

Medea



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

'Medea' is an ancient Greek tragedy written in 431 BC about a woman, Medea, who is left by her husband, Jason, for the king's daughter, Glauce and seeks vengeance. The play's protagonist, Medea, can be defined as a tragic hero for many reasons. A tragic hero is a person who is basically good, yet to whom terrible things occur. The person must overcome great odds and the play always ends in their downfall. Medea can be considered a tragic hero as, although she does not possess all the qualities a tragic hero normally does, she holds many of the most important qualities.

She experiences agon, goes through catharsis, has a hamartia, demonstrates hubris and the play even finishes in a peripeteia which leads to her emotional destruction. Throughout the play Medea experiences many agon within herself and with other characters. Medea is in constant conflict with herself over the matter of whether to kill her sons or to let Jason get away with his betrayal by not destroying him emotionally. This is shown on pages 49 and 50 where she says: " Why should I hurt them, to make their father suffer, when I shall suffer twice as much myself? " (Euripides, 431 BC, p49).

Later she decides that she must kill her sons even if it would cause her much pathos, which is also a trait of a tragic hero, she states: " My pain is more than I can bear. " (Euripides, 431 BC, p50). Here, she is talking about her pain over the thought of killing her sons. The decision to kill her sons is a difficult one for Medea and this is one of the terrible acts that define her as a tragic hero. Jason and Medea have a lot of conflict as he left her for the king's daughter, Glauce. Her abandonment causes her much pathos as

shown on p21 when the Chorus describe her as, " that unhappy woman from Colchis. (Euripides, 431 BC, p21).

Jason does not believe he has done any wrong yet Medea states on page 24:

" Jason was my whole life; he knows that well. " (Euripides, 431 BC, p24).

Medea's unprovoked betrayal by Jason makes her vengeful and essentially leads to the tragic end of the play. Agon also occurs between Medea and Glauce, as she is Jason's new wife and Medea therefore despises her. Creon and Medea also experience agon because Creon tries to exile her. He orders her, " out of Corinth. " (Euripides, 431 BC, p25) because he is worried, quite rightfully, of her vengeance.

His apprehension over letting her stay is proven on page 25 where he states;

" I fear that you may do my daughter some irreparable harm. " (Euripides, 431 BC, p25). This shows how well he knew Medea and how right his fears

were; as she does indeed go on to kill his daughter. Medea's experiences constant agon in the play which combine, forcing her to remove her problems to stop the conflicts, leading to a process of Catharsis. Catharsis is the idea of purging or removing negative influences in one's life and bringing about spiritual renewal.

Medea brings about her renewal through returning equal pain to those who have wronged her. Everyone who causes Medea pathos in the play is purged or given returned pathos. Medea must go through this process even though it causes her pathos; it is her way of righting wrongs. One page 22 she states;

" Oh, may I see Jason and his bride ground to pieces in their shattered palace for the wrongs they have dared to do to me, unprovoked! " (Euripides, 431

BC, p22). This shows how Medea had an eye for an eye philosophy and how the only way for her to go through catharsis was to literally kill of all the bad.

In Jason's case Medea did not just want his removal; she wanted him to suffer the way she had. On page 59 she states, " my pain's a fair price, to take away your smile. " (Euripides, 431 BC, p59). This proves that she did not care about herself, only his pain. Medea's method of catharsis, revenge, brings about her spiritual renewal as it gives her a sense of compensation. It is one of the traits that define her as a tragic hero as her method is violent and causes her pathos; it is also linked very strongly to her fatal flaw.

Medea's hamartia is her distorted morality, her belief that no matter what, people who have done her wrong must be punished. Her need for revenge is fuelled by her betrayal and it is her hamartia that causes her to kill the best thing she has left, her children. Medea believes Jason has done the wrong thing by leaving her, even though he claims it was so he could support her and their sons financially. She even states; " to my mind... you are acting wrongly in thus abandoning your wife. " (Euripides, 431 BC, p 34).

Because he has betrayed her Medea sees it as her job to cause him pathos. Killing him is not enough and she decides that the only way to really cause him pain is to remove his new wife and their children. On page 55 it becomes clear that, from her actions, her children will most likely be killed anyway and she states; " they must die... and since they must, then I who gave them birth will kill them. " (Euripides, 431 BC, p 55). This proves that her morality is her strongest trait and overpowers her compassion as she could have easily taken her children and fled.

Medea shows how strong her quest for justice is on page 59 telling Jason, "I've reached your heart; and that is right." (Euripides, 431 BC, p59). This shows how Medea believes that she has done the proper thing by causing him pain, even if her own, innocent children had to die in the process.

Medea's hamartia is responsible for her downfall, but, had she not possessed such hubris, her morality would not have been distorted to extremes. Hubris is clearly possessed by Medea as she sees herself as untouchable and sees it as her right to create her own justice.

Medea is very powerful, being a sorceress and so has a high level of confidence. Her friendship with the gods leads to an overconfidence and causes her to achieve god-like status; as proven by the way Ageus comes to her for help. Because she is powerful, Medea sees herself to be on the level of a king, as proven on page 26 where she speaks back to King Creon. She also takes on the royal family when she kills Glauce. In Ancient Greece, all women were considered beneath men; therefore, her speaking back to Jason shows her strength.

She also did not want any help from him financially. Most women would have needed the support but Medea is independent and would not even accept a small token, even though exile would make her life difficult. Her hubris leads to tragedy as, had she accepted what those more powerful had told her to do she would have been able to live with her sons. In true tragic hero manner Medea sealed her own fate and caused her own peripeteia. At the end of the play Medea experiences peripeteia as the end result of her plan was not what she intended.

Medea hopes that by killing her sons and destroying Jason she will achieve catharsis. She does achieve catharsis, however; her pathos is still considerable. Initially she believed she would be able to overcome her pain but by the end of the play, she realises she can not. Tragically for Medea, by then it is too late and she must kill her children as her plan has come too far for it to end peacefully.

At the plays end there is no way to know what becomes of Medea; however some insight is given by the chorus who state: " One woman... raised hand against her own children... eing defiled by the murder of her children; from the steep cliff's edge she stretched out her foot, and so ended, joined in death with her two sons. " (Euripides, 431 BC, p 57). Although they are not talking about Medea this shows how one woman's life was after she murdered her sons, implying that Medea's life would be similar and that she too will be emotionally shattered. The chorus also express that peripeteia has occurred stating: " the things we thought would happen do not happen... and such is the conclusion of this story. " (Euripides, 431 BC, p61).

This shows how the story does end in an unexpected way, even for the characters that experienced or watched it. The peripeteia that concludes the play makes Medea a tragic hero as it causes her emotional destruction.

Medea experiences a lot of agon in the play, both with other characters and herself. She also goes through a process of catharsis, possesses a hamartia and hubris with the play ending in a peripeteia. Medea can be considered a tragic hero because she displays many of the traits of a tragic hero and must conquer overwhelming odds. The play is tragic and although Medea gets her revenge, her emotional pathos is still great.