

Extract #3

Medea: *Nothing More Bloodthirsty than her*

Plot context

In this passage Medea reveals her full revenge: she will feign acceptance, summon Jason, then send her children with poisoned gifts to Creon's new bride, killing her; afterwards she plans to murder her own children and flee. The speech marks the moment her private grief becomes a public, irrevocable plot against Jason's household.

Thematic summary

The extract fuses revenge, exile, and maternal horror: Medea transforms personal betrayal into systematic destruction, challenging notions of justice and female agency. Her invocations of gods and talk of righteous vengeance complicate morality—Medea presents atrocity as both retribution and assertion of power, exposing the tragic collision of love, pride, and social marginalisation.

Act V, Scene 1, Lines 1310-1312

Medea

Oh Zeus and Justice, daughter of Zeus, and light of the Sun!

I shall be victorious over my enemies now, my friends.⁷⁶⁵

I have set out upon my journey.

Now I have hope that my enemies will pay the price.

For where I was most in trouble, this man

appeared as a safe haven of my plans:

to him I shall attach a cable to guide me there,⁷⁷⁰

going to the city and fortress of Pallas Athena.

And now I shall tell you all my plans.

Hear my words though there is no pleasure in them.

I will send one of my servants to Jason,

asking him to come into my sight.⁷⁷⁵

And when he comes I will speak to him ingratiating words,

how I agree with him in all these things and everything is fine —

this royal marriage he has made, after betraying me.

And I will say that it is advantageous and sensible.

But I will beg for my children to stay here,⁷⁸⁰

not that I would leave my children in hostile territory

for my enemies to abuse,

but so that with deceit I may kill the king's daughter.

For I shall send my children with gifts in their hands,

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bringing them to the bride, asking for reprieve from exile,785
a finely woven dress and a tiara of beaten gold.
And if she takes them in her hands and puts them on her flesh,
she and anyone who touches her will die a horrible death,
so potent are the poisons I will smear on the gifts.
After this it is a brand new story.[33] 790
I grieve over the deed I must do
after this. For I shall kill my children.
There is no one who will rescue them.
And after confounding Jason's whole house
I shall leave the country, in flight from the murder 795
of the children I love, after daring a most unholy deed.
For it is not tolerable to be laughed at by my enemies, friends.
Let it pass. What good is life to me? I have no homeland,
I have no home as a refuge from evils.
I made my mistake when I abandoned800
my father's house, won over by the words
of a Greek man, who will, with god's help pay for this.
The children born from me, he will never again see
them alive, for the rest of his life, and he will not father a child
from the newly-wedded bride, since she, the wretch, must die805
wretchedly through my poisons.
Let no one think that I am mean or weak
nor peaceful, but of the other sort,
a weight upon my enemies but to my friends most kind.
It is to such people the heroic way of life belongs.[34] 810

Reflection

Thematic: What does Medea's decision to kill her children reveal about the relationship between vengeance and identity in the play?

Stylistic: How does Euripides' use of future tense, divine invocation, and dramatic announcement create a sense of inevitability and heighten tragic tension?

Conceptual: To what extent can Medea's actions be read as protest against her powerless status (as foreigner and woman) rather than simply as monstrous revenge?