

To Rubric
To Score Higher
Especially

Continuity of Classical Myth: Paper 2

15 March 2014

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CIV241.003

Section

topic is just the right paper's scope

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Good in topic: in OGCMA but mostly in comparison
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well judged volume of detail
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Medea in *The Merchant of Venice* straightforward title
Amidst the volatile relationship between Jews and Christians, multiple cases of cross-dressing, financial scheming, an engagement dependent upon a riddle, and subtle homosexuality depicted in Shakespeare's dark comedy *The Merchant of Venice* the Bard details a couple entangled in the comedic ruckus, yet doomed through their similarities to failed relationships of Classical Mythology. The comparisons of Lorenzo and Jessica make between their elopement and the caustic affair of Jason and Medea casts an unfortunate pallor over their future and suggests that not only is Jessica unhappy with her husband, but that the couple could head toward a more destructive ending. Moreover, the similarities Jessica and Medea share highlight the former's betrayal of her father, the cunning Shylock, and add depth to Shakespeare's controversial Jewish moneylender.

Shakespeare references several flawed relationships of antiquity during the conversation between Lorenzo and Jessica, but arguably the most defective couple involves the abusive Jason and his wife, the destructive Medea. The other pairings include Troilus and Cressida, Pyramus and Thisbe, and Aeneas and Dido, all of whom separate either by consequence of death or betrayal. Intriguingly though, Lorenzo and Jessica—who abandoned her father, stole his money, and deserted her Jewish faith all for her lover—compare themselves to these failed relationships. Although the plot does not revolve around them, Lorenzo and Jessica are present throughout the majority of the play and both have connections to key players—through Lorenzo's friendship with the protagonist Bassanio and Jessica as the daughter to the antagonist Shylock. The audience first meets Jessica in act 2 scene 3 when she reveals how she is "ashamed to be my father's child" and longs for Lorenzo by declaring to "Become a Christian and thy loving wife."³ The next scenes then depict Lorenzo stealing Jessica away from her father and gloating; he declares: "She hath directed/How I shall take her from her father's house/What gold and jewels she is furnished with/What page's suit she hath in readiness."⁴ Intriguingly, Lorenzo admits that Jessica connived their meeting and the theft of her father's riches, a fact he reiterates after they have joined the protagonists and the couple relives the night they eloped. In the same conversation though, Jessica admits that she and Lorenzo stole away together, comparing them to Medea and Jason: "In such a night/Medea gathered the enchanted herbs/That did renew old Aeson." She continues with the conversation by saying: "In such a night/Did young Lorenzo swear he loved her well/Stealing her soul with may vows of faith/And ne'er a true one."⁵ Both this accusation and allusion depict how terribly unhappy Jessica must feel in her relationship, particularly her final line as she informs Lorenzo that she no longer believes that he loves her. The comparison between herself and Medea strikes particularly poignantly, as Medea also betrays her father for a man she quickly becomes infatuated with.⁶ Medea's mythological introduction occurs when Jason and his Argonauts reach the country Medea's father, Aeetes, rules and must struggle through tasks in order to win the holy grail of antiquity: the Golden Fleece. Fortunately for Jason, the king's daughter and part-time sorceress, Medea, promptly falls in love with the dashing hero and assists Jason in his quest, ultimately killing her half-brother,

The mythological moment of Aeson/Medea is back in Tolchis after the elopement. Aeson is in a visit of witchcraft.

references are from the edition of

- The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine et al. (Washington Square Press, 1992), 5.1.17.
- References act, scene, and line.
- The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine et al. (Washington Square Press, 1992), 2.3.17.
- References act, scene, and line.
- The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine et al. (Washington Square Press, 1992), 2.3.21.
- References act, scene, and line.
- The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine et al. (Washington Square Press, 1992), 3.4.33.
- References act, scene, and line.
- The Merchant of Venice*, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine et al. (Washington Square Press, 1992), 5.1.15.
- References act, scene, and line.

*Way too much! Confute... OR, BETTER use in-line citation

Accessible Classical sources provided by J. Davidson Reid, Oxford Guide to Classical Mythology in the Arts, 1300-

1990's (Oxford 1994) include Hom. Euripides (Medea), Hesiod (Theogony).
Add this → OGCMA 0644 Medea - Shylock
It's relevant.

Most effective here would be particular to the line-number references to Medea/Aeson part of the story.

betraying and stealing from her father,⁷ and reviving Jason's father from the dead in order to prove her love to the Argonaut.⁸ However, after several years of supposedly marital bliss Jason decides to depose of Medea, replacing her with a younger, more politically significant wife. Medea promptly flies into a rage and kills Jason's bride, his father-in-law, and their two sons before departing on a chariot of Helios. Consequently, by projecting the characterization of Medea onto Jessica, the Jewish girl's betrayal of her father becomes far more important, as it is equated with Medea's treacherous behavior towards her own family. Thus, the considerable similarities between the two women add another layer to the mistakenly simple daughter of Shylock, and emphasize how destructive her marriage may eventually become.

Furthermore, Shakespeare's utilization of the story of Medea and Jason in comparison to that of Jessica and Lorenzo reemphasizes not only the potential unfortunate future of the couple's marriage, but Jessica's theft and betrayal as well as the sympathetic nature of Shylock. The Jewish moneylender is perhaps one of the playwright's most memorable and controversial characters. Shakespeare's depiction of him in *The Merchant of Venice* incites declarations ranging from a tragic hero to anti-Semitic. Unfortunately, Jessica's usage as a Medea character does little to satisfy the argument; by extrapolation Shylock becomes comparable to Aetis, a character who Medea clearly does not agree with yet falls prey to the conniving of the Argonauts. On the one hand, Aetis jealously guards the Golden Fleece and lies to Jason by claiming willingness to part with it; however, since Jason does not earn the Fleece himself, Aetis's decision to retain the magical object holds validity, and the reader's sympathies reach him upon the murder of his son by Medea. Similarly, Shylock appears extremely vengeful as he longs to receive a pound of Antonio's flesh; however, through his daughter's deception and his forced conversion to Christianity, the reader once again feels sympathetic towards the moneylender. Moreover, Jessica and Lorenzo's relationship appears to fail as Jessica seems impassive towards her lover. In the Modern Perspective section of the Folger Shakespeare Library edition of the play, Alexander Leggatt emphasizes this situation as he claims "The final images of harmony are a bit precarious... these stories [are] not just laughed off." It seems that the couple may have quite a few more problems than was suggested in their initial introduction. It is intriguing to note that similarly to Medea, Jessica loathed her father, orchestrated the betrayal of said man, and ran away with another who was clearly out of bounds; she demonstrates cleverness, and clearly does not need a man to depend on. Furthermore, if the comparisons between the two women continue, we may suppose that Lorenzo may have reason to fear for his self-preservation in the coming years; the marital harmony the two initially wish for may not exist.

In conclusion, by using the myth of Medea and Jason in comparison to the relationship of Jessica and Lorenzo, Shakespeare not only adds to his confusing character Shylock, but Medea's sympathetic yet debauched characterization adds another layer to the moneylender's mistakenly simple daughter. In his only play to mention the "Golden Fleece,"¹⁰ Shakespeare alludes to a woman who takes destiny into her own hands and does not treat it particularly well.

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Excellent sketch

Good balance st early 45 + narrative

utilization = use?

Aetis

Seems a little unclear

Let your close mentions carry this information
orchestrated his betrayal...

Year?

Additional source want

⁷ Robert E. Bell, "Medea," in *Women of Classical Mythology*, 293-296. Oxford University Press.

⁸ Edith Hamilton, "The Quest of the Golden Fleece," in *Mythology*, 133, Grand Central Publishing.

⁹ Alexander Leggatt, "Modern Perspective." In *The Merchant of Venice*, 220, Washington Square Press.

¹⁰ Root, "Argonauts" in *Classical Mythology in Shakespeare* 39-40, Guardian Press, Inc.

Please follow Chicago style.