

Medea by euripides

Literature



In Medea by Euripides, Medea expresses her extreme anger and bitterness towards Jason after Jason visits her. Subsequently, the Women explain the complexities of love, making a distinction between a normal, controlled love and a powerful, consuming love. Using metaphor and vivid imagery, the women juxtapose "little" love and "great" love, conveying the theme of the destructive power of passionate love.

First, the Second Woman introduces the seemingly innocent idea of love. The description of a small love as "a joy in the house" makes it appear harmless, pleasant, and almost trivial, as the "joy" occurs "in the house" rather than directly to somebody. The imagery of the "jewel" depicts love as beautiful and valuable; it contrasts with the cold, unfeeling "frost and darkness" which it must withstand. The metaphor of the jewel suggests strength and endurance, but not a consuming power. The parallel structure of the two lines emphasizes the harmlessness of the small love.

The First Woman then describes the destruction caused by a "great love," using several metaphors. She equates love to a fire that is consuming a house, contrasting with the little love's simple presence in the house. The fire, symbolically, burns down the "beams of the roof" and "doorpost." The fact that the fire destroys the structure of the house, rather than the inside, until the house collapses relates to the gradual way in which a person can become consumed by their passion. Over the course of the play, for instance, Medea's mental state disintegrates as a result of her extreme love and jealousy, until she is unstable enough to kill her children for vengeance.

The First Woman also uses the metaphor of passionate love as " a lion in the cattle-pen." This classic dangerous situation emphasizes the inevitability of destruction as a result of powerful love; both are disasters that are waiting to happen. The " herd [that] goes mad" symbolizes the disintegration of Medea's mental state and morality as a result of her passionate love, while the " heifers [that] run bawling" represent her children, who panic at a sensed danger from Medea when she talks to them. The vivid, animalistic image of " the claws... in their flanks" is ominous, conveying the crude way in which passionate love is harmful. The fact that the humans are compared to common animals demonstrates the crude, inevitable, almost instinctive way in which people are destroyed by powerful love.

The next metaphor that the First Woman uses is human, rather than animalistic. However, the image of the " armed robber in the treasury" has a similar sense of inevitable horror. The overtly violent images of " he has killed the guards" and " he walks in blood" accentuate the devastating effects of a consuming, powerful love. The theme of passionate love as a destructive force is seen throughout Medea, and leads to Medea's mental disintegration and subsequent murders of Creon, Creusa, and her own children.