

*University of Warwick  
Classics Society Presents...*

Euripides

# Medea

Directed by Asha Martin  
Produced by Gabrielle Leadbeater

18-19th January  
2018

*Warwick Classics*



## Directors Note – Asha Martin



The prospect of writing a 'Director's note' has always somewhat scared me, as I feel like I must now condense my whole experience of *Medea* into a few short paragraphs; when, in fact, there are simply too many words to articulate this.

Furthermore, the fancy title of a 'director' can sometimes suggest that there was one single backbone to a creative project - but that is certainly not the case with this production. Gaby and I began this journey in March 2017, and we have grown from a strong team of two with high aspirations and ambitious dreams, into a fierce ensemble of over 50 individuals – all of whom, in one way or another, have helped in personifying our creative visions. If one cast or crew member was absent from this, *Medea* would not be the same production.

The role of a director was a piece of dramatic land I had left untouched until now. Before this, I was often the actor on stage, and although this role is hugely enjoyable, I had always felt like it was never quite enough: I never had an influence on the other theatrical elements - such as the set, lighting or sound – and after repeatedly being the actor, I had come to realise the remarkable importance and creativity of these aspects. I fell in love the idea of taking a script and interpreting it anyway you desired - lifting the words, themes and concepts and creating a completely fresh piece of theatre. Thus, my directing journey began, and I have not looked back since. Through this job, I have discovered so much more about both theatre, and myself as a person – I have grown as an individual as this production has developed from page to stage, gaining new skills and experiences that I could not have found in any other way.

When analysing the many complex themes of *Medea* in order to build my artistic vision, I found that the repeated motif of 'the mind' covered many bases of the play. I believe that *Medea's* distance from community and thus, her mental decline from knowledge and culture into isolation and insanity is a pinnacle topic – one of upmost

importance that could not go unexplored. I wanted to portray this theme in every theatrical medium possible, with every aspect working together to give the impression that we are the intruders searching through Medea's mind: viewing all the raw and intimate details of her life that she would rather hide away; intricate pieces of her personality she wishes to suppress. I do not wish to explain or justify each of these theatrical decisions in depth, but rather leave it up to your own personal judgement – at the end of the day, theatre is subjective and often a private experience, and I do not wish to take this away from you.

As I have said, creating *Medea* was very much a team effort. Every person involved with this project brought their own energy, opinions and ideas – they all had something different to offer. And for this reason, I cannot say thank you enough to every single member involved with *Medea* - however, there are a few special individuals I must name. Firstly, thank you endlessly to Kirk Hastings, our Musical Director, who managed to create the most beautiful composition. Kirk wrote this soundtrack singlehandedly, creating a piece of music that matched every aspect of my creative vision. This music can often seem reassuring and almost familiar; but as *Medea's* story gradually unfolds, it takes a menacing turn, and the once comforting composition distorts into an eerie combination of pulses and rhythms, producing the most ominous (but also the most wonderful) piece of music. Without Kirk's extraordinary creativity, this would not be the same show.

I would also like to thank the University of Warwick's department of Classics and Ancient History, who made this production possible. They presented me with the most exciting opportunity, and their support has been overwhelmingly positive. I constantly received valuable guidance and information, and without their help, *Medea* would not be nearly as strong as it is today.

Finally, I need to thank Gaby, who has been one of the greatest driving forces behind this production. Gaby and I have stuck together throughout the whole process, growing from strangers to best friends – words cannot describe how grateful I am that we were thrown together! Gaby tackled the far more logistical and technical side of theatre (the side I am no good at!), and no one could have done it better. We make a great duo.

The list of individuals I need to thank for making this possible goes on! We have all worked so hard on this project that we are now a family, bursting with energy and talent and enthusiasm; and without this amazing team, my dream of directing this play would have simply stayed like that – a dream. I am so proud of what we have created and achieved.

I hope you enjoy this exhilarating production. Introducing Warwick Classics' 2018 production: Euripides' *Medea*.

## Producer's Note – Gabrielle Leadbeater

This year, Warwick Classics Society has been working closely with the academic department of Classics and Ancient History to create an innovative theatrical interpretation of Euripides' *Medea*. The Classics Play is part of the Ancient Drama



Festival for Schools, and throughout our creative process we've embraced the opportunity to present a production that will encourage a diverse range of students from all backgrounds to engage with Classics as a relevant, exciting and experimental subject. The Classics Play this year has offered a wonderful opportunity for Warwick University students to work closely with the academic department to create a fully supported, professional production within the highly regarded Belgrade theatre.

The opportunity to Produce such a play at University is incredibly valuable to me, and will provide everyone involved with the tools to follow any career in the arts with confidence and experience. Performing Classical Greek theatre to large and diverse audiences is fundamental to supporting the study of Classics and humanities across the country, as well as encouraging experimental multi-media interpretations of classical texts.

We'd like to thank IATL, Warwick Innovation Fund, Warwick Impact Fund, and Warwick Widening Participation Fund for providing us with all the financial support we needed to produce a truly innovative Classics Play this year. We are particularly grateful for the immense support provided by The Department of Classics and Ancient History at Warwick, particularly Dr. Emmanuela Bakola, for the Warwick Classics Society Play.

We'd especially like to express our gratitude to the wonderful crew of *Medea*: our Lighting Designer, Aiden Bromley; Sound Designers, Kirk Hastings and Molly Barron; publicity team, Rosie Mullen and Kelsi Russell; and our Costume and Prop designers, Jessica Burkinshaw and Bethan Goddard, who have all committed a lot of time and effort to making the Classics play as successful as possible.

The entire cast and crew of *Medea* have worked tirelessly this year, and we hope you enjoy the performance just as much as we have enjoyed working on it!

# Euripides' *Medea* and the critique of ideology

Dr Emmanuela Bakola



Euripides' *Medea* was performed for the first time in 431BC at the theatre of Dionysus in Athens. Although not particularly successful in its first production, today it is one of the best-known and most frequently produced ancient plays. *Medea* has captured the audiences' imagination for centuries because it features one of the most shocking crimes in human societies: the murder of children by their own mother.

What are we to make of this horrific act, and especially of the fact that *Medea* escapes unpunished, and seemingly without remorse, on the dragon-drawn chariot of her grandfather Helios?

Since the fifth century BC, playwrights, scholars, directors and composers have given different meanings to this horrific act and to the play's perplexing ending. Thankfully, we are not anymore in the era where the barbarity of the act would be bluntly attributed to *Medea*'s foreign identity. In his introduction to the 1938 edition of the play (p. xxi), the otherwise formidable scholar Sir Denys Page wrote "Because she was a foreigner she would kill her children". And he continued elsewhere: "It is important to understand that the poet has described not a Greek woman, but a barbarian. Though her emotions are natural to all women of all times in her position, their expression and the dreadful end to which they lead are everywhere affected by her foreign origin".

This is a shockingly simplistic interpretation by the modern scholar, even for an era that post-colonialist studies were still in their infancy. The play's discourse about the foreign element is anything but this simple: for example, *Medea*'s very first words when she appears on stage ring devastatingly true of many societies' hostile attitude towards the foreign element out of mere ignorance and prejudice:

*For there's no justice in the eyes of humankind—  
before they clearly learn the insides of a man,  
they loathe on sight, although they've suffered no  
injustice. (Medea 219-21, tr. R. Blondell)*

Medea's sharp description and critique of societies' prejudice against the foreign element offers a fruitful way to start the exploration of the play; it shows what a devastatingly transformative effect ideologies can have on humans, giving rise to unjustified hatred and cruel marginalisation, and even making societies operate against their own fundamental values. Medea's critique in these lines concerns attitudes dictated by ethnic ideology; but throughout the play, other varieties of ideology, especially gender ideology and the ideology of heroic identity, receive sharp reflection and criticism. Even more so, they become directly linked to the murder of the children at the end. In other words, as I will argue, what we are shown through this horrific act is how incompatible such extreme ideologies are with the fundamental values of close human relationships (the ancient Greek *philia* relationships), even familial relationships, and the protection of innocent life. It is these ideologies, with their inherent contradictions and extreme nature, rather than anything else, that drive the dramatic action to the horrific ending of the children's murder.

Despite what Page (and other scholars) have written, Medea is not portrayed as non-conforming with Greek ideology; if anything, at the very beginning of the play she is portrayed as having conformed almost fully with the gender ideology that concerns Greek women. She is a model wife, above all having given her husband a stable household and male sons for the continuation of his family-line. She has also experienced in full the Greek institution of marriage and all its hardships, as the heroine poignantly says soon after, in one of the most devastating critiques of ideology that dictates the role of Greek women within the institution of marriage:

*Of all those beings capable of life and thought,  
we women are most miserable of living things.  
First, we must buy ourselves a husband, at great cost,  
and thus acquire a master over our own bodies—  
a second evil still more grievous than the first.  
The greatest ordeal here is whether we will get*

a worthwhile or a bad one; for departure harms  
a woman's reputation, and she can't refuse  
a husband. Then she comes to new customs and ways,  
and must divine prophetically—not having learned  
at home—what kind of bed-mate she'll be dealing with.  
If we succeed in working all this out, and if  
our husband bears in peace the yoke of living with us,  
our life is enviable; if not, we must die.  
But when a man is burdened by the company  
within, he goes outside to ease his heart's distress.  
We, by necessity, must look to one alone.  
They say there is no danger in the life we lead,  
staying at home while they do battle with the spear.  
How wrongheaded they are! I'd rather stand three times  
behind a shield in war than give birth to one child!  
(Medea 230-51, tr. R. Blondell)

Granted, Medea may have not literally gone through the process of marriage that Greek women did (see fig. 1) when she came with her husband in Greece.



.Figure 1: Greek wedding (or The wedding of Thetis and Peleus): Reproduction of the image on an Attic red-figured pyxis by the 'Wedding Painter', 5th cent. BC, Paris Louvre L55

However, the large spatial metaphor of Medea's journey from the Black Sea to Greece strikingly mirrors this process of the bride's separation and abandonment of her family, and captures the fact that Medea's current state embodies the most nightmarish version of what marriage could be for a Greek woman: having abandoned her home and her family with no possibility of going back, she finds herself all alone, isolated in a context hostile to her foreignness. She is, as she herself says, an unknown quantity in her new home, with loads of prejudices oppressing her – including her

reputation for being wise; and like the desperate Greek wives she describes in the monologue above, she has no one to turn to and is left to look to Jason alone – even when he is ready to give her and their children up in order to secure a better status for himself.

On the other hand, Jason, even with his totally unflattering characterisation in the play, is not completely unlike Medea in that he himself is also subjected to society's oppressive ideologies and expectations. His motivation for breaking his oaths to Medea, abandoning her and their children for a royal marriage with the Corinthian king's daughter, largely stem out of the fact that he is state-less and status-less. Jason is an exile in Corinth, so, like Medea, he is essentially a foreigner. The status of his children is also unfortunate: when he justifies his actions to Medea, he suggests that as sons of a foreign mother, they can acquire status only if they have brothers of a royal bloodline. For an Athenian audience, and in light of recent changes to the Athenian family law, Medea's foreign ethnicity would also mean that Jason's children would not be considered legitimate. In other words, Jason could be thought of as not really having heirs to continue his family line. Although the world of Medea and Jason is not that of fifth-century Athens, the words and actions of the characters suggest that the social and ideological context that shapes them and motivates their actions – and that is being critiqued so sharply – evokes the context of fifth-century Athens. It is this oppressive framework of society's expectations that largely transforms the two spouses into the inhumane characters they become.

That ideology and its critique is the focus of Euripides' *Medea* is also suggested by how obsessively – and disturbingly – the play engages with heroic ideology. In the play, the image of the hero is not conveyed by Jason; on the contrary, Jason's heroic credentials seem to be compromised from the start, especially as Medea is essentially shown to have achieved the heroic feat of the Golden Fleece. What Jason has done is to violate the Greek ethical norms of trust and honesty in his treatment of his family. With Jason's heroic image shattered, it is Medea who disconcertingly becomes obsessed with heroic ideology. It is almost as if, once the heroine has so sharply exposed and rejected the pathetic role of women in her place, she has no other identity, no other framework to

turn to, so she starts transforming into something that chillingly evokes a hero – in all the ambiguity we encounter heroes elsewhere in Greek literature, heroes like the Homeric Achilles, the Sophoclean Ajax, or the Euripidean Heracles.

The most disturbing element of Medea's behaviour, which, I believe, ultimately aims at critique of heroic ideology, is how frequently Medea obsesses with her heroic honour and shows concern about being 'laughed at':

*Now it is a contest of courage. Do you see  
what is being done to you? You must not suffer mockery... (Medea  
403-5)*

Once Medea undertakes the paradoxical feat of achieving heroic glory and fame – by killing her children, of all things – she becomes a creature we can hardly relate to: a pathetic figure who almost schizophrenically struggles between her intense maternal love for her innocent boys and her self-imposed heroic expectations. Most chillingly of all, in her final disconcerting monologue, where Medea struggles with her decision to murder the children and constantly changes her mind, what finally tips the balance and brings about the devastating finale is Medea's concern with heroic honour:

*I'll live bereft of you  
the rest of my poor life—a life of grief and pain.  
And you, you'll no more look upon your mother with  
those dear eyes, after leaving for a different kind of life.  
[She gives a cry of lamentation.]  
My sons, why are you gazing at me with  
those eyes? Why smile at me this final laughing smile?  
[She screams in anguish.]  
Aiai! What shall I do? Women, my heart for this  
deed disappears when I catch sight of my sons' shining  
eyes. I cannot do it! Farewell to the plans  
I made before! I'll take my sons away from here.  
Why should I do this evil to them, just to bring  
their father pain, when doing so will gain me twice  
the evil for myself? I won't! Farewell, my plans!  
But what's come over me? Do I want to incur*

*laughter for leaving enemies unpunished? No!  
This must be dared. What cowardice it was in me,  
to let those soft words even come into my mind!  
Be gone, my sons, into the house. If anyone  
is not permitted to attend my sacrifice,  
that is his own concern. I won't let this hand fail!*  
(*Medea* 1036-55, tr. R. Blondell)

Under multiple pressures, in front of our eyes Medea transforms into a creature that we can no longer place anywhere in our experience: a disconcerting mixture of an intensely loving mother and an honour-



*Figure 2: Still from Yukio  
Ninagawa's*

*production of Medea, Athens*

obsessed hero that destroys innocent life. Several modern productions, such as the one by Y. Ninagawa shown in fig. 2 have turned the character of Medea in this final, shocking scene into a physically unrelatable creature: standing on Helios' chariot, she is portrayed as neither human nor divine, neither male nor female. This is what the dramaturgy of the play itself suggests: Medea is anything but human at this point; she is an outlandish creature

of nightmares, a Fury, an entity that destroys innocent lives to restore injustice:

*Oh god-born light, prevent her! Stop her!  
Take from the house this wretch, this Fury,  
bold, bloody and inspired by demons of revenge. (Medea 1258-60,  
tr. R. Blondell)*

How are we to make sense of the final scene of Euripides' *Medea*?

Perhaps the utter horror and shock of the scene does only not concern characters, personalities and domestic conflicts. We of course abhor Medea's inhumane act; but in my view, the horror of this scene captures above all the failure of human societies, despite, or perhaps because of, their ideological structures – structures often rigid, tyrannical and self-contradictory – to protect the value of human life and the cornerstone of human relationships: that of parents and children.

# Main Cast



## Medea – Holly Cowan

Like many other members of the cast, I first became familiar with Medea's character whilst studying Euripides at A level. As Medea is my favourite character in ancient Greek tragedy it has been a huge honour to have been given the opportunity to play her. She is by far the most complex and interesting role I have ever had to portray, her ruthless rationality in the decisions we see her make, contrasting with her softer maternal love for her children. This is my second year performing with the Warwick Classics Society; having played Tiresias in *Antigone* in 2017, it has been brilliant to be a part of another fantastic Society production that I hope you all enjoy!



## Jason – Oliver Sheard

Having studied *Medea* for A-levels in recent years, I found it important to portray Jason in such a way that highlights him as a flawed but not unredeemable character. He is shown to have many negative attributes as an individual focusing entirely selfishly on himself in times of peril, but this fails to detract from his humanity; we can still clearly see a love for his children in the culmination of the play, regardless of the motivations behind this.



## Nurse – Laura Adebisi

I am a young, passionate and professional actor, in my final year at the University of Warwick, studying English and Theatre. My journey towards becoming The Nurse – the stable narrator and objective close watcher of *Medea* – has been complex and fulfilling. I

have professionally acted in a feature film, short films, music videos, corporate videos and commercials. My professional theatre debut at the Hen & Chicken Theatre in London, last year, saw me take on the titular role in the new play *Aisha* which received some outstanding reviews. It has been such a privilege to return to the stage through this production of *Medea* alongside a fantastic and resilient cast and creative team.



### Tutor – Meg Christmas

I'm currently doing a Masters in Drama and Theatre Education, but this is my fourth year at Warwick, as I did my undergraduate in Classical Civilisation here! I've always loved Greek Theatre, and been involved in the Classics Play every year since I arrived at Warwick - *Medea* is my favourite Greek play, so

I'm thrilled to be a part of it!



### Aegeus – Theo Guinness

I've greatly enjoyed seeing the production of *Medea* grow over the first term. Since Aegeus wasn't a character written with much stage time, I have been able to watch the main chunk of the production grow over time which was wonderful to see. Aegeus himself was a character made in heaven for someone such as

myself, I was lucky enough to channel my naturally bumbly self, needed for the character, to give my own personalised interpretation.



### Creon – Wilkie Dickinson-Sparkes

I've loved being involved in the classics play this year. Creon was a really fun character to play as he has such intense emotions in his short time on stage, which were really fun to portray. It's been so amazing to make new friends in the cast and get involved with theatre outside the university's normal theatre

societies, especially to be able to get involved with such an important aspect of the Classics society in my first year.



## Glauce – Hannah Tier

*Medea* has been one of my favourite tragedies since I first studied it a few years ago and I've always loved drama, so the show seemed like a pretty perfect thing to get involved with in my first term of uni. Being part of *Medea* has been such a fun experience, and different to anything I've done before with the spoken word aspect of the chorus. Plays are always a great way to get to know people, and this has been no exception! I've had a ball, hope you enjoy!

# Chorus



Edward Villers  
Chorus Leader



Alice Saunders  
Chorus Leader



Maya Russell Smith



Jenny Benton



David Hughes



Dillon Patel



Megan Walsh



Lucy Kitcher



Sebastian Chapman



Leo Crozier



Zhara Manji



Harvey Aunales



Tara McMaster



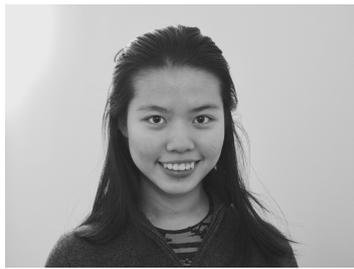
Adelle Morgan-  
Adefarakan



Annabelle Livingstone



Charli Kelly



Michelle Tan



Joshua Folley



Matilda Wood



Catherine Quinn

# Production Team

Director - *Asha Martin*

Producer - *Gabrielle Leadbeater*

Set Designer & Academic Advisor – *Dr Emmanuela Bakola*

Original Translation – *Clive Letchford*

Musical Director - *Kirk Hastings*

Lighting Designer – *Aiden Bromley*

Graphic Designer – *Sarah Brown*

Assistant Musical Director - *Clare Mahon*

Band – *Becky Windsor, Ella Newton, Emily Holt, Hannah Dyson,  
Jenny Wheeler, Lydia Johnson, Nicky Leathard*

Costume and Prop Designer - *Jessica Burkinshaw*

Costume and Prop Designer - *Bethan Goddard*

Warwick Classics Publicity Officer - *Rosie Mullen*

Medea 2018 Publicity Officer - *Kelsi Russell*

Set Design Assistants – *Maxwell Talbot, Meghan Cradock*

Stage Manager— *Penny Fraser*

Company Stage Manager - *Hannah Thorpe*

Deputy Stage Manager - *Conor Adolph*

Assistant Stage Managers - *Ellie Smales, Holly Raidl, Richa Snell,  
Radha Patel, Jasmine Thiarai*

## With Special Thanks to...

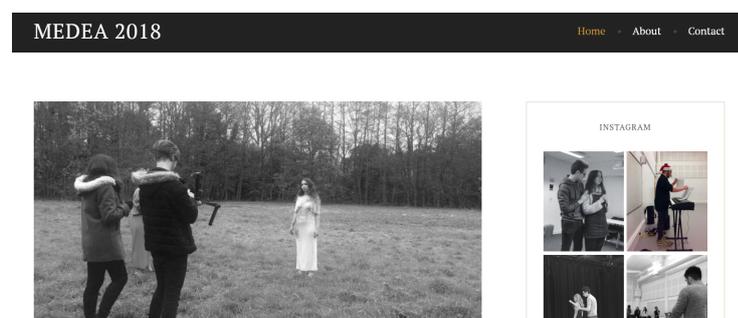
- Warwick Impact Fund, Warwick Innovation Fund, Widening Participation Fund and IATL for generously sponsoring the *Medea* production and the Ancient Drama festival
- The Department of Classics and Ancient History, especially Dr Emmanuela Bakola, for raising the production's funds and providing academic and practical support to the project of *Medea* from its inception
- Emily Nguyen for the permission to use her artwork 'Branch Hands' on the production's poster.
- Clive Letchford for the translation of the play
- Laura Cordery for her support with elements of the set design.

Be sure to keep in touch with Warwick Classics Department and stay up to date with our future events and productions by checking our new website:



<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/classics/research/outreach/dramafestival/>

Here you will find information on performances from Warwick Classics Society along with video recordings of past productions, past programmes, essays, and talks from academics.



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Instagram: @WarwickClassicsPlay

Blog: <https://warwickclassicsplay.wordpress.com/>

*University of Warwick Open  
Days...*

*Friday 22 June 2018*

*Saturday 23 June 2018*

*Saturday 6 October 2018*

*Saturday 20 October 2018*

*Please come along and pay our  
Classics and Ancient History  
Department a visit.*