

Book Review

Medea

Hewlett (R.) Pp. 423. London: Penguin Random House, 2024. Cased, £16.99. ISBN: 978-1-7876-3729-0.

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This is a work of a greater magnitude than the author's previous novel, *Medusa*, but Hewlett's easy-reading style filled with dialogue makes for another entertaining read.

It is clear that the author has done her homework and drawn upon the work of Ovid and Euripides here. You'll find quotations from these texts sneaking into the narrative. But this is clearly a feminist retelling too. Hewlett's Medea is a power-hungry woman who is a product of her childhood exposed to harsh physical punishments from her father and brother.

The retelling covers much of Medea's life going well beyond the scope of classical texts with a number of the early chapters working through the imagined upbringing in the palace of Colchis, including training sessions with her aunt, Circe, and the arrival of the golden fleece and her role in protecting it. King Aetes uses her as a weapon, then Jason arrives, and she instantly becomes infatuated by him and goes off to be a weapon for him instead.

Whilst the author does not shy away from many of the crimes Medea has committed, she does work to explain the actions Medea chose, although this is often a result of the 'dark magic' by which Medea has become overpowered in this version. The manipulative side to Medea from Euripides' account seems to be lacking, as does the internal monologue of the decision to take the lives of her own children.

After the, at times, slow move through Medea's imagined childhood, some of the other key events in her life, particularly the killing of Glauce and Creon, seemed to move rapidly from one major event to the next. I would have liked to see more of some of the side characters; the ten-year jump taken at one point means that when we are dropped back into the text the characters lack any backstory. Jason seemed one-dimensional for much of the text. Atalanta is well developed though and there is some similarity to the portrayal of her in Jennifer Saint's recent novel on the warrior huntress.

Whilst the easy reading style would make it accessible to pupils, I would be reluctant to recommend it to anyone whilst studying the classical texts for GCSE or A Level as I would worry this version would be the one recalled in essays or exams instead of the classical texts. When considering recommending to school pupils it is worth knowing that there is a portrayal of domestic violence in the first few chapters, and the impact of this is felt throughout the book. It is probably suitable for GCSE or older pupils.

doi: 10.1017/S2058631024000898