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## **Exploring the Nature of Elite and Non-Elite Conflicts in Euripides' *Medea***

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### **Abstract**

Euripides frames the character of his tragedy in the light of reality and contemporary history. In his play, he depicts the nature of the aristocratic and unorthodox conflicts of Athens at the time. Euripides tries to portray social reality with great skill in his plays; *Medea* is a real example of this. *Medea* is an ancient Greek tragedy that portrays a woman who goes beyond the traditional role of a woman in ancient Greek society, so far as to kill her children and her husband's new wife—to revenge his betrayal. A contrast between mythology and Euripides' philosophy of life is found in his plays. In *Medea*, he combines mythology with contemporary Athens' judicial system, family situation, socio-political situation, and prevailing values. In his plays the nature of the aristocratic and non-aristocratic conflicts of the time is illustrated with his own beliefs and justifications. In this research article we will explore the ways in which Euripides prioritizes contemporary philosophy and problems in the reshaping of mythological traditions in the context of his era. We will examine how *Medea* became a symbol of the oppressed woman—portraying the concerns of any woman of the epoch. We propose a reading for this Ancient Greek tragedy, which widely influenced world literature and the arts, within the lens of the humanities. The main goals and Objectives of this Research article is to explore how the characters in *Medea* face socio-economic discrimination and fall victim to

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social divisions. In the context of *Medea* we will discuss how Euripides explored the nature of elite and non-elite conflicts in his plays. This research work will follow qualitative analysis methods. The research article will be written in a descriptive and comparative manner using primary sources. Here, along with the analysis method, the case study method will also be applied. An interdisciplinary analysis approach will be followed with qualitative methods. Researcher's own interpretations, observations and perspectives will be presented. The APA approach for data guidance and reference will be followed when presenting this research work. Through this paper, the researcher will be involved in the study of dramas of this genre, as well as this article can add new ideas to the theory of drama. This article may be able to generate new themes and observations in theatrical research.

**Keywords:** Euripides, Medea, Elite society, Non-elite society, Conflict

Euripides, the famous author of classical Greek tragedy was born in 431BC. In the hands of the classical Greek tragedy writer Euripides, Greek drama exposes the flaws of reality and social human beings. His work reveals all the faults and qualities of social people. Divine faith is portrayed in his plays as an inviolable stigma. In his plays, the divine chain is presented as an obstacle to the individual being. It can be said that in Euripides' play, it is human, not God who controls the fate of human beings. In his play it is not God who is the controller of human's own destiny. In Euripides' play, man himself is the controller of his own destiny. That is why Euripides makes his explicit statement about the power of the Olympian Gods. Euripides was a vocal critic of traditional beliefs, morals, and political ideals. He believed in the new scientific ideology of the new era. He understood the suffering, pain and deprivation of the common man. And, out of this feeling, he questions the dignity and morality of the Gods and Goddesses in his tragedy. At the same time, from the realization of human suffering and life's suffering, God's various interpretations and the numbness of astrology are also proved in his tragedy. As a result, his theatrical characters appear as equal to normal human beings. It can be said that Euripides wrote

the reverse myth based on the mythology. In *Medea*, Euripides combines mythology with the judicial system, family situation, social policy, political situation, prevailing values of contemporary Athens. He reflects the conflict between the aristocracy and the non-elite according to his own beliefs and arguments, in light of the new age meditations and ideas.

Euripides, the architect of reality, prioritizes contemporary philosophy and problems in the renewal of mythological traditions. In the play, he challenges traditional myths and religious ideologies while portraying the minds of the common man. (Graves, 1955:137) A contrast between mythology and Euripides' philosophy of life is found in his play. In his play *Electra*, Princess Electra is a housewife of an ordinary farmer. In *Trojan Women*, Euripides begins his story from where Homer ends the story. The root of this play is mythology. Not only that, but the characters Hecuba, Andromache, Agamemnon, Helen are also part of the myth. The main theme of both these plays is mythology. And the reality is the contemporary context of the play. The main element of *The Woman of Troy* is taken from Homer's story, but here the reaction of the real man is more important than the action-reaction of the God. Euripides actually wanted to paint a brutal picture of the war frenzy of his contemporaries in the form of the mythical Troy war. The devastating end of the lives of the bridesmaids in this play is the culmination of the next catastrophe of the Athenians. According to the consecutive tradition of Greek tragedy, the play does not tell the story of a hero who died or suffered for terrible sins. The Greek soldiers of this play are its tragic heroes. The Temple of Troy has been destroyed by their sins. In this play, the Trojans are brutally murdered. Hector's son Astyanax was tragically killed after being thrown off the top of a mountain. The deaths of the Trojan people and Hector's son reminded me of the cruelty of Mels Island. In fact, Euripides saw life and the world as opposed to the mythic beliefs of the Troy War and the traditional practice of Greek tragedy. (Grube, 1941:221)

In his play *Alcestis*, when the death date of King Admetus approaches (Because of Apollo's blessing), his wife agrees to

sacrifice her life in exchange for the life of Adamidis. In this play, the argument on which Alcestis, the wife of Adamidis agrees to save her husband at the cost of her life is the reality. Alcestis realized that if Adamidis survived, his children would be able to live properly and his children would be able to become proper human beings. Myth is the facts of this narrative, arguments are the essence of reality. Euripides has always verified myth in the hard stone of reality. In Euripides' play, there is always a form of reality presented. *Medea* is set in mythological background. Medea was the daughter of King Etiz of Kalchiz. Medea was proficient in witchcraft. Jason, son of Eason, king of Iolkas, went to Kalchiz to fetch a golden skin on the orders of Peleus. That is where Medea and Jason first met and Medea falls in love with Jason at first sight.

In Euripides' plays, the form of reality has always been revealed. *Medea* was written based on a mythological background. (Hadas, 1950:47) Medea was the daughter of King Eitz of Kalchiz, skilled in witchcraft. Jason was the son of Eason king of Ayolcus. At the behest of Eason's brother Peleus, Jason went to Kalchiz to get the skin of the golden sheep. That is where Medea first saw Jason and Medea fell in love with Jason at first sight. And that's why Medea helped Jason in all cases to get the golden sheepskin. Jason succeeded with the help of Medea in all the difficult tasks given by King Etiz to get the skin of the golden sheep. Then, on his way home, Jason brings Medea with him. Medea protects the Argonauts from all dangers when they return home. As soon as Jason reached Ayolcus, he handed over the skin of the golden sheep to Peleus. Jason kept his promise, but King Peleus did not keep his promise. Peleus broke his promise by not giving the empire to Jason as promised. Then Medea kills Peleus with his magic and deceit. There were Peleus' daughters who killed their own fathers at the behest of Medea. Peleus's death at the hands of Peleus's daughters was very tactfully confirmed. Medea wanted to put Jason on the throne by killing Peleus through deception. Jason was a brave warrior, he did not want to seize the throne by deception.

Then, with the help of Medea's magic, father Ison regained his youth. Jason left Ayolcus, placing his young father Ison on the

throne. Then one day, Jason and Medea arrived in Corinth while traveling to different countries. Ten years have already passed. They have lived together like a happy couple for these ten years. Two of their children have already been born. Arriving in Corinth Jason marries Gluko, the daughter of King Crayon of Corinth without Medea's knowledge. Medea could not tolerate Jason's deception. Medea presents Jason's newlywed bride a venomous dress and crown. Gluko dies a painful death from wearing poisoned cloth and crown. Gluko's father Crayon also died while trying to remove clothes from her body. Then, in order to punish Jason, Medea killed their two children. After that, riding in a chariot carrying dragons, he found refuge with King Egeas in Athens.

Although Euripides wrote plays based on mythology, he always presented mythology in the context of contemporary times. In his plays, the feelings, conflicts, realities of the common people have been exposed in the shadow of myth and the demands of the time. In the context of the social system of that time, the rule of Jason's country Ayolcus was that- no foreigner could be married. (Storey & Allan, 1988:122) That is why Jason did not marry Medea. But they lived like husband and wife. Jason had two children with Medea. Medea loved Jason, but Jason never loved Medea. Jason has only used Medea to serve his own interests. Then, out of a sense of humanitarian responsibility, he returned home with Medea. Here in this play, we see the intense love of Medea for Jason. But on the other side, we cannot see Jason's love for Medea. The conflict of love here is basically a form of internal conflict between the elite and the elite class of the society. We can see that Jason didn't really like Medea but he brought Medea with him. They lived together because Medea helped Jason when he was in danger. Jason was living together and fathered two children without really liking Medea. Through this trait of Jason's character, Euripides wanted to show that the elite of society are always selfish.

During the time of Euripides, women had no social status. They had no participation in state affairs. Those who worked in agriculture at that time were socially non-elite. At the time, Greeks called other cities outside Greece 'barbaric'. (Kitto, 1950: 164) In their view,

the kings or statesmen of countries other than the Greeks were also non-aristocrats. Jason was not a native of Corinth, but he was a descendant of a dynasty. Although Medea was a descendant of the dynasty, he was not a native of Greece. And that's why, in the context of that time, Jason was a representative of the elite community, but Medea was a member of the non-elite class. In *Medea* play, the Greek Jason takes pride in bringing the Non-Greek Medea from the wild to the civilized Greek society. Medea lovingly helped Jason in all dangers, protected him from all the obstacles of the voyage. But Jason's unscrupulous utterance to this Medea:

But in return for the saving me I can show  
That you received more than you gave.  
First, instead of living among barbarians-  
In your barbarians land, you live in Hellas  
You have learned what Justice means  
And how the rule of law's superior  
To that of brute force. The people of Hellas  
Recognize your gift; you have won  
A name for yourself, a reputation. (Greene & Lattimore, 1959:321)

The opportunistic character Jason is a symbolic representation of the opportunism of the Athenian nobles of that time. The selfish Jason marries Medea for the greed of empire, for the greed of rank. The seemingly where barbaric Medea leaves in her state, motherland, loved ones and goes with the people he loves; there Jason the symbol of the aristocracy, marries Medea only for the lure of power and position. Here too, the distinction between the aristocracy and the non-aristocracy becomes evident, a small sign of their inner contradiction. Medea honestly loved Jason. That is the reason she went against her father and helped Jason. She bravely removed all obstacles to Jason's voyage. However, Jason is far from paying the price of this love of Medea, he is reluctant to acknowledge her favor. When Medea is outraged by Jason's new marriage she reminisces about the beneficial works she did to Jason. We can hear Medea's voice being uttered: The fame of your victory today, I am his first lamp. (Greene & Lattimore, 1959:319) Jason then very ungratefully refused all the help and cooperation of Medea, all the sacrifice, saying:

Now I believe, since thou wilt exaggerate thy favors,  
That to Cypris alone of Gods or men  
I owe the safety of my voyage. (Greene & Lattimore, 1959:320)

Jason owes only the Goddess Aphrodite for all the success of his voyage. Jason's image of ingratitude is the epitome of the aristocracy of the time. The elite of that time did not value the sacrifice of the people of the lower class. They did not even give any dignity to the people of the non-elite class. Here the nature of the aristocratic and non-aristocratic conflict became clear.

If love dies, the relationship that exists turns to be lifeless and formal. After Jason's second marriage, Medea and Jason's relationship became also lifeless and artificial. By the time Jason returned to Corinth, his self-esteem was strong. At that time, for him, Medea's existence had vanished.

Jason, a voluntary exile from Iolcus, arrives in Corinth and is defeated by his lust for power. In his lust for power, he marries Princess Gluko. The ambition of his mind and the dream of reaching the top of the elite class are reflected in his dialogue:

Since I have here with down from Iolcos  
With many a hopeless trouble at my back,  
What happier device could I, an exile  
From than marriage with the daughter of the king?(Greene & Lattimore, 1959:323)

Jason chose this path for him as there was no other way to gain royal honor than marrying a princess. His character has opportunistic traits on the one hand, and hypocrisy on the other. That is why Jason confessed to Medea at that moment that it was not possible to get royal honor without marrying the princess, so this marriage took place. The next moment, Jason again tries to distract Medea with his hypocritical behavior. That's what his voice echoes:

Be well assured of this: it was not for the Women's sake  
I wedded the king's daughter,  
My present wife; but as I have Already told thee,  
I wished to insure thy safety and to be the

Father of royal sons bound by blood  
 To my own children - a bulwark to our house. (Greene & Lattimore, 1959:324)

In the space of a few moments, these contradictory words in his mouth were a metaphor for the contradictory mentality of the aristocracy of the time. History is witness that the aristocracy has always deprived the non-nobility. The proof of this is the relationship and characters of Medea and Jason in the play *Medea*. Medea is not elite. Nevertheless, the being within her is honest. That is why it is heard in her mouth- if Jason was honest, he would refrain from marrying without telling her; rather, he would conquer her and persuade her to marry like a hero:

Hodst thou not had a villain's heart,  
 Thou should have gained my consent,  
 Then made this match, Instead of  
 Hiding it from those who loved thee. (Greene & Lattimore, 1959:325)

This contradictory tendency of the characters of Medea and Jason reveals not only their character traits, but also the characteristics of the two classes of which the two are representative. Medea's arrival in Greece broke down the walls of Greek nobility. Neither Athens nor Greece could accept the arrival of the barbaric magician Medea. Because the elites never compromise. Medea turns against her father in the hope of getting the man she loves. She killed her own brother and dismembered him and threw him into the sea. Her brutal behavior, this deception is all to save her love and the loved one. The angry side of Medea's character to save her love cannot be a negative side, but a positive aspect. All the misdeeds she has committed in her life have been for a noble purpose, to make her love imperishable. However, at the end of the play, the murder that this positive character Medea causes is completely contradictory and negative. Jason takes the final blow of self-esteem by insulting her love. As a result, she kills Jason's newly married wife, Gluko. Gluko's father Crayon also dies while trying to save Gluko. Medea kills her own sons with the intention of causing Jason the ultimate



blow in order to win over her own vengeance. This murder, this vengeful form at the end of the play, is completely negative side of her character. This transformation of Medea into the play *Medea* is largely due to the influence of the aristocracy of the time. The Elite system of the time turned a positive attitude into a negative attitude. That is why Lakovos Menealau says:

Euripides' Medea can be seen as the manifestation of revenge by an abandoned woman in a society which was built by men for men. The play connects us with the role of women in Ancient Greek society. She has been wronged by her husband, and her voice is the voice of oppression in a manmade society. Nevertheless, she goes too far by killing her own children. Through Medea, Euripides depicts the "theatricality of madness" which reveals the inevitable intersectionality of sociology, psychology, jurisprudence, and ethics. (Lucas, 1959:132)

The elite community is the ruler of everything in society. Elites create myths, they do all the work to break and build society. As we can see, the elite society of that time did not know how to value human relations. That is why, the elite of society ridicule Medea's tragic fate, while they are the ones who have led Medea to such extreme cruelty. The woman who once loved, had new dreams, traveled on the path of light, pushed that woman towards the dark life of the then elite society.

The main concern of *Medea* is the awakening of a human relationship; that human relationship in this play was destroyed by Jason. Here power and greed rise above human relations. At the center of which is the king. Jason wants to reach the pinnacle of power in that center. Medea suffers from all the deprivation in this journey of Jason's ambition and attainment of power. The boundless greed of power and aristocracy resulted in the destruction of human relationships. This greed is evident in Jason's character. As a result, the human relationship between Medea and Jason is severely broken. Medea killed her own children with fierce revenge. And for the same reason, instead of killing Jason, she kept him alive. Medea wanted him to suffer more pain for the rest of his life than Jason had inflicted on her.

In civilized Hellenic society, especially in imperial Athens, sympathy for barbarians or Asian or non- Greek women is not expected. All non-Greek women are despised and rejected by the men of Athens. Yet Jason has been living with Medea for ten years (he did it only out of gratitude, there was no love; only human responsibility). Nevertheless Medea kills Jason's own child and inflicts him with heartbreaking trauma that is largely the result of aristocratic and non-aristocratic conflict.

Euripides saw the myth from the opposite side, analyzed it according to his own faith and rationality. As a result, the myth was purified in his drama with new age ideas. That is why his the message of life expressed in the plays is never a transcendental grandeur, but a faithful sense of the mundane and human way of life. The characters in the vast world of Greek tragedy are almost always revealed in special majesty. But the characters in Euripides' plays are ordinary yet elevated to the extraordinary because of the dramatist's awareness of social responsibility. In the Reformation he prioritized contemporary philosophy and the problem of self-time over epochal considerations. Euripides sowed the eternal tragedy in the light of the daily "problems" of the contemporary state and social reality in the mythological alluvium of Greek drama. (Verrall, 1913:164)

Phrynicus was an early Greek chorus poet. He freed the dithyramb from the constraints of conventional conventions. His drama was free from Dionysian restrictions. (Murray, 1913:156) Similarly, the strong presence of contemporaneity and reality in the mythological background of Euripides' dramas diverts the conventional belief in a completely different direction. We can imagine the clash of national faith and the dramatist's personal faith, the absurdity of the mythic subject and the crippling cry of worldly expectations, or the great potential of man on earth rather than heaven. Euripides is repeatedly confronted with conflict over trusting or valuing the needs of the present over those of the past. Due to the necessity of the present, the content and style of his plays have changed. As a result, Euripides was able to bring tragedy from the mountain of Greek tragedy to the everyday happiness and sorrow of people.

The spouses of his plays are not manifested in the supernatural glory of Aeschylus or Sophocles, but in the joys and sorrows of everyday life. They stir people's sense of belonging. They are also entangled in anxious and desperate dilemmas.

The Sophist-influenced Euripides has created the characters of his tragedy in the light of reality and contemporary history. That is why the theme of his plays is not the great feat of opulence, but sympathy for the neglected. The desire to create a language to protest the pain of those oppressed by the gods exists in his writings. The revolutionary change in his theatrical thought was developed against the backdrop of the growing political, social, philosophical and economic changes in Athens in the fifth century. Euripides took truth and reality from the burnt life of man and state degradation. As a result, the modern attitude of breaking the veil of all illusions and depicting the beauty of reality has been manifest in his writings. Euripides portrayed the characters of his plays as human beings. Throughout his life, in all his writings, he composed the anguish of those human's inner soul. In the drama, he has painted human life in the light of social reality. Medea and Jason of the play *Medea* are a brilliant representative of those humans. The evidence that Euripides tried to portray the social reality in his plays with great skill is evident in the play *Medea*. In the context of the overall discussion, it would be appropriate to say that: in the play *Medea*, Euripides highlights the conflict between the aristocracy and the nobility of contemporary Athens.

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