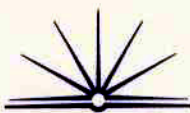


6.(a)

Euripides portrays Medea's character in several ways - but he <sup>exploits</sup> ~~does~~ our feelings of sympathy for her to make her, in the end, a <sup>much more</sup> sinister character. While in Greek theatre the idea of character was fixed and therefore different from what it is <sup>today</sup> ~~is~~, nevertheless Euripides <sup>innovates</sup> ~~uses~~ Medea to a considerable extent to portray Medea's character.

First and foremost, Medea is a hero (not a heroine!) in the ~~Sophoclean~~ traditional Greek mode, or even Sophoclean mode. She dominates the stage for the entire play; at the beginning, she wails like Ajax in the *okhry* to such an extent that there are fears for her children. Medea has the requisite conflict of *Oymos* and *Panteloyntz*. She deals out death, just as the *tragic* heroes do. She is unrelenting in her quest for revenge. Medea is, in the world

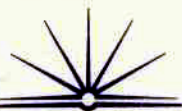


of a Sophoclean hero like Ajax, "βάρβαρον ἔχθρῶς καὶ φίλουσιν  
εἰμυεῖν". And she cannot bear to be laughed at: "δύσει γ' ἄλγος,  
ἢν ἴδῃ μὴ γυέλῃς."

But <sup>there is a major</sup> ~~is a~~ ~~major~~ difference: this 'hero' is a woman. And

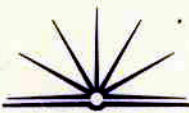
as such she subverts social processes. She refuses to be cooped up  
in the οἶκος, saying defiantly on her very first entrance,  
κοινοῖσι γυναικῶς, ἐξήϊστον γένοιτο. In her revenge, too, she adopts  
the vindictive tendencies of Greek legal processes, while ignoring  
their bias against women. She is a σοφὴ γύναι, who proves her  
political acumen by persuading Creon to let her stay for one day,  
by ~~persuade~~ tricking Aegeus into giving her refuge, by persuading  
Jason with spurious sophistry that — as much as she accuses him of —  
that she accepts his supremacy! In fact, ~~she~~ much of what she says  
reflects Athenian ideas of rhetoric and sophistic ideals. Further,  
Medea subverts the tradition of gift-giving, the social fabric  
and the relationship between host and guest, by giving poisoned  
gifts to Glauce. In sum, Medea is a woman who is dangerous  
to society: a dangerous woman.

Please see  
next booklet.



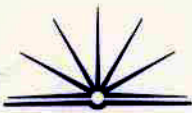
This dangerous woman is originally the object of sympathy from the chorus of Corinthian women, and this would have originally created sympathy for her. After all, Medea is set against mealy-mouthed Jason, a male chauvinist who even calls his children 'my children', asks Medea  $\epsilon\omicron\iota\tau\epsilon\ \gamma\alpha\rho\ \pi\alpha\tau\epsilon\rho\alpha\varsigma\ \tau\acute{\iota}\ \phi\epsilon\iota$ ; and says  $\alpha\chi\eta\iota\upsilon\gamma\alpha\rho\ \alpha\lambda\lambda\omicron\theta\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota\ \pi\omicron\theta\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota\ \beta\rho\omicron\tau\omicron\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota\ | \pi\alpha\tau\epsilon\rho\alpha\varsigma\ \tau\epsilon\kappa\nu\omicron\upsilon\theta\epsilon\alpha\iota$ ,  $\theta\eta\lambda\omicron\ \phi\iota\omicron\upsilon\epsilon\ \alpha\iota\ \epsilon\upsilon\upsilon\kappa\iota\ \gamma\epsilon\nu\omicron\varsigma$ . In this context, it is not surprising that the chorus side with Medea; they sing that it is "new who play <sup>whom they turn into a masculine hero:</sup> <sup>almost entirely male</sup> trickery" - "the world is overturned". Yet the audience could have mixed sympathies for Medea - on the one hand, she destroys the royal house of Corinth, the <sup>hated</sup> city-state with which Athens was at war; but on the other hand, not only is Medea threatening to familiar masculine procedures (and Jason, the <sup>Greek</sup> ~~traditional~~ hero, made a weak and ineffectual man), but she is to escape after his murder of the children to Athens: to pollute the state.

It is this murder, an innovation of Euripides in the original myth, that <sup>most vividly</sup> ~~establishes~~ <sup>turns</sup> sympathy against Medea. It shows her cleverness, certainly, as she realises through the insistence of Creon, Aegeneus and Jason on the theme the importance of children to men, and as she overcomes the time constraint



of our day placed upon her. It gives Euripides the opportunity to present the heroic conflict in Medea in no uncertain terms: for she agonises over the murder of the children, but in the end horrifies us by ~~self~~ referring to them as a 'sacrifice'.

But most of all, it shows us the ascendancy of a sinister Medea, with the shocking climax of the play. Jason rushes on, is told the children are dead. He tries to open the ~~egg~~ door to the ~~okivry~~, to reveal - as so often - the ~~εγχειρημα~~ <sup>metatheatrical triumph</sup>. But in a ~~deus ex machina~~, Medea calls down from her chariot,  $\tau\acute{\iota}$  κενός κἀναποχθόνιος πύλος, ~~establishing the metatheatrical triumph~~ with her words. She has gone beyond humanity - she usurps the function of the deus ex machina, ordering Jason, to  $\pi\alpha\upsilon\delta\alpha\iota$ , telling him to  $\sigma\tau\epsilon\lambda\chi\epsilon$ , making prophecy. Jason, comparing her to a lioness, warns that she should not look on earth and sun - but Medea's chariot is sent by the sun, she <sup>says</sup> ~~is~~  $\gamma\epsilon\gamma\omega\upsilon\alpha$   $\xi\epsilon\theta\lambda\omicron\upsilon$   $\pi\alpha\tau\epsilon\rho\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$  'Ηλίου τ' αἴου. This shocking finale destroys our sympathy for Medea, as does the chorus' musing on Ino, a Greek example of infanticide: Euripides' portrayal of Medea's character is amplified by the very nature of her triumph, her ascension to a terrifying godhead.



Thus we may say that Euripides' portrayal of Medea exploits her heroism, femininity and her revenge, keeping our sympathies for her in the balance.