CHAPTER EIGHT

Connubial Revenge

Euripides' Medea

I

When Medea, the other great avenging maternal child-killer,[1] is placed beside Procne, there seems at first to be a perfect ethical opposition between the two. Medea is the barbarian this time, while her tortured husband is a Greek hero, and there is no question of defending a father's honor in the case of the woman from Colchis. Nor does Medea avenge a sister; instead she responds in primary fashion to an injury she herself has received. That injury, moreover, is one that we today do not take very seriously. Jason hasn't raped and he hasn't maimed; he has simply repudiated one wife and taken another, and so to us Medea seems to have answered an everyday misdemeanor with a stupendous act of unnatural cruelty. She has not even been moved by the true avenger's indignation, it would seem, but only by a sordid sexual spite, and so on superficial view her tragedy appears to be no tragedy at all but a melodrama meant to display the dangers that breed in flamboyant foreign females.[2]

1. It was Euripides who fixed this function upon Medea, choosing to give her the crime of infanticide and to label it as revenge. Whether or not Neophron had already made her the knowing killer of her children (for a recent argument for his priority, see A. Michelini, "Neophron and Euripides' *Medea* 1056–80," *TAPA* 119 [1989] 115–35), tradition offered at least three other versions of the children's death: accidental, during immortalization process (Eumelus, *Corinthiaca* 3A *EGF* = Paus. 2.3.10 ff.), used by Carcinus in a tragedy of the end of the fifth century (Arist. *Rh.* 1400b); killed by Corinthians (Paus. 2.3.6–7; Diod. Sic. 4.54.7; Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.9.28; schol. Eur. *Med.* 264, as found in Parmeniscus and Creophilus); killed as sacrificial victims, to end famine (schol. Pind. *Ol.* 13.74).

2. See, e.g., R. Just, *Women in Athenian Law and Life* (London, 1989), p. 276: the "message" is that "with women and the passions one is still playing with fire."

Certainly that is the way Jason looks at the event. He accuses his wife of being, like all women, interested only in bed (570–71). Baffled lust gives her an angry itch, he says (568, cf. 555), and most scholars agree.[3] Follow them and you find a heroine who kills her children in a fit of jealousy. She is an oriental witch, a psychopath, or a woman crazed by injustice,[4] but nevertheless she engineers a complex program of slaughter that ends in the intentional killing of her own two sons. She appears, moreover, in a drama with an aberrant and redundant structure, because while she moves ever in one direction and at a tremendous pace, she performs three separate scenes of decision, all reaching the same infanticidal conclusion, though the chorus reacts each time in an entirely new way (once with a horrified attempt to dissuade, once with consolatory wisdom, and once as if it had never before heard of such a decision). Finally, this usual twentieth-century reading shows its hard-grained and repetitious child-killer flying off incongruously in a heavenly chariot, leaving her audience filled with pity for her devastated husband. Such is the *Medea* one is ordinarily asked to read, a play variously summed up as a poetic excursion into perverse sensationalism, a study in abnormal psychology, a threatening lesson to males whose dominance may create such female monsters, or an ironic denunciation of violence as it is glamorized in myth.[5] There has been an increasing recognition of the heroic elements in Medea's character,[6] but nevertheless almost all critics agree that the Euripidean child-killer, like the Senecan, is proposed as an embodiment of

3. E.g., B. Gentili, "Il 'letto insaziato' de Medea," *SCO* 21 (1972) 60–72, who argues that the play's language of honor and justice is merely a reflection of the commonplaces of erotic poetry and that Medea herself is afflicted by a kind of erotic incontinence. For a quick summary of views, see G. Gellie, "The Character of Medea," *BICS* 35 (1988) 15–22.

4. E.g., K. Reckford, "Medea's First Exit," *TAPA* 99 (1968) 329–59, where the play represents "the corruption of a human being" who becomes "a witch totally lacking in human feeling" (p. 333).

5. E.g., H. D. Voigtländer, "Spätere Überarbeitung," *Philol.* 101 (1957) 220, who sees Medea as a satanic barbarian combination of cleverness and passion; for B. Knox, "The *Medea* of Euripides," *YClS* 25 (1977) 193–225 = *Word and Action* (Baltimore, 1980), pp. 295–322, Medea represents "the unspeakable violence of the oppressed and betrayed"; P. Pucci, *The Violence of Pity* (Ithaca, 1980), p. 158, asserts that "there is no doubt that she has exercised her will to sacrifice herself in view of redeeming herself from subjection" but also that the Sun chariot "symbolizes the purely rhetorical, contrived, mythical quality of her success"; S. Saïd, "La tragédie de la vengeance," in *La vengeance*, vol. 4, ed. R. Verdier (Paris, 1981), p. 71, reports the play's intention in this way: "c'est bien plutôt pour dénoncer d'imposture un langage qui pare de beaux noms une réalité sanguinaire"; cf. H. Foley, "Medea's Divided Self," *Cl. Ant.* 8 (1989) 87, who believes that the play's purpose is to illustrate "the problematic nature of this archaic heroism."

6. Led by Knox, "The *Medea* of Euripides." See also E. B. Bongie, "Heroic Elements," *TAPA* 107 (1977) 25–56; cf. R. Rehm, "Medea and the λόγος of the Heroic," *Eranos* 87 (1989) 97–115, whose heroine is finally possessed by the male heroic values she had attempted to replace with a female *logos*.

extreme sexual passion, her anger an example of Baudelaire's "fureur des cœurs mûrs par l'amour ulcerés."[7] I want now to propose the opposite—a reading of *Medea* as a carefully designed, truly Attic tragedy, its forward motion checked in a minor *peripeteia*, its passions complex and changeable, its chorus relevant, and its finale strictly appropriate. The principal, by this reading, is not a jealous woman but a unique female avenger ruled by a masculine impulse to recover a personal honor of her own. She is a heroine exploited, like Clytemnestra, by extrahuman powers, but, unlike Agamemnon's queen, she is countercommanded by her insurgent female self, so that her finished deed demands horror and consternation from its audience, but strong pity as well for her who must accomplish it.

Now to the play. Whether they are sympathetic, obscurely disgruntled, or openly hostile, critics agree that Medea is jealous, Medea is mad,[8] and that the dramatic action is not so much tragic as melodramatic.[9] And yet, if you listen to Medea herself, you hear only of motives neither sexual nor insane. She locates the injury that angers her not in the part of herself that is couched but in her hand (496), the hand on which Jason's broken oath of alliance was sworn. She never suggests that Jason should be punished as a womanizer: a husband who strays should be viewed with disdain—so Aegeus suggests, and Medea agrees (699–700). Nor does she show the prurient curiosity that invests sexual jealousy; she has no interest in the princess (which is one reason why we do not know that unfortunate young woman's name).[10] Even Clytemnestra is given a few nasty words about Cassandra, but for Medea the other wife is simply one of three corpses that she dreams of creating (375). The new marriage is hateful

7. Two traditional figures seem to have blocked modern understanding of Medea: that of the *abbandonata* (e.g., Donna Elvira) and that of the lusty would-be adulteress (e.g., Stheneboea or Potiphar's wife). Medea has none of the sexual nostalgia of the first of these, nor does she suffer the disclosure and punishment that come to the second (she cannot, since the love refused her is licit instead of illicit), but many readers try to make her conform to one or the other of these types. A further source of misunderstanding is Seneca's Medea, who does have some of the characteristics of the *abbandonata*, for she would still join Jason in a common exile (Sen. *Med.* 273), and her love for him undermines her anguished anger in the first inner debate (137 ff., cf. chorus at 849 ff.).

8. As proof that Medea was intended as a demon of jealousy, the name "Oistros," given to the chariot driver on the Apuleian volute krater from Canosa (*LIMC* s.v. "Medeia," 29), is sometimes cited. It is possible that the painter's source (probably a fourth-century tragedy, certainly not Euripides, since only one child is killed) meant the name to suggest female mating madness (cf. Eur. *Hipp.* 1300), but more probably it described the quality of the punishment that Medea inflicted (cf. Eur. *Or.* 791; *IT* 1456).

9. The most frequently used text instructs its readers, largely students, that they are to respond with "incredulity and horror"; see D. L. Page, *Euripides, Medea* (Oxford, 1971), p. xiv.

10. Only once does she give her rival a sexual aspect; at the end of the first confrontation with Jason she suggests, as a final insult, that he must (like a cowardly Paris) be eager to get back to bed (623).

not for the pleasures it presumably brings to Jason but because it is linked to a new power alliance for him, illegitimacy for his sons, and exile for her (399–400).[11]

"Bed" matters to Medea not for reasons of pleasure (as Jason somewhat fatuously asserts) but because her bed once gave her status and definition by making her the mistress of a household. She had been wife of Jason,[12] mother of the *genos* of Jason, reigning woman in the *oikos* of Jason, by virtue of her marriage bed, and he, by formally leaving it, has outraged and erased these three selves. Her identity is destroyed, her honor canceled,[13] and the only definition left to her comes from exclusion. *Phygas*, "exile," is the term by which the man who fathered her children would now hear her designated (273; cf. 74–75, and note Aegeus' astonishment at 707). In return, she now defines Jason as a shameless (472) traitor (489; cf. 17) who returns ill-treatment for benefaction, and for his own advantage (591–92) treacherously (587) betrays the bed where his children were made. The point is not that he enjoys another woman but that he gratuitously makes himself the enemy of what was his house (and so her status) by entering an alternate kin-group, wherein he will make new sons who demolish the legitimacy of hers (cf. his admission at 563).

That is Medea's version of why she is angry, but her denunciation stretches further, making Jason not just her enemy and the enemy of the house but the enemy of society as well. In the play's first moment we are told that Medea "howls about oaths and invokes the great faith of the right-hand pledge" (21–22), and this nexus of notions—oath, good faith, right hand—is the standard under which she actually goes to war.[14] It is Jason the perjurer, a man who so scorned the gods that he purposely betrayed his oath (161, 209, 492–95, 995, 1392),[15] who moves Medea to the extremes of her

11. In her rejected plan of revenge Medea enters the palace and goes to the bed of Jason (380), but there is no syllable to suggest that this is anything but the logical extension of the hypothesis under examination: Suppose I work alone and with direct violence, gain access at night when all are unarmed, etc.

12. D. M. MacDowell, *The Law in Classical Athens* (London, 1978), pp. 67 and 87, argues that Medea would not have been considered legally married by a fifth-century Athenian audience, but she is certainly so considered within the play by herself, the Nurse, and the chorus.

13. She is "deprived of honor" (ἠτιμασμένη, 20, cf. 33, 1354) and she says ὑβρίζομαι πρὸς ἀνδρός (255–56).

14. On the importance of Jason's oath, see also B. Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy* (London, 1973), pp. 283–86.

15. Cf. 755, where the perjurer is guilty of *dyssebeia*. At Pl. *Leg.* 885b, a man who commits sacrilege either doesn't believe in gods, holds that they don't care about affairs on earth, or thinks that he can outwit them. The last of these seems to be the case with Jason, for he still thinks there are some gods who might favor him (1373); cf. Psalm 10.13, "Why is it that the wicked one has disrespected God? He has said in his heart: 'You will not require an accounting.'"

rage.[16] And it is likewise this crime of perjury, attaching to the outrages she has suffered, that brings her response into conformity with the other revenges of Attic tragedy, as Jason's own self-curse joins Medea as a kind of avenger's daimonic companion.[17] By the same token, however, it robs her of freedom in the pursuit of her purpose because, by the will of Zeus Defender of Oaths (169–70), the perjured man stands necessarily doomed as to house and children.[18] Within the broad boundaries of this utter destruction, Medea can create a disaster of a particular design, but she cannot fail, and she cannot leave the work half done.

II

Jason is not just an opportunist who uses women. Rather, the play proposes him as a (somewhat seedy) exemplar of that Hesiodic perjurer who was the key to the dissolution of human society. Like his epic forebear at the end of the Age of Iron, he takes advantage of persons stronger than himself by using crooked arguments and swearing false oaths (Hes. *Op.* 193–94). Like the man of bad faith in that final time, he is associated with the disappearance of *philia* within families (*Med.* 77; cf. *Op.* 180–84) as he plans to make bastards of Medea's sons. And all this he does to advance himself in the world, like that final oath-breaker (*Op.* 192). We know that the Hesiodic passage was a commonplace because it is closely reproduced in the Theognidea (1137–42, where the irreverence of the oath-breaker is emphasized), and Euripides here causes the chorus of his *Medea* to make the epic allusion directly. After Medea's first promise of some kind of revenge, they sing of a world in which nature is reversed and justice stands on its head, where dishonor comes when honor had been promised, and all because men make treacherous plans and Pistis, good faith sponsored by the gods, no longer holds (*Med.* 410–45). When, in summation, they announce that "the sweet reciprocity of oaths (ὅρκων χάρις) has flown from Greece, with Aidos, into the upper air" (*Med.* 439–40), they clinch the identification of Jason with

16. Page, *Medea*, p. xix, instructed students to see this rage as a barbarian's "childish surprise at falsehoods and broken promises."

17. A. Rivier hints at this when he says that the appearance of the chariot was proof that "le crime n'était point de ceux que la nature de l'homme suffit à expliquer, qu'il fallait une energie, une force de haine et de détermination plus qu'humaine, une connivence avec les puissances de destruction qui, dans la nature et la vie, représentaient pour les Grecs la face obscure du divin" ("L'élément démonique chez Euripide," in *Euripide*, Entretiens Hardt, 6 [Geneva, 1958], pp. 45–72, esp. 68).

18. D. Kovacs, "Zeus in Euripides' *Medea*," *AJPhil.* 114 (1993) 45–70, attempts to show that Zeus is directly concerned and is using Medea to impose a divine punishment (because of Creon's initial rejection of Medea's supplication?). There is, however, no indication in the play that Zeus does anything other than observe and rejoice at the independent performance of the oath-demon.

the perjurer whose Hesiodic misdeeds cause the sweetness of Oath-Keeping (εὐόρκου χάρις), Justice, and Uprightness to depart from men, along with Aidos and Nemesis (Hes. *Op.* 190–91, 199–200).[19] Small and despicable though he is, a falsely swearing man can cause the disintegration of an entire community.[20]

Jason the oath-breaker thus has a certain similarity to Tereus, to Eurystheus, even to the Cyclops; he threatens the armature of the social order, because in Greek thinking both cosmos and society are guaranteed by irrevocable oaths. In Homer's heaven the gods divided powers and places, confirmed agreements, and settled quarrels by oath,[21] and for Empedocles the eternal fluctuation from one to many and back to one was sealed by "broad oaths" taken between Neikos and Philotes.[22] In earthly reflection of these arrangements, Hellenic culture began when Chiron showed men "oaths and offerings and the arrangement of Olympus," while at Athens order commenced when Bouzyges taught men to back up common decency with oath and curse.[23] The ideal city rested upon the oaths men took to observe justice (Soph. *Ant.* 369);[24] at Ithaca Athena confirmed the reestablishment of order

19. In the Theognidean version Sophrosyne and the Charites retire to heaven in company with Pistis, 1137–38; cf. Eur. *Med.* 731. Compare old Oedipus' picture of social decline (Soph. *OC* 610–11): "Earth's strength gives out, the body gives out, Good Faith dies and Faithlessness is rampant." Thucydides produces a secular version when describing the general depravity of communities that had suffered revolution (3.83): "And there was nothing to resolve this distrust—no powerful word, no oath carrying fear. Instead, when men felt they were strong, they simply took precautions against injury rather than placing their faith anywhere, for they thought any real security was beyond hope." Cf. Pl. *Leg.* 949a–b, where justice is undermined by men who use oath and self-curse simply to influence a jury.

20. Compare the secular fourth-century words of Demosthenes that equate oath-breaking and swearing of false oaths with the most impure forms of irreverence such as eating the Hecate meats or the pigs' testicles thrown out in cleansing rites (54.39–40).

21. E.g., *Il.* 15.36; 19.108, 127; 20.313; cf. Pind. *Ol.* 7.65; *Pae.* 6.112. According to Cassandra there is a general oath-based agreement among the gods that sons shall avenge fathers (Aesch. *Ag.* 1290, a line obelized by Fraenkel), and at Aesch. *Cho.* 126, Clytemnestra's Furies are bound into their sodality by oath.

22. 30 DK; cf. 115 DK, where the eternal decree in Ananke's possession is likewise oath-sealed.

23. Chiron, *Titanomachia* 6, *EGF*; Bouzyges, Append. prov. 1.61 in *Paroemiogr.*, cited *CAF* 2:561. Even among Aesop's cynical animals there was a belief in oaths, and though other forms of deceit were admired, oath-breaking was seen as dangerous. In tale 50 a woodcutter tries to catch a fox by breaking his oath, and the fox gloats that the god of oaths will get him in return. On oaths in general, see K. Latte, "Meineid," in *Kl. Schr.* (Munich, 1968), pp. 367 ff.; J. Plescia, *The Oath and Perjury* (Tallahassee, 1970).

24. At Sparta all the citizens were bound by oath to keep the laws of Lycurgus in his absence (Plut. *Mor.* 239F; *Vit. Lyc.* 57D). In the cities of Crete there was an annual oath of new citizens promising loyalty; see R. E. Willetts, *Cretan Cults and Festivals* (London and New York, 1962), p. 107.

by introducing "faithful oath-agreements" (*Od.* 24.483), and actual colonies were sent out according to oath-based regulations.[25] The Delphic Amphictyony, the Athenian empire, and all other external alliances were held together by oaths,[26] while within the separate cities rulers, like soldiers, were oath-bound,[27] so that the broken oath became one of the characteristics of the standard tyrant.[28] The fourth-century orator Lycurgus could assume absolute agreement when he said, "The power that keeps our democracy together is the oath" (*Leoc.* 79).[29] Asylum was given, exiles brought back, parties and factions formed, kinship confirmed,[30] all according to oath, while business was carried on in the same way, the very weights and measures being fixed by oath.[31] Physicians took the Hippocratic oath;[32] at Olympia athletes and judges were oath-bound to fair play and fair training (Paus. 5.24.9) and everywhere supervisors of holy places—brotherhoods of priests, even the fourteen ancient priestesses of Dionysus at Athens—took oaths to observe

25. E.g., Locris, ML 20.45–46p; cf. the danced oath-taking ceremony at Cyrene, *SEG* 9.3.

26. Amphictyony, Aeschin. 3.110; empire, Tod 1.66.41. The Oath of Plataea (Tod 2.204), whether genuine or not, likewise embodies the Greek sense that Hellenic society depended upon the oath-bound agreement. On authenticity, see P. Siewert, *Der Eid von Plataiai* (Munich, 1972); Meiggs, *AE*, p. 504; W. R. Connor, *Theopompus and Fifth-Century Athens* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), pp. 78–83.

27. Athenian archons, Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 55.5; cf. Pl. *Cri.* 119d, where the kings of Atlantis renew their oaths, swearing to give judgments according to laws of Poseidon. Athenian ephebes swore by wheat, barley, vines, olives, and fig trees as well as by the gods (Tod 2.204); see P. Siewert, "The Ephebic Oath," *JHS* 97 (1977) 102 ff. At Hdt. 3.11, mercenaries bind themselves together by drinking a mixture of wine, water, and the blood of a sacrificial victim; cf. Xen. *An.* 2.5.5–7. A particular crisis could inspire a particular oath, as that among the several groups at Thermopylae (Hdt. 7.132.2).

28. Eur. fr. 286 *TGF.* Philip of Macedon was the consummate oath-breaker according to Pausanias (8.7.5).

29. In 410 B.C. a decree of Demophantus required all Athenians to take an oath against tyrants (Andoc. 1.96–98); see H. Yunis, *A New Creed* (Göttingen, 1985), pp. 43–44 and nn. 10, 11, 12. Regular oaths opened each day of political and judicial work at Athens; boule, Xen. *Mem.* 1.1.19; Lycurg. *Leoc.* 31; boule and ecclesia, Dem. 19.70–71; areopagus, Dem. 23.67; 47.71; Antiphon 5.11; Din. *Demosth.* 46; Heliastic courts, Dem. 24.151; Palladion, at end of trial, Aeschin. 2.87. Less frequent oaths could establish innocence (e.g., Andoc. 1.126–27; cf. *Il.* 19.258–65; 23.553; Aesch. *Eum.* 29; Soph. *OT* 644–45; Eur. *Hipp.* 1025 ff.) or bring pardon to a convicted killer. See S. Todd, *Nomos* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 35; E. C. Mirhady, "The Oath-Challenge in Athens," *CQ* 41 (1991) 78–83. In general, see W. Hoffman, *De Jurandi apud Athenienses Formulis* (Darmstadt, 1886).

30. Exiles, Andoc. 1.90; 105; 107. For oaths of qualification for deme, phratry, or *genos*, see *IG* 2^2.1237; Dem. 43.13–14; 57.61; Isaeus 7.28; 8.19; Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 42.1. At Dem. 39.40 a (mother's) oath establishes the legitimacy of children; see L. Gernet, *Droit et société* (Paris, 1955), p. 66 n. 3, and 110–11; Todd, *Nomos*, p. 35.

31. Tod 1.67.12; cf. Stob. *Flor.* 44.22 for oaths in commercial contracts.

32. F. Muller, "Der hippokratische νόμος (und ὅρκος)," *Hermes* 75 (1940) 93–105.

their religious duties.[33] Finally, mystic initiates had secrecy imposed upon them by special oaths taken in the names of their own deities.[34]

Oaths were the cement of order, yet their breach carried no secular penalty because giving one's word was a religious, not a juridical, act.[35] The cosmos depended upon men's good faith, without which any oath was written in ashes, as a proverb had it.[36] The man who upheld his oath, the man who was *euorkos,* would have a long line of descendants according to common belief,[37] and Pindar held that reverence for oaths, *euorkia,* was potentially man's saving virtue, the practice of which meant a pleasant afterlife (*Ol.* 2.60).[38] Hypothetical rewards, however, were not what maintained the mysterious authority of the Hellenic oath. The entire system ran on dread, on *phobos,* and the source of this dread was the ritualized sacrilege and the conditional self-curse built into every solemn oath. Touching an oath object[39] that was ordinarily untouchable—an altar, a part of someone's body, the blood or entrails of a slaughtered beast[40]—each party

33. *IG* 2^2.1175.20–24. See D. Whitehead, *Demes of Attica* (Princeton, 1986), chap. 4, n. 130.

34. *PSI* 1162; 1290; *Syll.*^{3} 2.401–11, no. 736, Andanian mysteries. Cf. R. Merkelbach, "Der Eid der Isismysten," *ZPE* 1 (1967) 55–73, esp. 72–73. According to Near Eastern beliefs oaths could be used against afflicting demons; see T. Abusch, "An Early Form of Witchcraft Ritual," in *Lingering over Words: Studies . . . Moran* (Atlanta, 1990), pp. 1 ff. This belief is reflected at Aesch. *Ag.* 1570, where Clytemnestra thinks to use oaths to evict the Pleisthenid demon from the house.

35. See Todd, *Nomos,* p. 36; there was, however, a fine for one found guilty of giving false trial testimony (Dem. 29.16). On the other hand, a curse could serve as the religious enforcement of public law, as recorded in the stele from Teos (Tod 1.23).

36. Philonides, *Incert.* 1 (LSJ s.v. τέφρα); women's oaths were said to be written in water. See Pl. *Leg.* 948b3, on the degeneracy of oaths in the fourth century.

37. Hes. *Op.* 285; cf. Pl. *Resp.* 2.363c–d. At Eur. *Med.* 995, *euorkos* is explicitly what Jason is not.

38. Cf. Xen. *Symp.* 4.49; Ar. *Plut.* 61–105.

39. So in informal asseverations one "touched earth" in token of good faith; e.g., Bacchyl. 5.42; 8.119. See E. Benveniste, "L'expression du serment dans la Grèce ancienne," *Rev. Hist. Rel.* 134 (1948) 81–94, where the fundamental meaning of ὀμνύναι ὅρκον is found to be the same as the Homeric ὅρκον ἑλέσθαι, i.e., to seize hold of a sacralizing object. On the continuing discussion of the etymology of *horkos*, see N. Rollant, "Ὅρκος et sa famille," in Université de Nice, Centre de recherches comparatives sur les langues de la Méditerranée ancienne, *Document* no. 4 (1979), pp. 214–304. On touching a forbidden object, see J. Plescia, *Oath and Perjury*, p. 11: "this amounted to attaching the oath to a sacrilege the pardon for which could not be obtained except by fulfilling the oath at all costs."

40. Altar: *IG* 2/3^2. 1237.76; cf. Thuc. 5.50.1; Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 55.5 mentions the stone where oaths were taken at Athens; this was probably a primitive altar with ancient *horkia* or *tomia* buried beneath; see P. Stengel, "Zu den gr. Schwüropfern," *Hermes* 49 (1914) 94. The remains of animals used in oath rituals had to be specially disposed of (*Il.* 19.267; Paus. 5.24.10; schol. Ar. *Pax* 717; Plut. *Phoc.* 1; *Mor.* 523C; *Suda*, s.v. χόλικες). This dangerous sacredness could also attach to implements; see Eur. *Supp.* 1205–7, where Athena prescribes special treatment for the knife used in the treaty sacrifices. Body part: Zeus' head, *Il.* 15.36; cf. Sappho 44A; the per-

dedicated himself to total destruction should he (intentionally or unintentionally)[41] not keep faith. The formulae hardly varied: the oath-taker asked for utter ruin, *exoleia,* to be visited upon self, children, house, and race,[42] or, in careless phraseology, he "pledged his children" (Dem. 54.23; 29.54).[43] In addition, possessions such as flocks could be dedicated to destruction, and famine, plague, or monstrous births might be particularly requested as its means,[44] but these were mere embellishments. In the same way, the words of the oath might be accompanied by gestures of sympathetic magic, like the pouring of wine at the truce in *Iliad* 3, the melting of a wax giant by those on their way to Cyrene,[45] or the throwing of an iron bar into the sea when the Phocaeans left home (Hdt. 1.165).[46] Such extra magical pressures were appropriate but not required, because the words in themselves meant that, should the speaker not "remain steadfast,"[47] a demon whose specialty

son of Eriphyle, Pind. *Nem.* 9.16; heads of Demeter and Praxidike, Paus. 8.15; 9.33; genitals, *Gen.* 24.2, 9; 46.26; 47.29; *Exod.* 1.5; *Num.* 5.21. Sacrificial victims: Dem. 23.67 (Areopagus oath); Aesch. *Sept.* 42 ff.; Hdt. 6.68.1; Aeschin. 1.114. W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), p. 253, supposes that sacrificial victims were regularly trampled in Athenian public oaths, though parties were merely said to stand "in the presence of" the victims (ἐπὶ τῶν τομίων) as one might "in the presence of" witnesses (ἐπὶ μαρτύρων). Burkert is following Stengel, "Schwüropfern," pp. 90–100, where texts are interpreted so as to make the oath-sacrifice as aberrant as possible, with victims maimed or castrated.

41. Arist. fr. 148 Rose makes a distinction between the perjurer who willingly gives false oaths, then knowingly breaks them, and the simple oath-breaker, but this was a sophisticated attitude; see Latte, "Meineid," pp. 367–75, esp. 373.

42. [Dem.] 59.10; cf. Dem. 54.40–41; Antiph. 5.11; Lys. 12.10; Lycurg. *Leoc.* 79; compare the parodies at Ar. *Ran.* 586–88; *Eq.* 765 ff. When the oath-taker asked for the standard punishment for *dyssebeia,* should he break the oath (as Aegeus does, Eur. *Med.* 755), this was called swearing ὡς νόμιμον. One of the reasons that women's oaths were not much respected is that, having neither house nor heirs, the self-curse could threaten only their own persons; see Just, *Women in Athenian Law and Life,* pp. 33–39. On women's characteristic oath deities, see D. Bain, "Female Speech in Menander," *Antichthon* 18 (1984) 24–42.

43. This is parodied at Eur. *Cyc.* 269, where Silenus asks the destruction of the satyrs, and it was later forbidden at Alexandria (*PHal.* 1 Z.217).

44. See the oath of the Amphictyons (Aeschin. 3.110 f.) or the Ephebic oath (Tod 2.204.39 ff. For biblical parallels, see D. R. Hillers, *Treaty Curses and the Old Testament Prophets,* Biblica et Orientalia, 16 (Rome, 1964), pp. 68–69.

45. ML 5.46–49. On the genuineness of this oath see A. J. Graham, "Authenticity," *JHS* 80 (1960) 94–111; L. Jeffrey, "The Pact of the First Settlers," *Hist.* 10 (1961) 139–47. For sympathetic oath-rites in general, see C. Faraone, "Molten Wax, Spilt Wine and Mutilated Animals," *JHS* 113 (1993) 60–80.

46. Compare Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 23.5 for the same gesture of permanence at the formation of the Delian league; for Near Eastern parallels, see H. Jacobson, "The Oath of the Delian League," *Philol.* 119 (1975) 256 ff. Cf. also schol. Soph. *Ant.* 264; Callim. *Aet.* 388–89, for practices in which iron was simply grasped, that its permanence might enter into the oath.

47. To keep an oath was μένειν, as at ML 5.46, 49; Tod 1.39.11; cf. Eur. *Andr.* 999–1000, and note *Med.* 753–54.

was pursuit, torture, and eventual extermination would come into being. This punitive agent might be called Erinys, or Ara, or Horkos, or Oistros, or Alastor,[48] but whatever its name, the anguish that it worked was the greatest known to man (Hes. *Theog.* 231–32; cf. *Op.* 219–22, 803–4). Implacable and invulnerable to any countermagic—it could not be bound since it had neither hands nor feet[49]—the oath demon would root out all trace of a man who had sworn falsely, pursuing him, if necessary, even into Hades (Hdt. 6.86), and destroying his house and hereditary line as well.[50] It could attack directly, but it could also have the work done by a human curse-bearer termed *araios* or *araia*[51] who might be willing or unwilling.[52] And finally this demon, malign as it was, had Olympian sponsors, because any well-made oath was taken in the presence of various invoked gods who would serve as its overseers.[53] These might be many or few, and they usually included local powers, but Zeus, Ge, and Helios were favorites everywhere because they were universal and all-seeing forces.[54]

48. Erinys: *Il.* 9.453–57; 19.259–60; Alc. 129 Voigt. Ara: Soph. *El.* 111; *OT* 418. Horkos: Hes. *Op.* 219; 282; Soph. *OC* 1767; Arrian (156 F 94 *FGrH*) reports a river in Bithynia called Horkos because it would seize and drown a perjurer. Oistros: Poll. 4.142, cf. the Apuleian krater cited above, n. 8. Alastor: Aesch. *Ag.* 1501; Eur. *Phoen.* 1556; cf. *Med.* 1059. In Sicily the demon was double, a pair of brothers called Palikoi who had a sanctuary on the slopes of Etna (Diod. Sic. 11.89.5; Strabo 6.2.9).

49. It could not be crippled by an act like *maschalismos.* A simpler notion is expressed at Soph. *El.* 489, where the demon is *polypous* and *polycheir* because of its swiftness and striking power. Xenophon says that there is no refuge to which an oath-breaker could run (*Anab.* 2.5.5–7), and Demosthenes, more succinctly of the perjured juryman, "he won't escape the gods" (19.239).

50. The mechanical, magical quality of the punishment inspired stories in later times about men who had tricked the oath demon; e.g., the Locrians, who swore, "as long as we walk this earth with these heads on our shoulders," having shoes full of sand and false heads (Polyb. 12.6a-3; Polyaenus 6.22).

51. As at Soph. *Trach.* 1202; Eur. *IT* 778, and note *Med.* 608.

52. Aeschylus makes Orestes into a generalized oath demon who from his grave will work inescapable disasters upon all perjurers (*Eum.* 762 ff.). The term ἀραῖος can also be used of one under a curse, as at Soph. *OT* 644.

53. In the words of E. Benveniste, swearing an oath meant "devoting oneself in advance to divine vengeance" (*Indo-European Language and Society* [London, 1973], p. 442); that vengeance was imaged in the statue of Zeus Horkios at Olympia, showing the god with a thunderbolt in each hand (Paus. 5.24.9–11). Oaths were often taken in temples or at shrines or altars; a law requiring an oath might specify the place and the divinities, but many cities and sodalities had their customary *theoi horkioi.* Local gods were especially favored, and one could simply swear by "the god of this place" (*RE* s.v. "Eid").

54. See West ad Hes. *Op.* 249 and 267, for Vedic parallels, and in general, H. Usener, "Dreiheit," *Rh. Mus.* 58 (1903) 330. Chthonic divinities were also favorites for obvious reasons (e.g., Clytemnestra at Aesch. *Ag.* 1406); at Athens, Heliasts swore by Zeus, Poseidon, and Demeter (Dem. 24.149–51). Solon's oath-watching Three Gods were three aspects of Zeus (Hikesios, Katharsios, and Exakester) according to Pollux (8.142), but Hesychius reports that some took them to be Zeus, Athena, and Apollo (s.v. τρεῖς θεοί). At Pind. *Pyth.* 4.166, Peleus and Jason

Now consider the oath and the "right-hand pledge" that Medea howls about (21–22).[55] Ordinarily a bridegroom promised his bride's father, with or without formal oaths, that he would maintain the daughter as fairly as she was given, and would honor her as the mother of his legitimate children.[56] Jason, however, was the enemy of his bride's father, which meant that Medea had to play parent to herself, binding her husband to his future duties as Aetes would have done.[57] The "wedding" at Colchis, a sexual alliance sponsored by Aphrodite, was thus a union of Greek and Barbarian formed in a cultural limbo,[58] an agreement made directly between a male and a female who dealt with each other as equals.[59] We do not know what promises Medea demanded,[60] but we do know what the chorus supposes, for they sing their own mild curse on Jason for having broken faith (659–62). According to them, the marriage that he entered upon meant not just living together (1000) and having the same friends and enemies, but also the peaceable coupling (641–42) of partners who

swear by Zeus, as ancestor of both; the mystic swore by his special Creator (Merkelbach, "Der Eid der Isismysten"), and the Pythagorean by "him who gave our soul the *tetrakys*" (Plut. *Mor.* 877A = Diels, *Dox. Graec.* 282).

55. Page, ad loc., supposes that Medea shouts, "Horkoi!" as if she were summoning curse-demons.

56. Archil. 173 W seems to suggest an accompanying *xenia* ritual with table. Cf. Theoc. *Id.* 22.147–48, where Lynceus claims that the father of the Leucippides has given the girls to him and Idas, so that their marriage is γάμος ἐν ὅρκῳ. At Men. *Pk.* 1010, the father says, ταύτην γνησίων / παίδων ἐπ' ἀρότῳ σοι δίδωμι; see Gomme-Sandbach ad loc. for the same formula in other plays, and cf. Dem. 59.52.

57. There was a tradition that Heracles had acted as *kyrios* for Medea (Diod. Sic. 4.54.7). For other associations with Heracles, see below, n. 130.

58. On the chest of Cypselus, in the second level, Jason stood with an enthroned Medea bride in the presence of Aphrodite (Paus. 5.17.2–18.3); see W. von Massow, *MDAI(A)* 41 (1916), pl. 10, for a reconstruction. Note that Pindar, at *Ol.* 13.74, lists Medea's giving of herself, without her father's sanction, as one of the glories of Corinth, Aphrodite's city. Jason's pledge was the "wild" version of the *enguesis* that was the necessary guarantee of the legitimacy of children in fifth-century Athens (though cohabitation would establish a woman as a wife); see E. J. Bickerman, "La conception du mariage à Athènes," *Bull. Ist. Dir. Rom.* 78 (1975) 1–28.

59. This is how gods might marry, and in later times at least the Medea-Jason union was thought of as a kind of *hieros gamos*, their wedding cave honored as a sacred place (Ap. Rhod. 4.1153). As between equals, the agreement also has an everyday parallel in promises exchanged by men, in love or in friendship pacts; so at Eur. *Or.* 1086, Pylades curses himself with an unquiet death, should he betray Orestes; this kind of oath is parodied at Ar. *Eq.* 765 ff. Pl. *Symp.* 183a speaks of the oaths by which the *erastes* wins the *eromenos*, adding at 183b that these are the only oaths that can be broken without divine punishment.

60. Later writers assumed an oath-bound promise to marry and to continue a common life until death; e.g., Diod. Sic. 4.46.4. At Ap. Rhod. 4.1084–85 Jason swears great oaths to keep Medea in his house as his lawful wife.

gave each other honor and opened each to the other the "inner doors of a clean heart-mind" (660–61).[61] These terms suggest those of a treaty in which Jason and Medea, like two sovereign states, summoned Theoi Horkoi and swore to a mutual friendship that would be faithful and undeceiving, to endure forever.[62] From the parties themselves we gather that Jason had promised to be a "faithful husband" (511), to treat Medea as the best of friends (449–50, that is, planning good things for her, 566–67, 595–97), perhaps even to make her "blessed among Greek women" (509), in return for her taking his enemies as her own, even when they were her own kin (506–8).[63] Now he has broken his oaths (like the chorus, Medea uses a phrase reminiscent of Hesiod, ὅρκων δὲ φρούδη πίστις, 492), harming his friends unjustly (470) with behavior that is unfaithful, deceitful, and anything but simple (566–67, 595–97). Other passages make it clear that these oaths were sworn in the presence of at least three Olympian powers, Zeus Guardian of Mortal Oaths, Themis (Dike), and Helios,[64] their curse upon self, children, and household clinched with a gesture that involved Medea's right hand (21–22). And when she holds up that right hand (496) as visible proof that Jason has broken faith, it is plain that she is not referring to a simple handclasp, as seen at the top of

61. Put in everyday language, this is close to the good marriage envisioned in reverse by Isocrates (3.40), when husbands κοινονίαν ποιησάμενοι παντὸς τοῦ βίου are careful not to give pain to the wife who does not cause them pain.

62. Compare promises of a φιλότης that would be πιστή and ἄδολος forever (ἀείδιον), exchanged between Sybaris and the Serdaioi, 550–525 B.C.? (ML 10). Athens and Samos, in 439–438 B.C., bound themselves to speak and plan fair things each for the other, to be faithful, undeceitful, and simple, each party being just, neither party to do or to receive harm (ML 56.21–22). Cf. Athens and Rhegium, 433–432 B.C. (ML 63.11–15); Athens and Leontini, 433–432 B.C. (ML 64.21–25). Compare also the offer of Croesus, when courting Sparta, to be φίλος . . . καὶ σύμμαχος ἄνευ τε δόλου καὶ ἀπάτης (Hdt. 1.69.1–3).

63. Medea presents herself as one who promised salvation and delivered it (476–82); she also presents herself as a wife who valued her husband over father and brother (483) and made her husband's enemies her own (486). S. Schein, "Philia in Euripides' *Medea*," in *Cabinet of the Muses*, ed. M. Griffith and D. Mastronarde (Atlanta, 1990), pp. 57–73, argues that Medea is shown as one who cannot make the distinction between friend and enemy, but what she says is that she has no friends because she took her husband's enemies as her own, and these happened to be her only natural friends (9–15, 508). He has now destroyed the oath-bound *philia* between the two of them (77, 84), and by doing so destroys Medea's only other "friends," the children.

64. Cf. 160, 169; at 209, Medea was brought to Greece by Zeus' Themis Horkia; at 764, Medea cries out to Zeus, Zeus' Dike, and Helios, when it appears that the broken oath may be punished. Artemis is named at 160, either because she also (with Aphrodite?) was among the witnessing gods or because she is the divinity to whom a woman cries out when she suffers. A third-century funerary stele in the Getty collection carries a curse upon anyone who might damage it, with Artemis Medeias appointed as its divine executor; see A. Oikonomides, "Artemis Medeia," *ZPE* 45 (1982) 115–17.

a treaty stele,[65] for she says that her knees, too, were used by the cowardly perjurer (496–98). It is thus no commonplace gesture of mutual disarmament that she refers to,[66] but a complex of sacred gestures in which Jason, having succeeded as a suppliant,[67] became party to an oath-bound marriage promise.[68] Medea's hand (forbidden as belonging to a young girl)[69] was retained as the oath object, the *horkion*, on which he swore to use her as his legitimate wife.[70] Medea's right hand was thus the location of the continuing magical force of the oath's contingent curse, the "objet dépositaire" that contained a promise of demonic destruction for the oath-breaker, his children, and his house.[71] In Medea's language there is an oath-faith witnessed by the gods and belonging to her right hand (δεξιάς πίστιν μεγίστην, 21–23). When the oath is broken, that hand carries the contingent curse, the curse that Medea would activate with her

65. See, for example, the handclasp of Hera and Athena that decorates the stele recording the treaty between Athens and Samos of 404 B.C. (*IG* 1[3].127).

66. Aeschin. 3.224, τὴν δεξιὰν ἐνέβαλες ἄνδρα φίλον καὶ ξένον ποιούμενος; at Eur. *IA* 58–60, all the suitors of Helen seal their agreement with handshakes; cf. Soph. *Trach.* 1181, the oath of Hyllus; *Il.* 4.158, the battlefield truce; Xen. *Hell.* 4.1.31. Note, however, that the handshake does not necessarily imply an oath (Soph. *Phil.* 811–12). See J. Taillardat, "Φιλότης πίστις et Foedus," *Rev. Ét. Grec.* 95 (1982) 1–12; G. Herman, *Ritualised Friendship* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 50–53; also G. Neumann, *Gesten und Gebärden in der gr. Kunst* (Berlin, 1965), pp. 49–71. Achilles says that there can be no oaths between men and animals (*Il.* 22.262 ff.), but St. Francis persuaded a wolf to signal his good faith by offering his right paw to the right hand of the saint (*Fioretti* 21).

67. For the hand in suppliancy, see, e.g., Eur. *Heracl.* 307; *IT* 1068–69, and the little joke at Alcman 3.79–81 *PMG* = 26.79–81 Calame.

68. There is no evidence to show that a groom-to-father handshake was customary at the end of an Athenian *enguesis*; see A. R. W. Harrison, *The Law of Athens* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 5–6. Orestes, however, giving the absent Electra to Pylades, has him swear by his (Orestes') right hand that he will not "betray" her couch (Eur. *IT* 700, 716–17).

69. Men did not ordinarily touch the female hand (though Heracles and Athena do clasp hands on a black-figure amphora in the Vatican; see Neumann, *Gesten*, fig. 25, p. 54); as rapists or bridegrooms they took a woman by her wrist. The rare male/female handclasps on fifth-century funeral reliefs symbolize greeting or departure (cf. Alcestis with the servants, Eur. *Alc.* 193); see G. Davies, "The Significance of the Handshake Motif," *AJArch.* 89 (1985) 627–40. In Hellenistic and Roman art male/female handclasps are more common, and at Ap. Rhod. 1.842 Jason marks his agreement with Hypsipyle by taking her hand.

70. At Eur. *Hel.* 835, Helen swears by Menelaus' head that she will die if he does, and he asks her to confirm the oath by touching his right hand. Cf. Eur. *IA* 471, where Menelaus asks Agamemnon for his hand, then swears that he speaks from the heart, in effect asking that this hand should destroy him if he is insincere. On this kind of gesture, see D. Cohen, "Horkia and Horkos in the *Iliad*," *RIDA* 27 (1980) 55 n. 20.

71. Benveniste, "L'expression du serment," pp. 86–90; cf. *Indo-European Language and Society*, p. 486: "a material invested with baneful powers." That this hand will aid in killing both dragon and Apsyrtos only makes it a more appropriate residence for the negative power of the potential curse.

first consecutive words: "O children who stand under a curse, children of a mother despised, may you be destroyed with your father, and let the whole house crumble!" (112–14).[72]

The marriage scene that serves as a backdrop to today's action thus had a certain resemblance to the staged encounter of Aegeus with Medea.[73] At Colchis Jason had asked for salvation, as Aegeus asks for the perpetuation of his line, and Medea had promised it, then as now exacting in return the assurance of an unassailable refuge. Aegeus now swears by the gods that Medea proposes (Helios prominent among them, 746) as Jason must have done, and he dedicates himself, his children, and his house to destruction should he not remain within the terms of his oath (754–55),[74] as Jason will also have done. The difference, however, is that the Athenian king is *euorkos*, one who will have a long line of descendants, so that his staged oath-taking demonstrates the right working of the sacred institution that is threatened by Jason's self-promoting transgression. Indeed, it demonstrates more, because the present faithfully sworn oath activates the punishment of the perjurer, signaling to Medea that she may now begin upon the action that will "dissolve the house of Jason" (794).

III

An ordinary victim of perjury—an Aesopian beast, a slave, or a mortal not worth singing about—would call the oath deities, activate the curse, and then wait. A state whose treaty had been violated, however, would retaliate with a perfect sense of justice—as would a city against domestic criminals,[75]

72. The children are κατάρατοι, the objects of a curse, like Oedipus at *OT* 1345. The term ἐπάρατος covers persons or things protected by a curse (temple servants or sacred property), while ἐπαρή signifies the force field of the curse; cf. the Thasian decree on informers, ML 83.5, p. 253 (411–409 B.C.). Medea may also be compared to Alcaeus, when he calls on the erinys of the conspirators' broken oath (129.13–14 Voigt).

73. In terms of standard revenge structure this is the recognition scene, and it works as such scenes do to consolidate the tactical position of the avenger, while it adds to his humanity. Medea is unique, however, in that she does not share either the planning or the prosecution of her intrigue with her ally.

74. His phrase is minimal but effective; he asks to suffer, if he should break his word, as do those guilty of *dyssebeia* (755); one could also ask to suffer simply "according to *nomos*," with the full self-curse implied, as is spelled out at Dem. 54.40; 57.22: ὡς νόμιμον, κατ' ἐξωλείας αὑτοῦ καὶ γένους καὶ οἰκίας. The same extreme compression can be found in the formula εὐορκοῦντι μὲν μοὶ εὖ εἴη, ἐφιορκοῦντι δὲ τὰ ἐναντία, as in the mystics' oath cited above, n. 34.

75. Cf. Dem. 19.70–71: "we leave the unknown criminal to the punishment consequent upon his broken oaths, but him we know we prosecute." The Athenian state did not try to imitate the daimonic *exoleia*, but it did sometimes work the literal destruction of a criminal's house; see W. R. Connor, "The Razing of the House," *TAPA* 15 (1985) 79 ff.

or a man betrayed by his sworn friend[76]—and this is what Medea does. Euripides thus gives his maternal child-killer a double definition: she is a woman whose honor is structured like that of a man, and also one who is directed by a nonhuman power. Her motives are thus serious and potentially tragic (as jealousy would not have been) but they are nonetheless hard for a dramatist to use because, with the curse at work, Medea's overdetermined crimes must enjoy an almost mechanical success. There is a risk that such a principal will seem to be a curse-fiend, not a mortal woman, and this, indeed, is what many critics find, after which they find themselves reading a melodrama instead of a tragedy. I would argue, on the contrary, that Euripides found in his Medea an entirely human counterforce, one almost strong enough to balk both honor and curse-demon, and that he gave this force a moment of ascendancy, just before the climax of his play. His heroine begins like another Clytemnestra, her passionate will in perfect agreement with the curse that uses her, but she is made to discover within her mortal gendered self another passion that resists the daimonic power. The curse carries the day as it must, but Medea nonetheless achieves what a fated mortal can—she determines the ethical color of her inescapable deed. When the task claims her, she slaughters her children, yes, but not as a mechanical agent, and not as an eager madwoman. This Medea paradoxically kills as mother, and also as a woman cornered, as any mortal may be, by past actions, time, and causality.

Medea knows that Jason must be the target of supernatural pursuit, and with her first intelligible words she calls on the gods for the destruction of the father, the sons who have been cursed, and the whole house (112–14). What is more, she tells Jason that she is "curse-carrier for his halls" (608).[77] The knowledge that her victim must be damned makes her expect success (764–65),[78] and yet she works hand in glove with the oath-curse through the first three episodes without recognizing her own collaboration. She arrives at the very deed that the daimonic world demands while listening to her own counsel and relying on her own powers. She is suited to her function by strength and temperament, certain of her superiority to all around her, and she has no intention of waiting for the possibly slow response from

76. See Herman, *Ritualised Friendship*, p. 126: "A man's whole moral personality was . . . at stake. Being left in the lurch was interpreted as an affront to honor, and if one party ignored his obligations, the other was not only freed of all obligations, but saw it as his own duty to punish the offender."

77. Compare 1259–60, where (with Page's reading) the chorus senses the presence of "an erinys who reports to an alastor" in the plan to kill the children; the degree to which they identify this force with, or separate it from, the woman Medea (1253) is unclear.

78. Compare Xen. *Anab.* 3.1.22, where the men are told that the gods will be on their side because they have kept their oaths while the enemies have broken theirs.

another world; she wants satisfaction now. She could simply kill and be killed, but her real desire is for a revenge designed like an epinician ode.[79] "Many are the roads," she says (376), and she means to choose the finest. The superlative revenge would let her look upon Jason in a condition like her own: living, but erased (as the curse demands) as the member of any future family. And above all there must be no enemies laughing at her in the end (404, 797, 1355, 1362). The ordinary plan needs only courage, but the superlative one demands trickery (δόλος, 391; cf. 783) and also a final refuge for the avenger. And so she wheedles twenty-four hours from the king and lets what she takes to be chance decide which of the two programs, the lesser or the greater, she will implement (389–90). When asylum appears in the form of Aegeus, she salutes herself as already *kallinikos* (765) and calls the oath divinities to enjoy her victory (764), but she still does not recognize herself as acting with or for the curse. She is Medea at the starting line, about to earn a superlative fame (810).[80]

In the opening episodes Medea has manipulated Creon, Jason, and Aegeus like a lion playing with mice (for her leonine quality, cf. 187, 1342, 1358). Her smooth success measures the strength of her anger (though no one of her antagonists is worthy of her), while it also reflects the perfect unanimity between her will and the curse that would use her hand. Now, however, at the moment of full opportunity, the agreement between the daimonic power and the woman begins to break down. The first hint of strain comes as Medea discusses her confirmed plans, her *bouleumata* (772; cf. 769), with the women of Corinth. The initial phases, the tricking of Jason and the despatch of poisoned wedding gifts, she relishes, but when she comes to that other "job that must be done" (ἔργον ἐργαστέον is what she calls it, 791), her tone shifts. If Jason's house and line are to be entirely dissolved (as her revenge and the curse demand), the children too must be killed. "I wail over it," Medea begins, and she speaks of the boys as "children / mine!" with the "mine" strongly enjambed (792–93). Even this angry lioness has a maternal instinct.

79. The vengeance/contest metaphor exists throughout: Medea sees the revenge as an ἀγὼν εὐψυχίας (403; cf. 366); the Nurse judges that no opponent will earn the *kallinikos* cry (45); Medea claims to be *kallinikos* over her enemies (767). Meanwhile there are agonistic touches in the suffering of the vanquished (1195) princess (*dromos*, 1181; *palaismata*, 1214). These serve as foil for the last appearance of the metaphor at 1245 (a line closely related to 403 by its urgent ἕρπε), when Medea urges herself toward the starting line of a race no longer seen as the way to a splendid reputation but instead as a long grievous course that will last her a lifetime (unless βαλβίς means "goal," in which case she moves toward a painful end to her life).

80. It is hard to understand how Saïd, "La tragédie de la vengeance," p. 70, can report that Medea's vengeance "est vécue comme une fatalité et une pure passivité."

The slight rift between avenger and mother, curse and curse-bearer, is focused in the hand that belongs to both in the scene that follows, that of Jason's beguilement. He is to be hoodwinked into taking part in the attack on his new bride (in vengeance terms, he will provide access to a well-defended surrogate victim), and to achieve this Medea has chosen a daring disguise—that of the humble and repentant little woman (892–93), a silly denigrator of her own sex (889–90) grateful for small masculine favors. She costumes her voice and manner, and Jason, for all his knowledge of her, is duped by his own fatuity. Meanwhile, however, Medea's hand—the hand on which this perjurer swore—has much to do.[81] It has been busy since early morning, first used like an actor's hand in the supplication of Creon (370), then addressed like a witness-object, even goaded, in the accusation of Jason (495). Now it has to project its strength into other instruments, for Medea means that the poisoned gifts should go from her hands (595) into those of the children (956), thence to those of the princess (1003), in order that finally the hands of Creon will touch them (1206). First, however, as a kind of proof of the beauty of her design, she means to make Jason repeat the very gesture on which this whole ugly retaliation is founded. The little boys, like herself long ago, are to make a "treaty" with him, their right hands joined to his (898–99). And this is where trouble comes, because in order to set the little tableau in motion, Medea must touch her sons as she presents them to their father. Her hand for the first time instead of actively dealing out effects, passively receives a sensation[82] and she gasps ("Oimoi!" 899). Then, pushing the children toward Jason, she mutters, "I begin to understand the pains that are hidden in this plan" (899–900). In a moment she is openly weeping (922), and since her tears will blend with her disguise she lets them flow, but they are nonetheless genuine (χλωρά, 922). They come, she says, from her woman's nature, because she gave birth to these boys (928). She means to use her sons as instruments in a murderous deception that will in the end take them as incidental victims, but in spite of her resolve, because she gave them the slightest touch, an insurgent pity has entered her mind (931).

The scene that follows the successful beguilement is marked by an entire absence of forward movement. Even behind the stage buildings nothing is happening because the initial phase of the revenge-violence is being played out in the royal palace on the other side of town, not in Jason's abandoned house. Here there is only Medea, to whom the Tutor and the boys come to say that the princess has accepted her gifts. Which is good news as far as it goes, but the intrigue can still go wrong: the drugs may be discovered or diverted to victims other than those intended[83]—there may be no corpses in the princess' chambers, or the poison may reach Jason himself, thus robbing her of the pleasure of prolonging his suffering as her own will be prolonged (as in Hyg. *Fab.* 25). Success or failure depends now on factors beyond Medea's control, and she who is accustomed to be at the center finds herself on the edge of the action and disengaged. With nothing to do, her vindictive passion relaxes its hold on her will, and when this happens, Medea's psyche falls into an unaccustomed state of loosened discipline, itself becoming the scene of an event, albeit an inner one. Pity, the emotion stimulated by the children's physicality, surges up again, and this time it openly challenges Medea's anger (and the allied curse-force) for command of this woman's mind and movements.[84]

What follows, the section of the play usually referred to as "Medea's monologue," has suffered every indignity that editorial brackets can inflict.[85] Though scholars have proposed cutting as many as forty of its sixty lines, the entire speech (except for 1062–63, which repeat 1240–41) will here be treated not simply as belonging to the play but as being the representation of its central event. First of all, the scene must be read for its stage directions because these indicate a system of visual signals meant to influence the spectator as he heard these lines. Until now, Medea has moved ceaselessly, but at the sight of the returned children she is said to stand stock-still (1005). She had earlier behaved like a woman of iron (264), but now, to the Tutor's manifest surprise (he draws in his breath, ἔα), she seems to collapse and melt (1005). She had entangled Creon, Aegeus, and Jason in a multiplicity of cunning words, but now speech is beyond her and she can only groan and groan again (1009). She had looked boldly into the eyes of tyrant and king, but now she cannot meet the glance of a domestic, and when she does lift her eyes they are

81. See S. Flory, "Medea's Right Hand," *TAPA* 108 (1978) 69–74, where the prominence of the hand is noted, though it is not seen as the sacralizing object of the oath-curse. I want to thank my student Chris Kirby, whose intense thought about Medea's hand helped me to formulate my own.

82. Wilamowitz believed that at 902 one of the children stretched out his arms to Medea, and that she seized him and kissed him; see "Excurse zu Euripides Medeia," *Hermes* 15 (1880) 496–97. I can see no indication of either of these gestures, but certainly she touches the children at this point; Wilamowitz supposes that she leads them, or even picks them up and passes them, to Jason.

83. Like Creusa's poison in Eur. *Ion;* for the magic practice that strikes the wrong target as a standard fairy-tale motif, see A. H. Krappe, "La robe de Dejanire," *Rev. Et. Grec.* 52 (1939) 565–72; J. Fontenrose, "The Sorrows of Ino and Procne," *TAPA* 79 (1948) 125 ff.; S. P. Mills, "The Sorrows of Medea," *CP* 75 (1980) 289–96.

84. Note that Seneca places his close imitation of this monologue (*Med.* 893–958) after the coming of the messenger; his heroine is in command of the facts and in position to make a decision. She also has a strong ego that observes and supervises the debate.

85. See Appendix, Medea's Monologue, pp. 273–287 below, for a review of the complex debate over the text and a defense of the interpretation offered here.

drowned in tears (1012). The actor, in fine, is to signal an altered mental state even before he attacks the notorious lines that record the debate going on within Medea's mind.

The larger blocking of the scene is likewise implicit in the text. Medea has evidently gone well forward to watch for her emissaries, so that the Tutor comes upon her almost as soon as he is visible. They stand together long enough for the Tutor to suggest a likely disguise for Medea's sudden grief—she must mourn the coming separation (1017–18)—and then the old man and the children move on at her command, across the playing space and toward the house-door at the rear. Their backs are turned and they are already dedicated to the interior, so that Medea, looking after them, does not address listening and responding secondary players, but only three outlines. When they reach the door, however, the children turn and look back, smiling at their mother (1040–41). And they linger there through her more and more excited speech, marshaled toward the still unopened door by the Tutor when she tells them to go in (1053), but running out to her when, moving upstage, she reaches to touch them (1067–69). The door evidently opens but the Tutor waits until, at Medea's second command (1076), the children run back to him and all three exit. This leaves Medea still well forward and probably on her knees, since she will have sunk down to embrace the boys. These children, incidentally, are still young enough to enter the royal women's quarters and garner kisses there (1141–42); the youngest is able to walk, to understand instructions, and to carry a parcel, so he is perhaps three, his brother four or five years old.

Now to the Monologue itself. Because she is still formally in the presence of the Tutor, Medea begins her speech (1021) with calculated deceit, pretending that she means to go away while the children live on in Corinth. This time, however, the man she would fool is only a servant with his back turned, and the challenge is not sharp enough to distract her from the felt presence of the children. Her feigned regret overextends itself in an evocation of the delights the little boys' company would have brought (1032–35), then suddenly runs out of control, a real emotion instead of an imitation. And just at that moment the two little figures pause, glance back, and laugh (1040–41). She looks at their small bodies and sees the culmination of her perfect vengeance plan described now in palpable flesh. It is not just the abstract *genos* of Jason that she means to destroy but these immediate laughing children, and at this recognition rebellion breaks out in her mind.

Up to this point Medea's whole being has been flooded with a harshly confident daring or courage (αὐθαδία, 1028) that has its source in her heroic heart (καρδία, 1042). Under its unchallenged influence she has used her mind to develop her vengeance plans (βουλεύματα, 1044) and

carry out their first phase, and until now it has dominated her speech. The children's aspect and gestures, however, provide a stimulus that brings another psychic tendency into Medea's spirit (her *thymos*, a vital, breathy, chest-located organ that can translate impulse into physical action),[86] crowding her Courage. This softer counterimpulse of maternity (called Cowardice, κάκη, 1051, when the vengeance thrust controls Medea's speech)[87] first whispers a half-simulated complaint against the plans of Courage (1028). Then, after the children have turned and smiled, it takes a stronger hold on Medea's tongue so that for the next few moments she speaks like a ventriloquist's dummy shared by two speakers, one harsh and one soft. Two impulses strive for control of her *thymos* and so of her speech, and their conflict is introduced by Medea's cry (αἰαῖ, 1042) at the enfeebling sensation caused by a recession of Courage. Briefly invested by the newcomer, Cowardice, she turns to the women of the chorus and gasps, "I could never do it. I will take the children with me—goodbye, revenge!" (1044). This lapse causes an outraged Courage to break in once more and scold Cowardice for introducing soft words into the mind (φρήν) that each of them would control (1052). "Am I to be laughed at for letting enemies go? It must be done!" (1049–51). Her spirit once again dominated by this assertive Courage, Medea orders the children out of sight as her restored daring proclaims the coming revenge (which is called simply χείρ, the work of the hand, 1055). With a slight accommodation to the mixed tendency of Medea's present mind, Courage even pretends that the killing will be a kind of sacrifice (1054), but maternal Cowardice is not appeased. It takes back Medea's voice and breaks in with, "No, my *thymos!* Don't *you* make that sacrifice! Spare the children—let them go!" (1056–57).[88] Implicitly admitting that escape with two small children is impossible, this softer voice urges, "Even if they aren't present, they will be a source of cheer because they live" (1058).[89]

86. R. B. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 93 ff. and the bibliography cited in Appendix, Medea's Monologue, p. 277 n. 17 below.

87. In Seneca's very similar version of this inner struggle (*Med.* 893–958) these two impulses are called, on the one side, *ira* (902, 916, etc.), *furor* (930), and *dolor* (907, 914, etc.), as belonging to her wifely self; and on the other side, *amor* (938, cf. 897), *pietas* (943–44), *pudor* (900), and *horror* (926), as belonging to her persona as mother; cf., e.g., 927–28: "ira discessit loco / materqua tota coniuge expulsa redit."

88. So, when Ion in retaliation would kill his mother, the Delphic priestess says μὴ σύ γε (Eur. *Ion* 1335), i.e., another might do it, but there is a particular reason (kinship) why you should not. Cf. also Thgn. 1031, likewise counseling *thymos* to relinquish retaliation.

89. Reading κεἰ μὴ μεθ' ἡμῶν ζῶντες εὐφραινοῦσί σε, as proposed by Hermann, and accepted by Pohlenz; see O. Regenbogen, "Randbemerkungen zur Medea," *Eranos* 48 (1950) 21 ff. Cowardice captures Medea's voice, but addresses a *thymos* wherein Courage still has the greater influence.

This is arrant foolishness, since children who took part in a plot against the throne will obviously not live on in Corinth, and it causes Courage to break in with an angry oath. "By all the destructive spirits of Hades, I will never hand my sons over to enemies who will maltreat them" (1059–61). And with that, the aggressive, honor-regarding impulse imposes what seems to be the last word, a clinching argument from necessity. "The thing is decided," says Courage, "there is no way out, because the crown already rests on the princess' head and the bride expires in her robes" (1064–66).

At this point, two-thirds of the way through the speech, the debate proper is over, leaving the revolt of maternal pity (defined as Cowardice) apparently suppressed, the victory of vengeance (defined as Courage) apparently assured. As a simultaneous report of an internal war coming direct from the battleground, the device of the two voices that issue from a torn spirit has been consummately theatrical. The ultimate power of the monologue, however, is owed to its strong epic overtones, for this projection in speech of an inner struggle likens Medea to familiar Homeric warriors. She has addressed her *thymos* and analyzed her situation much as Odysseus does in the *Iliad* (11.404–13; cf. Menelaus, 17.91–105; Agenor, 21.552–70; Hector, 22.99–130): retreat will be cowardly, attack will mean honor, therefore she must attack. This echo, however, only emphasizes the immeasurable difference between hers and a battlefield situation, since what Odysseus chooses as courageous is an act that supports friends, while her Courage calls for the killing of small sons. Indeed in ethos, though not in form, Medea's inner argument comes much closer to the famous conversation of Hector and Andromache, as a hero-Medea returns for an instant to a hearth within herself, there to hear a maternal voice begging that the young and helpless should be spared. Her courageous part, like Hector's, rejects such pleas and sends her back to "battle," but here again the epic doublet serves to identify Medea's special case. Like him, she would take a last farewell of the family members who will be destroyed, but she does not have the singleness and strength of the great Trojan prince. Full of heroic battle resolve, she calls the boys back from the palace door, and the result is psychic disaster.

Medea is no helmeted warrior. However strong her need for revenge, however forceful the push from the daimonic world, she is without armor against the poignant physical bliss of a child's softness and candor (1074). She touches small hands, kisses fresh mouths, and marvels at the structure of noble little heads (1071–72). Then in a fright she sends her sons scurrying into the house, for her avenger self cannot bear to look at them. It is unmanned and defeated by the suffering in store for it (1077), now all too real because sense stimuli arriving through eye and ear and hand

have revived her pitying, cowardly maternity. The ideal of honor remains, and also the vocabulary, but the vengeance impulse can no longer command, and as she observes her inner collapse Medea concludes almost clinically:

καὶ μανθάνω μὲν οἷα δρᾶν μέλλω κακά,
θυμὸς δὲ κρείσσων τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων,
ὅσπερ μεγίστων αἴτιος κακῶν βροτοῖς.

Certainly I understand that what I mean to do is cowardly,
but my impassioned will is stronger than my vengeance plans
—such is the cause of men's greatest sufferings.
(1078–80)

Medea had feared the laughter of enemies, but the laughter of her own children (1041, 1049) has brought her avenging self to this defeat. She had meant to use her violent hand against her sons, but having kissed their dear fists (1070), she cannot. She still sees vengeance as a splendid and heroic task, its loss a disaster, and she is ashamed of the softness that has invaded her, but she is helpless before it. She has decided nothing, and irresolution is the greatest of evils (1080), but in an overwhelming rush of weakness she has come to feel that she cannot complete the finest of revenges.[90] Her impulse to cherish the children and keep them from harm is stronger even than her impulse to restore her own honor by making Jason suffer.

Medea must have knelt to embrace the little boys, and when her speech ends she probably sinks to the ground, for she has arrived at perfect *amechania*.[91] The chorus had doubted that she could perform the final part of her intrigue (856–57), and she has now confirmed that doubt. "I could not do it," she has said of the child-killing (1044), but she has not discovered anything else that she might do. She is, perhaps for the first time in her life, without a plan. Her pleading maternal pity has babbled of taking the boys with her or leaving them here, but these are both impossible notions. If the poisons have done their work, and her reason suggests that they have, then her sons will now be killed on sight like herself, as accessories to murder. An adult might conceivably attempt an escape, but no pursued criminal could run in search of the necessary cart or ship (1022–23) with two small children tagging along, and she has sworn not to abandon them. In the next

90. See Appendix, pp. 273–281 below, for detailed discussion of the debate over the reading of 1079–80.

91. The *thymos* can be seized by *amechania*, as Odysseus' was when the Cyclops ate his shipmates and he was unable to resist (*Od.* 9.295).

few minutes, then, Medea can expect to be taken and stoned to death, along with her sons. That is where her emergent maternal pity has left her, and the chorus offers what bitter consolation it can find with a song about the inevitable griefs of parenthood (1081–1115).

For Medea the moment is comparable to Electra's perfect hopelessness as she embraced what she thought were her brother's ashes. For the spectator, however, the experience is opposite, for he who watches the Sophoclean play knows that a happy recognition and a swift resolution are just ahead, whereas he who watches Medea's collapse is filled with conflicting responses. He is relieved, for like the chorus, he wants Medea to spare the children, and yet he cannot rejoice because the present danger is intense, and also because (again like the chorus) he wants to see the perjurer punished. Probably he is familiar with stories in which the children were at this point killed by angry Corinthians—he may even know the old tale of their accidental death in the course of an immortalization process[92]—but nothing seems to point toward any such resolution in the present drama. Its action has concentrated entirely on Medea's revenge, and the Athenian theatergoer doesn't need Aristotle to tell him that the major deed of a tragedy cannot be well begun and then simply abandoned for lack of enthusiasm (cf. *Poet.* 53b). Medea's present immobility thus comes as a welcome drop in tension and an enriching shift in tone, but it is extremely unsatisfactory, and the dramatist does not prolong it. A breathless servant arrives to say that a strange and horrid event has occurred at the palace, and that Medea must save herself however she can. He has come shouting, "Run! Run!" and this brings Medea to her feet, but she doesn't move. When told that the princess and Creon have died from the poison, she cries, "Splendid!"—glad to have done at least this much harm. She insists on a full report, though angry Corinthians are presumably on their way, and what she learns (from one of the longest and most elaborate speeches to survive from the Attic stage) causes her to resume her role as heroine of a tragedy of revenge.

As the Servant delivers this messenger speech, players, chorus, and audience all watch an imaginary drama in which Medea has no visible part. At first almost baroque comedy, it shifts for a moment to ritual parody, then closes as an apocalyptic revelation of the instability of the human form. A figure of Vanity appears at the opening, a pouting princess made happy by golden gifts and her own looking glass, smiling, as this Euripidean common man says, "at the lifeless image of her flesh" (1162). The princess is throned like a bride,[93] surrounded by handmaids; then, having decked herself out,

92. See above, n. 1.

93. See H. Lohmann, "Das Motiv der Mors immatura," in *Kotinos: Festschrift E. Simon* (Mainz, 1992), pp. 103–13, esp. 110.

she moves into a stately dance (1164), but instead of wearing her ceremonial costume, it wears her. Now the rite places its dancer on a throne while an old woman, expecting the epiphany of some maddened god, gives the sacrificial cry (1172–73). The girl answers with an antiphonal call (ἀντίμολπος ὀλολυγῆς κωκυτός, 1176–77) and the women around her split into two sections that run away for help, ending this part of the ritual. What follows is the revelation, a nightmare vision in which the poisoned gifts destroy mortal life through a degradation of living matter that is far uglier than death. For a few moments the central abomination keeps the appearance of a lurching female, but then it slips into an appalling realm where known forms decompose and are confounded. Strands of hair become fire and mix with blood to blot out features (1186–87). Deadly clothing gnaws and chews the human wearer (1188–89), but the victim—the father now—clings to the fragile web as if he were the parasite vine and it the tree he chokes (1213–14). Flesh oozes as resin would from a pine trunk, leaving the skeleton bare (1200), and dissolving bodies tangle in a wrestling match that peels meat from the bone (1217). In the end, what had been a king and his daughter are become a promiscuously mixed heap of mortal decay (1220).

As she listens to this report, Medea at first recognizes her own design. She had poisoned the gifts (789) because she meant to dress this bride for a marriage with death. She had hoped to erase the new wife as Jason had erased the old, and to attack the wife's father so that no other man would ever give his daughter to this perjurer. As the narrative continues, however, she hears of effects too uncanny to have come from even the strongest of *pharmaka*,[94] and when the agonized princess melts like a waxen oath-figure it is plain that Medea's was not the only magic involved.[95] Something with the unearthly force of Styx water or the Hydra's gore has been at work,

94. Within this action Medea has done nothing beyond what a plain dealer in herbs and spells might do; like Deianeira, she has applied a substance to a piece of fabric, but the audience has not witnessed any major magical operation. Medea once swears by Hecate (395–97), but she does not call her force directly into the business at hand, as does the Medea of Soph. *Rizotomoi* (fr. 535 *TrGF*). Seneca's Medea, on the other hand, prays to Hecate for exactly the effects that occur here, and hears her response (*Med.* 833–43). See M. Schmidt, "Sorceresses," in *Pandora*, ed. E. Reeder (Princeton, 1995), pp. 57–61, esp. 59: "Medea is little more than a woman who is particularly apt at mixing poison."

95. In ordinary magical operations one might melt, burn, or mutilate a manikin, but one did not expect the victim's sufferings to be a literal version of these operations: "bind him" meant make him unable to move, "melt him" meant make him unable to resist, etc. Even in the Babylonian parallels wherein the Sun was asked to execute curses upon practitioners of witchcraft while petitioners burnt statues and then trampled them in water, the action was metaphoric: "May they come to an end in a trickle like water from a waterskin"; see Abusch, "Witchcraft Ritual," p. 3.

which is why Creon cried out from within the scene, "Oh my suffering child, which of the daimonic powers is it that dishonors you so, as he destroys you?" (1207–8). Medea knows, and the audience now remembers, that though the drugs were hers, the gifts that made them effective—the stuffs and the crown—were the heirlooms of Helios (954).[96] He was one of the gods who had witnessed Jason's oath, and he has been physically present in this hideously chaotic episode. Her recognition of the enormity of what has happened leaves Medea understandably speechless when the messenger finishes, and there is a moment of dead silence. Then the voice of the chorus leader breaks the stillness, saying reflectively: "It would seem that some power (ὁ δαίμων) has loaded Jason with great suffering today, and with justice" (1231). After which Medea announces her conclusion, which is absolute and economical. "Friends," she says, "it is now decreed that I should kill the boys at once, then leave the country. Any waste of time will mean giving them a rougher hand than mine for their execution" (1236–39).

In a sense the messenger's speech has done for Medea what Pylades' few words did for Orestes in the Aeschylean play,[97] for it has reminded her of her otherworldly allies. What is more, the palace horror has shown her the nature of the power that inhabits her hand: it is fierce and undeniable, and the punishment begun under its guidance enforces its own completion because the terms of the curse are not yet fulfilled. Jason has not been destroyed, and there is now no chance of an attack on him; he has been deprived of future Corinthian sons, but his house will disappear at his eventual death only if these present children are removed. That is what the standard oath-curse demands, and meanwhile Medea is cornered by the results of her now partially successful scheme, because the complicity of the little boys makes their public slaughter certain. She has no choice but to return to the letter of her plan, but she does so in a totally altered mode. She must ask her heart now to arm itself against the pity that had earlier captured her spirit because pity, at this point, would keep her from doing what a larger tenderness commands. She urges her wretched hand (ὦ τάλαινα χεὶρ ἐμή, 1244)

96. The fiery diadem is the doublet of Helios' ray-spiked crown, the attribute by which he was recognized on Attic pottery. For golden diadems found in burials in later cults of Helios, see J. G. Szilagyi, "Some Problems of Greek Gold Diadems," *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 5 (1957) 45–93.

97. The Messenger's function is also like that of the ghost of Apsyrtus in Seneca's play (958–66), though he only affirms the turn back to vengeance that Medea has already expressed with the wish that she had as many children as Niobe, that she might kill them all (954–56).

back to a task that is now necessary to its human, as well as to its daimonic, proprietor. To do what is necessary now, she must be both mother and not mother, and so she commands herself to forget for an instant that she bore these children so that she may give them the better of the two alternative deaths that are their only future (1246–48). Better her hand should do it than that of some enraged Corinthian (1239). "Afterward you may grieve," she reminds herself. "Though you kill them, they were born to be your own dear ones" (1249–50).[98] She has made her decision, and the chorus, sensing the presence of a gory erinys that serves an alastor (1260), cries out to Earth and Sunlight to stop her bloody hand (1253–54).[99]

As crude physical motion, the killing that Medea will now perform is exactly the same as the killing she had resolved upon when she hailed herself as victor in an *agon* of vengeance (765, 792). Here at the climax of the play, however, a true speech of decision gives her deed a new definition and an entirely altered quality (1235–50). She still uses an athletic metaphor, but instead of anticipating the fall of an opponent in a contest of courage (403), she treats what she has to do as a long and miserable race that will last her lifetime (1245, where ἕρπε echoes 403). And it is significant that as she brings herself to commit her act of violence, Medea utters no single word either of hatred or of retaliation. Jason is never mentioned because the child-slaughter that she will now accomplish has no reference to him but is reoriented so as to become a rescue instead of a revenge. In effect she will triumph over him, and in the end she will rejoice in that triumph, but the poet has scrupulously banished any expectation of such victory from the phrases with which Medea urges her hand to take up the sword. It is once more her reason that commands, but not as it did in the early scenes when the most excellent vengeance was its aim. Her thought is exercised for the children: how they may have the least deplorable death. It is not Medea the avenger who now chooses to kill; it is Medea the woman of misfortune, as she says in her last statement as an earthbound mortal: Δυστυχὴς δ' ἐγὼ γυνή (1250; cf. 928). In this persona she enters the palace and at once takes a sword to the boys.

98. See Appendix, p. 284 n. 45. Throughout this speech Medea is doing the opposite of what the Nurse described at 103 ff. There she roused her *kardia* to anger, whereas here, though she would evict pity, she asks for an act of violence based entirely upon reason, one that will be as nearly as possible dispassionate. On 103 ff., see J. E. Harry, "Medea's Waxing Wrath," *AJPhil.* 51 (1930) 372–77.

99. They also call her hand αὐτοκτόνος (1254): one that itself kills, that kills its own, that kills itself (cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 1635; *Sept.* 805, cf. 681, 734).

Medea's voice is next heard from the airborne chariot of Helios which evidently picked her up in the instant that the children breathed their last. From this superior position she speaks in an altered voice, as Vengeance Achieved and Curse-Demon Satisfied. When she killed the little boys, she killed the source of her tenderness, the one stimulus that could bring soft arguments into her mind, and so what remains of her in the exodus is once more in angry harmony with the force that uses her. At some future time she will grieve (1249), but in this moment she feels only hatred and triumph as, like Hecuba, she boasts to her victim's face about what she has done. "Call me beast or monster or what you will," she says. "I have wounded you to the heart as you did me" (1358–60). And from the ground Jason testifies to the completion of his self-curse when he groans, "I shall get no profit from my new marriage" (a fitting lament for the princess!) "and I am deprived of the sons I had already engendered—I am destroyed!" (1348–50). He cannot see why this has happened and thinks a mistake has been made in heaven, that the gods have carelessly sent upon him a destructive daimon meant for Medea (1333).[100] The wiser audience, however, knows that this daimon is the *alastor* whom Medea serves (cf. 1260) and that in striking Jason it has struck where it meant to strike. When Medea laments the children, as destroyed by a father's moral sickness (νόσος, 1364; at 471–72 she called it ἀναίδεια, greatest of such sicknesses), Jason objects that it was not his right hand that struck them. No, but it was his *hybris,* she answers, the new marriage that broke faith and outraged the old (1366); the hand that killed is the hand he touched when, promising faith, he laid a curse upon himself and these sons of his. The gods know, she says, the origin of this "bane," using the word proper to miseries that follow on a broken oath (πημονή, 1372, 1398).[101]

In this ultimate confrontation Medea's "finest" vengeance is achieved. She has inflicted a lasting psychic suffering, in place of quick death or mere fugitive physical pain, and she has watched as her victim begins to understand what has been done to him. From her point of view, she has

100. Jason says τὸν σὸν ἀλάστορ' at 1333, though strictly speaking, ὁ σὸς ἀλάστωρ means "the *alastor* that you called into being by speaking a curse"; cf. Soph. *OC* 788. The schol. at Eur. *Phoen.* 1556 suggests "*alastor* sent against you" (citing also *Phoen.* 1593–94) as an alternative, which proves that this second sense was conceivable. Euripides here exploits the ambiguity of the phrase, making Jason intend its least obvious sense, so that the audience, taking it strictly, will correct him: "Ah no! Not hers, but the destruction you called down on yourself!"

101. Horkos is a πῆμα to perjurers (Hes. *Op.* 804); he punishes through the verb πημαίνειν (*Theog.* 232), which can also mean to violate an oath (*Il.* 3.298–99); consequently πημοναί were the sufferings one asked for in a self-curse (Soph. *Trach.* 1189; Quint. Smyrn. 13.379). At *Med.* 1185 and 1368, πῆμα has its less restricted meaning.

forced Jason to look upon his own crime,[102] and she repeats her essential accusation against him, calling him "false to his oath" (ψευδόρκος, 1392). She herself, instead of standing among dead enemies, is surrounded by the corpses of those who were most dear to her, but she has the satisfaction of knowing that they were also dear to this man who lightly dissolved the union that defined them as his. He asks to bury them, he would at any rate give them a final kiss, but it is in her denial of these privileges that her return upon him is finally perfect and complete.[103] It forces from him an unconscious ratification of his initial curse of destruction—the wish that he had never engendered these sons that she has killed (1413–14). To give him a part in their funeral would have been to let him reenter the household and the *genos* which have been utterly destroyed by the *exoleia* he asked for. And meanwhile they, the unfathered offspring of a marriage that was unmade, will be safe forever, protected from their enemies by the patron goddess of marriage,[104] and honored in a perpetual festival that centers around legitimate Corinthian children. This knowledge evidently came to Medea with the coming of the golden car, and she announces it like a divinity from her hovering machine.[105] Her hand is her own again, and the burial of her sons in the temenos of Hera Akraia will be its final work: τῇδε θάψω χερί (1378).[106]

102. So at Pl. *Leg.* 9.872b, the slave who has killed a free man is made to look upon his victim's tomb while he is whipped to death.

103. It is appropriate to remind oneself that in parallel tales of vengeance by child-murder the ultimate punishment came through a cannibal meal; e.g., Tereus, Thyestes, Harpalyce (Hyg. *Fab.* 93), Harpagus (Hdt. 1.119).

104. Medea was associated with Hera in a tale that told how she, like Thetis, pleased that goddess by resisting the advances of Zeus (schol. Pind. *Ol.* 13.74).

105. She is evidently alone with the children's bodies in a chariot that drives itself (like that of Oceanus in [Aesch.] *PV*); it was supposed to be of gold, and the work of Hephaestus (Mimnermus, fr. 12 W).

106. The audience presumably knew of rites for a Corinthian Hera Akraia which took the killing of Medea's children as their *aition;* exactly where and how these rites were observed, however, was for them of no importance. Spectators need not have known of the annual sequestration of fourteen children and the sacrifice of a black goat (whether this was in fact ritual procedure in 431 B.C. is moreover not certain; see W. Burkert, "Greek Tragedy and Sacrificial Ritual," *GRBS* 7 [1966] 87–121). Nor would they need to have sensed this as the fossil of an initiation ceremony, as proposed by A. Brelich, "I figli di Medeia," *SMSR* 80 (1959) 213 ff.; *Paides e Parthenoi,* vol. 1 (Rome, 1969), pp. 355 ff. The significance of Medea's announcement remains the same, whether one pictures a temple at Perachora or a tomb in the city near the spring of Glauke. On the conflict between the commentators and Pausanias (who states explicitly that in his time the old rites were no longer observed), see F. M. Dunn, "Pausanias on the Tomb of Medea's Children," *Mnemos.* 48 (1995) 348–49; "Euripides and the Rites of Hera Akraia," *GRBS* (forthcoming).

IV

Medea disappears in the chariot, a conveyance that Aristotle deplored, as everyone knows.[107] Many moderns feel that in kindness to the poet it should be overlooked, but there it is, hanging above the scene building at tremendous dramaturgical risk—"Souvent au plus beau char le contrepoids résiste / Un dieu pend à corde et crie au machiniste," as La Fontaine wrote of a much more confidently mechanized theater.[108] The magic car serves immediately as a "fortress" against the violent hands of Jason and the Corinthians (1320, 1322). It is also a means of escape for Medea, and as such it supplies a balancing mythic emblem to the flying gold-fleeced ram that once rescued Phrixus and Helle and so inaugurated the great adventure of the Argo. Moreover, as blatant spectacle it provides an overwhelming cap to the unseen slaughter of the boys. This has just been represented by a double offstage cry, a terrified exchange between the two victims that was subsumed into a short choral song (1271–92)[109] in which the child-killing was swiftly restated in a sublimated mythic form.[110] The intolerable maternal crime has, in other words, been given the smoothest scenic imitation that a poet could contrive, and now the chariot completes this manoeuvre by blocking any reconstruction of the unseen horror with an immediately visible miracle. Above all and most obviously, however, the chariot brings the supernat-

107. On the use of the chariot mechanism in Attic tragedy, see D. Mastronarde, "Actors on High," *Cl. Ant.* 9 (1990) 247–94.

108. "Sur l'opera," in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1958), p. 617.

109. It seems probable that there was only one such exchange, that at 1271–72. In no other case is there active communication between the victims inside and those who wait without (as here at 1276/1277); no other victim cries out "Please help!" to a questioning chorus. Elsewhere outsiders can hear the voice from behind scenes, but the victim does not hear those outside (though lines may be broken between the two locations, as at Eur. *El.* 1409–11, 1415–16). Since this is the only case in which two victims are dispatched, one might expect irregularity, but this lyric dialogue between chorus and one of the victims is highly suspect. It seems likely that an unparalleled exchange between the children has been duplicated at 1277–78, where the chorus is addressed and the gladiatorial ἀρκύων ξίφοι are employed; these lines are missing in the Strasbourg papyrus, as are the corresponding 1288–89, where Ino unaccountably has two children.

110. There is no other case in which the cries of vengeance victims are incorporated into a strophic structure (and so given a musical accompaniment), though at Eur. *HF* 887–905 the cries are part of a nonstrophic song. The strophe's representation of a (curse-driven) Medea in the act of killing, cries included, is overlaid by the antistrophe's image of a Hera-driven Ino leaping into the sea (1284–89) in the symbolic deed that transformed the Cadmaean Bacchic child-killer into a divinity. For Gilbert Murray, however, the effect was somewhat different: "That death-cry is no longer a shriek heard in the next room. It is the echo of many cries of children from the beginning of the world" (*Euripides and His Age* [London and New York, 1965], p. 242).

ural directly into the playing area. Because the action has grown out of the breaking of an oath, and because that oath was witnessed by invoked divinities, the gods have been closely interested in all that has happened today—so the mortal characters have told us, and so now the flying chariot proves. Medea had called on her grandfather, Helios, to witness her revenge (764), and he had supplied the instruments of its first phase, the golden crown and the robe that reduced Jason's allies to a tangle of bone and melted flesh. The chorus had later asked Helios to interfere, to stop the killing of children sprung from his golden seed (1252–54), but instead he has sent a radiant contrivance that seems to confirm the crime's accomplishment. In this chariot his granddaughter now transports his great-grandsons to a place of safety and perpetual honor.[111]

Though he was especially associated with Corinth and the Near East,[112] Helios was everywhere treated as a god from the Other Time. He was the folktale sire of Amaltheia or Aix, the goat-nurse of Zeus, and the original race of men were supposed to have worshiped him (Pl. *Cra.* 397c).[113] He was the essential creative force, with Ge the first parent, so that he could be called "progenitor of the gods and father of all" (Soph. fr. 752 *TrGF*);[114] at Olympia he shared an altar with Kronos (*Etym. Magn.* s.v. "Elis"). Because he was the source of sight and blindness, he controlled knowledge,[115] and he was guardian of justice and oaths because nothing escaped him.[116] Helios could bear witness to hidden wrongs and denounce secret criminals,[117] and consequently the fear of his testimony could keep men from

111. In another version Medea flies off to a temenos of Helios near the sea (Diod. Sic. 4.46.2).

112. So at Ar. *Pax* 406 ff. Helios and Selene are plotting to bring barbarians into Greece because barbarians give them cult honors.

113. For evidence of Mycenaean cult, see Nilsson, *NMR*, pp. 412–14, Abb. 55, 158; Wilamowitz, *Glaube der Hellenen*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1931), p. 115. See W. Fauth, *Helios Megistos* (Leiden, 1995), pp. xvii-xxxiii, who argues that Orphics honored Helios as a god of pre-Olympian cult. In Orphic thought Helios sat beside Phanes as partner of the demiurge (Procl. *In Ti.* 40b = iii 131.30D, p. 216 Kern); see M. West, *The Orphic Poems* (Oxford, 1983), p. 214 n. 126.

114. Wilamowitz assumed that this statement reflected theology, not actual belief (*Glaube*, p. 254 n. 4), and he compared the Menander fr. cited by Clem. Al. *Protr.* 6.59 P: Ἥλιε, σὲ γὰρ δεῖ προσκυνεῖν πρῶτον θεῶν, / δι' ὃν θεωρεῖν ἔστι τοὺς ἄλλους θεούς. We know at any rate that the Sophoclean speaker identified this as the belief of "wise men." Cf. Soph. fr. 535 *TrGF*, where Helios is called δεσπότης. Other appellations were Time's Father (*Hymn. Orph.* 8.10.12 Kern); Parent and Overseer of All (Aesch. *Cho.* 985–86); Eye of Dike (Soph. fr. 12P; *Hymn. Orph.* 7.13 Kern); Megas Daimon among both men and gods (Ar. *Nub.* 573–74).

115. Hes. fr. 148 M-W; Soph. *OC* 868–70; Eur. *Hec.* 1068–69; cf. Pind. *Pae.* 9.4.

116. As witness and guardian of oaths, e.g., *Il.* 3.277–80; *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 26, 62; Ap. Rhod. 4.229; Helios is πιστοφύλαξ at *Hymn. Orph.* 7.17.

117. Hom. *Od.* 8.302; *Il.* 3.277–80; *Hom. Hymn Dem.* 26, 62, 69 ff.; Ap. Rhod. 4.229. See K. J. Dover, "Ἥλιος κῆρυξ," in *Greek and the Greeks* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 186 ff.

crime (Dem. 19.267). The chorus of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, calling him "captain of the gods" (*promos*, *OT* 660),[118] swears by him as a power who will punish, if they break faith, and this is the belief that dictated later inscriptions on graves of murdered men: "Helios, avenge him!"[119] And finally, in connection with Medea, it may be noted that some mythographers gave Helios a daughter, Ichnaia, who (like Themis or Nemesis) could track down doers of wrong.[120]

In Attica the presence of Helios was most strongly felt in popular practices and extra-city celebrations.[121] Thus a priest belonging to Helios took his place with a priestess of Athena and a priest of Poseidon in the procession of the Skira,[122] and he was honored (with the Horae) in ancient children's begging rites at the Pyanopsia and Thargelia.[123] Most significant, however, was his position in the persisting pre-city cults of ancestors, for there Helios was generator and father of the wind-daimon Tritopatores who, as the source of familial seed, were worshiped by each phratry and called upon at marriages as guarantors of legitimate sons and grandsons.[124] It was thus ultimately because of Helios that each man

118. Cf. Ar. *Nub.* 571–74, where he is called upon (in prominent last position, after Zeus, Poseidon, and Aither) as "*megas daimon* among both men and gods." For Heraclitus he was subordinate to Dike and the Erinyes (fr. 94 DK). Helios could cure and purify (Hes. fr. 148 M-W; Bacchyl. 11.101; Pind. *Ol.* 7.58 and schol.; Eur. *Hec.* 1068–69), and so he could also blight and punish (Eur. *Phoen.* 1–5).

119. Ἥλιε, ἐκδίκησον. See F. Cumont, "Il Sole vindice dei delitti," *Atti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia*, ser. 3, *Memorie*, 1 (1923) 65–80; D. M. Pippidi, "Tibi commendo," *RSA* 6–7 (1976–77) 37–44; D. Jordan, "An Appeal to the Sun for Vengeance," *BCH* 103 (1979) 521–25. Compare Oedipus in his vengeful curse upon Creon (Soph. *OC* 869), and chorus at Soph. *El.* 824–26, who look to thunderbolts of Zeus and chariot of Helios for revenge.

120. Lycoph. *Alex.* 129 and schol.

121. Note the large painted double disk found in an Agora well. The work of a follower of Brygo, it shows Helios emerging from the waves and was evidently an important dedication; see L. Talcott, "Vases and Kalos Names," *Hesp.* 5 (1936) 333–35.

122. Lysimachus, *FGrH* 366 F3; schol. Ar. *Eq.* 729; Harp. s.v. "Skiron"; Deubner, *Attische Feste*, p. 48. For fourth-century inscriptions recording cult honors, see Nilsson *GGR* 2:315 n. 7.

123. Pyanopsia, schol. Ar. *Eq.* 729; *Plut.* 1054. Thargelia, Porph. *Abst.* 2.7 (cf. Ath. 14.565a), but Deubner, *Attische Feste*, p. 192, finds the association with Thargelia dubious.

124. For their temenos in the Ceramicus, *IG* 1².842, 870; cf. 2².2615; and for cult at Marathon, 2².1358b30 ff., 51 ff.; see I. T. Hill, *The Ancient City of Athens* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 22, fig. 6 and p. 216; further, schol. *Il.* 8.39; Arist. fr. 415 = Poll. 3.17. According to Phanodemus, cited in *Suda* s.v. "Tritopatores," Athenians prayed to these powers ὑπὲρ γενέσεως παίδων; they are sons of Helios and Ge, according to Philochorus, and the *goneis* of mankind (cf. *Med.* 1255, the choral prayer to Ge and Helios, in which Medea's sons are said to have come from the γονή of Helios); see S. Eitrem, "Die Labyaden und die Buzyga," *Eranos* 20 (1921) 97–99, for offerings from phratries at the Apatouria. Jane Harrison equated the Tritopatores with the Anakes, whose priest had a throne in the Theater of Dionysus (*Mythology and Monuments* [London, 1890], pp. 162–63). There may have been a connection with Hecate: the temenos of the Tritopatores in the Cerameicus (*ΠΑΕ*, 1910, pp. 102–4) is

had his place in family and tribe as his father's son, and so took part in the city's ceremonies. Sitting in the Theater of Dionysus (where in Roman times at any rate the priestess of Helios had a special place),[125] Athenians had seen Orpheus punished for revealing that Helios and Apollo were one and the greatest god of all.[126] They had heard Cassandra beg Helios for vengeance (Aesch. *Ag.* 1323–26), heard old Oedipus name Helios executor of his vengeful curse against Creon (Soph. *OC* 869),[127] and listened as the chorus of the Sophoclean *Electra* named the car of Helios, along with the thunderbolts of Zeus, as instruments of right revenge (824–26).

At the end of the *Medea*, then, Euripides' audience will have seen the play's principal propelled toward their city in the chariot[128] of a primordial, paternal, and punitive god,[129] a fearsome power who guaranteed patriarchal seed, the firmness of oaths, and the inevitability of vengeance. Like Nemesis in the Hesiodic parable, Medea was flying away from a society corrupted by a perjurer who denied his own sons' legitimacy. And like the Erinyes, she was about to find a place in the city of Harmony (832) because she had been in service to an oath's curse-demon (1260). Before she reached Athens, however, Medea would stop at a sanctuary of Hera, there to deposit her freight of child corpses and let the goddess' hospitality rinse the kin-gore from her hands. The boys, the great-grandchildren of Helios, would be honored as heroes in Corinth under Hera's protection, while Medea, his granddaughter, would be delivered by his car to Athena's city. There she was to stay, a

neighbor to that of Hecate (*RE* s.v. "Tritopatores," 2777), and at Samos women sacrificed at the crossroads while men honored the Tritopatores with a fire ceremony (Eitrem, "Die Labyaden").

125. *IG* 3:1.313; Φιλίστωρ 3 (1862) 460; *RE* s.v. "Helios," 66.

126. Aesch. *Bassarai* frs. 82–84 *Supp. Aesch.*; cf. Eur. *Phaethon* 224–25. See West, "Tragica VI," *BICS* 80 (1983) 63–67; *Orphic Poems*, pp. 12–13.

127. Helios is prominent among the divinities of the revenge curses cited by H. S. Versnel, "Beyond Cursing," in *Magika Hiera*, ed. C. Faraone and D. Obbink (Oxford, 1991), pp. 70–71.

128. It may be that Helios was depicted driving his chariot in one of the Parthenon metopes, but the piece is so weathered that no certain identification can be made; see *LIMC* s.v. "Helios" no. 30.

129. Just at this time Athens was peculiarly aware of the sun because of Meton's observation of the solstice on June 27 of the previous year, but what effect this would have had on the ordinary man's view of Medea's chariot is anybody's guess (Ar. *Av.* 995–1011 and schol. 997; Phrynicus, frs. 21–22 *CAF*; Diod. Sic. 12.36.3; cf. 2.47.6; Philochorus, fr. 99 *FHG* 1.100; Plut. *Nic.* 13; *Alc.* 17; Ael. *VH* 13.12). The fact that Meton was caricatured on the comic stage does not tell us whether his calculations were thought to have enhanced or diminished the sun's divinity. E. Heitsch, "Drei Helioshymnen," *Hermes* 88 (1960) 139–58, supposed that the Homeric Hymn to Helios was composed at this time, expressive of a conservative reaction against newfangled notions.

terrifying agent of primitive justice, until Athens was refounded in its milder modern form by Theseus.[130]

130. It is usually assumed that Euripides expected his audience to foresee an attack on Theseus by a Medea who had become the wife of Aegeus, as is recounted by Diod. Sic. 4.54 (cf. Apollod. *Epit.* 1; Ov. *Met.* 7.404–24; Plut. *Thes.* 12; *Myth. Vat.* 1.1.48). Because this later story has a double action ("wie Euripides es liebt"), it was appropriated by Wilamowitz as the content of the Euripidean *Aegeus* (*Griechische Tragödien,* vol. 3 [Berlin, 1910], pp. 175–77; *Sitz.* Berlin, 1925, p. 234 n. 3), which play has been thought to precede *Medea.* There is, however, nothing in the fragments from *Aegeus* to prove even that Medea was among its characters, nor is there any indication of a date as early as 431. It should be remembered that Herodotus knew a story in which Medea, with a surviving son, merely stopped in Athens on her way to the Medes (7.62), while Diodorus found a report that sent her from Corinth to Thebes, where she cured Heracles of madness and restored his children to life (see M. Schmidt, "Medea und Herakles," in *Studien zur Mythologie und Vasenmalerei,* ed. E. Bohr and W. Martini [Mainz, 1986], pp. 169–174). Vase paintings moreover give evidence of versions of the tale of Theseus' return in which Aithra, not Medea, has a central role. An amphora from the British Museum by the Oinanthe Painter (*LIMC* s.v. "Aithra," 1.46) shows Aithra presenting Theseus to Aegeus; other vases seem to show an attack on Aithra by Theseus (*LIMC* s.v. "Aithra," 1.25; see Beazley, *Paralipomena,* pp. 512–13); a cup from Bologna by the Codrus Painter, ca. 440–430, shows Theseus, Aegeus, Phorbas, Aithra, and Medea associated in what seems to be perfect amity (*LIMC* s.v. "Aithra," 1.48; see C. Robert, *Archaeologische Hermeneutik* [Berlin, 1919], pp. 145–47; Preller-Robert 2.1, p. 144 n. 8). Certainly Medea appears in scenes of the bull of Marathon from the 430s (see B. B. Shefton, "Medea at Marathon," *AJArch.* 60 [1956] 159 ff.; V. Zinserling-Paul, "Medea in der antiken Kunst," *Klio* 61 [1979] 401–36), but nothing suggests that the attempted poisoning by Medea was at this time a necessary part of Theseus legend.

CHAPTER NINE

The Women's Quarters

Euripides' Electra

I

At the close of the fifth century, two decades of external war and internal conflict had worked a change in Athenian ways of thinking. In particular, the multiplication of political gangs and the related outbreak of murder and retaliation within the city had given an altered aspect to fictional deeds of revenge. Even at mid-century men had still felt concern over the possibly softening effects of too much civilization, and celebrations meant to perpetuate wild virtues were important in the civic calendar. Athenians had still gathered in the theater to share in a subversive nostalgia for alternate forms of association, whether as warriors or as hunters, and to borrow a sense of individual potential from heroes who were insubordinate even to the gods. After Syracuse, however, Attic citizens, like others in time of civil war, were, in Thucydides' phrase, inventing "ever more ingenious attacks and revenges ever more grotesque" (3.82.3). Civic disorder was actual, and consequently the deed of violent self-assertion began to lose its poetic attractions. Retaliation had become an everyday fact and a source of commonplace fear,[1] as men grown all too wild threatened the actual secular order. In these new circumstances, enormous crimes could no longer serve, even in fiction, as atavistic assertions of mortal vitality.[2] The traditional matter of

1. Thucydides' description of cities in throes of civil war will suit Athens in this period; see W. Burkert, "Die Absurdität der Gewalt und das Ende der Tragödie," *A&A* 20 (1974) 97–109.

2. G. Herman, "How Violent was Athenian Society?" in *Ritual, Finance, Politics,* ed. R. Osborne and S. Hornblower (Oxford, 1994), pp. 99–117, describes the coexistence of two codes, a "primitive" one that valued retaliation, and a "civilized" one "according to which retal-

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