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MYTHOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL ELEMENTS THAT BRING EURIPIDES' MEDEA'S TRAGIC END

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Abstract

Euripides' Medea is one of the tragedies of the ancient Greece that has survived. Based on a mythological background, the play focuses on the final part of Medea and Jason's marriage, which is catastrophic not only for the couple alone but also for their families. As well as being an ancient classic, one significant point about Euripides' Medea is that this psychological tragedy refers to the mythological factors that foreshadow and prepare the bloody final approaching. Another outstanding point is how Euripides deals with the Greek attitude towards foreigners and women, what gives Euripides' Medea an authenticity. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to analyze how the mythological histories of both Medea and Jason, and the cultural realities of the ancient Greek world make Medea's happiness impossible and bring her tragic end.

Keywords: Medea, mythology, Ancient Greece, foreigner, woman

EURIPIDES'İN MEDEA'SININ TRAJİK SONUNU GETİREN MİTOLOJİK VE KÜLTÜREL UNSURLAR

Öz

Euripides'in Medea'sı Antik Yunan'dan günümüze ulaşan trajedilerden biridir. Mitolojik bir arka plana sahip olan oyun, yalnızca çiftin kendisi için değil aynı zamanda aileleri için de yıkıcı etkilere sahip olan evliliklerinin son bölümüne odaklanır. Antik döneme ait bir klasik olmasının yanı sıra Euripides'in Medea adlı eseriyle ilgili önemli noktalardan biri de, bu psikolojik trajedinin yaklaşmakta olan kanlı sonu öngören ve hazırlayan mitolojik unsurlara yaptığı göndermelerdir. Diğer bir kayda değer nokta ise Euripides'in Yunanlıların yabancılara ve kadınlara yönelik tavrını yansıtmasıdır, ki eseri özgün yapan da budur. Bu sebeple, bu çalışmanın amacı Medea ve Jason'ın mitolojik geçmişlerinin ve Antik Yunan dünyasının kültürel gerçekliklerinin Medea'nın mutluluğunu nasıl imkansız hâle getirdiğini ve trajik sonunu hazırladığını incelemektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Medea, mitoloji, Antik Yunan, yabancılar, kadınlar

Introduction

Centuries after their production, Greek intellectual and artistic achievements still take our interest. Because of their timeless plots and characters dealing with universal issues and expressing human conditions, products of the Greek world are always popular. It is actually important to understand them not only for the sake of art but also for these reasons as well as their significant role in both shaping and reflecting the Western thought and civilization in the name of the Greek society.

Drama, which emerged out of religious rituals, was still a part of the religious cult and was presented on annual religious festivals in Greek society. Therefore, plays were usually about gods, oaths, sins, curses, punishments and the unchangeable fate of the human race. The stories were usually taken from mythology and there was no need to give information about the mythological background of the plays since the audience was already familiar with them. As Moses Hadas puts it, the point for the poet also was not to create a new story but to retell an old one because "it was not the outcome of the story (which everyone knew) that the audience came to discover, but rather how the new poet would handle the plot" (1982: 3).

Tragedy has a special place in Greek drama since it "offers the most convenient approach to spiritual contributions because tragedy combines high art with profound thought" (Hadas, 1982: 1). "The first example of "psychological tragedy" in Western literature" (Mills, 1980: 289), *Medea* stems from a web of mythological tales and characters like most of the works of literature of the time. The mythological background of *Medea* and Jason's tragedy, only the final part of which is told in Euripides' play, is the outcome of several tragic elements in the world of myths such as old curses on a family, betrayal of relatives and spouses, breaking oaths, prophecies and murder. The play has been studied from several perspectives so far including themes like violence, revenge, motherhood as well as from psychological points of view. Besides these, Euripides' interpretation of this tragedy, which the Greeks were very much familiar with, is authentic for it represents *Medea* as a figure who has the courage to take the initiative throughout her story with Jason and one with her own voice and identity although both make her the victim of an unlucky fate. Additionally, Euripides emphasizes how *Medea* as a foreigner and a woman in Greek society loses her chance for happiness both in her marriage and in this new culture during the course of events. Therefore, this paper aims to reveal the mythological and cultural elements that prepare the tragic end of *Medea* at the end of Euripides' ancient play while focusing on Euripides' distinctive approach in reflecting the realities of being both a foreigner and a woman in ancient Greece.

Mythological Background and Euripides' Representation of Medea

As mentioned earlier, as it is the case with many other plays of Greek drama, Euripides's play is based on common mythological stories of his time. Since Euripides' audience had an acquaintance with this mythological background, the play involves references to it especially to provide connections between some former events and their outcomes.

In accordance with the ancient Greek mind, *Medea* proves that individuals are never free from the good or the bad deeds of their ancestors. Although never mentioned by Euripides himself, the first shadow cast upon both Jason and Medea is "a curse associated with ancestral wrongdoing: the recurrence of ills in successive generations" (Holland, 2003: 257). Cursed houses are famous and common in Greek mythology. However, the reason and origin of the curse is not always so important; the important point is the fall of the hero caused by the curse. The family curse beneath Jason and Medea story is connected to Sisyphus who intended to kill his brother and raped his brother's daughter Tyro because an oracle told him the children born as a result of the rape would kill Sisyphus' brother. However, when Tyro learnt the truth, she immediately killed her own children. That is why Sisyphus was punished by rolling "a rock on his neck up a mountain in the Underworld... when he gets it to the top, it rolls back down behind him" (Holland, 2003: 263). Lora Holland states that the myth has significance in both ways: first, "Sisyphus is Jason's great-uncle" and "Tyro his grandmother" (2003: 264) which means Jason is doomed with ill fate as a member of the family, second; Tyro's fate of killing her own children draws a parallel with Medea's and even works as a foreshadowing.

Another significant source of information about Medea and Jason is the story of Jason and the Argonauts told in *The Argonautica* by Apollonius Rhodius in the 3rd century B.C. The background for Euripides' tragedy overlaps with Jason's adventures told in this source. Briefly, Jason, the son of Aeson, turns back to his country and demands the throne back from his uncle Pelias who usurped it before. Pelias, who with the help of a prophecy understands that Jason would cause his death, decides to get rid of him by sending him on a dangerous quest to bring the Golden Fleece back whose origin goes back to another mythological story as well. Jason builds the ship Argo and together with the heroes of his age he sets off to Colchis. After many adventures, the ship arrives to the land of Colchis where they are not welcomed. King Aeetes suggests giving The Golden Fleece to Jason on condition that he successfully performs some tasks:

The trial of your courage and might shall be a contest which I myself can compass with my hands, deadly though it be. Two bulls with feet of bronze I have that pasture on the plain of Ares, breathing forth flame from their jaws; them do I yoke and drive over the stubborn field of Ares, four plough-gates; and quickly

cleaving it with the share up to the headland, I cast into the furrows for seed, not the corn of Demeter, but the teeth of a dread serpent that grow up into the fashion of armed men; them I slay at once, cutting them down beneath my spear as they rise against me on all sides...if thou wilt accomplish such deeds as these, on that very day shalt carry off the fleece to the king's palace; ere that time comes I will not give it, expect it not. (Rhodius, 2008: 72)

When Jason hears the words of Aeetes, he falls into despair because Jason is a fully human Greek hero whose abilities are limited. While he is trying to find a way to win The Golden Fleece, Medea, who is the princess of Colchis and shot by the love arrow of Eros by the order of goddesses Hera, Athena and Aphrodite, decides to help him. Contrary to the usual sequence of a hero's deeds, in which the hero completes the task to win the princess, here Jason "wisely wooes Medea" (Gayley, 1939: 232) to take possession of The Golden Fleece. Medea's sudden passion for Jason ends in a plan to reach The Golden Fleece. Medea teaches Jason of every trick to overcome the cruel plan of her father; Aeetes. What she wants from Jason in turn is just to be remembered by him when he goes back to his country. As a reply Jason promises that he will never forget her:

All too surely do I deem that never by night and never by day will I forget thee if I escape death and indeed make my way in safety to the Achaean land, and Aeetes set not before us some other contest worse than this. (Rhodius, 2008: 85)

Jason does not stop here, but by offering Medea to come Ioicus with him he makes another promise:

But if thou comest to those abodes and to the land of Hellas, honoured and revered shalt thou be by women and men; and they shall worship thee even as a goddess, for that by thy counsel their sons come home again, their brothers and kinsmen, and stalwart husbands were saved from calamity. And in our bridal chamber shalt thou prepare our couch; and nothing shall come between our love till the doom of death fold us round. (Rhodius, 2008: 86)

Promises given by Jason to Medea have significant role in their tragic end. Although a hero is defined as "a man whose career has somehow enlarged the horizons of what is possible for humanity" (Hadas, 1982: 4), it must be always kept in mind that "it is not expected that the hero should be without flaw" (Hadas, 1982: 4). Likewise, Jason as a hero is not a flawless man whose promises and oaths will become unable to be kept in the future.

Although led by the love given to her by the goddesses and represented more innocently by Euripides, Medea takes steps that will take her to her own tragedy. Again told in *The Argonautica*, Medea's greatest mistake is to forsake her royal heritage not only for Jason's love but also because of her fear of King Aeetes who discovered Jason's trick:

Save me, the hapless one, my friends, from Aeetes, and yourselves too, for all is brought to light...And I will lull to sleep the guardian serpent and give you the fleece of gold; but do thou, stranger, amid thy comrades make the gods witness of the vows thou hast taken on thyself for my sake; and now that I have fled far from

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my country, make me not a mark for blame and dishonour for want of kinsmen. (Rhodius, 2008: 93)

Thus speaks Medea, and Jason, whose heart is in great joy, promises in front of the gods to make her his wife:

Lady, let Zeus of Olympus himself be witness to my oath, and Hera, queen of marriage, bride of Zeus, that I will set thee in my halls my own wedded wife, when we have reached the land of Hellas on our return. (Rhodius, 2008: 94)

Both Medea's and Jason's promises, oaths and Medea's betrayal of her own heritage prepare their future tragedy and turn them into fallen heroes: Jason, "who once was a great individual who could lead the Argonauts, who could make Medea fall in love with him and desert her fatherland" (Palmer, 1957: 51) becomes the victim of his wife Medea, who was also a princess. Both during the return journey of Argo and when they reach Iolcus, Medea continues her ill-deeds again just for the love of Jason. Thus, she not only betrays her family and country but also kills her brother and throws away his body parts into the water to stop the approaching Colchians after setting off with Jason, by which she adds murder to her mistakes. As Thomas Bulfinch states, Colchians were too busy "to collect the scattered fragments and bestow upon them an honourable interment, the Argonauts escaped" (1993: 87). However, leaving Colchis and arriving Iolcus back successfully does not finish their story and struggle; Medea causes the death of king Pelias this time from the hands of his own daughters which corrects the prophecy about Jason killing Pelias even if it occurs indirectly. Sent exile by the son of Pelias Jason and Medea arrive Corinth finally, but after so many cruel deeds they end up in nothing but tragedy:

Medea did love Jason, but because by loving him she had shown herself faithless to her father, Aetes, and to Apsyrtus, her brother... Her love had motivated capital offenses which in turn generated still crueller crimes and threat of punishment so great that even the pleasures of her marriage had not and would not allay the misfortunes of her life. (Phinney, 1967: 328-341)

Euripides' tragedy opens with the tragic marriage life of Medea and Jason. The nurse gives a brief summary of their history in her soliloquy while she is at the same time lamenting for the approaching disasters of the whole family:

How I wish that the ship *Argo* had never winged its way through the gray Clashing Rocks to the land of the Colchians! How I wish the pines had never been hewn down in the glens of Pelion, to put oars into the hands of the Heroes who went to fetch for Pelias the Golden Fleece! Then Medea my mistress would not have sailed to the towers of Iolcus, her heart pierced through and through with love for Jason, would not have prevailed on the daughters of Pelias to murder their father, would not now be dwelling here in Corinth with her husband and children... Jason has betrayed his own children and my mistress to sleep beside a royal bride, the daughter of Creon who rules this land, while Medea, luckless Medea, in her desolation invokes the promises he made, appeals to the pledges in

which she put her deepest trust, and calls Heaven to witness the sorry recompense she has from Jason. (Hadas, 1982: 190)

Medea who has made great sacrifices to be with Jason is now in great sorrow and regret and “she knows, from bitter experience, how sad a thing it is to lose one’s fatherland” (Hadas, 1982: 191). She is helpless because her trust in Jason has turned out to be nothing. Therefore, she repeatedly stresses “the oath Jason gave to her when he took her from her native land- that he would remain true to her” (Palmer, 1957: 52). However, he has not and Medea is alone in a foreign land with abandoned children, betrayed by her husband and without a homeland:

You, Medea, in the mad passion of your heart sailed away from your father’s home, threading your way through the twin rocks of the Euxine, to settle in a foreign land. Now, your bed empty, your lover lost, unhappy woman, you are being driven forth in dishonor into exile. (Hadas, 1982: 199)

After lamenting for Medea, the Chorus criticizes Jason and the society in which he lived for being treacherous and for not respecting oaths anymore. Medea is portrayed as a victim. Although she tries to find a solution while her heart is burning with the desire of revenge, she fears what will happen both to herself and her children if she kills Jason together with his new bride. She asks herself which city will receive her from being punished if she acts violently. Unlike Medea who hesitates for action, the Nurse gives foreshadowings about the end of the tragedy starting from her first speech after mentioning that Medea hates even her own children because of her great grief:

I fear she may form some new and horrible resolve. For hers is a dangerous mind, and she will not lie down to injury. I know her and she frightens me lest she make her way stealthily into the palace where his couch is spread and drive a sharp sword into his vitals or even kill both the king and the bridegroom and then incur some greater misfortune. (Hadas, 1982: 191)

Medea’s greater misfortune is going to be the murder of her own children of course since it is known that “her sorrow is only beginning, it’s not yet at the turning point” (Hadas, 1982: 191). Understanding that her mistress is planning a bloody revenge, the Nurse wishes the sufferers to be the “enemies, not loved ones” (Hadas, 1982: 192).

Her wish is a hopeless one since the tragedy of Medea is not only to be betrayed but also to be sent to exile. Medea is learning bitterly that “every man loves himself more than his neighbour” (Hadas, 1982: 192). Even the love of her children is not enough to turn Jason from his decision. So, she addresses gods as “the victim of grievous wrongs” (Hadas, 1982: 194), but no other way is shown to her except her biggest tragedy; the death of her children from her own hands. She murders them because she knows they will be punished together with their mother when the death of the bride and her father is discovered. She knows “neither leaving her sons nor taking them with her will assure their well-being in the absence of a father’s protection” (Corti, 1998: 38). So, she thinks she can not “leave [her] children for [her] enemies to insult... And if die they must, [she] shall slay

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hem, who gave them birth" (Hadas, 1982: 213). She believes that killing the children is the most suitable punishment for Jason because it is the thing that "will hurt [him] most that way" (Hadas, 1982: 208). She is so much in pain that she never reckons her own feelings as a mother and acts as a real heroine who defends her honour: "Nobody shall despise *me* or think me weak or passive. Quite the contrary. I am a good friend, but a dangerous enemy. For that is the type the world delights to honor" (Hadas, 1982: 207).

Medea has nothing to do except defending her honour now. She acts "to be true to her own self, to go on being someone she can respect" (qtd in Corti, 1998: 57). She plans killing the new bride and her father first, making "corpses of three of [her] enemies" (Hadas, 1982: 198) indicating Jason to become a living corpse, then it will be the turn of her children. Meanwhile, both she and Jason are reminded of their previous mistakes and the curse on them. Jason is blamed for the death of the new bride since his "fate is visiting his sins on [him]" (Hadas, 1982: 216) and Medea is called by the Chorus to stop while she is murdering her children:

O woman, who made the inhospitable passage through the gray Clashing Rocks! Why let your spleen poison your heart? Why this murderlust, where love was? On the man that spills the blood of kinsmen the curse of heaven descends. Go where he may, it rings ever in his ears, bringing sorrows and tribulations on his house. (Hadas, 1982: 217)

The miserable end of their family is brought about them by the hands of both Jason and Medea. At the end of the tragedy, Medea is taken by a chariot driven by winged dragons instead of being punished. That is not because Euripides approves her behaviour and thinks she must escape without punishment but because he believes Medea's innocence more than Jason's who blames Medea completely instead of searching a mistake in himself:

At last I have come to my senses, the senses I lost when I brought you from your barbarian home and country to a home in Greece, an evil plague, treacherous alike to your father and the land that reared you. There is a fiend in you, whom the gods have launched against me. In your own home you had already slain your brother when you came aboard the *Argo*, that lovely ship. Such was your beginning. (Hadas, 1982: 219)

Jason, unlike Medea who is regretful about her previous deeds, is still unaware of her own faults causing the tragedy. He is still too much proud of himself which is the fatal flaw of a hero. Because of his pride he is left in pain and misery alone while Medea escapes in a supernatural way heading towards the sky. Jason is so selfish that he can not understand Medea who did all her terrible deeds for his love. Even she murders the children for Jason, but this time the reason for her action is not love but hate:

Jason: O children, what a wicked mother you got!

Medea: O children, your father's sins have caused your death.

Jason: Yet it was not my hand that slew them.

Medea: No, it was your lust, and your new marriage. (Hadas, 1982: 219)

By blaming Jason of being the indirect cause of her cruel actions, Medea again reminds him of their past and the guilt he shares with her. She has performed none of them alone and she did all in the name of love. Contrary to her, Jason denies their past and in Medea's words he is "the breaker of oaths" and "the treacherous guest" (Hadas, 1982: 220) who convinced her to join his group and come to Greece. The play ends with Medea leaving Jason in desperate situation.

Medea as a Foreigner and a Woman

Perhaps the most striking point about Euripides' *Medea* is the cultural and social criticism it involves about the Greek society of the time. Although generally read as a tragedy of rage and vengeance, *Medea* is also about the concepts of "barbarism" and "womanhood" in Greek world. Euripides uses both concepts as key ideas that create the violence in the tragedy embodied in the character of Medea. Considering that the male citizen was the central character in the society who had many oppositions "among whom the most important [was] the woman" (Clauss and Johnston, 1997: 253) in ancient Greece, Medea, whose otherness is "multifaceted" (Clauss and Johnston, 1997: 253), is the "other" both as the barbarian foreigner and the woman.

Medea's characterization as the barbarian foreigner goes back to the myth created by the patriarchal Greek society which pictures her as a furious, tricky, bloody woman. Although she gains a domestic and respectable character as a mother and a housewife after arriving Greece, she still remains the barbarian who is regarded inferior in Greek society just because she is a foreigner and outsider. For Greeks, foreigners could only be called "barbarians". Medea, who is from Colchis, is therefore portrayed as a murderer who does not doubt to kill even her people of the same blood, an alien who has the gift of scary witchcraft and a monster who can act with her passions instead of reason. She is constantly abused and despised. When Medea reminds Jason of her help and how he has broken his oaths, he also reminds her that she "got more than [she] gave" (Hadas, 1982: 201) because Jason has saved her from a barbarian land for which she must be thankful:

You have your home in Greece instead of in a barbarian land. You have learned the blessings of Law and Justice, instead of the caprice of the strong...If you had been living on the edges of earth, nobody would ever have heard of you. (Hadas, 1982: 201)

According to Jason, Medea must be happy instead of complaining because even though she can not be the legal wife of him according to the Greek rules- because she is an outsider- and even though Jason marries another woman, at least she is in Greece and she can have a comfortable life if she lets Jason do whatever he desires. But she does not and this causes great disturbance for Creon. He fears her "because Medea is a stranger and a non-Greek" (Palmer, 1957: 52) and her reactions to her husband's betrayal are not "those of the Greek common-law wife who must suffer in silence. And so he must banish her." (Palmer, 1957: 52). Therefore, she is exiled.

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Remembering the position of foreigners in ancient Greece seems to be helpful in understanding Medea's unlucky position. Generally speaking, first and most important distinction in the organization of Greek society was between the citizens and foreigners. This distinction was so sharp that, "in any Greek city one could always tell the insider from the outsider by his full name" (Hansen, 1996: 190). However, as stated by Robert Garland, "the status of being a foreigner, as the Greeks understood the term, does not permit any easy definition" and covers a huge diversity from Persians to Egyptians and even Greek people with a different accent or dialect (2009: 112). Yet, there were great many foreigners who chose to dwell in Greece because of reasons such as trade relations or marriages. For these permanent dwellers, there were special rules under the name 'metic'. The number of these people was so high in the middle of the 5th century B.C. that their rights were restricted and precautions were taken against those who claimed citizenship under false pretenses (Garland, 2009: 113). Foreigners were subject to many laws that demanded taxes and military service while limiting their rights to own property. To protect the right of citizenship, law in ancient Greece commanded that "an Athenian convicted of living as husband with a foreign woman, shall be fined a thousand drachmas" (Arnaoutoglou, 1998: 13) and prohibited the citizenship of a child from a citizen father and a foreigner mother. Heinrich Hase emphasizes the severity of the law against marriages with foreigners and states that "foreigners, whether male or female, could form no legal marriage. They were forbidden to marry Athenian citizens under severe penalties. Marriages of the latter, contracted in foreign parts, were also illegal" and he concludes that "the ranks of the citizens were thus secured from being overfilled" (1836: 242).

Under these circumstances, Medea's marriage to Jason has no validity, which leaves Medea in a very unpleasant situation with her children. She is extremely lonely in Greece being fully aware of the distance between herself and other people. She is "a woman who betrayed father and killed her brother for the sake of a future husband" (Clauss and Johnston, 1997: 256). However, her bond to her husband is illegal in Greece. She expresses her loneliness as follows:

Women of Corinth, do not criticize me... you and I are not in the same case. You have your city here, your paternal homes; you know the delights of life and association with your loved ones. But I, homeless and forsaken, carried off from a foreign land, am being wronged by a husband, with neither mother nor brother nor kinsman with whom I might find refuge from the storms of misfortune. (Hadas, 1982: 195)

As well as being the "barbarian other", Medea's position as a woman doubles her isolation. Being the least misogynistic writers in classical Greek literature, Euripides pictures Medea as a strong and noble woman especially when compared to her male counterpart (Tetlow, 1980: 9). Euripides' interpretation of this familiar story emphasizes the fact that, "in abandoning Medea, [Jason] has broken his oath, an essential item in the traditional hero's moral equipment. Medea however has remained true to hers" (Blundell, 1995: 175).

Jason and Medea's marriage is the central theme of Euripides' tragedy. As put forward by Marianne Hopman, "much of the tension between Medea and Jason derives from the incompatibility of their views on their relationship" (2008: 158). Jason is engaged to a new bride. Still, as usual in the Greek society, Medea is supposed to keep her silence and continue to fulfill her responsibilities as a wife and mother. In such a male centered society, where "women are forced to accept as masters of their bodies men whose characters are totally unknown to them" (Blundell, 1995:177), it is not surprising that she is accused for her husband's betrayal even if she is betrayed. The society expects unquestioned obedience from a good wife. That is; "if the man turns out to be bad, his wife cannot reject him, and divorce only brings disgrace. A husband who is tired of his home can find diversions elsewhere, but a wife is compelled to look to one man alone" (Blundell, 1995: 177). If a woman wants to be happy, she must "avoid conflict with her husband" (Hadas, 1982: 190) for her own security.

On the contrary to the expectations of the patriarchal society, Medea neither behaves as someone inferior nor keeps her silence against injustice as Greek women do. Rather she cries, threatens and makes plans for revenge. Chorus puts forth the Greek ideals about the situation: "If your husband worships a new bride, it is a common event; be not exasperated. Zeus will support your cause. Do not let grief for a lost husband waste away your life" (Hadas, 1982: 193). However, punishment from gods or leaving decision to fate is not enough for Medea. "While Jason insists that his new marriage does not impinge on his obligations to Medea and their children, ... Medea considers him an enemy who is doing evil to his friends," (Hopman, 2008: 158) which makes her passionate and impatient for revenge that she sees her right for "Jason's engagement to the Corinthian princess breaks away from their common past" (Hopman, 2008: 158). Left alone and without support, she turns to women of Corinth and utters her words which make Euripides' Medea a popular one for the feminist movement:

The man who was everything to me, well he knows it, has turned out to be the basest of men. Of all creatures that feel and think, we women are the unhappiest species...They say that we have a safe life at home, whereas men must go to war. Nonsense! I had rather fight three battles than bear one child. (Hadas, 1982: 95)

Although Medea has right in her contrasting the responsibilities of two sexes, it is no surprise that the role of women was underrated in ancient Greece where religious values were moving away from the domination of generative female principle of matriarchy towards the authoritative patriarchy. That is to say that the cultural, religious and social changes in the region are evident historically. Written in 5th century B.C., *Medea* is a great source in reflecting these changes for the Hellenic invasions that caused the mentioned transformations started earlier around 12th century B.C.

One of the most important transformation was in religion since "the Mediterranean peoples, who worshipped an earth goddess, were conquered by

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successive waves of Hellenes bringing with them some form of tribal sky god" (Wilson, 2006: 490). Although the local goddesses worshipped in the region were not denied completely and their cults continued to be followed, they were placed under the reign of Zeus as a result of this patriarchal dominion. Accordingly, degradation of female deities seems to create a shift in the common approach towards sexes in the society, which distorted the general perception of females and labeled them with negative connotations.

Once a princess and "originally a goddess" in Colchis, whose lineage goes back to Sun, Medea undergoes such distortion and reduced to "become a 'witch' in the patriarchally" (Neumann, 1963: 288) constructed Greek system. Her fame for her expertise in herbs and healing in her native country becomes the evidence for this negative reference to the degree that it passes as another reason for her exile. Medea in *The Argonautica* is portrayed as being interested in witchcraft and magic in addition to her knowledge all about herbs and drugs; "some for healing, others for killing" (Rhodius, 2008: 79). Yet, her arrival to Greece symbolizes her becoming a part of the patriarchal Greek religion and losing her importance by being named as a "wizard possessed of evil knowledge" (Hadas, 1982: 196).

There is evidence for this shift in Medea's perception in two different cultures. Actually, Medea as a woman who holds the ability for both life and death –as in the case of the lamb and Pelias- is the symbol of the goddess; the Great Mother in her three stages. When Euripides' tragedy is considered together with the myths it is based on, she is first the innocent Maiden, the Virgin Goddess who is responsible with the spiritual guidance of the Hero in his quest. In her second stage, she becomes the domestic mother figure whose world is shaped around her children. However, in her third and last stage, she represents the dark face of the goddess who is "occasionally related to the moon, either through the blood sacrifice... or through a child-sacrifice" (Jung, 1959: 185). Her visits to the temple of Hecate support the idea as well. As the goddess with multiple faces, she both gives and takes life, "when she is angry, as Hecate, can close the wombs of living creatures, and all life stands still" (Neumann, 1963: 170) or she promises children to people as Medea does Aegeus. Because of all these, murder of her children can also be associated with human sacrifice which was probably a tradition surviving in barbarian lands. As a result, in Euripides' tragedy, Medea is pictured with bloody hands which contribute to her barbarian character. Finally, her divine roots are reminded by Euripides with her *deus ex machine* departure from the stage despite being undervalued by the Greeks.

To criticize the Greek society, which gave value to neither foreigners nor women, Euripides makes use of Medea's case. In his tragedy, Medea, who expresses the pain of only childbirth equal to three battles without mentioning the difficulties of bringing them up, becomes a monster to shed their blood. According to Euripides, Medea is the perfect example of a human being whose rights are denied. Human beings may turn into monsters when they are not treated as humans and "the results may be as tragic as they prove to be in *Medea*" (Hadas

188). Likewise, Medea warns the audience about the dangers of a heartbroken woman by saying “woman in most respects is a timid creature, with no heart for strife and aghast at the sight of steel; but wronged in love, there is no heart more murderous than hers” (Hadas, 1982: 195).

Conclusion

Despite being a common story of ancient Greece probably told many times, Euripides’ *Medea* stands original as a result of its writer’s unique approach to the familiar story of Jason and Medea and his brave criticism of the society he lived in, which are embedded cleverly within the text. Euripides analyzes the inevitable tragedy waiting for Medea through references to the mythological history that constitute the background of Medea and Jason’s story. Additionally, he emphasizes how their marriage is doomed to a catastrophical end for the cultural perspective of the ancient Greek society towards foreigners and women, which make a happy life impossible for the couple. Thus, Euripides’ *Medea* becomes the tragedy of a woman externalized for various reasons by the Greek society in addition to its mythological connections, tension between oppositions such as love/hatred or passion/reason and the miserable fall of the heroes. Medea represents “the exploited ‘other’ who fights back” (Clauss and Johnston, 1997: 302). Like all people who are oppressed and abused, Medea herself becomes a tyrant when she comes to power. Therefore, murder of her children aims not only vengeance but also a rejection of offspring having the blood of a disloyal Greek. Finally, she drives high into the sky leaving this unfaithful Greek behind in incredible pain and declares her superiority by cutting her bonds with patriarchy.

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