

### 1: Orestes - ECU Libraries Catalog

*The Violence of Pity In Euripides' "Medea" Book Description: This structural analysis of Euripidean tragedy focuses on the dramatist's literary self-awareness as revealed in his own works and particularly in the Medea.*

Instead of letting others make the choices for her, she takes things into her own hands and decides to do what she feels will be best for her children and also for herself. Medea has to debate seriously, with herself, about whether or not to kill her children. Medea is a sorceress and a princess in her homeland, Colchis , which is considered to be a land of barbarians. She uses her powers to help Jason secure the Golden Fleece and ends up falling in love with him. She decides to leave her home in order to flee with Jason to Iolcus, his homeland. In order to insure her escape from Colchis , Medea murders her brother, Absyrtus, and cuts his body into pieces so that her pursuers would have to find each piece and bury them. Instead they were exiled as murderers and decided to live in Corinth. In Corinth, Medea and Jason had two children and gained a good reputation. But Jason decided to divorce Medea to marry the princess of Corinth so that he would have better connections in the city. Therefore, children are the property of the father and belong only to him. Medea strips Jason of this extremely important part of his life. But there is a moral gap between having reasons to kill the children and actually killing them. In the play, Medea shows mixed feelings and doubts about committing infanticide. Even though during the earlier course of the play Medea is confused as to what to do, she finally decides to ignore her maternal side and kill the children because she is convinced that if she does not kill them, the children would be killed by the people of Corinth. Although Medea is the one that puts her children in danger with the people of Corinth because she sends them to deliver the poisoned garments to Glauke , she does it to make it seem like she wants Glauke to accept them. It is the only way for her to avoid suspicion by Jason , Creon , and Glauke and insure that Jason is left alone. Hands I love so well, O lips most dear to me! She tells Jason very clearly that she is the one who loves him not him in the following quote: The murder shocks not only the audience but also some of the characters, including the chorus and Jason. The chorus is proved wrong because they think that Medea will not be able to kill her children when she sees them in front of her begging for her mercy, but to their surprise and horror she is able to carry out their murders. Medea and her children are in similar situations: Her triumph also causes her pain and suffering, and in a way she does not win because she has lost her children, but it comforts her to know that Jason will suffer with her: Thou, too, art grieved thyself, and sharest in my sorrow. Be well assured I am; but it relieves my pain to know thou canst not mock at me. The very act of killing her children shows the love that Medea has for them and the sacrifice she is making in order to save them from a worse death. Medea is a strong and powerful woman she is also a goddess! Works Cited Clauss, James J. Princeton University Press, The Myth of Medea and the Murder of Children. Westport, Connecticut and London: Cornell University Press,

### 2: The violence of pity in Euripides' Medea - ECU Libraries Catalog

*Euripides. > Medea. Medea, > consort of Aegeus, King of Athens (Mythological character) > In literature. Women and literature > Greece.*

Arguments and Persuasive Language: The Theatre of Dionysus at Athens had more than 17, seats. The actors all male performed in formal costumes and wore masks that emphasised the dominant traits of their respective characters. It varied depending upon the method of the playwright and the needs of the play being performed. Tragedy has six main elements – plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle and song music. And life consists of action, and its end is a mode of activity, not a quality. There is no doubt that Medea is a revenge tragedy that evokes strong reactions in the protagonists and ambivalent reactions in viewers. For many viewers, even the grief-stricken husband and father, the Jason of the last scene, does not seem to arouse pity. Medea is introduced to the audience by the Nurse in terms that clearly foreshadow disaster. Throughout, the audience is encouraged by the chorus to sympathise with Medea: But the audience is taken, nonetheless, on a horrific journey into the depths of depravity that challenges the very limits of such identification. The sacrifice At the heart of the tragedy lies a string of violent sacrifices arising from a passionate love affair. The Nurse depicts the first murder-sacrifice that reverberates throughout the play: In the absence of home, and in the face of such misery, Medea can only contemplate death. The exasperation and wretchedness in her voice are clear from the start: This deep, estranged and wailing voice sets up an encounter with death from which there appears to be no escape. The dowry system, their lack of freedom in the choice of a husband, the inequality of divorce provisions and sexual inequality all contributed to their unequal marital status. Defiantly, Medea dares to challenge the patriarchal social order when she challenges King Creon and Jason owing to their decisions about her future. In her first soliloquy, Medea, echoing the views of the Nurse, rails against the unjust and unequal plight of women in Greek society. She rails against the fact that women are expected to be obedient, suppliant and submissive. He encourages the marriage and coerces Medea into submitting to their wishes, as presented as law. He also then decides to banish her and her children. The poets were all men Euripides predicts that the poets will have to rewrite the books. He foresees that, armed with greater foresight and understanding, the poets will need to amend their representation of women: Moving from the general to the particular in her first soliloquy, Medea personalises her plight to reinforce her individual misery. For a Greek woman, their social status is intolerable; for a foreign woman it is unbearable. Betrayed and incensed, Medea knows that Jason owes his success to her. She killed the snake, which enabled Jason to return home a hero. As she plans the triple murder, her main motive is that she spares herself humiliation at the hands of the enemy. Slipping into the third person as she often does to convey her wretched internal struggle, Medea steels herself to action and encourages herself to show the necessary courage to deal with her humiliation. On to the deadly moment that shall test your nerve! Apparent stereotypical contrasts On the one hand, Euripides sets up a contrast between Jason and Medea: Medea is the typically passionate and jealous woman who has been spurned by her ex-husband. Medea champions personal relationships and harbours a burning sense of justice. She already has blood on her hands and is capable of violent actions: Or moved her cheek from the hard ground. Through interjections and questions, Medea wails and bemoans her misery. What misery, what wretchedness. Contrastingly, Jason appears cool and calculating. He saved her from the barbarous land. He says that he will provide well for her in exile. Although Euripides sets up a contrast between the two protagonists he also undermines their differences. Like Creon, he fails to grasp her burning sense of injustice, offensively downplays his dependence upon her for his previous victory the Golden Fleece and typecasts her as a sexually-jealous woman. Sensibly, Medea outlines the injustice of her plight and yearns for justice for women, and yet her course of action undermines her struggle. She also comes to Corinth with a history of violent actions. Note important quotes from the Nurse: It is also the Nurse who suggests: Although Medea wins our sympathy owing to her understandable position of despair and misery, she dubiously justifies her murderous deeds: Medea appears as the courageous Sophoclean heroine, who often presents her case as a necessary divine struggle and eventually escapes triumphantly through divine intervention , and yet the

murder of her children clearly undermines the heroic nature of her cause. Medea triumphs over Jason and gloats in his agony. Does Euripides suggest that her triumph and gloating are warranted, or is he critiquing a mindset that excuses heinous crimes according to the murderous standards of the god? In this regard, Euripides deliberately builds a contrast between the vulnerable, passionate, scorned spouse and the phlegmatic protagonist who first emerges to address the Chorus: She appears strong, intelligent and clear-headed about her situation and her choices. Notice, too, how Medea at first universalises her plight and speaks sensibly on behalf of all women. Only towards the end of this first soliloquy does she personalise her situation and draw attention to her state of physical and emotional exile. This is why Creon fears Medea; she must reassure him and she does, temporarily and despite his wishes. Men distrust superior intelligence in general; they fear and hate it in a woman. She also dissembles in her discussion with Jason; she flatters him and uses self-deprecating terms to acquiesce to his authority. Transforming herself into the stereotypical submissive and compliant housewife, she anticipates that Jason will be appeased. She insists that Aegeus swear an oath to honour his commitment that she can live in Athens. She is feared by many. So may the gods grant you fertility, and bring Your life to a happy close. I know certain drugs Whose power will put an end to your sterility. So, whilst magic belongs to the realm of the other, it also consists of a certain skill and deftness that one attributes to the Grecian world of law and order. Whilst a general trait, such access to magic is also presented as rare, ingenious and uncontrollable. And indeed Medea capably reassures Creon by appealing to the love of family. Despite his best intentions, he grants her an extra day. The threat as Euripides shows is not merely external. Medea personifies the threat from within. On the one hand, Medea presents a powerful case in defence of women and suggests that her grievances are fuelled by the injustices done to her, as a woman and as a foreigner. However, the means by which she seeks to redress these injustices undermines the righteousness of her cause. She deceives Creon by recognising his soft heart. Later, she will extract a promise from Aegon because of his desire for children. Jason also protests that the children were of prime consideration in his own advancement plans. And it seems, that it is during these discussions with her two enemies, that Medea forges the scheme to kill the children. As spectators, we follow the ironies which are concealed from both Jason and Creon. If Medea deceives Creon with her self-deprecating pretensions, Medea deceives Jason by acknowledging his desire for an obedient and repentant wife. Her false declaration of submission to Jason, her confession that she was a foolish emotional woman, lures him to his doom. Medea knows that her best way to conceal her motives and implement her plan is to pretend to be submissive. And we must also consider, why Medea goes so far? As love and hatred intertwine, the nurse also reminds us that the failure to deal with sorrow can have egregious consequences. The playwright suggests that hatred festers and leads to shameful excuses on behalf of Medea, who condones the suffering she inflicts on others, and admits that she is concerned with protecting herself from scorn. In fact, there appears much to detest in his line of argument; he generally fails to arouse the sympathy of viewers and we must ask why. But just as Medea blurs the boundaries between justice and revenge, there is a sense that Jason acts not so much for rational, but for expedient reasons. There appears no doubt that Medea was an exemplary and submissive wife. Jason admits that his motives were not sexual as he did not, like many other husbands, lose desire. In this regard, he is also motivated by patriarchal concerns typical of men in 5th century Greek society and believes that he has the right to make choices for his sons and opts for status and prosperity without the stigma of difference. Even in his final comments, he, typically, continues to downplay the enormity of her pain: He overlooks her criticism of the social order that excludes and shamefully treats women as chattels. Contrastingly, right from the outset, Medea has universalised her predicament to focus our attention on the social order. Jason does not understand and blindly continues to justify and promote the benefits of a civilised Hellas that benefits men solely. He goes so far as to scorn his dependency upon women: He offensively posits himself as the representative of justice and has the audacity to level at Medea the charge of traitor: Also, Euripides argues that judging women on their sometimes emotional and irrational behaviour is hypocritical. His diatribe, in which he unleashes insults and threats at Medea, is testament to this: Avenging justice blast your being! As the ironies mount, we also note that the naked and exposed Jason is stripped of status at the end and Medea is the one to systematically kill the relationships upon which he depends. A Sophoclean heroine or tyrant? As a

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mother, Medea recognises the need to endure the pain; she has powerful maternal feelings.

### 3: Looking at Medea : essays and a translation of Euripides' tragedy - ECU Libraries Catalog

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As a tragedy, this play is completely unlike the Aristotelian concept of tragedy, but it has a nerve-jarring impact. It also reveals the extent to which Euripides diverges from his fellow tragedians, Aeschylus and Sophocles, in his depiction of human pain. With *Medea* there is no comforting philosophy to put the tragic agony at a safe psychological distance. Instead, Euripides tries to make Medea as close to an actual woman as possible, and to show her fiery lust for vengeance in naked action with nothing to mitigate its effect. The audience is witness to a hideous passion and cannot be certain whether Euripides approves of it or condemns it. He simply presents it objectively so that we understand Medea, but he leaves it to his audience to determine his meaning. Euripides was probably in his fifties when this play was first produced in b. What struck him most was the universality of suffering. Confronted with pain, every other human reality seemed to dissolve. In *Medea*, Euripides portrays a very important aspect of terrible suffering, namely, the desire of the sufferer to create the identical agony in the person who caused it. The dramatist recognized the crucial link between anguish and hate. Reports of Euripides say that he was a bookish recluse, but it is understandable that a man as vulnerable to human misery as he was should shut himself off from people. Euripides turned to the old legend of Jason and the Golden Fleece to illustrate his preoccupation. Jason has deserted Medea to marry the Greek princess, Glauce, leaving Medea with two small sons. As the nurse remarks in her opening monologue, Medea is not one to take such a betrayal lightly. A common technique of Euripides is to use the opening speech or section to explain the background of the action and to suggest the climactic development. Medea is a barbarian princess and sorcerer who is accustomed to having her own way in everything. Furthermore, as a barbarian she has none of the restraints that civilization imposes. Jason is a Greek, subject to law, rationality, and practical calculation. As a result, he seems cold and indifferent beside Medea, who is a creature of passion. However, this is merely a surface appearance. Euripides exposes the inner layers of their psyches with unflinching honesty in the course of the play. As a woman of passion, Medea is wholly committed to Jason as the object of her emotional life, whether in love or hate. She is equally amoral in her hatred. The drama consists of the unfolding of her plans for revenge and their ultimate execution. When Medea first appears on stage before a chorus of sympathetic women, she is the image of the wronged woman, and one feels pity for her. These murders are as coldly calculated as any in classical tragedy, and Medea feels no penitence at all. It is precisely the icy manner in which she goes about the killings that inspires dread. She caters to Creon to gain time to kill him and his daughter, Glauce. Medea plans to kill Jason, too, but when she sees Aegeus heartsick at being childless, she determines to render Jason childless, wifeless, and friendless. Medea pretends a reconciliation with Jason to slay Creon and Glauce in a loathsome fashion. Then, after hesitating to kill her sons because of temporary softness, she butchers them without mercy. The passion by which Medea lives makes her both subhuman and superhuman. When Euripides finally has her escape in a dragon-drawn chariot through the air, one comes to realize that Medea is a piece of raw nature—barbaric, violent, destructive, inhumanly powerful, and beyond all moral standards. Jason becomes entangled with a force that crushes his dignity and detachment, that tears his successes to tatters. At the end, he is in exactly the same position as Medea. Both are bereaved of mate, children, and friends. Both are free to grow old without comfort. Both are utterly empty inside, except that Jason is now filled with the same burning hatred that possessed Medea. This play operates on several levels. The antagonism between Jason and Medea can be read as the enmity between man and woman, between intelligence and passion, between civilization and barbarism, or between humanity and nature. In each instance, the woman, the passions, the barbarian, the forces of nature—all embodied in Medea—have the power to turn and reduce the masculine elements to nothing. *Medea* is a strong, depressing, fearsome drama in which Euripides presents his stark vision of life.

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### 4: SparkNotes: Medea

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