

The Heartbreak of Medea: A Playlist for the Betrayed

For this playlist, I have chosen to explore the tragic and intense journey of Medea, a figure from Greek mythology whose story is defined by betrayal, heartbreak, and ultimately, revenge. Medea's emotional transformation from a loving wife to a vengeful mother highlights the destructive power of grief and anger. After Jason abandons her for another woman, Medea is consumed by a desire for justice that leads to tragic consequences. This playlist reflects the stages of her emotional turmoil – from the devastation of betrayal to the cold determination of revenge. Each song embodies the complex emotions that shape her journey and captures the raw intensity of her heartbreak and wrath. Through these tracks, I aim to delve into the psychological and emotional depth of Medea's character, highlighting her inner conflict and the inevitable descent into vengeance.

The Playlist

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Playlist

Development
Process

Bibliography



Figure 1

AI generated
depiction of Jason
and Medea

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1NgGg0zY1oEvttePwYb8sx?si=56ee1c487c794074>

1. “All I Want” by Kodaline

This song captures the profound sadness and longing that defines Medea’s emotional state after Jason’s betrayal. The lyrics, “All I want is nothing more / To hear you knocking at my door,” expresses a desire for the return of someone she once loved, mirroring Medea’s yearning for Jason’s affection and the life they once shared. After Jason abandons her for Glauce, Medea is left devastated, questioning why the love she gave was not enough. The line, “I lay in tears in bed all night / Alone, without you by my side,” perfectly reflects Medea’s isolation and emotional suffering. She is physically and emotionally alone, abandoned in a foreign land, with no one to turn to. As he sings, “But if you loved me, why’d you leave me?”, it echoes Medea’s internal torment: if her love was so strong and self-sacrificial – having even betrayed her family for Jason – why was she cast aside so callously? The song encapsulates the painful vulnerability that comes with heartbreak, which fuels the anger and betrayal Medea will soon channel into her quest for revenge.

2. “Traitor” by Olivia Rodrigo

After the raw heartbreak of “All I Want”, “Traitor” perfectly captures the moment when Medea’s emotional devastation turns into anger and realization. The lines “You betrayed me / And I know that you’ll never feel sorry for the way I hurt” reflects Medea’s understanding that Jason will never truly acknowledge the extent of the pain he’s caused her. Much like the song, Medea loved Jason at his worst, sacrificing everything for him, and yet he leaves her for another woman, with no remorse. The line “Loved you at your worst, but that didn’t matter” echoes Medea’s feelings of betrayal, as she reflects on her sacrifices – her family, her home, and even her own identity – all of which she gave up to help Jason.

The lyrics “Guess you didn’t cheat, but you’re still a traitor” align with Medea’s realization that Jason’s actions, though technically not an affair, are still a form of treachery. He has chosen power, wealth, and a new life over their relationship, and this feels like a betrayal to her. In Medea’s eyes, Jason has cheated her of the future they could have had together.

The lines “God I wish that you had thought this through / Before I went and fell in love with you” mirror Medea’s growing regret and bitterness as she processes the impact of Jason’s choices. She is consumed by the thought that Had Jason considered the consequences of his actions, she never would have fallen in love with him – or perhaps she would have seen the truth sooner.

Finally, “When she’s sleepin’ in the bed we made / Don’t you dare forget about the way / You betrayed me” connects deeply to Medea’s torment as she imagines Jason with his new wife, Glauce, in the life they were supposed to have together. This song captures the fury at the fact that Jason’s betrayal is not just emotional, but is a public act, leaving Medea to feel as though her pain is ignored as he moves on. This moment is pivotal in her transition from heartbreak to rage, as the seeds of her revenge are planted.

3. “Haunted” by Taylor Swift

As the third song in the playlist, “Haunted” captures Medea’s growing desperation as she grapples with the irreversible fracture of her relationship with Jason. The fragile life she and Jason once walked – her sacrifices for him, his promises of love – has now shattered beyond repair, leaving her emotionally untethered. The line, “I have known it all this time / But I never thought I’d live to see it break,” reflects Medea’s dawning realization that Jason’s betrayal has destroyed not only their bond but also the foundation of her identity and security.

The haunting refrain, “Come on, come on, don’t leave me like this,” parallels Medea’s initial pleas to Jason, a futile attempt to reconcile with a man whose affection has grown cold. When Jason leaves her to marry Glauce, he walks away from “everything we had,” stripping Medea of her status, home, and family in Corinth. The repetition of “I’m haunted” mirrors Medea’s descent into anguish, as she becomes consumed by the ghosts of what once was and the betrayal that cannot be undone. This song powerfully conveys Medea’s transition from heartbreak to the simmering fury that drives her to seek vengeance.

4. “Mad Woman” by Taylor Swift

After the devastating heartbreak of “All I want” and the realization of Jason’s betrayal in “Traitor”, “Mad Woman” now captures Medea’s descent into fury as she begins to take control of her anger and confronts the consequences of Jason’s actions. The line “They strike to kill, and you know I will / You know I will” reflects Medea’s newfound resolve. Her pain has transformed into a deadly determination to make Jason feel the consequences of his betrayal. No longer passive, she is ready to strike back in the most impactful way possible.

The lyric “Every time you call me crazy, I get more crazy / What about that?” speaks directly to how Medea’s emotions are often dismissed by others as irrational or overblown. In the myth, Jason, as well as others, dismiss Medea’s reactions as the actions of a woman “driven mad” by jealousy or love. But as Medea’s rage intensifies,

she grows more resolute in her feelings – refusing to be belittled or ignored. Like Swift, she pushes back against the label of “crazy” and instead fully embraces the anger she feels. Medea is no longer the woman who will quietly suffer in the background; she is the “mad woman” who will stop at nothing to exact revenge.

The lyric “No one likes a mad woman / You made her like that” echoes Medea’s frustration with Jason. She did not choose to become enraged, but his betrayal and cruelty have pushed her into this position. Medea’s wrath is not an inherent flaw but a consequence of the life Jason forced upon her. Jason’s actions, including marrying Glauce and abandoning Medea, have led to this moment of uncontrollable fury. “Cause you took everything from me” perfectly mirrors Medea’s sentiment – Jason has stripped her of her family, her home, her status, and now, he is taking the future she imagined with him. As Medea begins to play her revenge, she becomes that “mad woman” who will not be ignored or controlled, and in her case, it is this fury that will ultimately drive her to commit the unthinkable.

5. “Castles Crumbling” by Taylor Swift feat. Haley Williams

This song perfectly captures Medea’s internal reckoning as she reflects on the total collapse of her world. In Euripides’ Medea, she is a woman who once held great power and admiration, having betrayed her own family and sacrificed everything to help Jason. The lyrics, “I was held up so high, I used to be great / They used to cheer when they saw my face” parallel Medea’s glory during her early days in Corinth when Jason’s success depended on her cunning and resourcefulness.

However, as Jason abandons her for another woman, Medea feels her metaphorical castle crumbling – the life she built has been destroyed, and the bridges to her former allies and family are burned beyond repair. The line, “And I watch all my bridges burn to the ground” resonates with how Medea isolates herself, even rejecting offers of help from others, as seen when she pushes away Aegeus and others who might support her.

The lyrics, “My foes and friends watch my reign end” also reflect her position in Corinth, where both allies and enemies witness her downfall. Medea knows she has become someone to be feared and hated, which aligns with “Now they’re screaming that they hate me / Never wanted you to hate me.” This song captures the tragedy of her emotional disintegration as well as her self-awareness of the destructive path she is on.

This song is a somber moment of reflection, showing that while Medea may be powerful and defiant, she is also deeply aware of the ruins of her former life, both as Jason's wife and as a person of influence in Corinth. It's a pivotal track that bridges her sorrow and anger with the decisive vengeance she will enact next.

6. "Castle" by Halsey

After experiencing the raw heartbreak of "All I Want", the sting of betrayal in "Traitor", and the simmering fury of "Mad Woman", "Castle" represents Medea stepping into her power and embracing the defiance that will define her revenge. The lyric **"I'm headed straight for the castle / They wanna make me their queen"** parallels Medea's awareness of her own agency. While Jason and others have dismissed her as powerless or irrelevant, Medea is fully aware of the power she holds as both a sorceress and a woman scorned. Her resolve strengthens as she metaphorically "ascends the throne," ready to take control of her own narrative.

The lines **"And there's an old man sitting on the throne / That's saying I should probably keep my pretty mouth shut"** reflects the societal constraints Medea faces. As a woman in a patriarchal society, she is expected to remain silent and submissive, even in the face of such deep betrayal. These words mirror the attitudes of Jason and others who assume that Medea, as a woman and foreigner, will meekly accept her fate. But instead of yielding, Medea chooses to defy those expectations, becoming even more determined to assert her voice and take action.

Finally, the lyric **"They wanna make me their queen"** encapsulates Medea's growing sense of control over the situation. While she will never be Jason's "queen" again in the traditional sense, Medea's revenge will crown her in her own right – queen of her fate and ruler of the chaos she is about to unleash. "Castle" is a declaration of her refusal to be silenced or subdued, setting the stage for the calculated vengeance that lies ahead.

7. "You Should See Me in a Crown" by Billie Eilish

This track marks a critical moment in Medea's story, where she transitions from quiet calculation to taking command of her revenge. The opening lyric, **"Bite my tongue, bide my time,"** reflects Medea's patience as she waits for the perfect moment to enact her plan. Despite the turmoil within, she conceals her intentions, a master strategist keeping her cards close to her chest. This mirrors the myth itself, where Medea appears calm and composed, even offering Jason's new bride a gift, all while plotting her deadly retaliation.

The line “Wait ‘til the world is mine” captures the inevitability of Medea’s vengeance and her resolve to reclaim control over a world that betrayed her. In the myth, Medea’s actions defy societal expectations of passivity and submission, asserting her dominance in a realm where she is seen as an outsider.

The chorus, “You should see me in a crown / I’m gonna run this nothing town / Watch me make ‘em bow,” perfectly encapsulates Medea’s transformation into a force to be reckoned with. In the myth, her power as a sorceress ensures she is feared and revered, even by those who seek to dismiss or control her. The imagery of “a crown” aligns with Medea’s ultimate triumph over Jason and Corinth, as she figuratively ascends the throne of her own narrative, leaving devastation in her wake.

Finally, the lyric “Your silence is my favorite sound” resonates with Medea’s desire for Jason to experience the depth of his loss, silenced by the destruction of everything he holds dear. In her revenge, she dismantles Jason’s ambitions, leaving him powerless and broken. This song embodies Medea’s icy composure, her calculated rise to power, and the dark allure of her vengeance. It sets the stage for the climax of her story, where her wrath is fully unleashed.

8. “Seven Devils” by Florence + the Machine

This chilling and intense song captures the climax of Medea’s story – the moment she kills her children to exact her ultimate revenge on Jason. The haunting lyrics, “Holy water cannot help you now / See, I’ve come to burn your kingdom down,” mirror Medea’s scorched earth resolve to destroy Jason’s life, leaving him with nothing but the agony of loss. Medea, who once gave everything for Jason, now becomes his ultimate undoing, fueled by fury and heartbreak.

The line “What has been done / Cannot be undone” resonates deeply with the irreversibility of Medea’s actions in Euripides’ Medea. Her decision to kill their children is not just an act of revenge but a declaration of her total power and agency. In the play, Medea’s speech before committing the act is chilling: she acknowledges the pain it will bring her but emphasizes that it is the only way to truly punish Jason. Similarly, the lyrics “Seven devils all around me / Seven devils in my house” evoke Medea’s near-demonic determination, as though she is possessed by the grief and rage that drive her to commit such a horrifying deed.

The imagery in “No rivers and no lakes can put the fire out” reflects the emotional and physical devastation Medea unleashes. Just as fire consumes everything in its

path, her revenge spares no one – not her children, not Jason, and not herself. This moment is the heart of her tragedy; it solidifies her place as both the victim of betrayal and the perpetrator of unimaginable violence, making her one of the most complex figures in Greek mythology.

9. “Take A Bow” by Rihanna

This song captures the final moment of Medea’s emotional detachment and Jason’s humiliation after the tragic events unfold. The opening lines “You look so dumb right now / Standing outside my house / Trying to apologize” reflect Jason’s desperate, futile attempts to reconcile with Medea after she has already enacted her revenge. His pleas, like the apology, are empty – Medea knows there is no true remorse behind them. The line “Don’t tell me you’re sorry ‘cause you’re not” is particularly poignant, as Medea understands Jason’s betrayal is irredeemable. Her victory over him is complete, and now, she no longer needs his hollow apologies.

The lyrics “Oh, and the award for best liar goes to you / For making me believe that you could be faithful to me” directly mirror Jason’s broken promises and false assurances throughout their marriage. Medea was deceived by Jason’s empty vows and his betrayal, which ultimately led to the tragic events. Now, in her final act of defiance, she turns the tables, and his apologies seem utterly insincere.

Medea’s strength in this song is captured in “But you put on quite a show, really had me going / Now it’s time to go, curtain’s finally closing / But it’s over.” This reflects how Medea has orchestrated her revenge with precision, like a performer on a stage. The “show” is Jason’s false narrative, and now, as the curtain falls, the consequences are set in stone. The relationship is irrevocably over – Jason is left begging, powerless, while Medea walks away with her own power intact.

This song emphasizes the dramatic collapse of Medea and Jason’s relationship, highlighting Medea’s emotional detachment and Jason’s failed attempts at redemption. His desperation is met with Medea’s cold indifference, as she exits the “stage” victorious, while he is left with nothing.

10. “My Tears Ricochet” by Taylor Swift

This song perfectly encapsulates the emotional and vengeful aftermath of Jason’s betrayal and the tragic consequences it has for both him and Medea. The line “And if I’m on fire, you’ll be made of ashes too” echoes Medea’s state of destruction after Jason’s betrayal, as she decides to destroy him in the same way he has destroyed her. It highlights how their fates are intertwined, where his actions toward her ultimately

bring him down, too. Medea's emotional devastation sets the stage for a revenge that is both deeply personal and universally tragic: she hurts Jason in the same way he hurt her.

The lyric “I didn't have it in myself to go with grace / And you're the hero flying around, saving face” speaks to Medea's rejection of the societal expectation to simply forgive or move on from Jason's betrayal. In the myth, she is portrayed as a strong and defiant woman who will not passively accept her fate or Jason's lies. She chooses instead to confront the pain head-on, without grace or apology. Jason, meanwhile, tries to present himself as the hero, saving face after abandoning his family for a more advantageous marriage to Glauce. But this posturing only deepens the wound for Medea.

The line “And if I'm dead to you, why are you at the wake? / Cursing my name, wishing I stayed / Look at how my tears ricochet” highlights the heartache Jason faces as he realizes the full extent of his betrayal. Medea's decision to kill their children and escape is the ultimate response to his abandonment, and it leaves him haunted by her presence, even after her physical departure. In the myth, Jason is left alone, broken over the choices he made, and how he must live with the consequences. “Cursing my name, wishing I stayed” reflects Jason's regret, as he begins to realize too late the destruction his actions have caused. Just as Medea's tears ricochet, his regret ricochets as well – his own downfall is a direct result of his treatment for her.

Finally, the lyric “You had to kill me, but it killed you just the same / Cursing my name, wishing I stayed / You turned into your worst fears / And you're tossing out the blame, drunk on this pain / Crossing out the good years” sums up the tragic symmetry of their fates. Medea's revenge, though painful and horrific, serves as a means of reclaiming her agency, and it destroys Jason just as much as it destroys her. His fear of retribution and the collapse of his once-promising life is a direct result of his own choices. This lyric speaks to the irreversible damage caused by betrayal – the “good years” they once had are erased in the wake of his selfish actions.

“My Tears Ricochet” fits seamlessly into the playlist as a reflection of Medea's deep pain, her vengeance, and the tragic outcome for Jason. It illustrates the lingering emotional impact of betrayal and the inevitability of consequences, where both Medea and Jason are forever changed by the decisions they made.

11. “The Night We Met” by Lord Huron

This song beautifully encapsulates Jason's grief and his haunting regret after losing Medea and their children. This moment in Euripides' *Medea* is pivotal, as Jason realizes the true extent of what he's lost – his family, his legacy, and his future. The lyrics “I had all and then most of you, some and now none of you” speak directly to Jason's devastation: he had everything – Medea and their children – but now, in the wake of his actions, he is left with nothing. His once promising future, built around his family, has crumbled, and he is left empty, haunted by the consequences of his betrayal.

The repeated line “Take me back to the night we met” reflects Jason's desperate longing to undo everything, to return to the moment when things were right, before his choices led to the irreversible destruction of his family. It mirrors the tragic realization that nothing can bring back what he's lost, especially the children who were supposed to be his legacy, his hope for the future.

“I don't know what I'm supposed to do, haunted by the ghost of you” captures the essence of Jason's emotional collapse. His grief is not just about Medea's departure but the murder of his children – his legacy has been violently erased. He is left with nothing but the haunting memory of what was, and Medea's shadow looms over him as a reminder of his actions. Jason is tortured by his choices, and this song reflects his hopeless yearning for the past, knowing it is forever out of reach.

12. “History of Man” by Máisíe Peters

This song serves as the perfect closing song for this playlist, reflecting the cyclical and tragic nature of love and betrayal, as seen in *Medea*. The song's lyrics highlight the timelessness of human suffering and the inescapable patterns of manipulation, heartbreak, and revenge. By referencing “the history of man,” it suggests that the emotional turmoil Medea and Jason experience is not unique to them but part of a broader, repetitive cycle that echoes throughout history.

The lines “She begs him, he says he doesn't understand / She loves him, more than anyone ever has in the history, the history of man” reflect Medea's boundless love for Jason, contrasted with his inability to comprehend the depth of her feelings or the consequences of his betrayal. This disconnect between love and understanding mirrors the tragic disconnect that often occurs in relationships, where one party's feelings and sacrifices are ignored or undervalued, leading to eventual destruction.

“Medea's history” is pained with the tragic notion of “he stole our youth and promised heaven” and “the men start wars yet Troy hates Helen.” These lyrics

connect directly to the myth of Medea, where Jason promises Medea a shared future, only to discard her for a political marriage. Just as Helen's beauty led to the destruction of Troy, Medea's love and sacrifice are distorted into violence and vengeance. The repetition of "history of man" throughout the song emphasizes how these patterns of betrayal, suffering, and manipulation keep repeating through time.

The lyrics "Women's hearts are lethal weapons / Did you hold mine and feel threatened? / Hear my lyrics, taste my venom / You are still my great obsession," ties into the way Medea's passion and love, when betrayed, become her tools of destruction. This mirrors the way society often fears powerful women, seeing their emotional intensity as a force that can be weaponized.

Finally, "I tried to rewrite it but I can't / It's the history of man" reflects the futility of trying to change the past or escape the destructive cycles of human behavior. Medea, in her final act of vengeance, cannot undo the harm done to her, just as Jason cannot undo the devastation he caused. In this way, the song not only wraps up Medea's story but also comments on the broader human experience – one filled with love, pain, and an unbreakable cycle of repeating history.

Narrative for Development

For this project, I created a playlist that narrates the emotional and thematic arc of Euripides' Medea through modern music, highlighting the timelessness of its central conflict: betrayal, revenge, and the destruction wrought by fractured love. The playlist features twelve songs, each chosen to represent a key moment in Medea's story. By pairing contemporary lyrics with Medea's ancient tragedy, I aimed to explore how universal themes from classical literature resonate in today's art and culture.

Development Process

I began by closely analyzing Medea to identify its most pivotal moments – Jason's betrayal, Medea's anguish and rage, the murders of her children, and her ultimate escape and triumph. From there, I mapped these moments onto a playlist structure, using each song to represent a specific emotional or narrative shift. I carefully curated songs based on their lyrics, tone, and alignment with the characters' motivations and emotions.

The songs reflect a progression: beginning with Medea's heartbreak and Jason's infidelity (All I want by Kodaline and Traitor by Olivia Rodrigo), moving through her realization of what has happened with Haunted, Mad Woman, and Castles Crumbling by Taylor Swift. Then, it progresses through her fury with Castle by Halsey and You Should See Me in a Crown by Billie Eilish. The climax of the playlist and Medea's vengeance results in Seven Devils by Florence + the Machine, followed by My Tears Ricochet, which perfectly portrays how the tragedy has killed both of them. Then it goes into Jason's lament with The Night We Met. Finally, the playlist closes with a reflection on the cyclical nature of love and tragedy with History of man by Maisie Peters, which ties Medea's personal story to universal themes.

Each song was analyzed in the context of its lyrics and emotional tone, and I wrote commentaries to explain how each track connects to specific scenes or themes in Medea. The commentaries incorporate direct references to the text, ensuring a strong connection between the music and the myth.

Relation to Class Topics

This project ties deeply to the themes and lessons explored in class. First, it demonstrates an understanding of how classical texts like Medea address timeless human experiences. By pairing Euripides' tragedy with contemporary music, I show how the themes of betrayal, vengeance, and the human cost of broken relationships to continue to inspire and resonate across cultures and generations.

Additionally, the project reflects a creative engagement with narrative adaptation, a key theme in the study of Greek and Roman mythology. I adapted Medea's story into a modern format that is both accessible and emotionally impactful, showing how classical stories can evolve while retaining their core significance. The playlist format itself echoes the oral tradition of storytelling in ancient Greece, where music and performance were integral.

Finally, the project connects to broader discussions of gender and power in Greek mythology. Medea's rage against Jason and her defiance of societal expectations echoes the roles and representations of women in ancient myths. By using modern songs – many written and performed by female artists – I highlight Medea's agency and the enduring relevance of her story as a critique of patriarchal structures.

Acknowledgments

This project was completed individually. I conducted all aspects of the work, including song selection, commentary writing, and playlist organization. Feedback from peers and insights gained during class discussions on themes such as mythological archetypes, the role of women in mythology, and the nature of tragedy helped shape the final product.

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