

*In the Wake of Medea: Neoclassical Theater and the Arts of Destruction.*

Juliette Cherbuliez.

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Juliette Cherbuliez's *In the Wake of Medea* starts with the bloodiness of recent stage productions of *Medea*, which reduce the myth to "the story of a woman who kills her children" (3). Cherbuliez debunks this cliché and unveils the real Medea: "mythology's quintessential foreigner," the lover who sacrifices her relatives to her love, and the emblematic figure of violated sovereignty. *Medea* is repositioned as "a meditation on" rather than a show of violence (7). Cherbuliez's study features Pierre Corneille's *Médée* (1634) and Jean Racine's and Jean Rotrou's works, all to be analyzed as contrasts between Ovidian intertexts and contemporary retellings. This approach emphasizes the myth's variants and the contemporary relevance of seventeenth-century literature.

Cherbuliez's choice of a theatrical prism avoids the trap of a static genealogy of Medea. Instead, the study brings out the "fundamentally political" nature of premodern tragedy and "the demands [made] on [the] audiences, whether in print or on stage" (7). Neoclassical tragedy is "less a genre than a dynamic form of political poetics" (8). *Medea* helps Cherbuliez reenvision neoclassical French tragedy. To that effect, Cherbuliez defines five features of the "Medean principle of violence" through which she considers the dynamic and instructive nature of tragic violence: it is "relational," "unassimilable," "exceptional," "untimely," and "nonredemptive" (19–20). These characteristics underpin the book's five chapters, which are introduced by an enlightening manifesto that retraces what Medea means to artists, thinkers, and viewers.

The first chapter explores the character's connectivity in Corneille's *Médée* and stresses the figure's projective power. The reader or viewer is invited to question subjectivity, sovereignty, and justice. The second chapter reconsiders Corneille's *Médée* in contrast with Pasolini's 1969 adaptation. It stresses the rhythm of the Medean principle of violence, which is never assimilated but continuously unmade and remade, and the tragic questions it raises "by the performance of the physically devastating and politically debilitating, of the morally irrecuperable" (119).

The third chapter focuses on the "staying power" of Medea as enabler of "the performance of the present moment of tragedy" (120). Cherbuliez gives a diachronic definition of the present moment, spanning from seventeenth-century views to the contemporary approach of presence in performance studies. After Bacon, she discusses presence as "a production of negotiation" (127) and the civic *virtu* of heroism. The fourth chapter argues that "the Medean paradigm [is] to refuse the march of time as either eternal or progressivist" but "contributes to the interruption of temporal continuities" (143). This chapter deepens Cherbuliez's convincing study of temporality through both political and theater history. The fifth chapter focuses on Medea's after history. The concept of catastrophe is brilliantly reconfigured as an instrument to understand "the complicity" of premodern and modernist narratives and the modernity of the

Medean figure and seventeenth-century plays. The latter are shaping “meditation[s] on the notion of catastrophe,” and Cherbuliez shows that “our rehearsal of violence in tragedy is not just our interpretation of the past, but our relationship to the future” (176).

The Medean observation of our relationship with violence leads to consideration of literature beyond territoriality in the epilogue, “The Cosmopolitics of Literature.” The premodern Medean principle of violence “both ushers in the law as it founds the nation-state and yet indicates what can never be assimilated.” Reminding us of the basic humanism of the often-derided cosmopolitans, Cherbuliez recalls that they are “persons whose allegiance is to the worldwide community of human beings” (200). She questions the nature of this community and of the allegiance. For her, the answer lies with Medea, the “true cosmopolitan.” She explains that “what makes her a cosmopolitan is precisely what makes her unassimilable in Greece: her conviction that the stuff of this world can do things others think it cannot: that is, her foreign knowledge, which we might call supernatural” (200). Cherbuliez’s book is an enthralling discussion of violence and an essential read for our times. Both Medea and her book “help us face the structures of violence ungirdling our lives” (206).

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*Le Labérynthe*. Mireille Huchon.

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The practice of imitation that governs most of Renaissance production is the background of *Le Labérynthe*. Mireille Huchon focuses on Louise Labé’s entrance into literature and into *l’écriture féminine* as it connected to the network of poets that orbited around her 1555 collection *Œuvres de Louise Labé Lyonnaise*, which included the “Escriz de divers Poëtes, à la louenge de Louïze Labé Lionnoize.” Huchon reconstructs the circle of poets active at the time of Labé’s publication. By closely reading the twenty-five poems of “Escriz de divers Poëtes,” and by comparing them to works by the same or by different writers, Huchon seeks to establish their authorship and interconnections. The book’s first chapter discusses at length the genesis of the different versions of Labé’s name used in her publications and portrayals, including Loyse Labé, Louïze Labé, and Loise Labbé. Therefore, establishing Labé’s identity, questioning her authorship, and distinguishing Labé as the poet and as the historical figure become *Le Labérynthe*’s main preoccupation. Poetry, Huchon argues, is fiction; the object of desire is also fluid, and so at times it becomes unclear why it matters to the author’s argument if these poems are about same-sex or opposite-sex desire.