

Andreas Flourakis – "Medea's Burqa"

Tatia Davitadze

PhD Student

Shota Rustaveli State University of Batumi
Georgia, 6010. Batumi, Al. Pushkin St. N125/127, Ap. N 23.
+995 571091310. davitadzetatia@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-7888-719X>

Abstract

The article analyzes "Medea's Burqa," a monologue adapted to modern standards by the Greek playwright Andreas Flourakis. This play offers a distinct interpretation of the classic Greek myth of Medea, viewed through the lens of contemporary issues. While the main plotline of the classical myth is preserved, it is excellently interwoven with Flourakis's individualistic approach to the myth, thereby lending the play its current relevance.

The entire piece is a monologue delivered by Medea, who recounts her own story, speaking about her past, present, and even her future plans. Other characters, meanwhile, play only a passive role.

A. Flourakis tells the story of a woman who finds herself in a foreign land—an emigrant who must cope with a culture that is different and non-native to her, along with a daily, unfamiliar reality. It

is crucial for her to establish her own identity within the existing society in order to survive. The author skillfully highlights several significant aspects:

- **Emigration:** Medea is on foreign soil, operating within a different identity, a different culture, and a different society, far removed from anything native.

- **Preservation of Self (Identity):** The constant struggle to maintain her native culture and uphold the norms acceptable to her.

- **Her Desire for Freedom of Choice:** The persistent need to have autonomous decision-making power.

- **The Attempt to Overcome Patriarchal Stereotypes:** The effort to tackle the patriarchal constraints present both within herself and in the foreign culture.

Keywords: Emigration, Identity, Freedom, Stereotypes, Burqa.

Introduction

The text opens with a striking, unexpected setup: shortly before sunset on a beach, Medea, veiled in a "burqa," is reclining on a deck chair with her eyes closed. A beach bag lies nearby. This immediately establishes Medea as a contemporary woman belonging to our time. Her children are also playing close by, though notably, they are girls, not boys, unlike in other literary sources.

Medea's ensuing monologue is ominous, signaling a planned catastrophe:

"Today is a heavy day.

Today, everyone will get their due.

In one hour, everything will be turned upside down.

It's better this way. Let what must happen, happen.

This will be better than that, anyway."

(Flourakis, 2020: 83)

Based on the text, it becomes clear that Jason is the reason for Medea's emigration. She explicitly states that she fell in love with him and consciously became an immigrant for his love: she abandoned her homeland, family, friends, and language, becoming a refugee in a foreign land. She is unacceptable to everyone, and even Jason is planning to abandon her. This situation fuels the terrible desire for revenge ripening in her soul and heart.

"I did not come here because I was fleeing war, or poverty.

My father was a king. Nor did I come here to study.

Nor to live independently and not be a burden to others.

I did not even come here for some man.

For some ordinary, common man.

I came here for Jason." (Flourakis, 2020: 83).

In the play, both Medea and Jason are exiles in a foreign land, but Medea profoundly experiences the feeling of displacement and fully grasps the meaning of this "status."

"I didn't just abandon my homeland, nor just my family.

I abandoned my friends, I abandoned my language.

I abandoned my youth. Forever.

The moment I crossed the border, I immediately became a refugee.

Severed from my own land...

The reason is always secondary.

Only the state of being a refugee remains.

I became unacceptable in a world where they believed foreigners should stay put in their homelands."

(Flourakis, 2020: 88).

Method

Initially, relevant literature was gathered using the textological research method. This was followed by a comprehensive study and critical analysis of the collected materials. In the subsequent stage, the similarities and differences in the interpretation of Medea's artistic image within Flourakis's text were analyzed using the comparative method (comparison and contrast). Furthermore, the historical-cultural method allowed the issue to be examined within the context of relevant cultural paradigms.

Discussion

The characters in the text travel by cars and airplanes, which further emphasizes the contemporary setting:

"My husband smuggled me out 'in a special way.'

He didn't put me in a truck loaded with Persian carpets,
or in a refrigerated container stuffed with sheep,
just to cross a frozen Asia, nor did he put me on a boat with
other refugees to cross the Aegean Sea.

Jason booked me a plane ticket, business class."

(Flourakis, 2020: 89)

Flourakis retains Medea's role as her brother's killer, but she does not forcibly take him; instead, the brother himself follows the fleeing couple. Consequently, Medea is compelled to kill him due to the surrounding circumstances, as she has no other choice:

"When I ran away with Jason, I didn't even look back.

My brother tagged along.

A foolish creature who expressed his own foolish protest by fleeing with us.

My father, with his thugs, chased after us.

Jason was driving like a maniac, but they would still catch up.

I took a knife and carved cheese on my brother.

He groaned like a woman." (Flourakis, 2020: 84)

It must also be noted that in A. Flourakis's work, Medea is a traitor to her country and a tyrant who, even from childhood, constantly contemplated the murder of her family members, as she admits in the monologue:

"I would take my brother's sword and stab the pillow without hesitation.

I killed my father many times this way,
because he prioritized my brother over me,
teaching him how to wield power.

Sometimes I would kill my mother too,
because she dreamt of me becoming like her— subjugated to
men,

outstanding among women." (Flourakis, 2020: 85)

By describing this scene, the author harrowingly conveys Medea's psychological state: from childhood, she yearned to kill someone and practiced extensively on animals. However, she also notes that killing a human is an entirely different emotion, one that requires courage and strength:

"Killing a person is something completely different from killing
an animal.

The same, perhaps, as killing your own brother,
your own flesh and blood.

It's as if you are closing a familiar door behind you.

Forever. I didn't just close that door, I nailed it shut."

(Flourakis, 2020: 87)

Medea is an astonishingly wise woman, even in the modern age. In Flourakis's depiction, she is distinguished by extraordinary wisdom; she knows well how to save herself. The play effectively illustrates how events would unfold if Medea lived in our time.

"One morning, when I was eight months pregnant,
I got up from the chair and approached the sea.
The sea was calm. Not a single wave.
I slightly lifted my dress and put my feet in the water.
A fish swam across the reflection of my belly,
drew something with its tail, and disappeared.
I was sure of two things:
that I would give birth to a girl and that the sea was a
woman,
just like me.
I removed my headscarf to introduce myself to it."

(Flourakis, 2020: 94)

According to the text, Medea wears a burqa, which the author deliberately introduced into the monologue to demonstrate the profound impact of one's own "identity," roots, customs, and origin:

"I am not wearing the burqa because someone forced me
to,

some man or some law.

I just want to. Without it, I feel almost naked.

Isn't it terrible to walk around naked because some law
compels you to?

But after a while, you probably get used to it.

I hide my face because it is the only thing left to me from
my homeland.

At first, I didn't want to remain a foreigner forever.

Now I am proud of it." (Flourakis, 2020: 100)

As noted, the symbolic weight assigned to the burqa represents the author's brilliant intention. It is a head covering (an oriental symbol) which, on the one hand, might signify the existence of a path of retreat for Medea in any situation, and on the other, her "identity,"

which she is unwilling to surrender and is prepared to sacrifice anything for, even Jason's love. The burqa is a significant prop in the work:

"When we first arrived here,
Jason tried to convince me to take off the veil and show my face.

He wanted me to be accepted by his society,
to become friends with their women.
I, a king's daughter, was to become friends with them.
I think, deep down, he still likes that I hide my face,
that no other man has seen my thick hair,
no one has seen the color of my lips."

(Flourakis, 2020: 99)

At the play's conclusion, Medea manages to save herself precisely through the use of this prop.

Medea consciously knows that she has no rights in the foreign land, that Jason does not love her, and that he plans to abandon her:

"My husband fell in love with another woman.
I didn't hear it as a rumor.
My husband shone like phosphorus in the dark of
night,
when he left the house, only to return in the morning.
Snakes were coiling around me.
All the signs were visible.
My husband was seeing someone.
He didn't need to tell me. I already knew.
However... Yesterday, ladies arrived from the city,
to visit the unbeliever and told me everything.
They informed me that my husband is
betraying me with a woman who is much younger

than me,
and who is also of his own kind."

(Flourakis, 2020: 102)

It is a striking fact that Flourakis's Medea is not a child-killer; on the contrary, she saves them by sending them back to Colchis. Although Medea is left without her children, she has no other choice; she cannot save their lives otherwise. By sending the children back to their homeland, to their father (Aeëtes), she seemingly atones for the sin committed before her father and her entire nation:

"Tell my father that you are his granddaughter.

He will embrace you with tears in his eyes and proclaim you a queen.

And everything will be as it should have been, and as it is not."

(Flourakis, 2020: 108)

Furthermore, during a conversation with her youngest daughter, Medea decides to apologize to her father for the crimes committed after all this time. She entrusts her daughter with this apology, thereby admitting her guilt before her father:

"And when you reach there,

I want you to do one thing for me.

Just don't forget. I want you to apologize to Grandpa on my behalf.

Apologize for everything.

Tell him that I often think of him.

The more time passes, the more often."

(Flourakis, 2020: 109)

It is no accident that all of Medea's residences in the monologue are located on the seashore; this represents a form of nostalgia for her homeland:

"When we changed residences for the second time,
strangers among strangers, we rented a house near the
sea.
The waves did not leave me for even a minute.
They say there are subterranean seas on other planets
too,
but I am certain they are not like mine."

(Flourakis, 2020: 102)

Medea, in this play, is still a woman boundlessly in love with
Jason, ready to sacrifice everything she possesses without hesitation:

"My aunt and I are alike;
she also fell in love with a foreigner, Odysseus.
She did everything for him, but he broke her heart.
Made her bleed with bitterness.
I, too, fell in love with a foreigner.
History rotates in a circle, it repeats itself."

(Flourakis, 2020: 104)

At the play's conclusion, Medea kills Jason's new lover, which
leads to the decision to arrest her. However, no one recognizes her; no
one knows what she looks like because the headscarf Medea is
wearing completely covers her face. Only Jason knows her face:

"My burqa will flutter on the horizon like a pirate's banner.
The skull on my flag will freeze the blood."

(Flourakis, 2020: 106).

In the final moments, Medea removes the burqa (the oriental
symbol) and presents herself as an ordinary woman sunbathing on the
beach. She tells the law enforcement officers who approach her that
she saw a woman who took off her clothes and disappeared into the
sea.

Conclusion

The author portrays a woman completely isolated in a foreign world—a refugee who is humiliated and stripped of dignity. Yet, this does not bother her, as she conceals her truth beneath the burqa.

The play does not explicitly state how Medea continues her life, whether she returns to her homeland, or what her fate ultimately is. There is no definitive answer to this question; instead, numerous plausible interpretations exist, which remain merely expressed hypotheses.

The plot detailing Medea's tragic history breaks off at the end, and she begins a new life, free from her old "identity." This is why she removes the burqa, symbolizing her shedding the past and embracing a new beginning.

Furthermore, we cannot definitively conclude the fate of Medea's children, as it is difficult to determine whether they reached Colchis, or if they did, whether Aeëtes accepted them and recognized them as his grandchildren. Nevertheless, Medea's intention (to return the children to Colchis) is already considered an act of atonement.

One thing is certainly evident from the monologue: a character who simultaneously destroyed her past, present, and future would not find it difficult to live with dignity under a new identity in a place where her worth and glory were recognized.

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