

Extract #8

Medea: *Nothing More Bloodthirsty*

Plot context

This moment follows Jason's furious denunciation of Medea after the murder of their children. Medea, already in the divine chariot, refuses Jason even the comfort of touching or burying the bodies. As she departs for Athens, Jason is left powerless, lamenting before the gods, his authority and identity utterly broken.

Thematic summary

The extract highlights themes of powerlessness, divine injustice, and the shattering of patriarchal expectations. Jason's suffering contrasts sharply with Medea's elevated, untouchable position. His appeal to the gods exposes his desperation and moral confusion, while Medea's denial of burial rites intensifies the tragedy's exploration of honour, grief, and the irrevocable consequences of revenge.

Jason

In the name of the gods
let me touch the soft skin of my children.

Medea

That will not happen. Your words are thrown into the empty air.

(She flies off into the air toward Athens.)

Jason

Zeus, do you hear how I am driven away¹⁴⁰⁵
and what I suffer from this loathsome
child-killer, this lioness?
This is all that is left to me, all that I can do,
to mourn and cry out to the gods
and call the divine spirits to witness how she¹⁴¹⁰
killed my children and keeps me
from touching them with my hands and burying their bodies.
I wish I had never fathered them
to see them destroyed by you.

Exit Jason.

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Reflection questions

Thematic question:

How does Jason's newfound helplessness deepen the tragedy's exploration of loss, honour, and the limits of patriarchal authority? What does his exclusion from burial rites reveal about familial bonds and the play's vision of justice?

Stylistic question:

How does Euripides use Jason's appeals to the gods, repeated laments, and emotionally loaded imagery ("soft skin of my children") to dramatise his anguish and heighten the sense of irreversible devastation?

Conceptual question:

What does Medea's refusal to allow her children's burial suggest about the boundaries between justice and cruelty, and how does Jason's inability to understand her motives complicate the audience's ethical response to both characters?