

Some literary texts present disturbing challenges for their readers. In what ways is this true of one of the works you have studied?

Challenges, while having the tendency to be unsettling to the readers, are widely presented in literary texts, and the play Euripides's "Medea" is no exception. Such disturbing challenges are primarily faced by the eponymous character, Medea herself, who first had to undergo tragic betrayal by her husband Jason. Her subsequent exile from Corinth by the King Creon, leaving her with no place to reside, also puts forth a crucial challenge that Medea encountered which effectively heightens the sense of unease in readers. Nonetheless, Medea's internal conflict during her challenge of attempting to overcome her hesitation to murder her children would also have caused a great sense of uneasiness within the readers.

Jason's act of infidelity being presented as a tragic act that led to the emotional downturn of Medea, whilst highlighting Medea's gruesome and volatile nature, would have caused a great sense of unease within the readers. The Nurse comments on how "if only the good ship Argo never beached on Colchis" and "if only no forester had ever chopped the wood", "Medea would have never besotted with her Jason". Her attempt to place great focus on the most trivial events that eventually led to Medea getting to Jason and consequently getting betrayed by him brings out the victimhood of Medea and absolving her of any fault. The fact that the Nurse further mentions how Jason, "the traitor, chose to bed down with Creusa" despite "Medea [having done] anything for Jason" further underscores how Medea's selfless nature was greatly undermined by Jason, who chose to marry Creusa despite the sacrifices and the "promises" "[Medea and Jason] had made". This only serves to illustrate further to the readers the extent in which Medea has been victimised and exploited by Jason, which not only allows us to sympathise with Medea's plight, but also to highlight the tragic nature of Jason's betrayal. Overall, such portrayal of the challenge that Medea was going through would have inevitably been greatly disturbing to the readers through evoking a sense of pity for Medea's unfortunate circumstances.

Nonetheless, such feelings that readers would initially have towards Medea are immediately superseded by characterising Medea in a negative light. The Nurse's suspicion of Medea "sharpening her knife for her new own heart", or to "kill the king or the new bride" only serves to expose Medea as gruesome and vengeful, and perhaps someone who tries to overcome challenges through violent means. Moreover, Medea's emotional outburst when she cried offstage "Let me die!" may on one hand place further emphasis on her suicidal intentions, and thus her pitiful situation. Nonetheless, it may further hint at the likelihood of her succumbing to violence inferred through her emotional volatility and inability to control her emotions. Such likelihood is validated when she expresses her intention of wanting Jason and Creusa "to be obliterated", ultimately amplifying her murderous nature. Such a portrayal of Medea conveyed through the way she tries to react to the challenge she is facing would have been unsettling to the readers.

Despite such negative portrayal of Medea, the author once again appeals to the reader's pathos by placing her in a precarious situation in Episode One. It was when Medea was confronted with the challenge of facing exile from Corinth by King Creon. When King Creon exiles Medea in suspicion of her "devis[ing] any mischief against [his] daughter", Medea "beseeches" Creon against his decision as she claimed that "she needed time to think about banishment" and "to make provision for [her children]" as exile "for them is a disaster". It thus made clear to the readers that exile would do great damage to not only her but also to her children, effectively inviting the readers to sympathise with the situation that she is placed in. The chorus's wish for "death, rather than life with no country" in the stasimon that follows

shows the extent in which the implications of exile by its strong comparison with death, further seemingly places her in a pitiful situation in the readers' eyes. Overall, sympathy evoked through Medea facing the challenge of exile would have raised a sense of uncertainty about her future place in Corinth, successfully bringing out a sense of disturbance within the readers.

The author however once again overrides the pity the readers had for Medea when she reveals her malicious intentions for trying to overcome her challenge of facing exile. While Medea successfully convinces Creon to "stay a last day if you must", she exposes how "a last day is enough to transform the father, the daughter and [her] husband, three enemies into three corpses". Such foreshadowing of Medea's plausible atrocities allows the readers to realise that the reason that exile posed as a challenge to Medea is not just because of the potential threat to the well-being of her children, but also the likelihood of Medea not being able to satisfy her vengeful desire previously mentioned in the parados. Such a repulsive portrayal of Medea uncovers her deceitful intentions when she tried to overcome the challenge of facing exile, which would have been particularly ?? develop uneasiness as they wait for the atrocities that she had planned out.

Nonetheless, the display of Medea's maternal nature when faced with the challenge of deciding on her children's murder, eventually being overturned by her strong desire for vengeance against Jason through her adoption of masculine ethos, would have caused significant disturbance in the readers. When she finally faced the time to murder her children in Episode 5, she at first hesitated after her children "melt[ed] [her] heart", leading to a "change of plans" of committing their murder. The translation's use of visual imagery presented emotional diction in "melt" and "heart", suggesting strong motherly affection for her children, which seems to temporarily hold her back and suppress her vengeance for Jason. However she prioritises her need to protect her honour by presenting the likelihood of "her enemies" "laughing at [her] for going soft", and prevents herself from "weakening". She nevertheless hesitates once again and convinces herself in the preceding lines to "let her children go" but continues to overturn her affection and protect her pride by "not letting the children of [hers] for her enemies to scorn and spit upon". Overall, the quick vacillation between her desire to uphold her maternal instincts by not committing the filicide, and her strong need to seek revenge against her enemies, referring to Jason and the Corinthians, twice within a few lines conveys the extent of her internal conflict and the psychological trauma of suppressing her motherly love to commit the grievous act. Such internal conflict would have caused a strong sense of uneasiness within the readers arising from the uncertainty of Medea's challenge of prioritising either her motherliness or her vengeance. Meanwhile, Medea's attempt to overcome the heteronormative idea of gender by overcoming her femininity as a woman herself by suppressing her maternal instincts and adopting a masculine ethos of shielding her honour and pride by inflicting harm on her enemies could also present her challenge as unsettling to readers who may hold a conservative view on gender norms. As such, Medea's challenge of deciding on the final act of filicide in the play through the unsettling presentation of her internal dilemma and her escape from the heteronormative view on gender would have been viewed as greatly disturbing by a wide array of readers.

In a nutshell, depicting Medea in a both sympathetic and resentful way when she was confronted with the challenges of overcoming Jason's infidelity and her exile, as well her highly tense internal conflict and her subversion of the heteronormative gender norms when challenged with deciding on whether to murder her children, would have highly disturbed readers.