there's his image for his children and there's his image for his wife, and in this case, his daughter would be judging from what is done to *her* and her brother. Her mother was the Devil she knew, up close and personal, doing harm to her at home. Her absent father could live in her idealised remembrances; she doesn't have the omniscient view of an outside observer.

IPHIGENIA IN AULIS and IPHIGENIA AMONGST THE TAURIANS

It's interesting to see a couple Biblical parallels with these two plays, namely the Genesis story of Abraham being asked by God to sacrifice Isaac, his only son, to test his loyalty and faith; and upon obeying the command, a ram appears in Isaac's stead. Then there's the Judges story of Israelite leader Jephthah promising God that in exchange for victory he'd give up the first thing that'd come to greet him on his return home, and voilà, his only daughter comes to greet him.

Similarly, King Agamemnon foolishly promised the goddess Artemis his most precious and most loved possession, and then is told by a seer it has to be his favourite daughter. He balks at the suggestion, calling it monstrous, but his brother and the troops strong-arm him into accepting the sacrifice. employing a rather cruel ruse to lure his daughter and wife to Aulis for the sacrifice. He's found out, and quarrels ensue with his recalcitrant wife and weepy daughter. Only Achilles agrees to champion Iphigenia and save her from the sacrifice, though he later participates in the rituals on the altar, so I'd not be awarding him brownie points so quickly. Finally, Agamemnon is saved from carrying out this sacrifice by Artemis whisking the girl off and

leaving a hind in her stead.

I have a problem with this version. A big problem: inconsistency. If Euripides chose this version instead of the one that has Iphigenia dying like Aeschylus and Sophocles did, how in the name of Hades is he going to make sense with the argument of his *Electra* play, where he has Clytemnestra saying explicitly that she hates her husband for what he did to Iphigenia? And it's not like she doesn't know, because in this very play she is told and is relieved that Iphigenia was saved even if she's disappeared. What's more, her daughter told her *not* to do what she eventually did. In any case, it takes away *gravitas* and negates the pathos of the motive for Agamemnon's murder.

Not to mention there's again the irritating *Deus ex machina* where it's not needed!

Then there's the continuation, *Iphigenia amongst the Taurians*, which to me is not only a mediocre play but also even more inconsistent than the former. For a start, Iphigenia's character has the stability of a yo-yo. Can you guess what she's doing amongst the Taurians? Hint: Artemis. Another hint: human sacrifice.

That's so. Sweet Iphigenia, who cried, begged, and eventually gave a grand oh-so-noble speech about sacrificing herself for the good of Hellas and living forever in legend, is a priestess for Artemis and performs human sacrifices. Sure, she justifies herself with that it's not she who is doing the sacrifices, she merely cleans and consecrates the human victims, so it's all right. What? But that's exactly what Agamemnon did, he wasn't going to execute her on the altar by his own hand, a priest would, yet she hates her dad with a passion now. What happened to noble feelings, forgiveness, and giving one's life for Hellas?

And it's only Greeks who are sacrificed, not the locals. She justifies this with her having come close to being victimised herself, so it's all right they're sacrificed. But the moment a couple of shipwrecked Greeks arrive to Tauris, she goes from *I hate all Greeks, hate them so much, my dad especially* to *Hooray! Take me back home to Hellas, brother, I wanna go home*.

I'm not inclined to believe Euripides was playing with irony here. He's done irony and paradox in other plays, and better than this. It's just poor characterisation.

HIPPOLYTUS and MEDEA

The first of these plays shows what Euripides can do with ironic plot twists. The story is about Theseus' bastard son, Hippolytus, an extremely handsome youngster that kindles the insane passion of his stepmother, Phaedra. Problem is, Hippolytus must be the first asexual male in Western literature, because he has absolutely zero interest in coupling with women. And no, it's not because he prefers men instead. It's because he really, really doesn't have *any* interest of a sexual or romantic nature, and he's dedicated his chastity to a goddess.

And since this is Greek drama and you can't have people approaching unrequited love with a mature attitude (what would we be reading if so?), Phaedra wastes away pining for Hot Stepson. Her nurse tries to "cure" her by suggesting to Hippolytus that he reciprocate. Talk about stupid ideas. Hippolytus chews her out, not only because he has no sexual interest but because the woman is suggesting he betray his father by shagging his wife. Phaedra learns of the betrayal of his confidante, and hangs herself in fear that Theseus will find out. But not before she writes a suicide note in which she lies that her stepson tried to rape her. See? False accusations of rape are as old as time.

I liked the play for the plot, not for the characters, which aren't likable. There's other versions of the story, all of which make Theseus the biggest fool and the most unjust, and in which Phaedra is more malicious than she is here. Euripides has "softened" it by making her more a weak and rather foolish girl than a vindictive harpy, and it works well enough, for the outcome is the same.

Medea is another play that shows how to weave a great story with horrible people in the leading role. Medea and Jason "deserve each other," as the saying goes, and it's a pity that the innocent are the only real victims.

I am not sure I subscribe to the interpretation that this is about the mistreatment of women in marriage, because if that was Euripides' intention, then he blew his case up to the stratosphere by choosing Medea as his mouthpiece, and by introducing what's believed his own invention: the killing of her sons by her own hand. For a start, Medea is no simple downtrodden girl married off against her will to some old dodderer, and has no choice but to obey him, keep the house, and pop out babies. She's a powerful witch, daughter of a god, and *chose* Jason of her own volition. Nobody forced her to elope with him. Nobody married her to him because of an arrangement by her parents. She chose, regardless of the excuse that it was Hera who told Aphrodite to make her fall in love with Jason (an excuse Euripides himself mocked in another play).

So, poster gal for feminine oppression, Medea isn't. In the *Argonautica*, she is painted as a very unstable woman, prone to violent mood swings, so violent she prefers to commit suicide because she can't handle her "love" for Jason, wishes he'd never come to her island, wishes him dead and herself dead, etc. In such a very manic and unstable woman, it's no wonder her "love" would be a pathological obsession. And Jason is no innocent, either, because he used her for getting the Golden Fleece, promised her marriage, and went on with the promise even after witnessing with his own eyes the revolting crimes Medea was capable of for "love" of him.

I mean, "the things I do for love" sounds nice and all. But if there's more red flags in your relationship than in a Soviet Union victory parade, then what right do you have to be surprised that your beloved turned out to stab you in the back? Accountability is something Euripides isn't doing well here. You should own up to making a bad choice of mate, and not victimise yourself because the liar and cheater you slept with (fully knowing he was a liar and cheater) left you pregnant and washed his hands of you. Then there's the fact that Jason wasn't even cheating on her, he chose to cast her aside to make a more advantageous political marriage, something common for ruling classes throughout history, and her reaction is . . . to kill the innocent Glauke, who unlike Medea is coming to this marriage because it's arranged and not of her free choice. How's that for injustice?

Killing her sons is just more of the same. And a bigger injustice. Euripides chooses to make her not pay for her crimes but conveniently flee for refuge to Athens. At least in the versions where she isn't responsible for the deaths of her sons or of Glauke there's a point to her seeking refuge, and seeing herself as a victim makes more sense. But not in this play. She's simply not right in the head, never was, and the husband she took for herself worsened her insane behaviour.

Debby Cash says

Love these plays, Particularly Medea and The Trojan women. I still find Trojan women very moving

Ruth says

I really enjoyed these plays, and I thought the translator did a good job making them clear and compelling. There were a couple of things that bugged me. In the intro to *Ion*, the editor romanticizes the rape of Creusa, saying she was "ravished," when it's clear from the text it was a violent and cruel rape.

The editor also seems to dismiss Electra's character and motivations, saying she's envious of her mother

when it's obvious her motivation is revenge. And in the intro to *Trojan Women*, he calls Helen a "paltry toy."

Don't even get me started on the idea that the Trojan War was Helen's fault.

Anyway, I really did enjoy reading these and found them fascinating and thought provoking.

Abby says

Since this is ten whole plays, I feel justified in my lengthy response. In fact, these ten plays led to a whole string of related reading: Linda Hogan's *American Medea*, John Camp's *Archaeology of Athens* with its descriptions of Classical theaters, and of course Anne Carson's translations and essays. I'm on a bit of a kick.

Sophocles was my first love, and at first I was sadly disappointed in Euripides by comparison. I remember copying large swaths of Sophocles' choral odes into notebooks in high school, just because they were so beautiful. Euripides is much less pretty. In fact, he's kind of famed for being downright unpoetic in places. But ten plays later, I have a much greater appreciation of Euripides' other gifts as a playwright.

There is a moment in *The Trojan Women*, just after Cassandra has been taken away and Hecuba has fainted and then revived to recount her sorrows. Hecuba refuses the offer to be helped up, and so presumably begins her story lying on the ground. I could feel the details even though Euripides doesn't mention them: the damp, chilly air of an overcast morning, the small clump of grass under the muscle on the left side of the spine, the small motion of her head from side to side to shift the little stones underneath it. The red dust settling in her hair. The bright, bright sky she speaks to as she lies on her back. That feeling like you just fell off your bike, hurting everywhere, wanting to cry and fighting desperately not to cry. What an incredible gift with words, to provide just enough detail that readers fill in the gaps with their own experiences. It makes the whole reading experience richer than if he had described the scene more thoroughly. Euripides is genius about that balance—he also provides background information and stage directions as part of the dialogue, but so unobtrusively that you hardly notice.

The literature of Greece is much like the fractured and fleshed-out fairy tales enjoying such supersonic popularity lately. These poets work from spare, strong stories that everyone already knows, and they supplement the existing plot with emotional content. So you see the same characters (same gods, kings, wives) and hear the same stories (*Electra*, the sack of Troy) over and over, but each writer's take on the dramatic content is a little different. So Euripides' Achilles is very different from Homer's, even if they had the same skeleton of information to work with.

In general I am amazed at how vastly different Euripides' versions are from Homer's. Euripides kind of hates Helen's guts, whereas Homer cuts a lot more slack to the quintessential bad girl. Euripides views the Trojan War as an unalloyed disaster from every perspective. When you read all these plays in tandem, it's great to see people who were maligned by their victims in the last play eventually become sympathetic characters themselves. Even Helen eventually gets to defend herself. Make no mistake—Euripides' Helen has a lawyer's brain behind that pretty face. You could get no better counsel for the defense. I know this girl, the girl who gets what she wants by intelligently and unapologetically playing the system. I meet people like that a lot. Hating them is easy to do and hard to justify.

I also have a huge appreciation, now, for the structure of a Greek drama. I love how they invented the Broadway musical, and perhaps did it better than Broadway. Definitely a lot more going for the Greeks plot-wise. I love the juxtaposition of the lyrical, beautiful piece with the action piece—who says you can't have it

all? I like how Euripides makes the choral members actual characters with a reason to be present, compared to Sophocles' singers who kind of drop out of the sky. And of course, the chorus leader's endearing way of saying exactly what you the audience wanted to point out.

I think the Greeks got it right in a lot of ways. These plays, especially *The Bacchae*, have such nuanced understanding of two-sidedness. The way opposites can be simultaneously true, like Bacchus as the bringer of joy and prosperity and also the purveyor of horrific, ironic cruelty and ruin. Most Greek gods are like that, and the proper response is respect. This is not such a bad response to a universe of powerful, capricious forces and people. It's not so foolish to teach your children that the things you want most—love, fame, prosperity, power—can turn on you in the blink of an eye.

Not bad for the library book sale find.

Jossalyn says

8/18- re-read *Bacchae*, for live performance this weekend at getty villa. theme of fear of eastern religion spreading westward, radicalizing suppressed segments of society, and resulting in violence and mayhem; so timely now.

9/17-re-read *Iphigenia in Aulis*, for the live performance this weekend at the getty villa. these translations are very modern and approachable.

rebecca says

Required text for a World Literature class, however, the plays in this book are actually really good. Written by the Greeks, they are full of drama and scandals. I love how every situation was taken to extremes. My favorite was the play about *Medea*. There are lessons to be learned in these plays and important themes such as religion, love, loyalty, and revenge. The plays are actually pretty easy to understand. Would recommend to theatre and drama readers/lovers and actors.

Kristen Coffin says

"Beauty is a joy forever." [*The Bacchae*]

So I previously read *Electra and Other Plays* and two of those plays (*Electra* and *The Trojan Women*) were contained in both editions, so I skipped them here. The other eight were as follows, with brief overviews:

1. *Alcestis*: Alcestis has to die for her husband
2. *Hippolytus*: Hippolytus spurns Aphrodite and she's out for revenge
3. *Ion*: basically the life story about Ion, who has a child with a god
4. *Iphigenia at Aulis*: Agamemnon is told that his daughter must be sacrificed in order for victory in the Trojan War
5. *Iphigenia among the Taurians*: A continuation of the previous play where we find out what happens to Iphigenia
6. *Medea*: Jason wants to marry another and Medea goes crazy
7. *The Bacchae*: Dionysus returns to his home town

8. The Cyclops: A comedy about a satyr, a cyclops, and Odysseus

By far Medea was both my favorite and my least favorite. It was the most enthralling for me, but I also hated Medea. She's legitimately crazy. Jason wants to marry another woman and Medea is justifiably pissed off. But her levels of revenge are ... well EXTREME is too tame a word. She's nuts.

"Many the forms of divine intervention
Many the marvels the gods entertain.
What was expected was never perfected
And God found a way for the unexpected.
So ends this story today."

Kathleen says

I read this because my friend was going to see the Bakkhai and I wanted to talk to her about it, plus I've always wanted to read the Iphigenia plays, Medea, Electra, and The Trojan Women, and while I was reading six of the plays in the book I might as well read the other four. This turned out to be varyingly good for me.

General comments: Roche is kind of a weird translator. Some of the plays (most notably the Bakkhai) have noticeable gaps in the text, and he's flat out made up segments of verse to fill in these gaps. I'm not sure how I feel about that, although he's very conscientious about pointing out where he's made up things and where he's made questionable or just disputed choices in the translation. He also includes a number of introductions to the plays that I'd just skip, since they're spoilery and kind of tell you what to think. His glossary of people, places, and names at the end of the book was much appreciated, though. I'm more than passingly familiar with Greek mythology and there were definitely some references that evaded me.

Also, Euripides is very, very sympathetic to his female characters. Almost shockingly so if you know anything about ancient Greek culture. Just wanted to put that out there.

Alcestis: Admetus, king of Pherae, has wrested a promise from Death that he can live past his ordained time of death if someone else will die in his place. Unfortunately for him, the only volunteer is his beloved wife Alcestis. While she's dying, Hercules pops up and after behaving like a fratboy for most of the play, eventually goes down to the Underworld and brings her back. I really only have a few impressions, namely that gee, Admetus, what a huge shocker that your parents don't want to die in your place. This may be a cultural difference, but he seemed to be a huge ungrateful little shit about his parents not wanting to die for him. Also, Hercules is a fratboy and Alcestis doesn't get much to say at all. Kind of a meh play over all.

Hippolytus: I went into this thinking it was about an entirely different subject, so for those of you wondering, no, it isn't about any Amazons, alas. It is about Phaedra (Minos's daughter), who marries Theseus and falls in love with her stepson. Her nurse tells her to tell said stepson (the titular Hippolytus), and when she refuses, the nurse tells him anyway. Hippolytus reacts like a little shit, which results in Phaedra killing herself and claiming Hippolytus tried to rape her (??), which somehow ends up in his death and everyone beating their breasts about it. Also pretty meh, with bonus why the fuck did any of this happen at all.

Ion: I had the least idea what was going on here. Ion is the son of Apollo by a mortal woman he raped and left at his father's temple but ends up being adopted by his mother's husband as that man's bastard son...? And then his mother tries to kill him, for which he tries to kill her right back, but then it's revealed that she's his mother and everything's hunky-dory? IDEK, guys. Skip it.

Electra: This is where the plays started to get interesting. Electra is the daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemenstra. Those of you who know Greek mythology know that Agamemnon was killed by Clytemenstra for sacrificing their other daughter, Iphigenia, in order to get to Troy. Clytemenstra also had a lover in here somewhere, who forced Electra to marry a peasant (who is, of course, chivalrous and kind and too aware of his class to touch Electra at all). Electra eventually runs into her brother, Orestes, who had been banished by the aforesaid lover, and together they conspire to kill both the lover and Clytemenstra. This play is particularly notable for allowing both Electra and Clytemenstra to speak their piece, and for allowing both of them to be deeply sympathetic.

Iphigenia at Aulis: The play where Agamemnon sacrifices Iphigenia. He lured her to Aulis under the pretext of becoming Achilles's bride, which is hilarious because Achilles a) is already married and b) is head over heels in love with his boyfriend Patroclus. He does try to rescue Iphigenia once he figures out what's going on, but he gets overruled by pretty much every other man in the play. Notable because Iphigenia eventually allows herself to be sacrificed and sees it as a heroic, if tragic, action. Also notable because Euripides really did not like Odysseus and it shows.

Iphigenia Among the Taurians: At the end of the last play, Iphigenia was stolen away by Artemis and replaced with a white hind. She was then transported to Taurus, where she became priestess of Artemis's temple there and was given the responsibility of preparing for sacrifice all the Greeks who end up in Taurus. Why is never explained. Orestes shows up with a friend, in an attempt to cure the madness inflicted on him for killing his mother, and after a back and forth in which neither one of them recognizes the other (it's important to note that Orestes was a baby when Iphigenia was supposedly sacrificed, so this isn't as stupid as it sounds), they recognize each other and make plans to escape. Iphigenia is very different here than she is in the previous play; she seems to have turned against her father for sacrificing her and now just hates pretty much everyone. Can't blame her, though. Bonus points for Iphigenia giving her brother's friend a letter to her brother, at which point the friend turns around and gives it to Orestes. I laughed.

Medea: This is an amazing play. Amazing. It's told almost completely from Medea's point of view, is completely sympathetic to her plight, and treats Jason as the jackass he is, although it doesn't condone Medea's actions. Basically, Medea saved Jason's ass at the expense of her family ties, for which he brought her home and married her and had two sons with her. Recently, he's decided to discard her and marry someone else. On top of that, the new wife's father insists that Medea be expelled from her country. Medea sends the new wife a poisoned dress and crown, which kills her and her father, then kills both her children by Jason and books it to a prearranged sanctuary. Lesson learned: don't be a douchebag to your wife and then blame it on her when she's hurt and unhappy. But seriously, great play.

The Bakkhai (spelled Bacchae here): Dionysus is a new god, just getting his worship set up. He's pretty well established in what the play calls Asia (basically Turkey), and is now trying to set up in Thebes, the home of his mother, Semele. Incidentally, there's a truly gross story about Dionysus' birth that I won't tell here but you should look up. So, he returns to Thebes and finds that the current king, Pentheus, has banned his worship and even mocks him to his face. Horrible things happen. I had two quibbles with this play: first, what did Cadmus even do to deserve being turned into a snake, and second, what did Agave even do? Oh, okay, three things: what the hell was with the epilogue? I think this would be better on stage and look forward to discussing it with my friend.

The Trojan Women: Also a powerful, amazing play. It's the aftermath of the destruction of Troy, told mostly through Hecuba's eyes, but with cameos from other notable Trojan women, including Cassandra, Andromache, and Helen. It's brutal, and doesn't shy away from the reality of what happens to the people of a captured city (hint: nothing good). It's also almost entirely female, with one Greek man and a few nameless Greek soldiers who do the horrible things and act embarrassed about their orders, but don't try to stop it. The women all get their chance to speak, including Helen, and though they're pretty hateful toward each other, you get the feeling that the playwright at least wishes them all well. At least two people die over the course

of the play. Cassandra predicts her own rape and murder, as well as the death of her mother. Troy is utterly destroyed. It's pretty damn heartrending. Also displays Euripides's hate-on for Odysseus, even though he doesn't show up.

The Cyclops: This, on the other hand, is a plain old bawdy play with a random rape joke and grossness from Odysseus. I wouldn't even bother.

So! Overall I'm glad I read it; I learned things about Greek mythology and got to read several plays I've been wanting to. Still, if I were to do it again, I'd skip Ion and Hippolytus, and I'd *definitely* skip The Cyclops. I'd love to see at least four of these plays staged, though. Maybe closer to six. I mean, I really want to see the Trojan Women now. A lot.

Karl H. says

A word about the translation: Paul Roche does a great job, with a few caveats. These translations seem to be made for stage productions of Euripides, so they tend to spell everything out. In some cases this is nice, like during scenes where the staging is crucial to understanding the action. In some cases, like when he completely makes up parts of a play that are missing, it can be bad. He notes when he thinks the play is not reputable or when he has to fill in the gaps, so I'm inclined to think he simply wanted to provide something for people putting these plays into production. Heed these warnings for maximum enjoyment: Don't read the introductions, which will spoil the plays on a first reading. You can also dispense with the stage directions at the beginning of scenes as they sometimes spoil what is about to happen, and the "setting" portion at the beginning of the play which is usually explained by the opening scene anyway. Otherwise you're good to go.

ADMETUS

Once upon a time, Admetus made a deal with Apollo. He wouldn't have to die if someone would agree to lay down their life instead. His parents (shockingly) do not take him up on this generous offer so he lets his wife bite the bullet for him instead, and then for the rest of the play mopes about how hard he has it. Got to say, I empathize with the parents here. I probably wouldn't die for such a selfish jerk either. The translator thinks Euripides is endorsing this kind of behavior but I don't see how Admetus complaining about how terrible it is now that he has to live alone and exclaiming "I wish I were dead!" is anything but massively ironic. A deeply ironic dark comedy- it had me laughing out loud at parts. 5/5

HIPPOLYTUS

Phaedra falls in love with her stepson (Hippolytus) because he's celibate for no apparent reason and that makes Aphrodite upset. Phaedra and her Nurse argue a little bit about what course of action is ethical in this situation, but I have to say that what Phaedra wound up doing was a hell of a lot more immoral than anything the Nurse suggests. If only they had bothered to listen to the Nurse at any point, things would've gone smoother. I guess the moral is "Don't be too hasty" but what I took away was "Don't piss off Aphrodite." 4/5

ION

I'm beginning to sense a suffering woman theme here. Apollo rapes a woman, she conceives a son named Ion and then Apollo decides to pull an ol' switcheroo on the mom who is now infertile. Not terribly divine of him. As Ion says, "If the day ever comes (I know the notion is absurd) when you gods must pay the price to human beings for all your rapings and whorings [Apollo] and Poseidon and, yes Zeus himself will bankrupt every temple to fit the bill." And after all his naughty behavior, Apollo doesn't even have the balls to show up in the play. Creusa, get that low down dog to pay child support! Euripides kind of backpedals in the end

but I guess he didn't want to be too critical of all-powerful beings, particularly ones backed up by mob justice. 5/5

ELECTRA

Euripides tells the story of Orestes and Electra avenging their father who was murdered by their mother. The Libation Bearers was the weakest of the Oresteia, and this version of the story is improved. There's a cheeky bit in here where Euripides takes a shot at the idea of Electra identifying her brother by comparing hair and looking at footprints, so no doubt he read Aeschylus's version too. The view of feminine subservience isn't much better here, but at least it's less obnoxious. Euripides gets our sympathies more successfully on the side of the children of Agamemnon. The character of Electra in particular is beefed up, showing shades of Macbeth's wife half way through the play. The only confusing bit is when Euripides tries to shoehorn in a lesson about how wealth isn't everything... doesn't quite fit in with the rest of the play. 4/5

IPHIGENIA AT AULIS

This is the story of Agamemnon sacrificing his daughter Iphigenia to gain favorable winds for Troy. This play doesn't mesh with the traditional portrait of these characters- it's kind of an iconoclastic interpretation. Agamemnon isn't a hyper-ambitious man willing to sacrifice his daughter for glory, he's kind of a bumbling figure boxed in to a bad situation. Odysseus is no longer a draft-dodger who pretended to be crazy to avoid going to Troy, now he's a blood thirsty demagogue. And so on. This origin of the Trojan War reminds me quite a bit of the rush to war in World War I. There's no one figure to pin the blame on- there's just a general war fever on the part of the public. The 'heroes' are just along for the ride. Iphigenia gains most of our sympathies- but not for the reasons you might think. The ending to this play is hilariously bad but Euripides didn't write it, so I'm going to cut him some slack on that one. 5/5

IPHIGENIA AMONG THE TAURIANS

If Euripides died after he wrote Iphigenia at Aulis, then how could he write this sequel? Well, he wrote this one first, as we can tell because things don't match up between the two plays at all. Iphigenia and Orestes meet up in some barbarian land but, tee hee, don't know they're related. Expect to wait until half way through the play before they figure that one out. At no part of this play does anything surprising or interesting happen. The end sucks too. The only lousy play of the bunch so far. 2/5

MEDEA

Do not believe the false advertising in the title. This is NOT a light hearted Tyler Perry comedy. I can empathize with Medea. If your husband cheated on you after you killed your family and betrayed your homeland to be with him, I can see how revenge might be the first thing on your mind. But it's not so far-fetched to say that some of her revenge is also for the insult to her pride- particularly after the line he gives saying cheating on her was for her benefit. She'll show Jason what it means to mess with Medea, even if she has to scheme and kill and cut off her own nose to do it. Just how far did I say I empathized with Medea again? 5/5

BACCHUS

Bacchus is the new kid on the block- the god of wine and revelry trying to get widespread acceptance. You would think if anything, people would be thrilled to have a god of partying. But no, some people like repressed ol' king Pentheus are just a bunch of meanies who want to bring everyone down. This type of divine party-pooing is called "hubris" and as we all know, the gods have a talent for punishing this sort of thing. Tiresias has the right idea- you've got to cut loose and act a fool every once in a while or you'll wind up half crazy running around the woods in women's clothes. And that won't even be the worst of it. When God says party, you party- or else. 4/5

TROJAN WOMEN

After the war in Troy ended, all that was left was to split the spoils of war. This included slaves, like Hecuba, the former queen of Troy, whom Trojan Women follows. This play is an utterly devastating indictment of

war. In the introduction, it is clear the gods aren't satisfied with the bloodletting at Troy and plan for more slaughter. Hecuba is forced to endure the destruction of all she loves- her children taken from her, her country enslaved, her home burned to the ground, her faith in the gods shattered, and the woman responsible for it all goes unpunished. Do the dead have it any better? Not by a long shot. Cassandra points out that though the war is over the Greeks have hardly won a happy fate. The Greeks have won back Helen, whom they hate, and have paid the price of countless casualties and years of hardship away from their homes. On the way back to Greece many more will die in storms, Agamemnon will be murdered, and Odysseus will endure another ten years of tribulation. The most nihilistic play I have ever read. 5/5

CYCLOPS

This irreverent play is a humorous interpretation of Odysseus' encounter with the Cyclops. It's crude, rude and pretty funny. It reminds me of Looney Tunes, if Looney Tunes didn't shy away from jokes about getting drunk and having sex. Silenus plays Bugs Bunny, and Odysseus is the straight man.

4/5
