Reading Beneath the Words: Dramatic Techniques in Medea

About This Guide

Euripides' Medea develops its tragedy through argument, persuasion, concealed intentions, and the difference between what characters say and what they intend.

1. Persuasive Dialogue

Medea persuades Creon to delay her exile, obtains Aegeus' promise of refuge, and convinces Jason that she accepts his new marriage. Compare the different appeals she uses.

Questions: What does each listener want or fear? How does Medea adapt her speech?

2. Dramatic Irony

When Medea pretends to reconcile with Jason, the audience knows that she plans revenge, while Jason believes her change of heart is sincere.

Questions: What does Jason misunderstand? How does the audience's knowledge increase suspense?

3. Imagery of Marriage and Exile

The play repeatedly evokes marriage, the household, family ties, and the loss of homeland. The home becomes both a symbol of belonging and a site of betrayal.

Questions: How does Medea describe marriage and the vulnerability of exile?

4. Choral Commentary

The Corinthian women initially sympathize with Medea, but recoil as her plans turn toward the children.

Questions: How does the Chorus' response change? What moral distinctions does it draw?

5. Messenger Speech and Offstage Violence

A messenger recounts the deaths of Creon and his daughter. The children's cries are heard from inside the house, but their deaths are not shown.

Questions: What effects do narration and unseen violence produce?

6. The Ending and Divine Imagery

Medea appears in the chariot of Helios, beyond Jason's reach. Her escape complicates rather than settles questions of justice.

Questions: How does the chariot alter the balance of power? Does the ending resolve the tragedy?

Literary Devices at a Glance

Persuasive dialogue; dramatic irony; imagery; choral commentary; messenger speech; offstage violence and visual spectacle.

Classroom Activity

Compare Medea's conversations with Creon and Jason. For each, identify her objective, her listener's assumptions, her appeals, what the audience knows, and the effect on the plot.

Analytical Writing

Choose one technique and explain how it develops betrayal, justice, power, or revenge. Support your argument with a particular scene and explain its effect on the audience.

Note to the Educator

Translations vary in wording and line numbering. Have students identify scenes and dramatic situations and connect techniques to meaning, not merely name devices.

Reading the Play

This guide may be used with any complete translation. Ian Johnston’s translation is published by Richer Resources Publications: https://richerresourcespublications.com/books/classics/medea/25

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