



Resource Pack for students, teachers and actors.

# MEDEA

By Euripides

a new version by Tom Paulin

A Northern Broadsides production

Directed by Barrie Rutter



Written by Maeve Larkin for Northern Broadsides © 2010

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## **Cast List**

Nurse	Cleo Sylvestre
Tutor/Aegeus	Fine Time Fontayne
Chorus	Barbara Hockaday
	Michelle Hardwick
	Heather Phoenix
Medea	Nina Kristofferson
Creon	Barrie Rutter
Jason	Andrew Pollard

## **Creative Team**

Director	Barrie Rutter
Musical Director	Barbara Hockaday
Designer	Emma Wee
Lighting Designer	Julie Washington

All music composed by the company.

## **Production & Stage Management**

Producer	Sue Andrews
Production Manager	Kay Burnett
Company Stage Manager	Guy Parry
Deputy Stage Manager	Steve Hall
Wardrobe	Bridget Fell



## NORTHERN BROADSIDES THEATRE CO.

Northern Broadsides was founded in 1992 by Artistic Director Barrie Rutter. Having worked as an actor at the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre, Rutter became frustrated with the bias for speaking the classics with Received Pronunciation. It seemed as though a Northerner couldn't be a king! As verse-speaking is so well suited to the sing-song tune of the north, the upward inflections and the flat vowel sounds, Rutter set up his new theatre company in Halifax, West Yorkshire.



Robust, explicitly theatrical story-telling with language at its heart became the hall-mark of all Northern Broadsides' productions.

The company is as feted for its minimal sets, live music, ensemble-playing and its adaptability to any space large enough, as it is for its northern-ness.

Noted for its clarity and simplicity of style, Northern Broadsides has won international acclaim and a reputation as one of the country's leading exponents of Classical Theatre.

## INTRODUCTION

This pack is designed to offer some insights into how *Medea* might be explored practically. Northern Broadsides is a theatre company, its job to produce plays for performance. Obviously some exploration of background, context and style is essential, but that can never match what is revealed to us by the practical approach. Apart from actually watching the play, the easiest, most enjoyable and most useful way of accessing it is to...

*Get it on its feet.*

Intended as an accompaniment to Northern Broadsides' production of *Medea*, this pack for students, actors or any interested individuals wishing to explore the play further, approaches the text as a working script, through the eyes of the practitioner. It's worth remembering that the great Greek playwrights were also the directors of their work. The script was only the beginning. What really mattered was **performance**.

Studying the play solely as a piece of text will deprive you of its greatest offerings. The drama is action - it is there to be **SEEN**. The language is poetry - it is there to be **HEARD**. As language is at the heart of all Greek tragedies, as well as all of Northern Broadsides' productions, in the words of artistic director, Barrie Rutter:

*It 'as to be spokken!*



## GREEK TRAGEDY - WHY STILL DO IT?



On a typical Monday evening, you can watch *Coronation Street* then *Eastenders* then more *Coronation Street* and that's after *Emmerdale*, which is preceded by *Hollyoaks* and earlier in the day, *Doctors*.

Theatre - drama enacted in public - began with the Greeks.

Is this a reason to keep doing it?

Not in itself, no.

Do we still have an appetite for dramatic story-telling?

Looking at the Monday night schedule I'd say yes.

The popular medium may have changed from a 17,000 open-air-seater to the comfort of our own front rooms but essentially, the stuff of these dramas hasn't changed at all: family conflict, ambition and social advancement, war and displacement, the battle of the sexes...

What Greek theatre offers us is not only the opportunity to reconnect with the bedrock of all drama - back to the source if you like, but also to rediscover just how MODERN these plays are. How often have we read in recent years, of the tragic misuse of children in the acrimonious disputes between estranged parents? Or of the difficulties immigrants face in finding acceptance in a new community? Not to mention the subject of adultery and vengeful murder... all subjects explored in *Medea*.

Greek tragedy pares back the layers of dressing we have acquired over the centuries (technology, subtexts, subplots and attempts at realism) and gives us instead the bare bones - **STORY**.

This is what audiences continue to hanker after. The enduring appeal of these ancient plays is that our appetite for **STORY** is as big as ever.

The style is stark, the language simple, the plots - though extreme - are straightforward, the themes are universal and its relevance, timeless.



## WHAT'S THE STORY?

*Medea*, like most Greek tragedies, is made up of one long scene.

Within that, there are a series of encounters. For ease of analysis, I have broken these down and numbered them as follows:

1. **A Nurse comes out of Medea's house and laments the string of events that have led to this day.** Namely: when King Peleus commanded Jason to sail the *Argo* to steal the Golden Fleece, Medea helped him by leaving her family and homeland, killing her own brother, tricking Peleus' daughters into killing their father and settling with Jason and their two children as exiles in a foreign land. Now Jason has left Medea for the daughter of Creon 'king of this place' and plans to marry her. Holed up in her room, Medea refuses food, cries for days on end and calls out for her homeland. She can't bear to look at her children and the Nurse is worried for them.
2. **The children's tutor sees the Nurse and questions why she is out of doors alone. He shares the news he has overheard that Creon intends to banish Medea and the children.** The Nurse warns him to keep the children away from their mother. The tutor goes into the house.



3. **From within the house Medea wishes for death and curses her children.** Still outside, the Nurse pleads moderation in all things.
4. **A Chorus of sympathetic women arrive and on hearing Medea's shouts of despair, they ask the Nurse to fetch her out.**
5. **Medea comes out, more poised than expected. She bemoans her lot and that of women in general.** Namely: there is no justice for women; whatever their character, they get a reputation. For foreigners, it's even harder to find acceptance. Jason's abandonment has destroyed her. Women have to raise the dowry to get married but men are the masters of their wives' bodies. Medea asks the chorus to keep secret any revenge plot she comes up with, declaring that she 'will have blood'. The Chorus agree.
6. **Creon enters and banishes Medea and her two children. Medea begs for mercy but to no avail. She begs instead for one final day. Creon relents and leaves.**



7. **Medea tells the Chorus of her 'scheme' to poison Creon, his daughter and Jason.** She rallies their support by invoking the wild she-goddess, Hecate. The Chorus declare that 'women will have rights'.
8. **Jason enters and berates Medea for not accepting her fate more calmly.** Medea lists all that she has done for Jason. Namely: saved his life on the *Argo*, harnessed fire-breathing bulls, ploughed the 'field of

death', sowed the dragon's teeth, killed the sleepless serpent, lit him to safety, abandoned her family, had King Peleus killed and bore him two sons. Jason argues that she got more in return by escaping her 'tribal' roots and coming to cultured Greece. He justifies his betrayal by claiming that marriage to a royal will provide stability for their children. **Outraged, Medea refuses his offer of money and sends him away.**



9. The Chorus beg Aphrodite, the goddess of love, to choose their husbands wisely. They lament the hardships of banishment.
10. **Aegeus, the king of Athens, arrives on a quest to solve a riddle that'll enable him to father a child. As old friends, he agrees to offer Medea refuge in Athens, providing that she make the journey herself. In return, Medea promises Aegeus a cure for his childlessness.**
11. **Galvanised by her good fortune, Medea is ready to execute her revenge. She tells the Chorus she intends to make assassins of her children by sending them to the princess with the poisoned gifts. Then she announces her plan to kill the children herself. Horrified, the Chorus try to dissuade her. Ignoring them, she sends the Nurse to fetch Jason.**

12. The Chorus praise Athens, 'the home of hospitality' and beg Medea to think again.
13. Jason returns and Medea feigns a change of heart. Pretending to accept her banishment, she asks Jason to get the princess to persuade Creon to allow the boys to stay. She suggests the children present the princess with some beautiful gifts (a gown and crown) that the Nurse fetches.
14. Once Jason has gone - with the children and the gifts - the Chorus lament the inevitability of the impending deaths.
15. The Tutor brings news that the gifts have been well received and the children allowed to stay.
16. In a 'schizophrenic' speech, Medea wavers in her plot to kill the boys before steeling herself with the resolve to continue.
17. A servant brings the gory details of the princess' and Creon's horrible deaths, by the poisoned gifts.
18. Medea 'takes up the sword' and goes into the house to kill the children.



19. The Chorus plead with the gods to stop Medea. We hear the screams of the children.

20. Jason enters looking for his children. He fears for their lives, as revenge taken by the house of Creon, for the royal murders. The Chorus tell him that Medea has killed them already.
21. Medea appears above in a winged chariot. In a bitter exchange, Jason and Medea blame each other for everything. She refuses to allow him to bury the boys or even touch them. Jason is broken, Medea triumphant.
22. The Chorus state plainly that the gods control all aspects of mortals' lives.





## PLAY TIME...

### WHISTLE-STOP *MEDEA*

Get into groups.

Taking the bare bones, re-tell the story of *Medea* in a series of frozen sketches.

Give each sketch a title. Eg. *The Abandonment of Medea*, *The Banishment...*

Appoint a curator to talk the audience through each image.

### IMPRO

The servant who reports Creon's and the Princess' death (no. 17 above) gives a blow-by-blow account of what happened.

Adopting the roles of news-team and eye-witness, create a scene in which the servant tells everything s/he remembers about the royal double murder. Create newspaper headlines, a television news interview or even a *Crimewatch*-style reconstruction.

Make sure your facts are drawn solely from the details in the script.



### Investigate this...

Greek theatre didn't hold back on death and gore. What's the total body count in this play, including the deaths that are reported to have occurred before the play's beginning?



## GREEK THEATRE - WHAT WAS IT LIKE?

Imagine yourself in the original audience for *Medea*. Here's what we know:  
The performance took place in the open-air.  
It took place in Athens, pretty hot.  
It took place in daylight.  
It was part of a playwriting competition that in turn, was part of a religious festival.  
It played to an audience of about 17,000.  
The performers all wore masks.  
The performers were all male.  
The audiences were probably all male.

This version of *Medea* is based on the play by Euripides which, in turn, found its source in Greek mythology. Although its original audience would have been familiar with the characters, Euripides made the STORY his own so that the events of the play would have come as a shock. Jason was hitherto known as a hero. This interpretation would have been new. The *Medea* of this story kills her own children, before fleeing to Athens, where this play was first staged. How might the Athenians have felt about this? (The play only came third in the competition.)



## PLAY TIME...

### EVERYONE'S A CRITIC

Take on the roles of ancient Athenian theatre critics.  
You have just seen the first ever production of *Medea*.  
Enact a *Newsnight Review*-style discussion programme, debating the virtues and vices of the play.  
(For more arguments, see below.)



## THE TRAGIC HERO OR WHAT, NO COMEUPPANCE?

In *Medea* we see a woman placed at the centre of the drama who starts by reacting to her own tragedy - abandonment by her husband - and who then instigates the tragedies of those around her. She is both victim and perpetrator. The definition of a tragic hero is *a great person, destined through a flaw of character, fate or society to downfall or destruction.*

What is striking about Medea is that she doesn't conform to this definition.

True, she does have a flaw of character - her uncontrollable rage: *In my heart the rage is stronger far than reason.* Fate and society also play their part. But what is lacking for Medea herself, is any sense of downfall or destruction. Triumphant and remorseless, she flees to Athens and gets away with it! For modern audiences, this is quite a challenge. We're used to and expect the comeuppance. Shakespeare liked the comeuppance. Hollywood loves the comeuppance. Euripides leaves us to question, whose tragedy is it?

There is plenty of *downfall and destruction* for everyone else. All other characters, right down to the Nurse and the Tutor, stand to lose something from Medea's actions. In the eyes of classical tragedy, some victims are less innocent than others. Jason, for example. Or Creon. Even the Princess, by association, isn't totally innocent.

However, the children are.

Perhaps there is a point being made here. Was it Euripides' intention to show that the real victims in these disputes between men and women are always the children?

Has this changed?



## PLAY TIME...

### WHOSE TRAGEDY IS IT ANYWAY?

Take a character each.

Enact a scenario in which each character goes up before a judge(s) to make a compensation claim based on who has suffered the greatest tragedy.

Appoint a judge or panel of judges to ask pertinent questions relating to the characters' individual circumstances.

Medea's might go something like this: *After giving up everything for him and cutting myself off from all my family, Jason has just left me and our children for another, younger woman...*

Jason's might go: *I have lost everything. My bride-to-be, my future father-in-law (who was a king) but most of all, my children...*

Don't forget the Nurse and the Tutor, both slaves with no social status.

Allow the judges to discuss and deliver their verdicts.

Keep the proceedings as formal as possible.

Dead characters (the Princess, Creon and the Children) may take part!

(Read the character breakdowns below.)

### TUG OF WAR CHILDREN

The central relationship of this play focuses on the ugliness of a divorcing couple, with the children in the middle.

Use objects to represent each child, probably something soft like pieces of clothing.

Place them in the middle of the room.

Medea is at one end, Jason at the other.

Try the abridged scene below, using the 'children' when necessary.

They can be touched affectionately, grabbed protectively, handed over or completely left alone, according to the actors' choices.

Be detailed and specific about when to make contact and when to let go.

Don't let the exercise descend into one long tug of war.

Respond physically to the shifts in the scene.

Make the exercise interesting for an audience to watch.

Try the exercise a second time, exploring different choices.

**ABRIDGED EXTRACT FROM *MEDEA* (Tom Paulin)**

**Jason**        **Just look at you.  
You can hardly contain your rage at me.**

**Medea**        **You're getting old.  
Your heroic deeds  
They're hardly remembered now.  
And you're stuck with a poor foreigner for a wife.**

**Jason**        **Medea this is not about 'another woman'.  
This royal marriage as I told you  
Was for you and our children.  
The boys would have princes for brothers.  
Then everyone would be safe and sound.**

**Medea**        **Such a dangerous safety! I pray I never get there.  
Or find this so-called prosperity  
That would break my heart entirely.**

**Jason**        **Pray for something wiser then.  
Pray instead for a happier view of life.**

**Medea**        **I go without friends into exile  
While you sit in your palace.**

**Jason**        **I'll give you money  
Money for you and the children  
Just ask me for it.  
I'm ready to be generous.  
I'm happy to give you letters  
For friends abroad.  
They'll take you in I'm sure of it.**

**Medea**        **I need no friends of yours to take care of me.**

**Jason**        **I have done all that I can do.  
Offered help to you and to the children  
But you've thrown it right back in my face.**

**Medea**        **Get out of my sight you beast.  
I can see you want to be back in the palace  
With your randy playmate.  
She'll be waiting in bed for you. Dying for it I'm sure.  
So act the bridegroom while you can.  
Your honeymoon I tell you will be most brief and bitter.**

## CHARACTER

### Medea

*Her passion is so strong, the air around her hurts. (Chorus)*

In order to gain a clearer understanding of how actors might unlock character, this section is divided into three parts.

1. Character is **ACTION**. What I mean by this is that the only absolute and concrete facts we have about a character are the things they do - their **actions**. The rest is open to conjecture and interpretation. When an actor prepares for a part, one chief aspect of the writing tells us nearly all we need to know - the character's **actions**. Here are Medea's:

She persuades the Chorus to back her.

She persuades Creon to give her another day.

She persuades Aegeus to give her sanctuary in Athens.

She persuades Jason into believing her change of heart.

She kills both the princess and Creon, by persuading Jason to allow the children to deliver the poisoned gifts.

She kills her children.

She exults in her 'triumph'.

She flees to her new life.

**Back-story** features quite heavily in Greek Tragedy so in terms of **actions**, we learn many of Medea's before the play's plot has even started:

She helped Jason win the Golden Fleece (see list in *WHAT'S THE STORY?*)

She abandoned her family and homeland.

She killed her brother.

She tricked King Peleus' daughters into killing him.

She fled with Jason and their two children.

She settled as an exile in a foreign land.

If **actions** speak louder than words, we've an awful lot to go on here!

2. Character is **PERCEPTION**. I said above that actions tell us *nearly* all we need to know. However, what is *said* about a character, either by the character itself or by others, is an essential component to understanding them. It allows us to form a **profile** based on everything we can glean from the text. Here are a few examples of what we learn:

Medea is a non-Greek, living in Greece. She is therefore an outsider.

She comes from an ancestry that is part-human, part-divine (her grandfather was the sun-god Helios).

Her invocation of Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft, suggests she's a sorceress herself. Creon backs this up: *You're skilled in the dark black arts*. The Nurse, probably Medea's closest ally, says: *She has a temper that is vile and violent*.

Medea tells the Chorus that Jason *took me as plunder from some foreign campaign*, while Jason says: *You were driven solely by desire*.

There are usually contradictions between what a character says about itself and what is said by others. In this example, Medea goes further and contradicts what she has already said about herself: *I did this all for love of you*. These discrepancies are always useful because they reveal what characters are trying to hide.

3. Character in **CONTEXT**. The above two points are concerned entirely with the text. If we layer onto these our wider knowledge of social context, we gain further insights. For example:

A non-Greek was considered to be a barbarian - savage, uncivilized and uneducated. Greek society, especially Athens where the play was first performed, saw itself as the cultural and civilized centre of the world. Jason tells Medea: *You're in a land of culture and justice not some base tribal swamp*. Medea's divine connections, along with her celebrated intelligence - *You are known throughout the land of Greece for that fine brain of yours* - would no doubt have helped her transcend her low social status as an immigrant. Add to this her marriage to Jason, a famous hero, and her acceptance into Greek society would have been made easier still. His abandonment therefore is more than just a blow to her emotionally. It leaves her in a precarious position, socially. She literally has nowhere to go and concludes: *I have nothing left to lose*.

Context is crucial to our understanding of character.



## CHARACTER ACTIVITY 1

### ACTION EXTRACTION

The idea is to access character through what we see them do.

Choose a character from the play.

List their actions.

Avoid phrases like: the Nurse talks about...

Keep it active eg. the Nurse begs information from the Tutor.

Use actions from the back-story also but only those that are mentioned in the play.



## CHARACTER ACTIVITY 2

### ACTORS' HOMEWORK

The idea is to examine your character from different perspectives.

Choose a character.

Go to the script.

Extract as many things that you say about yourself as possible.

Extract as many things that **other** people say about you as possible.

Compare.

What do we learn?



## CHARACTER ACTIVITY 3

### MITIGATION

The idea is to examine the circumstances surrounding a character.

Choose a character.

What part does **context** play in their choices?

Does it give them reasons for their actions?

Does it give them excuses for their actions?

## Jason

*We build our lives on accolades. (Jason)*

Using the three activities above, find out what we know about Jason according to his **actions**, what is said by and about him - **perceptions**, and what the social **context** to his character is.

When Jason delivers his defence to Medea, it is important that he is given fair hearing so as not to render him a two-dimensional villain. His argument does have some credibility. Mindful of their low status as exiles, he asserts that by being married to him, Medea found acceptance in a land far superior to her own. He claims his impending royal marriage has nothing to do with lust but is a shrewd move to ensure stability and prosperity: *All I want is security*. It is worth taking a closer look at this line of reasoning. As immigrants, Medea and Jason are vulnerable enough but the added label 'exiles' carries heavier connotations - it suggests a background of trouble. Finding acceptance in a land deemed *the very cradle of fame* is one achievement. To marry into its royal family is the ultimate.

Medea see things differently: *Getting old, your heroic deeds are hardly remembered now and you're stuck with a poor foreigner for a wife.*

Is Jason's defence a genuine argument or as Medea claims, *tricksy rhetoric*?

## The Nurse

*I hope to grow old just the way I am, lowly, unremarkable and safe. (Nurse)*

The Nurse is our first introduction to the world of the play and delivers a kind of prologue. She sums up the back-story, whilst regretting the present. She sets the tone for the tragedy to come, with her portentous foreboding: *She hates to have her kids near her... I am frightened she is planning something in her mind*. A foreigner like Medea, she has an affinity for her *dear mistress*. She also represents the slave-class: *but he is my master so I cannot curse him*. She provides the voice of reason: *we should be moderate in all things* but, like the Chorus, does nothing to stop Medea's murderous actions.

## The Chorus

*Among her friends, her fury might lessen. (Chorus)*

The Chorus is the epitome of sympathetic impotence. Ever-watchful and always inactive, it listens, soothes and questions but never *affects* the action. Or does it?

On the one hand, it begs the gods to stop Medea's filicide (the act of killing one's own son or daughter) but is powerless to do so itself. However, it could be argued that as the Chorus acts like a channel between the audience and the play, shaping our interpretation of events, its role is more active than at first might seem.

Once onstage, it stays throughout. It usually acts as one, in terms of opinion and outlook. It also provides a link, often through song, between the world of the play and the wider universe: *look at parents, ground down by love and worry.*

Euripides contrasts Medea's temperament with that of the Chorus, who urges against excess and passion, and argues instead for restraint.

It is often said that the presence of the Chorus is the most antiquated aspect of Greek Tragedy - that there is no modern equivalent. I would argue that the role of the chorus is akin to our modern-day editor in film and television, in the sense that both manipulate what we see and how we are meant to feel about it.





## PLAY TIME...

### CHORUS LINE

Get into groups of three.

Do the speech below, trying out different ways of delivery.

At times, speak as one. At others, speak individually.

Try it with movement - simple, stark gestures (nothing too complicated)

Imagine you are wearing masks.

How might that change your physicality?

Employ different vocalisations: whisper, sing, echo etc.

Try singing all of it.

Be brave!

### ABRIDGED EXTRACT FROM *MEDEA* (Tom Paulin)

<b>Chorus</b>	<b>We wish that she Would come out And listen to us closely. Meet us face to face. Among her friends her fury Might lessen. Nurse fetch her from the house Tell her that we support her always But be quick about it Lest she hurts those inside. Her passion is so strong The air around her hurts.</b>
---------------	--

N.B. Read *Conversation 5 - Barbara Hockaday* for comments on the Chorus.

## **The Tutor**

*Old teacher, the tired slave of Jason's children. (Nurse)*

The tutor of Medea and Jason's children serves two important plot functions. He is the first to impart the knowledge that Creon is going to banish Medea. Later, he reports back to Medea that the gifts were received favourably and the children reprieved from exile. His first line to the Nurse: *Old nurse what are you doing here?* exposes her behaviour as a transgression. Women were not meant to be out of doors alone. However, he is not an unsympathetic character. He comments on the bad behaviour of Jason and makes that the common view, as it is shared by the Nurse and the Chorus. His line: *We mortals have to learn to bear our misfortune* could be regarded as the moral of the story.

## **Creon**

*I make the law... to put it bluntly I'm afraid of you. (Creon)*

Creon is the king of the land, whose daughter is set to marry Jason. He deals the blow that sets the course for Medea's murderous revenge. By banishing her, she transforms from Medea, the heartbroken to Medea, the avenger. By giving her one more day, a seemingly harmless request that elicits from Creon the play's most resoundingly ironic line *one day will surely bring no harm on us*, the play's tragic events begin in earnest.

## **Aegeus**

*I will act as your protector. I will never give you up.*

Aegeus is the king of Athens who travels to where the play is set to find a cure for his childlessness. An old friend of Medea's, their chance meeting represents an act of fate in the play. By offering Medea refuge in Athens, even though for diplomatic reasons he cannot assist her journey, he secures her future and unwittingly drives the tragedy forward.

# WOMEN

Euripides is noted amongst the Greek dramatists for his sympathetic portrayal of women. Here are some facts about the role of women in ancient Greek society:

Girls belonged to their fathers, then to their husbands.

Girls were taught household skills, sewing and cooking etc.

A housewife was considered the most respectable position for a woman.

Women couldn't own property. It either belonged to their husbands or, if they divorced, control and rights went back to their father.

Men could divorce their wives by a simple declaration before a witness.

Women had little power. They had no right to vote or take part in politics. They were not highly regarded until they produced their first child.

Women dominated the household and the domestic sphere. They usually had servants.

No respectable woman was seen in public. Married women were not allowed out of the house alone, except for certain religious festivals.

Poorer women didn't have servants and had to go out to work. Although their lives were harder materially, they had more freedom of movement.

Prostitutes and courtesans were commonplace, revealing the sexual double standards of the day. All other women were meant to remain chaste.

Women did play a significant role in the religious life of Ancient Greece and goddesses were highly regarded.

# IMMIGRANTS

All non-Greeks were classed as barbarians.

Immigrants were excluded from participation in political life.

Immigrants experienced varying degrees of legal disadvantage.

They didn't have citizen's rights and couldn't attain citizenship.

They were essentially second-class citizens.

Metics were legal, resident 'aliens', usually of Greek origin - like Jason. They could be integrated into the social and economic life of the city. However, they shared the burdens of citizenship (tax, military service) without the privileges.

# SLAVES

Euripides' portrayal of the Nurse and Tutor as intelligent and worldly, contradicted the stereotype of the slaves of the day. Here are some facts about slaves in Greek society:

Most Greek households had slaves. Only the poorest Greek citizens didn't possess a domestic slave.

Slaves were almost always of foreign origin and would have been involuntary immigrants.

They were usually trafficked as spoils of war or international trading agreements.

Slaves were the property of their master, who could dispose of or sell them at any time.

They had no rights.



## PLAY TIME...

### ISOLATION EXERCISES

As a woman and a foreigner, Medea has her work cut out for her. As a woman, foreigner and slave, the Nurse is even lower in the pecking order. Although a Greek, Jason is an outsider too. Using the extracts below, try the following exercises, which attempt to physically illuminate the characters' isolation.

#### Isolation Exercise 1

Medea is at one end of the room.

The rest of the group, at the other.

Medea's quest is to use the speech to make the group listen to her.

She can move where she likes.

The group's quest is to move as one and to ignore her.

The group can move anywhere but cannot speak or make noise.

Afterwards, discuss what discoveries are made, both for Medea and the rest of the group.

#### Isolation Exercise 2

Chairs are laid out randomly around the room, one chair per person.

Everyone occupies a chair except for Medea.

Her objective is to get to and sit on the empty chair.

The group's objective is to prevent this.

As Medea makes her way, the rest of the group - working together - all swap chairs, continuously blocking her attempts to sit.

Medea always heads for the new empty chair.

The group always attempts to occupy it.

Try the exercise first without text. Then use the speech.

As the actor playing Medea will probably be reading, place a 'no running' restriction.

Discuss what the exercise reveals for the actor playing Medea and for the rest of the group.

Try the above exercises for Jason and the Nurse.

**ABRIDGED EXTRACT FROM *MEDEA* - Medea (Tom Paulin)**

**Medea**        **Women of Corinth**  
I have come out here  
To show you just who I am.  
I will not be judged by anyone  
- judged as a proud woman.  
I know many that are vain it's true  
- know them indoors or out.  
But whether you go out in public  
Or else retire in private  
You get a reputation either way.  
In the eyes of men there is no justice  
For they judge only by what they see in front of them.  
They never judge by what they know.  
For foreigners like me  
It's the hardest thing to be accepted  
- we're always working  
always trying our hardest to fit in.

**ABRIDGED EXTRACT FROM *MEDEA* - Jason (Tom Paulin)**

**Jason**        **As to my marriage, my most royal marriage**  
I'll show you just how wise and prudent I have been  
and what a great friend I am to you and to the children.  
No! Hold your tongue and listen to me now!  
When I moved here from Iolcos  
Dragging my bad luck behind me  
what better fortune could I find  
than marriage to the daughter of a king?  
I was an exile then.  
You think I'm tired of you  
that I lust for younger flesh  
or that I want to rival others  
- others who have many children.  
But that's not true.  
All I wanted was security  
security and prosperity both.  
I don't want to end up as a vagrant  
men cross the street to avoid.

**ABRIDGED EXTRACT FROM *MEDEA* - Nurse (Tom Paulin)**

**Nurse**        **They are truly dangerous.  
They give the orders  
And never take them.  
When they get angry  
Their wrath is slow to cool.  
Ordinary life's much better  
- there everyone is equal.  
I hope to grow old just the way I am.  
Lowly unremarkable and safe.  
We should be moderate in all things.  
Excess brings mortals no advantage.  
All it does when the gods run wild  
Is draw more ruin down on us.**





## CONVERSATION 1 - Tom Paulin (Adapter)

**First of all, what does *lunk* mean?**

'Lunk' means oppressively hot and still. It's in the first line of the play. The Nurse says *it's a lunk day today*. It's a northern Irish word. I think it came over with the Vikings.

**Why did you want to do a version of *Medea*?**

A while back, a friend of mine said that most versions of Greek tragedies are stilted and academic. I thought to myself, 'I'd like to give it a go'. I wanted to strive for a vernacular pitch and cadence. I wanted it to have a spoken, extemporaneous quality. With regards to translation, I did try and learn ancient Greek but I'm a hopeless linguist, so I gave up!

**Some commentators call this play 'proto-feminist', because of the sympathetic portrayal of its main protagonist.**

There is no doubt that Medea is the greatest female part in all classical Greek drama. Here you have a woman who is intelligent, powerful and wronged, who is completely out of control because she is so ANGRY. The feminism didn't go down well at the time. This play came last in the competition that it was first performed in. They couldn't take this woman who had killed her children.

**As well as her (low) status as a woman, she is also a foreigner. Is this something you wanted to flag up for your audience?**

Yes. Her status as an outsider humanises her and makes the audience sympathetic to her.

**As a writer, is there a tension between the play and the production?**

In the end, the play has to respond to the production's demands; it's what works in production that's crucial. It's always a challenge doing rewrites but Barrie Rutter and I have honed the script. He has had me cutting bits here and adding bits there. I have long admired Northern Broadsides' work and it's been fun working with Barrie. I have been inspired by the rehearsals - it's great to hear the words spoken by the actors.



## CONVERSATION 2 - Barrie Rutter (Director)



### **Why *Medea*?**

Tom (Paulin) sent me his adaptation. The concrete nature of this piece provides fertile ground for inspiration for production. It has a presentational quality. Although we don't have physical masks in this production, there's the mask of language. Euripides was looser than Sophocles or Aeschylus in terms of the formality of language, as Tom has been here. But still, the language had to be spellbinding.

### **How much did you and Tom collaborate on the script?**

He had very little briefing from me. I sent some rewrite ideas that were mainly concerned with more muscular poetics based on alliteration, monosyllables and *rhyme*. Rhyme wasn't a big poetic tool in Greek theatre; there aren't many examples of it.

### **What about the removal of the children from this version?**

We're a touring company. When we did *Alcestis*, we had to rehearse two new children every week for each new venue and ensure that they fit the costumes etc. From a purely practical point of view, it was a problem. I think that a symbolic representation of their presence has the power to be just as poignant and shocking, if not more so.

### **How do you direct a play like this?**

It's not about naturalism. The psychological journey is already there - it's written in. Many of these exchanges don't work in naturalism. Remember, the

actors would have been wearing masks. I direct it like the mask is still there. I love the form. I don't deny or apologise for it.

**Where did the Blues idea for the music come from?**

The Nurse says we need a tune when the chips are down. I, by extension, went to the blues for that. As the Nurse goes to fetch Medea, a lightbulb goes on in the Chorus. Music is inextricably linked to this story. It led to at least fifty operas. I'm often reminded of Nina Simone. I was there in the audience one night - she did hatred wonderfully.

**What do you think about Medea as a tragic hero?**

All the commentators say that the killing of her sons has got to hurt Medea. But there's no text for that. She says to Jason, it's going to hurt you more. The schizophrenic speech where she grapples with whether or not to do it is the only time we know it's a struggle. But she comes out of it completely lacking in remorse. She gloats.

**This doesn't conform to what we know about the tragic hero. What about catharsis?**

There isn't any, she gets away with it! I hate those buzz-words surrounding Greek drama. It's much more transgressive than that. She stabs those children with great clarity. It isn't straightforward for the audience. Her escape is resolved but her end isn't.

**It makes it a harder job for the actress, knowing you're not the audience's heroine...**

But the audience marvels at her ingenuity. This play only came third prize when it was originally shown. You can imagine why. The judges witness a woman getting away with these crimes and then finding refuge in their very own city.

**Why do you think its appeal has endured?**

All Greek tragedy is basically the fight between male and female, it all comes down to that. Two and a half thousand years ago, there was no record of any woman ever attending a theatre. They simply wouldn't have been allowed out in public. All female representation in plays was done by men, in masks. But the poets continually wrote about women and questioned society in that way, Euripides more than most.



### CONVERSATION 3 - Nina Kristofferson (Medea)

I caught up with Nina during a rare break before her very first performance on the preview night.



**How do you see Medea's status as a tragic hero/ine? Does she suffer 'downfall and destruction' or does she get away with it?**

Medea's 'downfall and destruction' is that she loses Jason. That in itself is a huge blow for her. Hence she goes on the rampage for vengeance... to ease her soul, to feed herself, to get rid of the anger so she can breathe again. Is she heroic? Well, killing children is not a nice thing. The question for me as an actor is, what drives her to do that? I believe she loved her kids, what mother doesn't? But her hatred for what Jason has done is stronger. She sees no other way of getting back at him.

**How do you, as a person, feel about her as a character?**

That's a hard one. I like her strength but I don't like what she does to get even. I like that she can think so clearly and so quickly. She's very skilful and that's to be admired to some degree.

**How do you think she sees herself?**

In her mind, she's not just human, she's part divine. She thinks that places her above the rules of everyone else. She thinks she has the right to behave as she does.

**For a woman and an outsider, she doesn't suffer from an inferiority complex, does she?**

None whatsoever! In her mind, she's not even an equal - she's above.

**I suppose you could say she's earned her sense of status, through what she's done for Jason...**

She's not prepared to be denied it. That's the thing.

So many restrictions were placed upon her as a woman and yet she doesn't live within those rules. She's skilled in the dark arts as well. That's a whole other area that fuels her confidence and pride.

**What challenges have you faced as an actress playing this role?**

I haven't done Greek tragedy for a while, the last time was at drama school. Barrie's very exacting, he knows what he wants. He's very clear in his direction. The challenge was to not make it modern, to embrace the style and scale of the language and yet, the dialogue does have elements of a modern feel. It's modern but it's not modern.

**You have some huge speeches...**

Yes! Barrie told me not to learn it before rehearsals began. I thought 'are you sure?' I read it a few times, I thought about the character and then I thought 'okay, it sounds like I need to keep an open mind on this one because I'm not sure where he wants to go with it...'

**Have rehearsals been enjoyable or intense?**

They've been intense. There's no way you can play Medea and it not be. Barrie's an intense director. However I do enjoy getting to the core of my character. I like finding out what the through-line is.

**Are there aspects of Nina that you feel are aspects of Medea?**

You know what, no. Other than the fact that she's a woman and a woman who's been scorned by a man, in the sense of a relationship that's broken up badly, that stuff I can align myself with. Most women can and vice versa but I really have to go somewhere else to play this part. I don't really have this angry side in me. (BIG LAUGH) I've had to find it and I've used Barrie as a bit of a ...

**...punchbag?**

...Yes! (LAUGH) Because it's been demanding, it's enabled me to channel any hard feeling through the character. If Barrie gave me a note that wasn't likeable or it was something I had to question, I'd be questioning it in my mind as Medea.

**Has the role's iconic status been a burden in any way?**

It wasn't when I first got the job but then all my friends were saying 'Ooo, you're playing Medea' and I thought oh dear, that's a pressure. But I've played Billie Holliday and she's pretty iconic. I knew when I read the part that I could bring it to life. There's so much in the dialogue I can use.

**This is your first time working for Northern Broadsides. How have you found it?**

It's challenging but I like it because it's different. There's been push and pull on both sides and I think that's worked. Because there is a distinct style, you get a clear vision. Barrie's a good driving force. Some of what he demands is difficult when you're trying to find it for yourself but to be honest, I've liked it. He's a tough director but I'd do it again!

**Are you looking forward to tonight?**

I am. It needs an audience because when you get to this stage, in order for it to become really alive and electric, you can't do it in a vacuum. The audience allows you to make discoveries about the character and the story as a whole. They give you something back.





## CONVERSATION 4 - Emma Wee (Designer)



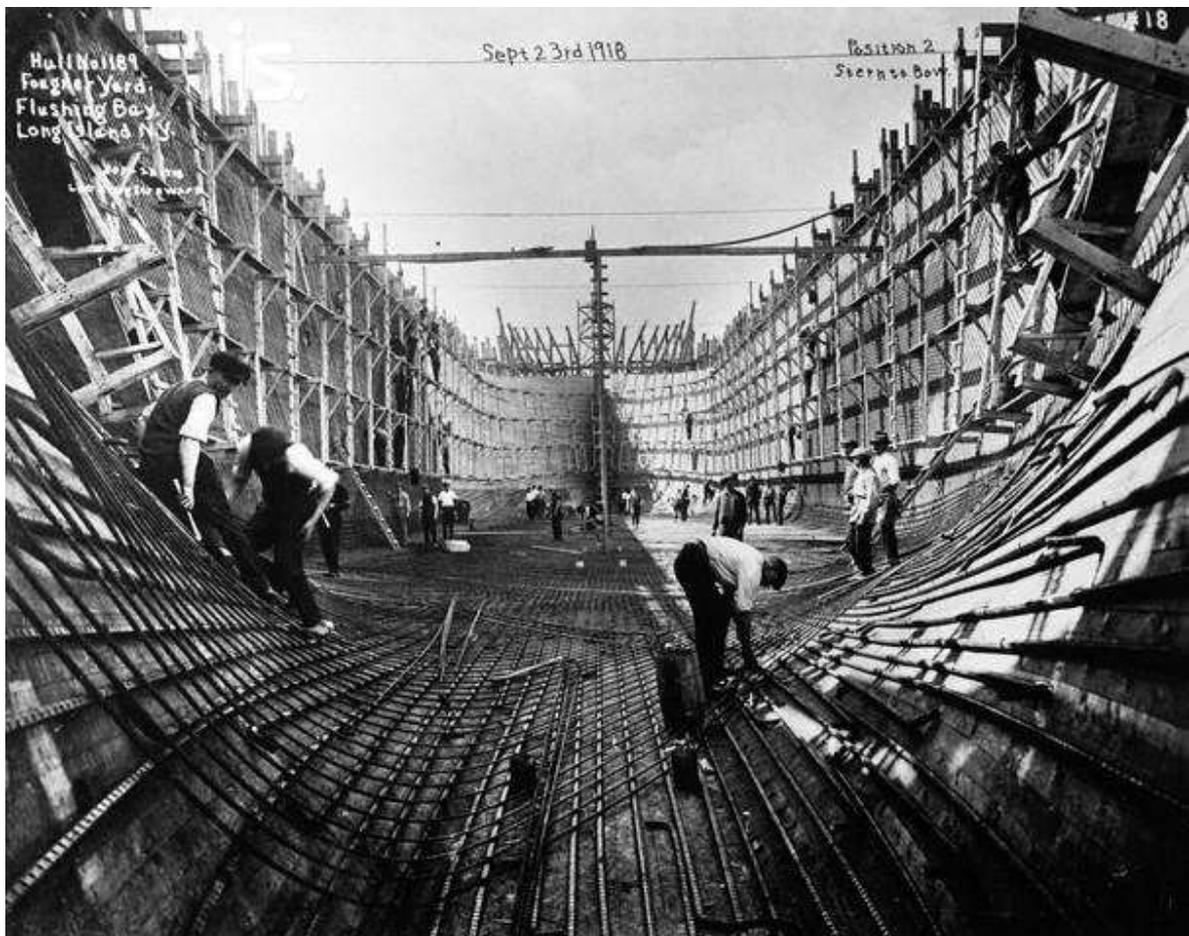
### Can you talk us through the set?

The set consists of a long, sloping central section with steps up to it. Barrie wanted the chariot to feature so it had to be there from the start. The main cradle section represents Medea's house then later becomes the chariot. It has the look of a stripped-back carcass, down to its bare bones and made of the driftwood that came from the Argo.

Because it's quite a small space, I wanted something that had different levels so you could very subtly have the hierarchy played in different places. Originally, the cradle section was fuller but mindful of the need for the set to work in different touring spaces (in-the-round, end-on and in traverse) we

had to strip it back for sightlines. In the end, this made better sense metaphorically. Half the cradle structure swings round to the front for when it becomes the chariot.

The floor is made up of calf-skins sewn together. Providing an uneven floor surface, they are reminiscent of the Golden Fleece. I was struck by Medea's line *I need only pull one tiny thread and the whole thing falls apart*. The skins separate down the middle so that at the end, the whole floor is unstitched and pulled apart, revealing a river of blood.



**Can you tell us about your designs for the costumes?**

We're not setting this in Classical times. We have an Edwardian, formalised tailoring that goes against the heat of the place. Barrie knew he wanted the jazz/blues element. I didn't want a period too far away from Billie Holiday in the 1930s, yet it had to be far away enough to make Medea's behaviour seem as wilful and mad. The Edwardian constraint contrasts well with that.

### The Chorus



**We're in a fitting with Cleo who plays the Nurse. Tell us about her costume.**

I've been using the textures of the voices of the actors a lot. Cleo's got a fragile area at the top end of her voice but as a character, she has a lot of grace and grounding. So her costume is quite a solid colour but we're using chiffons and more delicate fabrics so that she's got that contrast of qualities. The Nurse is a foreigner like Medea. Her costume will be a more muted version of Medea's.

**Tell us about Medea's costume.**



Medea's is a very punchy, bright turquoise. There is a painting by JW Waterhouse called *Cerce Invidiosa* that depicts Cerce pouring poison into the river. She is wearing an incredibly vivid turquoise. It's a seductive colour with malicious intent behind it!



*Circe Invidiosa*

**Did you start with Medea's costume?**

Yes. She was the focal point. Everyone else is in relatively muted colours. The small playing space really allows colour to have an impact. It's the same with props. By using so few of them, we can say an awful lot about the ones we have - the crown and poisoned gown, the blade Medea uses to kill the boys and something to represent the boys' bodies at the end.

**How much autonomy do you have as a designer and how much comes from Barrie? Who starts?**

Barrie gave me his initial feelings. He knew he wanted the chariot and also that he wanted something quite simple. Aside from that, he's been generous about letting me find my way through. I work very closely with the text. I feel the rhythm of the text, the way he finds the musicality of the language, so we're similar in that respect. We've had an open dialogue. The question I

always ask is: what do you want people to come away with at the end of the performance?

**How much contact did you have with the director before rehearsals began?**

We met about once a month. We emailed ideas constantly. I was first booked about six months ago and we are still finding things. By the end of the project, it'll probably have been about a year.

**Quite a long commitment then?**

In opera, it's about three years.

**Do you have a working method or process?**

I have a working wall. Any image or text or even a sound, goes up on this wall. It's a gradual process of focussing it down.

**What advice can you give to anyone hoping to start a career in theatre design?**

I was a sculptor. I did a lot of site-specific and installation work. I have done a lot of 'reading spaces'. Be curious. That's really important. I learned enough skills to be able to talk to people who have better skills, so that I can work with them - like Dawn, the costume-maker and Rob who is building the set. We work together.

**How did you make the shift from sculptor to theatre designer?**

I did an Art and English Literature degree. So I was working as a sculptor and studying text at the same time. I was also a singer. These three elements came together. (Also, when I was at Art College, they said I was too bossy!) I would recommend courses, but don't be afraid of trying to make work outside of theatre.

**Finally, how did you end up working for Broadsides?**

I was designing a show at West Yorkshire Playhouse (*The Hounding of David Oluwale*) and Northern Broadsides was there at the same time with *Othello*. So I introduced myself. The challenge for designers is finding someone you can work with.



## CONVERSATION 5-Barbara Hockaday (MD & Chorus)



**The music for *Medea* has been composed collaboratively, during the course of rehearsals. You are officially the Musical Director. Did you come on day one with anything?**

Only a feeling of what Barrie wanted. Over the past few months, he's regularly drip-fed me *have you heard this?* or *I like that musician* or *I like this kind of feel*. He also asked me to pick up the harmonica.

**When you say pick up the harmonica, do you mean learn it?**

Yes. That began May or June of last year (now Jan 2010). So I didn't come with a piece composed but I'd honed in on certain sounds and rhythms so that I had something ready to improvise.

**Did you know the instrumentation you had?**

Yes, we knew the keyboard would be used. We knew that Fine Time (Tutor/Aegeus) was going to bring his electric guitar, we wanted to include saxophones, harmonicas and percussion.

**How have you found the collaborative process? Must be hard at times, four brains instead of one?**

Everybody's brought their perspective on what this music is. Somebody'll say *what about this on keys?* Someone'll say *what about this, vocally?* We'll find the chord that suits us... Yes, different brains will hear things differently but it allows for more material to be built upon.

**Have you tweaked any of the text to fit the music?**

Barrie specified to Tom (Paulin) certain bits that needed music and that's largely been a collaboration between them. Bits of text are tweaked all the time.

**What does your role as MD comprise of?**

Maintaining the music on tour, really.

**Do you mind me asking what musical qualifications you have?**

I have a recital certificate in piano (comes after Grade 8), I'm a bass player (though not in this show) and I'm a Grade 8 advanced percussionist.

**How has your music education fed into your acting?**

I think a sense of musicality is really useful in terms of addressing a script. There's always a rhythm or a sense of dynamics - where we're gaining momentum or slowing down, getting louder or softer. My knowledge of music helps me out.

**Do you think there's a growing trend for actor/musicians?**

I work as an actor because I'm a musician. I didn't go to drama school, I went to university. It makes you a useful commodity. It's having another string to your bow. There do seem to be more productions going that way.

**Would you like to compose?**

Yes. But I'm really enjoying this process, the way we're all experiencing the drama as it comes together and discovering what feeds into it musically. The music is really responding to the moment that's being created in the room.

**How are you finding playing one third of the Chorus?**

As an actor, you're usually concerned with your own character and what you're going to do but as a Chorus, we're really responsible for each other. We want to be 'as one' but if we're completely identical, then why have three? It's balancing how far our individuality extends within it and where the boundaries are. There's a formality to the speech but that isn't without

drama. It's choosing how far to go gesturally or facially. What we don't want is for people to be thinking *who are you as a person?*

Our voices mix well and are all slightly different. The designer picked up on this and is going to reflect it in the costume. Michelle's voice is sparky and energetic, Heather's warm and mine 'prim'. They represent different vocal muscularities.

### **What has Barrie said about the Chorus?**

He's talked about how although we're not wearing masks, we still have to observe the same rules. You can't look away. You have to see. The masks' eyes are always open. The Chorus sees everything and understands everything but are not able to interject. Although as unmarried women, there's a level of things we haven't got to yet (sex), we also enjoy a freedom over married women because they're not allowed outside the house.



