SPECIAL EDITION

Daily Quote

OPEN CASES

MEDEA ON TRIAL

CLASSICAL THINKERS ON MEDEA

FROM EURIPIDES TO SENECA, MANY ANCIENT AUTHORS HAVE NO DOUBT: INFANTICIDE IS A CONSCIOUS CHOICE.

Was Medea the victim of Jason's betrayal or guilty of one of the most heinous crimes? While in modern times the figure of the sorceress of Colchis is often reinterpreted as a symbol of female marginalisation and rebellion, ancient sources tell a different story. Numerous classical authors insist on Medea's full responsibility, presenting her as consciously guilty of her actions.

EURIPIDES: A FAULT CHOSEN WITH LUCIDITY

In Euripides' tragedy Medea, performed in Athens in 431 BC, the protagonist never appears as a woman lacking control. On the contrary, she reflects at length on her most extreme act: the killing of her children. Medea knows that this is an ungodly crime, contrary to the laws of men and gods, but she decides to do it anyway to punish Jason in the cruelest way possible. The conflict between reason and passion does not lessen

"Mlle Clairon in the role of Medea"
by C. André van Loo.

her guilt: it makes it worse. Medea recognises the evil she is about to commit and chooses it deliberately.

SENECA: MEDEA AS A SYMBOL OF PASSION THAT DESTROYS

Seneca's judgement is even harsher. In his Medea, written in Roman times, the protagonist becomes the embodiment of furor, the destructive passion that destroys all moral balance. There is no room for justification or mitigating circumstances: Medea claims the crime as an affirmation of power and identity. In Seneca's Stoic thinking, the guilt is total because it arises from a conscious rejection of reason: Medea is not swept along by events, but dominates them, choosing crime as a means of revenge.

OVID AND HYGINUS: A RECURRING FAULT

Also for Ovid, Medea is not acquitted. Her crimes multiply: deceit, murder, betrayal. Violence is not an isolated episode, but a constant feature of her character. In Hyginus' Fabulae, the story is essential and devoid of emotional commentary: the facts speak for themselves and Medea appears simply as the perpetrator of actions that violate every human and divine law.

While Jason's betrayal and her status as a foreigner explain Medea's pain, for ancient authors this does not justify it. Euripides portrays her tormented conscience, Seneca condemns her without appeal, Ovid and Hyginus record her repeated violence. In all cases, she is not a woman without choice, but a person who decides to transform pain into destruction. Final verdict: GUILTY!