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Director’s Booklet

S6 Advanced English







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**General Summary**

Euripedes' *Medea* opens in a state of conflict. Jason has abandoned his wife, Medea, along with their two children. He hopes to advance his station by remarrying with Glauce, the daughter of Creon, king of Corinth.

A nurse laments the events that have lead to the present crisis. After a long series of trials and adventures, the pair had settled down and established their family in Corinth, achieving a degree of fame and respectability. Jason's recent abandonment of that family has crushed Medea emotionally, to the degree that she curses her own existence, as well as that of her two children.

Fearing a possible plot of revenge, Creon banishes Medea and her children from the city. After pleading for mercy, Medea is granted one day before she must leave, during which she plans to complete her quest for "justice, the murder of Creon, Glauce, and Jason. Jason accuses Medea of overreacting and says it is her fault because she voiced her grievances so publicly. He claims that his decision to remarry was in everyone's best interest.

Appearing by chance in Corinth, Aegeus, King of Athens, offers Medea sanctuary in his home city in exchange for her knowledge of certain drugs that can cure his sterility. Now guaranteed an eventual haven in Athens, Medea has cleared all obstacles to completing her revenge, a plan which grows to include the murder of her own children; the pain their loss will cause her does not outweigh the satisfaction she will feel in making Jason suffer.

Medea then pretends to sympathize with Jason (bringing him into her confidence) and offers his wife "gifts," a coronet and dress. Ostensibly, the gifts are meant to convince Glauce to ask her father to allow the children to stay in Corinth. The coronet and dress are actually poisoned, however, and their delivery causes Glauce's death. Seeing his daughter ravaged by the poison, Creon chooses to die by her side by dramatically embracing her and absorbing the poison himself.

A messenger recounts the gruesome details of these deaths, which Medea absorbs with cool attentiveness. Against the protests of the chorus, Medea murders her children and flees the scene in a dragon-pulled chariot provided by her grandfather, the Sun-God. Jason is left cursing his lot; his hope of advancing his station by abandoning Medea and marrying Glauce has been annihilated, and everything he values has been lost through the deaths that conclude the tragedy.

**Summary of each scene**

**1st scene**Enter the chorus of Corinthian women. The chorus directly informs the reader that Medea is 'unhappy' and generally unwell. The nurse reinforces this by telling the chorus about the situation with Jason and the princess, and states that Medea is upset beyond comfort. Medea's voice is heard from inside the palace, and she expresses, using parallelisms, the will to die. The women of Corinth react by attempting to comfort her, but Medea, still indoors, begins to wish that Jason and his new wife should both die. It becomes clear that Medea's wrath cannot be stopped, and this is stated by the nurse. The increasingly worried chorus asks to see Medea and speak to her, and despite the nurse's pessimism (she says Medea is 'like a raging bull'), their wish is granted, and Medea emerges. She begins by criticizing the prejudice to which she (being a foreigner) has been subjected, before once again expressing the will to die. After briefly insulting Jason, Medea begins for the second time to criticize society, this time by talking of how unfairly women are treated ('we women are the most wretched'). This begins to hint at the feminist aspect of the play. Medea shows her grief at having been left alone (no city, no family...), and finishes her speech by suggesting the possibility of taking revenge on Jason. The chorus understands and agrees ('to punish Jason would be just'), and Creon enters.

**2nd scene**
Enter Aegeus. Aegeus informs Medea that he has received a mysterious oracle to do with his sterility, and that he has come to Corinth to seek the man who will tell him the meaning of the oracle. When asked about her state, Medea says that she feels 'disowned' and unloved, and calls Jason 'the most evil man alive'. Her despair is such that she considers her situation to be 'the end of everything'. After letting out her anger, Medea goes on to ask Aegeus to welcome her in her home in Athens, seeing as she is now banished from Corinth, and she tempts him by saying that she knows of certain drugs which can cure sterility. To this Aegeus agrees, but he tells Medea that she is to find her own means of transport to Athens. All is agreed and Aegeus swears an oath to stand by his word, and exits. At this point, Medea, now full of hope, states that she is 'on the road to victory', and promises to see her enemies punished.

**3rd Scene**Enter Jason, who directly asks the chorus about Medea, calling her a ‘sick murderess’. His anger and despair are obvious (his wife and Creon having been killed by Medea) as he also enquires about his children, which he considers to be most important. The chorus informs Jason that his troubles are to be unimaginably great, as his sons are both dead, killed by Medea. Jason’s first reaction is to actively threaten to kill Medea, at which point she emerges above Jason in a chariot pulled by winged serpents. She calmly states that she cannot be touched by Jason, and orders him to be quiet, while Jason bitterly curses her and expresses his frustration and remorse at ever having married her. Medea, in a passive-aggressive tone, powerfully tells Jason that he was mistaken if he thought he could disgrace her so, shows overpowering indifference at Jason’s curses, and even goes as far as to say that her pain is ‘a fair price to wipe away your [Jason’s] smile’. Jason, in absolutely desperate rage, resorts to telling Medea that their children will haunt her, to which Medea responds by dismissing him as ‘bitter’. There comes a point where a calmer Jason asks to come to terms with Medea, and she agrees. However, Medea refuses to give Jason the corpses of his children (which were what he has asked for), and tells Jason that he is to die an ‘unheroic death’. More insults are interchanged, and Jason ends up begging Medea to let him at least see their children, a claim which she pitilessly denies. Jason finally calls to the gods in his despair, before his and Medea’s exit. The chorus closes the play by stating the unpredictability of God’s will and decisions.

**Context**

**General context of the play**

First produced in the 5th century BC, *Medea* is set in the Greek city of Corinth. The play opens in a state of conflict. Jason has abandoned his wife, Medea, along with their two children and hopes to marry Glauce, the daughter of Creon, king of Corinth. All the events of play proceed out of this initial dilemma. Medea and Jason had settled down and established their family in Corinth, where they had been forced to seek exile after a long series of trials and adventures. Jason's recent abandonment of the family has crushed Medea emotionally, to the degree that she curses her own existence, as well as that of her two children.

**Background: Jason and the Argonauts, Medea and Jason**

Pelias, son of Poseidon, had usurped the throne of Iolcus from his brother Aeson. To save the life of her son Jason, Aeson's wife had sent him away, but after Jason grew up, he returned to Iolcus, seeking to regain the throne. Pelias promised to surrender the throne to Jason if he could steal the Golden Fleece from Colchis, on the Black Sea. Jason summoned volunteers from all over Greece to accompany him on the quest for the Golden Fleece. A man name Argus crafted a special ship with the help of Athena; the ship was named Argo and the heroes on the expedition were called Argonauts.

The Golden Fleece was guarded by a dragon that never slept; it was the prized possession of the king of Colchis, Aeëtes, son of the sun god Helios. When Jason and the Argonauts arrived in Colchis after many adventures, Aeëtes set impossible conditions for handing over the fleece – Jason would have to yoke two fire-breathing bulls, use them to plough the Field of Ares, and then sow the field with dragon's teeth that would immediately sprout into warriors who would attack him.

Jason had no idea how to accomplish this task, but the goddesses Hera and Athena prevailed upon Aphrodite to cause Medea, the daughter of Aeëtes, to fall in love with Jason. Medea was an accomplished sorceress: her aunt was the famous sorceress Circe and she was also connected with Hecate, goddess of witchcraft. Jason and Medea met secretly and swore a solemn oath that Medea would help Jason in return for becoming his bride. Medea gave Jason a magic salve that made him impervious to fire or weapons, and he was able to accomplish the tasks set by Aeëtes. However, the king refused to surrender the fleece, so Medea gave Jason a potion that put the dragon to sleep, enabling Jason to steal the fleece. Medea left on the Argo with Jason, but later betrayed and killed her brother Apsyrtus, who was pursuing them.

When Jason and Medea returned to Iolcus with the Golden Fleece, however, Pelias refused to surrender the throne to his nephew. The daughters of Pelias were concerned about his old age, so Medea demonstrated her magic powers to them by cutting the throat of an old ram and boiling him in a cauldron with special herbs. They were amazed to see a young lamb jump from the cauldron and scamper away. Persuaded by Medea, they cut the throat of their own father, but Medea did not rejuvenate him.

The people of Iolcus were outraged by this deed and refused to make Jason king, so the couple moved to Corinth, where Medea bore Jason two sons. Jason’s ambition leads him to divorce Medea and marry the princess of Corinth, and it is at this point in the story that Euripides’ play *Medea* opens.

**Context of first scene (lines 131 – 270)**

This scene takes place near the beginning of the play when Medea, consumed by her overwhelming anger towards Jason, is despairing of her fate and wishing she were dead. The chorus, composed of Corinthian women, try to reason with Medea and convince her that suicide would be an overreaction to her husband’s infidelity: it should be dealt with and forgotten. Still within the palace, Medea remains adamant and calls on the gods Themis and Artemis to allow the death of Jason and his new wife. She accuses Jason of breaking his oath to her, i.e. his marriage vows.

**Context of second scene (lines 663 – 771)**

This scene takes place after Medea’s encounter with Jason, in which he has rebuked her for publicly expressing her murderous intentions. She used the opportunity to tell Jason exactly how she feels, and reminded Jason how she helped him pass the tests her father had established for him to win the Golden Fleece. He tried to explain how he intended for his actions to benefit both of them, as well as their children, as marriage with a king's daughter would secure a better life for them. However, Medea interpreted his gestures of compassion and offers of help as Jason's manner of alleviating his own guilt and sent him away in a bitter rage. She feels utterly betrayed by Jason: he has broken the vow he made to her which was protected by Zeus, and abandoned her and the children, leaving them to be exiled from Corinth by Creon. Alone and nursing a furious desire for revenge, she is greeted by her old friend Aegeus, king of Athens, who is passing through Corinth on his way to see the king of Troezen.

**Context of third scene (lines 1295 – 1419)**

Medea has sent gifts to Jason’s new wife, ostensibly to try and persuade her to convince Creon to let Medea’s sons stay in Corinth and not suffer the same fate of banishment as her. However, the crown and the dress she sends are actually poisoned, and their delivery causes Glauce's death as well as Creon’s. At the beginning of this scene, Medea has been identified as the murderer of Creon and Glauce, whose deaths have just taken place. Jason arrives, cursing Medea’s actions, in search of his sons in order to protect them from Creon’s family, but he learns that his sons are dead – Medea has killed them in revenge, as she consider the pain her children's death will bring her a price worth paying to see Jason suffer.

**Scene 1 pages 141-145: relationships, tone, Facial expressions, gestures, movements and stage directions**

**Tone**

**Chorus:**

* Concerned, curious, caring, anxious, sincere
* On Medea’s side
* Determined to prove that they want to help her
* Sympathise with her because she is a woman

**Nurse:**

* Distraught
* In despair
* On Medea’s side
* In fear of what she is going to do

**Medea:**

* Suicidal, dramatic, angry
* Calling on the gods
* Feels that she has been unjustly treated because she is a foreigner/woman
* Depressed, self-pity, self-possessed

**Relationship between the characters**

**Medea and Nurse:**

* Close and trust each other
* Medea has a position of power over her
* The Nurse is a motherly figure for Medea (known her since she was a child)
* The Nurse is very protective of Medea and her children
* The Nurse’s main concern is Medea’s happiness and safety
* The Nurse is respectful towards Medea and is aware of her position as a servant

**Medea and Chorus:**

* The chorus are new friends of Medea; they don’t know her that well and don’t have a strong connection with her.
* They are detached from the rest of the characters.
* They want to help Medea but their words are insignificant to her.

**Nurse and Chorus:**

* They have not met each other before this scene.
* Both concerned about Medea
* The Chorus has a higher status socially than the Nurse

**Recommendations for the actors**

**Stage directions (starting at line 130):**

* Chorus enter upstage left.
* Nurse is centre stage.
* Nurse moves downstage left as the chorus moves closer to the centre.
* L144- Chorus and Nurse turn to look at the house, still at angle facing the audience.
* L168- Nurse moves centre stage-facing audience, chorus faces Nurse.
* L202- Nurse exits upstage centre to unseen wing.
* Chorus are centre stage facing audience.
* Medea enters from unseen wing upstage centre, and then moves to centre stage.
* The Chorus splits into two groups, one moves upstage right, the other upstage left.
* L222- Medea moves downstage left.
* L235- Medea begins to move toward centre stage; by the end of her speech she has finished centre stage.

**Facial expressions, gestures and movements**

**Chorus:**

Facial expressions: Concerned and anxious.

Gestures:

* Stand in spread out group
* Move slowly in a group
* L148- look up questioningly at sky and hold out hands.
* L205- link each other’s arms for comfort/support
* When Medea appears they slowly approach her but draw back when she makes her speech

**Nurse:**

Facial expressions: Scared, worried and upset.

Gestures:

* L140- Makes hand gesture towards unseen wing upstage when talking about Medea.
* L143- Shakes head in distress.
* L188- holds hands together on chest.
* L190- moves hands slightly while talking.

**Medea:**

Facial expressions:

* At beginning of speech: nearly expressionless
* Then pain, fear and hopelessness on face.
* Slowly fear turns into anger and lust for revenge.

**Scene 2 pages 156-161: relationships, tone, Facial expressions, gestures, movements and stage directions**

* Medea starts the scene sitting down on the bench (situated up stage left).
* Aegeus enters the scene from stage right. He approaches Medea and speaks lines 663-664 “All happiness to you…”
* Medea stands as she replies (lines 665-666)
* Aegeus turns away from Medea towards audience “To ask for children; that my seed may become fertile.” (Lines 668-669)
* Aegues turns back to Medea (lines 674) “I am married”
* He takes a step forward towards Medea (line 676)
* Medea starts to walk behind Aegeus in order to position herself at his other side as he is speaking line 679
* She stops next to him (on his right) as she says line 680
* Medea (line 688) turns to leave stage right.
* Aegeus (line 689) puts a hand to her shoulder.
* Medea has turned her body away from Aegeus (line 690) diagonally right looking out to audience.
* She turns towards him before speaking line 694 “He has taken…”
* She walks towards centre stage while saying line 898. “Head over heels in love…”
* Aegues approaches Medea (Line 706)
* Medea turns towards Aegeus for line 708
* She falls to her knees line 710 “”I touch your beard as a suppliant brace your knees…”
* Aegeus helps Medea to her feet line 719 “ I am eager…”
* Medea moves toward stool and stands on it talking to Aegeus from lines 746 “Swear by the Earth…”
* Medea stands down from stool ( line754) “ I am satisfied…”
* (Line 756) Aegeus addresses the audience
* Medea goes up to Aegues and speaks to him (line 757) “Go now…”
* Aegeus exits stage right.
* The chorus will be standing 3 either sides of the stage (up stage left and right) facing audience (from lines 759 -763)
* Medea is now centre stage with raised arms stretched, bent at elbow. Her face tilted upwards at an angle as she speaks lines (765-771)

**Stage, costumes and props**

**Page 141-145,page 156-161,page 177-182**

* A Simple stage with large double doors (down centre stage), facing audience representing the front door to Medea’s house. This will obscure Medea from view in the first scenes of the play. A bench positioned up stage left for action outside the house, closer to audience to bring forth the action of the play. Above the double doors appearing from pages 177-182 a balcony (elevated platform) that will support Medea and her snake pulled chariot.
* Props= Golden chariot for Medea, sword and helmet for Aegeus
* Costumes
* The chorus in the play, symbolizing the women of Corinth (six in number) shall be dressed in formal rich clothing. Gold and red colours best suited to represent their wealth. The dresses shall be ankle length, respecting the women’s different ages (many of them are married and have children) and modest attire. The costumes, although rich in colour should be kept plain for a minimalistic affect perhaps though paired with a belt.
* The nurse would be dressed in rags (also ankle length) as she is a servant and would have to differentiate herself from the rich women of Corinth. The colour used would be dark (ranging from brown to grey). She would also sport a matching headscarf to hide her hair. These are important also to indicate her age, that is to say she is considerably older than Medea or the women of Corinth.
* Medea represented as a woman of wealth and strong character would look more dishevelled to emphasize the state she is in (her hair for example would be messy). Her costume would consist of a purple (ankle length) dress, however unlike the women of Corinth her dress would be more crumpled, more worn in, considering she would perhaps have still been wearing it the day before (taking into account the state she’s in).
* Aegeus would have a crown above his head (indicating to the audience that he is a king); he would wear a toga (green or blue colour) with sandals (as he would be travelling he wouldn’t be wearing very expensive clothes). He might also have a navy blue/black cape with him as well as a walking stick (emphasizing his old age).

Jason (page 177-182) would be in military clothing (metallic armour with red cloth, wearing a helmet with a crest and carrying a sword, brown plain sandals) as he sets to attack Medea to avenge the death of Glauce and Creon.

**Scene 3 pages 177-182: relationships, tone, Facial expressions, gestures, movements and stage directions**

Jason shows, right from the start of the scene, absolutely bitter hatred towards Medea, and makes a clear threat to kill her. This hatred and the threat that accompanies it intensify upon Jason realising that Medea has killed his children. This would suggest an equal moral fight between the two upon their encounter, however this is not the case, as Medea shows an overwhelming mental superiority to Jason right from the moment she appears above the stage in the chariot drawn by winged serpents. Her position above Jason and the stage in general already give a hint at this superiority, which is elaborated when she calmly tells Jason to be quiet and states that she (and the children) cannot be touched while in her chariot.

 Although Jason’s initial reaction shows pure loathing and wrath, his position and power begin to lose ground to Medea as his speech prolongs into a remorseful passage about his regret in ever having married her. He also makes an obvious attempt at denting Medea’s emotionlessness when he talks of her treason to her original family, but the failure of such an attempt only increases the feeling that Medea’s power is far above Jason’s. Jason goes on to throw more bitter and mad insults at Medea (who is completely unaffected), and this shows the inconsistency in Jason’s efforts at confronting Medea; he suddenly changes from remorse and regret to bitter rage, and vice versa.

 Medea’s answer to Jason’s speech confirms her overpowering position, as she calmly, and in a passive-aggressive tone, seems to enjoy dismissing Jason’s insults, and destroying him in general (‘You were mistaken if you thought you could dishonour my bed, live a pleasant life, and laugh at me.’). She is clearly determined up to an unimaginable extent, as she says that murdering her children was ‘a fair price to wipe away your [Jason’s] smile.’ and this adds to her superiority. At this point, it is clear that while Jason is painfully attempting to harm Medea, Medea is immensely determined to show Jason up to what extent she has annihilated him, and takes great pleasure in doing so.

A rapid-fire sort of interchange of insults between Medea and Jason follows, and Jason is the first one to break, as he asks Medea to make terms. However, Medea’s superior position is shown again as she pitilessly refuses to abide by Jason’s terms, and tells him that he is to die an ‘unheroic death’. The scene moves on with more interchanging of insults, as it starts to become noticeable that while Medea consistently insults and destroys Jason, Jason begins to sound more desperate, and even starts to call to the supernatural to save him (he calls for his dead children’s curse on Medea).

Finally, Jason completely breaks down in remorse and frustration, as he pathetically begs Medea to let him touch his children’s corpses. At this point it is clear that Medea has won the moral battle. She pitilessly dismisses his words as per usual, which once again shows her outright superiority over Jason. Jason ends the scene by desperately calling directly to Zeus, and this marks the completion of Jason’s obliteration by Medea.

To summarise the relationship between Jason and Medea in the exodus; Jason is obviously below Medea from the moment she enters. This superiority of hers only increases throughout the scene, as she consistently destroys Jason, and his efforts to keep up with her only get more pathetic and pitiful. Medea seems to thrive off Jason’s weakness and despair.

**Annotated passage 1 pages 141-145**

Characters – Medea, Nurse and Chorus

 CHORUS (concerned)

 I heard her voice, I heard

 That unhappy woman from Colchis

 Still crying, not yet calm.

 Old nurse, tell us about her.

 As I stood by the door, I heard her

 Crying inside the house.

 My own heart suffers too

 When Jason’s house is suffering,

 For that is where my loyalty lies.

NURSE (distraught)

 Jason’s house is no more - all that is finished!

 Jason is a prisoner in a princess’s bed;

 And Medea is in her room

 Melting her life away in tears;

 No words from any friend can bring her comfort.

MEDEA [*still indoors*] (very angry, suicidal)

Come, lightning bolt,

Pierce through my head!

What do I gain from living any longer?

Oh, how I hate being alive! I want

To end my life, leave it behind, and die.

CHORUS

O Zeus, and Earth, and Light,

Do you hear the woeful prayer

Of a wife in her anguish?

[*addressing* MEDEA]

What madness is this? The bed you long for

Is it death that you desire?

Do not say that prayer, Medea!

If your husband is won to a new love,

The thing is common. Why let it upset you?

Zeus will plead your cause.

End this desperate grief over your husband

Which wastes you away.

MEDEA [*still indoors*] (desperate for revenge)

Mighty Themis! Dread Artemis!

Do you see how I am used-

In spite of those great oaths I swore with him-

By my accursed husband?

Oh, may I see Jason and his bride

Dashed to pieces in their shattered palace

For the wrong they have dared to do me, unprovoked!

O my father and my city that I deserted!

O brother that I shamefully murdered!

NURSE (given up hope)

Do you hear what my mistress is saying-

Clamouring to Themis, hearer of prayer,

And Zeus, who is guardian of oaths?

It is no trifling matter

That can end a rage like hers.

CHORUS (determined to help Medea)

I whish she would come out and let us see her

And talk to her; if she would listen,

Perhaps she would drop this deep resentment,

This vehement indignation.

As a friend I am anxious to do whatever I can.

Go, nurse, persuade her to come out to us.

Tell her we are all on her side.

Hurry, before she does harm to those in there;

This passion of hers is an irresistible flood.

NURSE (defeated)

I will. I fear I might not persuade her,

Still, I would like to do my best.

But as soon as any of us servants

Gets near her, or tries to speak,

She glares at us like a raging bull

Or a lioness guarding her cubs.

The men of old has had little sense;

If you called them fools you wouldn’t be far wrong.

They invented songs, and all the sweetness of music,

To perform at feasts, banquets and celebrations,

But no one thought of using

Songs and the lyre to banish

The bitterness and pain of life.

Sorrow is the real cause

Of deaths and disasters and ruined families.

If music could cure sorrow it would be precious.

But after a dinner why sing songs?

When people are full of food they’re happy already.

[*The* NURSE *goes into the house*.]

CHORUS

I heard her sobbing and wailing,

Shouting shrill, pitiful accusations

Against the husband who has betrayed her.

She invokes Themis, daughter of Zeus,

Who witnessed those promises which drew her

Across from Asia to Greece, setting sail at night,

Threading the salty strait that forms

The gateway to the Black Sea.

[MEDEA *emerges from the house, surprisingly calm and self-possessed*.]

MEDEA (proud, self-possessed, sure of herself)

Women of Corinth, I would not have you censure me,

So I have come out. Many, I know are proud at heart,

At home and in public; but others are maligned

As supercilious just because their ways are quiet.

There is no justice in the world’s judgemental eyes.

People will not wait to learn a person’s true character;

Though they have been wrong, one look and they hate.

Of course a foreigner must conform, but even citizens

Should not annoy their peers by wanton stubbornness.

I accept my place; but this blow that has fallen on me

Was unexpected. It has crushed my heart.

Life has no pleasure left, dear friends. I want to die.

Jason was my whole life; he knows that well. Now he

Has proven himself the most contemptible of men.

Surely, of all creatures that have life and will, we women

Are the most wretched. When, for an exorbitant sum,

We have bought a husband, we must then accept him as

Possessor of our body. This is to aggravate

Wrong with worse wrong. Then the great question: will the man

We get be good or bad? For women, divorce is not

Respectable, and to repel the man not possible.

Still more, a foreign woman, coming among new laws

And customs, needs prophetic powers to find out

What her home could not teach her: how to treat the man

Whose bed she shares. And if we are successful in

This demanding task, and our husband does not struggle

Under the marriage yolk, our life is enviable;

Otherwise, death is better. If a man grows tired

Of company at home, he can go out and find

A cure for boredom. But we wives are forced to look

To just one man. They say that we at home live free

From danger, while they venture out to battle- fools!

I’d rather stand three times in the front line than bear

One child. But the same arguments do not apply

To you and me. You have this city, your father’s home,

The enjoyment of your life, and your friends’ company.

I am alone; I have no city; now my husband

Insults me. I was taken as booty form a land

At the earth’s edge. I have no mother, brother, nor any

Of my own blood to turn to in this predicament.

So I make this one request. If I can find a way

To work revenge on Jason for his wrongs to me,

Say nothing. Women are weak and timid in most matters.

The noise of war, the glint of steel, makes her a coward.

But hurt her marriage and there’s no bloodier spirit.

**Annotated passage 2 pages 156-161**

Characters - Aegeus, Medea and the Chorus

Relationship between- Medea and Aegeus - Old friends

Medea and the Chorus - 'New' friends

Enter AEGEUS.

AEGEUS (*sincerely*)

All happiness to you, Medea! Between old friends

There is no better greeting..

MEDEA (*enthusiastically*)

All happiness to you,

Aegeus, son of Pandion the wise! Where have you come from?

AEGEUS

From Delphi, from the ancient oracle of Apollo.

MEDEA (*curiously*)

The center of the earth, the home of prophecy:

Why did you go?

AEGEUS (*despairingly)*

To ask for children; that my seed

May become fertile.

MEDEA (*curiously*)

Why, have you lived so many years

Childless?

AEGEUS (*despairingly*)

Childless I am; so some fate has ordained.

MEDEA (*curiously*)

You have a wife, or not?

AEGEUS

I am married.

MEDEA

And what answer

Did Phoebus give you about children?

AEGEUS

His answer was

Too subtle for me or any human interpreter.

MEDEA

Is it lawful for me to hear it?

AEGEUS

Certainly; a brain

Like yours is what is needed.

MEDEA

Tell me, since you may.

AEGEUS

He commanded me 'not to unstop the wineskin's neck--'

MEDEA

Yes - until when?

AEGEUS

Until I came safe home again.

MEDEA (*curiously*)

I see. And for what purpose have you sailed to Corinth?

AEGEUS

You know the King of Troezen, Pittheus son of

Pelops?

 MEDEA

Yes, a most pious man.

AEGEUS

I want to ask his advice

About this oracle.

MEDEA

He is an expert in such matters.

AEGEUS

Yes, and my closest friend. We went to the wars together.

MEDEA

I hope you will get all you long for, and be happy.

AEGEUS (*worriedly*)

But you are looking pale and wasted: what's the matter?

 MEDEA (*bitterly*)

Aegeus, my husband's the most evil man alive.

 AEGEUS (*concernedly*)

Why, what's this? Tell me why you are unhappy.

MEDEA (*bitterly)*

Jason has betrayed me, though I never did him wrong.

AEGEUS (*concernedly*)

What has he done? Tell me in detail.

 MEDEA

He has taken

Another wife, and made her mistress of *my* house.

AEGEUS (*worriedly)*

But such a thing is shameful! He can't have dared—

MEDEA

It is so. Once he loved me; now I am disowned.

AEGEUS

Was he tired of you? Or did he fall in love with someone else?

MEDEA

Head over heels in love. He's not a man his friends can trust.

AEGEUS (*calmly)*

Well, if - as you say - he's a bad lot, let him go.

MEDEA

It's royalty and power he's fallen in love with.

AEGEUS

What?

So who's the girl's father?

MEDEA

Creon, King of Corinth.

AEGEUS

I see. Then you have every reason to be upset.

MEDEA

It is the end of everything! What's more, I'm banished.

AEGEUS

Worse still - unbelievable! Why, who has banished you?

MEDEA

Creon has banished me from Corinth.

AEGEUS (*pitifully)*

And does Jason

Accept this? How disgraceful!

MEDEA (*knowingly/shrewdly)*

Oh, no! He protests.

But he's resolved to bear it bravely. - Aegeus, see,

I touch your beard as a suppliant, embrace your knees,

Imploring you to have pity on my wretchedness.

Have pity I am an exile; let me not be friendless.

Receive me in Athens; give me a welcome in your house.

So may the gods grant you fertility, and bring

Your life to a happy close. You have not realized

What good luck chance has brought you. I know certain drugs

Whose power will put an end to your sterility.

I promise you shall beget children.

AEGEUS (*earnestly/eagerly)*

I am eager,

For many reasons, to help you in this way, Medea;

First, for the gods' sake, then this hope you've given me

Of children - for I've quite despaired of my own powers.

This then is what I'll do: once you can get to Athens

I'll keep my promise and protect you all I can.

(*Admonitory tone)* But I must make this clear first: I do not intend

To take you with me away from Corinth. If you come

Yourself to Athens, you shall have sanctuary there;

I will not give you up to anyone. But first

Get clear of Corinth without help; the Corinthians too

Are friends of mine, and I don't wish to give offence.

MEDEA (*with satisfaction)*

So be it. Now confirm your promise with an oath,

And all is well between us.

AEGEUS (*defensively)*

Why? Do you not trust me?

What's the problem?

MEDEA (*emphatically)*

I trust you; but I have enemies -

Not only Creon, but the house of Pelias.

Once you are bound by oaths you will not give me up

If they should try to take me out of your territory.

But if your promise is verbal, and not sworn to the gods,

Perhaps you will make friends with them, and agree to do what they demand.

I've no power on my side, while they have wealth and all the resources of a royal house.

AEGEUS (*understandingly)*

Your foresight is impressive; but since you wish it,

I've no objection. In fact, our taking of an oath

Safeguards me; since I can confront your enemies

With a clear excuse; while *you* have full security.

So name your gods.

MEDEA (*majestically)*

Swear by the Earth under your feet,

The Sun, my father's father, and the whole race of gods.

 AEGEUS (*readily)*

Tell me what I shall swear to do or not to do.

 MEDEA (*forcefully)*

Never yourself to expel me from your territory;

 And, if my enemies want to take me away, never

 Willingly, while you live, to give me up to them.

AEGEUS (*sincerely)*

I swear by Earth, and by the burning light of the Sun,

And all the gods, to keep the words you have just spoken.

 MEDEA (*admonitory tone)*

I am satisfied. And if you break your oath, what then?

 AEGEUS (*acceptingly)*

Then may the gods do to me as to all guilty men.

 MEDEA (*contentedly)*

Go now, and joy be with you. Everything is well.

I'll reach your city as quickly as I can, when I have carried out my purpose and achieved my will.

CHORUS (*kindly/sincerely)*

May Hermes, protector of travellers, bring you

Safely to your home, Aegeus; may you accomplish

All that you so earnestly desire;

Your noble heart wins our goodwill.

MEDEA (*joyfully/victoriously)*

O Zeus! O Justice, daughter of Zeus! O glorious Sun!

Now l am on the road to victory; now there's hope!

I shall see my enemies punished as they deserve.

Just where my plot was weakest, at that very point

Help has appeared in this man Aegeus; he is a haven

Where I shall find safe mooring, once I reach the walls

Of the city of Athens.

**Annotated passage 3 pages 177-182**

*In this passage, actors’ aught to play Medea as being a victor, smug and condescending in regards to Jason, who is broken and showing disgust, violent anger and inconsolable grief.*

*The Chorus should attempt top remain more distant in its tone of voice, showing grief and trying to distance itself from Medea’s doings.*

JASON *{full of anger, with vengeance and fury in his voice}*

 You women standing round the door there! Is Medea

 Still in the house – sick murderess! Or has she gone

 And escaped? I swear she must hide in the deep earth

 Or soar on wings into the sky’s abyss to escape

 My vengeance for the royal house. She has killed the

 king

 And the princess! Does she expect to go unpunished?

 Still, I am less concerned with her than for the children.

 Those who have suffered at her hands will make her suffer;

 I’ve come to save my sons, before Creon’s family

 Murder them in revenge for this unspeakable

 Crime of their mother’s.

CHORUS *{with sad resignation}*

 Jason, you have yet to learn,

 How great your troubles are; or you would not have

 spoken so.

JASON *{angry; interested in what is being said, perhaps showing sarcastic amusement}*
 What is it? Does she plan to kill me, too?

CHORUS *{sadly}*
 Your boys are dead, killed by their mother's hand.

JASON {disgusted, angry, grievous}
 No. What are you saying? Woman,
 you have destroyed me.

CHORUS *{sadly, in soft voices}*
 The boys are dead.
 You must fix your mind on that. They're gone.

JASON *{lamentably}*
 Where did she do this? Inside or outside?

CHORUS {resigned to the facts}
 Open the doors and you will see them,
 Your slaughtered children.

JASON *[shouting into the house, as he shakes the doors]{furious and impatient}* You slaves in there,
 Remove the bar from this door at once,
 Withdraw the bolts, so I may see two things—
 My dead sons and their murderer, that woman
 On whom I shall exact revenge.

*[Jason shakes the doors of the house, which remain closed. Medea appears in a winged chariot, rising above the house. The bodies of the two children are visible in the chariot]*

MEDEA *{mockingly}*
 Why are you rattling the doors like that,
 Trying to unbar them so you can find
 Their bodies and me, the one who killed them?
 Stop trying. If you want something from me,
 Then say so, if you want to. *{Defiantly}* But you'll never
 Have me in your grasp, not in this chariot,
 A gift to me from my grandfather Helios,
 To protect me from all hostile hands.

JASON *{abhorred}*
 You accursed woman, most hateful
 To the gods and me and all mankind.
You dared to take the sword to your own boys,
 You—the one who bore them—and to leave me
 Destroyed and childless. Having done this,
 After committing this atrocious crime,
 Can you still look upon the earth and sun?
 May you be destroyed! Now I understand—
 I must have lost my mind to bring you here,
 From that savage country, to a Greek home.
 You were truly evil then—you betrayed
 Your father and the land that raised you.
 But the avenging fury meant for you
 The gods have sent to me. You slaughtered
 Your brother in your home, and then came aboard
 Our fine ship, the Argo. That's how you began.
 When you married me and bore my children,
 in your lust for sex and our marriage bed,
 You killed them. No woman from Greece would dare
 To do this, but I chose you as my wife
 Above them all, and that has proved to be
 A hateful marriage—it has destroyed me.
 You're not a woman. You're a she-lion.
 Your nature is more bestial than Scylla,
 The Tuscan monster. But my insults,
 Multiplied a thousand fold, don't hurt you.
 Your heart's too hard for that. So be off,
 you shameful murderer of your children.
 Let me lament my fate. I'll get no delight
 From my new bride, nor will I ever speak
 To my own living children, the two boys
 I bred and raised. They're lost to me.

MEDEA *{disdainfully}*
 I would reply to your words at length,
 If father Zeus did not already know
 What I did for you and what you did to me.
 You weren't going to shame my marriage bed
 And have a pleasant life ridiculing me.
 Nor was that royal bride or Creon,
 Who gave her to you, going to banish me,
 Throw me from here with impunity.
 So if you want, call me a lioness
 Or Scylla, who lives on Tuscan shores.
For I've made contact with your heart at last.

JASON {trying to hurt MEDEA; hoping she feels pain too}
 You have your own share of pain and sorrow.

MEDEA *{dismissive and smug}*
 That’s true. But there's relief in knowing
 You cannot laugh at me.

JASON *{with pity for his murdered sons}*
 O my children,
 You had such an evil mother!

MEDEA *{imitating Jason}*
 O my children,
 Victims of your father's evil actions!

JASON *{rebuking Medea}* At least it was not my hand that killed them.

MEDEA *{plainly}*
 No. It was an insult—your new marriage.

JASON *{surprise and disgust}*
 Was it right to murder them for that?

MEDEA *{bemused}*
 Do you think that insult to a woman
 Is something insignificant?

JASON *{equally bemused}*
 Yes, I do,
 To a woman with good sense. But to you
 It’s completely evil.

MEDEA *{resigned and defiantly}*
 Well, your sons are gone.
 That should cause you pain.

JASON *{hopefully and with conviction}*
 I think their spirits live
 To take out their revenge on you.

MEDEA *{distantly}*
 The gods are aware who began this fight.

JASON *{raging}*
 Yes, they well know your detested heart.

MEDEA *{dismissive}*
 Keep up your hate. How I loathe your voice.

JASON *{sickened}*
 And I hate yours. It won't be difficult
 For the two of us to part.

MEDEA *{with amused curiosity}*
 Tell me how.
 What shall I do? For that's what I want, too.

JASON *{expectantly}*
 Let me bury these dead boys and mourn them.

MEDEA *{Explaining}*
 Oh no! I will take them myself to the temple

 Of Hera Acraea. There in the holy precinct I

 Will bury them with my own hand, to ensure that none

 Of their enemies can violate their or insult their graves.

 *{Sadly, after a pause}* And I will ordain an annual feast and sacrifice

 To be observed forever by the people of Corinth,

 To expiate this unholy murder. *{Defiantly}*I myself

 Will go to Athens, city of Erechtheus, to make my home

 With Aegeus son of Pandion. You, as you deserve,

 Shall die an unheroic death, your skull shattered

 By a falling relic from the Argo. So, wretchedly,

 Your fate shall end the story of your love for me.

JASON *{outraged}*
 The curse of children’s blood be on you!

 Avenging Justice strike you down!

MEDEA *{condescendingly}* What god or spirit listens to you,
 A man who doesn't keep his promises,
 A man who deceives and lies to strangers?

JASON *{overwrought}*
 You polluted wretch! Child killer!

MEDEA *{snobbishly}*
 Go home.
 Bury that wife of yours.

JASON {realising more fully what has happened; sadly}
 I’ll go.
 I've lost both my sons.

MEDEA *{malignly}*
 Your grief's not yet begun.
 Wait until you're old.

JASON *{unhappily}*
 Oh such loving children!

MEDEA *{hurtfully}*
 Their mother loved them. You did not.

JASON *{offended}*
 And yet you killed them?

MEDEA *{slowly; smirking}*
 Yes, to injure you.

JASON *{melancholically}* Alas, how I long to see my dear boys' faces,
 To hold them in my arms.

MEDEA *{nastily}*
 So now, at this point,
 You’ll talk to them, you'll give them an embrace.
  Before this, you shoved them from you.

JASON *{pleadingly}* By the gods,
 I beg you, let me feel their tender skin.

MEDEA *{steadily}*
 No. Your words are wasted.

JASON *{desperately}*
 O Zeus,
 Do you hear how I'm being driven off,
 What I must endure from this child killer,
 This she lion, this abomination?
 But I'll use the strength I have for grieving
 And praying to the gods to bear witness
 How you have killed my children and refuse
 To let me hold their bodies or bury them.
 How I wish I'd never been a father
 And had to see you kill my children.

*[MEDEA's chariot takes her and the CHILDREN up and away from the scene. Exit JASON]*

CHORUS
  Many the fates on Olympus dispenses;

 Many matters the gods bring to surprising ends.

 The things we thought would happen do not happen;

 The unforeseen the gods make possible,

 And such is the conclusion of this story.