

Medea

FREELY ADAPTED FROM THE
"MEDEA" OF EURIPIDES

By Robinson Jeffers



Samuel French, Inc.

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SAMUEL FRENCH, INC.

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MEDEA

STORY OF THE PLAY

"Medea" won third prize for Euripides at its first performance in the annual drama festival in Athens. Since 431 BC, the universality of this Greek tragedy has impelled twenty playwrights and uncounted translators to indite repeatedly this protest against woman's status in a man's world. The legend has been treated in six languages as drama, opera, poetry, even as a domestic burlesque for Victorian audiences in one act entitled: "Medea, or the best of mothers with a brute of a husband." Robinson Jeffers, in the words of Brooks Atkinson, "has retained the legend and characters; has freely adapted 'Medea' into a modern play by dispensing with the formalities, editing most of the woe-woe out of the chorus speeches; . . . and does not waste time invoking the Greek gods who were more numerous than influential in the dispensation of justice."

Prior to the play's opening, Jason has returned from his Argosy to Colchis where with the aid of Medea's sorcery he stole the Golden Fleece from the serpent-guarded cave. The princess of Colchis saved his life once again when she slew her brother who pursued them in their flight to Jason's Argo anchored on the Black Sea shore. Jason returned victorious to Corinth and married Medea who bore him two sons. The "Medea" begins several years later. Jason, driven by ambition, renounces Medea to wed Creusa, young daughter of King Creon. In the heart of the abandoned barbarian wife, justice is fused to vengeance. When Creon exiles her from Corinth, endless loathing for

her perfidious husband drives Medea to inexorable revenge. Invoking her witchcraft, Medea sends Creusa gifts of a golden robe and crown which when donned cremate the monarch's daughter, as well as Creon who attempts to rescue her. Her final fury is vented when Medea slays her two sons and departs from kingless Corinth leaving behind her a Jason, broken, despairing . . . "hopeless, friendless, mateless, childless, avoided by gods and men, unclean with awful excess of grief."

Freely adapted from the "Medea" of Euripides by Robinson Jeffers; staged by John Gielgud; settings by Ben Edwards; costumes by Castillo; lighting by Peggy Clark; original music and scoring by Tibor Serly; presented by Robert Whitehead and Oliver Rea at the National Theatre Monday evening, October 20, 1947.

THE CAST

THE NURSE.....	<i>Florence Reed</i>
THE TUTOR.....	<i>Don McHenry</i>
THE CHILDREN.....	<i>Gene Lee, Peter Moss</i>
FIRST WOMAN OF CORINTH.....	<i>Grace Mills</i>
SECOND WOMAN OF CORINTH.....	<i>Kathryn Grill</i>
THIRD WOMAN OF CORINTH.....	<i>Leone Wilson</i>
MEDEA.....	<i>Judith Anderson</i>
CREON.....	<i>Albert Hecht</i>
JASON.....	<i>John Gielgud</i>
ÆGEUS.....	<i>Hugh Franklin</i>
JASON'S SLAVE.....	<i>Richard Hylton</i>
ATTENDANTS TO MEDEA.....	<i>Martha Downes, Marian Seldes</i>
SOLDIERS.....	<i>Ben Morse, Jon Dawson, Richard Boone, Dennis McCarthy</i>

SYNOPSIS

The entire action of the play occurs before Medea's house in Corinth.

MEDEA

DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTERS

THE NURSE: *An old slave-woman, Medea's nurse in childhood, now her devoted servant.*

THE TUTOR: *An old man, a slave, tutor to Medea's children.*

THE CHILDREN: *Two little boys.*

CHORUS: *Corinthian women of various types.*

MEDEA

CREON: *A man of fifty, perhaps; the ruler of Corinth.*

JASON: *Famous hero and explorer, now settling toward middle age.*

ÆGEUS (E'GEUS—accent on first syllable): *ruler of Athens, visiting Corinth. A kindly person, a little older than Creon.*

A YOUNG MAN: *A slave of Jason's.*

Also men in attendance on Creon, Jason, Ægeus, and serving women belonging to Medea.

Medea

ACT ONE

HOUSE LIGHTS UP

CURTAIN

LIGHT CUE #1 UP

LIGHT CUE #1 DOWN

SCRIM at front of scene. MUSIC, LIGHT CUE #2,
SEA EFFECT (all together).

The NURSE comes from the door Left toward the
front of the stage, as soon as SCRIM is fully drawn.

LIGHT CUE #3
SEA EFFECT STOPS

THE NURSE. (*Reaches up stage Right position, then
speaks*)

I wish the long ship Argo had never passed that peri-
lous channel between the Symplegades,

I wish the pines that made her mast and her oars still
waved in the wind on Mount Pelion, and the gray
fishhawk

Still nested in them, the great adventurers had never
voyaged

Into the Asian sunrise to the shores of morning for
the Golden Fleece

(LIGHT CUE #4.)

(*Crosses up to 3rd step, Center.*)

For then my mistress Medea

Would never have seen Jason, nor loved and saved him,
nor cut herself off from home to come with him

Into this country of the smiling chattering Greeks and
the roofs of Corinth: over which I see evil

Hang like a cloud. For she is not meek but fierce, and
the daughter of a king.

Yet at first all went well.
The folk of Corinth were kind to her, they were proud
of her beauty, and Jason loved her. Happy is the
house

Where the man and the woman love and are faithful.
(Sits on 3rd step)

Now all is changed; all is black hatred. For Jason
has turned from her; he calls the old bond a bar-
barian mating, not a Greek marriage; he has cast
her off

And wedded the yellow-haired child of Creon, the
ruler here. He wants worldly advantage, fine
friends,

And a high place in Corinth. For these he is willing to
cast Medea like a harlot, and betray the children
That she has borne him. He is not wise, I think

(LIGHT CUE #5)

But Medea
Lies in the house, broken with pain and rage; she will
neither eat nor drink, except her own tears,
She turns her face toward the earth, remembering her
father's house and her native land, which she
abandoned

For the love of this man: who now despises her.
And if I try to speak comfort to her she only stares at
me, great eyes like stones. She is like a stone on
the shore

Or a wave of the sea, and I think she hates
Even her children.

(Rises and crosses to rock down Right)

She is learning what it is to be a foreigner,
cast out, alone and despised.

She will never learn to be humble, she will never learn
to drink insult

Like harmless water. O I'm in terror of her: whether
she'll thread a knife through her own heart,

Or whether she'll hunt the bridegroom and his new

bride, or what more dreadful evil stalks in the forest

Of her dark mind. I know that Jason would have been wiser to tempt a lioness, or naked-handed Steal the whelps of a tiger.

(From up Right she sees MEDEA'S BOYS coming with their TUTOR, ELDER BOY first with sea-shell, YOUNGER BOY on TUTOR'S back.)

Here comes the happy children. Little they know Of their mother's grief. *(LIGHT CUE #6)*

(During this speech TUTOR lets BOY off his back. BOYS go up and sit up Right corner of house. TUTOR crosses down Center to Left of NURSE.)

THE TUTOR.

Old servant of my lady, why do you stand out here, keeping watch in solitude With those grim eyes? Is it some trouble of your own that you are lamenting? I should think Medea Would need your care.

THE NURSE.

It is all one to Medea, whether I am there or here. Yes, it is mine, My trouble. My lady's grief is my grief. And it has hurt me So that I had to come out and speak it to the earth and sky.

THE TUTOR.

Is she still in that deep despair?

THE NURSE.

You are lucky, Old watchdog of Jason's boys. I envy you, You do not see her. This evil is not declining, it is just at dawn. I dread the lion-eyed Glare of its noon.

THE TUTOR.

Is she so wrought? Yet neither you nor Medea

Knows the latest and worst.

THE NURSE. (*Rises from rock*)

What? What?

THE TUTOR. (*Crosses to Center*)

I shouldn't

have spoken.

THE NURSE. (*She follows him to Left Center. As she does this Boys cross down to rock. One sits on rock and other sits on ground at his feet*)

Tell me the truth, old man. You and

I are two slaves, we can trust each other,

We can keep secrets.

THE TUTOR

I heard them saying—when we

walked beside the holy fountain Peirene,

Where the old men sit in the sun on the stone benches

—they were saying that Creon, the lord of this land,

Intends to drive out Medea and the children with her,

these innocent boys, out of this house

And out of Corinth, and they must wander through the wild world

Homeless and helpless.

THE NURSE.

I don't believe it. Ah, no! Jason

may hate the mother, but he would hardly

Let his sons be cast out.

THE TUTOR.

Well—he has made a new

alliance.

He is not a friend of this house.

THE NURSE. (*She crosses below TUTOR to Left*)

If this were true!—

MEDEA. (*Within house. She is Asiatic and laments loudly*)

Death.

THE NURSE.

Listen! I hear her voice

MEDEA. (*Within*)

Death. Death is my wish. For myself, my enemies, my children. Destruction.

THE NURSE.

Take the children away, keep them away from her.
Take them to the other door. Quickly.

(During "Deaths" YOUNGER BOY rises from rock. TUTOR crosses, picks him up and exits Left, followed by ELDER BOY. They go out, toward rear door of the house. THE NURSE looks after them, wringing her hands.)

MEDEA.

That's the word. Grind, crush, burn. Destruction. Ai—
Ai—

THE NURSE. *(Wringing her hands)*

This is my terror:

To hear her always harking back to the children, like
a fierce hound at fault. O unhappy one,
They're not to blame.

(Sits step Right of pillar down Left.)

(LIGHT CUE #7)

MEDEA. *(Within)*

If any god hears me: let me die.

Ah, rotten, rotten, rotten: death is the only
Water to wash this dirt.

(FIRST and SECOND WOMAN are coming in up Right, but the NURSE does not yet notice them. She is intent on MEDEA's cries and her own thoughts.)

THE NURSE.

Oh, it's a bad thing

(LIGHT CUE #8)

To be born of high race, and brought up wilful and
powerful in a great house, unruled.

And ruling many: for then if misfortune comes it is
unendurable, it drives you mad. I say that poor
people

Are happier: the little commoners and humble people,
the poor in spirit: they can lie low
Under the wind and live:

(Enter THIRD WOMAN; joins FIRST and
SECOND up Right Center.)

while the tall oaks and cloud-
raking mountain pines go mad in the storm,
Writhe, groan and crash.

MEDEA.

Ai!

THE NURSE.

This is the wild and terrible justice of God: it brings
on great persons
The great disasters.

MEDEA.

Ai!!!

THE NURSE. (*Becomes aware of the WOMEN who
have come in, and is startled from her reverie. FIRST
WOMAN crosses down Center*)

What do you want?

FIRST WOMAN.

I hear her crying again: it

is dreadful.

SECOND WOMAN. (*Crosses down to Right of FIRST
WOMAN*)

Her lamentation.

She is beautiful and deep in grief: we couldn't help
coming.

THIRD WOMAN. (*Crosses down to Right of SECOND
WOMAN*)

We are friends of this house and its trouble hurts us.

THE NURSE.

You are right, friends; it is not a home. It is broken.
A house of grief and of weeping.

MEDEA. (*Within*)

Hear me, God, let me

die. What I need: all dead, all dead, all dead

(THIRD WOMAN crosses down Right of rock.)

Under the great cold stones. For a year and a thousand

years and another thousand: cold as the stones,
cold,
But noble again, proud, straight and silent, crimson-
cloaked
In the blood of our wounds.

(FIRST WOMAN crosses to 3rd step, Center.)

FIRST WOMAN.

O shining sky, divine earth,
Harken not to the song that this woman sings.
It is not her mind's music; her mind is not here.
She does not know what she prays for.
Pain and wrath are the singers.

SECOND WOMAN. (*Crosses to second step, facing door*).

Unhappy one,
(LIGHT CUE #9)

Never pray for death, never pray for death,
He is here all too soon.
He strikes from the clear sky like a hawk,
He hides behind green leaves, or he waits
Around the corner of the wall.
O never pray for death, never pray for death—
Because that prayer will be answered.

MEDEA. (*The rise and fall of her voice indicate that she is prowling back and forth beyond the main doorway, like a caged animal*)

I know poisons. I know the bright teeth of steel. I
know fire. But I will not be mocked by my enemies,
(THIRD WOMAN crosses up Right of rock to
Right Center.)

And I will not endure pity. Pity and contempt are
sister and brother, twin-born. I will not die tamely.
I will not allow blubber-eyed pity, nor contempt either,
to snivel over the stones of my tomb.
I am not a Greek woman.

THIRD WOMAN. (*Crosses to step Center*)

No, a barbarian woman from
savage Colchis, at the bitter end

Of the Black Sea. Does she boast of that?

SECOND WOMAN.

She doesn't

know what she is saying.

MEDEA. (*Within*)

Poisons. Death-magic. The sharp sword. The hemp rope. Death-magic.

Death—

SECOND WOMAN. (*Crosses down Right of rock.*

THIRD WOMAN *joins her*)

I hate Jason, who made this sorrow.

FIRST WOMAN. (*Crosses to NURSE in front of doors*)

Old and honored servant of a great house, do you think it is wise

To leave your lady alone in there, except perhaps a few slaves, building that terrible acropolis

Of deadly thoughts? We Greeks believe that solitude is very dangerous, great passions grow into monsters

In the dark of the mind; but if you share them with loving friends they remain human, they can be endured.

MEDEA. (*Within*)

Ai!

FIRST WOMAN.

I think you ought to persuade Medea to come from the dark dwelling, and speak with us, before her heart breaks,

Or she does harm to herself. She has lived among us, we've learned to love her, we'd gladly tell her so.

It might comfort her spirit. (*LIGHT CUE #10.*)

THE NURSE.

Do you think so? She

wouldn't listen

(*Door BOLT is heard. NURSE rises. FIRST WOMAN crosses down Right, joining other two WOMEN, and sits on rock*)

—Oh, oh, she is coming!

Speak carefully to her: make your words a soft music.