

Medea Key Info

Writer: Euripides | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Key Facts

- **Full Title:** Medea
- **Author:** Euripides (c. 480 – c. 406 BCE)
- **Title of the Author:** One of the three great Athenian tragedians (alongside Aeschylus and Sophocles); called the “Tragedian of Human Nature.”
- **Source:** Draws from Greek mythology, especially the story of Jason and the Argonauts, and Medea’s role as a sorceress and outsider.
- **Written Time:** 431 BCE during the City Dionysia festival in Athens.
- **First Performed:** 431 BCE at the City Dionysia in Athens, where it won third prize.
- **First Published:** 431 BCE.
- **Genre:** Greek Tragedy / Revenge Tragedy / Mythological Drama
- **Form:** Verse drama written in Ancient Greek; dialogue in iambic trimeter and choral odes in lyric meters.
- **Structure:** A single play (not part of a trilogy); revolves around Medea’s betrayal by Jason, her revenge through the murder of their children, and her escape in a chariot sent by the Sun-god Helios.
- **Tone:** Intense, emotional, passionate, vengeful, tragic, shocking, and psychologically probing.
- **Point of View:** Dramatic dialogue and choral odes; perspectives shift between Medea, Jason, the Chorus of Corinthian women, Creon, the Nurse, the Tutor, and Aegeus.
- **Significance:** A landmark tragedy exploring betrayal, revenge, exile, the condition of women, and the destructive power of uncontrolled passion. It shocked ancient audiences with Medea’s infanticide and remains one of the most controversial and studied Greek tragedies.
- **Language:** Ancient Greek.
- **Famous Line:** “We women are the most unfortunate.” (Medea)

- **Setting:**
- **Time Setting:** Mythological time, after Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece. (c. 12th century BCE, mythological time).
- **Place Setting:** Corinth, in front of Medea and Jason's house.

Key Notes (Translation)

Golden Fleece (The Tale of the Golden Fleece): According to Greek mythology, the Golden Fleece was the skin of a winged ram (Chrysomallos) whose fleece shone like pure gold. Nephele, the goddess of clouds, prayed to the gods to save her children, Phrixus and Helle. The gods sent the magical ram, Chrysomallos. Phrixus and Helle escaped on its back, but Helle fell into the sea (the place later called Hellespont). Phrixus safely reached Colchis and sacrificed the ram to Zeus. He then gave the fleece (Golden Fleece) to King Aeetes. Aeetes hung it in the sacred grove of Ares and placed it under the guard of an immortal dragon that never slept. Later, Jason arrived in Colchis with the Argonauts. With the help of Medea's magic, he put the dragon to sleep and took the Golden Fleece. The Golden Fleece symbolized authority, kingship, and divine right.

Feminism: Medea is known as one of the most feminist voices in ancient Greek literature. Euripides portrayed Medea as a strong woman who fights for her rights and dignity. She complains that women are neglected in society and bound by the decisions of their husbands. The famous line, "Of all creatures that have life and reason, we women are the most miserable of living beings," expresses the suffering of women. Though Medea's act of revenge is horrifying, her position symbolizes the oppressed lives of women. Euripides gave a voice to women on stage. Medea is not only vengeful, but also a symbol of female helplessness, humiliation, and social injustice. That is why Medea remains a central text in Feminist literary criticism.

Sorcery (Magic): Medea was an extraordinary sorceress, a descendant of the sun-god Helios. Euripides enriched her character with supernatural powers. In the play, her use of magic is frequent—through spells, poisons, and enchantments, she destroys her enemies. She sends a poisoned robe and crown to Glauce, the princess of Corinth, which burst into flames and killed her. This scene makes the play terrifying and highly dramatic. Magic here is not only for spectacle, but also a symbol of Medea's power and isolation. In a society that saw women as weak, Medea empowered herself with magic. Thus, magic becomes a symbol of her strength, fear, and unnatural control.

Infanticide (Child Murder): The most shocking and horrifying moment in Medea is the killing of her own children. To take revenge on Jason's betrayal, Medea murders her two sons.

Euripides presents this as a symbol of the boundless extremes of human passion, anger, and vengeance. Infanticide is not just personal revenge but also a radical break from the traditional concept of motherhood. Medea shows that a woman, in extreme circumstances, can break social expectations and make dreadful decisions. This act shocks the audience and immortalizes the play. Infanticide makes Medea at once terrifying and noble—she destroys herself but refuses to compromise in revenge. That is why this theme is one of the most discussed in the history of Greek tragedy.

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