

MEDEA DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Below are two interpretations of Jason and his role in the play, and three of Medea and her role in the play. Be prepared to support any of these positions, using passages or actions in the play. (You may feel the best interpretation is somewhere in between; that will come out in discussion but work from these interpretations.)

Consider such elements as:

- The sincerity or lack of it in the character, in words or actions
- The relationship of Jason and Medea, as expressed in their encounters
- The view others express of them
- The imagery associated with each of them (and for that matter, throughout the play)

Consult the Protevi study guide (linked from Assignments: resources) to quickly locate/ remind yourself of key scenes and expressions.

JASON

Interpretation 1:

From the start, he is portrayed as treacherous in abandoning Medea and their children. When he defends his actions, his arguments are clearly facile and self-serving, and he is more concerned with elevating his own position than anything else, including loyalty to his existing family. He shows several times that he does not really care about the children, and only thinks of their deaths as a diminishment of himself. Throughout, he behaves in a thoroughly despicable way, and the audience would have little sympathy for him.

Interpretation 2:

Although Jason has decided to remarry and abandon Medea, he has good reasons for doing so. Since being exiled from Iolcus, the family has nothing, and he is creating a real future for his family that they didn't have before. He also has every reason to be concerned about Medea, since she is a dangerous woman and has proven herself capable of violence. He does care about his children, and throughout the play is working within the conflicts surrounding Medea to try to do what's best for them, including insuring their future. In Jason, the audience would see a man who is trying to make the best of a bad situation, but is in a no-win situation and loses everything because he is not able to overcome the obstacles.

MEDEA

Interpretation 1:

Medea is a heroic character whose journey in the course of the play is from helplessness to revenge. The tension between her and Jason is not so much about love and marriage, or even shared parenthood, but results from her rage at Jason's betrayal. She is not so much concerned with losing her lover as with avenging herself on a man who broke his promises to her and does her harm. She loves the children, but everything she does is in service of revenge, and the

children are a necessary sacrifice. The audience would be horrified at the murder of the children, but would be more or less on her side and would understand why she found it necessary to do it.

Interpretation 2:

From the start of the play, Medea is an alarming character. While the Nurse and chorus express sympathy for her, their expressions of fear about her violence and danger, combined with her deceptive encounter with Creon, make everything she says and does suspect and give the audience ominous foreshadowing of the final destruction. Medea's arguments with Jason show her as a manipulator who knows how to work people's emotions (Jason's and those who are sympathetic to her), and her mentions of the children are all manipulation. At the end of the play, after she kills her children, the audience (at least its male members) would be reaffirmed in their view of women as irrational and potentially dangerous.

Interpretation 3:

Medea's story is one of loss, of being cut loose from everything human until finally there is nothing left of her but the witch whose dragon chariot reveals a completely different place in the world from her earlier helplessness. From the beginning, we see her cut off from everything – her home, her family, now her husband and possibly her children. The exchanges with Jason highlight the extent to which the Greek world has cut her off and rejected her. When she kills her children in revenge, it is the final stage of her tragic loss of everything human and transformation into the fearsome witch that has little concern for humanity.