

# Jason and medea



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The Chorus delivers these final lines of Euripides's *Medea*, "...the end men look for cometh not, / And a path is there where no man thought; so hath it fallen here. " (Euripides, 80) This quotation not only signifies the events, which have transpired in the plot of *Medea*, it also shows the recognition of a very curious aspect of *Medea*: that the protagonist of the play, *Medea*, is not the tragic hero.

A tragic hero by Aristotelian standards is one who possesses a driving aspect- or hamartia - which causes his or her downfall, who endures a reversal of fortunes leading to immense suffering - called peripeteia, and who undergoes an anagnorisis: a profound change or realization. *Medea* does not have any of these attributes. Instead, it is *Medea's* ex-husband, the antagonist of the play, *Jason* who is the embodiment of the aspects of a tragic hero. Through the examination of *Jason's* flaws, his suffering, and his tragic realization, *Jason* may be viewed as the tragic hero of *Medea*.

*Jason's* hamartia is his rationality. He leaves *Medea* not for some whim of emotion, but to give himself and his children a position of power within the kingdom of Corinth. " Not - what makes thy passion wild - / From loathing of thy bed; not overfraught / With love for this new bride; not that I sought / To upbuild mine house with offspring: ... / But, first and greatest, that we all might dwell in a fair house and want not, ... Next, I sought to rear / Our sons in nurture worthy of my race, / And, raising bretheren to them, in one place / Join both my houses, and be all from now / Prince-like and happy. (31)

*Jason's* rationality causes his downfall because of his inability to realize that *Medea* would act irrationally. *Medea*, once she finds out about *Jason's*

betrayal cries curses about Jason; King Creon; and Jason's fiance, Glauce. It is this emotional cry that causes Medea and her children to be outcast from Corinth, ruining Jason's plan. Jason's fortunes at the start of the play are very positive: he is married to a woman in a position of power and he's secured a future for himself and his children.

His peripeteia occurs when Medea curses the royal family of Corinth in a rage of passion, reversing his upward rise to power. To further Jason's suffering, Medea poisons Glauce and Creon and kills Jason's children. This incident leaves Jason with nothing: he has no power, no bloodline, and the citizens of Corinth, his would-be subjects, sympathize with Medea and hate Jason. Jason loses all traces to any sort of home or family, he suffers because there is no "greater grief than the loss of one's native land. Medea leaves Jason with a final blow to his happiness - the knowledge of his own death. "For thee, behold, death draweth on, / Evil and lonely, like thine heart:, the hands / Of thine old Argo, rotting where she stands, / Shall smite thine head in twain. " (77 - 78) With this revelation, Jason is left with nothing but hopelessness and misery. Medea never goes through a dramatic, tragic realization. While she does question her actions temporarily before killing her own children, she never regrets it afterwards and knows that it must be done.

It seems as though she knew that her children must die from the first instant Jason divorced her: "Too late, too late / By all hell's living agonies of hate, they shall not take my little ones alive / To make their mock with! Howsoe'er I strive thing is doomed; it shall not escape now / From being. Aye, the crown is on the brow, / And the robe girt, and in the robe that high / Queen dying. I

know all. " (61) Jason however is blind to what's going on around him until the death of his children. He fails to see how powerful Medea's revenge would be. He believes that he is fully in control of every action within the play.

His tragic realization comes when he confronts Medea after he learns of the death of his children. He comes to terms with his children's death and finally understands that events are not always within his control. " Thou, Zuis, wilt hear me. All is said / For naught. I am but spurned away / And trampled by this tigress, red / With children's blood. Yet, come what may, / So far as thou hast granted" (79). Here, Jason relents the remainder of his life to the gods, asking not his own strength to exact revenge as he would have done in the past, but of the Gods to exact their own heavenly revenge.

Jason is left alone to die at the end of Medea. He has no hope for a future, no happiness to revel in, and nothing to look forward to. He embodies every aspect of the Aristotelian tragic hero. While he is not the protagonist and, therefore, unsympathetic, the audience still feels fear that a similar fate will await them if they are too overconfident in their actions. Through a tragic flaw, immense suffering, and a tragic realization, Jason becomes the tragic hero of Euripides's Medea