

Do you think that  
Euripides intended us  
to sympathise with  
Medea essay



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Euripides has a reputation for not like women, so we would expect there to be a great deal of scorn and an unsympathetic depiction of Medea coming from Euripides. I have four parts to the way that my sympathies turn in Medea. Firstly I am sympathetic, then when we find Medea very scheming and plotting to kill her husband, Creon and his daughter and she enjoys thinking about it, our sympathies change. Then my sympathies change when we meet Jason for the first time and when we see Medea deliberating over whether or not she will kill her children.

These scenes produce unsympathetic feelings for Jason but then afterwards we see how evil Medea can really be. But we also see Medea deliberating whether or not to kill her children and we see into her heart. Then in the end we are left in suspense about whether she will kill her children or not, when we find that she does, this alters our opinion yet again and I am more sympathetic to Jason. Overall I believe that Euripides intended us to not sympathise with Medea all together, but sympathise with her enough, to be shocked in the end when she kills her sons.

In the beginning of the play, our opinions of Medea are based on other people's opinions of the situation. Therefore we sympathise with whomever the people sympathise with. We hear the Nurse talking about how wronged Medea is and how horrible Jason has been to her, so we have no sympathy for Jason: " Since she first heard of Jason's wickedness. " And we sympathise with Medea : " Poor Medea! ... " When we meet the Tutor he also has sympathy for Medea: " Poor women! Has she not stopped crying yet? " Now the first two characters we meet both have sympathy for her and we have heard that she is crying and very upset.

Our natural response to someone crying is to sympathise with him or her. If Medea had no emotion or didn't seem to care, neither would we because we would think that she wasn't hurt, but by saying she is crying we know she is. The nurse says plainly of Jason: " He is guilty" this backs up our bad view of the man. Although we sympathise with Medea, we are given clues that she isn't just going to sit and cry about the situation, she is a strong woman: " Her mood is cruel, her nature dangerous, Her will fierce and intractable.

We see that the chorus is sympathetic to Medea, to us the chorus is the voice of reason, they see all that is going on in the play and respond to it, so therefore we are sympathetic: " Tell her we are on her side. " Yet we are still reminded of Medea's unpredictable nature, which makes our sympathy very shakeable, because we are not sure what Medea is going to do: " She glares at us like a mad bull. " When we finally meet Medea she tells her story in such a way that we have to sympathise.

We learn that she is a foreign woman, she has nowhere to go, she loved Jason and he has " crushed her heart. " Medea's constant appeal to the Gods, give the impression that she is in the right, and the gods that are our for justice, should help her. This again makes us believe that she is in the right. When we witness the meeting of Medea and Creon, we begin to become suspicious of Medea, and our sympathy for her begins to waver. This is because we see how manipulative she really is and how she is clever and knows exactly what button to push with everyone to get her way.

She plays the innocent woman and she says that she has no intention to harm Creon's daughter: "... I bear no grudge against your happiness: marry your

daughter to him, and good luck to you both. " But we know that in the previous scene she is not so kind about Creon's daughter: " Oh, may I see Jason and his bride Ground to pieces in their shattered palace... " But for a moment we are brought back to sympathise with her by the chorus who say: " Medea, poor Medea! Your grief touches our hearts. " So we are not totally distrustful of her.

After we have just heard her say that she will not harm Creon or his daughter she says very vindictively: " Today three enemies I shall strike dead: Father and Daughter; and my husband. " We lose a bit of sympathy for Medea here, firstly because we know she has lied to Creon and secondly because Creon comes across as a nice man, he lets Medea stay against his better judgement because he feels sorry for her. Now that we hear that he is going to be harmed, we do not take well to it. Then Medea goes on to describe in relish, ways of killing them.

This takes away our sympathy because we see her as a tyrant, she is plotting to kill them and she seems to love it, we see Medea in a bad light, and to us, she is no longer the victim, and we sympathise with those whom she is plotting to murder. " I have in mind so many paths of death for them, I don't know which one to choose. " She then appeals to Queen Hecate, who is a dark God, so we know that what Medea is doing is dark and wrong. But still we can see by the way that she is appealing to the Gods that she thinks that she is doing something right.

Euripides then reminds us what he thinks of women by having Medea say that women are: " evil skilled practitioners. " This makes the audience weary

of women and most importantly, weary of Medea. When we meet Jason, he doesn't come across very well. He is very rational and blames Medea for everything. This even angers me because he speaks to her in such a patronising manner that I do not like him. " Think yourself lucky to be let off with banishment. " He does not see that he is in the wrong. " You no doubt hate me: but I could never bear ill will to you. " That comment is very annoying and I understand why it would make Medea angry.

In this scene we also learn all that Medea did for Jason, we see that she really did love him by her acts. She killed her brother, betrayed her father made the daughters of King Pelias kill their father by mistake. We understand why she is angry with Jason because as she says " and in return for this you have the wickedness to turn me out, to get yourself another wife, Even after I had borne you sons! " Women especially would feel sympathy for Medea here; because she gave up everything for this man that she adored and gave him sons, which was very important in Greek society.

Jason's argument comes across as specious and we are still not sympathetic toward him. He has an answer for everything and he treats Medea badly saying: " No, keep quiet! " We are again reminded in Jason's speech what Euripides apparently thought of women: " If women didn't exist, Human life would be rid of all its miseries. " But instead of making us weary of women in the play, I believe that it just makes us annoyed at Jason, to come out with a comment so rude and horrible. Our sympathies yet again are with Medea.

When Ageus come into the scene we again see that other people think that Medea is wronged so we gain a little sympathy for Medea, but we also see

that Medea yet again is scheming and uses Ageus to get out of Corinth and makes him swear by the gods that he will give her a safe home, we know that if he knew she was going to kill he wouldn't, so we see a perfectly nice man get brought into a horrible situation that he can't get out of. We then see that Medea is planning to kill her children. The reason she is doing it is so that her enemies can't kill them and then have the last laugh.

I don't think that this is a good enough reason to kill your children, even if it is also to punish Jason. We lose sympathy with Medea here. She also plans to kill Creon's daughter in a terrible way: " If she takes and puts on this finery, both she and all who touch her will expire in agony. " (The finery being a dress and a coronet. ) We know that the Chorus does not support her act, which again supports our unsympathetic view of her: " I tell you, you must not do this. " We again see Medea being manipulative and vindictive when she totally lies to Jason about what she is thinking and gets him to take the boys to deliver the gifts.

Although we do not like Jason, we feel sorry for him, because he is totally taken in to thinking that Medea has sorted out her emotions and has forgiven him. Our sympathy lies with him. When we see Medea deliberating whether or not to kill her children, we see that she does actually love them but she is in 2 minds about it, on one hand she is a mother who loves her children but on the other hand she cannot let her enemies have the last laugh. " Why should I hurt them, to make Their father suffer.. " She even comes up with a solution, to let them live and they will all go off together.

But the fact that she comes up with a solution and still does not take it, takes sympathy away from the fact that she cares, because to us, she does not care enough, and we don't like her for it. When the messenger describes the awful death of Creon and his daughter in great detail we again feel absolutely no sympathy for Medea. This is firstly because it is a horrible death: " -the stuff was eating her clear flesh. She leapt up from her chair, On fire, and ran" But also because we see the princess as an innocent, childlike figure: On white bare feet, and many times she would twist back To see how the dress fell in clear folds to the heel. "

And we also like Creon as we see how kind he is to Medea, against his better judgement. When Medea is about to kill her children she says: " Arm yourself heart" as though she is going to care about her children. I think this was Euripides trying to be fair to Medea and not make her that bad, but it arouses very little sympathy in me, and I can pass past the line without worrying about Medea's ' armed heart. ' The chorus also does not feel sympathy for her calling her: " Bloody-handed fiend of vengeance. So there is little room for sympathy with us.

The children's voices heard pleading from inside also had a lot of drama because we feel very sorry for them being murdered by their mother. When Jason runs up when Medea is in her chariot, he is scene as a very low character and Medea is very patronising, this makes us sympathetic to him. We also see him pleading to see his children, and we understand why he would, just to have them by his side, as a comfort: " Give me my sons for burial and mourning rights. " But Medea doesn't even give him this comforts of buiring his own sons who have been taken from him.

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We also see that Jason now has nothing; he has lost his new bride, his old wife and his sons. Although in the beginning we see that Medea has lost Jason, she still has her sons, but now she has stupidly taken them away from both of them. I feel more sympathy now for Jason, than I ever did in the beginning of the play for Medea. Overall, I think that Euripides did not intend us to sympathise with Medea. But he could not paint her out to be the bad figure all along, as then it would not bring suspense into the story and we would not change our minds about the people so much, which makes it more interesting.

We do have sympathy with Medea in some parts of the play, but it is by her own doing that she makes things a lot worse for herself and many other people in the play, by the brutal murders she carries out. It is very difficult to expect an audience to sympathise with someone, who so readily is able to kill their own children. Especially when we see that she could have avoided doing it. Overall we are not as sympathetic to Medea in the end, as we are to the other characters.