

Medea: Euripides' Tragic Hero

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The rhetorical devices that Euripides uses throughout *Medea* allow Medea to become the poem's tragic hero. For Medea is not only a woman but also a foreigner, which makes her a member of two groups in Athenian society who had nearly no rights. Thus, the Athenian audience would have automatically aligned their sympathies with Jason instead Medea, and Medea would have been labeled the villain from the start. This would have negated [Euripides'](#) literary cause and given the play little dramatic merit. However, Euripides employs a rhetorical style, which greatly enhances the depth of Medea's character and allows the play to proceed with a thought provoking depth in which Medea becomes the tragic [hero](#) instead of the [antagonist](#).

Euripides uses the extended monologues of various characters to make the audience compassionate toward Medea's internal turmoil. It is no coincidence that Euripides begins the play with a soliloquy spoken by Medea and Jason's household nurse. The nurse is one who has an unbiased point of view because she has been the servant of both Medea and Jason. Yet, her compassion clearly lies with Medea. She says, "Poor Medea is slighted, and cries aloud on the / Vows they made to each other, the right hands clasped/ in eternal promise" (lines 20-21). From a 20th century perspective, one might question why in the beginning of the play the Greek audience would choose not to automatically align

themselves with Medea. It is of utmost importance to note the "complacent pride in the superiority of the Greek masculinity" (p. 641) that was present in this culture (p. 641). In the eyes of the ancient Greek men could do no wrong. Thus, the nurse specifically describes Jason as "a man who is now determined to dishonor her [...

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...pt her role because it was far different from that of an ideal woman. They were not open the feminist view, that women should act according to their best interests regardless of the consequences. However, times have indeed changed. Today our society has embraced this perspective for women: in regard to abortion. Law justifies a woman to take the life of her baby if this is in the woman's best interest. Indeed, Euripides would feel satisfied to see how the modern woman is daily accepted as the tragic hero.

Works Cited

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