

Unpunished Crimes in Ancient Greek Drama in Euripides' *Medea*

The term “crime” covers a broad spectrum of illegal behavior, like murder, doing drugs, theft, etc. In a typical manner speaking, when someone commits a crime, they face the people of the law and are charged for the crime. In the Greek drama play *Medea*, Medea wants to get revenge on Jason because he decided to leave her and marry the princess to give their children better opportunities in life. Medea does not care about Jason’s reasons, but she wants to hurt him as much as he had hurt her, and she decided the best way is to hurt things he cares about: his lineage. As part of her vengeance scheme, she decides to kill everybody who may aid Jason in improving his bloodline, even if they do not know that they are helping. Even though Medea committed a large crime by murdering four people, she escapes without consequences, since she has personal relations with the gods, and she made Aegeus take an oath promising her protection.

Medea does not face any consequences for her murdering King Creon and his daughter and her children with Jason. When Jason finds out that she murdered his children, he goes to the house and keeps rattling the gates until he gets the opportunity to talk to Medea. She had other plans – she takes her children’s corpse and escapes “in a chariot drawn by dragons” that got sent by Helios, Medea’s grandfather (Euripides and Collier, lines 1291-1292). This account shows the audience that Medea has successfully accomplished what she wanted to do to hurt Jason, but she does not see that she committed arson. She is not willing to let Jason grieve their children since she has their corpses on her chariot – she wants him to feel absolutely broken and finds her decision to kill everyone he cared about as a fair plan of revenge for what he did to her, which was leaving her to marry into the royal family to provide better for their children.

In this situation, all Medea can picture is that Jason left her for more prestige when she had given up everything she knew to make him happy. Medea is consumed by rage and the need

for revenge because Jason had thrown her love away for someone else. She reasons that she “has suffered unjustified dishonor and will inflict a bloody retribution upon her enemies” (Tessitore, pg. 590). Medea does not like that she got betrayed by Jason, who was the last person in her life that she expected to toss her aside because she had ruined her relationship with her family to make sure that Jason would thrive in life. At this point, Medea is satisfied that she has destroyed everything that Jason values and knows that she will not be going to face any penalties for her actions because she manages to convince Aegeus that Jason is unfaithful to her.

When she tells Aegeus, the King of Athens, about the situation between her and Jason, she makes herself seem innocent by stating that “he’s wronged me. I’m blameless” (Euripides and Collier, line 686). The audiences get to see how Medea manipulated the story of her situation to Aegeus so that she can have his protection when she goes through with her plan – the plan that she has not told Aegeus but made him promise to protect her. As Jason tells Medea about how her need for vengeance has resulted in many deaths, she justifies her actions as “the gods understand the source of this violence” (Euripides and Collier, line 1347). She rationalizes her actions as something the god support because she has Aegeus's protection – even though Medea made him that oath without telling him that she is planning on murdering everyone Jason cares about as revenge. The audience is allowed to see her way of thinking about dealing with betrayal and how she is willing to exploit gods to guarantee protection.

Medea does not see her revenge murder as a crime. She sees her revenge plan as something that she needs to do to get closure about Jason’s betrayal. Some potential reasons that help understand why Medea goes unpunished are because she has personal relations with the gods. From the moment she had Aegeus take an oath saying that she has protection in Athens, Medea does not care about how atrocious her revenge plan is – all she cares about is that Jason

suffers. She knows that no matter what she does to Jason, as long as Aegeus does not hear about her actions, Medea will continue to make decisions that will hurt Jason. Even if Aegeus does hear about what Medea did to get revenge on Jason, she could manipulate the story more, or she will bring up the fact that he took an oath, so even if he does not like her decisions, he must offer her security. Another potential reason is that how the playwrights' "imagination were so rich and subtle that each of their plays represented to the audience a wholly fresh experience" (JACT, pg. 305). This statement argues that the storyline in Greek drama plays that involve tragedy uses the element of drastic surprise because it allows storytellers to enhance their audience's reaction. With Medea, while she does escape without facing any real consequences for her action, it might be what Euripides must have wanted because it made the readers feel astonished that she gets to leave her when she has killed people as part of revenge.

Although Medea committed a major crime by murdering people, she spared punishment because she had personal connections with the gods and persuaded Aegeus to swear to protect her. Medea counts her decisions are fair because she got revenge against Jason but does not see how insane it is that she murdered people and does not face any consequences, especially after killing her own children. To Medea, she will be sad that she does not have her children anymore but will be satisfied with herself because she got even with Jason.

Works Cited

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