

**ДЕКОНСТРУКЦІЯ ГЕНДЕРНИХ СТЕРЕОТИПІВ
У ТРАГЕДІЇ ЄВРІПІДА “МЕДЕЯ”****Юлія ЛИСАНЕЦЬ, Олена БЄЛЯЄВА,
Інеса РОЖЕНКО, Ірина СОЛОГОР,**Полтавський державний медичний університет, Полтава (Україна)
julian.rivage@gmail.com; inlatmetod@ukr.net;
inviro@ukr.net; plantago@ukr.net**DECONSTRUCTION OF GENDER STEREOTYPES
IN MEDEA BY EURIPIDES****Yuliia LYSANETS, Olena BIELIAIEVA,
Inesa ROZHENKO, Iryna SOLOHOR,**

Poltava State Medical University, Poltava (Ukraine)

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0421-6362 ; https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9060-4753

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9899-6552 ; https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8334-5087

Лисанець Ю.В., Бєляєва О.М., Сологор І.М., Роженко І.В. Деконструкція гендерних стереотипів у трагедії “Медея” Евріпіда. Мета дослідження – проаналізувати особливості художньої репрезентації жінки, а також нарративні ознаки культивування та деконструкції гендерних стереотипів у Стародавній Греції на прикладі трагедії “Медея” Евріпіда. Методи дослідження: наратологічний, теорія рецептивної естетики, феміністична літературна критика. Об’єкт дослідження – трагедія Евріпіда “Медея” як один із найяскравіших здобутків давньогрецької драматургії, що складає базис практично всіх сучасних літератур світу і концептуальне підґрунтя гендерного дискурсу, який не втрачає своєї актуальності й нині. Наукова новизна. У статті уточнено художні інтенції автора і роль читачької рецепції в конструюванні образу жінки, традиційного для давньогрецького суспільства, а також доповнено попередні студії зарубіжних дослідників стосовно нарративної деконструкції гендерних стереотипів на прикладі сюжетної лінії Медеї. Висновки. Гендерний світогляд автора виявляє тенденцію до руйнування усталених канонів щодо традиційного місця жінки в суспільстві. У ході дослідження виявлено, що в трагедії Евріпіда простежується сміливий зсув гендерних ролей і відмова від традиційного статусу жінки в суспільстві за рахунок прогресивного характеру головної героїні, яка постає втіленням незламної волі та здатна протистояти усталеним уявленням. Показано, що переслідуючи власні амбіції, Медея повністю ігнорує багато клішованих жіночих характеристик. Таким чином втілено субверсивну стратегію автора, який ставить під сумнів нерівність жінок у патріархальному грецькому суспільстві.

Ключові слова: давньогрецька драматургія, жіночі образи, рецептивна естетика, феміністична літературна критика, нарративна репрезентація.

Problem statement. Women are quite often depicted as major characters in Greek tragedies. However, they did not participate in the life of society and were restricted to their households¹. Furthermore, the Athenians regarded women as unworthy of education. The Greek dramatist Menander (ca. 343-291 B.C.) once observed: “A man who teaches a woman to write should recognize that he is providing poison to an asp”². The Greek women had to reconcile themselves to such a fate of subjugation and subordination: “It is the best for all tame animals to be ruled by human beings. For this is how they are kept alive. In the same way, the relationship between the male and the female is by

nature such that the male is higher”³. Hence, the role of a female, as compared to that of Greek men, was insignificant indeed.

The aim of the research is to analyze the literary depiction of women, narrative features of cultivation and deconstruction of gender stereotypes in ancient Greece as exemplified by *Medea* by Euripides. In our previous studies^{4,5,6,7}, we have already focused on the narrative representation of women and gender issues in the U.S. prose. In this paper, we will examine these aspects in the Greek dramaturgy, which is a cradle of virtually all modern literatures and a conceptual foundation for the contemporary gender discourse.

¹ Blundell S. *Women in ancient Greece*, London: British Museum Press, 1999, P. 21–23 [in Ukrainian].

² Soupios M.A. *The Greeks Who Made Us Who We Are: Eighteen Ancient Philosophers, Scientists, Poets and Others*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2013, P. 37 [in English].

³ Ostrowick J. *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy: The Greeks and Lao Tzu*, New York: Routledge, 2015, P. 325 [in English].

⁴ Berezhanska Yu.V. “Cultivation and Destruction of Gender Stereotypes in “Maria Concepcion” by Katherine Anne Porter”, *Naukovyy visnyk Mykolayivs'koho derzhavnoho universytetu imeni V.O. Sukhomlyns'koho* [Scientific Bulletin of Mykolayiv State University named after V.O. Sukhomlynsky], Mykolaiv: V. Sukhomlynskyi MNU, 2014, Vol. 4.13 (104), P. 319–321 [in English].

⁵ Lysanets Yu. “Zhinochi obrazy u medychnomu dyskursi avtobiohrafichnoyi romanistyky SSHA” [Female images in the medical discourse of autobiographical novels in the United States], *Literaturnyy protses: metodolohiya, imena, tendentsiyi. Zbirnyk naukovykh prats' (filolohichni nauky)* [Literary process: methodology, names, trends. A collection of scientific works (philological sciences)], 2020, N. 15, P. 60–62 [in Ukrainian].

⁶ Lysanets Yu. “Svit kriz' pryzmu psikhichnoho rozladu: Naratyvy patsiyentok u literaturno-medychnomu dyskursi XX stolittya” [The world through the prism of mental disorder: Narratives of patients in the literary and medical discourse of the twentieth century], *L'vivs'kyi filolohichnyy chasopys* [Lviv Philological Journal], 2018, N. 4, P. 59–63 [in Ukrainian].

⁷ Lysanets Yu. “Representation of Women in the Literary and Medical Discourse of the U.S. Prose”, *Current Issues of Social Studies and History of Medicine. Joint Ukrainian-Romanian Scientific Journal*, 2020, N. 2(26), P. 70–73 [in English].

The antique motives have also been within the focus of our research^{8,9,10} as an inexhaustible source of issues and topics, which do not lose their relevance nowadays. The gender issues in *Medea* by Euripides have already been highlighted by researchers^{11,12,13,14}. This research relies on previous studies and further develops the idea of deconstruction of gender stereotypes in ancient Greece.

The material of the research is the tragedy *Medea* (431 BC), which is the most distinguished writing by Euripides, as it served as a powerful vehicle for raising the topical issues of social justice. The tragedy reveals the different roles of men and women in society. **The research methodology** relies on the application of modern literary studies in the fields of narratology, receptive aesthetics, and feminist literary criticism.

Presentation of the research material. Despite the fact that the Athenians had rather low views of a woman's role in society, the Greek women were not so powerless, and Euripides' depiction of *Medea* is the most vivid proof of this assertion. Euripides (ca. 480-406 BC) was considered the third greatest tragic poet of Greek theater, his renown still increased posthumously, and he made an outstanding break out in Greek tragedy. Euripides is famous for his reform of the tragedy structure. He managed to introduce ground-breaking performance techniques both in the form and content of his tragedies. His plays were also innovative for his focus on the psychological motives and inner lives of his personages, which was previously unknown¹⁵.

In his plays, Euripides very often used strong and complex female characters put in the context of extreme situations. Euripides extensively contemplates the problems of patriarchal order and family authority. This makes him one of the most "notable precursors" of the feminist conception¹⁶. He provides readers with profound insights into the attitude toward women in Greek society. Euripides presents "the fears and pressures faced by ordinary 5th-century Athenian women to a predominantly male audience"¹⁷. The poet expressly demonstrates the shift from the prevailing patriarchal tendencies of the time. To this end, he distorts the traditional

mythological variant of *Medea's* life. For instance, her children were traditionally asserted to be killed by the Corinthians after *Medea's* escape¹⁸. Euripides' own version of *Medea's* infanticide must have offended the Athenian audience¹⁹. Obviously, this is the reason why his play *Medea* was awarded only the third-place prize at the Dionysian festival. As a matter of fact, the Athenian audience simply was not ready for such progressive ideas. Thus, Euripides' tragedy *Medea* was way ahead of his epoch. The protagonist is an active and "clever woman, versed in evil arts"²⁰. This quality already contradicts the Greek conventional gender conception. *Medea* chose Jason as a husband independently, regardless of her family's opinion. In order to wed him, *Medea* also knew no limits and constraints. For him this determined and passionate woman left the motherland and betrayed her family, she even killed her brother.

Athens, a city proud of its democratic traditions, as opposed to the neighboring dictatorships, strongly relied on the oppression of women. As a matter of fact, in patriarchal Greek society women were equivalent to slaves²¹. As for *Medea*, she is a dangerous and deathful enemy indeed. She possesses an extremely strong sense of dignity and her well-conducted vengeance eventually wins the day. Thus, the protagonist of the tragedy is an intricate and unique amalgam of a villain, victim and heroine at the same time. Her love for Jason is deep and sincere indeed. When he decides to leave her to marry Creon's daughter, it is only natural that *Medea* is desperate and blind with fury. Jason's desire for divorce is quite legitimate under Greek legislation. It is obvious that the social role of the women is derisive: "... divorces bring not good fame to women, nor is it possible to repudiate one's husband..."²². The law in the effect at that time stated that "a man had the legal right to marry and have children by a citizen woman, while keeping a foreign, noncitizen woman as a concubine"²³. If a man wanted to divorce, "he had only to repudiate his wife formally and send her, dowry in hand, back to her father or other male guardian"²⁴.

However, one must bear in mind that Jason took an oath

⁸ Bieliaieva O.M. "Antychna problema spravedlyvoyi vidplaty u dramy Sartra «Mukhy»" [The Ancient Problem of Fair Retribution in Sartre's "Flies"], *Problemy literaturoznavstva: zb. nauk. prats'* [Problems of literary criticism: a collection of scientific papers], Odesa: Mayak, 1999, P. 244–252 [in Ukrainian].

⁹ Bieliaieva O.M. "Transformatsiya antychnoyi temy pokarannya za zlochyn u trahediyi Zh. Zhyrodu «Elektra»" [Transformation of the ancient theme of punishment for crime in the tragedy "Electra" by Jean Giraudoux], *Problemy suchasnoyi svitovoyi literatury ta linhvistyky: tezy Vseukr. nauk. filol. konfer.* [Problems of modern world literature and linguistics: theses All-Ukrainian. scientific philological conference], Cherkasy, 2001, P. 6–7 [in Ukrainian].

¹⁰ Bieliaieva O.M. "Osoblyvosti symvoliky antychnykh obraziv u «chornykh» p'yesakh Zh. Anuya" [Features of the symbolism of ancient images in the "black" plays by Jean Anouilh], *Problemy suchasnoyi svitovoyi literatury ta linhvistyky: tezy Vseukr. nauk. filol. konfer.* [Problems of modern world literature and linguistics: theses All-Ukrainian. scientific philological conference], Cherkasy, 2000, P. 4–5 [in Ukrainian].

¹¹ Barua A. "The plight of Women and the Female Discourse in the Society of Euripides", 2020, URL: <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.12652859.v1> [in English].

¹² Van Zyl Smit B. "Medea the Feminist", *Acta Classica*, 2002, Vol. 45, P. 101–122 [in English].

¹³ Durham C.A. "Medea: Hero or Heroine?" *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 1984, Vol. 8, N. 1, P. 54–59 [in English].

¹⁴ Williamson M. "A Woman's Place in Euripides' *Medea*", *Euripides, Women, and Sexuality*, Ed. Anton Powell, New York: Routledge, 1990, P. 16–31 [in English].

¹⁵ Williamson M. "A Woman's Place in Euripides' *Medea*", *Euripides, Women, and Sexuality*, Ed. Anton Powell, New York: Routledge, 1990, P. 16–31 [in English].

¹⁶ McDonald M. "Medea as Politician and Diva: Riding the Dragon into the Future." *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy and Art*. Ed. James J. Clauss, Sara Iles Johnston. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, P. 306 [in English].

¹⁷ McDermott Emily A. *Euripides' Medea: The Incarnation of Disorder*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989 P. 43–44 [in English].

¹⁸ Williamson M. "A Woman's Place in Euripides' *Medea*", *Euripides, Women, and Sexuality*, Ed. Anton Powell, New York: Routledge, 1990, P. 29 [in English].

¹⁹ Williamson M. "A Woman's Place in Euripides' *Medea*", *Euripides, Women, and Sexuality*, Ed. Anton Powell, New York: Routledge, 1990, P. 27–28 [in English].

²⁰ Euripides. *Tragedies*. Trans. Theodore Alois Buckley, London: Henry G. Bohn, 1850, P. 144 [in English].

²¹ Blundell S. *Women in ancient Greece*, London: British Museum Press, 1999, P. 89 [in English].

²² Euripides. *Tragedies*. Trans. Theodore Alois Buckley, London: Henry G. Bohn, 1850, P. 143 [in English].

²³ McDermott Emily A. *Euripides' Medea: The Incarnation of Disorder*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989, P. 45 [in English].

²⁴ McDermott Emily A. *Euripides' Medea: The Incarnation of Disorder*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989, P. 44 [in English].

to Zeus and Hera, that he would marry Medea. The point is that divorce is a violation of the vow given to gods. Certainly, Medea's revenge cannot be justified. However, these circumstances reveal her inner condition to the fullest extent. In this context, one should observe that the protagonist's cruelty is nothing but a vehicle for bringing attention to the injustice in society. Despite these horrific crimes, the reader's sympathy remains with Medea. She sacrificed everything she had for love. Naturally, her homeland will not accept her anymore; Medea is totally cornered and shattered. After marrying him, she actually lost the possibility to return home. Jason is fully aware of it and this aggravates his betrayal even further.

Medea's retribution for Jason's deviated attachment is swift and merciless: she sends his bride the poisoned garments. The second dreadful step of her retaliation is filicide. Medea's hatred for Jason exceeds even her motherly love. Medea also knows that her children are under the threat of retaliation. This is her ultimate revenge, since leaving a man childless, without any descendants, is considered one of the most horrible lot. Thus, Jason is doomed to pass away childless at "lonely and sorrowful old age"²⁵. By killing her sons, Medea becomes a personification of women who "refuse to be confined to the mere role of a breeder"²⁶. As a matter of fact, the protagonist displays no stereotypical female features. Medea actually had no desire to bear children: "I would rather fight three battles than bear one child"²⁷. Thus, Medea completely ignores the female role of motherhood. The acts of murder, committed by Medea, subvert the society's established conception that women give life and that it is the prerogative of men to take it away. This is when the reader's horizon of expectation is challenged. Unlike other women, whose actions and choices usually circuit within the framework of their families, Medea does not want to live in the shade of her husband, she is eager to follow her own ambitions. She seeks all those values and ideas, which traditionally are the undisputed prerogative of men.

It is interesting that the Corinthian chorus actually supports Medea and her defiance of male views in many situations, notwithstanding the fact that she is a barbarian. They display surprising feminine solidarity and sympathy: "Flow backward to your sources, the sacred river, and let the world's great order be reversed ... women are paid their due. No more shall evil-sounding fate be theirs"²⁸. The protagonist of the tragedy is a mouthpiece of the oppressed women willing to avenge themselves, which is quite a rare occurrence at her time. One can suppose that through the female chorus the author managed to express his own views. Thus, Euripides challenged social norms, defying the role of men and women in Greek society.

The opening speech of Medea to the Chorus is the most expressive exposition of the inequities that befall Greek women: "But of all things as many as have life and intellect, we women are the most wretched race"²⁹. Medea tosses a

challenge to traditional gender perceptions by demonstrating female and male characteristics at the same time. For example, she exhibits utmost pride, which is a clichéd male feature. Her jealousy is motivated primarily by the fact that Jason will have a new bed partner: "...thou vilest of men, thou hast betrayed me and hast procured for thyself a new bed"³⁰; "I heard the dismal sound of groans, and in a shrill voice she vents her bitter anguish on the traitor to her bed"³¹. In such a way, the author emphasizes the difference between men and women. Women are typically considered to be mothers first. However, Medea's readiness to sacrifice her children exemplifies her desire to restore her honour: "You will slaughter them to avenge the dishonor of your bed betrayed"³². She challenges the conventional perception of women as passive and weak. Thus, her vengeance is the means of vindicating her honour which is a typically male aspect. As a matter of fact, her ideas about "honour" are appropriate for Homeric heroes.

However, the protagonist still possesses inherently womanish traits. For example, the common feminine feature of women is the tendency to use trickery and deception on the way to achieving one's goal. In this context, Medea is no exception. She is extremely cunning – the evidence is her bargaining with Creon for one extra day before her exile. Medea pleads: "Allow me to remain here for just this one day. So I may consider where to live in my exile"³³ and contrives her plot of vindictory punishment. Euripides' Medea is endowed with independent, resolute and unbending character. In order to hurt Jason really deeply, she leaves no stone unturned: "Death. Death is my wish. For myself, my enemies, my children. Destruction"³⁴. Thus, the protagonist of the tragedy violates the traditional gender perceptions by displaying both male and female character traits. Meanwhile, Jason is depicted as much more meek and decreased.

Thus, in his tragedy *Medea*, Euripides scrutinizes the position of women in society and introduces the unusual and progressive female character. Medea's individuality is a tantalizing and breathtaking embodiment of indomitable will and the ability to resist subordination. She administers a counterstroke, which essentially is a spine-chilling alloy of male ferocity and female prudence. In such a manner, the inequality of women in patriarchal Greek society is questioned. In Euripides' *Medea*, the gender roles typical of ancient Greek society are boldly abandoned and shifted. The protagonist overtly challenges the conventional submissive role of a woman in Greece. In fact, Medea's nonconformity is the author's outcry against the treatment of women in ancient Greece. Pursuing her ambitions Medea completely ignores many of the clichéd female characteristics. The author subverted "the ways of thinking about relationships which are fundamentally different (from 5th century Athens); and Euripides effect is to put them all into question"³⁵. In such a way, Euripides managed to reveal the imperfections and intolerable trends of Greek civilization. The tragedy contends

²⁵ Euripides. Tragedies. Trans. Theodore Alois Buckley, London: Henry G. Bohn, 1850, P. 153 [in English].

²⁶ McDonald M. "Medea as Politician and Diva: Riding the Dragon into the Future", *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy and Art*, Ed. James J. Clauss, Sara Iles Johnston, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, P. 303 [in English].

²⁷ Euripides. Tragedies. Trans. Theodore Alois Buckley, London: Henry G. Bohn, 1850, P. 139 [in English].

²⁸ *Ibidem*, P. 157.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, P. 142.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, P. 149.

³¹ *Ibidem*, P. 142.

³² *Ibidem*, P. 152.

³³ *Ibidem*, P. 155.

³⁴ Euripides. Tragedies. Trans. Theodore Alois Buckley. London: Henry G. Bohn, 1850, P. 171 [in English].

³⁵ Williamson M. "A Woman's Place in Euripides' Medea", *Euripides, Women, and Sexuality*, Ed. Anton Powell, New York: Routledge, 1990, P. 24 [in English].

that a woman is able to protect herself, and, moreover, avenge herself. Euripides's *Medea* is a precursor of the feminist movement and its ideas are outstanding for their progressiveness and sympathy for women. In spite of their oppressed position in society, the author sought for strong females and believed that there would be the age of tolerance and equality of rights. *Medea* is an embodiment of the subjugated life force of all Greek women; perhaps this is why her vengeance is so horrible. The injustice, accumulated for centuries, has found its outlet in one dreadful retaliation.

Лисанець Юлія – кандидат філологічних наук, доцент кафедри іноземних мов з латинською мовою та медичною термінологією, Полтавський державний медичний університет. Коло наукових інтересів: світова література, гендерні студії, медичний дискурс, наратологія.

Lysanets Yuliia – Candidate of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor, Associate Professor of the Department of Foreign Languages with Latin and Medical Terminology of Poltava State Medical University. Focus of research interest: world literature, gender studies, medical discourse, narratology.

Бляєва Олена – кандидат педагогічних наук, доцент, завідувачка кафедри іноземних мов з латинською мовою та медичною термінологією, Полтавський державний медичний університет. Коло наукових інтересів: лінгводидактика, методика навчання латинської та іноземної мови за професійним спрямуванням, термінознавство, тестологія, професійна педагогіка, лінгвокультурологія, античні мотиви у французькій драматургії першої половини ХХ століття.

Bieliaieva Olena – Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences, Associate Professor, Head of the Department of Foreign Languages with Latin and Medical Terminology, Poltava State Medical University. Focus of research interest: linguodidactics, methods of

teaching Latin and foreign languages for professional purposes, terminology studies, testology, professional pedagogy, linguoculturology, ancient motifs in French drama of the first half of the 20th century.

Сологор Ірина – кандидат філологічних наук, доцент кафедри іноземних мов з латинською мовою та медичною термінологією, Полтавський державний медичний університет. Коло наукових інтересів: процеси термінотворення в німецькій та англійській медичній термінології, лінгвістичні, дидактичні й методичні аспекти вивчення та навчання латинської мови.

Solohor Iryna – Candidate of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor, Associate Professor of the Department of Foreign Languages with Latin and Medical Terminology of Poltava State Medical University. Focus of research interest: processes of term formation in German and English medical terminology, linguistic, didactic and methodological aspects of studying and learning Latin.

Роженко Інеса – викладач кафедри іноземних мов з латинською мовою та медичною термінологією, Полтавський державний медичний університет. Коло наукових інтересів: дидактичні й методичні аспекти вивчення та навчання латинської мови, процеси термінотворення в англійській медичній термінології.

Rozhenko Inesa – Lecturer of the Department of Foreign Languages with Latin and Medical Terminology, Poltava State Medical University. Focus of research interest: didactic and methodological aspects of studying and learning Latin, processes of term formation in English medical terminology.

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