

Masterpieces of Classic Greek Drama (Greenwood Introduces Literary Masterpieces)

By Helaine Smith

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Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Sophocles' *Oedipus* plays, Euripides' *Medea* and *Bacchae*, and Aristophanes' *Birds* and *Lysistrata* are discussed in this lively and scholarly volume. The author's experience teaching these plays to gifted high school students makes this volume particularly useful. The drama festivals, the adaptations of myth, the relevance of Aristotelian criteria, and the political and cultural background of each play are described fully, and the nature of tragedy and comedy, plot construction, stagecraft, theme, character, imagery and individual odes and speeches are analyzed in depth.

The 5th century BC witnessed the flourishing of Athenian culture and was one of the most influential periods in history. The achievements of the Greeks at that time forever shaped our political and legal institutions and provided the foundation for Western civilization. At the same time, the world of the Greeks is distant and exotic to contemporary students. The values and beliefs of the Greeks are best represented in the plays that were crafted at that time, and these works continue to be widely read and studied. This book is a valuable introduction to ancient Greek drama.

Designed for high school students, undergraduates, and their teachers, this work describes the origins and physical aspects of ancient Greek theatre, discusses Aristotle's *Poetics*, and analyzes, in ten separate chapters, ten frequently studied Greek plays: Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Sophocles' *Antigone*, *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, Euripides' *Medea* and *Bacchae* and Aristophanes' *Birds* and *Lysistrata*. For each there is cultural, political and mythological background, plot synopsis, and analysis of overall structure and important scenes, speeches and odes. The Aristophanes chapters explore comic method and all chapters discuss theme and stagecraft in depth.

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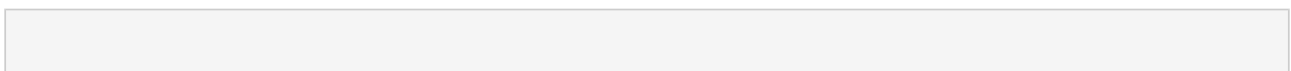
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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Grade 9 Up This book provides valuable information about ancient Greek drama, focusing on the four major dramatists. Plays discussed are: *Agamemnon*; *Choephoroi*, or *The Libation Bearers*; and *Eumenides* by Aeschylus; *Antigone*, *Oedipus Rex*, and *Oedipus at Colonus* by Sophocles; *Medea* and *Bacchae* by Euripides; and *Birds* and *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes. Meant as an introductory guide to both comedy and tragedy, this volume is packed full of useful information and explanations. Chapters include a brief biography of the dramatist, a discussion of style and the use of myth, a list of works, summaries of the plays, historical context, plot, setting, passage and scene analyses, characters, imagery, themes, stagecraft, translations, and notes. If a play has a specific feature, such as the significance of costume, this information is also provided. Additional discussions cover illusion vs. reality, the use of the mask, tragic flaws, sources of humor, etc. With this volume, students will find it easier to read and interpret these plays, and teachers will find the background material useful. *Pat Bender, The Shipley School, Bryn Mawr, PA*
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Review

"The work is intended as a handbook for Greek dramas typically encountered in mythology or literature-in-translation courses. Smith covers each drama separately, offering historical and mythological background, scene-by-scene plot analysis, literary interpretation, and a limited discussion of staging. She also includes a brief general introduction to Greek drama and a short comprehensive bibliography. Smith's interpretations are traditional for the most part, as one would expect in such a work, but she provides original and perceptive observations of her own. She also offers a lucid discussion of the use of modern and contemporary critical theory to introduce students to these concepts. The book will be useful primarily to beginners writing reports or seeking a better understanding of the plays. Recommended. Lower-/upper-division undergraduates; high school students; general readers." - **Choice**

"[A] useful collection of 'essays' on ten frequently studied plays which is well suited to school students and undergraduates new to this kind of study." - **The Journal of Classics Teaching**

"[W]ill give students a fine understanding of the power of comedy as well as tragedy, the techniques and stagecraft used, and mythological and historical contexts for the plays. Smith's volume delves into specific plays by four major Greek dramatists: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes." - **Curriculum Connections**

"For English teachers who cover mythology and Greek drama, this book gives them an introduction to the 5th century B.C., one of the most influential periods in history. Background information on the historical, cultural and religious setting is given. The physical aspects of the Greek theater, the divisions drama and Athenian history are briefly explained in the introduction. The 10 major plays by Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Aristophanes will help introduce students to the connection to modern politics and institutions while presenting the intersection between god and man. Each chapter begins with the playwrights life and style, the role of myth in the play, a plot summary, analysis of major speeches, a discussion of performance issues and a series of study questions." - **Gale Reference For Students**

"This book provides valuable information about ancient Greek drama, focusing on the four major dramatists....With this volume, students will find it easier to read and interpret these plays, and teachers will

find the background material useful." - **School Library Journal**

"[J]oins others in Greenwood's 'Literary Masterpieces' series to provide college-level students with an analysis of ancient Greek drama. From an introductory overview of the nature and terms of Greek drama to an analysis and sampling of ten widely studied plays, from Agamemnon to Oedipus and Lysistrata, *Masterpieces* analyzes both author influences, history, and the plot and intention of each play." - **Midwest Book Review/MBR Bookwatch and California Bookwatch**

About the Author

Helaine L. Smith teaches English and mythology at The Brearley School.

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