

Medea's Rise in Feminist Consciousness

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Abstract. Medea is a representative female image in ancient Greek mythology. Her experience reflects the rise in feminist consciousness, and her image portrays the strong and unrepressed desire in Greek traditional culture. Medea illustrates her constant pursuit of a romantic relationship, and within her unrestrained character lays a lasting spirit. Medea's feminist consciousness is constantly awakened and developed and has experienced stages of awakening to expansion with the change in her relationship. Facing the betrayal of love, her brutal nature breaks out. In the later period, the "devil" side of her nature appears. She begins to question what was originally regarded as life, using wisdom to fight against power and expressing a shocking resistance to "love" and dignity. Medea has become a model figure in ancient women's struggle for freedom and her revenge signifies the awakening of feminist consciousness.

Keywords: Feminism; Medea; Euripides; Tragedy.

1. Introduction: Medea's Rise in Feminist Consciousness

Medea is representative of the image of ancient Greek women. In "Argonautica", King Iolcus, unfortunately, loses his throne and is killed by his enemies. His son Jason determines to regain the throne to achieve the goal of revenge for his father and travels thousands of miles to steal the Golden Fleece. On his way through many hardships, Jason meets Medea, the daughter of the king of Colchis. Medea develops feelings for Jason, and not only uses witchcraft to help Jason avenge the family's wishes but also becomes Jason's wife. But Jason betrays Medea and engages with Creusa, the daughter of King Creon. To achieve her goal of revenge on Jason, Medea plans to kill Creusa and her children. Her abandonment reflects the underappreciation of women's status; her revenge reflects the awakening of feminist consciousness.

Through Medea's resistance to family and her conflict with Jason, this paper analyzes the development and changes in Medea's self-consciousness as a representative of ancient Greek women. Medea's revenge psychology from the perspective that the loss of women's status leads to its awakening and resistance, and the social and historical origin of this psychology will also be explored.

2. Feminist Consciousness Begins to Sprout

In Greek mythology, Medea is a combination of god, man, and witch. Her grandfather Helios is the original sun god; She lived the same life as mortals and faced the same emotional experiences as mortals; While she is the priestess of the moon god Hecate, the priestesshood of Athena was a position of great importance. Compared with ordinary people who are bound by moral concepts, Medea is free from any constraints, she is a character with an unrestricted, independent, and bold personality. Medea is not the typical princess that needs to be saved, but an essential helper that contributes to Jason's success. She shows characteristics beyond the times and helps her lover Jason to obtain the golden fleece.

3. The Loss of Women's Value

In Medea's era, the development of society forms a male-centered society, and the marriage and family system based on monogamy is also consolidated. Women are reduced to the property and accessories of men, slaves of labor, and tools for childbearing. The value of women must be endowed by men to exist. As the second sex, women are under heavy shackles in a patriarchal society and are in a subordinate position. The so-called monogamy is nothing but monogamy for women and not for

men. Women in Athens had to strictly observe their chastity and were even imprisoned in boudoirs. Like slaves and metics, Athenian women were denied political freedom, being excluded from the law courts and the Assembly. (Schaps, D. M., 1998) In some cases, if women were seen to comment on their husband's involvement in politics, they were reprimanded. Women's self-worth is buried and cannot be reflected.

Although Medea has beauty and wisdom in the country of Colchis and is proficient in witchcraft, she is at best a priest, usually reclusive, and the important affairs of the country are self-contained by the male. Under the power of her father and brother, love has become her only pursuit and sustenance, and her talents are still not valued by others. When Jason overcomes difficulties and finally sets foot on the land of Colchis, what awaited them is still an infinite danger. King Aeëtes of Colchis pretends to give them the golden fleece but secretly wants to put them to death. When Medea meets Jason, she can feel her voice. Driven by the power of love, she challenges patriarchy. In pursuit of her love, she betrays her father's wishes. (Argonautica, ca. 200-300 B.C.E) The reason why she betrayed her father was that he severely hindered her pursuit of freedom and happiness. She was soberly aware of what she wanted to do and what she should do, and she was able to eliminate all interference and overcome all difficulties to do it. Her courage and indomitable spirit were seen in Athens society where women were despised and suppressed at that time. Its progressive significance is obvious. Medea's resolute abandonment of her father, the king of a country, has implied the self-sufficiency and anti-authority of her character. However, the "husband" takes over the "father" to exercise ownership and control over the woman. The husband's authority specifies that he can not only interfere with the woman's behavior but also change his woman at any time. The anti-authority in Medea's nature determines that she will not give in whether she is actively or passively losing her home. She must resist in her unique way.

At the time, it is impossible to obtain the Golden Fleece solely by the wisdom and strength of Jason and the heroes, so they must turn to Medea, which put the heroes in an embarrassing situation. They have to resort to the help of a witch. Even Jason himself thinks that "pitiful indeed is our hope when we have put our return in the keeping of women." One of the heroes named Idas also strongly opposes: "Shame on us, have we come here fellow voyagers with women, calling on Cypris for help and not on the mighty strength of Enyalios?" (Argonautica, ca. 200-300 B.C.E) The heroes originally want to refuse Medea's help, but they eventually compromise. The value of women can only be realized with the recognition of men. The love that Medea pursued turns out to be a hoax used by men.

Medea and Jason flee to Corinth. She has hoped to live a normal family life of ordinary people and achieve the minimum value of life as a woman. Love has been disillusioned, and the value of its existence will soon be lost. Facing the tragic situation of being abandoned and expelled, Medea fell into extreme despair. She regretted abandoning her family and hometown for Jason. It is in this painful reflection that Medea begins to realize Jason's ruthlessness and selfishness. However, social morality or law does not impose any punishment on him. She realizes that she can only rely on her own strength to punish Jason, a heartless man, and fight against evil forces. In the tragedy, the chorus of Corinthian women comforts Medea:

"And if your husband
devotes himself to some new bed,
why get angry over that?
Zeus will plead for you in this.
Don't waste your life away,
with too much wailing for your husband. " (Medea, 431 B.C.E., Lines 181-186)

A largely masculine spirit has reigned in social and cultural interpretation. Corinthian women are more inclined to console Medea's resentment without any resistance of their own. Contrasting the two, Medea's image has played a significant role in educating the rise of feminist consciousness. It is this universal phenomenon of inequality that fuels Jason's arrogance and arouses Medea's

determination for revenge—She will express her dissatisfaction and resistance to this unfair society with blood and tears. Medea's behavior is an explosion in the age of silent feminism.

Facing the tragic situation of being abandoned and expelled, Medea fell into extreme pain and despair. She regretted abandoning her family and hometown for Jason. It is in this painful reflection that Medea begins to realize Jason's ruthlessness and selfishness. However, social morality or law does not impose any punishment on him. She realizes that she can only rely on her own strength to punish Jason, a heartless man, and fight against evil forces. Medea's behavior shows that she dares to fight against fate and fight for love. Her courage and behavior represent that women have a sense of self-pursuit, and her feminist consciousness begins to awaken. In the time of Medea, the status of women was low, and they were suppressed by patriarchy. Medea's behavior reflects the germination of women's pursuit of personal happiness and freedom. The awakening of feminism shows that the ideas of liberty, equality, and the pursuit of individuality and privilege have been rooted in women and will soon be expressed.

4. Expansion of Feminist Consciousness

Euripides, at the outset of the tragedy, tore off the veil that shrouded the conflict between the couple.

"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. " (Medea, 431 B.C.E., Lines 19-21)

In order to gain the right to inherit the throne of Corinth, Jason abandons Medea and is preparing to marry princess Creusa. King Creon, to ensure the safety and success of his daughter's marriage, orders Medea to be banished from the country. Medea is desperate. She laments:

"Of all things with life and understanding,
we women are the most unfortunate." (Medea, 431 B.C.E., Lines 263-264)

For Medea, this is no ordinary pain and misfortune, but a major turning point that determines her destiny. The unfortunate encounter and depression triggered her to think about the fate of women and the differences between the sexes. This sudden change in the marriage guides Medea to question and outcry

"Oh why can't a bolt of lightning strike me?

What point is there in living any more?

I want death to come and sweep me off

let me escape this life of suffering! " (Medea, 431 B.C.E., Lines 168-171)

is not a big deal in Jason's view. This contradictory view juxtaposes the nature of females and males. The patriarchal norms limit Jason to reflect on his attitude toward women. Jason repeatedly expresses his gender superiority and authority. In his exhortation, the lines are full of tones as a righteous husband's attempt to pull back a woman to the right path and make her rehabilitate.

Jason's desire for authority is precisely the desire for dignity and vitality, but all this results in the cost of Medea's loss of dignity and the suppression of vitality. Jason is not without affection for his wife, but not to the extent that he is willing to give up his autonomy for her sake. Because the acquisition of his subjectivity is at the cost of Medea's loss of subjectivity, the conflict between the two is inevitable.

Faced with her husband's infidelity, Medea's attitude has undergone a strong change after grief. The sense of resistance that exists in Medea's nature re-emerges. At this time, Medea's psychology represented the recovery of feminist consciousness, and this recovery becomes more violent. Medea's consciousness has turned again, she has changed from her original expectation of love to doubts about love. She uses the unique wisdom of women to deal with the betrayal of love, rebels against patriarchal power and even adopts the extreme method of murdering sons for revenge.

4.1 The Motive of Medea's Revenge

Medea's revenge is extremely cruel and appalling. While people sympathized with her misfortune, they were often unable to forgive her for the murder of her own son.

In his tragedy, Euripides focused on the psychological conflict before Medea killed his son. As a mother, Medea also loves her son deeply. Thinking about the pain and hardships of having a child, thinking that the child will die before enjoying the happiness of adulthood, thinking that her son will leave her forever before enjoying the filial piety, Medea is in extreme distress:

"Oh, my children,
why are you looking at me in that way?
Why smile at me—that last smile of yours?
Alas, what shall I do? You women here,
my heart gives way when I see those eyes,
my children's smiling eyes. I cannot do it.
Good bye to those previous plans of mine." (Medea, 431 B.C.E., Lines 1222-1228)

Thinking that innocent children are implicated due to their father's sins, Medea relented. The love of a mother makes her reluctant to part with her children. However, she comes to her senses again:

"What a coward
I am even to let my heart admit
such sentimental reasons." (Medea, 431 B.C.E., Lines 1237-1239)

Thinking of Jason's arrogance, she is furious again. However, after repeated struggles in the heart, Medea's rage has overcome her motherhood:

"I've made up my mind, my friends.
I'll do it—kill my children now, without delay,
and flee this land. I must not hesitate." (Medea, 431 B.C.E., Lines 1456-1458)

With this subversive action, she betrays patriarchy and disrupts the established order of male society objectively. Medea's temporary advantage in this gender war does not extend to a perpetual triumph for women. For Medea, she destroys herself as she destroys her opponent. From the nature of a mother's love, her son is equally important to her. What she adopts is the revenge method of perishing together to complete the assimilation with the true self through the alienation of the distorted self. For the sake of human value and dignity, she demolishes the motherhood that is equally essential to her true self; to discard the false part of the female attributes, she discards the other half as the price; to break the feminine mask of submissiveness, she adopted extremely cruel and destructive actions that were more masculine than men.

Therefore, Medea finds her own feminist consciousness but loses part of herself. She is in a dilemma, as a woman who refuses to bow her head and wants to prove herself, she has no choice. Otherwise, Medea will not become Medea.

Medea's experience exemplifies the tragedy of all women in ancient Greece. Facing the betrayal of love, Medea reconsiders the "love" she pursued. In the process of pursuing love, her dedication results in her being an accessory to male power and losing her value. In the subsequent transformation of consciousness, she no longer seeks love but challenges Jason's ruthlessness and injustice. During this transformation, her feminist consciousness is revived.

Faced with this sudden doom, Medea does not succumb but rises to fight. She does not want to submit to reality. She becomes vicious and cruel, orchestrating a plan of revenge. Her feigned reconciliation with Jason, making him disarmed and unguarded, and her petition for Creon to extend her expulsion for a day in order to carry out her plan of revenge demonstrate her courage and wisdom. Medea says:

"Let no one think that I'm a trivial woman,
a feeble one who sits there passively.
No, I'm a different sort—dangerous
to enemies, but well disposed to friends.
Lives like mine achieve the greatest glory." (Medea, 431 B.C.E., Lines 957-961)

Compared with the despicable Jason, Medea is a woman who is upright and who dares to love and hate. To punish Jason, she takes an extreme measure: killing two children with her own hands to cut off Jason's descendants. It shows women's efforts to reconstruct their sexual identities. Medea is proving that she is not a dress-up doll, a so-called "good woman," but a "living woman." The patriarchal society seems to be powerful, but its gender advantage is nothing but a spiritual myth invented by men. Medea's experience represents the evolution of feminism, from the initial bud to depression, and then to recovery and outbreak.

4.2 Son--Father's Continuation of Life

Due to the influence of the ideology of the patriarchal era, children are essential as the embodiment of the father's life, power, glory, status, and property, especially as a continuation of the father's life. The real bearer was considered to be only the father, the mother was considered to be the cultivator and protector of the father's seed. This idea is vividly reflected in Orestes. Orestes is hunted by the vicious Erinyes for killing Clytemnestra, his biological mother. Orestes killed his mother to avenge his father, King Agamemnon, because she colluded with an adulterer to kill Agamemnon. Erinyes states that revenge can only be limited to blood relatives. According to Erinyes, Clytemnestra did not commit a crime against the laws of the clan because she is not related by blood to the man she killed. Apollo stood up and defended Orestes, saying that the father should be a more important parent than the mother. The mother is only the cultivator of the inherited seed. In the end, Orestes is acquitted.

The heir has the meaning of inheriting the lineage of the father. In the tragedy, Medea realizes the importance of the heir to Jason. When Jason sees that the Creusa had been poisoned by Medea, he hurries to Medea's residence. He is not looking for revenge for the death of the princess but cares about his son's life. Worrying that his son will also be poisoned by Medea, he says,

"But at this point
she's no concern of mine. I'm worried
for my children. Those whom she has wronged
will take care of her. I've come for the boys,
to save their lives, in case the next of kin
try to harm me and mine, retribution
for their mother's profane murders." (Medea, 431 B.C.E., Lines 1550-1556)

Jason fears that after the princess and the king are killed by Medea, the king's relatives will avenge the king by killing Medea's children. Yet, he does not expect that it is not the king's relatives who kill the children, but the children's mother who kills them. When he witnesses that his son had been killed by Medea, he is devastated. She destroys what was valuable to Jason in a decisive gesture, and this destruction is complete and irreversible. The greatest punishment a woman can impose on a man is castration. As the son is the continuation of the father, and thus killing the son is equal to punishing the father. Medea has deeply realized the importance of blood ties to the male society. She will use her sharp sword to sever the link between father and son and deal a fatal blow to Jason. This is Medea's way of performing the castration.

Medea's tragedy is no longer a family tragedy, but a tragedy of society. It concedes that in a patriarchal society, women have realized their low status, and they are fighting to change their destiny. But this inevitably comes at a price. Punishing the husband and saving the son is difficult to balance, and people will kill her son for her revenge. Betraying her father made Medea lose her home, all the imprints in the first half of her life, and all kinds of connections with the past; betraying her husband made Medea lose her son, her family, and her life support in the second half of her life. These two losses are the result of her will, and only her own initiative underscores the strength of her character. Through two denials (denying her father and denying her husband), Medea walked towards the road of defining herself and breaking with the patriarchal consciousness.

5. Conclusion

Medea embodies a variety of images, she is kind, but also evil; she is forbearing, but also fierce. Medea is not an idealized woman. Therefore, the awakening process of her self-awareness is a gradual development process, and it is slowly growing up in various contradictory movements and emotional conflicts. She also once pinned all her happiness on her husband, and she once begged her husband to change his mind. But hopes were shattered again and again, and the insults deepened layer by layer, and Medea finally awoken.

Medea represents the change and development of women's self-consciousness. Although her love story ends in tragedy, the story implies the evolution of the feminist spirit, reflecting the struggle between women's rights and men's rights. Throughout the ages, many people of insight have been exploring through their respective works: how women can achieve equal status with men in love, marriage, and society. Euripides was a pioneer in exploring this problem. Through Medea, a dazzling female figure, Euripides expressed deep sympathy for the humiliated and damaged Greek women, affirmed their awakening and resistance, and at the same time rebuked the passive nature of patriarchy imposed on women. Euripides molded the image of Medea with complex and profound historical and cultural connotations. Although Medea's revenge is a declaration of war against the betrayal of love, it is also a struggle against the entire patriarchal society. Her actions mark the rise of feminist consciousness.

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