

An analysis of the play midea by euripides



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The notion of the ideal man presented in the play *Medea*, by Euripides, is an exceptionally important one in the context of 5th Century Athens, a culture based very much upon the importance of the man both in his household and the general society. In Greece during the time of the play, the ideal man showed strong attributes of physical skill and aesthetics, intelligence and wisdom, and courage and bravery, especially in the face of adversity. This representation is shown in many ways throughout the play, and in some aspects, it is greatly challenged, causing the audience to question his or her own morals and societal views.

Although these representations are still important to today's society, the effect they would have had on the Athenian society at the time would be far greater, as men had a much more powerful role in the society. Euripides portrays these views through the use of his language and style of delivery, and combining this with the setting of the piece provides a perfect backdrop to raise these issues. Jason's choices throughout the play both reflect and challenge the notion of the ideal man in 5th Century Athenian Culture.

The intelligence and wisdom of the men portrayed in *Medea* play an important part in showing the ideals of the perfect man in Athens at the time, and reflect that of the Greek culture as a whole. Throughout the play, an Athenian audience would believe that Jason is following a suitable custom, securing a wealthy future for himself and his children, with the belief that the man has the right to decide what would better himself and his children, without regard to his wife. Jason states, while justifying his actions, " Will you get this straight?

I marry not for sex, hot for the royal bed, but as I said: to care for you, to make royal brothers for our sons, to protect us all. ” This shows that Jason believes that he has made the wise decision, however hard it may be on Medea, in order to secure their future. Jason sees this decision, which the play revolves around, from an entirely unemotional perspective, simply taking into account the benefits and barely weighing them against the downfalls, stating, “...Your father has not been neglectful.

With the gods’ help, I’ve made secure provision for you”. This shows his support and care for his children, whom are most important to him, as they will carry on the family name. Euripides uses language in the following quotation wisely to show Jason’s care for himself above all, as he states to his children, “ I pray I see you mature into fine young men, victorious all my enemies”. Despite the fact that the children will have grown up, Euripides twists the words to portray Jason’s care for his children as a calculated tool against his enemies.

The problem which has occurred, from Jason’s perspective, is that Medea won’t accept his decision to further their lives, stating “ I’ve done all I could – for you, for them – but what’s good for others is no good to you: You kick our help aside. You’re mad. What but worse can come out of this? ” Euripides uses these dialogues to show Jason’s strictly rational thinking, causing him to lose touch with the social and emotional realities of his actions, questioning his suitability as a true man in Greek culture.

This idea of a wise and intelligent man is challenged to an even greater extent when the audience is introduced to King Aigeus of Athens. Naturally,

the audience would see the King of Athens as a brave, wise and intelligent man, due to the fact that it was being performed to an Athenian audience, and would initially see Aigeus as this, but as they are introduced to the character further, this illusion is shattered. Euripides challenges this image and presents Aigeus as a gullible fool, use his language to show his complete lack of sense in the situation.

Medea essentially fools Aigeus into swearing an oath to her, telling him only her side of the story of the situation between her and Jason, saying that he ' Betrayed the wife and sons he used to love. ' Aigeus know that what he is doing is wrong, shown when he states ' Find your own way to Athens. These people are allies. I won't offend them. ' Aigeus' motivations behind doing this are purely for his self benefit, not adhering to the honourable way at all, as Medea promised him sons if he aided in her escape.

Euripides uses the tone of conversation to undercut Aigeus's authority, showing him siding with Medea after only the most pitiful of explanations, as he states, " With Jason's full consent? I find that disgraceful", expressing his feelings for Medea's punishments. Euripides uses these strong words, such as disgraceful, to emphasize the change in the man's manner so intensely. An Athenian society would see this as a betrayal of his people's honour, and especially as he is an Athenian king, the audience would be even further shocked at Euripides' open challenge to the credibility of Athens.

Aspects of bravery and courage are shown strongly in this play, both in a positive and a negative light. The audience would view Jason as an obvious hero, defeating countless enemies in his quest to retrieve the Golden Fleece,

and returning to Corinth alive, stating it was “ favour and help from the gods that helped him survive the endeavor”. Firstly, the completion of this voyage would be viewed as an extremely brave act, and secondly, his help from the gods would be admired as well. Euripides uses these references to the gods to elevate Jason’s status to the audience, as a man that was favoured by the gods was widely respected.

Euripides uses Jason’s statement of, “ I see I must steer carefully, Must play the skillful captain, trim sail and run before your storm of words” as an important reference to his previous exploits sailing the Argo, fro which he gained most of his fame. Medea directly challenges his statement, and therefore his manhood, stating, “ The serpent, the unsleeping guardian coiled around the fleece, I killed. I made your reputation. ” This goes against the belief that it was Jason that was the hero, capturing the Golden Fleece himself, challenging the audience’s view of Jason being the ideal man, a respectful hero and father.

Jason’s shows of courage through his legend follow closely to the aspects of an ideal man, that he shall be brave and courageous, and Medea’s words prove a great challenge to this. Euripides challenged and portrays the notion of the ideal man in a number of ways through his play Medea, most prominently through the play’s antagonist, Jason, and his decision to marry Glauke and take up the royal bed to better life for his children. While Athenian society at the time was a very male-dominated society, the play would have been highly controversial due to its female-dominant nature.

In the ways in which it shows both Jason, the courageous hero, and King Aigeus of Athens to be the characters in the wrong, who were gullible and obtuse to the extent that Medea had to extract such a punishment upon Jason, and manipulate Aigeus. The play shows that the notions of the ideal man were often flawed from the perspective of a woman, as Jason's self-centered decisions affected not only himself but those closest to him, ultimately ending with the poisoning of his children by their Mother and his previous wife Medea.