

Example of essay on medea as a woman in ancient society

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Abstract

The paper discusses the story of Medea in the Euripides' play. The work also provides a brief description of the play's plot and then focuses on the ambivalent position of Medea in it. She is both the victim and the aggressor. The paper explains in detail in what circumstances Medea behaves like a villain and where she appears to be only a victim of the cruel rules of the society. Quotations from the play are used to support the ideas expressed in the paper.

The Medea is one of the most well-known plays of the ancient times. It was written by famous Greek playwright Euripides in about 431 B. C. Nowadays the play is more than 2, 000 years but still the tragedy of a betrayed woman leaves nobody indifferent. The plot of the play is an interpretation of the Greek myth about Jason, the famous captain of Argonauts, who travelled to Colchis to find the Golden Fleece. In the course of the journey Jason finds a beautiful barbarian woman, Medea, and takes her to Greece to be his wife. She bears him two sons. But the political situation in Corinth makes Jason to marry another woman, the daughter of King Creon. Medea, who feels offended and betrayed, decide to organize a revenge: she kills the bride using the poisonous jewelry. After that she kills both her sons. Despite she loves both of them she does it to make Jason suffer. She even takes their bodies with her not to give Jason the possibility to grieve over them. The play ends with chorus words, in which they explain the Zeus' will. It was a common thing in Greek tragedies to explain the actions of people by will of deities.

Medea herself is considered to be a proto-feminist character. It is one of the first such characters in ancient times. Euripides pays lots of attention to the destiny of women and their role in the ancient society. At that time women did not have almost any rights. As it can be seen from the plot Jason has the full right to marry another woman despite he already has a wife. In her speech to herself Medea reveals how hard is to be a woman in Athenian society: “ Of all creatures that have life and reason we women are the sorriest lot: first we must at a great expenditure of money buy a husband and even take on a master over our body: this evil is more galling than the first” (Euripides, lines 229-233). She states that a woman fully depends on the temper of her future husband. If he is a good one, the woman is considered to be happy and when husband has a bad temper nobody is interested in it and nobody would be sympathetic to that woman.

In his play Euripides might want to show the readers and the audience that a woman’s task is to obey the rules and follow her husband wishes. The reader feels that Medea’s actions are irrational. She poisons a new bride of his husband and kills her own beloved children. It looks like she is insane and therefore there is no place for sympathy in the readers’ hearts. The woman who broke the law should be punished by people and Gods.

She is an aggressor. She decides to break the law, not only the law of people but also the laws of Gods. To poison the new Jason’s bride she uses “ these ornaments which Helios, the Sun, father of my father gave to his descendant” (Euripides, lines 953-954). Her revenge plan is cruel and she implements it in a cool blood: “ I shall be victorious over my enemies now, my friends. I have set out upon my journey. Now I have hope that my

enemies will pay the price". Revenge becomes the only sense in her life. She wants to deprive Jason of everything and everyone that was important for him: his bride, his children and his future children as well. This means that in case Jason dies his kingdom will have no other descendant. So, her plan envisages that Jason will be left without his land, without his power.

But on the other hand, Euripides shows the tragedy of the woman, who gave up everything to be together with her lover. Yet, she receives nothing for her sacrifice. To escape from her land Medea needed to get rid from her brother: " I killed my brother in cold blood for him!" (Euripides, line 166). Besides, she was taken from her homeland to Greece, and she was not accepted by the Athenians because she was only a barbarian for them. Even her ex-husband, Jason, says that is not treated equally as the other citizens. " Now I see it, I didn't understand it then, when I brought you, so hideous a monster, into Greece, from your home and that barbarous land, betrayer of your father and the country that reared you" (Euripides, lines 1328-1332). He calls her a monster because he does not understand her motives. And he even blames her for her deeds she performed in the name of their love - she betrayed her father and killed her brother but she is only the monster for her beloved Jason. Furthermore, Medea agrees to have children being actually unwilling to do it: " I would rather stand three times in the line of battle than once bear a child" (Euripides, lines 249-250).

Finally, it can be seen that Medea is a character that can be sympathized with. As she describes herself: " I am abused by my husband, carried off as plunder from a foreign land, I have no mother, no brother, no relative to offer me a safe haven from this disaster" (Euripides, lines 254-257). She is alone

in the land where nobody can accept her and treat her as she was treated at home. There she was a princess, an independent and full of proud and in Athens she is only a poor woman, who needs to follow her husband wishes and obey his will. It is a great tragedy for a woman – to lose her children and her husband. But it is a much more tragic for any person to lose her independence and rights.

In this play Medea is both a victim and a villain. She performs against all the laws in order to protect her pride but she is betrayed and left lonely without no one she can turn to in case of the troubles.

References

Euripides. Medea. (C. A. E. Luschnig). Retrieved from: <http://www.stoa.org/diotima/anthology/EuripidesMedeaLuschnig.pdf>