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A Psycho-Analysis of Euripides' Play "Medea" (with Reference to Ahmad Aqeel Rubi's Translation)

ABSTRACT

"Medea" is a Greek play written by Euripides. The story is about a serious social issue of remarriage of Men and the response received by Women. Though such responses vary country to country but somehow they result similar familial destruction all around the world. The play uncovers the bitter realities related to the issue to the readers and to let them get through the actions which were practiced centuries back, and still exists ever beyond the geographical boundaries. In the article, the play is assessed in the light of psychological theories of personality and related traits presented by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung.

Keywords: Medea, Euripides, Freud, Jung, remarriage, theories of personality.

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Introduction

“Medea” is a tragic play written by the Greek playwright Euripides. Euripides (484 BC to 406 BC) is chronologically the last of the three renowned Greek classical tragedy writers (including Aeschylus and Sophocles). He was born in Athens. His father was the son of Mr. Mnesarchides and Cleito. Euripides is supposed to belong to a wealthy family. He participated in the drama competition for the first time in 455 BC and won the competition for the first time in 441 BC. In 408 BC, suggested by King Archelaus of Macedonia¹, Euripides left Athens and settled in Macedonia, and died in the same city in 406 BC. As far as Euripides' personal life is concerned, very little is known about him and it is said that his marital life was very unpleasant. Probably the name of his wife was Melito, had three sons, one of whom completed his play “Iphigenia at Aulis” after the death of Euripides.

Euripides was an intense intellectual who was influenced by Greek philosophers and thinkers like Protagoras² and Anaxagoras³. Although some of his plays contain shades of the traditional Greek religion but he was not a follower of outdated beliefs. An element of constant movement can be observed in his character. According to primal sources, Euripides wrote 92 plays, but only 19 of them are available, one of which is still not supposed to be of Euripides. Four of Euripides' plays won first prize in the drama competition. For twenty times, he was listed as one of the final three poets in poet-laureates⁴ competition. The importance of Euripides' art of drama can be measured from the fact that his art has been conceived as a regular theme in the works of many talented playwrights such as of Aristophanes⁵.

Euripides's plays are based on liberal thinking and rational attitudes towards ancient and modern religious ideas. To him, the actuality of many religious behaviors is nothing but fictitious stories. He also rejects Homer's religious views. Euripides' dramas refer to religious goddesses and he uses them only to comprehend the specific points of the story, and in his dramas we find no traditional devotion related to these goddesses. The characters of Euripides are from the public rather than the aristocrats. His characters are not free from human imperfections. His characters are surrounded by thoughts and anxieties through which he represents the public era. Sometimes, his character deviates from common issues and leads to social

¹ Name of a state in Greece

² Pre-Socrates Greek Philosopher (died: 420 BC)

³ Pre-Socrates Greek Philosopher (born: 480-500BC), described the philosophy of metaphysics.

⁴ Poets entitled Greek honorary crown made of the leaves and branches of the plant Laureate

⁵ Greek comedian (450 BC to 388 BC)

and philosophical discussions. Elements like chance, disorder, human irrationality and immorality lead his dramas to tragic end but even in the case of suffering; there is indifference from God.

Euripides's psychological perception enables him to capture the inner thoughts of the characters, and such consciousness is reflected in his scenes, especially based on love and passion. In his plays, the role of woman demands a special understanding. He has a long list of women. As the main character of his plays a woman is often portrayed angry, unfaithful, cruel, and extremist. It is also said that the base for woman's such photography is Euripides' personal obstinacy towards women. In this regard, Aristophanes' play "Women at the Thesmophoria" refers to the mockery of Greek women in Euripides' plays.

In the last decade of his literary period, Euripides created tragic dramas based on happy endings, also called romantic tragedies. Ion, Iphigenia among the Taurians and Helen are included in such dramas. These dramas formed the basis of the New Comedy in 4th century BC. The presence of realistic, sentimental and rational elements in Euripides' plays has kept his art alive to the day and many a parts of his writings have become proverbial.

"Medea" is a universal tragedy unfolded from the pen of Euripides, telling the story of a man's disloyalty and a woman's revenge. It is one of the Euripides' best and popular dramas. Medea was written in 431 BC, a story based on injustice against and revenge by a woman. "Medea" is princess of Colchis⁶ and the main character of this play. She is enjoying her life with her husband Jason along with two sons when suddenly her husband decides to re-wed with the princess of Carinthia⁷. Under the influence of her injured love, she falls for revenge on her husband. A war breaks out between her hate for her husband and the love of her children. In the end the passion of the love of the children is lost because of those wounds of negation which contaminated her personality.

She murders Jason's new wife and her father. She even murders two of her own sons. She leaves Jason alive to suffer the loneliness for lifetime. Even the bodies of her sons are not allowed to be buried near to Jason so that he might not be supported emotionally. Jason is incapable to punish Medea for what she did, and this is because he himself may be the real culprit. If examine indifferently the emotional role of Medea, she seems to be right in her actions because the exploitation of a woman's love means nothing to a man but it is not easy for a woman to share her love. The play is not only the portrayal of Medea's attitude but also of a general attitude. Euripides has

⁶ The eastern boundary of the Black Sea (Current Georgia)

⁷ An ancient city in Greece, rebuilt by the Romans in the 44 BC, became the capital of Greece.

explained the effects of this attitude of man on the psyche of a woman through the character of Medea.

The play perceives the aspect of the female psyche which is not related to a specific boundary, time or civilization but it is beyond all limits and restrictions. This play is a concrete illustration of those psychological behaviors and theories which were derived and presented by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung.

Before looking into the text and the psychological perspectives of the play, the list of characters is given below:

- Medea, heroine of the play, Jason's wife
- Jason, hero of the play, Medea's husband
- Creon, (King of Carinthia) and father of Jason's second wife
- Aegeus (King of Athens), sympathizer of Medea
- The "Nurse", a trusted maid of Medea
- The "Tutor", in charge of Jason's sons
- Chorus, A group of singing women
- Messenger, a servant
- Medea and Jason's two sons
- Creon and Jason's servants
- Aeetes (Medea's father)
- Pelias (Jason's Uncle)

Jason and his wife Medea are the main characters in drama. Jason is eight years old when his uncle Pelias kills his father and snatches his throne, while Jason runs to the woodland to save his life, and he grows up in the forest. Clothing made of animal skins; long hair and savage behavior become the hallmarks of Jason's personality. He demands Pelias for his father's kingdom. Pelias is horrified of Jason's appearance and considers it his trick. Pelias assigned Jason two risky tasks. He asks him to bring back the soul of the Phrixus⁸ controlled by the magician named Aeetes (Medea's father).

Jason is also supposed to bring back the Golden Fleece⁹ which Aeetes has taken from Phrixus. To Aeetes, Jason sets out with his companions on a ship named Argo. Jason's bravery fails in front of Aeetes, but Aeetes' daughter Medea (who is an expert enchantress herself) falls in love with Jason and helps him to survive.

For Jason, she deceives her father and gets Phrixus' soul along with Golden Fleece back. Medea's brother gets the hang of the matter and he is

⁸ The son of Athamas, king of the Greek state Thebes, whose step mother planned to murder him, his real mother Nephele sent a golden ram to escape away, reached to the region of Atis and died there.

⁹ The Golden Fleece was considered a symbol of kingship and government in Greek tradition.

planning a conspiracy against Jason. In the meanwhile, Medea murders him and runs away with Jason to Greece. In return for Jason's help, she seeks Jason's love only. Jason drops his father's throne and left for Carinthia with Medea.

The play begins with the long dialog of Medea's "Nurse". Medea's husband Jason plans to re-wed and to deport Medea. Jason seeks for a new wife for him, representing Jason's higher libido as compare to Medea... Libido is the concept originated by Sigmund Freud to signify the instinctual physiological or psychic energy associated with sexual urges and, in his later writings, with all constructive human activity¹. In psycho-analysis... the term "libido" does not mean psychical energy in general but the motive force of the sexual instincts.² Studies show a higher libido in men as compare to women.³ From Freud, Barbara Engler states:

"Sexual desires could be compared to a wish to remove an itch. However, as his work developed, Freud began to emphasize the psychological character of mental processes and sexuality. His use of the word libido to refer to the emotional and psychic energy derived from the biological drive of sexuality testifies to this shift in his thought"⁴

So Jason's higher urge proves the fact true and he goes for second marriage. Here the "itch" may be referred to his lost throne. And as he justifies his second marriage to get a chance to have the crown, it refers to the later writings of Freud.

Now beholding over Medea's reaction towards Jason's remarriage, she is depressed, remembering her past, the darker side of her personality where she left her blood relations for Jason, murdered her brother. At one hand her libido drives her to do such; on the other hand, she represents Carl Jung's idea of shadow in one's personality which is an archetype of darkness and repression, qualities a person do not want to be acknowledged, but attempt to hide from others. Medea's such condition causes her to repent on her past, to recall the repressed features inside her personality. From Jung, Ryckman states:

"In terms of the collective unconscious, the shadow consists of universal personifications of evil within our psyches. The devil, in its various forms, would be a prime example. Jung maintained that we may never understand this un-adapted side of our personality fully because we can never bring ourselves to confront absolute evil. Nevertheless, the shadow exists in all of us, and it manifests itself in a variety of ways—unaccountable moods, pains of unexplained origin, urges toward self-destruction, and desires to

harm others. It should be clearly understood that we do not, at base, have control over these impulses. Jung believed that these repressed feelings operate independently in the unconscious, where they join forces with other impulses. The result may be a complex with sufficient force to erupt into consciousness and momentarily subdue the ego. For example, a dignified and sophisticated executive may suddenly become highly abusive toward his colleagues during an important meeting. His arguments may become totally irrational, irresponsible, and unrelated to the issue under consideration. Finally, as with all of Jung's concepts, the shadow has positive as well as negative features. Some examples are the murderer who decides impulsively to spare his victim because the victim reminds him of a loved one; or the selfish woman who spends virtually all her time making money and then generously decides to donate a large percentage of her earnings to a local charity. More generally, the positive side of the shadow may be seen when a person feels unaccountably vital, spontaneous, and creative."⁵

Furthermore, Medea proves many aspects of above mentioned theory true.

The "Nurse" regrets that Princess Medea left her home and came here for Jason, the unfaithful, wishing she hadn't come here. In the text, the "Nurse" simply mentions Medea's love for Jason in these words:

"Her heart passionately in love with Jason"⁶

The playwright embellished the intensity of Medea's emotions in simple but expressive way. Medea's defeat can be well imagined by the fragments and Medea's inner condition is well revealed to the reader. Medea has always been Jason's supporter. But all this was a matter of love which now is turned into hatred. The playwright describes this idea in the following words:

"That's when life is most secure and safe, when woman and her husband stand as one. But that marriage changed. Now they're enemies. Their fine love's grown sick, diseased"⁷

Here the playwright reveals the power of libido as well as "self" in human. In Carl Rogers's theory:

"Self refers to those psychological processes that govern an individual's behavior."⁸

Medea's self is injured and causes to turn her emotional as well as psychological state. Man and woman have a productive approach towards many issues when they are in love, but if there is hatred they survive only for the "self", the archetype described by Jung. Here if we consider Freud's concept of libido, obviously it fabricates here Medea's behavior and transforms her love for Jason into hatred. On the other hand, Medea portrays a strong aspect of "self" according to which self is a center of an individual and he/she can never tolerate self-denial. Medea blames God for Jason's disloyalty. Her dilemma is described in the text in these words:

"She won't eat — her body she surrenders to the pain, wasting away"⁹

The playwright has given an extensive impression while portraying this condition which makes the pain of Medea very clear on the reader. The playwright described the deep perspective for Medea's pain; it is well used to describe the collision of Medea's personality. Medea is quiet, no voice affects her. She regrets that she left her homeland for a disloyal man like Jason. Here Jung's archetype "shadow" seems to be activated inside Medea. The pain is infused in text in such a way that the reader is compelled to feel this pain in a true meaning. Because of Jason's disloyalty Medea even finds her children no longer a source of joy for her. The "Nurse" is afraid of her revengeful nature. She is afraid that she may take her own life or of Jason, a way to the devastation. But Medea is not an ordinary lady so no one can stop her from doing so. The "Nurse" mourns over the matter. Medea has just met the grief and a lot to be seen. Jason may be abusive to Medea, but how can he do this to his children? The "Tutor" replies to the Nurse' dirge as:

Old devotions fade, pushed aside by new relationships.¹⁰

The playwright has painted the extreme pain in the text revealing the veracity of old and new relationships. Again, Jason's higher libido is presented here and the fact of a female's lower libido is reflected back to the lines.

The "Tutor" requests the "Nurse" that Medea should not be informed about her deportation plan aimed by Jason as it would be exposed by the time. The "Nurse" scolds Jason and goes inside with the children. Medea's mournful voice comes out of her room and she wishes the death for herself. The "Nurse" informs the children about the current situation by saying that their mother is suffering at the moment and it is safe for them to be away from their mothers in such a fierce situation. Medea's voice is raised from the palace full of grief and suffering, questioning does she not even have the right to cry? At the same time, she considers her children as part of her bad luck and says:

Oh my children, cursed children of a hateful mother— may you die with your father, all his house, may it all perish, crash down in ruins.¹¹

The “Nurse” is shaken to listen this and asks Medea to stay away her children from the fire of hatred. Here we may refer to the concept of shadow by Jung, according to which a murderer may decide impulsively to spare his victim because the victim reminds him of a loved one. Medea may think of her sons’ murder as to her they might be a remembrance of Jason rather than her own extension.

Here we may refer back to Freud as well, to him Libido plays a significant role in the character building of an individual and that actions of individuals are motivated and controlled by it. The motivation of Medea’s actions does not come from the outside circumstances but arise from her libido. All her actions are analyzed to bring a somewhat clear picture of her psychology. She murders her children after a lot of thinking because of the conflicts hatching in her mind. The movement of the unconscious of Medea has been highlighted. Her libido transforms into ego when her libido object is taken from her.¹²

Next, the song starts illustrating the cries of Medea. Her screams are being heard far and wide. Unfortunately, she is not comforted. The women of the Chorus sympathize with Medea. Medea is still inside the house responding the song:

Oh why can't a bolt of lightning strike me? What point is there in living anymore? I want death to come and sweep me off— let me escape this life of suffering!¹³

The text exposes the crash inside the heart of Medea. Medea comes out of the palace. She addresses the women of Carinthia and says that all the beauty of her life was due to Jason but when he became unfaithful then Medea has become hateful to others. The long dialogue of Medea reflects the frustration. In this long dialogue, Medea says:

This unexpected blow that's hit me, well, it's destroyed my heart. My life is gone,¹⁴

What could be more reflective of Medea’s devastation than this? Her whole universe is immersed. She longs for death. She is different from other women because everyone else is living in her homeland with her loved ones but she is suffering the punishment of disloyalty from her blood relatives in the form of separation. Here again we may refer to the Shadow presented by Jung.

She seeks the support of the women in the palace so that if she tries to get revenge on Jason, they will not stand in her way. The singer, who represents the troupe, tells her that she will remain completely silent on the matter. Meanwhile, the singer announces the arrival of King Creon. Creon addresses Medea and orders her to be deported along with her children. Medea says:

It's over. My enemies have set full sail against me, and there's no way I can avert disaster¹⁵

Medea rows on Creon that at one end she has been mistreated and on the other end she is being deported too, what is her fault? Creon replies that he is horrified of her magical powers. He heard that Medea wants to set fire to the lives of Jason and his new wife. That is why Creon wants to get her out of the country. He clears to Medea that his lamentation is not affecting him, so there is no use of her grumbling in front of him.

Medea responds to Creon by saying that she has always been controversial because of her extraordinary powers. But in reality she is not wise enough to betray like a king, Creon. In any case, she cannot do anything against anyone in the current situation. She favors Creon that he has made the right decision by marrying his daughter to Jason and that she is happy with the decision. If he gives her a place in the corner, it will be his favor. Creon responds that although Medea's pleas are lenient, Creon cannot be mistaken for trusting her. He tells Medea that it would be better for her to leave the country on her own; otherwise Creon's soldiers would pick her up and throw her away. Sensing Creon's harsh words, Medea guaranteed to leave the palace, but at the same time she begs him with the reference of his Parental affection to let her stay in Carinthia for just one more day so she can think about where she will go with her children. Creon reluctantly leaves the scene, allowing her to stay one more day.

Here Medea perfectly wears Jung's archetype the "persona". From Jung's theory, Ryckman states:

"The persona, in Jung's theory, is a compromise . . . between the demands of the environment and the necessities of the individual's inner constitution. It is the mask we wear in order to function adequately in our relationships with other people. This mask may take as many forms as the roles we play in our daily routines. It also aids in controlling evil forces in the collective unconscious."¹⁶

Medea uses persona to deal with Creon according to her need so perfectly that Creon couldn't get her in fact. As refer to the last part of above statement, Medea's persona doesn't control her evil force rather this force is hyper active behind the persona. But in the front, she is so composed that Creon couldn't find this hyper activity at all.

Medea's next dialogue can be called the most important dialogue of the drama. She talks about plotting to murder Jason, Creon and her daughter. She does not want to destroy her enemies with the help of fire, sword or poison as she might be trapped by adopting these conventional methods. She is confident because of the relation to the goddess Hecate¹⁰ expressed in her speech:

By Hecate, the goddess I worship more than all the others, the one I choose to help me in this work, who lives with me deep inside my home,

¹⁰ According to Greek mythology, the goddess of magic and sorcery

these people won't bring pain into my heart and laugh about it. This wedding of theirs, I'll make it hateful for them, a disaster— Creon's marriage ties, my exile from here, he'll find those bitter. So come, Medea, call on all those things you know so well, as you plan this and set it up¹⁷

Hecate makes Medea confident to take revenge by saying that Medea is not an ordinary woman rather she belongs to the Helios tribe of the Sun, and the race of Sisyphus¹¹ is inferior to her. Hecate empowers Medea and prepares her to deal with situations.

Jason arrives and informs Medea that she is being exiled because of her bad temper and bad language. Though there was a love between them, even now for her, there is no anger in his heart. If Jason had wanted, the king could have withdrawn Medea's deportation order, but he did not do so because of Medea's rude behavior. Medea is overwhelmed by his words and runs after him. She reminds him of her kindness and at the same time says that if he had no children then his second marriage would have been justified but now this act of his is displeasing. She regrets on her faithfulness to Jason and the disloyalty to her father and brother. Her regression refers to the traits under the arch type Shadow as well as refers to the Ego. She is not ready to accept her denial at all.

Jason decides to act wisely in return for her harsh words. He says that Medea's favors are not without reason as she has enjoyed Jason's companionship in return. Jason reminds Medea to take her out of the wild and gave her a place in civilized Greece. To Jason, the purpose of marrying Creon's daughter is simply to alleviate the hardships Jason has had to endure for Medea after leaving his homeland and settling in Carinthia. In Jason's view, it's the only possibility he had to take a chance to nurture Medea's offspring along with the princess's new offspring so that a connection could be established between his elder children and the royal blood. But Medea's aggression has proved to be a barrier in compliance of his wish. Medea considers Jason's words as mere deception and says that she is old, that's why Jason is looking for a new young woman. But Jason stands by his sayings. He blames Medea's immorality for all the problems and offers her that many of his friends are abroad who can help Medea after exile. But Medea refuses to take any help from him. She starts shouting at Jason, who then leaves.

Here Aegeus, the king of Athens, arrives. Medea and he are familiar to each other. Medea asks for the details of his arrival here. Aegis states that he went to the temple of Apollo to beg to have children. When Aegis inquires Medea about her condition, she tells him the whole story. She seeks for his help and assures him the gift of children because she is aware of the herbs that can end male infertility.

¹¹ King of Corinth

Aegeus likes what he says and agrees to help her for two reasons, one is to sympathies her and the other is the hope for children. He promises Medea if she comes to his homeland, he will be her protector. Medea especially lets Aegeus swears by God that he will not deceive her.

Medea asks her special the "Nurse" to arrange her meeting with Jason and not to reveal her plans to Jason. Medea has confidence in her. The "Nurse" carries her message to Jason. When Jason arrives, Medea expresses her sorrow in sugary words and declares him right in all matters. She calls her children to meet their father and at the same time her eyes are full of tears. Seeing her false tears, the voice is raised from the troupe (chorus) that it is wished the evil hidden inside Medea would really flow in these tears. Jason is shocked when the matter turns around and asks Medea about the tears. She justifies it by saying:

But it's a woman's nature to shed tears.¹⁸

In this one sentence, the playwright has described the whole psyche of a woman in general. No doubt that a woman uses tears well in every emotion, occasion and matter and a woman's false tears show more perfection than the real. Here Medea again uses a perfect persona according to her needs Medea is wishing Jason to save her children from deportation. At the same time, she informs Jason about the golden crown and the wedding dress, which is given to Medea by the goddesses, but she wants to send this gift to Jason's new bride through the hands of her children. Despite Jason's prohibition, she gives the children this special gift and asks them to go to the bride. Children and Jason leave.

Medea's servant comes with the good news that the new bride has received gifts from her children and ended their punishment.

A messenger arrives from the royal palace, threatening Medea to flee in a whirlwind, as according to Medea's plan the royal family is destroyed. Medea wants to hear the whole story on which the messenger says that the wedding dress and the golden crown sent by Medea were worn by Jason's new bride. Shortly after, the princess's condition began to worsen, and an old the maid rushed to her help. The crown enthralled the princess's head and her gold melts and clings to her forehead and earlobes. Her father Creon hugs her body and starts crying. Then, as soon as he begins to separate himself from the corpse, it becomes obvious that he cannot be separated from the corpse.

The chorus mourns the tragic death of Creon and his daughter. Medea breathes a sigh of relief and enters in the palace to kill her sons. In the voice of the song, Medea is requested to stay away from this horrible act which is of no use. The screams of the children are so loud that a woman from the troupe intends to help them, but in the meanwhile, Medea's sword kills the children.

Jason goes to his murdered children in a shock and finds the door locked. As he tries to break down the door, he finds Medea riding in a heavenly

chariot sent by her ancestral deity, along with the bodies of her sons. Jason expressed his grief and anger in a long conversation. He considers her a hungry lioness- Medea doesn't care. Jason requests Medea to hand over the bodies of his sons so that he can bury them himself. Medea refuses and informs Jason that she is going to settle down with Aegeus and that her remembrance will continue to disturb Jason. Medea says on Jason's curse that God will not hear the voice of such a traitor. Jason complains to Zeus as to why he was deprived of performing the last rites of his children. Medea's chariot flies. The sound of the last song echoes according to which Zeus decides fate for the people even if they are living in palaces. Sometimes man is unable to understand his destiny. The story ends here.

At the end of the play, Medea's character signifies to a practical presentation of Freud and Jung's theories. Refer back to the murder of Medea's brother, it can be related to Medea's new feeling of love with Jason that controls her libido. She is in danger of losing her libido object. She can go to all extremes to preserve this new feeling which she relishes now. Medea's actions are now derived by this new force and she is unable to act reasonably. She is ready to make the unwomanly move to kill her brother in order to get a safe passage for Jason and her. She acts unreasonably and unwomanly because she is unable to control the newly felt feeling of libido. This strange force of libido resides in her unconscious and inspires her actions. According to Freud "...it (libido) manifests itself in irresistible attractions exerted by one sex upon the other and that its aim is sexual union or at least such actions as would lead to that union." It is no doubt her overpowering libido which takes control of her consciousness and she acts as her libido dictates her. It is worth noting that all of her actions are violent now. This is explained by Freud as, "... the libido is regularly and lawfully of a masculine nature, whether in the man or in the woman."¹⁹

Next, the masculine nature of Medea's libido can be spectated when she kills her sons. Adding to this, she practices Jung's theories of Shadow, Persona and Self in a very well manner. Medea doesn't present a single lady of Greece rather than she is a representative of present woman of every region as well.

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