



# MEDEA IN PERFORMANCE

1500-2000



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# Medea in Performance

1500–2000



EDITED BY

EDITH HALL, FIONA MACINTOSH AND OLIVER TAPLIN



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## FOREWORD



The Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama was founded in 1996 under the co-direction of Edith Hall and myself. This was made possible thanks to funding from the Leverhulme Trust; and this has in turn enabled us to obtain further support from the Arts and Humanities Research Board which will extend our activities until at least 2004. We are most grateful for the opportunity that these bodies have given the Archive to establish itself as the internationally recognized centre in this field of activity.

In July 1998, we organized a conference at Somerville College, Oxford, and selected *Medea* as its subject. It was first conceived as a relatively local event, though word got around and it became more international. We also had no prior intention of publishing the papers delivered over the two days. But in the event, they were (we believe) of such high quality and interest that we have coordinated their publication in this volume. All those papers delivered in 1998 are here except for that by Marina Warner, which was already committed elsewhere. We are delighted that two of those present at the conference but not giving papers, Margaret Reynolds and Mae Smethurst, have agreed to write special additional chapters.

We have several bodies to thank warmly for their support in making the Conference possible: the Principal and Fellows of Somerville College, the Gilbert Murray Trust, the Dover Fund of the Hellenic Society, and the Craven and Passmore Edwards Committees of Oxford University.

We are obliged to the European Humanities Research Centre and its *LEGENDA* publication series for including us; and we have much appreciated their high editorial standards. The completion of this book owes much to David Gowen, our full-time Researcher, to Pantelis Michelakis, our Research Fellow, and to Fiona Macintosh, who has recently, much to our delight, been recruited as a Senior Research Fellow of the Archive. We also thank Leofranc Holford-Strevens for

his outstanding work as copy-editor, and Astrid Voigt for invaluable assistance. I should like personally to take this opportunity to say how much the Medea adventure and the Archive in all its aspects owe to the energy and intellect of Edith Hall.

Tragedy does not shirk misfortune and mortality. Don Fowler, who died young in 1999, was a great supporter and is much missed. And we must not avert our eyes from the early death in a road accident of one of the participants in the Medea conference, Margaret Mezzabotta of the University of Cape Town. She was a keen advocate of the importance of Greek drama and of its influence in our times, and a fine citizen of the new South Africa.

O.T.



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## CHAPTER 1



# Introduction: The Performer in Performance

*Fiona Macintosh*

Medea is arguably the most theatrical of all Greek tragic characters. From the off-stage wailing victim of marital infidelity (96 ff.) to the shrewd onstage commentator on the shortcomings of Athenian democracy (214 ff.), Medea impresses us from the earliest moments of Euripides' tragedy with her wide-ranging and highly disjunctive repertoire. Abject suppliant one minute (324 ff.), she can with ease and alacrity assume grand *hauteur* and menacing authority the next (368 ff.). Like any other outsider, the rootless Medea has learned that the assumption of new roles is a way of life. But in Medea's case, she comes to see that an ability to perform is really her only guarantee of survival.

Euripides' Medea may well display her theatrical skills most ably in her encounters with others—notably with Creon, Jason (three times), Aegeus, and the chorus—but she does so too in what may be termed her encounters with herself. For in her exchanges with the chorus we often witness an embryonic, soliloquizing Medea who is to become a familiar *persona* in subsequent theatrical versions of the myth. Following her encounter with Creon, for example, when she is divulging to the chorus her plans for revenge, she turns to address herself in exhortatory mode, invoking both her ancestors and the mockery of her adversary to steel her resolve (401–6). And after the deaths of Creusa and Creon, she makes a public declaration to the chorus about the imminent infanticide,<sup>1</sup> before turning towards herself to arm (literally and metaphorically) her own reluctant heart and hand as she enters the palace (1242–50).

Euripides' Medea wins over the audience (as she does the chorus) from the beginning of the play with the eloquence and verve with



which she puts her case. But whilst the chorus finds it impossible to support the mother who is prepared to kill her own children, the audience finds itself drawn deeper into Medea's cause with each of her embryonic soliloquies. In the last part of Euripides' tragedy, Medea plays out two seemingly separate, but really inextricably linked, roles: that of devoted mother of two young boys, and finally and most famously, the part of monstrous infanticide. Even when the pathos is intensified by the offstage cries of the boys, it is as futile to ask which is the 'real' Medea here as it is at any other point in the play, because character and role are truly one in Euripides' tragedy.

When Medea appears triumphant in Helios' chariot on the palace roof at the end of the play, the performer has turned stage-manager and is about to organize her own exit from the drama. Even though Aristotle strongly objected to Medea's usurpation of the traditional function of the *deus ex machina* at this point in the play (*Poetics*, ch. 15), generations of audiences since have clearly felt otherwise. The conception of the final scene, with Medea's exit in the chariot drawn by serpents (though they are not in our text of Euripides), is predominant in the tradition from at least c.400 BC onwards.<sup>2</sup> It is this finale that makes Medea the performer *par excellence*; and it is by no means fortuitous that it is this 'theatrical' version (as opposed to earlier versions) of the myth of Medea that predominates in the modern world.

If the hallmark of the Euripidean protagonist is her ability to act as each situation demands, this is true of the Senecan heroine even more. Seneca's Medea not only assumes the role of actor in her dealings with others, she is fully aware of her audience as well. In the opening soliloquy she envisages her grandfather the Sun as simply another 'spectator' to the treacherous nuptials in which Jason now participates (28–30). And after the murder of one of her children to appease her brother's ghost, Medea needs an audience for the killing of the second (976–7), and especially the audience of Jason himself, without whom no infanticidal act has meaning (992–3).

Whilst the Euripidean Medea is both consummate performer and keen manipulator, her Roman counterpart is rather more the actor-dramaturge,<sup>3</sup> stage-managing events with such flair that she becomes solo performer in the Black Mass to Hecate, which serves as a kind of play-within-a-play in Act IV. And like the traditional actor-dramaturge, she not only shapes the events of her own tragedy, she does so seemingly knowing the Euripidean version of those events as well.

When the Nurse bemoans her mistress's loss of status and wealth at the beginning of Seneca's tragedy, Medea famously retorts: *Medea superest* [Medea is left], proclaiming her legendary self as her greatest asset (166). Even if present circumstances have temporarily eclipsed that legendary self, she reminds the Nurse of its imminent resurgence: 'Medea' calls the Nurse; 'I shall be' replies Medea (171). Later in the play after news of the deaths of Creon and Creusa, Medea is liberated, declaring: *Medea nunc sum* [Now I am Medea] (910). From this point on Medea can be Medea; she can accede to the status accorded to her in the mythical tradition, and perform the bloody act of infanticide that the theatrical tradition has come to associate with her. Furthermore, in the final moments of the play, this actor-dramaturge is in charge of both the present and the future because (unlike Jason) she knows her Euripides: 'Don't you recognize your wife?' she sneers at Jason; and gesturing towards the now customary serpent-drawn chariot that provides her traditional exodus in the theatrical tradition, she adds *sic fugere soleo* [Thus am I wont to flee] (1022).

Medea has enjoyed a long and varied career in the theatre, and the versatility of the mythical heroine is reflected in the range of her manifestations on the ancient and modern stages. Euripides was not the only Greek tragedian to make Medea his protagonist; nor was Seneca the only Roman tragedian to place her centre stage.<sup>4</sup> But given the avowed theatricality of both the Euripidean and Senecan models, it is hardly surprising that her *persona* has served both as a vehicle for established star performers and as a means of creating new stars. It has often been speculated that Euripides' *Medea* of 431 BC, like that other atypical central-figure Greek tragedy from a similar date, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos*, was written with a particular actor in mind. And the performance history of the play from AD 1500 to 2000 may well lend credence to such speculation, with the roll-call of those associated with the part of Medea reading like an account of the leading actresses and opera singers in European theatre history: Mlle Clairon, Mme Pasta, Sophie Schroeder, Adelaide Ristori, Charlotte Wolter, Sarah Bernhardt, Sybil Thorndike, Judith Anderson, Maria Callas, Diana Rigg, Fiona Shaw, and Isabelle Huppert.

Medea has enjoyed a particularly vibrant life through the interpretations of singers. In the first half of the first century AD, most probably in Egypt, an expert 'tragic singer' called Canopus is said to have performed songs from *Medea* in Greek;<sup>5</sup> and we find St Augustine recalling his own sung performance of *Medea volans* (*Medea Flying* or

*The Flying Medea*), when he sang in Latin in a theatrical singing competition in North Africa in the late fourth century AD.<sup>6</sup> Medea is associated with song early in the Greek mythical tradition, notably in Pindar's Fourth Pythian ode, which opens with Medea uttering prophecy to the Argonauts in song (21-101); and this collocation of prophetess and singer is powerfully continued through the role of *diva* in the modern theatrical tradition, and most famously through the performances of Mme Pasta and Maria Callas (see Reynolds, Ch. 6).

Just as Medea has lent herself so readily to the roles of star actress and *prima donna* respectively, she has also been associated with the role of *prima ballerina*. Her appearances in Roman pantomimes from the first to the third centuries AD, in which the various stages of her career were enacted by a male solo dancer to the accompaniment of a group of instrumentalists and a choir, may be said to have inaugurated a long tradition.<sup>7</sup>

Medea appeared in ballet proper from as early as the sixteenth century, with Jodelle's *Argonautes* being presented in the court of Catherine de Médici in France in 1558. But it was her association with Jean Georges Noverre, the 'Father of modern ballet', that is the most significant. Noverre's enormously popular *Médée et Jason* was first performed at the Württemberg court in 1762 before opening at the Hoftheater, Stuttgart in 1763, with Nancy Levier dancing the part of Medée and Gaëtan Vestris as Jason, to music by Jean-Joseph Rodolphe and a libretto by Noverre himself. *Médée et Jason* acts as a milestone in the history of dance because it was held up as the greatest example of the choreographic principles set down by Noverre in his *Lettres sur la danse et sur les ballets* (1760); and its status in the repertoire is reflected in its numerous revivals across Europe during the last three decades of the eighteenth century.

In the twentieth century Medea was again in the vanguard of choreographic innovation when Martha Graham, the most distinguished pioneer of 'Modern Dance', based her highly acclaimed ballet on the myth of Medea. Graham's *Cave of the Heart* (originally entitled *Serpent Heart*) was first presented in 1946 in the Mcmillan Theatre, Columbia University, New York, with music by Samuel Barber, and it went on to enjoy numerous revivals under different titles (*Medea's Meditation* and *Dance of Vengeance*) in the second half of the twentieth century.

However, it is not only women who have made their name as Medea. It has often been noted that the Euripidean Medea bears more than a



strain of the traditional Greek hero in her makeup;<sup>8</sup> and the highly transgressive theatrical heroine has, perhaps not unsurprisingly, also often received her most convincing interpretations by male performers. We have already heard of male performers in antiquity making their mark as Medea; and indeed, in the eighteenth-century Italian operatic tradition the part of Medea was originally conceived as a male (castrato) role (see Reynolds, Ch. 6). In the nineteenth century, Frederick Robson, the star of British burlesque, was considered by many commentators on the London stage to have surpassed the great Italian tragedienne, Adelaide Ristori, in the part of Medea (see Macintosh, Ch. 4). And there are some who would argue that the most powerful Medeas of the twentieth century were in fact male, Tokusaburo Arashi and Mikijiro Hira, the two Japanese actors who took the leading role in the Ninagawa production that astounded audiences around the world in the 1980s (see Smethurst, Ch. 10).

Whilst there have been previous accounts of the story of Medea as icon in the French and German traditions,<sup>9</sup> there has been no systematic attempt to chart the path of Medea on the stage in the modern world. The Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama at the University of Oxford organized a conference at Somerville College in July 1998 with the express purpose of recording Medea's various incarnations in the modern theatre. Most of the chapters in this volume began as papers at the conference, and although there is no sense in which this collection of essays purports to provide anything like an exhaustive account of the performance history of Euripides' tragedy and its various versions and adaptations from 1500 to 2000, it does go a long way towards filling some of the yawning gaps left by previous accounts of Medea.

The first three chapters break new ground in charting Medea's progress in the English theatrical tradition from the Renaissance down to the modern period, bringing to the reader's attention much neglected material that often challenges both traditional notions of the history of classical scholarship as well as accepted ideas about the history of British theatre. Any account of the English Medea has to be read in conjunction with an understanding of her role in European opera, and the next two chapters consider this rich operatic tradition from markedly different perspectives, with McDonald's transhistorical focus complementing Reynolds's thematic approach. The appearance of Medea's most celebrated modern operatic incarnation, Maria Callas in Pasolini's film

version, makes it vital to read Ian Christie's account of the filmic tradition of *Medea* (Ch. 7) alongside the chapters on opera.

The third part of the volume moves away from a generic focus and provides short histories of the reception of *Medea* in different countries around the world. It would be impossible to omit Greece from any geographically based account, although it is interesting to note from Platon Mavromoustakos's chapter how conspicuous the Euripidean version is by its absence from the early stages of the history of the revivals of Greek tragedy in Greece. In the wake of the end of the Cold War, it is highly pertinent that Eva Stehliková should have gathered for publication material that has hitherto been unavailable. Although there have been numerous attempts to chart the role of classical tragedy in East Germany, this is the first systematic attempt to consider the Czech Republic, which has an especially rich and long tradition, beginning with Jaroslav Vrchlický's epic cycle *Kreusa* in 1898–9.<sup>10</sup>

The last part of the volume moves towards rather more detailed accounts of particular productions. I have already signalled the importance of the Japanese production of *Medea* by the director Yukio Ninagawa in recent theatre history, and it is appropriate that it should be analysed by the leading expert on the links between Noh and Greek tragedy, Mae Smethurst. But analysis of the Ninagawa production is also extremely helpful in understanding the broader 'Orientalizing' trend in the revival of Greek tragedies in general and in revivals of *Medea* in particular, which can be said to date at the very least from Thomas Sturge Moore's Noh/Yeatsian-inspired *Medea*, which appeared in a collection entitled *Tragic Mothers* in 1920. The essays in this volume conclude with a moving account of what might be considered *Medea*'s homecoming to the Black Sea area by Olga Taxidou. In 1892 the Georgian poet A. Tsereteli wrote a tragedy entitled *Media* which formed the first part of an unfinished trilogy about Russian colonization,<sup>11</sup> and the Georgian Film Actors' Studio's adaptation of *Medea* performed in Georgia in 1997 provides a timely complement to Tsereteli's earlier project.

In its attempt to treat its subject both diachronically and synchronically (as Lévi-Strauss advocated for the reading of myth in general), this book goes further than any other account of *Medea* in its breadth as well as its detail. It does, however, presuppose in many senses an awareness of the extremely rich theatrical traditions of *Medea* in France and Germany, which I seek to outline here in the remaining sections of this introduction; and it does suggest that whilst certain thematic foci

are historically bound, they are also never exclusively so. There is a very real sense that in understanding Medea in the past, we are decoding her for the present and future as well. Indeed, we can extend the Senecan trope to say that it is not just knowing our Euripides that helps, but knowing our Seneca, our Corneille, our Grillparzer, our Legouvé, our Anouilh and, perhaps even, our Robinson Jeffers that really counts.

### Medea the Witch

In Act IV of Seneca's *Medea*, we watch the deracinated Medea 'become Medea' and return to her roots as she unclasps her hair, bares both feet and breast, and slashes her arm to perform a ritual comingling of essences with Hecate. This is Medea the witch, who had appeared on the stage from at least the fifth century BC, when she prepares her magical potions in Sophocles' fragmentary play *Rootcutters*. But Seneca's witch, tapping into her powers of inheritance with her spiritual and visual transformation before the audience, is a thrilling theatrical event that has inspired many imitators.

The first of Medea's crimes—the deaths of Creusa and Creon in the conflagrating robe that is magically fuelled rather than extinguished by water—are now summarily dismissed by the Senecan Medea as the product of a young girl's rage. 'Now I am Medea' (910), she pronounces before contemplating the act of infanticide that is to confirm her identity. Medea, who has performed her onstage ritual sacrifices with bloody hands and arms, now communes with the dead, seeking to appease the looming figure of the ghost of her brother Apsyrtus with the lunge of the sword through the body of her first son (958 ff.).

As Seneca's Medea ascends to the palace roof with the dead son in one arm and the living in the other, she proclaims her intention of defying not only nature's law but also (in her need for Jason as audience) Horace's proscriptions against onstage killing in his *Ars Poetica* (179–88). The sorceress in verbal combat with her adversary no longer displays any vestige of her human self: infanticide is for her the means of recovering her former, supra-human self. Stepping into the serpent-drawn chariot, she tosses out the corpses of her sons, and is free to ascend into the stratosphere, liberated from Jason and humanity itself.

Although there is no irrefutable proof for or against the Senecan Medea's appearance on the stage in Neronian Rome,<sup>12</sup> the theatrical power of the role was readily appreciated in the Renaissance. Whilst



it has until very recently been orthodoxy to argue for the relative absence of Greek models in the English Renaissance, the reception of the *Medea* may well give weight to the growing view that knowledge of Greek tragedy was much more widespread than has hitherto been acknowledged (see Purkiss, Ch. 2). Indeed, whilst the Renaissance seems especially fascinated by the intensity of the revenge in Seneca's version, there seems to have been an equal interest in the contrast between the Senecan witch and the Euripidean woman.

Lodovico Dolce, for example, wrote two versions of *Medea* in the first half of the sixteenth century in Venice, one being a loose translation of Euripides, the other a play based on Seneca's tragedy.<sup>13</sup> And when La Péruse wrote *Medée*, the first French tragedy written entirely in rhymed alexandrines, he drew not just on Seneca (as is often alleged), but on the Euripidean version as well.<sup>14</sup> Although there is no clear evidence of a performance of La Péruse's *Médée* at the time of its composition in 1553, with its formal innovations it clearly stands at the very beginning of a long and august French tragic tradition. But the distinction of having been the first *Medea* to be performed in the modern world had already been claimed by the highly influential Latin version of Euripides' tragedy by the distinguished Scottish scholar and teacher of La Péruse, George Buchanan. Buchanan's translation had already been performed in the 1540s at Westminster School.<sup>15</sup>

This dual fascination in the Renaissance with the tensions between the two ancient dramatic sources is perhaps nowhere better brought out than in the character of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth. Even if the notorious lines 'Come you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here' (I. v. 38–9) find close parallel with the Senecan *Medea*'s desire to rid herself of 'feminine fears' (42–3), the force of Lady Macbeth's 'I have given suck [. . .]' (I. vii. 54–9) derives from the fact, as Diane Purkiss eloquently points out in Ch. 2, that her words are deeply indebted to both Euripides and Seneca, but are not precisely from either.

Whilst general political parallels between Imperial Rome and Renaissance Europe undoubtedly made Seneca more readily accessible to Renaissance audiences than the Greek democratic model, it was precise events that made Seneca's *Medea* immediately appropriate in early seventeenth-century France. When Corneille came to write his first tragedy in 1634, it was the Senecan model that loomed behind his text for important political reasons. The first audiences to watch Créuse

being burnt on the stage at the Théâtre du Marais in Corneille's tragedy in 1635 may well have recalled the recent execution by burning in August 1634 of the priest Urbain Grandier, who had been found guilty of corrupting the Ursuline Sisters of Loudon. From 1632 onwards the exorcism of the nuns had been taking place, and the links between the allegations of Satanism and real-life oppression undoubtedly lie behind Corneille's tragedy of witchcraft and political corruption.<sup>16</sup>

Medea in Corneille's play is less ferocious and more human than her Roman counterpart, in large measure because the Cornélien Jason is more thoroughly self-seeking than usual. Medea's powers of sorcery too have been considerably diluted in being confined here to the lacing of the fatal robe in the magic grotto in Act V. Corneille's Médée does have other magical powers, but these have far more in common (as is often noted) with those of the fairy queen than they do with satanism. Armed with a magic wand, Médée frees Égée from prison and renders him invisible with a magic ring, in reward for which he offers her his hand as well as his throne. Médée may fly off in a chariot in the end, but she does so now to join Égée in exile, not to be reunited with her demonic ancestors.

Corneille's *Médée* proved successful at first, but it only enjoyed two revivals during the playwright's lifetime before disappearing from the repertoire. Its indirect influence, nonetheless, was felt considerably longer. Although Medea the witch is not much in evidence on the tragic stage beyond the neo-classical period, she does reappear in the French eighteenth-century and the English nineteenth-century burlesque tradition (see Macintosh, Ch. 4). And the busy neo-classical subplot of love and political intrigue that Corneille introduced to satisfy contemporary taste persists in versions of Medea well into the nineteenth century. Moreover, the figure of the *confident*, Pollux, who at the start of the play has just returned from a journey, goes on to perform a major role as moral guide in later versions of the myth. That Corneille's *confident* can exert influence beyond revivals of his *Médée* is due to his re-emergence in the operatic tradition. When in 1693 his brother, Thomas Corneille, wrote the libretto for Charpentier's opera *Médée*, which was first performed in Paris at the Théâtre de l'Académie de musique in 1694, it was Pierre Corneille's text that he substantially adopted, guaranteeing that Medea the witch remained on the operatic stage (see McDonald, Ch. 5), even though changes in contemporary taste led to her being refashioned in drama elsewhere.



### Medea the Infanticide

At the end of Seneca's *Medea*, after Medea has tossed the bodies of her two sons down from the roof of the palace and mounted her dragon-drawn chariot, Jason concludes the play with his outburst that Medea's escape will serve as a reminder of life in a godless world. That Jason is revealing his ignorance of both Medea's divine inheritance and the cosmos in general<sup>17</sup> is something that seems to have been lost on the Renaissance. When Studley translated Seneca's *Medea* in 1566, he felt compelled, in accordance with his Christianized world-view, to change the ending of the play in order to prevent the departure of the revenger without penalty. Although it was customary in the period to punish the revenger, who himself (as Hamlet so acutely appreciates) had become tainted in the process of redressing a wrong, there is more than a generalized objection implicit in Studley's rewriting: Medea is not just revenger pure and simple, she is infanticidal revenger.

The English stage in the eighteenth century appears to have built on the Renaissance misapprehension registered in Studley's reworking of the Senecan ending. As Edith Hall demonstrates in her account of eighteenth-century theatrical treatments of *Medea* (Ch. 3), the English playwrights used every conceivable means to avoid presenting Medea as a deliberate infanticide. Charles Gildon states in the preface to his version entitled *Phaeton; or, The Fatal Divorce*, first performed at the Theatre Royal in 1698, that infanticide is 'contrary to all the Dictates of *Humanity* and *Motherhood*' (his emphasis).

However, there is a very different focus in the operatic tradition where, as we have already seen, the Cornélian Medea's ultimately 'un-maternal' mother is kept alive in Charpentier's opera. The Senecan-inspired Medea also persists in many eighteenth-century operatic treatments, most notably in Salomon's *Medea and Jason*, first performed at the Opéra in 1713, where Medea's vengeance and her escape are celebrated (see McDonald, Ch. 5, and Reynolds, Ch. 6). In France as well as in England at this time, there is a real sense in which the dramatic treatments of *Medea* are being cast in contradistinction to this operatic tradition. Appearing one year after Charpentier's opera, Longepierre's play *Médée* of 1694 sought to 'correct' Corneille's tragedy in presenting a Medea who seems to have the gods on her side. Although Longepierre's play was not particularly well received at first, it went on in the eighteenth century to eclipse Corneille's version in the repertoire of the Comédie-Française, not



M<sup>LE</sup> CLAIRON DANS LE RÔLE DE MÉDÉE, D'APRÈS CARLE VAN LOO

1. Etienne Dauvergne, *Mlle Clairon dans le rôle de Médée*, 1765.  
Engraving after painting by Carle van Loo, Musée de Paris

least because the great tragedienne, Mlle Clairon, appeared in the title role (see fig. 1). Moreover, its status within the repertoire can be gauged by the success of the parody (1728) by Dominique (= Pierre François Biancolelli) and Lelio fils entitled *La méchante femme*, in which the immobilizing wand of Longepierre's Medea is parodied in true pantomimic style.<sup>18</sup>

During the French revolutionary period (1782–98), there were nine operas based on *Medea*, including Cherubini's of 1797, in which Medea is clearly likened to the spirit of the Revolution itself (see McDonald, Ch. 5). In Germany from at least the 1770s onwards, there is a fascination with Medea, and especially Medea the infanticide. The popularity of Heinrich Leopold Wagner's drama *Die Kindermörderin* (1776) goes some way towards accounting for the large number of adaptations of *Medea* that appear on the stage at this time.<sup>19</sup> In Wagner's play a butcher's daughter, seduced by an officer, kills her child and is subsequently put to death for infanticide. The focus here on the mother as victim of circumstance (as opposed to agent of revenge) is to continue to dominate treatments of Medea well into the nineteenth century.

The most famous of these early nineteenth-century versions in the German-speaking world is the trilogy, *Das Goldene Vließ*, by one of Austria's most distinguished playwrights, Franz Grillparzer. The trilogy was first performed on 26 March 1821 at the Burgtheater in Vienna, and consisted of *Der Gastfreund* (*The Guest*), *Die Argonauten* (*The Argonauts*), and *Medea*. The Romantic desire to adopt the Aeschylean trilogic form (as Schiller had done in 1799 with *Wallenstein*) proved impossible to replicate outside Vienna, both on account of the enormity of the cast (two Medeas are required) and the excessively long playing time required for the three five-act plays. It therefore became common to perform the *Medea* as a separate play elsewhere in the nineteenth century, where the appearances of Sophie Schroeder and Charlotte Wolter in the leading role enhanced the play's popularity.

In Seneca's play, the act of infanticide is articulated in terms that imply it is less about destruction than a reconstitution—in this case a recovery of Medea's former self. When Medea appears on the rooftop after the first killing, she tells Jason that now not only is her regal state regained, so too is her virginity (982–4); and just before the second killing, she declares that if there were any trace of Jason left in her womb, she would plunge her sword deep inside to perform her own abortifacient act (1012–13). Indeed in the Roman tradition as a whole,



the legendary account of Jason's stealing of the Golden Fleece was understood in terms of the loss of innocence; and Medea's unwitting participation in this postlapsarian world that Jason and the Argonauts now occupy is redressed in the Senecan version through the most brutal form imaginable—the act of infanticide itself.

Grillparzer's trilogy follows the Roman tradition in presenting the fleece as a symbol of guilt, which Jason lusts after not so much for its intrinsic worth as for what it represents. And as with Medea, the moment of acquisition brings with it the onset of satiation. In the first part of the trilogy Medea's father, Aietes, kills the 'guest friend', Phryxus, who, as he dies, curses Aietes' family. In the second part, Medea, now in witch's garb, falls in love with Jason when helping her father outwit the Argonauts; and Part Two ends with her brother Absyrtus jumping ship to avoid being taken hostage by a violent Jason. The *Medea* therefore begins with a sympathetically presented Medea in the background: the trilogic form has meant that the cause of the crime has been clearly located (in Aeschylean fashion) in an earlier generation—here her father's crime against his guest; and we also know that it is Jason, not Medea, who is the direct cause of her brother's death. Grillparzer's *Medea* may well turn out to be an (albeit reluctant) infanticide, but she is not guilty of fratricide as well.

Grillparzer's *Medea*, moreover, seeks to bury her past literally and metaphorically in the opening scene of the play as she symbolically buries the chest containing both the fleece and her magical charms. Medea wants to be Greek now, just as she was Colchian then, and the rest of the play shows her pitiful attempts at assimilation into a hostile host-culture. The parallels with the experience of *Ostjuden* in Austria at the time, where the anti-Semitic riots of 1817–18 were particularly violent, have been well drawn out, with Medea's discarding of her Hasidic dress that she wore in the second play making those parallels explicit to the first audiences.<sup>20</sup> Medea is patronized and humiliated by turns in her encounters with the radiant Kreusa and the overtly racist Kreon. In the pivotal scene, after suffering the height of humiliation, when she realizes that Kreusa has been lurking in the shadows during her encounter with Jason, Medea symbolically rends the gown that Kreusa had lent her (end of Act II). The final blow to Medea's self-respect is when she discovers publicly that even her children have been won over to Kreusa, since neither offers to accompany her after one is allowed to do so (end of Act III). The *Medea* of Act IV is clearly hardened by circumstances as she

contemplates crushing the children in her palm. But the killing of the children, as she insists to Gora, her nurse and *confidante*, would only be to prevent them meeting with a worse fate in the future.

When the chest is dug up by Kreon's men in order to obtain the golden fleece, Medea is reunited with the trappings of her magical past: 'Once more I am Medea', she exclaims. The resurgence of 'Medea' leads to the dispatch of the fatal gift to Kreusa by Gora and the offstage killing of the children. Act IV ends with an imperious Medea, dagger in hand with the palace in flames in the background. In the final act with his children dead, Jason too is banished from Corinth, and we see Jason forced to endure the status of outcast when even former friends have refused him refuge. Alone in the wild, Jason is confronted by the 'magical' Medea, who emerges from behind a rock on her way to Delphi to return the fleece. Her final words, uttered as she holds the fleece aloft, provide an object-lesson in the futility of the pursuit of fame and fortune.

Grillparzer's *Medea* enjoyed a prominent position within the repertoire of German-speaking theatres throughout the nineteenth century. When Freud refers to Medea in one of his case studies, he is clearly thinking of Grillparzer's and not Euripides' version of the events.<sup>21</sup> Although Grillparzer's trilogy descends into a morality play towards the end of the last act, it is a serious study in the victimization of both womanhood and the outsider; and in this sense it anticipates many of the interests in the myth of Medea that would dominate over the next hundred or so years. Furthermore, with its psychological insights, it may be said to adumbrate in important ways Freud's own analyses of the dangers of self-repression.

### Medea the Abandoned Wife

Even though the Medea of Corneille is in some sense the abandoned wife driven to revenge by her husband's treachery, it is not until the nineteenth century that Medea becomes abandoned wife *tout court*. Grillparzer's trilogy clearly set the trend in presenting Medea's cause in a thoroughly sympathetic light, where infanticide is no longer caused by the desire for passionate revenge, rather by the mother's desire to prevent her children meeting with a worse fate in the future. There were important social and political factors contributing to this change of focus on Medea, above all the growing support for the emancipation of women in the nineteenth century. In England it was

the introduction of rudimentary divorce legislation, above all, that made Medea's suffering at Jason's hands considerably more significant than Medea's infanticidal revenge.<sup>22</sup>

The most important nineteenth-century version of *Medea* after Grillparzer's trilogy of 1821 was by the French playwright, Ernest Legouvé, which opened on 8 April 1856 in Italian at the Théâtre-Italien in Paris. Legouvé went on to lend direct support to the women's movement, when he published three serious accounts of the history of the position of women in France.<sup>23</sup> But he had begun to contribute to the cause much earlier with his version of *Medea* that he completed for the great tragedienne at the Comédie-Française, Mlle Rachel, in 1854. Rachel, however, had declined, refusing to take on the role of an infanticide. By failing to read Legouvé's script carefully—and presumably believing that Medea had to be fundamentally the Senecan/Cornélian witch—Rachel made a serious professional error. For it was the appearance of the Italian actress, Adelaide Ristori, in the title role that led to Rachel's eventual eclipse, with the new Medea rising to stardom with Legouvé's play in the Italian translation of Joseph Montanelli. Ristori's success in the role extended way beyond France, with tours to London, Athens, Portugal, New York, even Brazil and Argentina (see Macintosh, Ch. 4, Mavromoustakos, Ch. 8, and fig. 2).

That Rachel had misread (or more likely *not* read) Legouvé's play is certain. Italy had not afforded Italian actresses many opportunities to perform Medea on the dramatic (as opposed to operatic) stage, but Ristori herself had turned down an earlier offer in 1814 to play the part in Cesare della Valle's version (after Alfieri). However, after she had read Legouvé's version, she had agreed to take on the role because the act of infanticide was 'both just and necessary'.<sup>24</sup> Indeed throughout the last part of Legouvé's play, there is never any doubt that Medea's love for her children exceeds her hatred for Jason. But tragically, as with Grillparzer, Medea is forced to endure the humiliation of being publicly rejected by her children as they are lured by security and material comforts that the abandoned, homeless wife is unable to provide.

Medea is doubly isolated in Legouvé's Corinth being both abroad and deprived of her traditional Nurse; and it is only Orphée, the Pollux/*confident* figure, who provides Medea with any support, when he prevents a baying crowd from stoning her at the end of the second act. This Medea is the victim of personal and political oppression, who suffers both private and public humiliation, and who eventually





2. Adelaide Ristori as Medea, c.1856 (photograph)

is driven to infanticide when she is pursued yet again by a crowd chanting 'Death!' Surrounded by the mob from both sides, the penultimate scene of the play begins with Créon trying to seize the children from her arms. Medea warns him that he will never have them; and with two cries of pain followed by cheers of jubilation welling up from behind her cloak, Medea turns to the audience with a bloodstained knife in her hand.

Legouvé's Medea is not only literally driven to infanticide, she is also noticeably more human than her predecessors. Like Grillparzer, Legouvé is interested in humanizing Medea in placing her within her cultural context. In his preface to the play he claims that it was nineteenth-century German scholarship on people from the Black Sea region that had enabled him to understand his subject fully.<sup>25</sup> This *Medea* gestures in many ways towards Corneille's play, with its linguistic and metrical echoes, but it is also cast in direct opposition to the Cornélian model. This is not Medea who invokes the gods as equal, but Medea who seems (like Longepierre's) to have the gods on her side (II. iii). And instead of the Senecan Medea invoking her mother through black magic, Legouvé's heroine tells Créuse of her painful and furtive departure from her home, and from her mother in particular, at whose bedside she wept whilst her (seemingly mortal) mother lay sleeping (I. vi). For a fleeting moment, it could be Alcestis, the archetypal good wife, that seems to lurk behind this typically nineteenth-century wife.

### Medea the Proto-Feminist

The importance of Legouvé's version can be registered by the fact that Ristori continued to tour with the play both in Europe and North and South America well into the 1860s.<sup>26</sup> But its importance in England can also be estimated by the number of new versions of *Medea*—both tragic and burlesque—that followed its opening in London in June 1856, when English political life was preoccupied with questions relating to divorce.

John Heraud's *Medea in Corinth* that opened at Sadler's Wells in 1857 was undoubtedly the most significant of these tragic versions, because it went on to play both in the provinces and, notably, in London's East End at the Standard Theatre in 1859, where the huge 5000-seat auditorium played host to *Medea* for twelve nights.<sup>27</sup> Legouvé's version had reminded the intelligentsia of the immediate



relevance of Euripides' tragedy, and had inspired radicals like Heraud (then drama critic of the *Illustrated London News*) to return to the Greek original and then recast it in the vernacular for a significantly wider audience.

When Ristori was performing in London, burlesques of the play (as was the case in Paris) appeared concurrently, most alluding to the bizarre fact that a French version of a Greek play performed in an Italian translation could be taking London by storm. And it is in the English burlesques, and one in particular by Robert Brough, that the 'modern' Medea may be said to originate (see Macintosh, Ch. 4). This modern Medea is no longer simply a victim of circumstance; she is determined to take a stand against both the individual who caused the suffering, as well as the society that allowed it to happen.

This modern Medea is really coincident with the resurgence of interest in the Euripidean Medea, and her 'Women of Corinth' speech in particular. That some of the sentiments of that speech on the iniquities of the marital state had been echoed in Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women* (I. ii.159 ff.) (c. early 1620s) is both interesting and unusual, because what all the divergent adaptations of *Medea* until now have in common is that they omit that now famous speech. This may well have been one of the factors that led Augusta Webster to publish her faithful and much-admired translation of Euripides' tragedy in 1868.<sup>28</sup> But it was not, perhaps, until some years later in England that the full force of Medea's speech was widely appreciated, when it formed part of the repertoire of the Actresses' Franchise League at suffragette meetings.<sup>29</sup>

In 1898 Catulle Mendès's version of *Médée* appeared at the Théâtre de la Renaissance with Sarah Bernhardt in the title role, in which Medea is a veritable *femme fatale*, famously recorded in Alphonse Mucha's colour lithograph poster design of that year, which shows Medea standing over her dead children (see the frontispiece to this volume). This 'modern' Medea kills her children in a fit of blind passion after Jason has failed to keep his promised assignation with the 'real woman' in his life. With her sexual voraciousness, Mendès's Medea conforms to the worst of the stereotypes of the New Woman (see Macintosh, Ch. 4).

A few years later the translation of *Medea* by the eminent classical scholar and Ibsen enthusiast Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff was produced at the Neues Theater am Schiffbauerdamm in Berlin in 1904 without much success. What is notable about the production in hindsight was the substantial involvement of Max Reinhardt in the

direction (who went on to produce the most outstanding twentieth-century production of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos*).<sup>30</sup>

By contrast, Wilamowitz's younger counterpart in England, Gilbert Murray, saw his translation performed at the Savoy Theatre in London in 1907 under the direction of Harley Granville-Barker with considerably more success. Murray was not only very much interested in Ibsenite New Drama, he had also been a keen supporter of the women's suffrage movement since at least as early as 1889. Furthermore, he is reported to have told the actress Sybil Thorndike that Euripides' *Medea* 'might have been written' for the women's movement; and in 1907 his translation appeared together with a series of suffrage plays under the direction of Barker.<sup>31</sup> Edyth Olive appeared in the part of *Medea* in the first production of Murray's *Medea*, and there were clearly some reservations about her performance. When Sybil Thorndike took over the part in 1919 for the New Theatre matinées, she was far more successful, and became closely associated with the *persona* of *Medea* in England at this time. One afternoon in 1919 crowds of spectators are said to have been so enthusiastic about her performance that they stopped the traffic outside the Holborn Empire. For Thorndike, this was a thoroughly feminist play: 'Medea was in a way justified. As I studied the part I thought a lot about the position of women in the world, the position of the underdog';<sup>32</sup> and Thorndike's feminist heroine went on to perform *Medea* around the world during the next four decades, and as late as 1954 on a recital tour (see fig. 3).

Murray's *Medea* became known in America from 1915 onwards, when the already well-established Canadian actress Margaret Anglin performed the title role in the Hearst Amphitheater of the University of California at Berkeley, before taking it to Carnegie Hall in New York in 1918, with Walter Damrosch's music. It continued to be performed in the twenties in New York, being hailed by at least one theatre critic as the paradigmatic feminist play, from which 'all plays about forsaken women since the world was young and men have been faithless' are taken.<sup>33</sup>

### Medea the Outsider

In the early nineteenth century, Grillparzer had explicitly localized *Medea*'s ethnicity in his version written against a background of violently anti-Semitic riots in Austria. And at the end of the century, when a New York Yiddish theatre company wished to explore



3. Sybil Thorndike as Medea, 1925 (photograph).  
Gilbert Murray's translation, performed at Christ Church, Oxford



contemporary Jewish oppression, they staged an adaptation of Grillparzer's *Medea* by Gordin, in which the myth of Medea was effectively transposed to the epoch of Antiochus IV.<sup>34</sup>

It was not, however, until the twentieth century that Medea's ethnicity became a dominant concern in dramatic treatments of the myth. Thorndike's tour with Murray's *Medea* to South Africa in 1928–9 is revealing in the way that it records what is to become a representative shift in response to Euripides' tragedy. Thorndike recalls how at the company's instigation, the management of the theatre in Johannesburg had agreed exceptionally to allow black members of the audience, as long as they remained segregated in the dress-circle. She comments:

Until now it had been for me a war cry for all oppressed people—now it was the blacks, as Medea, crying out against the civilised whites in the person of Jason, the Greek. And they felt it. You heard sort of deep-breathing sounds coming from the dress-circle, and it was absolutely thrilling.<sup>35</sup>

In the inter-war period when racial issues came to dominate *Mitteleuropa* with the rise of Nazism, *Medea* received a number of significant reworkings. The first and most startling of these explorations of Medea the outsider was Hans Henny Jahnn's expressionist *Medea*, which opened at the Staatstheater, Berlin, in 1926. With the black actress Agnes Straub in the part of Medea, Jahnn's play explores interracial strife and oedipal rivalry (the children here are adolescents and the elder son collides with his father over Kreon's daughter), as well as homoeroticism.<sup>36</sup> Its daringly risqué agenda no doubt explains in large measure why it should have gone on to enjoy numerous revivals in more recent times.<sup>37</sup> But it seems that the interracial dimension of Jahnn's play was not only the most urgent at the time of its first production, it was also the most important for Straub as well, who significantly went on to direct Grillparzer's *Medea* in 1933 in order to challenge Nazi racial policies directly.<sup>38</sup>

Henri Lenormand's adaptation *Asie*, performed at the Théâtre Antoine in 1931, similarly reflects the anxieties about racial identity that were being hideously exploited at this time. Jason here is a successful and ambitious French colonial, who returns to France with his Indo-Chinese princess and their two children. Jason abandons them all for a blonde daughter of a colonial official, and Medea kills the children to prevent them from suffering racial and cultural conflict.<sup>39</sup>

Countee Cullen, the 'poet laureate' of the Harlem Renaissance, spent a lot of time in Paris between 1926 and 1938, and his prose version of

*Medea* with choral music by Virgil Thomson in 1935 may well have been inspired by Lenormand's version, since it has an African Medea betrayed by a white man. But it met with fertile ground in New York, when it coincided with Langston Hughes's musical of mixed marriage, *Mulatto*, which was a hit on Broadway throughout the 1935–6 season.<sup>40</sup>

In 1936 the American playwright Maxwell Anderson similarly turned to Medea in his adaptation, *The Wingless Victory*, which is set in Salem in about 1800. Anderson's play, in which the persecuted daughters of a Malay princess and a New England sea-captain are finally killed by their mother in despair, enjoyed enormous success in the Empire Theater in New York, running for 110 performances with Katharine Cornell in the leading role.<sup>41</sup> The success of *The Wingless Victory* can surely be explained by the fact that the play was exploring contemporary concerns through the safe distance of historical drama; but that it was also exploring these concerns in another ethnic context was vital to its success. America had had its own 'Modern Medea' in the person of Margaret Garner, the runaway slave, who killed her daughter to avoid the ignominy of slavery and whose story was to be taken up by Toni Morrison in *The Beloved* over 120 years later in 1987. But the obvious interracial tensions at home in the 1930s meant that any modern 'Afro-American' Medea was too problematic to confront without some kind of mediation.<sup>42</sup>

### Medea the Modern Amalgam

During the second part of the twentieth century, we watch Medea returning to the stage in the various guises that we have traced across previous centuries. That the intensity of Medea's revenge came under scrutiny in post-war Europe is not surprising. In 1947 the Austrian poet and playwright Franz Theodor Csokor wrote a version explicitly alluding to its topicality, *Medea Post Bellica*. The Italian novelist Corrado Alvaro also drew on his war experiences when he wrote a tragic drama based on *Medea* entitled *La lunga notte di Medea* in 1949, the same year as the Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico's production of *Medea* at Ostia in Italy under the direction of Salvini.<sup>43</sup>

Gilbert Murray's insights in the preface to his translation of *Medea* proved illuminating once more in post-war Britain. His reading of Euripides' play had been influenced by his understanding of the events of the Boer War, and in the preface he emphasizes how revenge causes

pain and taint to avenged and avenger alike, adding: 'This is a grim lesson; taught often by history, though seldom by the fables of poets.'<sup>44</sup> For post-war Europe, watching newly reconstituted nation-states tear themselves apart in civil wars, the message of Euripides' tragedy could not be more pertinent; and Murray's translation enjoyed a new lease of life in 1949 with Eileen Herlie in the part of Medea when it was transmitted on the Home Service (the forerunner of Radio 4) instead of being relegated to the highbrow Third Programme.<sup>45</sup>

In the immediate post-war world it is not surprising to find Medea again as the displaced outsider. Although Anouilh's *Medée* was written in 1946, it was not performed until 1953, when it met with a mixed reception at the Théâtre de l'Atelier. It is very much a reflection of the previous decade, in which it was written, and this fact (together with the evident problems with casting)<sup>46</sup> may well account for its failure with its first audiences. *Medée* in Anouilh's version is a gypsy, who is being forced to flee or be decapitated and have her head handed over to Pelias' sons by Créon; and Jason here is the worst possible kind of collaborator, exonerating himself by claiming to have reduced the suffering of his victim.

But it was no doubt also the dubious taste of certain scenes that led to the play's poor reception. Anouilh's *Medée* is cast in the Senecan mould; she is really Medea the witch in the witch's modern guise of the gypsy. But instead of initiating a Senecan Black Mass towards the end of the play, *Medée*'s first step towards reconstituting herself is to invoke a large animal to revivify her in sexual union. This *Medée* sets fire to her caravan with herself and her two children inside; and when Jason arrives, she appears at the window pronouncing the deaths of the children and her own self-recovery: her past, the fleece, her home and her virginity, all that Jason had plundered, are now her own once more. This is pure Seneca until Medea kills herself and leaves Jason coolly indifferent, ready to undertake his next task of resuming order in Corinth. The final banal coda between a boy and the nurse, which ironically reflects the indifference of ordinary people to life's tragedies, was clearly pertinent in a late 1940s context, but no more than an unwelcome reminder in 1953 of the past indifferences of many members of the audience. Anouilh's play has, perhaps not unsurprisingly, been more successful outside France: it enjoyed eight revivals in Czechoslovakia between 1962 and 1983 (see Stehlíková, Ch. 9); and it was directed by Gian Carlo Menotti in Rome in 1966. Most



notably, perhaps, it served as the libretto to the opera by the Hungarian composer A. Kovách in 1960, and received a memorable staging by Ingmar Bergman in 1967.<sup>47</sup>

Just as Anouilh's *Medée* is really another version of the Senecan-inspired *Medea* the witch, the American version by the poet Robinson Jeffers, written the same year, is really another version of *Medea* the abandoned wife. In marked contrast to the French reception of Anouilh's version, the American version by Robinson Jeffers opened to great acclaim at the National Theater in New York in 1947 under the direction of John Gielgud (who went on the following year to direct Eileen Herlie in the same version at the very recently established Edinburgh Festival, before transferring to the Globe Theatre in London). Gielgud also took the part of Jason at first and appeared alongside the Australian actress, Judith Anderson. She herself had been instrumental in persuading Jeffers to write the version, and was to remain associated in the American imagination with *Medea* for many years. The programme note described the play as a 'tragedy [. . .] about the vengeance of a woman scorned by her ambitious husband';<sup>48</sup> and in Robinson Jeffers's version *Medea* becomes (like Arthur Miller's *Willy Loman* two years later) a victim of the American Dream, losing her self-vaunting husband to a younger model, and her children to a glut of toys that the abandoned wife cannot provide. When Jason announces his intention to send his sons away, he provides the spur for the infanticide because *Medea* is unable to bear the thought of others taking her children from her.

Over the next three years, there were 214 performances in America and worldwide of Jeffers's play; and although the part of Jason was taken by different actors (Dennis King followed Gielgud, and was in turn followed by Henry Brandon), Anderson remained in the part of *Medea*, only briefly being challenged in 1948 by Eileen Herlie in Britain. Devotees of the Murray translation found Jeffers's naturalistic language very un-Greek, and it is significant that Herlie went on to perform *Medea* in Murray's version for the BBC Home Service broadcast of the play in 1949.

Despite the evident misgivings about Jeffers's version in Europe, there was wide praise for Anderson's incantatory delivery, which was deemed to redeem the otherwise 'banal translation'.<sup>49</sup> The *New York Times* theatre critic, Brooks Atkinson, went so far as to claim that Anderson had come to understand the role better than *Medea* herself, Euripides, or any of the scholars had done.<sup>50</sup> When the play was revived on

Broadway in 1982 under the direction of Robert Whitehead, the 84-year-old Anderson took the role of the Nurse, graciously bequeathing the part of Medea to her younger compatriot Zoë Caldwell, who went on to win similar accolades for her performance.<sup>51</sup>

The most significant Medeas after Robinson Jeffers's abandoned wife also made their first appearances in the United States. The first was *Deafman Glance* (1970) by the American director, Robert Wilson, in which Medea the infanticide was explored in an extraordinary eight-hour production. Wilson went on to rework Medea on two more occasions and in his third version, *Overture to the Fourth Act of Deafman Glance* (1982), the nurturing mother gives her child milk before slowly returning, knife in hand, to kill him.<sup>52</sup>

The numerous versions of *Medea* by the (predominantly) American-based Romanian director Andrei Șerban are not only better known, they are also more closely modelled on the ancient sources. Șerban's lugubrious *Medea* of 1972 ushered Medea the witch back into the modern repertoire, with Senecan ritual now being re-presented through the theory and practice of Antonin Artaud. When it was performed at Ellen Stewart's Café La Mama in 1972, the promenade production began with the spectators' precarious descent (guided only by acolytes with lighted candles) towards a cave, where they were greeted by the ancient Greek utterances of the Nurse. They were then escorted into a large basement space with benches on one side against the wall, and an enchained figure of Medea cursing in ancient Greek on the other. When Jason arrived he spoke only in Latin, emphasizing the gaps in meaning between the actors as well as acting as a further guarantee of the audience's participation on an emotional (as opposed to rational) level. Șerban's constantly changing *Ancient Trilogy*, which included *Medea* together with *Trojan Women* and *Electra*, went on to be adapted specifically to Romania's civil war in 1989, when Șerban staged it at the National Theatre in Bucharest following his brief return home after the overthrow of the Ceaușescu regime.

The former East German playwright and director Heiner Müller has similarly turned to Medea for inspiration on more than one occasion. His *Medeaspiel* of 1974 was a pantomime in the style of Jean-Louis Barrault, which chillingly consisted of a mimodrama in which three projected titles—*The Sexual Act*, *The Act of Birth*, and *The Act of Killing*—explain the fortunes of a woman tied to a bed on stage, who is first wedded, then gives birth, and finally in Müller's words, 'takes



off her face [= mask], rips up the child and hurls the parts in the direction of the man. Débris, limbs, intestines, fall from the flies on the man'.<sup>53</sup> However iconoclastic Müller's dumbshow is, in its treatment of Medea as infanticide pure and simple, it is firmly within the post-romantic German tradition.

When Müller went on to put together his next Medea-inspired piece, *Medeamaterial*, in 1982, his choice of the trilogic form continued that association with tradition, and with Grillparzer's *Das Goldene Vließ* in particular. The first part of Müller's trilogy, *Verkommenes Ufer* (*The Despoiled Shore*) is set thirty years in the past in an East Berlin suburb, where man is destroying his environment (as Jason will do Medea), and it ends with Medea cradling the brother she has killed in her efforts to help Jason. Part Two is entitled *Medeamaterial* and is loosely based on Euripides, whilst the third part, *Landschaft mit Argonauten* (*Landscape with Argonauts*), is set in modern times amongst the rubbish of civilization and war, and ends with the voyagers' extermination. With its modern frame, we are reminded of Pasolini's semi-autobiographical *Edipo Re*; but we are also reminded of Grillparzer and the earlier Roman tradition, in which the Argonautic tales provide a commentary on postlapsarian decline. If the fleece within this tradition symbolizes the perils of the colonial endeavour, Medea in Müller's version is aligned to the Earth, which exacts its terrifying revenge after years of abuse.

If Medea the witch and Medea the infanticide have been prominent in the last fifty or so years, it is not surprisingly Medea the feminist who has enjoyed the highest profile on the late twentieth-century stage, and more often than not eclipsed the intrinsically nineteenth-century abandoned wife. Fringe productions of feminist *Medeas* were in abundance in London in the 1980s; and when Diana Rigg took Medea, in Alistair Elliot's translation, from London's Almeida Theatre to the West End and then on to Broadway between 1992 and 1994, she gave Medea the abandoned wife a feminist edge with her intelligence and ingenuity.

At least two highly distinguished poets have refashioned Medea the feminist. In 1988 the Irish poet, Brendan Kennelly wrote a spirited version of *Medea*, in which women's wrongs in general are explored through the example of Jason's misogyny, at a time when Ireland was undergoing its own vituperative debate on the question of divorce.<sup>54</sup> But it is, perhaps, the libretto by Tony Harrison entitled *Medea: A Sex-War Opera* (1985), commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera in

New York together with a score by Jacob Druckman, that is the most striking. With Druckman's score incomplete, Harrison's text has only received a fringe production, when it was merged with a radical feminist text by Valerie Solanas and performed at the Edinburgh Festival in 1991 and at the ICA in London the following May. But with its complexity and ingenuity, *Medea: A Sex-War Opera* merits close attention.

Harrison's libretto draws on a vast number of sources both ancient and modern—including the scholia to Euripides, the translations of Seneca's *Medea* by Buchanan and Studley, the operas of Cavalli, Cherubini, and Mayr, and the adaptations of Brough and Mendès—and it is in a very real sense a version *about* versions. With two choruses—one male and one female—it enacts the sex-war through its representation of differing versions of the myth of Medea.<sup>55</sup>

After the audience have witnessed the slaughter of Medea and Jason's fourteen children at the hands of the Corinthians, the male chorus protest: 'Euripides says that there were only two / and that it was the mother who slew.'<sup>56</sup> But the Euripidean version, according to the chorus of women, was simply:

Another male plot to demean  
Women's fertility. Fourteen! Fourteen!

Euripides blackened her in his play  
These MEN bribed him. He was in their pay. (p. 431)

Harrison's *Medea* is thus wrongly accused of infanticide and is electrocuted for her alleged crimes, when the true child-slayer, Hercules (here presented as a misogynistic paedophile), gets off scot-free. The protestations of the chorus of women seek to put the record straight: 'He killed his children so where / is Hercules' electric chair? / A children slayer? Or is Medea / the one child-murderer you fear' (p. 437). Harrison is offering us *Medea* who is the victim not only of Jason but of misogyny in general: 'In every quiet suburban wife / dissatisfied with married life / is MEDEA, raging' explain the chorus of women (p. 371): the *Medea* in this sex-war opera is, like Kennelly's, truly Everywoman.

Many of the fringe productions in the 1980s combined the question of gender with ethnicity.<sup>57</sup> But it is in South Africa, above all, that the most powerful recent productions of *Medea* the outsider have taken place.<sup>58</sup> *DEMEA*, which was written by Guy Butler in the early sixties, was not in fact performed until 1990 because it demanded a

multiracial cast and has a plot that turns on a sexual relationship between members of different racial groups, both of which made it unperformable at the time. In being set in the late 1820s in the Eastern Cape, and by including a marriage between a Tembu princess and a British officer-turned-trader (who has married once to further his business interests and will now remarry to do so again), it recalls the versions from the 1930s by Henri Lenormand and Maxwell Anderson. Like these earlier versions, Butler's play uses the myth of Medea to explore the pressures brought to bear upon colonial mixed marriages, which in *DEMEA*'s case are so considerable that the mother sends her children to a known death in order to avoid racial oppression from the ideologues of apartheid.

The post-apartheid *Medea* performed in Cape Town, Grahamstown, and Johannesburg between 1994 and 1996 is perhaps even more significant. The play was directed by Mark Fleishman and Jennie Reznek but, like much radical South African drama, it was a collaborative venture with multiple performance traditions supporting a multilingual text that had been developed by the actors themselves through improvisation. Like Şerban's *Medea* some twenty years earlier, the incomprehension and confusion (both within the play and amongst members of the audience) generated through the adoption of a multilingual text were not unconnected to the production's adherence to predominantly physical (rather than verbal) theatre. But the erection of literal language barriers was also a deliberate attempt to mirror the flux and uncertainties of the post-election period in South Africa.<sup>59</sup>

Since her first appearance on the stage in the fifth century BC, Medea has continued to intrigue audiences with her histrionic potency. Whilst the theatrical tradition seems to return time and again to the familiar roles of Medea the witch, Medea the infanticide, Medea the feminist, and Medea the outsider, changing circumstances combine to remake those roles and to refashion them with contemporary resonance for each new generation. When the young American playwright Neil LaBute used *Medea* as the source for the first playlet in his arresting new trilogy *Bash* that appeared at the Almeida Theatre in London early in 2000, his portrait of Medea the victim of child abuse may well have seemed to many to have been breaking new, particularly late twentieth-century, ground. But LaBute is only bringing to the fore a motif that has been latent in the tradition from at least Grillparzer onwards.<sup>60</sup>

When Fiona Shaw appeared as Medea in June 2000 at the Abbey



Theatre in Dublin under the direction of Deborah Warner, *Medea* the abandoned wife was granted a particularly moving and convincing portrait in a city where divorce is still a highly politicized issue. And when Liz Lochhead's Scots version of *Medea* opened in Glasgow in May, it was *Medea* the *femme fatale* who returned to the stage with gusto and immediacy. Maureen Beattie's voracious *Medea* has already stunned audiences in Glasgow, in Ayr, and on the Edinburgh Fringe; and when the production goes on tour in October and November of this year, its upfront sexual politics will no doubt cause wide debate in many parts of Scotland.

In September 2000 France's leading actress, Isabelle Huppert, will take the part of *Medea* at the Avignon Festival, proving that Euripides' tragic heroine continues to attract star performers; and there are plans in autumn 2001 to stage scenes from the *Medea* story in various locations in Sheffield, with the audience travelling across the city by tram, bus, and on foot in a production by the WilsonWilson Company entitled 'Mapping *Medea*'. *Medea* may only 'reconstitute' herself fully through her act of infanticide, but it is surely both her performative power and range that account for both her longevity and the prospect of her survival on a variety of stages well down into the twenty-first century.

## Notes to Chapter 1

1. Although the term 'filicide' is legally correct, I use the more common term 'infanticide' to describe both the person who performs the act of killing their own children as well as the act itself. It is significant that the much-disputed lines 1056–80 (excised by the editor of the Oxford Classical Text edition of the play) are generally included in performance (cf. Smethurst, Ch. 10), where the tensions between character and role can be fully appreciated. If these lines were indeed interpolated, it is highly likely that the innovator was an ancient actor who felt they enhanced his performance of the role.
2. See the scene on four vase-paintings from Southern Italy, two of which date from c.400. For comment, see Taplin (1997b).
3. Boyle (1997), 129.
4. On the other Greek tragic versions of *Medea*, see Colomo (1999); for the Latin versions of Ennius and Ovid, see Boyle (1997), 122.
5. Evidence is in an Oxyrhynchus papyrus, edited by Cockle (1975). I am indebted to Edith Hall for this and other references about performances in late antiquity.
6. St Augustine, *Confessions*, 3. 6. 11, cf. 4. 2. 2.
7. Lucian, *De Saltatione*, 40, 52–3.
8. Notably Knox (1977).
9. For France, see Mallinger (1897); Mimoso-Ruiz (1978) (also on Spain and other European countries). All references to Mimoso-Ruiz are to his dissertation

- (1978) rather than to his scarce monograph (1982). On Germany, see Friedrich (1968), and more generally Corti (1998). For Italy, see Uglione (1997).
10. For East Germany, see Seidensticker (1992). For the Czech *Kreusa*, see Mimoso-Ruiz (1978), 125.
  11. *Ibid.* 72, 832.
  12. Recent scholarship in favour, see Boyle (1997) and G. W. M. Harrison (2000).
  13. Mallinger (1897), 218.
  14. *Ibid.* 225. La Péruse's premature death led to the text's completion by Scévole de Sainte-Marthe. For a discussion of the impact of La Péruse's premature death on the text, see Coleman (1985), pp. v–viii.
  15. For the question of performance of La Péruse's play, see Coleman (1985), pp. xvi–xix. I am indebted to Dr Amy Wygant for this reference. For Buchanan's play, see Bruce R. Smith (1988), 201.
  16. Corti (1998), 92.
  17. Boyle (1997), 133.
  18. Mallinger (1897), 246 ff.
  19. Gotter's *Medea* (1775), put to the music of Benda in the same year; Soden's *Medea* (1785), and (part of the same circle as Wagner) Klinger's *Medea in Korinth* (1786); Desrioux-Vogel's *Das Goldene Vließ* (1786); de Winter's *Medea und Jason* (1790); and Klinger's *Medea auf dem Kaukasus* (1790).
  20. Corti (1998), 128 ff.
  21. Freud writes in *Dora; An Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* that Medea is 'quite content that Kreuse should make friends with her two children'. Cited by Corti (1998), p. xi.
  22. Hall (1999a).
  23. Legouvé (1864), (n.d.), (1881).
  24. Ristori (1888), 203.
  25. Legouvé (1854).
  26. Mme Francesca Janaschek also toured Europe in Legouvé's version, appearing at the Haymarket in 1876. See Hall (1999c), 67–8.
  27. Hall (1999c), 62–4. On 5 Nov. 1861 a translation of Legouvé by Matilda Heron appeared at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane.
  28. Hardwick (2000), 71–4.
  29. Murray (1913), 32.
  30. Flashar (1991), 124–6. For Reinhardt's *Oedipus Rex*, see Macintosh (1997), 299–302.
  31. Thorndike (1936), 74. For Murray's interest in the New Drama, see Macintosh (1998), 64–84.
  32. Sprigge (1971), 130–1.
  33. *New York Times*, 23 Mar. 1920. Cited by Hartigan (1995), 51.
  34. Mimoso-Ruiz (1978), 125. There are no precise details, only an approximate date for performance in 1897.
  35. Cited by Sprigge (1971), 186.
  36. Corti (1998); McDonald (1997), 298.
  37. There were revivals, for example, in 1964, 1978, 1981 (see Gowen, Ch. 12).
  38. See McDonald (1997), 298.
  39. Corti (1998), 190 ff.
  40. *Ibid.* 191.

41. *Ibid.* 193–6.
42. Weisenburger (1998), *passim*. For an account of race relations in the twenties and thirties, see Corti (1998), 193 ff.
43. For Csokor, see Mimoso-Ruiz (1978), 832; for Alvaro, see Fornaro (1977), 117–31. I am also indebted to Federica Arista for her help in researching Alvaro.
44. Murray (1910), p. xi.
45. Bruce (1975), 136–7, 142; *Sunday Times*, 23 Sept. 1949, for preview of Monday's 'World Theatre' production of *Medea*. Herlie had already played *Medea* the previous year at Edinburgh and the Globe in London, see below, 24.
46. Freeman (1984), p. xlvi.
47. Mimoso-Ruiz (1978), 83; see further Gowen, ch. 12 below, entries for 1967–8.
48. Hartigan (1995), 51.
49. Casson (1972), 285.
50. Cited by Hartigan (1995), 51.
51. Corti (1998), 201.
52. McDonald (1997), 298. For Wilson's operatic adaptation (1984), see McDonald, ch. 5.
53. Müller (1984), 45.
54. For details of the text, see McDonald (1997), 306–12; and for background to Kennelly's interest in Greek tragedy see Macintosh (1994), pp. xvii–18.
55. For comment on Harrison's use of a divided chorus here, see Taplin (1997a), esp. 176. See too McDonald (1991), 303–12.
56. T. Harrison (1985), 371. Cf. scholia to Euripides on vv. 9, 264; and for further discussion see Macintosh, Ch. 4, on Planché's treatment of this 'alternative' *Medea*.
57. Notably Theatr Clwyd's production with an all-black cast except a white *Medea* (1986), and the Lyric Hammersmith's production with the Indian actress Madhur Jaffrey as *Medea* (1986).
58. I am indebted to Mezzabotta (2000), 246–68, an illuminating study which formed the basis of a paper she gave at the Open University Conference in January 1999, just a little more than a year before her tragic death.
59. *Ibid.* 253.
60. Corti (1988), 182 ff.

## CHAPTER 2



# Medea in the English Renaissance

*Diane Purkiss*

In the remarkable New Zealand film *Heavenly Creatures*, directed by Peter Jackson (1994), two young girls fall, if not exactly in love, into a deep, narcissistic, imitative passion for each other. To sustain their love, they invent an alternative world of fantasy for themselves, one in which each has a different name, a different identity. And when the nice, muddled, ordinary mother of one of the girls sets out to separate them, they murder her with a series of smashing blows on the head. The film is based, as they say, on a true story, a story of two real adolescents in New Zealand. Yet its power comes not from this local and specific truth, but from a more general truth. The girls' crime is shocking because it is a crime of passion in which the 'natural', birth family is set against the created 'family', or emotional world, chosen by the girls. And the girls—unnaturally—choose this passionate bond rather than their blood ties. Their passion is strong enough to obliterate the blood tie, to allow them to obliterate it. But the result is their permanent separation. They are caught, imprisoned, parted forever. Having cast off their designated place in society, they cannot be left to inhabit their own, chosen place. It was a condition of the girls' eventual release, the film tells us, that they agreed never to see each other again.

This story can help us to understand the nature of the Renaissance fascination with Medea because, even in retelling outside the cinema, it retains all its horror, all its power to shock. In particular, it is resonant with the shock of otherness. Although Seneca's *Medea* was occasionally performed on the academic stages of Cambridge University,<sup>1</sup> the English Renaissance was not particularly interested in, even alienated by, the Medea of Euripides and Seneca. Eventually some exceptional writers, even dramatists, began to take an interest in Medea, the child-killing avenger, but the standard Renaissance Medea



was a treacherous and passionate young *girl*, a girl who helps a hero on his way in exchange for marrying him. This adolescent Medea, the Medea of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, is a Medea whose struggle is not between maternal love and revenge, but between sexual awakening and family loyalty. She boils not with middle-aged jealousy, but with the impossible, turbulent, disruptive passion of adolescent rebellion. For instance, Thomas Heywood retells the entire story of Jason and the quest for the Golden Fleece in his play *The Brazen Age*, which is one of a tetralogy of classical mythological plays. His Medea is simply and solely a headstrong girl who must choose between the demands of her family and country and the demands of Eros. She makes the wrong choice. Similarly, Heywood's reference to Medea in *Londons Peaceable Estate* is simply a retelling of the Golden Fleece legend as a fairytale with a happy ending; one would never gather from it that Medea and her prince did not live happily ever after.<sup>2</sup>

Now although this may be disappointing to post-Romantic admirers of Euripides, it is highly significant that the Renaissance took so much interest in the girl and so little in the woman, and there is much more to this trend than familiarity with Ovid and lack of familiarity with Euripides. We shall see that in the hands of Renaissance tragedians more skilled than Heywood the story of a young girl who betrays her family and country in order to wed with a beautiful stranger becomes resonant, resonant with precisely the social concerns evoked by Euripides through the story of Medea the woman and her fearful vengeance. Both the story of Medea the girl and the story of Medea the woman are stories of what happens when the family loses control of one of its female members. These are in essence the same story, with the same themes: patrilinearity disrupted, passion over female duty. To betray one family is to betray another; or, as Brabantio reminds Othello in similar circumstances, speaking of Desdemona, 'She hath deceived her father, and may thee' (I. iii. 292).<sup>3</sup> One of the themes central to all Renaissance Medeas, old and young, is foreignness; another is the construction of male identity through lineage and the birth of sons. As Edith Hall has eloquently shown in relation to the classical Medea, there is a link between anxieties about race and ethnicity and anxieties about paternity and patrilinearity.<sup>4</sup> I hope to show that the same linkage operates in Renaissance retellings of the story of young Medea, and that for the Renaissance it was possible to understand a woman's tragedy as grounded in the refusal of her father's choice of progenitor of his line.

A figuration of a Medea who is both emblematic of foreignness and whose foreignness is equated with an explicit threat to masculinity is found in Anthony Munday's *Metropolis Coronata* of 1615, which displays Medea, rather improbably, as part of a civic pageant:

Therein aloft sitteth Medea, whose love to Jason was his best meanes for obtaining the Golden Fleece: and therefore, as still witnessing the fiery zeale of her affection towards him, she sitteth playing with his love-lockes, and wantoning with him in all pleasing daliance, to compasse the more settled assurance of his constancy.

[. . .] This Argoe is rowed by diverse comely Eunuchs, which continually attended on Medea, and she favouring them but to passe under the fleece of golde, had all their garments immediately sprinkled over with golde, even as if it had showed downe in droppes upon them, and so they rowe on in Jason's triumph.<sup>5</sup>

It is effeminizing enough to have a woman playing with your love-locks in this fashion. Perhaps it is even uncomfortably near the knuckle, because there are relatively few Renaissance pictorial representations of Medea; those there are show a preoccupation with the dynamism of her flight rather than an interest in its causes.<sup>6</sup> We cannot be sure, but it sounds as if Munday's Jason may have been depicted lying with his head in Medea's lap, a Renaissance metaphor not only for sexual union, but also for the male's erotic surrender to the female body. No doubt this metaphor gains strength from the mild infantilization of the male concerned.

The entire scene is reminiscent of the erotic subordination of Acrasia's lover Verdant in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, who has discarded his armour and weapons, and with them his masculinity, to lie about in her lap.<sup>7</sup> As if to confirm the dangers of such a posture, Medea is linked with a foreign culture that effeminizes its men through the eunuchs who row the boat. In Renaissance England, eunuchs were associated with the Near East, and in particular with Turkey, and the Ottoman Turks were represented as the epitome of corrupt tyranny.<sup>8</sup> One sign of such tyranny was lavish wealth, and here we see Medea and Jason surrounded by gold. Another sign, however, was the presence of eunuchs, who became figures for courtiers with no will of their own, emasculated courtiers unable to tell the truth to an absolute ruler, and able only to flatter him. In this way, the Renaissance believed, eunuchs made rulers corrupt and themselves more effeminate. The link between Medea and eunuchs

thus emphasizes her foreignness and Easternness, and also links those qualities with femininity. Medea's unnatural power is at the bottom of the effeminizing effects she creates; her sexual magnetism reduces others to unnatural weakness.

This exotic version links up with another Renaissance Medea, Medea the maker of somewhat disreputable heroes. Tyrants, and villains of various dye, are often to be found invoking Medea. In Thomas Goffe's *The Courageous Turke*, a play explicitly concerned with the oriental and the exotic, the eponymous hero explains:

Then sturdy Jason who by the enchanted charmes,  
Medea gave, incountred unicornes,  
Queld Lyons, struggeld with fiery belching Bulls  
Obtained a glorious prize, a fleece, a fleece  
Dipt deepe in tincture of the Christians bloud  
Shal be my spoyle.<sup>9</sup>

It is well worth bearing this in mind as we look at the Renaissance's understanding of Medea's crimes.

For early modern writers, the voyage of the *Argo* was haunted by what to them was a dreadful crime, a crime analogous to, and in some respects worse than, infanticide: fratricide. To us, fratricide, though nasty, is nothing like as transgressive as infanticide. To the Renaissance, as we shall see, fratricide nearly *was* infanticide. In a piece called 'Why did Medea kill her brother Apsyrtus?', Jan Bremmer gives an explanation which fits the Renaissance as well as the classical world-view: 'by killing her brother', he writes, 'she not only committed the heinous act of spilling familial blood, she also permanently severed all ties to her natal home and the role that it would normally play in her adult life [. . .]. She simultaneously declared her independence from her family and forfeited her right to any protection from it'.<sup>10</sup> So fratricide is a severing of the female self from the natal family—a violent enactment of the bride's separation from the family home wrought by marriage. Bremmer also points out that there are numerous stories in which sisters are forced to choose between saving a brother and saving a husband or son; the 'right' choice is the brother, because another husband may be found, but a brother is unique. Choosing the brother also entails 'correctly' choosing the natal family over the marriage family. But Medea, as we know, chooses otherwise. She chooses Jason over her home, and thereafter is stuck with him. In cutting herself off from her natal family, she is



refusing to reproduce them, replicate them, refusing, in fact, to do what a daughter must. It is a kind of symbolic castration of the male; for the Renaissance, like many ancient sources, gives Medea only one brother, so that in killing Apsyrtus she is cutting off her father's line as well as cutting herself off from it. Her eventual infanticide could be read as merely the belated recognition of this bitter fact. Medea is always bound to undo some male's attempt to give his genes to posterity.

For the Renaissance, this violent cutting-off of Medea from the body of the natal family was symbolized by the dismembered corpse of Apsyrtus. His scattered limbs are the scattered family, divided by Medea's rebellion. It is this image that is picked up by the young Shakespeare in *York and Lancaster*, better known as *Henry VI Part II*: 'I cut it / As wilde Medea yong Absirtis did' (I. 3106). This is a play about family strife and patrilinearity, aptly symbolized by the cuts made by Medea in her brother's body. A very similar use is made of Apsyrtus' dismembered body in Michael Drayton's 'Mortimeriades', which focuses on political and public divisions that are also divisions in families:

Medea pitifull in tender yeares,  
 Untill with Jason she would take her flight,  
 Then merclesse her brother's lymmes she teares,  
 Betrays her father, flyes away by night,  
 Nor nations, seas, nor daungers could affright;  
 Who dyed with hate, nor could abate the wind,  
 Now like a tigar falls into her kind.<sup>11</sup>

Here too the emphasis falls on Apsyrtus' dismemberment as part of a pattern of family crime; having fallen as a result of dismembering her brother, Medea is condemned to repeat the act in new forms, betraying her father and finally murdering her own children. For Samuel Pordage, on the other hand, commenting on Seneca's *Troades*, Medea's murder of Apsyrtus is a signifier of a different kind of disruption of patrilinearity, the kind caused by Medea's foreignness, her importation of racial and ethnic otherness into the scene of Jason's self-replication. For him, Medea, 'ever since she most inhumanely tore in pieces her brother Absertes, has been branded with the stigma of cruel and barbarous'.<sup>12</sup> 'Barbarous': here the scattered body of Apsyrtus is a sign of Medea's ethnic and cultural difference, and hence of the difference she will bring to Jason; and that difference of



ethnicity will threaten his self-replication in any case. Pordage also insists that the murder of Apsyrtus somehow makes her later crimes inevitable.

Spenser brings together the murder of Apsyrtus and images of males made effeminate by their unruly desires for foreign women by using the story of Medea and Jason on the entrance to Acrasia's Bowre of Bliss. The Bowre, as many critics have noted since Stephen Greenblatt's pathbreaking rereading in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, is not merely a resting-place for erotically exhausted male courtiers, but is also a space of colonial otherness representing both the New World and Ireland, a barbarity to be tamed by the brave knight Sir Guyon.<sup>13</sup> Guyon, whose temperance allows him to withstand Acrasia's charms, obliterates the Bowre in the poem's most startling flash of violence. In doing so, he is removing a tangled foreign threat to English manhood. As such, he is a counter-Medea, while the languorous sorceress Acrasia strongly resembles Medea in her foreignness, and in her association with erotic decadence, effeminizing power, and magical ability. Medea's legend is inscribed upon ivory; though Spenser probably intended an allusion to the Gate of Sleep in the *Aeneid*, ivory also has other meanings in a Renaissance context: it is an exotic foreign trade good, representing the spoils gathered by trading voyagers in foreign climes, a simulacrum of the Golden Fleece that became such a central signifier of Renaissance imperialism. Naturally, the more direct reference to Virgil fits with this, for what Aeneas is shown in the Underworld where he encounters the gate is an empire. Ivory symbolizes both what Spenser's Medea has to give and what she threatens:

Yt framed was of precious yvory,  
That seemd a worke of admirable wit;  
And therein all the famous history  
Of Jason and Medaea was ywrit;  
Her mighty charmes, her furious loving fit  
His goodly conquest of the Golden Fleece  
His falsed faith, and love too lightly flit. (II. xii. 44)

However, ivory also resembles bone, and as such acts as a kind of *memento mori*, a reminder of Medea's murders:

And other where the snowy substance sprent  
With vermell, like the boyes bloud therein shed,  
A piteous spectacle did represent,

And otherwhiles with gold besprinkeled  
 Yt seemd the enchanted flame, which did Creusa wed.  
 (II. xii. 45)

Here, the ivory and gold of empire are marked by Medea's crimes. The gold of the New World that is the Bowre is deceptive, offering wealth and pleasure, but delivering death. The Medea story in Spenser teaches the same blunt moral lesson as the destruction of the Bowre; empire is only manageable for men who can obliterate every trace of its seductive otherness and bring it fully under control. Medea symbolizes the consequences of failure; fratricide signifies the loss of male identity in female violence.

Elsewhere in *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser writes of Medea's murder of her brother in terms of infanticide:

Like raging Ino, when with knife in hand,  
 She threw her husband's murdered infant out,  
 Or fell Medea, when on Colchicke strand,  
 Her brothers bones she scattered all about;  
 Or as that madding mother, mongst the rout  
 Of Bacchus Priests her owne deare flesh did teare.  
 Yet neither Ino, nor Medea stout,  
 Nor all the Moenades so furious were,  
 As this bold woman, when she saw that Damzell there. (V. viii. 47)

The object of the comparison is the sinister Radigund, a woman who is far from good; she is an Amazon who imprisons and disempowers men. Interestingly, Spenser gets his myths muddled; Ino did not throw her husband's murdered infant out, but jumped into the sea with her other living child after seeing her husband's crime. Moralists used to assert that these metaphors described a descent into evil: stepchild, brother, son. If so, Spenser descends rather precipitously, and even inaccurately. The force of the array of images is not to make fine distinctions, but to conflate the other women with Medea's crimes of patrilicide. The effect of this, in turn, is to address the way Radigund's imprisonment of Artegall is tantamount to a crime against a man's lineage. It is vital that Britomart and Artegall get together and make the babies who will be the ancestors of the Tudors. Radigund could prevent this by imprisoning Artegall with the other effeminate men who are forced by her to wear women's clothes and to weave all day. Radigund is interrupting the transmission of male identity, which is just what Ino, Medea, and Agave do. And like them she is motivated

by a descent into unreason, passion. And like them, and especially like Medea, she is foreign and hence anomalous.<sup>14</sup>

But the Renaissance was not only fascinated by Medea's fratricide. Her story intrigued for another reason too. Medea's rebellion against nature did not stop at family betrayal and fratricide. Something else was at stake as well, something in which the Renaissance male had a definite vested interest. This is her rejuvenation of Aeson. What is fascinating here is that the Renaissance routinely interpreted this to mean the sexual reawakening of an old man. Here at least they had read their Classics attentively; Renaissance medical textbooks were perpetually exercised about the possibility that sexual activity made men become too dry and hot, especially during the Dog Days of summer, thereby having an ageing effect. Older men, who were already somewhat wizened, were thought to be particularly at risk. Rejuvenation was theoretically conceivable by just adding water in some magical form, usually envisaged as some kind of gum or oil, and added water would, it was assumed, recreate lost sexual prowess also.<sup>15</sup>

The most hilarious version of this invocation of Medea as a kind of early modern answer to Viagra comes in Thomas Tomkis's *Albumazar*, first published in 1615, and performed in the same year. An old man in love with a young woman encourages himself to continue his pursuit of her with reference to Medea and her powers:

love of young Flavia  
More powerful than Medea's drugs, renewe  
All decay'd parts of man; my Arteries  
Blown full with youthful spirits, move the bloud  
To a new businesse: my withered nerves grow plumpe  
And strong, longing for action.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, in the anonymous Jacobean tragedy *The Bastard*, Medea is an anti-ageing drug:

This doting Don thinks that his years have made  
Him wise, in fishing with a golden belt,  
And doth presume his gold hath power so farre  
The renovation of his aged corps,  
As had Medeas enchanting spells to Aeson.<sup>17</sup>

Later in the same play, the same comparison is revived. Medea becomes a trope for that aspect of femininity which can arouse desire:



nay, were he

Withered with feeble age, should she smile on him  
 He well might laugh at sage Medea's charms:  
 Tell Aeson then, that her blest look had made him  
 Fuller of youthful vigours, then the force  
 Of her enchanted hearbs infus'd into him. (I. iv. 62)<sup>18</sup>

Jolly as all this is, however, it does have a dark side. These men are comical old lechers, and the plays invariably take the view that they should put away adolescent longings and stop spoiling the lives of the young with their pestering. In particular, they disrupt appropriate marriage and childbearing, and we have already seen that Medea is linked with just such disruptions. In a word, they are unnatural, and their unnaturalness flows from Medea's.

Michael Drayton uses the myth of Medea's rejuvenation of Aeson to talk about desire. His sonneteer's claim to make his beloved's beauty last for ever is likened to Medea's power to rejuvenate:

While thus my Pen strives to eternize thee  
 Whilst in despite of tyrannising Times  
 Medea-like, I make thee young againe  
 Proudly thou scornst my world-out-wearing rimes,  
 And murthrest Virtue with thy coy disdain. <sup>19</sup>

Amazingly, this seemingly very obvious metaphor is the symbolic key to all Medea's powers and transgressions. She is against nature, *au rebours*. With Medea about, nothing stays in its place, not even Medea herself; just as Medea, who should be her father's daughter, throws in her lot with Jason, so Aeson, who should be old, becomes young. She does not merely go for what she wants, like some ranting reader of feminist self-help books. She transforms what is into its opposite. For Drayton this is not just about otherness. This is about authorship. Medea is a maker, or rather a *deformer* of what others have made. That is why the young Medea is linked with miscegenation, adultery, racial and national betrayal.

She can thus create or manufacture perversity, as Drayton's second look at her shows. He links her with another, far more obviously transgressive form of desire in his poem 'Piers Gaveston'. Gaveston was the favourite and lover of King Edward II. Describing the king's first sight of him, Gaveston says:

As when old-youthful Eson in his glass,  
 Saw from his eyes the cheerfull lightning sprung,



When as Art-spell Medea brought to pass,  
 By hearbs and charms, againe to make him young,  
 Thus stood King Edward, ravisht in the place,  
 Fixing his eyes upon my lovely face.<sup>20</sup>

Here Medea's rejuvenation of Aeson is an emblem of unnatural desire. Just as Aeson's rejuvenation is against nature, so too are Edward's desires.

Yet it is Shakespeare's use of Medea that stands out, not because his interests are substantially different from those of other Renaissance dramatists, but because he seems to understand better than anyone else the tragic implications of the young Medea's choice. Whereas other young Medeas are portrayed with unremitting fear and hostility, Shakespeare creates two very appealing versions of the figure. One is Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice*, the daughter of Shylock the Jew, who chooses to betray her father and marry a Christian man, Lorenzo. When Jessica cites Medea as another inhabitant of the night on which she steals away with Lorenzo, she draws an uneasy parallel:

In such a night  
 Medea gathered the enchanted herbs  
 That did renew old Aeson. (V. i. 16)

But of course Medea is also a betrayer of her father, like Jessica, and like Jessica she marries his enemy. Does the allusion predict anything for the marriage of Jessica and Lorenzo? I think it does. Jessica, like Medea, is foreign; she is Jewish, and to be Jewish in this era, and above all in this play, is to be linked with wealth and magic—and, of course, with the murder of innocent children. Like Medea, also, Jessica has stolen gold as a gift for her lover, stolen it from her natal family, her people. In likening herself to Medea, Jessica at once reveals an uncomfortable awareness of her own terrible betrayals and points towards their likely result: the betrayal of a friendless outsider by a society that cannot really accept her. In betraying her birth family, she has placed herself entirely at the mercy of her husband. (By contrast, Juliet's marriage to Romeo is understood not as Medean betrayal, but as a doomed attempt at redemption that takes nothing from the natal family.)

This subtle, sensitive use of the Medea myth showed how deeply Shakespeare understood and feared its ambivalences, and it points towards his later reworking of it in the supreme Lady Macbeth. But it also points to another Medea figure, one treated with even more

sympathy. That figure is Desdemona, who, unlike Jessica, steals nothing from her father when she absconds with Othello, but who nonetheless threatens his self-replication by marrying a 'thing' with a 'sooty bosom'. 'You'll have coursers for cousins and gennets for germans', taunts the extremely racist Iago (I. i. 114-15). And, like Juliet, Desdemona must die for her error. Finding no protection for herself after stepping outside the birth family, her husband's protection turns to ashes; he becomes the threat that she must shrink from. But Desdemona's virtue also exposes Medea's vice; even when murdered by her husband she refuses to be revenged on him by naming him as her killer: 'Nobody / I myself' she gasps before expiring. At the moment when she feels herself defenceless, she is content to have it so. By dying when she does, she prevents herself from turning into that terrifyingly assertive middle-aged woman, the one the Renaissance seems eager not to write about.

Both Juliet and Desdemona, then, are as it were anti-Medeas, shaped in innocence by the dramatist's careful avoidance of her crimes. This evasion of Medea continues in those tragedies which glance at Medea as a figuration of revenge. *Lochrine*, in which Shakespeare may have had a hand (it was added to the Third Folio in 1664), provides just such a Medea:

Medea seeing Jason leave her love,  
And choose the daughter of the Theban king,  
Went to her devilish charmes to work revenge;  
And raising up the triple Hecate,  
With all the rout of the condemned fiends,  
Framed a garland by her magick skill  
With which she wrought Jason and Creon's ill.<sup>21</sup>

This is just a metaphor for resolute vengeance. Similarly, in a tragedy drawing on Euripides, Sophocles, and Seneca, Goffe's *Clytemnestra* remarks:

I may strike home now, and perform an act  
May make Medea blush, she thought not of it.<sup>22</sup>

In John Banks's *The Unhappy Favourite, or The Earl of Essex*, the lovelorn Queen Elizabeth pleads:

Prithee invent; for thou art wondrous witty  
At such inventions; teach my feeble malice  
How to torment him with a thousand deaths  
Or what is worse than death—speak, my Medea,  
And thou wilt then oblige thy queen forever.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, Medea the child-murderess does figure in the work of Hugo Grotius, the only humanist among the writers here, and perhaps the only one likely to have read Euripides in the original. As Francis Goldsmith states in the prologue to his English translation of 1652:

Here no Medea her own Children kills,  
nor Hercules the stage with horror fills.<sup>24</sup>

Now Hercules was a standard figure of civic virtue in art; not so Medea. In combining them as similes of what cannot be shown or seen, Grotius is not really confronting the horror of Medea's crimes. His gesture at Medea is little more than a cover-up.

This evasion of Medea is much more expertly and interestingly handled by Shakespeare in the most dazzling rewriting of Medea on the Renaissance stage: *Lady Macbeth*. If we look at the Medean implications of just one speech, I think we can learn much about which parts of the middle-aged Medea could be absorbed by Renaissance tragedy, and how:

I have given suck, and know,  
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me.  
I would, while it was smiling in my face,  
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums  
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn  
As you have done to this. (I. vii. 54-9)

This passage is likely to make us think of Medea, the wicked and vindictive queen who killed her own children.<sup>25</sup> We might be tempted to respond to this insight by looking diligently about for a source for the passage: Euripides? Seneca? Ovid? A Bumper Renaissance guide to Mythology, like the handbooks of Cartari or Ripa?<sup>26</sup> In fact it is the multiplicity of Shakespeare's sources that makes this passage brilliant. Precisely because Shakespeare does not try to imitate any one classical source, he can overcome the anxiety of humanist influence, the urge to replicate classical authors in every detail.<sup>27</sup> And this is what allows him to bring Medea trembling back to life, to perform a more perfect replication of classical tragedy than replication itself would allow. She is resurrected as a character in a *Renaissance* tragedy, not as the protagonist of Euripides or Seneca. And that makes all the difference, as we shall see.

This is one of the most memorably horrible and violent speeches in a violent play, and everyone knows that Greek and Roman tragedy,



like Renaissance tragedy, is marked by descriptions of terrible violence. The particular kind of violence in this passage is almost a generic marker in itself; tragedy is full of dead babies, and also of violence juxtaposed with images of the breast. One of the most familiar now, although it may have been unknown to Shakespeare, is Clytemnestra's plea to Orestes in Aeschylus' *Choephoroe* not to kill her because she suckled him: 'Oh, take pity, child, before this breast, where many a time, a drowsing baby, you would feed, and with soft gums sucked in the milk that made you strong.'<sup>28</sup> Another occurs when Seneca's *Medea* begins her magical invocation, given in Studley's 1566 translation as:

With naked breast and dugges layde out Ile pricke with sacred blade  
Myne arme, that for the bubling bloude an issue may bee mayde,  
With trilling streames my purple bloude let drop on th'aulter stones.  
My tender children's crushed flesh, and broken broosed bones  
Learne how to brooke with hardned heart.<sup>29</sup>

Studley piles up the horrors, but cannot make anything of them except a pile. I especially relish the completely discordant 'trilling streames' of blood, little laughing rills or Wordsworthian brooks, that seem to have got into the passage out of ornamentational habit. There is no trilling in Seneca, where *Medea* simply says (807–8), 'Let my blood flow on the altar', *manet noster sanguis ad aras*. Lady Macbeth is just as direct, just as simple. And it is from Seneca that Shakespeare learns to write violence directly and simply.

It seems almost unfair to compare poor Studley with Shakespeare at full tilt: but note especially Shakespeare's marvellous use of suspense in this passage. Studley just piles the horrors up pell-mell, but Shakespeare makes us wait for them. Knowledge of the rhetorical *exemplum* allows us to spot early on that Lady Macbeth's baby is somehow going to become part of an analogy of resolution, an antidote to pity, and this gives us grave doubts about what is going to happen to it. But Shakespeare *delays* the violence; Lady Macbeth's resolute 'I would' is followed by an evocation of tenderness that defers the violent end and makes anticipation of it seem worse 'while it was smiling in my face'. Now comes the stroke of real genius: 'Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums'. For a heartbeat we think *this* is the act of untender, unmaternal resolution. Lady Macbeth is, for a second, merely someone who restrains her child's greed for suckling; but then comes the terrific force of 'and dashed the brains out',



delayed again and hence given added force by that initial 'and'. The lines are like a slingshot; the leather strap gets tighter and tighter as the dreaded event is delayed and delayed, and suddenly something is launched at our heads with great speed. 'Dashed' is just the right word; imagine how much 'knocked' would reduce the force of the lines, losing that onomatopoeic sense of splattering that makes 'dashed' so untender.

Now, this is all Shakespeare in the sense that it does not correspond exactly to any single passage in either Euripides or Seneca. But it is also, in a profound sense, both Euripidean and Senecan. The Greek and Latin Medeas are both characterized as dangers to their own children from very early on in their dramas, and yet most of the action in both their cases passes by before the infanticide actually occurs. Shakespeare is producing a kind of miniature version of that terrible tragic suspense, translating it from plot to metaphor, from action to story.

There is another lovely detail here, and that is the changing pronominal status of the baby; 'it' is smiling in her face; but the boneless gums are 'his'. Although 'his' was the normal genitive of 'it', the aural effect is to make it sound more like a specific baby, giving bodily substance to the story. And yet neither 'his' nor 'its' brains are dashed out, but '*the* brains'. This is impersonal, and hence makes the line more callous, but taken together with the pronominal drift towards personalization elsewhere, it has the dramatic effect of a psychological shrinking; however resolute Lady Macbeth is trying to *sound*, she actually cannot quite bring herself to connect the splattered brain with the personalized baby, 'him'. This tiny flaw gestures at the impossibility of the task she has set herself, and points towards her eventual collapse; she cannot kill Duncan either because a kind of pity prevents her. She cannot be Euripidean or Senecan *enough*. In Euripides, Medea feels pity like Lady Macbeth: 'do not think of them, how sweet they are and how you are their mother' she tells herself (1247), and murders them moments later. Seneca's Medea, on the other hand, is completely unmoved by pity: when Jason appeals to her to kill him, she scorns his appeal as a plea for mercy. *Misereri iubes—/ bene est, peractum est* (1018–19), she cries. ('You tell me to pity [at this point she murders the remaining child]—it is good, it is done.') She stabs at Jason through his sons, and hurls the bleeding bodies down to him.

Is that hurling gesture the one Lady Macbeth imagines? Is the whole image about revenge on her husband for being unfaithful to

their plans as Jason is unfaithful to his marriage? But what for her is only a nightmare is Medea's reality. Jason's last lines in Seneca's play show the bleakness of Seneca's world:

Per alta vade spatia sublime aetheris,  
testare nullos esse, qua veheris, deos. (1026–7)

[Go by the high spaces aloft in the air,  
Bear witness that where you go the gods are not.]

By contrast, Macbeth's universe is roofed over by providence; Lady Macbeth and Macbeth can pollute it, but not for long; they do not nullify divine power or presence. And yet Lady Macbeth talks like a Senecan heroine: bloody, bold, and resolute. It is as if she were unable to 'read' the generic clues to the nature of the play she is in, clues which are transparently visible to the audience.

University-educated Hamlet can ask himself, 'What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba?' One simple reason Hamlet refers to Hecuba is Erasmus, and his translation of two Euripidean tragedies into Latin; one was *Iphigenia in Aulis*, in which, interestingly, Clytemnestra recalls the way Agamemnon once snatched her first baby, a son by a former husband, from her breast and dashed him to the ground (1151–2); the other is *Hecuba*.<sup>30</sup> Hamlet knows all about the Northern European humanist Renaissance, which is why he is so doubtful about the artifices of revenge. But what can a Scottish noblewoman know of such things? One kind of dramatic irony not often explored is the irony of genre and influence. Hamlet knows what kind of play he is in, which is why he is an outsider in it, but Lady Macbeth does not know the genre of her own play, which is why it closes in on her so relentlessly. She thinks she is in a Senecan tragedy, but she turns out to be in a providential tragedy that she cannot transcend by wickedness. Her Senecan rhetoric beats hopelessly against the limits of her world, which are also her own limits; she can dream of horrors, but she cannot act on them.

This dramatist's cruelty creates a new kind of *hamartia*. The Aristotelian term, so often mistranslated as 'tragic flaw', actually means something much more neutral, like unforced error: Herodotus uses it of Adrastus when, out hunting, he accidentally spears the son of his kindly host Croesus, a man who has taken Adrastus in despite the fact that he is accursed (1. 29–33). The situation in Herodotus can be seen as *proleptic* of tragedy, but the tragedy depends on misjudgement rather than on moral failure. Lady Macbeth's misjudgement, her

*hamartia*, is generic; she expects to be lifted above the clouds, like Medea, but she turns out to be a Senecan heroine trapped below them by the hand of an angry, providential god. She gets it wrong generically, and in so doing defines the genre she is in as tragedy. Medea's power in the Renaissance theatre partly comes from not fitting in with it.

## Notes to Chapter 2

1. Boas (1914), 387.
2. Heywood (1613); Act III concerns Jason and Medea. Heywood (1639), 8–10 ('The fourth show').
3. All quotations of Shakespeare are taken from Wells and Taylor (1987), with act, scene, and line numbers given in the text.
4. Hall (1989), especially 201–10.
5. Munday (1615), 2–3.
6. See Andrea Schiavone, 'Medea in her Chariot', drawing, Princeton University Art Museum, inv. no. 48–882; Peter Paul Rubens, 'The Flight of Medea', Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam.
7. Spenser, ed. Hamilton (1971), II. xii. 44–5. All quotations from *The Faerie Queene* will be from this edition.
8. See Purkiss (forthcoming), ch. 4.
9. Goffe (1632), V. iii. 118 (first performed 24 Feb. 1619).
10. Bremmer (1997), 100.
11. Michael Drayton, 'Mortimeriades', ed. Hebel (1931), ii. 655–61.
12. Pordage (1660), 70 ('On the Fifth Act').
13. Greenblatt (1980), 184–8.
14. Radigund: Spenser, *Faerie Queene* V. iv. 33 ff.
15. On classical beliefs, see Carson (1990). On masculinity in early modern England, see Amussen (1994) and (1995). See also Laquer (1990) and Sawday (1995).
16. Tomkis (1634) I. ii. 27. (First performed 9 Mar. 1615; first published 1615.)
17. Anon. (1652), I. ii. 5. (First printed and performed 1652?)
18. See also the Caroline drama *The Marriage Broker*, where Medea is celebrated as the creator of love-philtres: 'my skill / Can temper for thy scorn a draught shall fill / Thy veins with rage, till thou hast spent a night / In my Embrace, and dull'd it with delight, / Love-sallets cropt by Circe and Medea / Which Sagana with bold Canidia / Gathered by moonlight in Mount Esquiline / Are but weak Philters if compared with mine?' (M.W.M.A. (1662), V. 1. 329–36).
19. Michael Drayton, Sonnet No. 44, ed. Hebel (1931), ii. 5–8.
20. Michael Drayton, 'Piers Gaveston', *ibid.* i. 1406–11.
21. See Shakespeare (1664), V. i. 3. (First printed and performed 1594.)
22. Goffe (1633), I. iv. 21. (First printed 1632; first performed c.1613–18?) On Goffe's sources see Hall (1999a), 262–4.
23. Banks (1682), V. i. 274.
24. See Goldsmith (1652), 'Prologue'.
25. The connection between Medea and Lady Macbeth has of course been made before, for instance by Ewbank (1966).

26. Cartari (1556); Ripa (1562).
27. This is not to argue that Shakespeare did not know Euripides in Latin translation or even in Italian adaptation: he may have drawn on 16th-c. translations and versions of Euripides by Janis Lascaris, George Buchanan, Lodovico Dolce, or Maffeo Galladei. For a discussion of Shakespeare's knowledge of Greek drama through this type of work, see most recently Schleiner (1990).
28. *Choeph.* 896–8. Aeschylus was certainly the least accessible of the Greek tragedians in Shakespeare's day. He had first appeared in print in the 'Aldine' edition of 1518, a decade and a half later than Sophocles and Euripides. In the Renaissance Aeschylus' most popular work was *Prometheus Bound*, probably because of its (relatively) easy Greek. It appeared in several Latin translations.
29. See Newton (1581), ii. 90; Studley's translation of *Medea* was reprinted from Studley (1566).
30. See Erasmus (1506), and in general B. R. Smith (1988).



## CHAPTER 3



# *Medea* on the Eighteenth-Century London Stage

*Edith Hall*

### Introduction

In 1828 the diarist Henry Crabb Robinson was emotionally overwhelmed by the Italian opera singer Giuditta Pasta's performance in the title role of Giovanni Simone Mayr's *Medea in Corinto* at the King's Theatre in London. The effect of the infanticide scene on him was 'overpowering'. He wondered what a great tragic actress might have made of the title role, while observing that, of all Greek myths, Medea's story had, to his knowledge, 'never flourished on the English stage'.<sup>1</sup>

Robinson had a point. There had, however, been three attempts to stage non-operatic adaptations of Euripides' *Medea* in London theatres between 1698 and the 1760s: Charles Gildon's *Phaeton; or, the Fatal Divorce* (Theatre Royal, 1698), Charles Johnson's *Tragedy of Medæa* (Drury Lane, 1730), and Richard Glover's *Medea* (Drury Lane, 1767, several times revived). Although none was of the quality to ensure that its memory was perpetuated until Robinson was writing in the late Georgian era, the plays by Gildon and Glover had both achieved at least ephemeral acclaim. Euripides, of course, never found an English-language adapter of the calibre of Corneille, Racine, Voltaire, or Goethe, at least until the twentieth century. But it is quite incorrect to assume, as most scholars have done, that between the Restoration and the late eighteenth century it was Roman models, rather than Greek, which dominated manifestations of classicism in the English theatre.<sup>2</sup>

Greek tragedy certainly appeared, disguised, in several important dramas, for example William Congreve's *The Mourning Bride* (1697),

which used the recognition-scene of Sophocles' *Electra*, and James Thomson's *Edward and Eleonora* (1775, although published 1739), 'an exemplary instance of conjugal Heroism', modelled on *Alcestis*.<sup>3</sup> There were also several tragedies written on 'the antient model', suggested by lost plays named in Aristotle's *Poetics*.<sup>4</sup> But Greek tragedy had more directly appeared in the form of a number of five-act neoclassical adaptations, usually from Euripides and almost all with a female protagonist. The most important of these was William Whitehead's *Creusa, Queen of Athens*, a significantly retitled adaptation of Euripides' *Ion*, which Garrick produced and starred in at Drury Lane in 1754.

This chapter focuses on tragedies of this era, staged in the English language, which were based on Euripides' *Medea*. The next three sections briefly describe them. But the central argument is that the ways in which 'classic' archetypes are adapted can offer revealing insights into underlying cultural and ideological currents. The apparently drastic cuts, alterations, and supplements made to Euripidean archetypes by eighteenth-century playwrights in England need to be set against the backdrop of local late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theatrical, aesthetic, and literary trends, especially the distinctive vogue for heroine-dominated emotional dramas, known in their day as 'She-Tragedies'. It will become apparent from the radical surgery performed on Euripides' text that although eighteenth-century English playwrights were inescapably drawn to his *Medea*, her act of deliberate infanticide presented a nearly impossible challenge to contemporary sentiment. This tolerated scandalous and immoral actions in the opera house, especially if they were enacted in the Italian language, but was far more squeamish about vernacular spoken tragedy. Adapters of Euripides for the theatre had to contend with a London audience which would largely have shared the view of the critic Paul Hiffernan, who in 1770 specified *Medea's* crime as one of the most deplorable in drama, committed by 'such monsters that degrade the whole human system'.<sup>5</sup>

#### Charles Gildon's *Phaeton; or, the Fatal Divorce* (Theatre Royal, 1698)

A revealing account of the problem posed to playwrights by Euripides' *Medea* appears in the preface to its earliest English-language stage adaptation, Gildon's *Phaeton*. He explains that while his play owes 'a great many of its Beauties to the *Immortal EURIPIDES*', he was compelled to alter the heroine's character:

in consideration of the different Temper and Sentiment of our several Audience. First I was Apprehensive, that *Medea*, as *Euripides* represents her, wou'd shock *us*. When we hear of [. . .] the murdering of her own Children, contrary to all the Dictates of *Humanity* and *Mother-hood*, we shou'd have been too impatient for her Punishment, to have expected the *happy Event* of her barbarous Revenge; nay, perhaps, not have allow'd the Character within the Compass of Nature.<sup>6</sup>

Gildon needed to avoid alienating his audience by presenting an inhuman and 'unnatural' mother, and he therefore exculpated his heroine by transferring the child-killing to the hands of the local people, causing their bereaved mother to descend into lunacy and commit suicide.

This five-act tragedy was acted to considerable acclaim, partly because of the bravura performance of Frances Mary Knight in the tempestuous leading role of the *Medea*-figure *Althea*. Mrs Knight, the author claims in his 'Preface, 'was no small advantage to me; who in playing *Althea*, has evidently show'd herself as one of the formost Actresses of the Age'. The author commended Knight's striking delivery of demanding 'rants', especially after *Althea*'s two small sons have been torn to pieces offstage.<sup>7</sup>

Gildon's drama fuses the story of *Phaeton*, the son of the Sun, with the plot of *Euripides*' *Medea* and some features from *Iphigenia in Tauris* and the Senecan *Medea*. The heroine, *Althea*, is married to *Phaeton*, whose life she once saved when her barbarian father was persecuting him in her homeland of *Samos*. The couple are now living in *Egypt* at his stepfather *Merops*' court. The tragedy is precipitated by the passion *Phaeton* has developed for *Lybia*, *Merops*' daughter by a former wife, whom he decides to marry, whereupon *Merops* banishes *Althea*. Encouraged by her father's ghost to seek revenge, *Althea* sends a poisoned robe to *Lybia*, which kills her and her father before the wedding can be completed. The people of the city murder *Althea*'s children in revenge, and she dies, raving, of poison she has administered to herself.

To its *Euripidean* archetype this flamboyant drama adds several scenes of spectacle, with music composed by *Daniel Purcell*: the most significant of these are the descent from *Olympus* in the third act of a singing *Juno* and *Hymen*, who vow to punish *Phaeton*'s broken wedding vows through the medium of *Althea*; in the fourth act a 'Symphony and Song', during which *Althea*'s maidservants take up the role of the ancient Greek chorus; in the fifth a bridal procession,



complete with a hymn to Isis and Apollo, in the Temple of the Sun. But many scenes and passages in the play closely reproduce the corresponding lines in Euripides: notably the scene in which Merops banishes Althea and she supplicates him for one day's grace in order to prepare for her departure; the extended quarrel between estranged husband and wife in Act IV; and especially various parts of the dialogue between Althea's maids Cassiope and Merope. In their mouths are placed many of the complaints voiced in Euripides' play by Medea herself, for example in Act III:

CASSIOPE O! hard condition of poor Womankind!  
 Made Slaves to Mans imperious changeful Will.  
 MEROPE O! cruel Custom! O! too partial Laws,  
 That give to Man an Arbitrary Pow'r,  
 To throw us from him, when his Fancy veers,  
 And points him to another!<sup>8</sup>

At the climax of the drama in the fifth act Phaeton accuses his murderous wife in language clearly inspired by and elaborating on Euripides' *Medea* 1358–9:

O! barbarous Woman, or fell Tygress rather,  
 More cruel far, than *Scylla*, or the Syrens,  
 Like the Hyæna and the Crocodile.<sup>9</sup>

Such examples could be multiplied, perhaps constituting a third to a half of the total English text.

### Charles Johnson's *The Tragedy of Medæa* (Drury Lane, 1730)

Johnson's *The Tragedy of Medæa* is influenced by Corneille's *Médée*, but depends more closely on Euripides. He had wanted to stage a play on this subject

because it has been treated by the greatest Masters of Antiquity [. . .] among the Moderns, Erasmus, Buchanan and the elder Corneille attempted it with Success. As it had never, that I heard, been in *English*, I have ventur'd it on our Stage, and in some Places altered the Œconomy from the Original.<sup>10</sup>

Those alterations self-consciously improved the morality of the characters. Even Creon abdicates in shame at the wrongs he has done Medæa. More startling still is Johnson's decision not to have the children killed at all. Medæa sends them to safety in Athens before stabbing herself out of despair at the grief she has caused her beloved Jason.<sup>11</sup>



Yet Johnson's play, although resorting to the extreme strategy of deleting the infanticide, was still an outstanding failure. The author blamed the orchestrated interruptions of 'Criticks [. . .] not only in feeble Hisses, but in Hootings, horse Laughs, squalings, Catcalls, and other mechanical and judicious vociferations'. This was despite 'Mrs Porter's wonderful Performance, and the glorious Spirit, with which she rose in her Action'.<sup>12</sup> The cause of the play's failure, despite the ethical 'improvements', was its structural and verbal fidelity to the original, resulting in a sombre tone and lack of love scenes (although 'Aegæus' is motivated by his attraction to Medæa rather than his infertility). It faithfully replicates many speeches and situations—Medæa's plotting of her revenge, her confrontations with Jason, her encounter with Aegæus, her tears over the children, and the messenger speech. Even more adventurously, Johnson has made a serious attempt to translate some of the material from the choruses, and relocate it into the mouth of Ethra, the sister and confidante of Medæa. A good example is her praise of Athens in Act III, after the Aegæus scene, to be compared with *Medea* 823–45:

Athens the Seat of Demi-Gods and Heroes,  
For Wisdom, and for Virtue far renown'd  
There the Pierian maids, as Fame reports,  
First planted golden Harmony, and there,  
On the smooth surface of the fair Cephisus,  
The Cyprian goddess fans the yeilding Waters  
With sweetest Odours.<sup>13</sup>

Johnson regretfully notes that the strongest disapproval was expressed in passages such as these, translated more or less directly from Euripides. But he is aware that his play ultimately failed on account of its 'severe Morality'.<sup>14</sup>

#### Richard Glover's *Medea: a Tragedy* (Drury Lane 1767)

In contrast, the successful eighteenth-century British attempt at this play, Glover's *Medea*, succeeded precisely because of the reciprocal love interest (Jason still loves his wife) and pathetic deaths of the children. But since it was ideologically impossible for a tragedian to present a mother killing her children in cold blood, Glover exonerates Medea by allowing her to kill her children under the influence of madness. Although Euripides' Medea would certainly have been found guilty of murder in an eighteenth-century English court,

Glover's heroine would probably have been acquitted: there was a heated contemporary discussion of whether 'temporary phrenzy' absolved child-killing mothers of guilt; in reality such cases (where the deaths were usually perinatal) frequently revolved around precisely the issue of intent, and the courts freely admitted evidence about state of mind.<sup>15</sup> The term 'phrenzy' is used to describe Medea's state of mind in Glover's play.

The audience must have gathered excitedly to see this tragedy, on which Glover was reputed to have expended meticulous care.<sup>16</sup> This famous patriot had already used antiquity in a popular play (*Boadicea*, Drury Lane, 1753) and a well-known epic (*Leonidas*, 1737). Although today it is usually only cited as a forerunner of romantic Hellenism, some regarded *Leonidas* as superior to *Paradise Lost*.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, since the death of Mrs Cibber in 1766, Glover's leading actress Mary Ann Yates had become the unchallenged queen of tragedy in England. She did not disappoint: she 'melted every audience that has seen her inimitable Medea',<sup>18</sup> and the production inspired revivals into the 1790s by several actresses, perhaps including Sarah Siddons.<sup>19</sup> *Medea* encouraged Mrs Yates to choose another Greek tragic heroine for her benefit performance at Covent Garden (1769) in Francklin's *Orestes*, a play she subsequently revived at Drury Lane as *Electra* (1774).<sup>20</sup> She also flirted with Glover's sequel to *Medea*, an elaborate *Jason*, which was however rejected by the managers of both theatres, who objected to 'the grandeur of the scenery, and the expense required to bring it forward'.<sup>21</sup>

In *Medea* the statuesque Mrs Yates was required to look dazzlingly beautiful, her eye surpassing 'that refulgent star, / Which first adorns the evening'. Moreover, Medea is exceedingly intelligent, having a 'soaring mind' and 'the sublimest knowledge'. But Medea's supernatural wisdom cannot save her from the destructive power of love. The prologue promised that Glover had reworked 'Medea's mournful strain' so as to prove that 'Where love and fury, grief and madness' are joined, they 'O'erturn the structure' even 'of a godlike mind'.<sup>22</sup>

In common with all the actresses who attempted the heroines of Greek tragedy, Mrs Yates had to deliver complex rhetoric marked by heavy anaphora, the self-dramatizing use of the third person in soliloquy, and especially the cataloguing of emotions, often in asyndeton. Above all Mrs Yates had to express Medea's *struggle* between emotion and virtue; in Act I she laments

That anguish, want, despair, contempt and shame  
 Are heap'd together by the hands of fate,  
 Whelm'd in one mass of ruin on my head,  
 And dash my struggling virtue to the ground.<sup>23</sup>

Medea's moral struggle is engendered by conjugal love. Even her 'sorcery' dialogue in the fourth act (with a transvestite Hecate played by Mr Bransby) emphasizes her grief for her loss of Jason. Her maternal love also remains fundamentally unchallenged. Although she stabs her children to death, it is 'madness' that 'mingled smiles with horror'.<sup>24</sup> Glover's Medea goes truly, wildly, and memorably mad, a 'temporary phrenzy' which reaches its climax in her admired last entrance, when, still raving and distracted, 'she comes upon the stage, her hands dripping with the blood of her children', for, as one critic expressed it, 'her words and appearance perfectly harrow up the soul'.<sup>25</sup> When Glover's Medea regains normal consciousness it is only the intervention of Juno which stops her from committing suicide. The tragedy ends with her departing into exile in the dragon-drawn chariot of her 'Bright forefather'. But this is only after a touching dialogue with the husband she still adores. Glover's Medea, although a sorceress, remains a model eighteenth-century matron. Her virtues as wife and mother, astonishingly, emerge intact.

### Restoration Antecedents

These three attempts to stage adaptations of Euripides' *Medea* must be placed in the context of the far-reaching changes that the English tragic stage had undergone between the Restoration and the end of the seventeenth century. By the time of Gildon's *Medea*-inspired *Phaeton*, it had been two decades since the heroines of Greek tragedy had begun to attract attention. The earliest Restoration tragedy with an indisputably Greek model is Charles Davenant's *Circe* (1677), a musical version of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*; another significant forerunner of the female-focused adaptation of Greek tragedy was *The Destruction of Troy* (first performed in 1678) by John Banks (or Bankes). Ostensibly in the long-standing tradition of the male-dominated 'siege-and-conquest' heroic play (e.g. Dryden's *Conquest of Grenada* of 1670), this tragedy, influenced by Seneca's *Troades*, concludes with the burning down of Troy. Yet it highlights the psychological effects of the siege of Troy on Cassandra, an erotic Helen, a tragic Polyxene, and a tender Andromache. Moreover, it challenges the heroic play's



perspective on empire and violence by seeing them from a female perspective which casts them as male cruelty: Achilles urges his men, 'Against the Women shut your Eyes, and Ears, / Be deaf to their loud Cries, and blind to all their Tears'.<sup>26</sup>

In the same year there appeared the *Oedipus* of John Dryden and Nathaniel Lee. One of its most significant features is the role of Jocasta. It extends from her appearance at the close of the first act until her sensational expiry near the close of the fifth.<sup>27</sup> In accordance with Restoration tragedy's fondness for presenting the traumatized female body as spectacle, the horrific impact of her death-scene can be surmised from the stage direction (V. i), 'Scene draws, and discovers Jocasta held by her women, and stabbed in many places of her bosom, her hair dishevelled, her Children slain upon the bed'.<sup>28</sup> Jocasta's maternal love for her children is stressed by the addition to the plot of her crazed act of infanticide, probably inspired by the story of Medea, and her conjugal love for Oedipus is upgraded to a passionate attachment.

The heroines of Greek tragedy were simultaneously attracting the attention of the influential theorist Thomas Rymer, who, in the same year as the productions of both Banks's *The Destruction of Troy* and the Dryden-Lee *Oedipus*, compared the portrayal of heroines in Greek and Senecan tragedy. His sensitive discussion of Euripides' drawing of Phaedra's character commends her modesty, her virtue in not naming Hippolytus to the nurse, and especially her restraint in not 'solliciting her Son face to face'.<sup>29</sup> Rymer is impressed by Phaedra's first scene in Euripides, because her derangement is a believable result of her physical state:

And now for three days had she neither eat nor slept [. . .]. No wonder then if she talks very madly, she is in an hundred minds all at once, she tries all places and postures, and is always unesie [. . .]. Here is a *Scene of Madness*, but not of *Bedlam*-madness, here is *Nature* but not the *obscenities*, not the *blindsides* of Nature.<sup>30</sup>

Euripides, says Rymer, is superior to Seneca in probability, in occasioning 'pitty', and in ethical example. He also argues that *women* would 'pitty' Euripides' Phaedra more, because they know no woman remotely resembling Seneca's heroine, 'Nor can they allow her more compassion than to a Bitch or *Polecat*'.<sup>31</sup> Here Rymer is laying the theoretical groundwork for the theatrical appearance of Euripidean heroines like Phaedra and Medea, impersonated by famous actresses



for an audience with an influential female component, surgically altered to retain the claim to virtue, and designed to elicit emotional identification and sympathy.

### Turn-of-the-Century Transformations

Rymer's preoccupations prefigure the changes shortly to take place in the content and emotional impact of staged tragedy. In the 1690s the London stage underwent a transformation, culminating in Jeremy Collier's polemic against the raucous, sensational, and often obscene content of Restoration drama, *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (London, 1698). The first moves were made towards a more domestic and pathetic drama, for which the cultural causes have been sought in the monarchy's declining interest in the theatre under Mary and Anne, the greater decorousness and familial culture of the aristocratic court circles, and the middle class's increasing access to the theatre.<sup>32</sup>

Euripidean tragedy suddenly became more accessible to English writers on the publication at Cambridge, in 1694, of the first complete edition of Euripides by an Englishman, Joshua Barnes; his *Euripidis quae extant omnia* is an intelligent piece of scholarship and a spectacularly beautiful volume. Gildon's *Phaeton* shows a dramatist at the end of the seventeenth century responding to the changes in the cultural climate by looking to Greek tragedy—or rather to Euripides—for the prototype of a plot concentrated on the nuclear family, with a powerful female role, and emotive use of children.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, in his *Iphigenia* (Lincoln's Inn Fields, 1699–1700), based on *Iphigenia in Tauris*, John Dennis explicitly ascribes to his Greek model the innovative delicacy of feeling to which his play aspires. The epilogue criticizes the overblown, ranting style of 'heroic' Restoration tragedy, and declares that Dennis is consciously seeking inspiration by adhering more closely to an ancient Greek archetype:

Our bard resolves to steer a diff'rent Course  
And travel upwards to the *Grecian* Source.<sup>34</sup>

In the preface Dennis explains that two thousand years ago his play was brought upon the *Athenian* stage by Euripides; and the Athenians, who were certainly the most ingenious, and most delicate people that ever were in the world, were not only charm'd, but ravish'd with it.<sup>35</sup>

The language of 'ingenuity', 'delicacy', and 'charm' signals the emergence of a new aesthetics of tragedy, replacing heroic drama's associated concepts of terror and awe. This is apparent in the emphatic virtue of the females. Iphigenia incarnates that taste for 'virtue in distress' which was fundamentally to condition English fiction and drama throughout the entire eighteenth century. The symbolic figure of the distressed female expressed the complex relationship between the belief that human beings were fundamentally benevolent, and the realization that the world was often inimical to the achievement of happiness: as Brissenden has argued, the 'sentimental tribute of a tear exacted at the spectacle of virtue in distress was an acknowledgement at once of man's inherent goodness and of the impossibility of his ever being able to demonstrate his goodness effectively'.<sup>36</sup> The problem facing English adapters of *Medea*, therefore, was how to portray the clearly distressed Euripidean Medea as frustrated in all her attempts to demonstrate her inherent virtue.

### Women and the Theatre

The theatre for which authors like Gildon and Dennis were adapting Euripidean tragedies contained many women. The diverse audience in the Restoration playhouse had already included, in addition to the notorious orange-sellers, numerous female aristocrats, their servants, and the wives of Members of Parliament, craftsmen, and merchants.<sup>37</sup> Davenant's *Circe* was thought to appeal to the women in the audience: the prologue, penned by Dryden, argues that 'The Sex that best does pleasure understand' will be tolerant of this inexperienced young playwright, because 'There's such a stock of love within his Veins. / These Arguments the Women may persuade'.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, playwrights sometimes dedicated their works to female patrons, who exerted an influence on the types of play that were produced.<sup>39</sup> Banks dedicated *The Destruction of Troy* to Lady Katherine Ross, implying that his choice of subject-matter was connected with the sex of his patron: 'the history of Heroick Women shall henceforth own you to be the *Greatest* and *Noblest* Pattern of 'em all'. By the time of Abel Boyer's *Achilles* (Drury Lane, 1699–1700, based on *Iphigenia in Aulis*), the author can note that the tragedy had 'pleas'd the fairest Part of the Town, I mean the Ladies'.<sup>40</sup> The audiences of the eighteenth century, though increasingly middle-class, were to retain a sizeable female contingent whose reaction to a play helped to determine whether it succeeded or failed.

The most important agent in the 'feminine' transformation of tragedy was, however, the female actor. The increasing cult of individual star performers of both sexes is apparent from Boyer's observation in 1702 that 'Formerly *Poets* made *Players*, but nowadays 'tis generally the *Player* that makes the *Poet*',<sup>41</sup> yet the popularity of actresses meant that the female roles created by the dramatists were of relatively greater importance. The 'type-casting' of the most famous actresses such as Frances Knight, Mrs Bracegirdle, and Elizabeth Barry shaped the way in which many tragedies were written.<sup>42</sup> Drama's increased interest in heterosexual love was also a result of women's arrival on the Restoration stage, when theatregoers like Samuel Pepys could appreciate their sexual allure, even when the play was tedious.<sup>43</sup>

Some of these seductive women acted several 'Greek tragic' roles. After her magnificent performance as Gildon's Medea-based Althea, Mrs Knight created the role of Clytemnestra in Boyer's *Achilles*, a Greek tragic queen to whom she returned in Johnson's *Iphigenia; or, the Victim* at Drury Lane in 1714. Elizabeth Barry played both the Scythian Queen in Dennis's *Iphigenia*, and Phaedra in Edmund Smith's *Phaedra and Hippolitus* (Haymarket, 1707). In two successive years Mary Betterton played Iphigenia in Davenant's *Circe* and Jocasta in the Dryden-Lee *Oedipus*.<sup>44</sup> The role of the actress, including the specialists in Greek heroines, later became even more important. The famous Mrs Porter attempted both Johnson's *Medæa* and the title-role in Richard West's *Hecuba* (Drury Lane, 1725), but it was her Clytemnestra in James Thomson's *Agamemnon* (Drury Lane, 1738) of which her audience 'expressed the highest approbation by loud and reiterated applause.'<sup>45</sup> Mrs Porter was particularly commended for the emotional effects she produced both in her 'spirited Propriety in all Characters of Rage', and also 'when Grief and Tenderness possessed her', when 'she subsided into the most affecting Softness'.<sup>46</sup>

By the middle of the century Mrs Porter had been succeeded as the dominant exponent of Greek tragic heroines by Mrs Pritchard, who starred in William Whitehead's *Creusa*, based on Euripides' *Ion* (Drury Lane, 1754), and John Delap's *Hecuba* (Drury Lane, 1761). At this time David Garrick, the actor-manager of Drury Lane, who himself took an important 'Grecian' role in Whitehead's *Creusa*, was taking acting to new heights of sophistication. Actors' skills were assessed according to their representation of emotions, categorized by Samuel Foote as 'the Passions of Desire, such as Pleasure, Pain, Love, Hatred &c. and the irascible ones, namely, Courage, Anger, Despair &c.'<sup>47</sup> Emphasis



was laid on moments of emotional *change*: 'The transition from one Passion to another, by the Suddenness of the Contrast, throws a stronger Light on the Execution of the Actor'.<sup>48</sup> In Act III of Glover's *Medea*, for example, Mrs Yates represented a transition from tearful dialogue with her child into a furious rant. Here her Colchian attendant gave a running commentary on her emotional vicissitudes: 'Heart-breaking sorrow now succeeds to rage'.<sup>49</sup> Again, in the 'banishment' scene she underwent a transition from terrifying anger with Creon to pitiful lamentation, culminating in a fainting fit when the stage directions instructed her to be supported by her women (see fig. 4).

Unsurprisingly, Mrs Yates was concerned about excessive exertion when scheduled to act *Medea* and another tragic heroine on two successive nights.<sup>50</sup> By mid-century, in response to the emotional investment of the star actors, audiences were deeply absorbed in tragic scenes. A German commentator on the British theatre contrasted the low attention levels in France and Italy, and reported that in England Mrs Bellamy became so overcome by a sense of tragedy when performing the role of Jocasta in a revival of the Dryden–Lee *Oedipus* in 1775 that she lost consciousness, whereupon the audience also became distraught and left the theatre.<sup>51</sup> When Mrs Barry acted the 'Alcestis' role in Thomson's *Edward and Eleonora* in the same year, *The Morning Chronicle* commented with approval that 'the audience [. . .] confessed their sensibility, and wept applause'.<sup>52</sup>

Actresses had a counterpart in female dramatists. One anonymous woman produced *The Unnatural Mother*, which has echoes of Euripides' *Medea*, at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1697: the oriental Callapia poisons her husband and kills her son, before announcing in Act V that 'Ceres will send her winged Dragons for me, and bear me through the air'. She threatens the apparition of her murdered husband with a visit to a friend: 'I'll send thee to *Medea* to be new boil'd, and when thou art young again I will be fond of thee'.<sup>53</sup> *The Fatal Legacy* of Jane Robe, another 'She-Author',<sup>54</sup> was performed at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1723. This adaptation of Racine's *La Thébaïde*, itself based on Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, offered strong roles for both Mrs Boheme as the distressed mother Jocasta and Mrs Bullock as the virtuous virgin Antigona.<sup>55</sup>

### 'She-Tragedy'

The most popular early eighteenth-century tragedies were pathetic dramas, dominated by a suffering, virtuous heroine, which came to be



Act III.

MEDEA.

Sc. I.



Dodd del.

Goldar sculp.

*M<sup>rs</sup>. YATES in the Character of MEDEA.*  
*What spark of wisdom in my breast remains?*  
*All is extinguish'd there — Oh! Jason! Jason!*

*Published Aug. 23, 1777, by T. Lowndes & Partners.*

4. John Goldar, *Mrs Yates in the Character of Medea*, 1777 (engraving). Frontispiece to the New English Theatre edition of Richard Glover's *Medea*, first performed at Drury Lane, London, in 1767

known as 'She-Tragedies'. 'She-Tragedy' developed as the dramatists moved away from the heroic drama of the Restoration towards tragedy concentrating on the experiences of private individuals, usually women. The label 'She-Tragedy' first appears in the 1714 epilogue to Nicholas Rowe's 'pathetic' tragedy *Jane Shore*, featuring a distressed heroine from English history. Rowe's distressed heroines profoundly influenced the eighteenth-century stage, including its response to Greek tragedy, but the reverse influence, Greek tragedy's impact on Rowe, has been underestimated.<sup>56</sup>

Rowe had begun to depart from heroic themes in *The Ambitious Stepmother* (1700), and by the time of *Lady Jane Gray* (1715) had perfected the formula for 'She-Tragedy'. Rowe used a Greek heroine, Penelope, when experimentally developing this type of drama. In *Ulysses* (1705), the prologue promises that the hero's wife is a model of dutiful wifehood:

To Night, in Honour of the marry'd Life,  
Our Author treats you with a Virtuous Wife;  
A Lady, who for Twenty years, withstood  
The pressing Instances of Flesh and Blood.<sup>57</sup>

But Penelope is also presented with the kind of extreme feminine moral conflict that enthralled Rowe's audience. She is confronted with the choice between sacrificing her son, thus betraying her duty as a mother, and yielding to the suitor Eurymachus, thus betraying her husband. Rowe prolongs the pathetic scene in Act III in which she explores this feminine dilemma.<sup>58</sup> Rowe did not himself attempt to modernize a Greek tragedy for the stage, but his work fundamentally conditioned the theatrical climate, and therefore helped to determine which Greek tragedies would appeal to the eighteenth-century dramatists. Rowe's 'She-Tragedies' were crucial in determining the marked preference for Euripides.<sup>59</sup>

### **Euripides: Passion, Virtue, Compassion, Tears**

Euripides was seen as the Greek tragedian best at delineating different emotional states—what the Restoration audience would have described as 'the several passions'. The prologue to Gildon's *Phaeton* proclaims that 'Euripides to Night adorns our Stage, / For Tragic Passions fam'd in every Age.'<sup>60</sup> When describing his method, Gildon enumerated the 'tragic passions' he adopted from Euripides, and which he felt marked out this tragedian as superior to Sophocles:

I have closely follow'd the Divine *Euripides*, in the *grief, despair, rage, dissimulation, and resentment* of *Althea*; as I have in her several Passions in the fourth Act [. . .]. All just Critics have agreed in preferring *Euripides* to *Sophocles* himself, in his lively draught of the Passions.<sup>61</sup>

Yet, by the turn of the century, discussions of tragedy began to be concerned less with its 'lively draught' of extreme passion, and more with the intensity of the compassion it arouses in the spectator. In 1701 John Dennis, the adapter of *Iphigenia in Tauris*, declared:

I am no further pleas'd by any Tragedy, than as it excites passions in me [. . .] the greater the Resemblance between him who suffers, and him who commiserates, the stronger will the Apprehension, and consequently, the Compassion, be.<sup>62</sup>

A few years later Charles Johnson, who was subsequently to attempt to adapt both *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Medea* for the London stage, described the ideal spectators as those who enjoy

the Distress of a well wrought scene, who [. . .] behold the Conduct of our Passions on the Stage, and with a generous Sympathy feel alternate Joy and Pain, when Virtue either conquers, or is contending with adverse Fate.<sup>63</sup>

Johnson's formula is symptomatic of the early eighteenth-century development of what Rose Zimbardo has called an 'affective theory of emulation'. This entailed the audience not only identifying with the distress of virtuous characters, but consequently modifying their own behaviour.<sup>64</sup>

This notion of tragedy belongs to a contemporary debate about the relations between passion, reason, and sympathy, most famously instanced in David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40). By 1728 Frances Hutcheson had argued in *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections* (1728) that sympathy makes people aware of the need to discipline their passions: it restrains and educates their influence.<sup>65</sup> As the prologue of West's *Hecuba* put it, the audience should feel free to shed tears at the play, because

Pity's the generous Feeling of the Soul,  
And ought less gentle Passions to controul.<sup>66</sup>

The audience, it is implied, could learn how to control their own passions by feeling pity for the characters in the tragedy. Indeed, throughout the eighteenth century, the movement for the reform of the theatre assumed that it was an instrument for moral education.



Tracts argued that the stage was an effective medium for training the sentiments in a similar way to sermons, because of its psychological immediacy.<sup>67</sup>

Sympathy was seen as the element in human nature that both made society possible and offered the hope of a *good* society. This ultimately optimistic conception informed the emergent bourgeois ideal of the 'greatest happiness for the greatest number', a phrase invented in the eighteenth century.<sup>68</sup> The importance of 'sympathy' further illuminates Euripides' popularity, for the discourse around him consistently stressed his pre-eminence at producing pity and tears. Boyer was inspired to stage a play about Iphigenia by the effectiveness with which this heroine 'drew tears' in the French theatre.<sup>69</sup> Forty-four years later, in the fifth stanza of his *Ode to Mr West on his Translation of Pindar*, Joseph Warton entitled Euripides, 'soft Pity's priest, / Who melts in useful woes the bleeding breast'.<sup>70</sup> Delap's *Hecuba* (1761) was typically described in its Prologue as a 'modern ancient piece' designed to imitate a 'Grecian Bard' who 'Waken'd each soft emotion of the Breast / And call'd forth Tears, that would not be Supprest'.<sup>71</sup>

Yet often the eighteenth-century dramatists needed to help the perverse Euripides to call forth those insuppressible tears, since (as Aristotle had long ago perceived) he combined incomparable emotive power with the worst kind of ethical example. Plots were usually altered in order to punish, ameliorate, or excise altogether the crimes, especially those committed by women, found in his texts. One classical scholar, explaining why Euripides' *Ion* is so difficult to stage, observes with satisfaction that in William Whitehead's *Creusa* (1754), the Athenian queen, who survives in Euripides, is made by her English author to commit suicide. This was necessary because of her experience of sex outside marriage, and the

natural antipathy, which the more refined system of cultivated society, in the present æra of mankind, will inevitably raise against her: the Mother of an Infant, exposed by her own hand, could [not be . . .] tolerated on a modern theatre of enlightened Europeans.<sup>72</sup>

In Delap's *Hecuba* the plot is engineered so that the delicate queen, whose 'weak brain' is afflicted,<sup>73</sup> does nothing immoral at all. Instead of wreaking revenge on Polymestor, she concludes the play, raving, between her children's corpses. Medea required even greater ethical adjustment: she never even kills her children knowingly on the eighteenth-century English stage.



Another of the playwrights' strategies was to identify the 'situations' in Euripides' tragedies with affective possibilities, and to subject them to prolongation and repetition, the two distinctive techniques of English sentimental drama defined by Arthur Sherbo in his seminal study.<sup>74</sup> Certain scenes in Euripides, for example Medea's parting from her children, Hecuba's from Polyxena, or Creusa's recognition of her son Ion, were instantly arresting to eighteenth-century sensibility, and are always extended and sometimes repeated later in the play. Another way of 'improving' upon Euripidean pathos was to add explicit statements intended to guide the audience's reactions towards 'humane' sympathy. In Johnson's *Medæa* Creusa, the heroine's rival, says that her 'reflecting Soul / Will feel the Sufferings of poor *Medæa*' (I. ii).

Euripides' Medea famously tells her audience that she is perfectly well aware that the crime she is about to commit is morally wrong (1078–9). The eighteenth century inevitably had problems with this blatant statement of malice aforethought, as it did with all Euripides' morally bad characters, since its prevalent ideology perceived human beings as fundamentally good, or at least as having the capacity to act benevolently rather than malevolently if given half the chance. Expressions of this conviction were so pervasively articulated that it has been called both an eighteenth-century collective 'fantasy' and 'the propaganda of benevolence and tender feeling'.<sup>75</sup> The plays of the period, which Ernest Bernbaum in 1915 influentially labelled the 'drama of sensibility', demonstrate insistently a confidence in the goodness of average human nature.<sup>76</sup> At its most extreme this confidence had been expressed in Rousseau's conceptualization of virtue itself as a vehement and voluptuous passion.<sup>77</sup> In Thomson's *Agamemnon*, Clytemnestra eloquently expresses her yearning for her lost virtue (I. i):

There breathes a felt divinity in virtue,  
In candid unassuming generous virtue,  
Whose very silence speaks; and which inspires,  
Without proud formal lessons a disdain  
Of mean injurious vice.<sup>78</sup>

Eighteenth-century tragedy often articulates its understanding of virtue through giving its female protagonists such 'interiorized' speeches as this in reaction to their distress: like Euripides' own Medea and Phaedra, they often deliver soliloquies in which they explore, for

the benefit of the audience, the conflicts raging in their minds between virtue and passion or counterpoised familial loyalties. The plays also stress the virtue, delicacy of feeling, and 'humanity' of the *dramatis personae*. In Johnson's *Medæa* Aegæus announces that 'The love of Virtue / Now fires my Soul, uplifting it to Heaven' (III. i), and that his heart is swollen by 'Humanity, the pride of doing good'. In this play the word 'virtue' occurs no fewer than twenty-eight times, a record subsequently broken by Thomson's *Agamemnon*.<sup>79</sup>

When the eighteenth-century playwrights adapted Greek tragedy, therefore, they intrusively emphasized the virtue of the characters, regarded as necessary to the eliciting of sympathy. The earlier plays tended to reward virtue, punish turpitude, and draw an explicit moral. This tendency is shared with much of the polite literature of the time and is purely indigenous: the authors influenced by a French adaptation of Greek tragedy did not find the moralizing habit in them. Boyer's *Achilles* replaces both the Euripidean and Racinean endings with Calchas helpfully drawing a moral inference for posterity: the gods 'are just, and ever recompense, / True piety, and spotless Innocence.'<sup>80</sup> A similarly unprecedented moral is drawn by Smith's *Hippolitus* (1707), who (unlike Racine's *Hippolyte*) does not die. He is rewarded for his resistance to his amorous stepmother and fidelity to his fiancée by surviving the end of the play, upon which he opines that 'the righteous gods' always protect 'Goodness' and 'unguarded Virtue'.<sup>81</sup> This tendency towards disposing the fortunes of characters according to 'poetical justice' was a little later superseded by a luxuriant pleasure in the contemplation of unalloyed sorrows: neither of Jason's wives, both portrayed as innocent victims of circumstance, survives the end of Johnson's *The Tragedy of Medæa* (1730). Part of the reason for this transformation lay in the dramatists' awareness of ancient Greek tragedy, which the dramatist Richard Steele argued was superior to modern tragedy precisely because it eschewed 'poetical justice' in favour of a sterner contemplation of unmitigated distress:

the wise Athenians in their theatrical performances laid before the eyes of the people the greatest affliction which could befall human life, and insensibly polished their tempers by such representations.<sup>82</sup>

### Gender and Ideology

Between the late 1730s and the 1760s numerous examples were produced of 'high-sounding but highly actable poetic tragedy that

exploited the emotions'; most emphasized romantic love, and almost all contained the nearly obligatory role for a traumatized mother, wife, sister, or daughter.<sup>83</sup> It is this type of 'sentimental' tragedy which prompted a paternal writer of 'conduct literature' to advise his daughters to avoid comedy as 'offensive to delicacy', but to attend tragedy enthusiastically, for its 'sorrows will soften and ennoble your hearts'.<sup>84</sup> Rowe's 'She-Tragedies' were revived,<sup>85</sup> but the repertory was dominated by new plays, of which the outstanding 'Grecian' examples were Whitehead's *Creusa* and Glover's *Medea*. The word 'sentimental' made its first appearance in any dramatic context in the prologue to Whitehead's *The Roman Father* (Drury Lane 1749),<sup>86</sup> for Greek and Roman settings were vogueish, just as society ladies had themselves painted in classical disguise as Hebe, or in classical drapery, performing a pagan sacrifice.<sup>87</sup>

The theatre's fusion of fashionable Graeco-Roman contexts with suffering heroines also finds a parallel in contemporary classical-subject painting. Gavin Hamilton's *Andromache Mourning the Death of Hector* (commissioned 1759) and *The Death of Lucretia* (1767) both focus on female heroism, but are also 'sentimental' in the sense that feeling is their subject.<sup>88</sup> This artistic view of the role of the imagination in creating sympathy has in turn been associated with the philosophy of Adam Smith, who in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) argued that while 'pity' signifies fellow-feeling with another's sorrows, 'sympathy' can denote 'our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever'.<sup>89</sup> The audiences of the time came to feel *everything*—Lucretia's patriotic fervour and outrage, Medea's love and anger—along with their antique heroines.

The popularity of the Euripidean heroine is consonant with the consistent preference in sentimental tragedy for the central figure to be a suffering female. Women in love, tormented mothers, and victimized virgins were central vehicles for the eighteenth century's exploration of its contradictory ideology of gender. This encompassed simultaneously the ideal of passive female asexuality, a superficially contradictory conviction that women were more vulnerable to love, an increasing cult of conjugal passion, and a veritable sanctification of motherhood, which made certain scenes in Euripides (although not his overall plots) overwhelmingly tempting to dramatists. The ideals expressed in the popular genre of 'conduct literature' aimed at unmarried women equated 'natural' femininity with asexual virtue. Yet other texts offer explanations for women's potentially rampant sexuality. 'Love, and the Effects of it, is the darling and predominant



Passion of the Sex', as a treatise on marital infidelity opined in 1739; female sexuality was thus simultaneously constructed as both natural and unnatural, 'its potentially anarchic power contained by reducing it to the socially sanctioned duty of motherhood'.<sup>90</sup>

By the time of the last significant eighteenth-century adaptation of Greek tragedy, John Delap's version of *Heracidae* (*The Royal Suppliants*, Drury Lane, 1781), Greek tragic heroines had been transformed into the theatrical equivalents of Samuel Richardson's Pamela and Clarissa. Delap's Macaria and her mother Deianira are exemplars of affected and persecuted feminine sensibility, in whom 'virtue is articulated in the capacity to feel and display sentiments, the capacity called "sensibility": the instrument of sensibility is 'a massively sensitized, feminine body; its vocabulary is that of gestures and palpitations, sighs and tears.'<sup>91</sup> Macaria is all 'lovely tears'; who swoons, and sighs, with throbbing breast, through alternate states of calm, terror, and 'tumult of emotion', while her mother laments her dead husband, weeps over her son Hyllus as he goes into battle, and gushes throughout her scenes with her daughter.<sup>92</sup> Greek tragedy has here been refashioned as a concatenation of pathetic 'situations' exploiting persecuted virginal loveliness and maternal pain. This notion of the tragic heroine also finds a parallel in medical writings, where women possess a 'sensibility' based in physiology. Sensibility could easily veer into excess or out of control, and, in both Richardson's novels and the theatrical texts, female delirium and suicidal despair figure large. These states are played out in swoons and sighs; like the subjects of medical treatises, fictional and dramatic heroines suffer from emotional turns articulated in a common vocabulary of nervous disorders, marked by the voguish lexical items 'sympathy', 'delicacy', and 'passion'.<sup>93</sup>

The eighteenth-century Greek tragic heroines swoon, rave, or announce impending suicide with exhausting frequency. Glover's Medea, in her spectacular first delirium, re-enacts her spells over the dragon guarding the golden fleece, fantasizes that she is clinging to a desert cliff with her infants, and receives a visitation from a personified figure of Revenge.<sup>94</sup> After her children's deaths she raves again, passes out, revives, sees the blood on her hand, gradually regains her senses, and becomes suicidal—a scene both typically eighteenth-century and clearly dependent on Heracles' 'recovery' in Euripides' *Heracles* and Agave's in his *Bacchae*.

This specifically eighteenth-century construction of femininity mistakenly thought it found a reflection of itself in Euripidean



tragedy's complex female protagonists. Yet certain features of the women in the ancient Greek texts absolutely repelled eighteenth-century sensibility, in particular their frankness about erotic love. Gildon argued that the modesty appropriate to unmarried women must inhibit playwrights. He commends the Greek tragedians for their treatment of love 'as Euripides in his *Alcestis* and *Helen*, but then it is between Man and Wife'. But it is not consistent 'with that Character of Modesty, which is essential to the Sex, to fly out into those Transports and Fondnesses' before matrimony.<sup>95</sup> Dennis, similarly, describes the difficulty posed by Sophocles' *Antigone*, because 'the thing that lay most heavy upon her Heart was that she was to go to Hell with her Maiden-head'. Dennis says that the Athenians had a worse view of women than his English contemporaries, and ascribed to women a more dominant 'Passion'. If a 'maid' had expressed *Antigone's* view in Dennis's day, it 'would have appear'd a frailty particular and surprizing'.<sup>96</sup>

Euripidean tragedy, then, appealed to the eighteenth-century dramatists because of its passionate heroines and pathetic 'situations'. But his tragedies then had to be shaped to fit contemporary ideals of pre-marital modesty, conjugal affection, and sanctified motherhood, ideals which scarcely bring Euripides' *Medea* immediately to mind. Euripides' heroines needed to be reconceptualized in terms of a specifically eighteenth-century vocabulary of sensibility. Tragedy was certainly designed to provide the large female sector in the audience with positive paradigms of womanhood. Yet it is important to remember that tragedy's consumers included men. Euripides' *Medea* was reshaped in response not only to the redefinition of womanhood, but to the new bourgeoisie's quest for an identity. It has recently been argued that the eighteenth century's dominant ideal of femininity, with its emphasis on feeling and morality, was one of the most powerful factors in establishing a *general* middle-class identity. It has plausibly been urged that the emergence of female-dominated sentimental literature really demonstrates 'an evolution of a particular ideological construction of a new class identity, displaced into a discussion of female virtue'.<sup>97</sup> Even the rising cult of motherhood, which more than anything else explains the eighteenth century's revulsion at the premeditated child-killing committed by the authentic Euripidean *Medea*, was related to the expansionist ideology of an upwardly mobile middle class.<sup>98</sup>

## Conclusion

Euripidean tragedies presented a paradox to the eighteenth-century English theatre. Their gallery of memorable female protagonists, emphasis on mothers and virgins, use of children, representation of emotion, 'tear-jerking' situations, and interiorized monologues guaranteed that they were far more attractive to this era than previous scholarship has acknowledged. Yet these heroines were profoundly unsuited to contemporary notions of femininity and sentiment. Instead of romantic love, the tragedians found in Euripides (especially his *Medea*) visceral sexual politics. Instead of eroticism expressed in the coded language of sensibility, they found plays without love interest, and *Medea* talking openly about sexual deprivation and her insulted marriage-bed. In particular, they wanted idealized maternal love, and instead found in *Medea* a cold-blooded maternal infanticide, in *Hecuba* a grandmother who kills her enemies' children, and in *Creusa* an Athenian queen who could have sex outside marriage, abandon her child, plot his death, and survive the end of the play.

Thus the eighteenth-century audience, while able to take unadapted performances of Greek tragedy (usually Sophocles) in school productions,<sup>99</sup> could only cope with it in English after the extensive plastic surgery required to make its heroines fit eighteenth-century social imperatives. There was no shame attached to this project: contemporary critics frequently *praised* the strategies the playwrights devised for 'correcting' the ethical or affective material they found in their ancient archetypes. In the preface to the second edition of his *Iphigenia* play, Boyer said that the neo-classical adapter of Euripides was 'The One Improving what the other Writ'.<sup>100</sup>

The only professional eighteenth-century attempt to stage a Greek tragedy in English translation rather than adaptation was Richard West's *Hecuba* (Drury Lane, 1725). West's sole significant alteration was to replace the Euripidean prologue (delivered by the ghost of Polydorus) with a scene in which the same material is presented by Polymestor. Otherwise the order and content of the translated scenes replicate the Greek model, adding no love interest, presenting the blinding of Polymestor and the murder of his children without sentiment or amelioration, and even retaining most of the choral material, expressed through the mouth of *Hecuba*'s servant. The remarkably faithful blank-verse translation certainly merits the account in the Epilogue, which claims of the author that,

Instead of the prevailing, powerful Arts,  
 By which, perhaps his Play might move your Hearts,  
 He boasts, that from Eu-ri-pi-des 'tis writ!<sup>101</sup>

But this epilogue was never heard. 'A Rout of Vandals in the Galleries intimidated the young Actresses, disturb'd the Audience, and prevented all Attention.'<sup>102</sup> In the prevalent ideological climate, this was inevitable: as an insightful critic responded, 'there is not one Drama of Antiquity, that in a meer Translation, would not suffer Persecution on the present Stage'.<sup>103</sup>

This situation was to last for at least another century. The Victorians were occasionally and increasingly able to respond to the authentic voices of the Greek tragedians in English-language performances, especially those of Sophocles' *Antigone*.<sup>104</sup> But even they continued systematically to alter the infanticide in *Medea* in such a way as to make it acceptable to their audiences; the most influential adaptation of Euripides' play, much performed in English translation, was Ernest Legouvé's *Médée* (see further Macintosh, Ch. 1). In this version Medea does kill the children, but only in a spirit of selfless and courageous altruism, in order to prevent them dying a much worse death at the hands of the Corinthians.<sup>105</sup> The Victorians were extremely interested in what Euripides' *Medea* had to say about divorce and the plight of abandoned women, especially before, during, and immediately after the passing of the great Divorce Act of 1857: amongst numerous other examples, when Thackeray was describing a miserably unhappy marriage during the course of a novel set in the eighteenth century, *Henry Esmond*, he makes a frustrated wife, for whom divorce was impossible, recite lines from Euripides' *Medea* to the sympathetic hero.<sup>106</sup> Yet even the Victorians evaded the uncompromising brutality of Euripides' handling of the infanticide. It is a powerful indication of the radical nature of his presentation of Medea's myth that it was not to be until as comparatively recently as 1907, during the crisis in gender politics caused by the rise of the movement for women's suffrage, that Euripides' *Medea* was finally thought fit to be presented before the English public in a 'meer translation', rather than an adaptation, and only then by the most daring and progressive director in Edwardian London, Harley Granville Barker.<sup>107</sup> Whether we should actually be proud of our modern ability to stomach the authentic Euripidean *Medea* is, of course, another question.



## Notes to Chapter 3

1. Robinson (1872), ii. 56.
2. This is the underlying assumption of both James Johnson (1972), 1–2 and Turner (1989).
3. On *The Mourning Bride* see Davies (1784), iii. 348–9; on *Edward and Eleonora*, often performed between 1775 and 1796, see the adaptation by Thomas Hull (1775), 1; and for comment, Macintosh (1995), 57–8.
4. e.g. Owen (1703) and Sturmy (1722), which were both suggested by Aristotle's discussion of Theodectes' lost tragedy *Lynceus* (*Poetics* 1455b29). See also Gildon (1718), i. 241.
5. Hiffernan (1770), ii. 57. He also cites the murder of Clytemnestra by Orestes in Sophocles on the ground that it is encouraged by Electra, who is female.
6. Gildon (1698), 'Preface'.
7. *Ibid.*; see Wilson (1958), 55–6.
8. Gildon (1698), 14–15.
9. *Ibid.* 29.
10. Charles Johnson (1731), 'Preface', p. ii. Johnson is referring to George Buchanan's Latin translation of *Medea* (published Edinburgh 1544), and Pierre Corneille's French tragedy *Médée*, first performed in the Théâtre du Marais in Paris in 1634.
11. Charles Johnson (1731), 62, 66–7.
12. *Ibid.*, 'Preface', pp. i–ii.
13. *Ibid.* 37–8.
14. *Ibid.*, 'Preface', pp. iii, viii.
15. Mark Jackson (1996), 40, 120–3, 142–3.
16. See Doddington (1809), 192. Although Glover's tragedy was first published in 1761, references here are to the *New English Theatre* edition of 1777.
17. See Stern (1940), 123–6.
18. Davies (1780), i, 132, 86.
19. It was revived by Mrs Yates at Drury Lane in 1776 and 1779, and by Mrs Pope (formerly Miss Younge) at Covent Garden in Mar. 1792: see Hogan (1968), i. 30, 243; ii. 1440. Although Mrs Siddons is not otherwise known to have played *Medea*, the cast-list for a 1790 edition of Glover's tragedy suggests that she had appeared in the role at Drury Lane, and an engraving held at Yale (Yale D.H.3.12, 011) portrays her as *Medea*, wearing a leopard-skin sash and a striped shawl.
20. See Hall (1999a), 275–80.
21. Glover (1799), 'Preface', 3.
22. Glover (1777), 11, 12, 3.
23. *Ibid.* 12.
24. *Ibid.* 48.
25. Anderson (1795), 471.
26. Banks (1679), 50. On Banks's plays as the forerunners of 'She-Tragedy', see Waith (1971), 267–9.
27. See Ashby (1927), 8–9 and n. 1.
28. See Howe (1992), 39–43.
29. Rymer (1678), 92.



30. Ibid. 79–80.
31. Ibid. 82, 93–8.
32. See Ballaster (1996), 279–80.
33. See Rothstein (1967), 153.
34. Dennis (1700), 60.
35. Ibid. 3–4.
36. Brissenden (1974), 29.
37. Roberts (1989), 94.
38. Davenant (1677), 'Prologue'.
39. See Roberts (1989), 95–126.
40. Boyer (1700), 'Preface'.
41. Boyer quoted in Britton (1967), 18; see Wilson (1958), 19–20, 55, 88.
42. Rothstein (1967), 141–4.
43. See Payne (1995).
44. On Mary Betterton, see Gilder (1931), 151–60.
45. Davies (1784), iii. 467–9.
46. Victor (1761), ii. 56–8.
47. Foote (1747), 10. See also Taylor (1972) and Barnett (1987).
48. Foote (1747), 18.
49. Glover (1777), 27.
50. Oulton (1796), ii. 204–9.
51. Cited in Kelly (1936), 54–5.
52. Cited in Clifford (1947), 119.
53. 'A Young Lady' (1698), 49, 52. On women dramatists of this era, see Morgan (1981) and Ballaster (1996), 273–83.
54. On this term, see Gildon (1702), 27.
55. See Robe (1723) and Anon. (1723).
56. Rowe was probably the author of an important anonymous translation of Sophocles' *Ajax* (Anon. 1714). On the question of its authorship see Ingram (1965).
57. Rowe (1705), 8. See Burns (1974), 68, 77–8.
58. Ibid. 138–40.
59. There were, of course, a few exceptions, including the *Oedipus* of Dryden and Lee, which enjoyed several 18th-c. revivals, and James Thomson's *Agamemnon*.
60. Gildon (1698), 'Prologue'.
61. Ibid., 'Preface'.
62. Dennis (1939), 128.
63. Charles Johnson (1710), 'Dedication'; see Zimbardo (1986), 216–17.
64. Ibid. 206.
65. See Mullan (1988), 18–19, 31.
66. West (1726), 'Prologue'.
67. These tracts are discussed in Winton (1974).
68. Brissenden (1974), 70.
69. Boyer (1700), 'Preface'.
70. See Chalmers (1810), xviii. 169.
71. Delap (1762), 'Prologue'.
72. Whitehead (1778); Jodrell (1781), 247, 230–1.
73. Delap (1762), 35.

74. Sherbo (1957).
75. See the discussion of 'sentimentalism' in Brissenden (1974), 27-9.
76. Bernbaum (1958), 2.
77. See e.g. Babbitt (1919), 132.
78. Thomson (1738), 4.
79. Ashby (1927), 171-2.
80. *Ibid.* 170-1.
81. Edmund Smith (1707). On this important English interpretation of the Phaedra myth, in which Smith turns back beyond Racine to Euripides (and which John Dennis also planned to dramatize), see Eccles (1922), 9-10.
82. *Tatler* no. 82, quoted in Bernbaum (1958), 111.
83. Lynch (1953), 21, 38.
84. Gregory (1774), cited in Jones (1990), 49.
85. See Lynch (1953), 38.
86. See Sherbo (1957), 2.
87. See Perry (1994), 21.
88. See MacMillan (1994), 88.
89. Heilbronner (1986), 108.
90. 'Philogamus' (1739), quoted in Jones (1990), 77; *ibid.* 57-8.
91. Mullan (1988), 61.
92. Delap (1781), 14, 26, 31, 62, 65-7.
93. Mullan (1988), 216-19, 230.
94. Glover (1777), 39-40.
95. Gildon (1718), i. 200.
96. Dennis (1693), in Springarn (1909), iii. 150.
97. See Ballaster (1996), 280 and n. 28.
98. Jones (1990), 11, 59.
99. See Hall (1997*b*).
100. Boyer (1714), 'Preface'.
101. West (1726), 'Epilogue', 5-7.
102. *Ibid.*, p. iv.
103. Anon. (1726), 12.
104. See Macintosh (1997), Hall (1999*b*).
105. See Hall (1999*c*).
106. Thackeray (1974), 89.
107. See Hall (1999*c*). I should like to thank Clare Brant, Jo Innes, Fiona Macintosh, Fiona Stafford, and Peggy Reynolds for their help and invaluable references.

## CHAPTER 4



# Medea Transposed: Burlesque and Gender on the Mid-Victorian Stage

*Fiona Macintosh*

In an essay entitled 'The Womanly Woman' published in *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891), George Bernard Shaw refers to the quickly fading romantic ideal following completion of the marriage ceremony. Shaw informs us that:

The wife finds that her husband is neglecting her for his business; that his interests, his activities, his whole life except that one part of it to which only a cynic referred before her marriage, lies away from home; and that her business is to sit there and mope until she is wanted. Then what can she do? If she complains, he, the self-helper, can do without her; whilst she is dependent on him for her position, her livelihood, her place in society, her home, her very bread [. . .]<sup>1</sup>

A little further on in the essay, Shaw goes on to compare the sites of endurance that await each party:

The domestic career is no more natural to all women than the military career is natural to all men; and although in a population emergency it might become necessary for every able-bodied woman to risk her life in childbed just as it might become necessary in a military emergency for every man to risk his life in a battlefield, yet even then it would by no means follow that the child-bearing would endow the mother with domestic aptitudes and capacities as it would endow her with milk.<sup>2</sup>

In 1891 Shaw's unnamed paradigm is, of course, Nora Helmer from Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, which had only recently received its first London production two years earlier in 1889. But the details of these passages—the wandering husband versus the encaged wife; the collocation of childbed and battlefield—bear more than a passing resemblance to

Medea's famous 'Women of Corinth' speech in Euripides' tragedy. And when Shaw approaches the climax of his excursus, it is as if it were the example of Medea herself, the paradigmatic transgressor of duty, that was pointing the 1890s woman towards abandonment of the myth of the 'womanly woman'. Shaw writes:

unless woman repudiates her womanliness, her duty to her husband, to her children, to society, to the law and to everyone but herself, she cannot emancipate herself [. . .]<sup>3</sup>

In 1895 Max Nordau in *Degeneration* provided, amongst other things, a sharp riposte to the advocates of the Ibsenite 'unwomanly woman'. Nordau explains:

With Ibsen woman has no duties and all rights. The tie of marriage does not bind her [. . .]. Woman is always the clever, strong, courageous being; man always the simpleton and coward. In every encounter the wife is victorious, and the man flattened out like a pancake [. . .]. With Ibsen she has even overcome her most primitive instinct—that of motherhood—and abandons her brood without twitching an eyelid when the caprice seizes her to seek satisfactions elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

Nordau's nominal defier of duty is again Nora Helmer, but as with Shaw, he could equally well be offering his reader a commentary on the last two encounters between the Euripidean characters of Jason and Medea.

The perceived links between Euripides and Ibsen at the end of the nineteenth century were regularly commented upon, and not least by Shaw himself. What this chapter seeks to do is to provide some kind of prehistory to that relationship as it was interpreted by Shaw and his contemporaries in Britain at the turn of the century.

In *Degeneration*, Nordau identifies the source of the epidemic that is sweeping through the European theatre as Norwegian; it is, in his estimation, a foreign invasion that is undermining the foundations of the social order. And elsewhere we find the so-called 'unwomanly woman' (better known by the slightly later coinage 'New Woman') being generally designated as an import, either from Norway (as in Nordau) or from other (non-theatrical) genres (from fiction or from popular iconography).<sup>5</sup> But the New Woman's appearance on the British stage at the end of the nineteenth century was not without vernacular precedent. Far from being an import, the prototype for this New Woman can be found in the middle of the century in burlesques on the London stage.



Greek tragic characters, and Greek tragic women in particular, provided one of the staples of the Victorian burlesques. Many of these burlesques lie forgotten in the collection of the Lord Chamberlain's Plays in the British Library. They merit close attention not least because they presuppose, amongst the lower-middle-class audiences at whom they were directed, an altogether greater acquaintance with Greek tragedy than scholarship of the classical tradition has hitherto allowed. But most fascinating of all about these mid-Victorian burlesques, and the burlesques of *Medea* in particular, is the way in which they employ Greek tragic women to explore issues of gender that only come to the fore in the theatre with the emergence of the so-called New Woman of the late Victorian period. In this sense, just as the so-called New Drama of the 1880s, with its roots in the Victorian melodramas of Bulwer-Lytton and Dion Boucicault, can be seen as a culmination rather than a beginning, so the New Woman must be seen as a descendant of earlier *dramatis personae* rather than an interloper from Scandinavia.<sup>6</sup>

The increasing gentrification of the London theatres during the second half of the century had brought a new, narrower moral outlook amongst its audience. But the mid-century theatres with their broader social base were not (as is often still maintained) merely serving up trivial melodrama and extravagant spectacle for an un-discerning public; they were also acting as a relatively radical forum for serious debate.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it appears on close inspection that the difficult ideas touching upon the so-called Woman Question, far from being confined to the novel or treatise,<sup>8</sup> were in fact being publicly debated in widely different kinds of theatre across London from at least the mid-1840s.

Furthermore, the link between the New Woman and her earlier forebears in mid-century burlesques is no better illustrated than by the burlesques of the *Medea*. For with her 'unwomanly' fluent articulation and repudiation of the inequalities of the marital state, and her actions serving as a reminder that motherhood is not something fixed but of necessity redefinable in each context, *Medea* becomes the prototype for the 1890s New Woman.

### The Actress as New Woman

The term 'New Woman' was reputedly first used by the radical novelist Sarah Grand in the *North American Review* in May 1894; and

even if the first usage was a positive one, its adoption in Britain in the last decade of the century was very often prejudicial and derisory. Even before the article in the *North American Review* had appeared, *Punch* magazine printed a now famous cartoon of *Donna Quixote* on 28 April, where the bespectacled New Woman *avant la lettre* is seated in an armchair, wearing sensible, so-called 'rational', and deeply unfeminine dress, a book in one hand, a latchkey in the other, with piles of books as footstools. All aspects of the 1890s stereotype are captured here: the New Woman is perilously independent in mind, body, and fact; and *Donna Quixote's* imperious air and her distinctly masculine posture imply (as is the custom of the stereotype) her deviant sexuality.<sup>9</sup>

In September 1894, Sydney Grundy's play entitled *The New Woman* at the Comedy Theatre set the trend for the treatment of the increasingly vociferous and liberated woman of the period. But Grundy's New Woman who abandons domestic duties to write on 'The Ethics of Marriage' turns out to be a fraud: the New Woman's strengths are thus denied her by being converted into a chimera. And although Grundy's denigration is the most flagrant, the 1890s treatment of the New Woman in English drama generally consists of patriarchal studies of a perceived problem that the dénouement usually defuses or dismisses outright. It is only with the women playwrights of the 1900s, once the social and economic concerns are of uppermost importance, that the New Woman can become the heroine without reneging on her principles.<sup>10</sup>

The greatest irony about the stereotypical treatment of the New Woman in the plays of the 1890s is the fact that the women who acted in them were very often living embodiments of the New Woman themselves.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the Victorian actress herself could be construed as the archetypal New Woman. As Russell Jackson has pointed out, with 'her unusual degree of financial and expressive independence [. . . she was] a paradoxically respectable deviant from the society and (in conservative Victorian accounts) biological norms of class and gender.'<sup>12</sup>

Although respectability was something that the actress in the theatre unequivocally enjoyed in the last third of the century (once the advent of variety and the music hall had acted as conduit for the more morally dubious material), for most of the century the actress could be said to have occupied a precarious position between the Lady of medieval romance and the lady of the street. In 1839, for

example, the terms 'actress' and 'prostitute' are used interchangeably in the press.<sup>13</sup> By working for the stage the actress was twice removed from the life of the average Victorian woman: both by dint of having a career and by having a career moreover that subjected her to the public gaze.<sup>14</sup>

The image of the *prima donna* as free woman in women's fiction, journals, and memoirs has been well documented,<sup>15</sup> and the actress seems to have enjoyed a similarly privileged and/or exceptional status. One such example was the acting career of Helen Taylor (stepdaughter of John Stuart Mill and daughter of Helen Taylor Mill), which she pursued from the 1850s onwards in order to secure independence. And although generally the actresses of nineteenth-century fiction find that the realms of stage and home are rarely reconcilable,<sup>16</sup> there were real-life actresses like Helen Faucit (who in 1845 took the part of Antigone in the famous Mendelssohn *Antigone* in Edinburgh), who were seemingly able to combine fame with domestic stability.

The most interesting of these archetypal New Women in the theatre, for our purposes, was the actress-manager Eliza Vestris, who became the first woman to manage a London theatre when she took over management of the Olympic Theatre in 1831. She not only staged, together with the playwright James Robinson Planché, the first of the classical burlesques that were to prove so popular during the course of the century; she also appeared as Medea in Planché's *The Golden Fleece*, which was staged in 1845 in the wake of the success of the Mendelssohn *Antigone*.

Vestris was a suitable choice for Medea, with her dark features and exotic (Regency) past as a *diva* in Italian opera. But it was not only her previous professional appearances as *prima donna* that marked her out as a free woman; she could also be said to embody the independence of mind and body that the role entailed in her professional life beyond the stage. In her first curtain speech at the Olympic, she proudly proclaimed:

Noble and gentle—matrons—patrons—friends!  
 Before you here a vent'rous woman bends!  
 A warrior woman—that in strife embarks  
 The first of all dramatic Joan of Arcs.  
 Cheer on the enterprise thus dared by me!  
 The first that ever led a company.<sup>17</sup>

If Medea the outsider transgressed boundaries, so too did Madame



Vestris (as she was somewhat reverentially and exotically known); but unlike her Greek *persona*, Eliza Vestris crossed boundaries with a pioneering spirit and apparently without blame.<sup>18</sup>

### Medea, Maternity, and the Marital State

John Stuart Mill in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) wrote that 'the wife is the actual bond-servant of her husband', yet worse than a slave because she is unable to turn down the 'last familiarity' of her husband.<sup>19</sup> Whereas late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century farce, like comedy, had generally culminated in the marriage ceremony, the Victorian period tended to find that 'marriage was more often where the troubles began'.<sup>20</sup>

It was not until 1857, with the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act, that divorce was finally legalized for those below the aristocracy in England; and under the terms of the Act, women, whilst still experiencing inequalities with regard to access to divorce, were at last able to protect their own property from their estranged or former husband's clutches, and to remarry. The figure of Medea, the abandoned wife and mother, was adopted and adapted on the stage to illuminate the discussion about divorce legislation from, at least, the mid-1840s onwards.<sup>21</sup>

Planché's *The Golden Fleece* was regularly revived after its first production in 1845, not least because of the increasing topicality of the predicament of Medea in the wake of the public debate about divorce. By 1868, in a review in *The Athenaeum* of Augusta Webster's translation of *Medea* (Webster was an associate of Mill), the reviewer could write:

the subject, if not grand, is one of general interest, being confined to no time, place or class of society. It is also one which a lady might naturally be expected to handle with success as she must be able to enter fully into the feelings of the unfortunate heroine in her distressing condition.<sup>22</sup>

And in 1870 when Percy Fitzgerald writes about the reception of Planché's *The Golden Fleece*, he claims that: 'The story of 'The Golden Fleece' is, of course, familiar to all,—at least in its broad outline.'<sup>23</sup>

That by 1870 the story of Medea was broadly familiar to many is more than borne out by its production history on the London stage, which includes the extraordinary account of the performance of John Heraud's version entitled *Medea in Corinth* that played to packed



houses in the vast auditorium at the Standard Theatre for twelve nights in 1859 (see Macintosh, Ch. 1). But at the time of the first production of Planché's *The Golden Fleece* in 1845, Medea would have been a relatively unknown figure in British theatrical circles. Indeed, it would have been only through her operatic incarnations that she would have been familiar, and most notably through the recent interpretation by Madame Pasta at the King's Theatre, London in Giovanni Simone Mayr's *Medea in Corinto*, which opened in June 1826 and was regularly revived until 1837 (see Reynolds, Ch. 6).

Planché's burlesque is unusual in not being inspired by a play that was currently in the repertoire of the London theatres. Instead it is Franz Grillparzer's Austrian trilogy *Das Goldene Vließ* that lies behind Planché's play. Grillparzer's version, with its sympathetic portrait of Medea, had enjoyed enormous popularity elsewhere in Europe (see Macintosh, Ch. 1). But in choosing to write a burlesque of a play that was largely unknown to a London audience, Planché was not as foolhardy as may at first appear.

Members of the audience may not have been familiar with the details of the story of Medea, but many would have very recently become acquainted with the formal elements of Greek tragedy, and especially with its chorus, through the much-acclaimed production of the Mendelssohn *Antigone*, which was performed at Covent Garden earlier in January after causing a considerable stir at the Odéon in Paris the previous year.<sup>24</sup> Planché would have had particular reason for following the fortunes of the German *Antigone*, since as early as 1838 he had been approached by Mendelssohn himself to write the libretto, but his lengthy correspondence with the composer had come to nothing.<sup>25</sup>

Planché's play of 1845 and the three other burlesques I want to concentrate on in this chapter—Jack Wooler's (= Frank Sikes's) *Jason and Medea* (1851), Robert Brough's *Medea; or, the Best of Mothers, with a Brute of a Husband*, and Mark Lemon's *Medea; or, a Libel on the Lady of Colchis* (both 1856)—are all written around the time of the divorce reforms, and all contribute to that debate in significant ways. In Planché's play (written shortly after the debate had begun in Parliament), Jason threatens Medea with a 'Scotch divorce' at a time when in Scotland, unlike England in 1845, judicial divorce permitting remarriage was available to all. In 1851, in the working-class Grecian Saloon in London's East End, Jack Wooler's *Jason and Medea* focuses on Jason's flagrant cruelty and his callous rejection of Medea, who has

no life (literally and metaphorically) without a husband. In 1856 the editor of *Punch*, Mark Lemon, and the radical poet-playwright, Robert Brough, both wrote burlesques of Ernest Legouv e's *Medea* (see Macintosh, Ch. 1), in which they highlighted the penury to which the abandoned wife was subjected. All these plays assume a familiarity with the figure of Medea as deserted, wretched wife at a time when women's inequalities in the marital state were being publicly debated.

Medea, now thanks to the focus of debate surrounding the legislation, is less the monstrous infanticide than the wronged, abandoned wife. But she is not simply the traditional victim of melodrama; on the contrary, as is typical of the heroines of the burlesque tradition that adopted her so readily, she has cunning, resolve, and experience behind her that enable and indeed force her to break out of the traditional Victorian feminine mould.

Medea ends up killing her children in at least two of the mid-century burlesques—most chillingly in Lemon's onstage murder. Grillparzer's version, which lies behind Planch e's play, had focused on Medea the infanticide in order to mitigate her actions (see Macintosh, Ch. 1). Whilst the English theatrical tradition in the eighteenth century strove to avoid presenting Medea as infanticide at all costs (see Hall, Ch. 3), changing political and social circumstances in Britain at this time meant that infanticide had become a pressing and unavoidable concern. From at least the 1850s onwards, infanticide was deemed by journalists and letter-writers to the national press to have reached epidemic proportions.<sup>26</sup> Filicide provides, albeit in a late eighteenth-century context, the subject-matter for George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859); and in 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' (1864), Matthew Arnold cites a case of alleged infanticide as a reminder of the realities that reside behind self-satisfied myths about Victorian culture.<sup>27</sup>

However, by 1893 the most liberal of Ibsenite critics, William Archer, is unable to support an emotionally charged report of the crime of infanticide on the stage, when Florence Bell and Elizabeth Robins's play *Alan's Wife* was produced anonymously.<sup>28</sup> The New Woman plays may well have been breaking into taboo territory; but it was territory that had already been invaded by other combatants, and notably other theatrical combatants, albeit comically, in the mid-century burlesques of *Medea*.

### Performing Medea in Burlesque

Madame Vestris took the part of Medea in Planché's *The Golden Fleece*, but as a regular actress in burlesque, her most common role was the breeches part. In Planché's extravaganza she played opposite Priscilla Horton as Jason, who like Madame Vestris, was renowned above all for her shapely legs.<sup>29</sup>

The reluctance on the part of Victorian interviewers to mention male impersonation has led commentators to wonder whether this signals its relative unimportance or its perilous nature.<sup>30</sup> It may well be that: 'Transsexual casting was one way to give women the sort of mythic adventures [others imagined].'<sup>31</sup> For like the New Woman of the 1890s, when Priscilla Horton performed in Planché's burlesque of *Medea*, she wore unfeminine garb: not male attire, but a costume that was symbolically different from the voluminous Victorian petticoats. Therefore the burlesque actress was not only a woman of independent means through her pursuit of a career: by being clad in a costume that foreshadowed the famous knickerbockers of the *fin de siècle*, she enjoyed a freedom of movement that the normally restricted female body could never hope to share.

The hallmark of burlesque, where deviancy from and disjunction with an original or a norm is the source of the comedy, was its cross-dressing of both sexes. Naturalist representation of the male, at least, was not apparently the aim of the breeches role.<sup>32</sup> In the 1856 burlesques of Brough and Lemon, however, the part of Medea was taken by men, Frederick Robson and Edward Wright respectively. In both plays the actors seem to have played their roles all too naturalistically. Percy Fitzgerald was alone in finding the cross-dressing of Medea in Brough's play unconvincing, when he commended Vestris's interpretation over Frederick Robson because 'when played by a man, this perversion is always intruding—it takes the whole thing out of the range of possibility.'<sup>33</sup>

Robson's unique capacity for providing comedy upon a foundation of pathos was widely acknowledged; and in Brough's play he gained support for Medea's plight in wide circles. Charles Dickens, Henry Morley (Professor of English Literature in University College London), and the Cambridge undergraduate F. C. Burnand were all overwhelmed by the power of Robson's performance. Morley praises Robson's 'wonderful burlesque of *Medea*, wherein he seems to have reached the climax of success in personating jealousy by a wild



mingling of the terrible with the grotesque'.<sup>34</sup> Burnand, writing some years after the early performances, recalls Robson's 'best days at the Olympic', when he took the parts of Shylock and Medea with equal conviction.<sup>35</sup> Edward Wright was noted as one of the finest comedians of his generation, and yet as Medea in Lemon's burlesque, he made reviewers see only 'the wronged wife, the wretched woman, demanding sympathy and forbidding laughter'.<sup>36</sup>

The Theatres Regulation Act of 1843 concerned itself, amongst other things, with the dangers inherent in the ambiguity of cross-dressed roles. It has been suggested that it may be possible to see a subversive consciousness at play beyond the evident sex-appeal of the male impersonations.<sup>37</sup> If we look at the burlesques of Euripides' *Medea*, where both men and women (to borrow Froma Zeitlin's phrase) 'play the Other',<sup>38</sup> it is clear that on some occasions, at least, there is a serious manipulation of Victorian gender boundaries in the cross-dressed roles, which raises questions that come to dominate the stage in the last decade of the century.

Medea had appeared in burlesques since at least the early eighteenth century in France, when she was the anti-heroine in Dominique and Lelio fils's parody of Longepierre's *Médée*, *La méchante femme* (1728; see Ch. 1). At the end of the century Cherubini's opera *Médée* (1797) alone had inspired three parodies in the same year, C. Sewrin's *La Sorcière* (27 March), P. A. Capelle and P. Villiers's *Bébé et Jargon* (Théâtre Montasier, 28 March), and 'Citizen' Bizet and H. Chaussier's *Médée ou l'Hôpital des Fous* (Théâtre de l'Ambigu, 15 April).<sup>39</sup> In the same decade in London, Medea appeared in slightly different guise, when she starred in the enormously popular 1792 Easter pantomime at Sadler's Wells, entitled *Medea's Kettle*. Here her magical skills were successfully deployed to assist Harlequin and Columbine in their efforts to thwart the cruel machinations of the Old Hag.<sup>40</sup>

The English burlesques of the mid-nineteenth century were not fringe events. The playwright, F. C. Burnand, recalls of the early 1850s: Burlesque [. . .] was not a mere leg-display, for the ballet was still in existence as an attractive part of the entertainment, but it was acted, with a purpose [. . .] and the burlesque, or extravaganza, occupied an important position in the evening's programme.<sup>41</sup>

And since almost every successful opera, drama, and melodrama was promptly burlesqued from at least 1815 onwards, it was both a well-established and deeply popular art form. Furthermore, along with



melodrama, farce, and pantomime, it shared a relatively broadly based audience, which was in some ways more open to new ideas than the more socially homogeneous, more solidly bourgeois, audience of the last two decades of the century.<sup>42</sup>

Heroic tragedy enjoyed a brief revival in the 1830s in England with the plays of Bulwer-Lytton and Talfourd,<sup>43</sup> but in the hands of these playwrights the 'domestication' of the ancients had perhaps reached its limit. In the absence of any heroic tragedy, classical burlesque in the mid-Victorian period seems, in some senses, to have filled its place.<sup>44</sup> Classical burlesque had traditionally provided domestic and mundane settings to undermine the status of its subjects, and now this domesticity—with the examples of heroic tragedy, perhaps, in mind—was not simply used to comic, but now serious effect too.

Legouvé's *Médée* opened to great acclaim at the Théâtre-Italien in Paris on 8 April 1856 (see Macintosh, Ch. 1), and shortly afterwards on 9 June the burlesque of Cogniard, Grange, and Bourdois entitled *La Médée en Nanterre* appeared at the Théâtre des Variétés. Like the two English burlesques of Legouvé's version by Lemon and Brough of the same year, it is the multilingual layers of the performance—a French version of a Greek tragedy is now being performed in an Italian translation in Paris—that provide the source of much amusement. But there the similarities between the French and English burlesques seem to end. In *La Médée en Nanterre* the characters are all attached to a circus troupe, with Créon as the manager of the acrobats and Créuse as the high-wire dancer; Médée is a fortune teller and Jason earns his living as a fairground wrestler.<sup>45</sup> Whilst Mark Lemon's acrobatic and knifethrowing Jason bears more than a passing resemblance to his French counterpart, the English burlesques generally enjoy a much closer relationship with their tragic sources.

Indeed, what is striking about English tragedy and burlesque in general at this time is the extent to which the separate genres become intermeshed in the minds of audiences. George Henry Lewes's comments on the performance of the famous Italian actress, Adelaide Ristori, in the part of Medea in Legouvé's play are illustrative in this regard. Lewes recalls of a revival of this production:

[Ristori] completely conquered me in *Medea*; and the conquest was all the more noticeable, because it triumphed over the impressions previously received from Robson's burlesque imitation.<sup>46</sup>

The inference, of course, is that Lewes did not see Ristori as Medea

during her first London tour, whereas he had seen and been overwhelmed by Robson's performance in Robert Brough's burlesque. But since Robson's performance is here cited alongside that of a leading tragedienne of the European stage, Lewes's comments are also testimony to the power and seriousness of Robson's burlesque interpretation of the role. And the illustrations bear testimony to the uncanny resemblances between the two actors as they performed *Medea* (see figs. 5 and 6).

Elsewhere Lewes explains the success of a revival of Planché's *The Golden Fleece* with reference to the extraordinary self-discipline of the actors, who were able to engender both hilarity and credulity in the audience at one and the same time. Burlesque, in Lewes's formulation, is rooted in the real world; and he maintains that the finest of burlesque acting can 'show that acting burlesque is the gross personation of a character, not the outrageous defiance of all character; the personation has truth, although the character itself may be preposterously drawn.'<sup>47</sup>

Lewes is no lone voice in his high estimation of the genre. The degree of seriousness attached to burlesque by the 1850s can also be gauged by the fact that Cambridge undergraduates, according to Burnand, found it difficult to distinguish between tragedy and burlesque: of his fellow thespians in the Amateur Dramatic Club, he recalls:

at that time [Lent Term 1854] we probably mistook tragedy for burlesque, and burlesque for tragedy [. . .]. We were constantly seeing Robson [. . .] when in his burlesque he touched the very line of tragedy [. . .]<sup>48</sup>

Moreover, with Greek tragedy's combination of speech and song having been rediscovered with the Mendelssohn *Antigone*, it was the burlesque (with its initially legally enforced fusion of the words and music)<sup>49</sup> that turned out, paradoxically, most fitted to recapture the form of the original.

### Burlesquing *Medea*

Planché chose to distinguish between 'burlesque' and his own 'extravaganzas' by claiming that burlesque was 'the broad caricature of a tragedy', whilst extravaganza was 'the whimsical treatment of a poetical subject.'<sup>50</sup> It seems to have been the degree of seriousness with which Planché took his original, combined with no small amount of finesse, that secured his leadership in the field, and set exacting standards for his successors. If 'polysyllabic loquacity'<sup>51</sup> could



ADELAIDE RISTORI AS MEDEA

5. Anonymous, Adelaide Ristori as Medea, *c.*1856 (engraving).  
Ernest Legouvé's adaptation, performed at the  
Lyceum Theatre, London



6. Frederick Robson as Medea, c.1856 (photograph).  
Robert Brough's *Medea; or, the Best of Mothers,*  
*with a Brute of a Husband*, performed at the  
Royal Olympic Theatre, London



be claimed to be the hallmark of the burlesque, then Planché combined such linguistic pyrotechnics with ingenious allusiveness.

As a leading founder of the British Archaeological Association in 1843, Planché was at the forefront of the movement towards historical accuracy in scenic and costume design; and the extravaganzas he put on with Eliza Vestris at the Olympic have rightly been considered to be forerunners of the naturalistic plays of the 1880s onwards.<sup>52</sup> And it was the much-admired archaeological accuracy of the Mendelssohn *Antigone* at Covent Garden that made Planché choose a Greek subject for his extravaganza in 1845, so that he was able, amongst other things, to comment on its style of presentation.

When Fitzgerald writes about the play in 1870, he is uncertain that Planché's modifications of the formal elements of the original would have been widely appreciated in the 1840s.<sup>53</sup> At Covent Garden in 1845 there had been the first serious attempt in recent theatre history to replicate the multiple performance levels of the ancient Greek theatre, with actors and a singing chorus being allocated separate spaces; and the Covent Garden set with its raised acting stage was adopted by Planché at the Haymarket. Many members of Planché's early audiences would now have been more than casually acquainted with the formal elements of the original, and no doubt equally alert to their comic potential.

The vast chorus of sixty male members in the Covent Garden *Antigone* had been singled out for special derision in the 18 January issue of the newly emergent satirical magazine, *Punch*. And the chorus of sixty (which occupied the lower stage) at Covent Garden was comically (and economically) reduced to a chorus of one at the Haymarket, in the person of Charles Mathews, perhaps the finest comedian of the day and soon to be Madame Vestris's second husband. The part of Chorus provided Mathews with the ideal vehicle for his perfectly controlled and understated comic delivery. The programmatic prologue, paratragically modelled on the Euripidean divine prologues, is delivered by the Chorus, who explains the conventions and the conveniences of the ancient Greek chorus to the uninitiated:

Friends, countrymen, lovers, first listen to me,  
I'm the Chorus; whatever you hear or you see  
That you don't understand, I shall rise to explain—  
It's a famous old fashion that's come up again,



JASON I mean an iron crow, to force the gate  
Which she has bolted.

MEDEA (*within*) Fool, thou art too late! (p. 169)

With Medea's disappearance thunderclaps are heard, and the palace miraculously sinks to reveal Medea '*in a chariot drawn by two fiery dragons, amidst the clouds*' (p. 170). And then in a rewrite of the plot, Medea turns out to have deceived both chorus and audience by merely pretending to have 'flogged' her boys.

Planché, as he explains in his Argument to the play, has chosen to 'redeem the character of the unfortunate heroine'; he claims (mistakenly) to be following the historian Aelian in maintaining that the Euripidean account of Medea's infanticide was written following a bribe from the Corinthians, who were themselves the guilty party (see Macintosh, Ch. 1). And like Grillparzer, Planché chooses to inform his audience of Medea's prehistory in order to present her case in the most sympathetic light. In Part I not only do we see Jason's utter dependence on Medea for his early successes, we also learn that it was Jason, not Medea, who killed Apsyrtus when he 'Let fly a blow that would have felled an ox, / Black'd both his precious eyes, before so blue, / And from his nose the vital claret drew' (p. 158).

Planché, with his male chorus of one, has of necessity done away with the 'Women of Corinth' speech, replacing the general complaint of the Euripidean Medea with an account of personal grievance sung to the tune of 'The Fine Young English Gentleman'. This Medea has to put up with her absentee husband, who abandons her and the children to a dubious fate in cramped lodgings, whilst he is happily ensconced in the palace, lavishly entertaining his royal mistress. But this poor Medea (because of the absence of divorce legislation) cannot be shot of her thankless burden:

He leaves me to darn his stockings, and mope in the house all day,  
Whilst he treats her to see 'Antigone', with a box at the Grecian play,  
Then goes off to sup with Corinthian Tom, or whoever, he meets  
by the way,  
And staggers home in a state of beer, like (I'm quite ashamed to say)  
A fine young Grecian gentleman,  
One of the classic time. (p. 161)

Moreover, Planché's male Chorus, far from being sympathetic to Medea's plight, delivers a deeply misogynistic view of the perils of

Cupid on a young man's heart in the place of the Euripidean ode in praise of moderation (pp. 167–8, cf. *E. Med.* 627–62).

However, Planché's handling of the events of the plot would seem to fly in the face of the Chorus's assessment. Not only does his Medea draw the line at internecine killing, she also has little difficulty in winning over her audience to her side with an adversary in Jason, who is a drunken, cowardly, and serial philanderer. And when she turns to the audience in the last moments of the play to appeal to the Grand Jury—a punning plea, both to continue the theatrical run and to reach a judicial settlement in favour of the wronged woman—there is little doubt that the audience's sympathies are expected to lie with her (pp. 170–1).

Like Planché, Jack Wooler's *Jason and Medea* begins with the events of Book 3 of Apollonius Rhodius' epic of the third century BC, *Argonautica*, in imitation of Grillparzer's trilogy, to which it too owes considerable debt. Whereas Planché comically alludes to the stage conventions of the Greek original when he avoids enacting the capture of the fleece ('You'll think, perhaps, you should have seen him do it / But 'tisn't classical—you'll hear, not view it' (p. 155)), Wooler chooses to entertain his audience with the very spectacles that Planché so tantalizingly denies. Act I alone shifts from the clouds above Olympus, to a rocky and desolate island (where the Argonauts have landed), to the city of Aetes (with the Euxine Sea behind), all with the help of Mercury's wand. It then moves on to Hecate's temple at Medea's behest ('Melt tower and town! Rise, Hecate's shrine! behold!'),<sup>56</sup> before passing through the Field of Mars, the dragon's lair, and ending up at the port from which the *Argo* escapes.

However, as with Planché's treatment of the myth, the most notable effect of including the background to the events in Corinth is to enhance Medea's case. At the end of Act I when Jason has overcome the dragon with Medea's aid, he proclaims parodying a Byronic rhyme:<sup>57</sup>

The fleece is mine—and it shall ever be a  
Pledge of my passion for my own Medea. (p. 290)

But as soon as they arrive in Colchis, the philanderer forgoes his pledge to the popular tune of 'Jeanette and Jeanot':

Come conscience—I have loved you full a year  
One can't be constant constantly my dear. (p. 299)



Yet Wooler's Medea has shown herself to be a match for male tyranny from the first act, when she sings a song in defiance of her father's threats of restraint:

If all girls had my spirit—they wouldn't thus be done—  
I'd rather wed our butcher boy than ever be a nun. (p. 28)

Jason in Corinth seems to have forgotten Medea's powers of sorcery, which enabled her to stage-manage events for him in Act I, and which assist her now in melting towers and towns, and conjuring devils in a darkened wood.

Like Grillparzer's Medea, Wooler's heroine is pushed to the limits by the savage cruelties of a Jason, who deliberately flaunts his latest conquest. Even Creusa pities Medea's public humiliation, although her pity comes too late to avoid the wrath of Medea, who contrives for her a combusted, onstage end. This Medea merely kills her rival, not her own (here absent) children. Triumphant Medea magics herself away into the ether with the help of a white sheet, leaving a cursing Jason to fall and fatally crack his head. In the final moments of Wooler's play she re-emerges at the back of the stage in a chariot, agreeing to revive Jason with the Golden Fleece if he will only take her back as wife. The revived Jason ends the play with these utterly implausible lines:

My own dear Medea, all your grief is past  
You were my first love and shall be my last. (p. 308)

Marriage here at all costs is to be favoured over desertion, because in 1851 an abandoned Medea had no future whatsoever.

Both Planché and Wooler offer to some extent patriarchal studies of a woman *in extremis*, in which the male adversary is somewhat muted by the breeches role of Jason. But this complaint cannot be levelled at the burlesques of 1856, which were written in direct response to the London production of Legouvé's adaptation of *Medea* with Adelaide Ristori in the title role. Both Robert Brough's *Medea; or, The Best of Mothers, with a Brute of a Husband* and Mark Lemon's *Medea; or, a Libel on the Lady of Colchis* opened on 14 July, at the Olympic and Adelphi Theatres respectively.

As with the French burlesque of Legouvé's play, the fact that the London audience was being treated to an Italian translation of a French version of a Greek tragedy did not escape the wit of the English writers. In Brough's play, the penury of the deserted wife is

underlined in what is initially a hilarious begging scene, in which the younger of Jason and Medea's sons wears a placard round his neck with the word 'orphans' in four 'languages': first inscribed in Greek letters, then translated into French (Orphelins), Italian (Orfani), and English respectively. And at one point, Medea is driven to distraction by the plurality of linguistic options available to her for revenge:

'Sangue! sangue! Straziar spezzar suo cuore,'  
Which means, translated, something red and gory.  
'Unche di spaventos atroce strano'—  
Murder in Irish! No—Italiano!  
'Ai! Ai! Dia mow Kephalas flox owrania,  
'By-ee tiddy moi zeen èté Kurdos'—  
Stop, that's Euripides!

'Du sang! du sang!'

'Briser torturer son cœur—oui!'

That's wrong!

I've got confused with all these versions jinglish—  
Thunder and turf!—And even that's not English.<sup>58</sup>

In the prologue to Mark Lemon's play, Creon explains:

If your Italian scholarship's complete  
And you can pay a guinea for your seat  
Go, and applaud an artist truly grand  
And don't be proud because you understand.  
But if your stock of choice Italian's small  
And the wife wants the guinea towards her shawl  
You're better where you are—You'll get a notion  
Of what has thrown the town into commotion.  
While our Medea here is doubly strong  
Its twice as moral, and not half as long.<sup>59</sup>

That Lemon's *Medea* is 'twice as moral' is open to doubt, but it is true that his audience is being offered a remarkably close rendering of Legouv e's version, albeit in another key.

Lemon's protagonist is hardened by the experience of poverty and toil, and has little demonstrable feeling for the children. When Jason says that the children 'weigh immensely on my mind', Medea complains:

And so they ought, for it's three years old chap  
Since for those kids you've paid a single rap—  
It's difficult to say what brats were made for  
Unless to teach us 'Children must be paid for.' (p. 26)

After Jason has threatened Medea with deportation (he cannot afford the £2,000 necessary for a divorce) and claimed custody of the children, Medea begins to execute her revenge. When Glauce comes to warn Medea of her imminent deportation, the princess's altruistic motives are misconstrued by Medea, whose avenging hand fatally daubs her victim's cheeks with black (poisonous) face-paint. When the police arrive with a warrant for Medea's arrest, Jason announces his intention of sending the children to boarding school. Medea calls the boys over to bid them farewell, and in a startling and unprecedented *coup de théâtre*, she stabs them both onstage for all to see:

Stay stop a word or two  
 Children come hither I am sent away  
 And therefore I have only this to say  
 That if your father thinks he's served me out  
 He'll alter his opinion I've no doubt—  
 As witness this and this

[*Stabs children there and now*] (p. 16)

The 'moral', to which the Prologue refers, is the deeply ironic coda that is self-consciously appended to Lemon's play. Addressing Medea, Jason unconvincingly claims:

Yes, had you kept this business off your hands  
 And like Griselda bowed to my commands,  
 I had forgiven you for my past desertion  
 And spent my life with you without coercion. (p. 17)

Medea apologizes for any 'aggravation' she has caused, pays reparation by restoring both Glauce (with the aid of a damp towel) and her boys (by ordering them to 'look alive'). She is then miraculously united in embrace with Jason, proclaiming her own (significantly unreciprocated) undying love.

Whilst Lemon's play apparently raises questions merely to sidestep them in the final moments, what is new in his burlesque is an attempt to provide an exploration of, as well as an explanation for, the hardening of feelings in Medea. Even the comic defence of Lemon's Medea by Orpheus in Act I has its serious edge:

A woman's face grows haggard who reflects  
 All day upon her husband's base neglects.  
 And it don't mend her temper to consider  
 That tho' a wife she's lonely as a widder.

As for the other charges you have filed  
My classical Lothario—draw it mild. (p. 5)

However, in Robert Brough's *Medea* we have an even more convincing portrayal of the process of Medea's hardening. Like Lemon, Brough places great emphasis on the penury to which Medea and the children have been reduced, as they too are forced to beg for their survival. Medea's begging patter starts as a rewrite of the 'Women of Corinth' speech before taking on a life of its own, in which the pathos engendered almost eclipses the comic realization that Medea is offering a kind of confidence trick to the passers-by:

My Grecian friends, with deep humiliation  
I stand in this disgraceful situation,  
Though unaccustom'd publicly to speak,  
I have not tasted food since Tuesday week.  
Three sets of grinders out of work you see,  
Through the invention of machinery.

A landlord, as inclement as the weather,  
Has seiz'd our flock bed—we were out of feather.

Shoeless and footsore, I've through many lands  
Walked, with this pair of kids upon my hands.  
The tear of infancy requests you'll stop it—  
(*looking round*)

Bother! there's no one looking at us—drop it! (p. 11)

Indeed, thenceforth there are constant shifts in tone and register that reflect the human and superhuman sides of Medea herself. She pursues vengeance with Marlovian gusto, but only after having been driven to the limits of endurance by the supremely arrogant Jason, who pronounces his intention to strip her of her children as well as her marital status:

MEDEA (*giving vent to her suppressed passion*)

Now drop it! I can't stand it any longer!

Oh, gods celestial and gods infernal!

Oh, powers of mischief—dark and sempiternal!

Demons above, and deities below,

I ask ye sternly—isn't this a go? (p. 23)

She tries to smother her feelings for her children at their farewell, and (as with Legouv e's version) is reduced to a state of despair and hurt at the possibility that Creusa has poisoned their hearts against their mother. When she reads the note that they have brought from Creusa,



which promises to restore the children and to give her money, the stage direction describes her '*wholly overcome by this sympathy, stands trembling—crushing the letter in her hand; then she falls sobbing on her knees, embracing her two children, who have knelt on each side*' (p. 33). The author's note to the acting edition of the text at this point instructs all the characters that '*the action must be conducted [from now on until the end . . .] as in tragedy*' (p. 33 n.).

In direct imitation of the French version, as Brough's Medea hears the rabble approaching, she enfolds her children in her robes to protect them. When Creon threatens to seize the boys, it is already too late as '*Medea is seen standing alone, on steps [. . .] quivering with emotion—reeking knife in her hand*' (p. 34). Then the tragedy finally gives way to wish-fulfilment with the dagger turning into a jester's bauble as Medea is on the verge of killing Jason, and with Creusa being brought back onstage miraculously revived.

However, what is different about Medea's final speech in comparison with the endings of Wooler's and Lemon's plays, is that Brough's coda is not simply deeply ironic; it is a flagrant denial of any such attempts to rewrite the story of Medea. Brough's heroine turns to the audience in the final moments of the play, flanked by her revived children, and exclaims:

What can a poor, lone, helpless woman do—  
 Battled on all sides—but appeal to you? (*To audience*)  
 My plot destroyed—my damages made good.  
 They'd change my very nature if they could.  
 Don't let them—rather aid me to pursue  
 My murd'rous career the season through;  
 Repentance is a thought that I abhor,  
 What I have done don't make me sorry for. (p. 34)

Behind the traditional plea for the audience's support is an unequivocal call for endorsement of all that the New Woman stood for: 'They'd change my very nature if they could. / Don't let them' cries Medea, there on the London stage, some sixty-two years before women over the age of thirty were finally granted the vote. Robert Brough, who had in the previous year published satirical, radical verse with his *Songs of the 'Governing Classes'*,<sup>60</sup> is deliberately situating Medea at the forefront of the early campaign for women's independence. And that his burlesque spoke to a whole generation of theatre-goers, and not just to those who had seen Ristori's performance, is borne out by the

numerous revivals of the play in the late 1850s and well into the 1860s, where the role of Medea attracted star performers other than Robson.<sup>61</sup>

When Bernard Shaw and his contemporaries welcomed the New Woman and her pioneer in Ibsen onto the London stage towards the end of the century, little did they realize that an earlier version of Euripides' heroine had already prepared the way. Moreover, it is important to remember that when the figure of Medea joins the ranks of the Suffragette movement in the early years of the twentieth century, and when she appears on the London stage in Euripides' tragedy in front of sizeable audiences from 1907 onwards (see Macintosh, Ch. 1), she is already a veteran, having spent over half a century in the vanguard of the campaign for women's emancipation.

### Notes to Chapter 4

1. Shaw (1986), 59.
2. Ibid. 60.
3. Ibid. 61.
4. Nordau (1895), 412.
5. See Finney (1989), esp. 195 ff.; Kaplan (1992), 49.
6. See Booth (1980), p. xi for the importance of Victorian models for the New Drama. Cf. Gardner and Rutherford (1992) for other non-classical sources for the New Woman.
7. Trussler (1994), 238.
8. See e.g. Fernando (1977).
9. Kaplan (1992), 49–50.
10. Chothia (1998), pp. xii f.
11. Gardner (1992), 7 ff.
12. Jackson (1989), 80.
13. Powell (1997), 33.
14. Gardner (1992), 8.
15. Rutherford (1992).
16. e.g. in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1874–6) and George Moore's *The Mummer's Wife* (1885).
17. Cited by Auerbach (1987), 58.
18. Appleton (1974).
19. Mill (1869), 55, 57.
20. Trussler (1994), 238.
21. Hall (1999c).
22. *Athenaeum*, no. 2135, 26 Sept. 1868.
23. Fitzgerald (1870), 174.
24. Macintosh (1997), 286–8. After Covent Garden, the *Antigone* transferred to Edinburgh.
25. Roy in Planché (1986), 31.
26. See further Gould (1997), 263.

27. Arnold (1987), 145–6.
28. Gardner (1998), 9.
29. Fletcher (1987), 9.
30. Bratton (1992), 87.
31. Fletcher (1987), 31.
32. Bratton (1992), 88; Senelick (1993), 82.
33. Fitzgerald (1870), 181.
34. Morley (1866), 159; entry dated 1 Nov. 1856.
35. Burnand (1880), 22–3.
36. *Illustrated London News*, 811, vol. 29, July 1865, 65.
37. Bratton (1992), 87.
38. Zeitlin (1996).
39. Travers (1941), 27, 111.
40. See *Collections* (1787–95).
41. Burnand (1880), 23.
42. Trussler (1994), 238.
43. See Hall (1997a).
44. Rowell (1978), 10.
45. Mimoso-Ruiz (1978), 485.
46. Lewes (1875), 166.
47. *Ibid.* 70.
48. Burnand (1880), 22–3.
49. Before the 1843 Theatres Regulation Act only Patent theatres were allowed to present legitimate (i.e. spoken) drama, and other minor theatres circumvented the ban by including songs amongst the spoken dialogue.
50. Planché (1901), 268.
51. Cf. Trussler (1994), 238 on Victorian farce.
52. Booth (1976), 14.
53. Fitzgerald (1870), 181.
54. Planché (1986), 147.
55. Lewes (1875), 71.
56. Wooler (1851), fo. 287.
57. Cf. Byron (1970), 34, 'Translation of the Nurse's Dole in the Medea of Euripides' (June 1810): 'Oh how I wish that an embargo / Had kept in port the good ship Argo! / Who, still unlaunch'd from Grecian docks, / Had never pass'd the Azure rocks; / But now I fear her trip will be a / Damn'd business for my Miss Medea [. . .]'.  
 58. Brough (1856), 25.
59. Lemon (1856), 1.
60. Brough (1890).
61. Notably the Actor-Manager of the Grecian Theatre, George Conquest, who appeared in a popular revival in 1861. See Hackney Archives Department, Playbill no. 467.

## CHAPTER 5



# *Medea è mobile:* The Many Faces of Medea in Opera

*Marianne McDonald*

Medea the passionate, vengeful when wronged, the mother who murders her children, is the perfect operatic diva. She is strange, horrifying, and admirable; every century approaches her with caution. Five operas by five composers show how Medea changes over the centuries: Francesco Cavalli's *Giason* in 1649; Marc-Antoine Charpentier's *Médée* in 1693; Luigi Cherubini's *Médée* in 1797; Giovanni Pacini's *Medea* in 1843; and finally Mikis Theodorakis's *Medea* in 1991. I shall make passing remarks about others in each century.

I have located fifty operas (including one which might be considered a musical) based on or including the myth of Medea: eleven come from the seventeenth century, nineteen from the eighteenth, four from the nineteenth, and sixteen (plus many revivals) from the twentieth. Plato claimed that music never changes without radical political change (*Republic* 424 C). Operas during the ages of absolutism (seventeenth century) and imperialism (nineteenth century) were less receptive to a rebellious Medea. Operas from the eighteenth and twentieth centuries have been more faithful to the original Euripidean text, with its powerful Medea who, vengeance achieved, gloats from her chariot at Jason's impotence. Operas like Rolf Liebermann's *Freispruch für Medea* (1995), Michael John LaChiusa's *Marie Christine* (1999), and books like Christa Wolf's *Medea-Stimmen* (1998) show her as an appealing heroine for modern times, and represent her faithfully in her complex totality.

Susan McClary has argued that 'questions of gender rarely enter into discussions of music [. . .] until there exists some way of dealing with music in general as a social discourse, gender will remain a non-issue.'<sup>1</sup>



I hope to show that the way Medea is treated in opera is part of the social discourse, in fact a marker for the *Zeitgeist*, displaying contemporary attitudes towards women. When women's rights are taken seriously (as occasionally in the eighteenth and more consistently in the twentieth centuries), Medea is a tragic and powerful heroine who achieves a successful vengeance and escapes with impunity: even the titles celebrate her bloody revenge, like Giuseppe Moneta's *La vendetta di Medea* (1787).

When women's rights are not an issue, or not taken seriously (as was the case in the seventeenth and parts of the nineteenth centuries), operas about Medea are fewer, and in those that there are, she is usually either weak and submissive and commits no crime, or is punished for her violent acts. This is not to say that there are no exceptions to such claims; I only propose that the majority of the evidence points in this direction. Medea in opera is a barometer of sexual politics.

The eighteenth century produced treatises such as Rousseau's *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* (1755), setting forth the issue of universal equality. Beaumarchais wrote subversively in *Le Mariage de Figaro* (1784); and Mozart's opera derived from this play (1786) includes victories by a valet over his master and by women over men. Napoleon said that this work was the first stone flung by the French Revolution. In the twentieth century women finally gained the vote: 1920 in the United States, 1945 in France, and 1956 in Greece. Fifth-century Athens, eighteenth-century France, and twentieth-century Greece have been cultures when democracy was either practised or discussed as an ideal to be achieved. There are those who, like Richard Leppert, see elements in the eighteenth century as reaffirming hierarchy, thus sanctioning control of others: for example, the woman in a family, or a native people in imperialism—and in this he is correct.<sup>2</sup> My point, however, is that in this century ideas of equality were also being disseminated, at least on the mediated level of cultural activity, as evidenced by so many performances of operas about an assertive Medea.

In the seventeenth century art pursued the bizarre and exceptional; music showed relatively greater freedom in its use of modes and dissonance without the more regularized adherence to major and minor keys that would be observed in the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century Romantic creativity was stressed, albeit within the confines of the orthodox tonalities. Given those tastes, one might think that Medea would be popular in both the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries,

but it seemed particularly difficult during those times to accept women who were independent, unconventional, and as successful in crime as Euripides' Medea. The statistics of operas written about her in those centuries support this. By contrast, the eighteenth and twentieth centuries were periods large enough in their universalizing concepts to contain even a violent and successful Medea.

Medea changes throughout the ages and so does her adversary, Jason. In the seventeenth century, he is courtly and romantic; in the eighteenth century, reasonable and rather idealistic; torn by self-doubt and lingering romantic attachment to Medea in the nineteenth; in the twentieth he is once again the self-serving sophist that Euripides gave us.

Medea came from distant Colchis and could be easily dismissed as a barbarian by the Greek audience in 431 BC. Jason, however, was regarded as civilized since he came from mainland Greece, albeit the north (Iolcus). Jason boasts that he has brought Medea the benefit of civilization, and he justifies his actions by this, a standard move in the rhetoric of imperialism. He says, 'Now you live in Greece, rather than a barbarian land, and you are acquainted with justice, and how to use law rather than force' (*Med.* 535-8). But Euripides does not allow Jason to get away with this comfortable assessment. Medea seems to be more 'civilized' than Jason, for instance in her arguments for being faithful to one's vows; she becomes 'barbaric' only in response to his denial of justice and his oaths. Thus to the extent to which she becomes a monster, it is one of his making. (Cf. the *Bacchae*, where the women on the mountain are relatively benevolent until the men attack them, and apparently Sophocles' fragmentary *Tereus*, where only when Tereus attacks her sister does Procne turn against her son.)

Euripides may have been the first to tell us that Medea killed her children intentionally. Seneca (c. AD 4-65) also showed Medea slaying her children, but he stressed her supernatural powers over her human emotions: Medea was now a witch, and a cruel one at that. At the end of his play, she appears with one dead child, and another still alive, to tantalize Jason before she kills her second son. Many operas on Medea follow this interpretation of Medea as the 'Wicked Witch of the East'. To turn Medea into a witch is to render her evil, and to justify denial of women's rights.

Tragedies about Medea with only incidental music (not technically operas) were performed at the beginning of the seventeenth century: Pierre Corneille's *Médée* in 1635, and his *La Conquête de la toison d'or*

in 1661. Opera had been invented by the Florentine Camerata a little earlier, in the late sixteenth century, in an attempt to revive what were believed to be the performance conventions of ancient Greek tragedy, but it was not until 1649 and Francesco Cavalli's *Giasone* that Medea appeared in a full-scale opera; and it was not until 1675 that Medea's name appeared in the title of an opera, in Antonio Giannettini's *Medea in Atene*.

### Francesco Cavalli (1602–76)

*Giasone* (1649) features a libretto by G. A. Cicognini, who claims that he based it on the *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes. *Giasone* was the most popular opera of the seventeenth century, and shows a relatively benign Medea (see fig. 7). Both she and Hypsipyle (Isifile) have twins by Jason. Medea helps Jason in winning the Golden Fleece, and her magical powers are celebrated in the music ('Dell'antro magico', I. xv). At Medea's behest, Jason tries to arrange Hypsipyle's murder, but the plan goes awry: Medea is seized by mistake and hurled into the ocean. Aegeus (Egeo) rescues her and pledges undying love. Medea then helps Hypsipyle to wed Jason and live happily ever after.

This improbable story is set to music that uses idioms typical of the period, like, for instance, the *stile concitato* developed by Monteverdi to signify conflict. Recitative alternates with arioso passages, or aria poems. There are descriptive *sinfonia* sections that are purely orchestral. Many characters supply comedy and love interest, like Delfa and Demo. Jason and Medea pledge their love, as do Hypsipyle and Jason at the end. The opera begins with a prologue which shows Sun and Love opposing each other, much like Aphrodite opposing Artemis at the beginning of Euripides' *Hippolytus*. Love in both cases will get what she wants.

*Giasone* is more a comedy than a tragedy, although there are tragic scenes and impressive laments. For the most part, the story line resembles the plots that Roman comedy had adapted from Menander and other poets of Greek New Comedy, as well as the plots of ancient Greek novels, with their domestic situations, romance, adventures, and mistaken identities. (Cavalli also provided a happy conclusion in his *Didone* (1641), set to a libretto by Giovanni Francesco Busenello. Here, rather than stabbing herself, Didone marries Iarbas when Aeneas abandons her.) Happy endings are typical of the seventeenth-century theatre, and Nahum Tate's rewriting of the ending of Shakespeare's *King*



7. Michael Cooper, Krisztina Szabo as Medea, 1998 (photograph).  
Francesco Cavalli's *Giasone*



*Lear*, in which Lear is reunited with Cordelia to live happily ever after, is representative of the period. Instead of being dismembered at the hands of rejected women, Monteverdi's *Orfeo* is wafted off to heaven by Apollo. There are two ways of reducing Medea's stature: either to show her as weak and acquiescent, as she is in *Giasone* (and very likely in *Medea placata*, 1662, by Giovanni Faustini), or to punish her, as was frequent in operas of the nineteenth century.

### Marc-Antoine Charpentier (1634–1704)

Charpentier's *Médée* in 1693 was composed to a libretto by Thomas Corneille, who adapted the alexandrines of his brother Pierre's work (together with other minor changes) into flexible octosyllables which suited the music. Charpentier had studied in Italy with the most outstanding musician of the time, Carissimi. For a long time, Italian music, with its ariatic flourishes and counterpoint, was not popular with the French, who preferred stately harmonies and rhythms suitable for court dances. In his opera *Médée*, Charpentier effectively combined both.

Bad luck (he became ill during a competition for the post at the Chapelle Royale in 1683) and the taste of the times worked against Charpentier. He was the tutor of the Dauphin, and afterwards worked in the household of Mlle de Guise (1675). He gained some reputation from writing incidental music for Molière's plays, but Lully limited his advancement. Lully saw Charpentier as a major threat, and he was ruthless in destroying his rivals' careers.

After Mlle de Guise's death, Charpentier worked for the Jesuits and was trained in religious music. But he also wrote two operas, or 'tragédies en musique', *Celsus* (1687) and *David et Jonathas* (1688). Only after Lully's death was Charpentier finally able to have his *Médée* performed, but now, unfortunately, he met with the harsh judgement of the French, who did not like his 'Italian' style. *Médée* was performed only ten times before its final production in Lille (1700), when *Médée* exited literally in a blaze of glory because a fire burnt the set. It was not performed again until 1976. Charpentier ended his life in the service of the Sainte-Chapelle as a respected composer of religious music.

The music adds its commentary to *Médée*, and in its own way replicates the function of the tragic chorus in ancient drama. Sung portions alternate with recitatives, and there are regular divertissements. The action is carried on by the recitatives, the sung portions

are meditations, and the divertissements illustrate the text dramatically in song and dance. The drama is interspersed with interludes, which give the same break that the ancient chorus did between the spoken dramatic sections. However, a song with refrain differs from a choral ode: the choral ode presents a sequence of strophes and antistrophes, which adds and develops new material, whereas a refrain merely repeats (although it must be admitted that the repetition adds further colour).

Instruments and keys can have symbolic significance in this period, and Charpentier exploits this. Flutes can convey love, and agitated strings, conflict. E minor is effeminate, the key of love; D major is warlike. There are other programmatic touches (the music imitates what is said), such as melismatic flourishes accompanying the word for flying. When one mentions glory, the music often rises, and when one mentions repose, it descends (p. 48).<sup>3</sup> When pipes are mentioned they are heard. Guitars and lutes accompany love songs (p. 49).

Encomiastic prologues were common at this time. Molière hoped to win royal favour with his *Le Malade imaginaire*, with music by Charpentier, so his prologue to the play praised Louis XIV extravagantly. We see that same praise in Thomas Corneille's and Charpentier's prologue to *Médée*, which endorses royal power with stately music. There are often personified abstractions in prologues of the time, as there are in contemporary and earlier Italian operas. In his prologue to the *Ritorno di Ulisse*, Monteverdi had featured Time, Fortune, and Love, all forces that trouble man, and we see these themes developed in the opera. I have mentioned Cavalli's prologue with Sun opposing Love, and Charpentier's prologue is similarly symbolic; and like the prologue, the interludes are sometimes allegorical, as in Act II, where Love takes three captives. In the prologue we have War, Glory, and Victory, all harnessed in the service of Louis XIV, and all three musical motifs recur in the opera, where Glory is often presented in conflict with Love. The prologue also features a series of dances so beloved by the French; and it has the happy resolution that the *tragédie en musique* lacks, ending with pastoral music that endorses peace. The people of France celebrate the victorious Louis XIV: Victory, Glory, and War all personally congratulate him; and shepherds sing his praises and say that he has brought peace. This laudatory prelude is comparable to the official paintings of the time representing the king in his glory. This prologue, with its final vision of peace, or *Pax Gallica*, is in striking contrast to the story of Medea.

The opera shows Acaste, the son of the murdered Pelias, pursuing Médée for vengeance and attacking Corinth. Créon has summoned Oronte from Argos to help. Both Oronte and Jason are in love with Créuse, the king's daughter. Thus the original story is made more complicated. With the support of Créon, Créuse and Jason deceive both Médée and Oronte, but Médée soon sees through their impostures and enlists Oronte's help. She also confronts Jason. Sad slow music in minor keys characterizes many of Médée's complaints, whereas fast music in the major keys marks Jason's optimism. Jason also switches keys to show that he can adapt himself to the moment and will tell lies as it suits him. He also uses many flourishes, whereas Médée's music is simpler, resembling the mourning Penelope in Monteverdi's *Ritorno di Ulisse* (Penelope sings with flourishes only after Ulisse has returned). Médée's musical directness reveals her inner strength. One is reminded of Euripides' contrast between the elaborately rhetorical Jason and the more plain-spoken Medea. Here in the opera music accomplishes the same contrast.

The king exiles Médée, but she promptly enlists the help of Hell, and demons restrain Créon and his men. Hell is represented by a thunderous deep bass drum (bass notes were also associated with Monteverdi's Hell in *Orfeo*, and Charon was a bass). The initial conflict is conveyed by repeated chords in the strings, in the style used by Monteverdi to represent fights (*stile concitato*). Médée then charms the guards with her power and the spirits at her command. We hear flutes (remember 'the magic flute' later created in Mozart's opera to tame the guards who otherwise would have attacked the hero).

Créon is driven mad, murders Oronte, and Créuse perishes from the poisoned robe. At the end, Jason sees Médée escaping in her dragon-drawn chariot. Médée's final victory is enhanced by triumphant music in the major, fast and joyful, as she tells Jason to weep for ever for the evil he has created by his 'flame' or passion.

Dramatic scenes provided by lavish baroque machinery abound. Allegories (Love in his chariot) come to life, and demons appear under the allegorical guidance of Jealousy and Vengeance. Just before her successful exit, Médée causes an earthquake and a gigantic conflagration to consume all. Lavish display and royal resources have increased the number of actors from Euripides' time, and there are added choruses: shepherds in the prologue, Corinthian people, demons, soldiers, and various allegorical figures.

There is also a logical structure in the division into the five acts of



the opera: Médée appears in the first as the city is attacked, and she is ordered to leave; in the second we meet Créuse, who will not listen to Médée's justified complaints; in the third Médée decides that she will be avenged because she sees that she is betrayed; in the fourth she defeats Créon; and in the final act she has total victory over Créuse and Jason. The first two acts have their reversal in the last two, and Médée becomes Médée in the third.

Médée is even more sympathetic than in the Euripidean original. She is shown to love Jason genuinely, and does everything she can to achieve a bloodless solution, giving the characters several chances to save themselves. All she asks for is Jason. When this fails, she turns into a witch, complete with a wand. This is in keeping with the spirit of the seventeenth century. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was enlivened by witches, and so was Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. Thomas Middleton's *The Witch* (c.1613) was a great success. This was an era of witch trials, and the threat they posed added to the *frisson* of viewing these dramas.

Jason is also shown as genuinely concerned about hurting Médée. Of course, this does not prevent him from pursuing his new princess, nor from lying about it. Jason in Euripides also conceals his plans until he is ready to tell her (*Med.* 586–7), but the Jason of the opera has more self-doubts, saying:

Médée avec ardeur dans mon sort s'intéresse;  
Je lui dois toute ma tendresse. (p. 48)

He also admits his love for Créuse, asking: 'Que me peut demander la gloire / Quand l'Amour s'est rendu le maître de mon cœur?' (*ibid.*). This is quite different from the original power-seeking Jason of Euripides, who explicitly denies that he is in love with the new princess (*Med.* 555–7). This operatic Jason says that he will follow his beloved princess, Créuse, in death, and sings a moving lament. Créuse orders vengeance on Médée, thus showing herself more bloodthirsty than Jason. Créuse's moments of exultation in Jason's love contrast with Médée's despair (the music underlines the contrast). This Jason is still as self-serving as the original, but the reasons have shifted. Rather than power, it is the love of the princess that he craves; and their duets are glorious examples of passionate song.

We have no Aegeus here, unless we see Oronte in that role because he offers Médée Argos as a refuge. There is no gradual revelation of child-murder as the only means of vengeance, following Euripides. Nérine is a nurse even more loyal to Médée than Euripides' nurse,



who shows more concern for the children. Jason here has a *confident*, Arcas, as Créuse has Cléone, the function of these characters being to act as foils for the major figures.

There are nice displays of rhetoric, which owe more to Seneca than to Euripides. Médée says to Créon, 'Souviens-toi que je suis Médée' (p. 55), and we remember Seneca's Medea, who answers the Nurse's cry, 'Medea' with 'Fiam' ('I shall be', Sen. *Med.* 171), acknowledging that her original myth informs every new version. There are also acute psychological observations, and touches of humour: Médée warns Jason that if he appears too ardent in enlisting the princess's help, she may fall in love with him. This opera tries to explain much that Euripides left to the imagination: Médée, for example, is told to leave because her presence is a real threat to the city (Acaste has attacked because they are offering her refuge).

We also have the requisite mad scene, so popular in opera from *La finta pazza* to *Lucia di Lammermoor*. As Euripides showed us Madness sent by Hera to harass Heracles, so here Médée summons Madness to punish Créon. There is another parallel with Heracles, this time from the myth that Sophocles tells in the *Trachinian Women*. Créuse has a passion for Jason which is as destructive and egocentric as Heracles' for Iole. The robe sent by Medea is like the robe sent by Deianira: both consume their victims by burning them physically, matching the way that their passions burned them internally. The opera ends in a conflagration that underlines the disastrous effects of passion. Pasolini used this ending for his film on Medea in 1961.

In contrast to Euripides' version, Jason seems to suffer more from his loss of Créuse than that of the children. The same is true for Médée: she is more concerned about losing Jason than losing her children. She does not undergo a soul-searching debate about killing the children; she cannot bear to see Jason in their faces, and when she kills them, she is trying to extirpate Jason from her heart. She informs Jason in a recitative that she has killed them, just before her dramatic exit.

What we have now is a courtly melodrama rather than Euripidean tragedy; it is enhanced by glorious music, but Médée is an irresistible force, rather than the victimized woman that Euripides first lets us see (fig. 8). Euripides' Medea needs an Aegeus to provide her with a refuge. This Médée commands the powers of heaven and hell, and needs no one, except Jason, and him only for his love: we see her as love's victim. In spite of her magical omnipotence, this opera shows a



8. Gerard Amsellem, Esther Hinds as Medea, 1957 (photograph).  
Marc-Antoine Charpentier's *Médée*

fascinating and sympathetic Médée; we feel her vulnerability to love, and her anguished music reinforces this. She also has justice on her side, and her exile is only a result of the crimes she has committed on behalf of Jason.

Both Jason and Médée have been made more sympathetic by the music, but Médée clearly more so than Jason. Here is the biggest shift of all from Euripides' version: what for Medea was honour is now love for Charpentier's Médée. But in avenging herself on her unfaithful lover, she also restores her honour and displays the power that characterizes this period of absolutism.

Could Charpentier, with Thomas Corneille's help, be questioning the foundation of absolutism, by showing its disastrous effects? Love is indeed shown as a controlling force in emotional life, just as the king is in political life. Many similar questions about absolutism will be asked in the next century, with the American and French revolutions. Charpentier suffered from Lully's stranglehold on Parisian opera, due to the simple bias and ignorance of Louis XIV. This opera, which began with lavish praise for the king, ends with a subtle mirror image, which critiques the notion of a victory linked with absolute power.

This powerful Medea does not commit suicide. Since Charpentier's opera is on the cusp of the eighteenth century, I think it represents the taste of that time more than the seventeenth. Other operas in the eighteenth century show Medea in all her glory. For instance, Joseph-François Salomon wrote a *Médée et Jason* to a text by Simon-Joseph Pellegrin after Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which was performed in 1713. This celebrates Medea's bloody vengeance and triumphant escape, with the orchestral symphonies linking the scenes and acts with dramatic commentary.

Georg Benda composed his *Medea* (1775) with a libretto by Friedrich Wilhelm Gotter. Gotter's text shows us a humanized Medea who agonizes over killing her children even more than in Euripides' version, and only after a second attempt invokes Hecate and carries out her murderous plans. She escapes in a cloud chariot, and flaunts her victory over Jason who commits suicide by falling on his sword. As in Euripides, the emphasis is on the children as a source of vengeance, but with the added pleasure for Medea of seeing Jason dead. Benda's dramatic music uses recurring motifs, thereby offering a subtext by combining two episodes: for instance, Medea's jealousy and anger overcome her scruples about killing the children, and the memories invoked by the music show us how she comes to her

decision. When he saw the opera in 1778, Mozart admired the mixture of declamation and music.

### Luigi Cherubini (1760–1842)

Many divas have attempted the role of Cherubini's Medea, but Callas made it her own. She sang the Italian version by Carlo Zangarini, based on the original French by François-Benoît Hoffmann. Sentimentalists want to see in it a parallel to her own rejection by Onassis for the American princess Jackie/Créuse (Dircé). This *Médée* was written in 1797, but shows many features of nineteenth-century Romanticism, including Médée being dragged off to Hades.

Cherubini, like Lully, moved to France after an education in Italy. He headed the Théâtre de Monsieur in the Tuileries (1789), but had to vacate his quarters during the Revolution. He composed for whoever happened to be in power: the governments formed in the aftermath of the Revolution, Napoleon, and the Bourbons, for whom he was *surintendant* of the Chapelle Royale until their fall in 1830. Like Wagner he was criticized for being unmelodic and allowing his orchestra to overcome the voice; he luxuriated in extended orchestral passages, which added greatly to the dramatic representation; he did not use recitative or the ballet, as had been the popular custom, but aimed at more dramatic immediacy. He was known for revealing character through his drama, particularly characters in extreme circumstances. Both music and ideology were leading to the Romantic period.

Cherubini alternates music with spoken passages, and in this his opera resembles Greek tragedy. Many of the differences from Euripides seem inspired by the needs of the opera: for instance, a triumphant march displaying the Golden Fleece. It is as ominous a march as that which opens Berlioz's *Les Troyens*. When the opera begins, Jason has abandoned Médée and fled to Corinth, where he is about to marry Dircé, the daughter of King Créon. The first act shows us a Dircé with premonitions of disaster. Créon, Jason, and the chorus try to lull these fears; we hear a joyous marriage hymn accompanied with harp-like arpeggios not unlike Fauré's 'Sanctus' or 'In Paradisum' in his *Requiem Mass*. Flutes, oboes, and soft bells complete this evocation of bliss. But the princess's fears are fulfilled when Médée appears during the wedding celebration. Her appearance is rather like the witch in *Sleeping Beauty*, the uninvited guest at the wedding. Glorious celebratory music is followed by Médée's ominous, morose, and angry threats.



Médée here is more wicked than in Charpentier's opera. She threatens Jason that if he violates his vows to her he will get to know Médée in all her fury: 'Tremblez! à ses fureurs vous connoîtrez Médée' (p. 26).<sup>4</sup> Jason tells her that she has brought disaster on herself because of the cruel things she did in her past, and Créon seconds this; she retorts that all these things were done for love of Jason. In an aria she lists what she has done, and claims that before him she was virtuous ('Vous voyez de vos fils la mère infortunée, / Criminelle pour vous, par vous abandonnée' (p. 28)). Jason remains adamant, and Médée begins her plots, calling on the Eumenides. Néris, Médée's faithful attendant, enters to say that the people of Corinth are demanding Médée's death. Médée appeals to Créon, who, as in Euripides, gives her a day's grace. Néris acts like the sympathetic chorus from Euripides, and asks Médée where she will flee. Like the nurse she comments on the dangers of crossing Médée. Jason comes and Médée feigns her acquiescence. She asks for the children, but he refuses. When she weeps as she sees them, Jason softens and says she can keep them with her until she leaves. He bids her farewell, adding 'Vivez heureuse' (p. 36), careless of her suffering. She tells Néris that she hates the children; they remind her of Jason. A wedding procession enters, further enraging Médée, and she punctuates the couple's wedding vows with her curses.

Violins and tympani begin the third and final act. We hear a storm brewing, and then the wind and rain in the music. The children bring the poisoned robe and fatal diadem to Dircé. In the next scene Néris tells the boys to approach their mother, which they do, and they break her resolve. She tells Néris to hide them from her. An aria conveys her indecision:

Ô chers enfants! Je vous adore,  
Et malgré moi je sens encore,  
Je sens en vous voyant renaître ma fureur. (p. 41)

This reworks the famous passage from Euripides' *Medea*, in which she first comments on the soft skin and sweet fragrance of her children, but concludes that her passion (*thumos*) is stronger than her reason (*Med.* 1074–80). In the aria that follows she resolves once more to kill the children. She calls on Tisiphone, and we hear the storm again, now in her heart.

Offstage cries lament Dircé's death. Médée taunts Jason, asking him if all his concern is for Dircé, and not his children. She rushes into the

temple where Nérís has hidden the children. Jason follows her after Nérís tells him that Médée is chasing them with a knife. He finds her with three Eumenides at her side, and she claims that the children's blood has avenged her: 'Ils étaient nés de toi' (p. 44). Jason, she says, will never see them again. In a dramatic finale she tells him she will meet him in Hell, 'sur les bords du Styx' (ibid.). Hell, not Athens, will receive her. The Eumenides drag her off, rather like Don Giovanni at the end of Mozart's opera. Flames consume the temple and palace, and the chorus, rather futilely, note the justice of heaven.

This is the opposite of Seneca's ending with Jason telling Medea to go into the deep space of high heaven to bear witness that wherever she goes there are no gods. Corneille's libretto for Charpentier also seems to allude to Seneca because Medea claims heaven provides open roads for her escape, and Jason laments, 'Heaven, who always protects the innocent' (p. 213).

A march, a marriage celebration, and a storm: all these are conveyed orchestrally and now the music adds to the drama rather than interrupts it. Médée's brooding ferocity is well conveyed by dark orchestral colours culminating in an inner tempest. Her anger explodes into destructive acts for which she will pay in Hell. This opera emphasizes the theme most associated with Medea: the murder of the children, although neither in this opera nor in Charpentier's are we shown the bodies. We focus on an evil woman taking her frightful revenge. It is possible to interpret this as an aesthetic impression of a feeling that the idealism of the French Revolution has turned into the aftermath: bloodshed and violent reprisals. Médée now must be punished; vengeance belongs only to God.

### Giovanni Pacini (1796–1867)

Pacini was a master of the Italian style in opera, incorporating counterpoint and ornaments into his vocal lines. He became musical director of the Neapolitan theatres following Rossini, his contemporary, and was the leading composer of operas in the 1820s. After a temporary decline because of competition from Bellini and Donizetti, he tried to incorporate a new dramatic style into his operas, writing *Saffo* in 1840. This and *Medea* in 1843 are considered his masterpieces. *Medea* features simple melodies in an expressive style, resembling much of Bellini and Donizetti. Pacini began to break down the distinction between recitative and lyric sections; he modulated keys

dramatically to show a character's own transition from one state to another, and also to underline tragic or horrible events; and there is a new emphasis on ensembles over solo arias.

The libretto for Pacini's *Medea* is by Benedetto Castiglia. As in Cherubini's *Medea*, the heroine has already been exiled for her crimes. Here she disguises herself to everyone but Giasone. When she hears about Giasone's intended marriage to Glauce, she tries unsuccessfully to dissuade Creonte. During a ceremony annulling her marriage with Giasone, conducted by Calcante and other priests, she appears without disguise. The children are taken from her. She meets with Giasone and they sing a moving duet. She pretends to agree to her exile and asks to see the children, only to kill them and then finally herself. Her aria in which she decides to kill the children in Act III is a tragic masterpiece. Here we have the Romantic Medea, one who does frightful things and must be punished, and she inflicts that punishment on herself by suicide.

These are the types of heroines celebrated (or bemoaned) by Catherine Clément in her *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*. This opera is typical of the *Sturm und Drang* aftermath, and a suitable successor to *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers*. Now instead of the witch who must be punished, we have the suffering woman who kills herself, someone much more palatable to the Romantic audience. It is also a symptom of the colonization that was at its height during this century of conquest and exploitation. Wild countries, like wild women, need to be dominated. Better still, they should immolate themselves, ceding their power to the greater civilization and authority of the colonizers. Obviously this ideal culminates in the pathetic child-woman, Madame Butterfly.

### Mikis Theodorakis (1925- )

The twentieth century brings us full circle, back to Euripides. Mikis Theodorakis translates Euripides almost word for word, from ancient into modern Greek, and sets his text to music. This opera is symbolic of Greece's own political tragedies. Theodorakis was born soon after the catastrophe in Asia Minor (1922-3), when so many Greeks were forced to leave their homes in the East, and lived through the Second World War, the Greek civil war, and then the military dictatorship of 1967-74. He was often imprisoned for his outspokenness, and struggled ceaselessly for justice. He is a person who understands



suffering, but insists that it is inevitable in defending one's beliefs. It is significant that the operas he has devoted himself to are Euripides' *Medea* (1991), Sophocles' *Electra* (1992), and *Antigone* (1996). In Theodorakis's version, as in Euripides, we see Medea in all her glory, and she escapes in her chariot at the end, displaying the bodies of her slaughtered children. They are her trophies and her agony.

Theodorakis suggests in his opera the sufferings of the Greek nation in both victories and defeats. Understanding the tragedy of vengeance, having lived through a bloody civil war, he shows the sufferings on both sides. Although the words are from Euripides, through his music Theodorakis allows us to understand and sympathize with Jason more. At the same time he celebrates Medea in all her spectacular tragedy. He has two choruses: one male and one female, thus representing both sides.

Medea's vengeance, designed to regain her public honour, is destructive of what she values in her private life; she destroys herself by killing those she loves, her children. The civil war in Greece, in which child might oppose father, forced many a mother into such tragic choices.

Theodorakis's music adds in many ways to the interpretation. Composed throughout with no spoken interludes, one section follows another smoothly, and the dramatic flow is uninterrupted. Occasional dissonance punctuates traditional harmony. Theodorakis was trained in western music, and to this he added his knowledge of eastern music, both folk and religious. In the Aegeus scene, when oaths are sworn there is a religious ceremony, and the music derives from the Greek Orthodox Church. This recurs at the end, so that Theodorakis brings this play into a living religious context. The choruses for both men and women draw on his earlier choral works, both religious and secular.

The music is used to characterize. Theodorakis weaves in a theme from Asia Minor to remind us that Medea comes from the East. The orientalist associations can be applied to Greece itself, because its music differs from that of the West. Tonality is more flexible here, and there is more room for a woman to express herself than in the classical major/minor modes. Edward Said found a comparable freedom in the music of Umm Kalthoum, and of Messiaen, who uses 'oriental' modes, complete with fractional progressions between notes.

Theodorakis has four-square rhythms for Jason, and statements in major keys. Medea begins in the minor keys, but by the end takes over



the forceful rhythms and keys that were Jason's. Nevertheless, for the most part the softer three-quarters rhythm characterizes Medea. This is the tempo of her brilliant climactic aria, when she has finally decided to kill her children, with full realization that the success of her vengeance will be coupled with her own suffering. The major key and the waltz-like rhythm seem strange for a tragic text, but they convey the ambiguity of the decision. This dance rhythm links this Medea with Strauss's Elektra and Salome, who are fulfilled and defined by their gruesome acts and dances of death.

Medea has become a symbol of nationhood in the twentieth century: she was exploited by Jason, as was Greece during its years of occupation. Modern playwrights have used Medea in a comparable way, as a symbol of a nation or race. Brendan Kennelly uses Medea as a symbol for occupied Ireland, and Medea can represent black Africa (Guy Butler wrote *DEMEA* to show a black Medea exploited by a white trekker—see Macintosh, Ch. 1). Opera can function like other forms of theatre to express political concerns by using the classics.

Medea has been a potent symbol for the twentieth century, and represents a woman successfully fighting back, albeit with tragic results for herself. Darius Milhaud wrote a *Médée* (1938), when Europe began to fall to the Nazis. He fled on his own airborne chariot to the United States for the duration of the war. Maria Callas made Cherubini's *Médée* her signature piece, from her first appearance in this role in Florence in 1953, to her farewell performance at La Scala in 1962: a defiant and tragic woman as a defiant and tragic heroine. William Christie revived Charpentier's *Médée* in 1984, and in the same year Gavin Bryars collaborated with Robert Wilson on a *Medea*. Like Theodorakis, they returned to Euripides' text.

We have seen the Medeas of Euripides, Charpentier, and Theodorakis, successful in their vengeance, escaping to lead new lives. Cavalli shows her innocent; Cherubini and Pacini have Medea punished or suicidal. Charpentier and Cherubini are both on the cusps of their periods, and I see them as more indicative of the subsequent centuries, Charpentier of the eighteenth, and Cherubini of the nineteenth.

Medea's character and fate differ with the way women are viewed: she illustrates alternately women as tame and docile, or awesome in their passion and demanding respect, or demonic, inviting punishment and control. This reflects the psychological and political needs of different periods.

Opera has developed from its rational structure in the eighteenth

century into the free and uncompromising music of the twentieth century, worthy of a modern Medea, a free and uncompromising heroine. Medea's dragons are her unfettered songs.

### Notes to Chapter 5

1. McClary (1987), 52–3.
2. Leppert (1987).
3. The page references are to *Médée, Marc Antoine Charpentier: L'Avant Scène Opéra*, vol. 68 (1984).
4. The text is from the libretto in Patrick Fournillier's version of this opera (Nuova Era Records, 1996). For the music I follow Luigi Cherubini, *Medea*, in Classical Vocal Reprints.

## CHAPTER 6



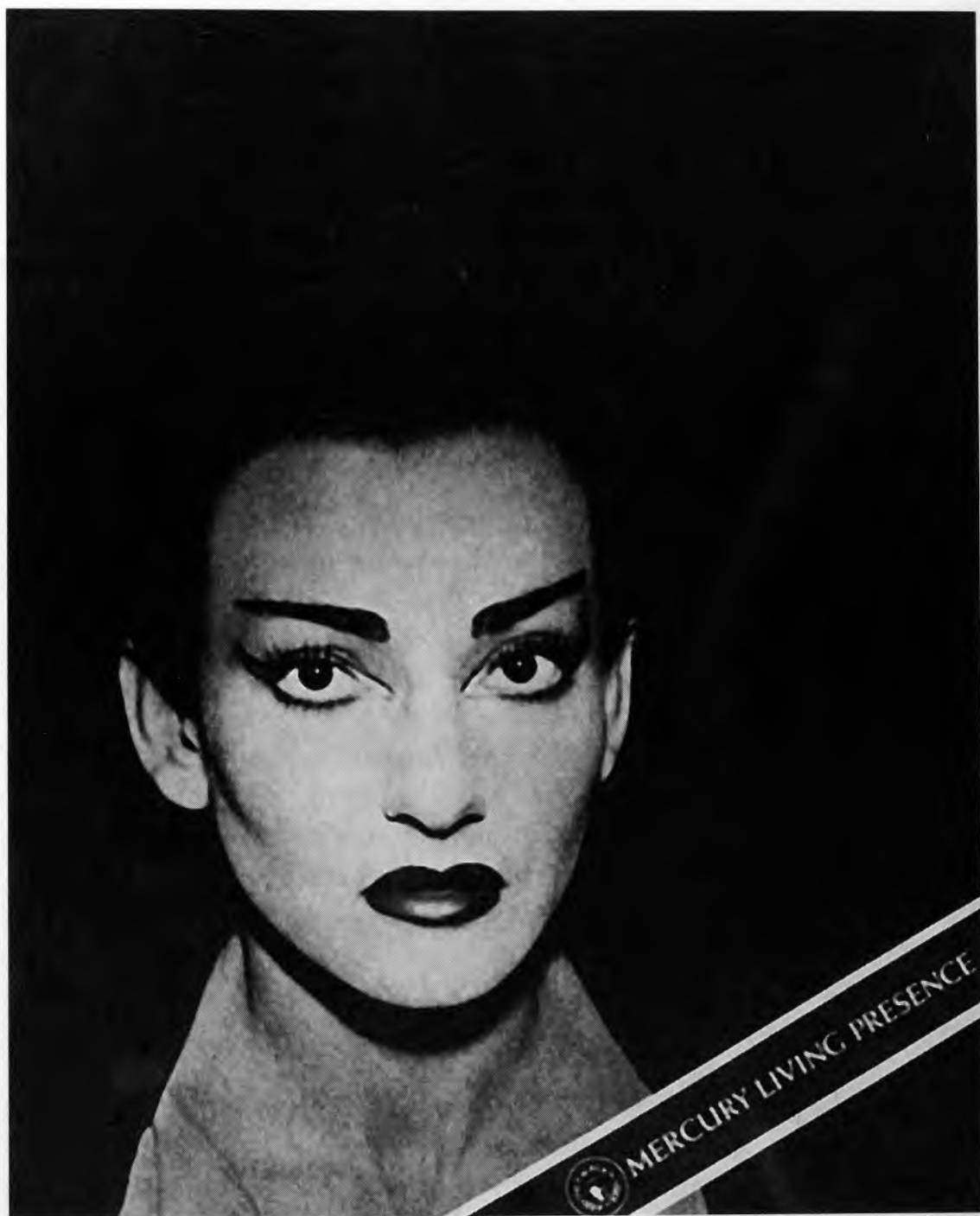
# Performing Medea; or, Why is Medea a Woman?

*Margaret Reynolds*

*Looking out from a 1958 photograph (fig. 9) Maria Callas challenges us. Her lips are painted full and red, her hair is tightly braided and piled in a crown on top of her head, her eyes are elaborately drawn with white shade and black winged outlines. Nothing is natural, save perhaps the shadow of her right cheekbone, and even that will be dusted in with rouge. The strangest features of all are her eyebrows. They are fierce, black, thickly angled upwards in a straight line. The photograph is contrived, abstract even, but these eyebrows make her beautiful face strangely foreign, as she herself is remote. Her eyes do not look at us, but through us. She gazes at something beyond us, something we do not see, yet still we are subject to her insolence.*

*I have picture books full of photographs of Callas and I turn the pages from time to time, always halting in the same places, always returning to this image. I am not the only one entranced. Wayne Koestenbaum has written about this picture—‘Tawdrily, I adore her’—though he does not discuss who she is here.<sup>1</sup> But it was this photograph that was used as the cover for the libretto of the 1958 Mercury Living Presence boxed set recording of Cherubini’s Medea.*

From the beginning of the invention of opera, Medea was one of its heroines. Early operas were intrigued by their own form, and relied upon subjects that introduced the self-reflexive element; on stage you saw a singer performing a singer, so the great set pieces were vehicles for the contemporary opera star, but they were also excuses to return to the moments of public performance in the lives of the heroes they portrayed. In this way Orpheus calming the Furies, or pleading with Pluto for the return of Eurydice, became the centrepiece in the many early works that took up his story, including Angelo Poliziano’s proto-



9. Oscar Savio, Maria Callas as Medea, 1958 (photograph)



operatic *Orfeo* (c.1480), Jacopo Peri's *Euridice* (1600), Caccini's *Euridice* (1602), and Claudio Monteverdi's *La favola d'Orfeo* (1607), and through to Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762). The invention of modern opera at the end of the sixteenth century is usually credited to the 'Camerata', a group of aristocratic humanists living in Florence, whose intention was to imitate the mixture of music and poetry that they imagined to have been the form of ancient Greek tragedy. It is not surprising, then, that early composers were attracted to the legendary story of Orpheus, the first singer and poet. But their respect for the Latin—and especially the Greek—Classics meant that these Renaissance scholars soon turned to the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides for sources for opera. The forms used in these plays—the use of the choral sections, the tense duet-dialogues between characters, the argued soliloquies of individual passion—were influential in shaping the patterns that we now recognize as 'operatic', but the subject-matter also dictated the tone of opera as it originally developed, and still remains today. As David Littlejohn puts it, the ancient Greek dramas offered a 'fusion of simplicity with primal passion', a 'union of aesthetic purity with human experience at the edge of nightmare'.<sup>2</sup>

'Experience at the edge of nightmare'. Yes. But in opera this is always *performed* experience. The actual experience, the facts, the events that make up the plot or motivate the characters may figure in the stage presentation, but they are always already over by the time the protagonist sings about them. The poetry of opera takes its rise not from 'emotion recollected in tranquillity', but from emotion faked in tranquillity by the composer and the performer, and felt, in an illusion of passion, by the listener. It is opera's emphasis on the moment of performance that explains why women began to take over from Orpheus as quintessential operatic characters. Not any women, that is, but specifically abandoned women.

'Historically', says Roland Barthes, 'the discourse of absence is carried on by the Woman: Woman is sedentary, Man hunts, journeys; Woman is faithful (she waits), man is fickle (he sails away, he cruises). It is Woman who gives shape to absence, elaborates its fiction, for she has time to do so; she weaves and she sings; the Spinning Songs express both immobility (by the hum of the Wheel) and absence (far away, rhythms of travel, sea surges, cavalcades).'<sup>3</sup> Gradually, the songs of Ariadne (Monteverdi's *Arianna*, 1608) or Dido (Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, 1689) took over Orpheus' Classical roles, to be followed by

their later Romantic incarnations, Donna Elvira, Violetta, Manon, Mimi, all abandoned in the way they gave themselves to their cruising men, all abandoned when those men sailed away.<sup>4</sup> And yet there was one *donna abbandonata* who also was deserted, who also sang her sorrows, but who did not die, who always did things differently: Medea.

It may have taken the Renaissance to revive interest in Euripides, but since then his *Medea* has never gone out of fashion. First performed in 431 BC, it is, as Edith Hall puts it, 'at a superficial level [. . .] the simplest of all Euripides' tragedies: its action consists of little more than its implacable protagonist's revenge on her treacherous husband by murdering his new bride and his sons'.<sup>5</sup> The play holds no other interest; all dramatic focus is on one thing—what Medea will do. But in that doing, Medea invents herself, performs herself, makes a creature of her own will, one who is utterly independent of authority, and who defies all convention and law, both human and divine. Above all, Medea insists upon having her say—which she has to, because otherwise there would be no play—but which she does always self-consciously. When she lies, she knows that that is a performance: 'Spare nothing of your expertise, Medea, as you plot and scheme. Go forward to your deed of terror' (401–3). When she acts, she knows that her act, too, is a performance, and she imagines for herself an appreciative audience: 'Let no one think of me as weak and submissive, a cipher—but as a woman of a very different kind, dangerous to my enemies and good to my friends. Such people's lives win the greatest renown' (807–10).<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, I suspect that the killing of the children remains so vividly as Medea's key act, not so much because we (and other audiences in other times) are appalled by its 'unnaturalness', as because it draws attention to Medea's physical performance of herself. She gave birth to the children, she 'invented' them by growing them in her own body. So she performed the mother. When she wishes to perform herself—'I am Medea'—the most extravagant act available to her is to destroy that which she herself has made: the children of her body. The emphasis upon the killing of the children, combined with a general assumption about the sanctities of motherhood (fathers who kill children are much more common, and altogether less scandalous), means that Medea's femininity can get overstated, though it is true that some ages pay more attention to it than others. She was after all written by a man, and in 431 BC she would have been performed by

a man. In other periods too, as we shall see, she was performed by men. In fact, Medea's real importance lies not in her being a woman, but in something much more generally relevant to all human beings in our culture—that is, in her performing a woman performing Medea.

Richard Poirier argues that all performance is connected to brutality, savagery even:

Performance is an exercise of power, a very anxious one. Curious because it is at first so furiously self-consultive, so even narcissistic, and later so eager for publicity, love and historical dimensions. Out of an accumulation of secretive acts emerges at last a form that presumes to compete with reality itself for control of the mind exposed to it.<sup>7</sup>

Performers, all performers, thrust themselves upon us. In that moment of 'extreme occasion' they strive for our attention and they do us a violence. They are outside of ourselves, their experience may be far removed from our own knowledge, and yet, when they have finished with us, when they have made us look at them, inscribed their texts on our flesh, invaded our psyche, then we remember them. Thus, through many violences, we recognize Medea, and she wins the 'renown' she craves.

During the period from the early seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, there were many operas made out of the legend of Medea (several of them drawing on Euripides), as well as any number of plays and dramatic recitations to be accompanied with music. These include Francesco Cavalli's *Giasone* (1649), Charpentier's *Médée* (1693), Antonio Caldara's cantata *Medea in Corinto* (c.1711), Salomon's *Médée et Jason* (1713), Georg Benda's *Medea* (1775), Luigi Cherubini's *Médée* (1797), Giovanni Simone Mayr's *Medea in Corinto* (1813), and Giovanni Pacini's *Medea* (1843). After about the middle of the nineteenth century Medea abruptly disappears as an operatic subject. Not only are there no new works composed in her name, but the operas that already existed remained unperformed. In the twentieth century Cherubini's opera was revived as a vehicle for Maria Callas in 1953, and since then a number of versions, both populist and elaborately arcane, have been composed or revived in the repertoire.<sup>8</sup>

Medea's operatic history is not the result of accident. Theodor Adorno has argued that music, after Beethoven, separated itself from the concerns of the bourgeoisie and acquired a purely aesthetic role, distinct from the social and cultural platforms that it had occupied



hitherto.<sup>9</sup> To some extent this may be true about virtuoso solo performance, and even about the increasingly elaborate orchestral inventions of the nineteenth century, but it is not true of opera. If anything, quite the reverse process was at work. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries opera was a courtly entertainment. With its cast of gods and heroes, with its spectacle, its deliberate artifice, its men dressed as women and women dressed as men, it was generally conceived as an aesthetic experience, remote from the world. In the nineteenth century it came to reflect social concerns; costumes were 'of the period', politics were contemporary; above all, the women on stage were women and the men were men. But Medea, from her earliest appearance on the operatic stage, had crossed these boundaries. So she could be tolerated in one historical and cultural situation; in the second, she was taboo; while in a third, in the twentieth century, she would be made into a heroine.

*Medea's image is an old one. In Pompeii, some time about the first century, a fresco painter portrayed her. Her stance is compact, focused, solid. Her hair is tightly bound. Her eyes, dark, lined in, stare fixedly out of the picture at something we cannot see. Her muscular arms, taut and strained, are held tight to her figure, so that her hands are clasped, fingers laced, over her lap. We can see that this Medea is a woman, but her femininity is contradicted by her given attribute. For in her hands, drawing attention to the hidden place of her sex, she holds an axe that draws a sharp diagonal line across her body. This fresco was unearthed during the excavations at Pompeii in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Today it is in the Museo Nazionale in Naples. It is reproduced on the libretto cover of the Virgin Classics 1991 recording of Antonio Caldara's Medea in Corinto.*

Caldara's *Medea in Corinto* gives us nothing but Medea, but in many ways it employs the same emphases that shaped Medea's story in Euripides and in the operas that came before and after Caldara (c.1670–1736). A bright instrumental introduction in the major is followed by a range of chords in the minor that anticipate Medea's vocal entrance. There is a brief return to the showy major tune, and then Medea begins to sing: 'Dunque, Giasone ingrato, fui io a farti senza periglio l'alta preda acquistar del vello d'oro' [So, ungrateful Jason, I was the one who made it possible for you to win without danger that noble prize, the Golden Fleece]. In this opening section,



effectively a piece of accompanied recitative, Medea lists all that she has done for Jason: the winning of the Golden Fleece, the sacrifice of her throne and country, the murder of her brother, the consequent loss of her own father, and the death of Pelias. She reminds him that she is still the same Medea 'to whom, in Phaeacia, you swore a husband's oath', punctuating each passage with the question 'è ver, Giasone ingrato?' [Is that true, ungrateful Jason?]

'Non respondi, e non mi guardi', begins a second section, an aria taking an AABAA pattern of repetition. 'You do not reply, you will not look at me', she sings—which well he might not, given that this is a solo, and Jason is not actually present here. In the second passage of recitative, Medea invites us to imagine Jason turning away ('But you leave me in anger'), while she calls him back ('Incautious Jason, stand still a while and listen'). She says that she knows about his planned marriage to Creon's daughter, Glauca, and the music climaxes as she says, 'Did you not say to them that I am Medea [. . .] that I can put out the light of the sun, and can call forth from the realm of Death shades and Furies to my aid?' Another AABAA aria follows as she warns of her fury: 'Beware then, if you betray me.' A third recitative section signals Jason's departure—'You don't reply, and now you leave'—and to the accompaniment of an extended arpeggio from the harpsichord, Medea announces that she will invoke her magic arts. Now, dramatically alone, the final aria section has Medea calling on the 'orrende Furie' [hideous Furies], who will assist her in punishing the 'perfido' [traitor]. The vocal line here plays with large intervals in showy leaps from the lower register to the high, while the libretto puns on 'aria'—as in both 'air' and 'song': 'Quest'aria ad infestar', sings Medea, 'come, infest the air' [. . .], 'mi voglio vendicar', 'I want to be, I will be avenged.'

In just some fourteen and a half minutes Caldara sketches out the essentials for performing Medea: the address to a silent (or absent) Jason; the memory of the past; the determination to resist the humiliation of the present; the invocation of dark powers; the impetus for revenge; and—above all—the self-recognition that goes into Medea's willed realization of self in performance: 'I am Medea', she says.

Antonio Caldara wrote his Cantata for alto solo and instrumental ensemble some time around 1711, possibly while he was working in Rome for the Princes Ruspoli. He had worked in his native Venice and in Mantua, and eventually was employed at the court of Charles VI in Vienna. Though his own instruments were the violin and the

cello, he had also distinguished himself as an alto in the choir at St Mark's, which suggests an interest in male singing of high-pitched parts, so that it seems to me perverse to suggest, as commentators have done, that his impressive virtuoso solo, 'Medea in Corinto', was written for his wife, Caterina Petrolli. In Italy, during the sixteenth, seventeenth, and most of the eighteenth centuries, the great stars of the new opera were the castrati. In Rome a papal ban forbade women to sing either in church or on the stage, and the custom of employing castrati in both sacred and secular roles spread throughout all the papal states.<sup>10</sup> Given the date and the place of Caldara's work it is highly probable that his Medea was performed by, if not actually written for, a contralto castrato, and its highly decorated musical style, particularly the exhibition of a wide vocal register in the last section, reflects exactly the kind of music that displayed the castrato voice to full advantage. (The Virgin Classics recording of 1991 makes the part a showpiece for the French countertenor, Gérard Lesne.) But there may be another consideration here too. I have said that Caldara's piece works through, in miniature, the essence of Medea's story. It does, but it leaves out one important element, and that is the resolution to murder her children.

The murder of the children is also absent from another early work, and again, perhaps significantly, it is one where all the major roles could have been sung by castrati. *Giasone* by Francesco Cavalli (1602–76), with a libretto by Giacinto Andrea Cicognini, was first performed at the newly established Teatro San Cassiano in Venice during the carnival season in the winter of 1649. *Giasone* himself was cast as a countertenor or male contralto role. Medea is a soprano, as are the *seconda donna* Isifile and the personifications related to Apollo and Eros (Sole and Amore). There is also a countertenor cross-dressing comic role for the character of Medea's nurse, Delfa, while the tenor and bass roles are entirely confined to the bit parts—*Giasone*'s friends, Ercole and Besso, Egeo King of Athens and Demo his servant. As *Giasone* was performed many times in many different situations, theatres would probably have cast the leading roles without regard to the gender of the singer, according to the common practice of the time. So *Giasone* might have been sung by a castrato in one production, and a woman contralto *en travesti* in another. Similarly, Medea might have been played by a soprano castrato, or by a woman.

The plot of Cavalli's *Giasone* deals with the early events of Medea's story. The opera opens in a garden near her father's palace and then

moves to the coast of Iberia as the guilty couple escape with the Golden Fleece. The musical plot involves many moralizing recitatives as well as some arioso laments, but the strangest aspect from the point of view of a modern audience is the introduction of the distinctively Venetian elements of burlesque and spectacle borrowed from the *commedia dell'arte*. These include a comic role for a stuttering hunchback servant, a ballet for a group of Spirits, and arcane jokes about the capacities, or otherwise, of the castrati singers. Though there was not as much scope for it in *Giasone* as in some of his other works, Cavalli's operas often drew attention to the gender ambiguities of his cast. In his *Calisto* (1651), for example, the story revolved around the seduction of Callisto by Jove, who went about it by disguising himself as Diana, to whom the nymph was dedicated. In spite of this ludicrous strand in the story, and also in spite of the fact that this plot focuses on the earlier part of the narrative, Cavalli's *Medea* is still recognizably performing herself, bringing herself into being by invoking her magic, by enacting the deeds that will make her who she is. And she still has an opportunity to sing a version of the 'I am Medea' style aria at the end of the first Act, where she announces her intention to assist Jason with all her powers: 'Sì, sì, sì vincerà il mio Re, / sì, sì, sì vincerà, vincerà il mio Re, / a suo pro Deità di la giù pugnerà, pugnerà, pugnerà, / sì, sì, sì vincerà, vincerà' (I. iv).

*Eugène Delacroix's famous painting of Medea dates from 1838. She is in a dark place, a low cave, and she looks over her shoulder away from us and toward the light filtering in at the entrance. Her eyes and her long black hair are in shadow, but her flesh is lit up; her bare arms, her full, naked breasts gleam luridly above the nude bodies of her two infant sons whom she clasps, dangling from her waist, as if they were ornaments. The picture draws attention to the enigma: Medea is a woman, bearer of children, and Medea is a murderer, wielding the fatal dagger. The Harmonia Mundi 1984 recording by William Christie and Les Arts Florissants of the Médée of Marc Antoine Charpentier (1634–1704) carries this picture on its sleeve.*

Unlike Cavalli's or Caldara's, Charpentier's *Medea* was certainly a woman. His *Médée*, with a libretto by Thomas Corneille, was first performed at the court of Louis XIV in 1693. The title role was taken by Marthe Le Rochois, the most celebrated singer of the day. Since French opera did not employ castrati, nor did it place so much emphasis on the high voice as the Italian opera, it was more likely to



make use of the full range of male voices. In *Médée* Créon is a bass, Jason a tenor, and Oronte a baritone. The style of early French opera is also markedly different from Italian opera in that it relies upon lengthy accompanied declamation rather than recitative interspersed with arias, and includes elaborate ballets and stylized set pieces of spectacle. But *Médée* is still given certain key passages where her musical characterization is brought dramatically into focus.

Act I Scene i opens with Nérine, *Médée*'s companion and nurse to her children, trying to persuade her that Jason is acting in her best interests in ingratiating himself with the princess, Créuse, and her father, Créon. *Médée* will have none of it: 'Qu'il soit abandonné de Créuse et du Roy, / S'il luy faut un appuy ne l'a t'il pas en moy?' [If he be abandoned by Creusa and the King, / If he needs support, has he it not in me?]. Nérine attempts to argue that he is doing it for the sake of the children. *Médée* replies, supported only by two chords on the harpsichord, 'Qu'il le cherche mais qu'il me craigne' ['Let him look for it, but'—this is sung on a extended, crescendo note—'but let him fear me']. Then the full orchestra enters with a rapid rushing passage in the strings evoking *Médée*'s anger and the threat of her will. Over a strong and fast pulsing beat from the continuo *Médée* makes her statement, rounded off with another full orchestral passage of display: 'Un Dragon assoupy, / De fiers Taureaux domptez / ont à ses yeux suivy mes volontez; / S'il me vole son cœur, / Si la Princesse y règne, / De plus grands efforts feront voir / Ce qu'est *Médée* et son pouvoir' [A dragon put to sleep, / fierce bulls tamed / have followed my commands before his eyes; / If he steals his heart from me, / if the Princess now reigns there, / then greater efforts / will show what Medea is and the reach of her power]. It is a striking moment, succinct and exciting, and all the more marked because such passages are few in the extended sung recitation that makes up most of this lengthy opera:

Such musically vivid and emphatic passages as there are in Charpentier's opera are almost all written for *Médée*. In Act II Scene i some dramatic orchestral writing accompanies *Médée*'s self-defence, addressed to Créon: 'Vos reproches, Seigneur, ne sont pas légitimes, / Si pour Jason je me suis tous permis, / Puisque luy seul a jouy de mes crimes, / C'est luy seul qui les a commis' [Your reproaches are not justified, my lord, / If I let myself do everything for Jason, / given that he alone has benefited from my crimes, / then it is he alone who is guilty]. In a short but evocative vocal passage further on in the same



scene Médée emphasizes again that always absolute, always threatened sense of self: 'Ay-je donc mérité cette rigueur extrême? / On me chasse, on m'exile, on m'arrache à moy-mesme' [And have I then deserved this harsh rigour? / I am driven away, exiled, torn away from my own self]. Act IV Scene v is introduced with vibrating strings as Médée wavers, contemplating the terror of her planned revenges, but her composure is restored with bright emphatic chords. In the following scene, during an exchange with Créon, Médée taunts him: 'Tu prens une trompeuse idée / De te croire en état de me faire la loy. / Quand tu te vantes d'estre Roy, / Souviens-toy que je suis Médée' [You have a mistaken idea / when you think that you are in a position to lay down the law for me. / When you boast that you are King, / Remember that I am Medea].

*When the Hungaroton label released Luigi Cherubini's Médée, recorded in 1976 with the Budapest Symphony Orchestra under Lamberto Gardelli, they used a photograph of their leading lady on the cover. Sylvia Sass stares straight out, her head slightly lowered so that she looks up at us, her eyes drawn in with fine black eyeliner. Her dark hair is loose, but she has crossed her hands over her chest, pulling two heavy tresses across her face, so that her mouth and chin, all the lower part of her face, are entirely hidden, and her face is framed with a veil of hair. The effect is strange, almost animal-like, barbaric, disturbing.*

The *Médée* of Luigi Cherubini (1760–1842) was composed to a book by François-Benoît Hoffmann during the years of the French Revolution. It was first performed in Paris in March 1797. Conventional musicological history says that the work is important because it marks a phase of transition from the traditional forms of Italian opera seria, and the beginnings of a recognizably romantic style, foreshadowing the development of grand opera that took place in the nineteenth century. That may be true. But for the history of performing Medea the date of this work also suggests many significant political and cultural associations.

Cherubini's overture sets out two contrasting themes. It opens with a vigorous tune in the strings, supported by emphases from the brass and percussion, which descends the scale in a succession of dramatic chords and then rises up to begin the process again. Against this is set a gentle secondary idea in the wind and string sections. This includes a passage of curtsying grace notes, three times repeated and concluded

with a phrase, itself repeated four times, that begins with a chord sounded by the wind instruments, then is completed in the strings as it fades delicately away. Erupting into that silence, variations on the fierce opening theme return. This pattern is repeated several times until, in the end, the energetic opening theme dominates, and the overture concludes with hurrying strings, trumpeting brass, and blaring percussion descending to the dominant in dramatic intervals of thirds. This form sets out the musical plot for the whole opera. It is Medea and Glauce (or Creusa or Dirce), it is assertion and acquiescence, it is revolution and reaction—and revolution always wins.

Throughout Europe, from about the middle of the eighteenth century, the intellectual and cultural atmosphere had promoted the rise of the intellectual and passionate woman. Writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft in England and, slightly later, Germaine de Staël in France, were vindicating the 'rights of woman'. Painters such as Angelica Kauffmann and Élisabeth-Louise Vigée-Lebrun had put women artists into the picture. Celebrated actresses such as Sarah Siddons had re-created roles for strong women, and Medea was a strong woman. During the last twenty-five years of the eighteenth century there appeared some ten operas based on Medea's story including Georg Benda's *Medea* (1775, a 'melodrama' for spoken voice), and those by Gossec (1782), Andreozzi (1785), Vogel (1786), Moneta (1787), Naumann (1788), Winter (1789), Cherubini (1797), Piticchio (1798), and Spontini (1798). Medea even appeared as one of Emma Hamilton's famous 'Attitudes' performed in Naples and elsewhere across Europe from the 1780s. By the time that the Austrian dramatist Franz Grillparzer came to write his well-known tragedy *Medea* in 1820, the third part of his trilogy *Das Goldene Vließ*, Medea's character, and then his particular version of it, had come to provide one of the great female roles (see Macintosh, ch. 1). In the introduction to an English translation of Grillparzer's play, the editor notes that 'It is in the present repertoire of the principal theatres, and the rôle of its Medea is a favourite one for the greatest actresses to choose as their *Glanzrollen*, or show parts.'<sup>11</sup>

Cherubini's Medea is also a *Glanzrolle*, a glitter part, and she does dazzle. The opera begins with a long scene for Glauce, a chorus of attendants, and then Creon and Jason, as they anticipate the marriage of Glauce and Jason. The music here is lyrical, playing on the grace note pattern introduced in the overture. Glauce is given the one

soprano coloratura aria of the work, 'O Amore, vieni a me', with a flute *obbligato*, and Jason sings a conventional tenor romance, 'Or che più non vedrò'. Besides Glauce's anxious mentions of Medea's name, and a brief musical frisson—'Colcho! Pensier fatal / O funesto presagio!'—it takes some twenty-eight minutes before the Captain of the Guard appears on stage to announce that a woman stands at the threshold, that her appearance is strange and mysterious, her face hidden by a thick veil, and 'ha breve e dura al labbro la parola' [her words fall short and hard from her lips]. Once Medea makes her entrance the stage is hers alone. 'Who are you?' asks Creon. 'Io? Medea!'—'I am Medea', she replies. As in Caldara's cantata, we see that Jason falls silent before her: 'Or parla tu! Perché muto stai? / Nulla hai tu da dire a me, tua donna?' [Now speak! Why are you silent? Have you nothing to say to me, your wife?]. Then follows the familiar pattern set out in previous versions of the legend: Medea pleads with Jason to remember their past, they sing an extended duet about the 'fatal Golden Fleece', and finally, at the end of Act I, Medea is banished by Creon, but then allowed one day, as in Euripides, before her departure.

In Act II Medea begins her 'doubled' performance. Once she has ascertained that Jason still cares about his children, she exhorts herself to dissemble: 'Finzione, sol tu puoi / aiuto dare a me! Ch'io menta!' [Deception, you alone can help me now! Let me lie!]. Medea masquerades as a loving mother, but she never forgets that this is all faked: 'You will have to pay dearly for my feigned sighs' she says in an aside as she coaxes Jason to let her see the children. From this point on, the whole opera is geared so as to act out Medea's internal struggles on stage. She works through successive stages of fury, despair, resolve, and pity, but eventually arrives at the moment of self-realization in the Finale. Here, once again, the key words appear: 'Eh che? Io son Medea! / Io son Medea, e li lascio in vita? / Che mai fu? Dove son? Dove son? / Son ciechi gli occhi miei!' [What is this? I am Medea. I am Medea, and yet I let them live? What have I done? Where am I? Where am I? My eyes are blinded!]. At the climax of this aria Medea invokes the Erinyes, the 'implacable goddesses', to a repeated, stressed, long-bowed accompaniment in the lower strings, which appears again as she takes up the knife: 'Rendi il pugnà! Rendi il pugnà / che di man mi sfuggì!' [Give me back the dagger, the dagger that fell from my hand]. This is who she is. 'I am Medea'. As the opera closes Medea shows herself to all: 'T'arresta', she cries to



Jason, 'e affissa ben la tua sposa schernita' [Stop! And look well at the wife you scorned].

This contrived theatrical display is the whole purpose of the opera—of all Medea's performances—and it is worth noting that this opera effectively sets the 'acting out' specifically against what is 'natural'. Medea knows that she deceives, plays a part. And she also knows that she contravenes conventional notions of order. In the moment when she finally dismisses her maternal feelings she construes them as 'natural'—'Natura, or tu invano parli a me' [Nature, now you speak to me in vain]—and her denial of such feeling is represented as deliberate and self-directed. The musical characterization of Medea's part bears out this 'anti-natural' strand. Her part is set consistently in the lower register, so that the voice does not always sound like a 'woman's', but is—like Medea herself—'strange and mysterious', with her words coming 'short and harsh', especially in the heated sections of invocation and resolve. The setting and the action also suggest her opposition to convention. The climactic scenes in Act III are set on a mountainside with a temple in the background, so that the temple represents the civilization that Medea will overthrow, as she has already torn down a torch from the altar in Act II, and as she will destroy both temple and city, leaving them in flames as she makes her escape at the end of the opera.

*During the London winter season of 1826 Giuditta Pasta played the title role in Mayr's Medea in Corinto. Her performance so captured the artist George Hayter that he made a series of lithographs illustrating all her principal scenes. For Act II Scene ix, 'Misere pargoletti' [my poor unhappy babes'], he made three images to be read consecutively, as if the artist was trying to capture the movement, the kinetic qualities of Pasta's performance, as well as the shifting shades of Medea's emotion (fig. 10). In the first picture, her hair down, her arms bare, Medea bends down to embrace the two children who reach up toward her. In the second, they still lift up their arms, while she, standing erect, raises her arms and her eyes to heaven in a gesture of despair and supplication. In the third, she moves swiftly right stage, her body in a marked diagonal, her garments swirling around her. She carries one child squirming and protesting, clasped tight to her waist, while she drags the other, resisting and pulling back, behind her. Her eyes are fixed, looking backward over her shoulder. She stares, but she does not see the children.*

It may be that Giovanni Simone Mayr (1763–1845), or his librettist





10. George Hayter, Giuditta Pasta as Medea, 1826 (drawing).  
Giovanni Simone Mayr's *Medea in Corinto*,  
performed at the King's Theatre, London

Felice Romani, knew Cherubini's opera. The story in Mayr's *Medea* (1813) is complicated by the introduction of a sub-plot where Medea forms an allegiance with Egeo, King of Athens, who was previously betrothed to Creusa; Medea and Egeo attempt to kidnap Creusa half-way through the opera. But the opening scene is similar, in that Creusa looks forward to her marriage while she fends off a sense of foreboding about what Medea will do.<sup>12</sup>

As in all the *Medea* operas, it is Medea's sense of self that makes the dramatic focus of the work. At her first entrance in Act I Scene v, she is met by a chorus of Corinthians who taunt her with Jason's betrayal: 'Partite o vili', she says, 'di mirare indegni / Siete l'affanno di Medea' [Depart, vile creatures, you are not worthy to witness the grief of Medea]. In Act I Scene ix, during an extended duet with Giasone, he points out that she was a queen who has now lost her throne: what can he do but seek another? What else is left to him? In one grand word, accompanied by the full orchestra, Medea replies: 'Io' [I am]. She goes on, 'Era Medea, lo sai, / Del suo destin maggiore; / Barbaro, oh dio! minore / Si fece sol per te' [Medea, you know, was greater than her destiny. It was only for you, barbarian, that she made herself less]. 'Trema', she says to him, 'Sai chi sono?' [Tremble . . . Do you know who I am?]

Medea's behaviour, in Mayr, as in Cherubini, is construed as opposed to the influences of civilization: she actually interrupts Jason and Creusa's marriage and overturns the altar. Her actions are at the same time designated as 'unnatural'. As she contemplates the murder of her children, Medea calls herself 'una madre snaturata' [an unnatural mother], and later calls on supernatural aid: 'Oh Furie, che un giorno / Guidaste il ferro del germano in seno, / A me venite: ho pieno / Il cor di voi. Copri natura il volto' [Oh you Furies who one day guided the dagger into my brother's breast, Come to me now. My heart overflows with you. Nature, cover your face].

It is, however, the musical contrast between the perceived 'femininity' of Creusa and the 'unnatural' contrivances of Medea that is made most explicit. After she has been rescued from Medea and Egeo at the beginning of the Second Act, Creusa sings one of the most famous arias of the opera, 'Caro albergo'. This is introduced by an extended harp obbligato and accompanied by harp and woodwind. Mayr's opera was premiered in 1813 and he is credited with having introduced the harp (then perceived as a domestic instrument) into the opera orchestra. From this time on a harp accompaniment became

an accepted tradition associated with the portrayal of women characters, and frail, excessively feminine characters at that. Examples might include Desdemona's solo in the last act of Rossini's *Otello* (1816), where she is sometimes staged accompanying herself on the harp, and Lucia's Act I solo 'Regnava nel silenzio' in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835). So closely did the harp come to be associated with a threatened feminine sexuality through the years of the nineteenth century, that in 1900 Puccini would introduce a harp part into the orchestration for Tosca's great aria 'Vissi d'arte', sung when she is most vulnerable to Scarpia's evil intentions. As the conductor Mark Elder once said to me: 'Puccini uses the harp when he wants to undress a woman.'

Mayr's Medea, on the other hand, is always associated with dramatic writing for the strings—and the lower register of strings at that—most often played in contrasting passages of heavy legato, or pizzicato, or given rushing passages of energetic bowing. In terms of voice, Medea's part is consistently set in the lower chest notes, alleviated by the kind of dramatic display that so often characterizes her, with huge octave leaps and arpeggios from high to low, or vice versa. In her great invocation scene in Act II Scene v she is accompanied by hollow vibrating notes from the strings and the woodwind, and a muted brass underlined by swift drum rolls. Mayr's use of a chromatic scale places the audience in a listenerly discomfort as our ears strain all the time for the resolution, not wholly offered until after the reply of the Furies and the end of the scene.

In Act II Scene xv, 'Miseri pargoletti' [Poor wretched babes], in which Medea discusses her resolution to kill the children, Mayr seems originally to have set a violin obbligato, later revised for the English horn. This may suggest that he is signalling a (brief) return to her 'feminine nature'. When Medea comes to the end of her task, performing herself, she is accompanied by broad chords in the strings and muted brass: 'Vili! Tremate ancor [Towards, tremble still]; 'Gl'occhi nel volto affissami; / Mirami, traditore', she says to Giasone [Fix your eyes on my face; you traitor, look at me].

The 'Medea' operas of Cherubini and Mayr fall quite close together, being premiered in 1797 and 1813 respectively, and their shared patterns reflect not just a common musical and dramatic inheritance, but the tone of a time when strong women could take on commanding roles. Yet times were already changing, and it is possible to trace certain shifts, changes, and trends in the way gender was



conventionally constructed to the years just after the events of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. During the Revolution, in the very years when Cherubini's opera was first being performed, Paris had seen many bloodthirsty women on the streets, and the authorities had become anxious that the undermining of the social fabric they were witnessing entailed the wholesale destruction of the family and the traditional roles designated to women and to men. Increasingly, legislation was introduced to restrict women's active political engagement. Then Napoleon's aversion to Madame de Staël—'la femme qui parle'—and her kind led, in particular, to her being exiled to Switzerland, and, in general, to the circumscription of women's influence even in the Salons. As Nancy Armstrong says, the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the development of an oppositional system of sex and gender where the definition of masculinity became increasingly dependent on the concomitant construction of its feminine 'other'. So over the course of the nineteenth century women had increasingly to be 'women', and men had to be 'men', as the whole ideological system of the 'separate spheres' of the sexes was worked out.<sup>13</sup>

In opera this had some peculiar and particular results. First of all it led, in part, to the demise of the castrati, for it was Napoleon who banned the practice in all the Italian states under French control.<sup>14</sup> Mayr's *Medea* itself had a small role to play in this larger operatic drama. The opera was commissioned for the Teatro San Carlo at Naples, where Napoleon's brother-in-law Joachim Murat ruled. The theatre had specified a 'French-style' opera, that is, through-composed with accompanied recitative, rather than the Italian style of a mix of *recitativo secco* interspersed with arias. To begin with, Mayr took no notice, and wrote an Italian opera, complete with the part of Giasone cast for a mezzo-soprano castrato (or woman, presumably, had no suitable castrato been available), but such was the antipathy of the French establishment at Naples that Mayr was forced to revise the part and give it to a tenor. So contemporary social conditioning changed Mayr's *Medea*. But the larger context implied by the anxieties underlying that conditioning ended up changing *Medea* herself and writing her a brand new story.

*A woman in white robes stands in the light of the full moon. She is a priestess, and leader of her people, enslaved by the conquering Romans. In the silence the rebellious people wait for her instructions. She draws a knife and prepares*



to cut the sacred mistletoe that will reveal the will of the gods and tell them if the time is propitious for attack. She raises her knife, and makes her pronouncement. Not yet. Instead, she calms her people and sings a hymn of praise to the moon, 'Casta Diva'—'Chaste goddess'. This is Callas again. She is poised, calm, as cool as her goddess, as she seems to sing a hymn to the beauty of her art. But we know that underneath this control beats a heart full of passion. And we know that she is Norma, not Medea, and that, in the end, she will be punished.

*Norma* (1831), by Vincenzo Bellini (1801–35), was composed to a libretto by Felice Romani, who returned for his story to the plot he had once created for one of his greatest successes—Mayr's *Medea*. Norma, High Priestess of the beleaguered Druids, has delayed giving the signal to attack the invading Romans who have conquered her people. Day after day, her father and her army await her orders; day after day she calms their expectations. Her reasons are personal. In spite of her vows of chastity, in spite of her loyalty to her race, Norma has been the lover of Pollione the Roman general and she has borne him three children. Pollione now wishes to leave Norma and marry Adalgisa, another of Norma's vestals. Norma releases Adalgisa from her vows, but then discovers who it is that the younger woman wishes to marry. In a scene taken straight from *Medea*, Norma nerves herself to kill her children. The difference is that she does not, she fails, and maternal pity wins the day. Then in the dénouement to the opera, Norma announces to her father that she must declare that the Druids have a traitor in their midst. A funeral pyre is prepared, and in the closing moments, Norma entrusts her children to her father's care, denounces herself as the traitor, and goes to the stake. Pollione, his old love rekindled by her heroism, joins her there.

It is a peculiarly nineteenth-century reworking of Medea's story. Everything is sweetened, toned down. Norma has committed no crimes other than the one of romantic passion; her incantation is addressed to the moon, not to the Furies; she cannot kill her own children—'Ah no, son i miei figli! Miei figli'; she forgives Adalgisa, the Creusa/Glaucé figure (though Pollione has a dream that Norma will murder her); she is reconciled to Pollione/Jason; she is pitied and pardoned by the Creon figure Oroveso, who is actually her own father; and it is Norma who acknowledges her own crimes and condemns herself to death. Though *Norma* was received with bewilderment at its premiere in 1831, it soon became a favourite and

is still one of the established operas in the repertoire. It revised Euripides' *Medea* and all the other operatic *Medeas*, and then *Medea* herself got rewritten.

The last *Medea* opera of the nineteenth century was composed by Giovanni Pacini (1796–1867) to a libretto by Benedetto Castiglia. It was first performed in Palermo in November 1843, and then in a revised version at Vicenza in 1845. Here *Medea* even begins the opera as someone else, not herself. According to Pacini's story *Medea* has already gone into exile, but she has returned to Creon's kingdom disguised as Creusa, who has been given the task of bringing up *Medea*'s children. Only Jason knows the truth of her identity. The authority of the state has been invoked against her by Creon's decree of exile—a punishment for her crimes in murdering her brother and betraying her father—but now the religious establishment also seeks to curb her powers, and the priests, led by Calcante, plan to annul her marriage, even in her absence, thus isolating her still further. In the only moment in the opera that comes close to the self-direction we are used to, *Medea* interrupts the sacred ceremony and makes Jason reveal to the priests who she really is. Her children are taken away, but then given back for a brief farewell when she promises to depart immediately. Jason goes ahead with his plans to marry Glauce, but then *Medea* carries out her revenge. She sends the poisoned robe to Glauce, she kills her children, and finally . . . she kills herself.

Pacini's first opera was *Saffo* (1840), in which Sappho—another strong and difficult woman—also challenged the authority of the priests and ended up being forced to take her own life. But in spite of Pacini's statement in his memoirs that *Medea*'s story moved him to 'loathing and compassion', it was not his personal bent that dictated her punishment in his opera. It was, rather, the insistence of the times, and after what had happened to *Norma*, *Medea* was not feeling herself. Here, and for the very first time in her operatic history, *Medea* has to pay.

*In my picture books of Maria Callas there is one image that comes up over and over again. She wears Classical robes, heavy linen, maybe one piece of outsize jewellery. Her arms are outstretched, tension in every muscle, her fingers too are open, her thumbs bent right back. Her eyes are wide, her face taut. And her mouth is open, her lips curled. 'I am Medea' she sings. And she is.*

Usually *Medea* doesn't pay. She suffers, but she survives. In *Caldara*,

in Cavalli, in Charpentier, in Cherubini, in Mayr, Medea gets away with it, just as she got away with it in Euripides. That is why she is the heroine she is. That is why she is unique. That is why we love her.

In the end it is the relation between the operatic Medea and her *audiences* that makes her so powerful a figure and that distinguishes her from all other operatic heroines. When Medea performs herself on stage, when she says 'I am Medea', or 'Do you not remember who I am?', she is not speaking to Jason or to Creusa or Creon. They are silent, irrelevant, offstage. Medea stands alone on stage. She speaks to herself. But we are there. We are listening. She speaks to us. And it is our presence that brings her into being, that allows her to perform herself. 'I am Medea', she says, and we acknowledge her. In silence we respond: 'Yes, we remember who you are. Let us see you act yourself. Commit your violent acts against the ciphers around you, and take us. Make us know you by your deeds, through the extreme occasion of your performance. Say it over again: "I am Medea."'

Under the heading of 'The Absent One' in *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, Roland Barthes asks in an aside: 'But isn't desire always the same, whether the object is present or absent? Isn't the object *always* absent?—This isn't the same languor: there are two words: *pothos*, a desire for the absent being, and *himeros*, the more burning desire for the present being.' Later on he writes, under the heading of 'Love's Obscenity', of a nightmare evening at the opera:

a very bad tenor comes on stage; in order to express his love to the woman he loves, who is beside him, he stands facing the public. I am this tenor: like a huge animal, obscene and stupid, brightly lighted as in a show window, I declaim an elaborately encoded aria, without looking at the one I love, to whom I am supposed to be addressing myself.<sup>15</sup>

'Isn't the object *always* absent?', asks Barthes. I have seen them. You will have seen them too. Perhaps you've even been one of them, those couples who sit in parked cars late at night. They speak, they talk in intense sporadic bursts. They talk, but they look straight ahead. Like the tenor, they address an absence. The beloved, though present, is not there.

Medea, by contrast, knows her real lover. Not Jason, or Egeo, or her rivals Glauce or Creusa. She has someone who does watch her, someone to whom she can address herself face to face. Someone who really is there. The audience. By witnessing the spectacle of Medea's suffering and acting we come to love her and to appreciate her as we



put our own selves in her place. In musical theatre the place of the listener, of the audience, is always a strange one. We are strangely removed, and at once strangely involved. The performer makes sounds with their body, supported by other sounds. They sing, and they pretend to feel. We hear; we let those sounds into our own body, and we do feel. That is the nature of opera performance. But when it is Medea who sings, Medea who pretends—twice or thrice over, because that is her operatic role and her function in the opera—then our collusion? ...subjection? ...manipulation? ...is made explicit. In *Image, Music, Text* Barthes asks: 'Does not musical fantasy consist in giving oneself a place, as a subject, in the scenario of the performance?' Elsewhere in the same book he points out that there is 'an imaginary in music whose function is to reassure, to constitute the subject hearing it'.<sup>16</sup>

This is what Medea does for us. She allows us, if only for the length of her performance, the freedom to perform ourselves—or, rather, the selves that we should be, if we were not bound by convention, by law, by order and decree. If we can no longer perform music routinely ourselves, if we no longer have access to that expression of self through mind and body in performance, then all the more do we need the heroines who will do it for us. And pre-eminent amongst those heroines is Medea, especially when she is performed by another anarchic heroine like Maria Callas.

It is too easy to say that the public so widely associated Callas with her roles as Medea (and Norma) because she acted out the betrayed diva who once had magic powers, who used them to ensnare her adventurer hero, and then lost him to another, more desirable and more feminine, princess. Callas was first of all Medea because she knew who she was: 'I am Medea.' Because she had created herself: 'Do you not remember who I am?' And then because she made her audience identify with her, belong to her, become her. When Callas performed Medea, she performed us too. Who we wanted to be. Who we could be. Live, sing, suffer, sing, be, sing, know who you are. That is what she did. For herself. For us. For her audiences then, for her admirers now. But she was only picking up on what was already there. In Euripides, in Cherubini, in all those incarnations. 'I am Medea,' she sings. And we respond, 'We remember who you are.'

Catherine Clément, at the end of her *Opera or the Undoing of Women*, writes what she calls a 'Finale: in praise of Paganism'. It is about what opera is for, and about why it works the way it does.



When the audience applauds, she says, they enter a barbaric state. They have heard the performance, orchestrated, rehearsed, planned to the last degree. But they respond with a wild demonstration, unplanned, inarticulate, savage, uncontrolled . . . hysterical even. And they do that, she suggests, because that is what the opera—ordered though it is—unleashes in them. She describes how what happens on stage, made by the bodies of the performers, enters into her body. She becomes ‘pregnant’ with the images she has seen, the sounds she has heard, the rebellions she has witnessed: ‘Norma passes the silent torch of revolt to Carmen, and it falls into my hands, like a shuttle with which it is my turn to weave’. As these images grow in her, she celebrates her own inarticulate, primeval, and physical reaction to opera:

As for myself, I prefer to get lost in this beneficial going to pieces where my body is no longer mine, but is inhabited; as for myself, I choose hysteria, the blessed quality of being other [. . .]. For a long time what acted as thought for me came from the head and did not belong to me. For a long time, orderly thoughts, words of wisdom, and controlled arguments crisscrossed the space of something that was not my language but that of others, men. The opera formed an enclave, an Indian reservation where wildness was permitted, a transitory and painful promised land. Music for me was an unthought place of refuge. One day I became aware that opera did not come to me from my head. And, although I had often used the word heart, it was because of some leftover sense of propriety and prudence in a world where women are still held—in respect or contempt. Opera comes to me from somewhere else; it comes to me from the womb. That is no easygoing sexual organ. The uterus, which is where hysteria comes from, is an organ where the thought of beings is conceived, a place where powerful rhythms are elaborated; a musical beat that is peculiar to women, the source of their voice, their breathing, their spasmodic way of thinking. There and there alone history is expressed in the first person.<sup>17</sup>

So this is a clue. Opera out of one body, entering into another body, speaks to a self that is not rational, but feeling. Medea is *the* operatic heroine, beyond all others, because she too inhabits a world—creates a world—of feeling, that is beyond speech, a world within a self that is untamed, wild, anterior to order and defiant of law. And she does it through her body; through what her body makes and then unmakes—the children of her womb. Maria Callas acted out Medea—on and off stage—because her art was her offspring, the thing that she made, and her body was still the medium. She made

herself into a diva, she succumbed to sex, she was betrayed for sex and power, and she killed her precious progeny. But, like most Medeas, she survived, at least in the minds of her admirers, and it is our continued admiration that lets her live.

*I began with that photograph of Callas as Medea, and I said that in my admiration I am not the only one entranced. Wayne Koestenbaum writes that the Mercury Living Presence recording 'tempts' him because of this photo: 'Callas looking like a ghost with dark painted lips and hair braided in a pile above her head, a photograph so abstract (black background, white face) that I dare not call my emotion sexual: nor is it a musical attachment, because while I stare at this picture I am not listening to Medea (though my love for her face depends on already loving her voice). Tawdrily, I adore her, and I believe, irrationally, that the dead Maria Callas, departed diva, is grateful for this devotion, that she intangibly depends on it.'*<sup>18</sup>

This is the paradox. Medea is strange, she will always be strange, always be different, for that is who she is, the outsider who makes herself through defiance, who performs herself through difference, through resistance. As that defiance is always other, it will always be lined up with 'woman'. Not a constructed feminine (like Creusa/Glaucé's) but, in Hélène Cixous's words, the 'dark continent' that cannot be colonized. And, as Cixous points out, this 'woman' can be either male or female. Koestenbaum is a man, but his reaction to Callas-as-Medea is feeling. It is, in Clément's terms, hysterical, mysterious, as strange and remote, as primeval as Medea herself.<sup>19</sup> And in many ways his reaction is the right one. Not just for Callas, but for Medea. She performed herself for us. So she will only survive if we recognize and acknowledge that performance. Callas, departed diva, does depend on our adoration. Medea, invented heroine, depends on our recognition. But she speaks to something deep within, to the prior experiences of the body without words, without order. She speaks to the child in the womb—which we all once were—and she speaks through the medium of the body of the woman, herself, her children, which she makes, and unmakes, at will.

Perhaps, after all, this is why Medea is always a woman, even when she is a man.

## Notes to Chapter 6

1. Koestenbaum (1993), 72.
2. Littlejohn (1992), 79.
3. Barthes (1990), 13–14.
4. On the abandoned woman in opera, see Lipking (1990).
5. Hall (1997*c*), xv.
6. All quotations from Euripides are taken from Morwood (1997).
7. Poirier (1971), 87.
8. The more recent works include Samuel Barber's ballet music originally entitled *Serpent Heart* (1946), later revised as *Cave of the Heart*, and reworked as a concert suite called *Medea*, Iannis Xenakis's *Medea* for men's chorus and instrumental ensemble (1967), Gavin Bryars's *Medea* (1984), Mikis Theodorakis's *Medea* (1991), John Fisher's *Medea: The Musical* (1995), and Michael John LaChiusa's *Marie Christine* (1999). Some of these are discussed by Marianne McDonald (Ch. 5) and in McDonald (1997). Other more bizarre contributions to the *Medea* oeuvre include a sketch, 'Medea in Disneyland', performed by Dorothy Greener in a Ben Bagley 'Shoestring Revue' on Broadway (1957), Melina Mercouri's song 'Medea Tango', recorded on the United Artists label in 1966, and a track entitled 'Medea Terrorists', written by Troy Tempest, published by Bravado Chappell Ltd, and recorded by the group Das psych-oh rangers (Troy Tempest, Be Decard, Jules von Vleet, and Che Atlas) on the zang tuum tuum label in 1986.
9. Adorno (1937).
10. See Heriot (1956).
11. Thurstan and Wittmann [1879], p. vi.
12. Opera Rara released a recording of Mayr's opera in 1993 which included Jane Eaglen as Medea, Bruce Ford as Giasone, and Yvonne Kenny as Creusa. The enclosed copy of the libretto reproduces many of Hayter's engravings, which are held in the Victoria and Albert Museum.
13. Armstrong (1987), 3–27. For Mme de Staël see Goldberger (1995) and Gutwirth (1978). For the gender politics of the French Revolution see Cameron (1991) and Hunt (1991*a*). For the effects in opera of these changes in attitudes to sexuality and gender see Reynolds (1995).
14. In spite of this reform, Napoleon himself personally admired the performances of many individual castrati. See Heriot (1956), 35, 119–21.
15. Barthes (1990), 175, 15.
16. Barthes (1977), 152, 179.
17. Clément (1988), 175–6.
18. See above, n. 1.
19. Cixous (1981).

## CHAPTER 7



# Between Magic and Realism: Medea on Film

*Ian Christie*

All that is mystic is realist.

PIER PAOLO PASOLINI, *Medea*

In September 1996, Margaret Jarvis, 47, killed herself and her two sons, Russell, eight, and Christopher, five, after her estranged husband, Paul, a 35-year-old policeman, told her he had a new relationship with a policewoman colleague.

*The Guardian*, 17 January 1998

After apparently ignoring Medea for seventy years, modern cinema has produced no fewer than three major treatments of the subject in twenty years. Moreover, none of these could be considered a mere record of a pre-existing stage performance: indeed the films of Pier Paolo Pasolini, Jules Dassin, and Lars von Trier are surely among the most significant twentieth-century reworkings of this mythic narrative in any medium.

Before establishing each in its context, it may be worth considering why Medea was avoided by filmmakers for so long. Early moving pictures owed much to the nineteenth-century stage tradition, with influences from other vernacular narrative media. The result was a preference for modern subjects that combined sentiment with sensation: moralistic melodramas of redemption were popular in the early 1900s, along with folk tales and fantastic spectacles—a repertoire embracing the likes of *The Drunkard's Reform* and *Tom, Tom the Piper's Son* or *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*. From around 1908, a new enthusiasm for



historical dramas emerged, prompted by the efforts of two companies: Film d'Art in France and Vitagraph in the United States. While Film d'Art led with *L'Assassinat du duc de Guise*, Vitagraph inaugurated what would become a vogue for Shakespeare adaptations with *Julius Caesar*.<sup>1</sup> Soon these pioneering efforts would be joined by a series of increasingly spectacular early Christian and Roman subjects, which combined the original elements in more extreme form. Hence, for example, *Quo Vadis?* and *The Last Days of Pompeii* proved highly compatible with contemporary thrillers such as *In a Lonely Villa* and *The Mother and the Law*—so much so that Griffith could combine the latter with a suite of period stories set in ancient Babylon, the Judaea of Christ's time, and sixteenth-century France in his epic *Intolerance* (1916).

*Medea*, of course, is nothing if not sensational; but it is also shocking in ways that melodrama found impossible to recuperate. William Morris's solution in *The Life and Death of Jason* (1867) no doubt helped to establish a pattern that would be followed in many subsequent Jason-oriented versions that banish the troublesome Medea to the margins in order to produce a 'masculine' adventure narrative. In cinema, this tradition leads to Don Chaffey's *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963), a picaresque enlivened by mechanical special effects.<sup>2</sup>

However, there is one instance of the 'monstrous', or at least threatening feminine in early cinema, which is the Vamp, launched by Theda Bara in her first star vehicle, *A Fool There Was*, in 1915. Strictly speaking, Bara's image as a seductress with magical powers to compel men's reckless devotion, was based on Kipling's poem 'The Vampire', and drew on the Romantic archetype of the *femme fatale* or *belle dame sans merci*, so popular among decadent artists. But the aura of exotic mystery that Bara and her publicists assiduously promoted might also remind us of the witch aspect of Medea; and the fact that Bara attracted a massive wave of identification among admirers might also recall the otherwise unacceptable face of female violence represented by Medea. A woman accused of murdering her lover in 1921 apparently tried to call Theda Bara as a witness, to testify to 'the mental attitude of a jilted vampire'.<sup>3</sup>

The most basic reason why we find virtually no Medeas in cinema until the permissive and experimental sixties is, of course, the taboo of what cannot be shown and seen. The convention in Greek drama that violent action occurs offstage and is narrated runs directly counter to cinema's imperative to show rather than tell. A conventionally 'cinematic' Medea would show us precisely what we don't want to

see—the revenge killing of Glauce and, above all, the killing of the children. While the first of these has eventually found a place in neo-noir and the psychological thriller—think of Glenn Close’s attempt to kill her rival in *Fatal Attraction* (1987)—the latter remains deeply troubling and fundamentally taboo.<sup>4</sup>

The three modern film Medeas do indeed seem to be products of the transgressive 1960s: unafraid to confront the monstrous feminine or infanticide, appearing during or after a watershed that had seen most taboos in cinema challenged. In fact, the two outstanding Medeas, Pasolini’s and von Trier’s, stem directly and indirectly from the second half of that decade, and from a climate in which the political and the psychosexual were in close communion. Pasolini’s *Medea* belongs to a central period in his career, coming after his early ‘realist’ films (a term that needs to be heavily qualified in relation to Pasolini), in which he turned to myth as a new basis on which to develop a radical critique of bourgeois society and all its taboos—and at the same time to explore his own psyche. In 1967, he described *Oedipus Rex* (*Edipo Re*), set in a syncretic ancient world after a modern prelude, as his most personal film. This was followed by *Theorem* (*Teorema*, 1968), in which the myth of angelic or satanic possession is realized in the present; then *Pigsty* (*Porcile*, 1969), an original anthropophagic ‘myth’, followed by *Medea* and the *Notes for an African Oresteia* (*Appunti per un’Orestide africana*), both in 1970.

The placing of von Trier’s *Medea* is more complex. This was made for Danish television in 1988 by the still emerging *enfant terrible* of Danish cinema, in the midst of what became a trilogy of postmodern meditations on the theme of post-war Europe—*The Element of Crime* (1984), *The Epidemic* (1988), and *Europa* (1991). What sets *Medea* apart from these is that it is based, in a spirit of homage, on an unrealized script by Denmark’s greatest filmmaker, Carl Theodor Dreyer, probably best known for *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (*La Passion de Jeanne d’Arc*, 1928). The script apparently dates from the last four years of Dreyer’s life (he died in 1968), after his poorly received final film, *Gertrud* (1964). Set in a medieval pagan Denmark, it stands thematically in Dreyer’s oeuvre midway between the seventeenth-century witch-hunting of *Day of Wrath* (*Vredens dag*, 1943) and the serene feminist renunciation of *Gertrud*. As von Trier’s only historical film to date, it seems to be both a claim of filial kinship with Dreyer, as well as a characteristic combination by von Trier of mysticism, eroticism, and provocative extremism.

The third (or second, depending how we read this chronology) is another hybrid. *A Dream of Passion* was written and directed in Greece by Jules Dassin in 1978, three years after the fall of the junta, and is in several senses a 'homecoming' work. Dassin was forced out of Hollywood into exile in Europe by McCarthyite blacklisting in the early 1950s, and his career was not re-established until the success of *Never on Sunday* (1960), starring Melina Mercouri, which represented an idealized 'modern' Greece to an international audience. After the Colonels' *coup d'état* in 1967, both Dassin and Mercouri (now married) were active in the protest movement against the junta, which was widely believed to have tacit American backing. This background, both personal and political, cannot be divorced from—indeed is essential to—the multiple political allegory of *A Dream of Passion*. Here, Mercouri plays a famous actress returning to her native Greece to appear in an outdoor ancient-theatre production of Euripides' *Medea*—a production which did in fact take place.<sup>5</sup> In what begins as a publicity stunt, she makes contact with an American woman who has been jailed for the murder of her three children, as revenge for her husband's affair with a Greek woman. During their stormy relationship, Mercouri comes to empathize with the murderess; and as her performance of *Medea* becomes correspondingly intense, ancient and recent pasts merge in a hallucination, in which she imagines witnessing the killings.

Of these three approaches, Dassin's is the most self-consciously 'modern'—ultra-reflexive, owing to a film-within-a-film strand involving a television crew supposedly recording the production and interviewing its participants—as it earnestly seeks a latter-day relevance for *Medea's* filicide. Pasolini and von Trier, on the other hand, both aim to create remote worlds in which the coexistence of magic and ritual with politics and personal emotion is comprehensible. Despite their ahistoricity, they are also clearly marked by a politics of feminism that can hardly be considered coincidental at the end of the 1960s. Both are unmistakably motivated by a revolt against patriarchy, understood in a political as well as a psychoanalytic sense.

All three works inevitably stand in a relationship to Euripides, and in what follows I want to consider the differing kinds of textual strategy they adopt in relation to their daunting ancestor. In a sense, all replace elements excluded in Euripides' condensed dramatization of the *Medea* myth; and in doing so they draw selectively upon the other ancient sources, as well as reflecting the myth's lasting presence



as a *ne plus ultra*—a final taboo. Thus Pasolini reintroduces Colchis and Medea's past as a priestess in a prelude to the Corinth drama; Dreyer and von Trier (if we consider them centaur-like as a single 'author') contextualize the political intrigue between Creon, Jason, and Glauce, alongside Medea's continuing involvement in witchcraft, as virtual determinants of the final drama; and Dassin deals with the aftermath—both the legacy of Euripides as a classic text to be kept alive through reinterpretation; and also the link between Medea's 'archetypal' filicide and the mundane reality of contemporary matrimonial breakdown and child-killing.

## I

Pasolini first began to engage with Greek drama at the end of the 1950s, and published a translation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in 1960. This was to be the beginning of a sustained engagement with historic narratives that would occupy most of his later filmmaking career from the mid-sixties to the mid-seventies, first with a 'Greek' cycle, then with the 'trilogy of life' drawn from the pre-renaissance collections of tales.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, as Robert Gordon suggests, the 'interplay between an original text and a filmic representation of it' became the basis of Pasolini's film work, even to the extent of his adaptations of his own 'original' texts in the cases of *Theorem* and *Pigsty*.<sup>7</sup> The first of these adaptations, *The Gospel According to St Matthew* (*Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*, 1964), followed a principle of literal textual fidelity—itself a subversive strategy within the tradition of biblical narrative—but thereafter Pasolini set out to frame and challenge his classic sources in a variety of other ways. In the case of *Medea*, he implied that an early version of the script had shown the ritual human sacrifice in Colchis as a dream that gives Medea 'the strength to carry out her vengeance'.<sup>8</sup> But in the finished film, it appears as a deliberately disorienting prelude to the narrative proper, before we encounter any of the other characters.

Euripides' central Medea story is in fact doubly prefaced, with the effect of establishing a mythic background not only for Medea but also for Jason. The film's opening scenes consist of two extended monologues by the centaur Chiron, who raised Jason on behalf of his father, the usurped king Aeson. However, Pasolini's concern is not with the dynastic complications of the house of Aeolus, which would be impossible to grasp from these speeches, but with establishing, both verbally and visually, the thematic core of his work. Chiron, played by



the French actor Laurent Terzieff (who would also play one of Buñuel's time-travelling pilgrims in *La Voie lactée* around the same time), appears literally as a centaur, thanks to some transparently obvious visual trickery. But if his image is somewhat risible, it serves to establish the 'literalist' strategy of the film. And his speeches express Pasolini's vision in a torrent of powerful epigrams:

All is sacred: nothing in nature is natural [. . .]

All is sacred, but holiness is a curse.

An uncertain time has elapsed between the first and second scene: the infant Jason is now older and Chiron announces that he has become human (in what is presumably an echo of the story of his wish to become mortal in order to die after being wounded by Hercules). He tells Jason that he must claim his birthright from Peleas, with a further statement of Pasolini's assimilation of myth and reality:

In the ancient world, myths are living reality

Mythical people are very realistic

Realistic people are very mythical.

The lush coastal Arcadian setting of these scenes gives way to a parched exotic 'eastern' landscape of fantastic tower-like rock formations, which was filmed in Cappadocia in Turkey. Medea, played by Maria Callas in what would be her only non-operatic film role, is no less exotic. In addition to the aura of her diva status, she is first seen in what appears to be a shrine, with a male fetish figure hanging before her and an expectant crowd waiting outside. In contrast to the intense verbal poetry of the opening scenes, which runs over abrupt temporal ellipses, the syntax of this much longer wordless second prelude is entirely visual. Its distinctive quality has been acutely and evocatively described by Olivier Bohler:

The ritual unfolds in a present which excludes any *a posteriori* rationale, which makes the appearance of this ceremony not 'realist', in the style of a classical documentary, but oniric, as if we were witnessing the screening of unedited rushes, filmed by a cameraman who could not understand the meaning of what he had to film—an ignorance which meant that he was always slightly behind what is happening in the ceremony, shooting aspects of it on the run, like so many divinities bursting forth from nature.<sup>9</sup>

The fertility rite of a youth being ritually killed and dismembered, and his body and blood being spread across the fields, appears to be based on an Indian ritual described by both Frazer and Eliade, and so

has a 'legitimate' anthropological grounding. But it also fulfils at least three important poetic-dramatic functions in the film.

Most obviously, it establishes Medea as even more than the Euripidean, 'barbarian witch', expert with poison. Here she is the priestess of a cult, practised in bloody ritual, and so her eventual revenge on Glauce and on Jason through their children is, as it were, logical in the terms of 'realist myth'. A second strand of foreshadowing is established through the fetish figure first seen, followed by the crucifixion of the sacrificial youth. When Medea sees Jason, she seems possessed by him, which 'explains' what Robert Gordon describes as 'her trance-like theft of the fleece and killing of her brother whilst escaping—actions which break the fundamental taboos of theft and religion'.<sup>10</sup> Thus the Medea of the Corinth narrative, in effect, has emerged from her trance and reverted to her 'true' magical vocation. Finally, a third level of significance in this sequence links it to the recurrent motif across Pasolini's work of the dismembered body. This may explain in part his attraction to the classical *Medea*, which already includes references to two such grisly episodes: Medea's killing of her brother Apsyrtus during the flight with Jason and the Golden Fleece, and her incitement of Pelias' daughters to hack him to pieces.<sup>11</sup>

In shaping his own psychobiography, Pasolini often cited an image of what can be read as dismemberment as his first significant experience of cinema, at the age of five:

I remember that I was looking at a publicity folder for a film showing a tiger tearing a man to pieces. Obviously the tiger was on top of the man but for some unknown reason it seemed to me with my child's imagination that the tiger had half-swallowed the man and the other half was still protruding out of his jaws. I terribly wanted to see the film; naturally my parents wouldn't take me, which I bitterly regret to this day. So this image [. . .] which is a masochistic and perhaps cannibalistic image, is the first thing that has remained impressed on me.<sup>12</sup>

He would try to recreate this childhood fantasy-memory in an essay film, *Notes for a Film About India* (*Appunti per un film sull'India*, 1968), made shortly before *Medea*, which sketches the proposed story of a maharajah who gives himself to be eaten by hungry tiger cubs and so leaves his own family to starve. The motifs of dismemberment and cannibalism are also at the centre of *Pigsty*, made immediately before *Medea*. Their significance for Pasolini was resonant and complex,

apparently stemming from his early religious beliefs and his coming to terms with his own homosexuality, through a fetishization of parts of the (male) body, but then metaphorically linked to his work in film, where parts of imaged bodies are 'cut' and reassembled through editing. Sam Rohdie has tried to express this overdetermination of meaning:

Involved in the eroticism, the editing, the dismemberment are analogies with the sacrifice of Christ and his martyrdom, and also, as with that sacrifice, an exhibitionism, a scandal of the body, of sacrifice and cannibalism, and of social scandal which accuses the world of no longer caring.<sup>13</sup>

In his structuring of the pre-Euripidean part of *Medea*, we can see a variation on the structure Pasolini had already used in *Oedipus Rex*, where a 'personal' prelude drew on his own childhood, before treating Sophocles' *Oedipus* as a dream-like 'collective myth'.<sup>14</sup> Here, the disturbingly brilliant, wordless Colchis episode establishes a 'natural' Medea, working magic in harmony with her people, before she is civilized and domesticated by Jason. This process is completed in the scene between them after Peleas has spurned Jason's offering of the fleece: Medea has exchanged her heavy ritual clothing for symbolic white and Jason has said farewell to his last fellow Argonauts. Together in a tent, the newly humanized Medea looks approvingly at Jason's naked body before looking out at the prospect that awaits them, which is Corinth and tragedy.

True to his double perspective, Pasolini begins the Corinth narrative, not with Medea's lamentation, but with Jason experiencing a visitation by Chiron. The centaur appears simultaneously in both his earlier forms, as mythic creature and man, explaining that his 'sacred' form is now preserved within his 'desecrated' [*sconsacrato*] one, corresponding to Jason's own childhood and adult understanding. This elaborately literal representation of two levels of understanding—childhood fantasy and adult realism; or even the unconscious and the conscious—can perhaps be related to Pasolini's defence of 'dreamlikeness' [*oniricità*] in cinema in a widely circulated essay of 1966.<sup>15</sup> At any rate, it makes possible the claim that the 'old centaur' enables Jason to 'love Medea and to understand her spiritual catastrophe. She is a woman of the ancient world, who is confused in a world that ignores her beliefs. She experienced the opposite of a conversion and has never recovered.'

Jason receives this diagnosis blankly: 'why tell me this?' To which the centaur responds: 'It is reality, and nothing can prevent the old



centaur from having feelings or the new centaur from expressing them.' Here Medea's plight and Jason's incomprehension are, to some extent, caught up in Pasolini's continuing interest in semiotics and linguistics, as well as in Marxism and psychoanalysis. The issues at stake are far-reaching and technical, but it may suffice to point to the debate that raged throughout the sixties between Lacan and other French neo-Freudian psychoanalysts over the nature of metaphor and the relationship between linguistic signs and the structure of the unconscious. From this emerged such views as that the unconscious consists of signifiers corresponding to the visual imaginary, and that it is primal repression, depending on a 'primitive, mythical state' prior to the constitution of the unconscious, which enables metaphor to function.<sup>16</sup> For Pasolini, seeking to break out of the limitations of a decayed neo-realist tradition while avoiding the pitfall of avant-gardism, such theoretical formulations were immediately attractive; and from the mid-sixties onwards there is a theoretical as well as a personal discourse running through all his work.

The centaur, then, is posing what might be termed a modern Delphic diagnostic riddle to Jason: how can he *not* understand what has produced the 'desecrated' and embittered Medea? Indeed this is a projection of Jason's own conscience/unconscious. But the Euripidean Jason cannot understand and shakes his head. The visual location of Corinth, no less than that of Colchis, serves to broaden Pasolini's canvas. The interior of the city is the Piazza dei Miracoli in Pisa, which, with its fine Renaissance architecture and well-kept lawns, stands eloquently for the world of what Lefebvre terms 'abstract space', roughly that of the modern secular state, and which he dates from around the twelfth century.<sup>17</sup> Medea, we learn, lives in a small house perched outside the city wall, halfway down the steep incline of the hill on which it perches.<sup>18</sup> She must go up from there to enter the city, while Creon will come down to deliver his ultimatum; and, taking advantage of this superb scenography, Glauce and Creon meet their death in flames on this same incline, having run out of the city gate.

Although this latter part of the film largely follows Euripides' sequence of events, Pasolini continues to disrupt and make mysterious the familiar narrative. Most importantly, he inserts a sequence in which Medea, after being taunted by the women of Corinth as a sorceress, resolves to recover her powers: 'I am still myself.' In a dream, she sees a red sun over water, and prays to her grandfather, the sun-

god Helios. From this point, she is transformed into a fiery energetic avenger, pacing the floor of her house in a dance-like exchange with the chorus of servants. The first two of Euripides' three contrasted meetings between Medea and Jason become two versions of the same, second one. The first, leading up to Glauce's fatal acceptance of the gifts, is revealed to be a dream or vision when Creon arrives to banish her. The second, after she has awakened from another faint, results in an apparent reconciliation, with Medea and Jason sleeping together (fig. 11), after which he and the children set off 'in reality' as unwitting agents of her vengeance. After Glauce's and Creon's deaths, seen in long shot, the killing of the children takes place with great simplicity, indeed tenderness: while the tutor dozes, Medea bathes each in turn, before reaching for a knife. Two symbolic shots follow: she sees the half-moon, then the sun, before starting a fire, through which her staring, distorted face is seen in a severely truncated version of the final exchange with Jason, ending with Medea's words: 'Nothing more is possible, ever.'

How are we to interpret this? From a Euripidean perspective, its most striking feature is the flat denial of Medea's departure from the scene of her revenge. Her meeting with Aegeus does not take place in Pasolini's version, and so there is no promise of a safe haven after the humiliation of Jason. There is, however, confirmation of Medea's resumption of her divinity as the film ends with a blaze of evening sunlight, recalling the idea that in Greek solar mythology, Medea, as the granddaughter of Helios, now represents the evening twilight, fleeing to the east.<sup>19</sup> In terms of Pasolini's personal mythology, its meaning is more apocalyptic. The antique—in Lefebvre's terms 'absolute'—world of Colchis represents an ideal of harmony, where everything is sacred, because the category of the 'desecrated' has not been introduced by repression and alienation. For Pasolini's Medea, 'nothing more' is possible in the contaminated, repressed modern world for which Jason and Corinth stand. During the late 1960s, Pasolini despaired that consumerism had depoliticized the working class, while also finding hope in the 'new left' involvement in ideology and culture as well as, or instead of, traditional Marxism's class and economic interests. His 'mythic' films of the late 1960s can thus be seen as a remobilization of art in the service of a politics of liberation—a strategy described by Sam Rohdie as contesting 'a political real by being other to it, its complete ideal alterity'.<sup>20</sup> In this, they connect with the call by others seeking to reconnect the psychic with



11. Pier Paolo Pasolini, Maria Callas as Medea, 1970  
(still from film directed by Pasolini)



the political at this time. In 1966, on the eve of the widespread student revolts of 1967–8, Herbert Marcuse republished his influential essay on Freudian psycho-politics *Eros and Civilisation* with a 'political preface' which ends with the declaration: 'Today the fight for life, the fight for Eros, is the political fight.'<sup>21</sup> Despite its apparent nihilism, Medea's destruction of her and Jason's 'modern' family can be seen as the first of Pasolini's increasingly violent acts of artistic terrorism against a society which he equated with living death—to be followed by the anthropophagy of *Pigsty* and the final charnel-house of *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* (1975).

## II

Dreyer and von Trier also locate Medea in a world where animistic magic is being relegated to the margins by mercantile and political society: although here the setting is not the 'African' desert world of Pasolini, but the murky bogland and seashore of the North. This Medea is dressed entirely in black, even wearing a black skullcap until the final moments of the drama, and is clearly a witch, a 'wise woman', living in a forest that seems to echo the cinematic location of Kurosawa's *Macbeth* adaptation, *Throne of Blood* (*Kumonosu-jo*, 1957). Her house is a traditional witch's or wizard's dwelling of folklore, first seen beneath the sign of a crescent moon; and she is an explicitly liminal character, who haunts the seashore and swamp, collecting berries and seaweed for her magical preparations. Here Jason is even more of a modern politician than in Pasolini's film. He first appears in a remarkable torchlit setting of tunnels and chambers, which evokes a mixture of the mythic (a sea-lapped grotto) and the early-modern industrial (Victorian quayside warehouse), introduced at the end of a sequence in which Creon's advisers recommend transferring power to him in recognition of what he has already done to increase the prosperity of Corinth. And instead of Jason courting Glauce, it is Creon who offers her as a reward and a bond, to tie Jason to Corinth and its fortunes.

Glauce is also simultaneously eroticized and politicized. Seen at first naked, like a 'maiden in a tower', she later belies this fairy-tale image when she refuses to allow Jason to sleep with her on the night of their marriage until Medea has been banished, thus implying that she has initiated this demand and also giving Jason a sexual motive for hastening Medea's departure. But even as he strives to advance

himself, realizing that Medea is a handicap in this process, he knows that he too is vulnerable and ultimately dispensable—after Glauce's death, a cry is heard: 'will you not follow your Queen to the grave?' The medieval world created in the film is focused obsessively on the politics of succession. Medea, as a witch, can control fertility and this adds substance to Creon's declaration that he fears her when he comes to declare her banishment. In von Trier's film, this involves him being carried by bearers through the misty swamp into Medea's realm, where she is gathering her ingredients; and when he is separated from his retinue by the fog, his fear becomes highly convincing. On Jason's first visit to Medea, during which she sits weaving at an open-air loom as if controlling the threads of destiny, his declaration that he wishes men could procreate without women (see Euripides, *Medea* 573–5) gains extra force from our awareness of her fertility powers. Medea, in turn, uses her reputation in these matters to defend herself.

Although Dreyer and von Trier follow Euripides closely in placing her encounter with Aegeus immediately after the end of the acrimonious meeting with Jason, there is also a careful tightening of narrative causality, which is typical of the adaptation as a whole. The film's opening scene is in fact an interpolated first meeting with Aegeus, as he sails to consult the oracle, and Medea's request for a promise of sanctuary foreshadows all that will follow, like the opening ghost scene in Shakespearean tragedy. When they meet a second time, it is because he needs her help, not as in Euripides Pittheus' aid, in interpreting the oracle's advice; and she in turn needs confirmation that he will take her away, as she stands on the estuary's edge with her children. And to further intensify the tragic irony, she tenderly comforts the younger child after he has grazed his knee.

Dreyer and von Trier's most radical departure from Euripides involves the elder of Medea's children colluding in his own and his brother's death. Far from these deaths being offstage, they become the harrowing *visible* climax of the story. After Medea has effected her pretended reconciliation with Jason, here consummated against lurid backdrops which suggest some kind of hallucination, and has sent her poisoned gift to Glauce in the 'poetic' form of her own bridal crown, she sets out in the dawn half-light with her children. She pushes the younger in a cart that seems part-perambulator and part-tumbril, in a pilgrimage that initially parallels the torchlit funeral procession for Glauce and Creon. Soon it is bright daylight over an open landscape that is in stark contrast to the claustrophobic fog-bound forest of the

earlier scenes. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in view of the intense religious feeling that pervades many of Dreyer's films,<sup>22</sup> the setting subliminally evokes a *via dolorosa* leading to Calvary, as the barren heath rises to a hill, on which stands a tree. This distinctly un-supernatural Medea understands that, while her sons hitherto represented a threat to the transmission of power through Jason's new alliance with Glauce, they now offer the only way to destroy him (fig. 12).

The children, accordingly, are not the hapless innocents of most versions: the older boy is a saddened, knowing spectator of his mother's disgrace. He realizes that he and his brother must die in order to complete her revenge on their faithless father, telling her, 'I know what's to happen.' When the younger boy playfully runs away as Medea struggles with the rope she has brought, his brother chases him and helps her hang him. As Medea kneels, traumatized by this first killing, the older boy gently prompts her, 'Help me, mother'. He then arranges his own noose and she holds him aloft until her strength fails. Falconetti's intense physical and mental anguish at the stake in Dreyer's *Joan of Arc* comes to mind, and may well have influenced Kirsten Oleson's and von Trier's harrowing portrayal of Medea's struggle to defer this 'necessary' death. The effect of this elaboration of the children's death is complex. First, it introduces a new note of psychological 'realism' and horror, since it implicates the older boy in both fratricide and suicide, and humanizes Medea's involvement. Secondly, instead of being offstage/offscreen, or stylized as near-domestic ritual as in Pasolini, it is here virtually a public execution. In terms of filmic tradition, the bleak hilltop with bodies hanging from a crooked tree evokes more directly the traditional setting for witches' executions than the Calvary of Passion portrayals; and it is in this form that Jason discovers them.

Such associations serve to underline Dreyer and von Trier's repositioning of Medea on the troubled boundary between a pagan and an implicitly Christian world. They also align this *Medea* with the still-developing trajectory of von Trier's own work. His first substantial film, *Liberation Pictures* (*Befrielsesbilleder*, 1983), is set during the Danish liberation from German occupation in 1945 and turns on an escaping German officer who believes that a Danish woman (played by Oleson) is prepared to help him, until she reveals her plan of revenge. Equally, it is possible to see in *Medea*, which as a television film has never been widely shown, an important step towards von Trier's major achievement of *Breaking the Waves* in 1996. In this, a





12. Lars von Trier, Kirsten Oleson as Medea, 1988  
(still from film directed by von Trier)

naïve girl who believes that she can speak to God sacrifices herself as a prostitute in order to fulfil the wishes of her paralysed husband. The fact that her nemesis, a sadistic sailor, is played by the same actor who plays Jason, Udo Kier, is only the most direct link between these two morality plays. Less obviously, Bess's trajectory from naïve devotion to heroic and horrifying self-sacrifice, culminating in a form of erotic and religious martyrdom, could be seen as a reworking of the Dreyer-von Trier *Medea*. Certainly, without the intervening experience of interpreting Dreyer's script, there is little to suggest that von Trier could have achieved the major thematic deepening and focus on female subjectivity that marked *Breaking the Waves*.

In spite of its relationship with earlier and later films by von Trier, *Medea* has a distinctive visual style that is no less unusual than that of Pasolini's mythic films. In part, this almost certainly derives from the confines of television production; but it also points to the possibility of a form of visual drama which is less dependent on 'linear' narration than on the accumulation of meaning within and between images, in a developed form of Eisensteinian 'montage'.<sup>23</sup> At its simplest, this amounts to a preponderance of long-held shots, many taken from a high or overhead angle, which are linked by slow dissolves or held in superimposition. Among the most striking uses of this technique are a slow dissolve from Jason's face in close-up to the distant tree bearing the two children's bodies; and soon after, the ship bearing Medea away from Corinth seeming to plough 'over' Jason's body prostrate in the field where he has writhed in agony after the fateful discovery. But beyond such instances, there is a consistent level of visual overlay which avoids conventional shot-reverse shot construction, linked to a marked avoidance of synchronous speech, so that much of the film's language is effectively offscreen, heard as 'voice over'—a trope which incidentally fulfils Eisenstein's prediction in 1932 that the future of sound cinema would lie in 'inner monologue'.<sup>24</sup> In the same way that Pasolini rejected conventional continuity in camerawork and editing for his mythic films, seeking instead a more enigmatic *écriture*, so von Trier has responded to the challenge of classical tragedy by forging a novel visual language to accommodate the essential absence of narrative causality in *Medea*. Everything has, in a profound sense, already happened: what remains is to reveal the complex meanings and interrelationships, which his audiovisual syntax helps us discover.

## III

Ostensibly, *A Dream of Passion* addresses the distance between our age and that of Euripides through a head-on interrogation of the 'relevance' of Medea to modern actors and, by implication, their audience. How can we 'relate' to the passions of Medea, and to the conventions of her presentation in Euripidean drama, it asks; and as it pursues these questions, several traditional genres are invoked. The oldest of these is the popular 'play within a play', used frequently by Shakespeare (*The Taming of the Shrew*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Hamlet*, *The Tempest*), by Corneille (*L'Illusion comique*), and by Calderón (*La vida es sueño*). A later, less well-defined genre, is the 'artist's apologia', in which elements of artistic production are interwoven with the artist's biography to create a metafiction in which 'life' and 'art' are shown to be mutually illuminating. Although the prototypes of this genre probably lie in the earliest artists' autobiographies, it enjoyed great popularity in cinema, particularly between the 1950s and the 1970s, with a cluster of metafictional autobiographies that include Guru Dutt's *Paper Flowers* (*Kaaghaz Ke Phool*, 1959), Federico Fellini's *8½* (*Otto e mezzo*, 1963), Vincente Minnelli's *Two Weeks in Another Town* (1962), Jean-Luc Godard's *Contempt* (*Le Mépris*, 1963) and *Passion* (1982), Jacques Rivette's *L'Amour fou* (1968), Andrzej Wajda's *Man of Marble* (*Człowiek z Marmuru*, 1976), and Bob Fosse's *All That Jazz* (1979).

Although *A Dream of Passion* fits most obviously into this confessional mode, it also evokes two other significant genres. One is the backstage story, which had its origins in the *fin de siècle* theatre world, in such works as Gerald Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894) and Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera* (1911), and later flourished in cinema with Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *The Red Shoes* (1948), Joseph Mankiewicz's *All About Eve* (1950), and George Cukor's *A Star is Born* (1954). The other relevant genre is the intertextual narrative in which a well-known work is invoked by the presence of a related figure or similar events, as in Nikolai Leskov's invocation of Shakespeare in his story 'Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk' (1865) and its later adaptation as an opera by Shostakovich. A celebrated example in cinema would be Norma Shearer's role as a silent-era diva, parodying herself, in Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950). In the case of Dassin's film, at least one reviewer noted that Ellen Burstyn's presence as the child-murderer evoked her relatively recent performance as the mother in *The Exorcist* (1973).<sup>25</sup>

That *A Dream of Passion* is fully conscious of its antecedents is indicated



by the title, explicated in an onscreen epigraph. It comes from one of the most familiar of all 'plays within a play', specifically from Hamlet's soliloquy following his welcome of the players, in which he marvels that the actor 'but in a fiction, in a dream of passion, / could force his soul so to his own conceit' (Act II scene ii). From the outset, we are alerted to issues of cultural perspective: an offscreen voice asks, in English, 'are they speaking in ancient Greek?' To which the answer comes that the main drama is translated into modern Greek, while the Chorus speaks in the original Euripidean form. The production being rehearsed is striving both for authenticity, being presented in an historic theatre, and for contemporary resonance. The director criticizes his star, who is better known as a film than a theatre actor (as in Mercouri's own situation), for sacrificing the play to a topical 'women's lib' interpretation; while it is her publicist who promotes the idea of introducing the actress to a 'real Medea', in the shape of the American woman imprisoned for killing her children.

When this backfires, after the prisoner recoils in horror from the invasion of reporters and photographers cued to record her meeting with Mercouri, we are encouraged to reflect, along with the star, on the vanity of such superficial associations. Chastened, Maya/Melina embarks on a double quest: to discover the true circumstances behind Brenda Collins's dreadful deed; and also to uncover what she has repressed in her own life. This latter is revealed in a monologue to camera, delivered for the benefit of the television documentary crew who are covering the production, in which she confesses both to the abortion she had at 18, for the sake of her career, and also to seducing the fiancé of her friend Maria. These two retrieved memories—killing an unborn child and stealing another woman's man—are intended to align this stage 'Medea' with Euripides' drama and with that of Brenda Collins. Liberated by her confession and first-hand research of Brenda's situation, Maya undergoes what might be termed the opposite of a catharsis: she is able to enter more fully into the fictive world of Euripides' drama because of what she has experienced in real life. This leads her to produce a performance that impresses even her sceptical director with its authenticity—experiencing at its climax an *Exorcist*-like hallucination in which she 'witnesses' Brenda's killing of her children.

Unfortunately, neither Maya/Melina's performance, nor the elaborate dramatic scaffolding that surrounds it, is likely to impress many spectators of the film. For all its earnest striving after relevance and revelation, the film is flawed by a self-consciousness and level of

contrivance that make it often risible. Compared with such models as *Le Mépris* (starring another screen legend, Brigitte Bardot), or *L'Amour fou* (in which rehearsals of Racine's *Andromaque* lead to a traumatic separation between director-husband and wife-star, also observed by a television crew) or *Man of Marble* (which tackles the political role of cinema in Stalinist Poland), Dassin's film can hardly be said to achieve any real resonance, in its exploration either of celebrity or of the timelessness of classical drama. Its residual value probably lies in recording an important moment of cultural recovery in post-junta Greece, when Mercouri, Dassin and their collaborators were able to return from exile and reclaim the public stage (cf. Mavromoustakos, Ch. 8).<sup>26</sup>

The film's most ambitious effort to achieve a 'higher' intertextuality might, however, give pause for further thought. During the 'backstage' strand, an extract from Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966) is shown as a *mise en abîme* figure for the film's theme of the 'merging' of Maya and Brenda.<sup>27</sup> In Bergman's film, a celebrated actress, Elizabeth (Liv Ullmann), who has suddenly fallen mute during a performance of *Electra*, is joined by a nurse-companion, Alma (Bibi Andersson). Gradually the two women draw close, and in the climactic psychodrama, they 'merge' in a composite visual image—which is the scene quoted in *A Dream of Passion*. What Dassin invokes is the idea that dream and reality can no longer be clearly distinguished. This will become the trope of his film's climax, as Brenda's killings 'substitute' for Medea's—as if to compensate for our inability to respond to Euripides' mere rhetoric. There are two serious problems here: one is the bathetic effect of invoking *Persona* in a film that fails to reach the same level of achievement; and the other is the effective undermining of the theatrical or filmic illusion. After we have 'experienced' Brenda's demented killing of her children, through the mediumship of Maya, we are returned to the theatre stage, and to Maya/Melina in heavy witch-like make-up, before rejoining Brenda, who is seen at prayer through the spy-hole of her cell. It is tempting to interpret this ambiguous ending as showing Maya's triumph to be due to her vampirizing Brenda's despair and madness—though this may not be what Dassin and Mercouri intended in their postmodern conception.

The three modern screen *Medeas* discussed here could be supplemented by a range of others, either staged versions filmed for television,<sup>28</sup> or such avant-garde reworkings as Robert Wilson's silent *Deafman Glance*.<sup>29</sup> Indeed television, as a vehicle for canonized drama,

offers a platform for 'safe' presentation of the transgressive or repellent, an inbuilt 'bracketing' effect (which is an implicit theme of Dassin's film). Television productions are also not normally distributed outside television itself, partly because of union agreements and partly because of their often limited resources: hence von Trier's *Medea* remains virtually unknown amid his work for cinema. Yet the themes of the vengeful wife or the monstrous mother can be traced widely across the terrain of the modern 'horror' cinema, which includes many instances of both stereotypes. But these are not apparently Medeas: they are, rather, mutations of the Medusa figure, that isolation of the horrifying from the pleasure-giving effects of representation of the female genitalia, which Freud identified.<sup>30</sup> And the mythical Medusa has long been a more popular figure in cinema.

The development of psychoanalytic film criticism may, however, offer a way of linking these seemingly diverse forms of feminine monstrosity. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's theory of 'abjection', Barbara Creed has reinterpreted the field of modern horror in terms of a deep-seated fear of woman as castrator.<sup>31</sup> For Kristeva, the 'abject' is that which does not 'respect borders, positions, rules': it is where 'meaning collapses' and it must be 'radically excluded'. The horror film can thus be seen as a genre founded upon abjection, since it deals primarily with such border crossings and collapses of distinction and meaning—the animate becomes inanimate, the alien human; gender becomes unclear; taboos are broken. In this respect, *Medea* marks an important boundary, so to speak, of the abject: the place where the female castrates the male by killing both his new wife and his earlier progeny; and at the same time castrates herself by killing her own children. The fact that Dreyer's and von Trier's *Medea* shows the older child as complicit in this is perhaps the single most horrifying moment in all reworkings of *Medea*, and through Kristeva and Creed we can perhaps start to understand why this is so.

It is likely, then, that Euripides' *Medea* will remain a severely circumscribed field for screen (i.e. popular) adaptation, even if the fact that it has produced at least the two themes of the vengeful wife or the monstrous mother could be traced across the terrain of modern 'horror' cinema, which includes many instances of both stereotypes.<sup>32</sup> None of these, however, would constitute a true development of the Euripidean *Medea*. The fact that it has produced at least two works of outstanding originality, and one of at least symptomatic interest, is testimony to the



challenge of showing the unshowable. While 'slasher' and 'splatter' movies and 'body horror' proliferate, *Medea* remains an austere subject, offering few compensations to those in search of vicarious excitement or catharsis. The gulf between 'real life' child-killers and Medea or Heracles (a male filicide) remains, as Dassin's film shows, obstinately wide. The conventionally magical worlds that cinema creates can only accommodate the violation that *Medea* constitutes with extreme difficulty, and with imagination. Looking back at Pasolini's and von Trier's remarkable versions, they are distinguished not only by their determination to preserve the *mystery* of Medea, her divinity rather than her witchery, but also by the sense that for both artists they marked a crucial stage on the way to an even more harrowing confrontation with sacrifice and life-denial—in Pasolini's case, *Salò*, in von Trier's, *Breaking the Waves*.

### Notes to Chapter 7

I should like to thank Erich Sargeant and Katerina Athanasiadou for invaluable help in locating viewing copies of, respectively, von Trier's *Medea* and Dassin's *A Dream of Passion*.

1. On Film d'Art, see Abel (1994), 246 ff.; Uricchio and Pearson (1993), ch. 3.
2. Ahl (1991), 56 makes larger claims for Chaffey's film and its successor, *Clash of the Titans* (1983), both scripted by Beverley Cross, but better known for Ray Harryhausen's 'superdynamation' stop-action special effects. He notes that Jason ends with the promise of a sequel in which we shall see 'Jason and Medea again in, perhaps, less agreeable circumstances'.
3. Brownlow (1990), 30.
4. It is not strictly true that there were no early *Medeas* in cinema, but the two so far identified (neither of which appears to be extant) both stem from unusual circumstances. A German *Medea* of 1911 (also known as *Das Goldene Vließ* and starring Dora von Warburg and Bernhard Wenkhaus) was produced by Oskar Messter's company during a pivotal year that saw the emergence of the 'monopoly film' as a new strategy in the German film industry. This involved distributors acquiring 'monopoly' rights in productions, in return for a guaranteed print order, and so making the business of production less risky. Messter had been one of the German pioneers, and he helped launch the monopoly phase with his first long feature in January 1911. Although no information is to hand about his *Medea*, we can be sure that it was a similar prestige feature, influenced by the new desire for cultural cinema and also perhaps by the emergence in 1911 of Asta Neilsen as Germany's first great female star. The only other early *Medea* seems to have been an Austrian production of 1920, which may have belonged to the beginning of a cycle of ancient-world spectacles filmed in Vienna that would climax with a lavish Franco-Austrian *Salammbô* in 1925.
5. I owe this information to Katerina Athanasiadou.

6. *Il Decameron* (1971), based on Boccaccio; *I racconti di Canterbury* (1972), based on Chaucer; and *I fiori delle Mille e una notte* (1974), based on the *Arabian Nights*.
7. Gordon (1996), 224.
8. Pasolini, in an interview quoted in Willemen (1977), 67.
9. Bohler (1997), 117 (my translation).
10. Gordon (1996), 202.
11. *Eur. Med.* 9–10, 166–7; see Morwood (1997), 1, 5, 169–70.
12. Stack (1969), 30.
13. Rohdie (1995), 66.
14. Stack (1969), 122.
15. Pasolini (1966).
16. Lemaire (1977), 97–8.
17. Lefebvre (1991), 255 ff.
18. The exterior is plainly not Pisa, but a walled city on a hill, in a modern display of Kuleshov's 'magic geography'.
19. Guerber (1986), 356.
20. Rohdie (1995), 138.
21. Marcuse (1969), 20; the book was first published 1955 and republished 1966.
22. Notably *The Passion of Joan of Arc* and *Day of Wrath*. Dreyer also planned a *Life of Christ*, which he wrote in 1959–60 and was still hoping to film in Israel until his death in 1968. For details see Milne (1971), 154–5.
23. Although often associated with his films of the 'silent' period, Eisenstein's thinking about montage as the core of cinematic meaning continued to develop throughout his career. See Eisenstein (1987, 1991).
24. Eisenstein (1949), 103.
25. Auty (1979), 43.
26. The stage production of *Medea* with Mercouri and other actors who appear in the film (Despa Diamantidou, Dimitris Papamichael) had its première in August 1976, unusually in the northern town of Didimoticho, in Evros, making an important political gesture after the end of the junta. Mercouri's performance is remembered by Katerina Athanasiadou as having a strong feminist thrust.
27. Bergman is thanked at the beginning of the film, for more than permission to include the extract from *Persona*.
28. These include a 1972 production for Italian television, directed by Paolo Benvenuti, of a performance by a 'choral peasant theatre' near Pisa; and a 1983 US adaptation of Robinson Jeffers's production, directed by Mark Cullingham for WQRD television.
29. Mentioned in McDonald (1992), 149.
30. Freud (1953–66), xviii. 274.
31. See Kristeva (1982); Creed (1993), 8–15.
32. For reflections on the implications of modern horror cinema, see Carroll (1990); Clover (1992).

## CHAPTER 8



# Medea in Greece

*Platon Mavromoustakos*

The extent of modern Greek performances of ancient Greek drama is impressive. According to a recent and almost exhaustive exercise in cataloguing, we can trace over 650 different productions of ancient Greek plays staged in the Greek world by modern Greek professional companies.<sup>1</sup> The modern Greek experience provides important clues to the understanding of the objectives behind modern performances of ancient Greek drama in general, and of the issues associated with the use of its translations.

The performances and, in conjunction, the translations are historically determined by the way they address two specific issues. The first of these has to do with the way that the context of the performance shapes linguistic habits. This directly affects the style of a translation; these habits also bias the choice of material for performance, and therefore modify the immediate goals of stage practice. In this a key figure is the translator—the chief mediator between audience and text. This phenomenon becomes particularly noticeable during the nineteenth century and may be placed within the framework of a first period in the history of performances, during which they were dedicated to the effort of reconstructing the glorified image of the ancient world. We could call this first period (in keeping with—and motivated by—the innermost desire of the creators of the performances) ‘archaic’.

The ideologically charged performances of the early nineteenth century (the first was at Odessa in 1818)<sup>2</sup> also had a separate function, however: to prepare the overall framework of modern Greek theatre. To a large extent, they determined the form of theatre practice that was devised by the first professional companies working in the newly independent Greek state.<sup>3</sup> The subjection of theatre practice to



patriotic tendencies continued to characterize the approach to ancient Greek drama and especially tragedy for a long time after independence.

The second problem has to do with the conditions and terms of stage practice, which meant that the key mediator was no longer the translator, but rather the star actor or the director. This new mediator shapes the stage conception while exploiting the translation; he is the one who comes between audience and translation. This second period in performance history actually begins simultaneously with the dawn of the twentieth century. Study of the special characteristics of particular performances suggests that we could designate this period as a 'middle era'. This lasts up to the third decade of the twentieth century approximately, when the 'new era' starts with the creation of the National Theatre and the Popular Stage (the first company founded by Karolos Koun). Some examples selected out of the history of the performances of ancient drama in modern Greece may allow us to grasp this historical scheme more clearly.

The beginning of the twentieth century also marked the beginning of a change in theatre practice in Greece. The new outlook is defined by the projection of a different viewpoint, and is closely related to the creation of some different conditions for stage practice. The first rift in the uni-dimensional approach of the nineteenth century is marked by the appearance of the director in Greek theatre practice, right at the turn of the century. Konstantinos Christomanos paved the way, through his 'sensual attempts', for a new approach to ancient Greek drama, which introduced the director as the new key figure in stage practice.<sup>4</sup> Through his company, Nea Skene, he offers an early example of the director as the dominant factor in the shaping of a performance by mediating between audience and text.

Of course, the evolution of theatre practice is non-linear. The emergence of the director in the early twentieth century was not the only determining factor in Greek theatrical life. Theatrical activity in Greece also began to be centred on the figure of the star actor;<sup>5</sup> the performance was shaped according to his or her wishes, and aimed towards his or her own distinction. During the first quarter of the twentieth century, there was a revival of interest in plays with ancient Greek themes like Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* and Goethe's *Iphigenie auf Tauris*.<sup>6</sup> These plays fully satisfied the requirements of leading actors and were ideal elements in the alternating repertory of star-actor troupes from the end of the nineteenth century.

The performances of Euripides' *Medea* itself follow the same rationale. We should note, however, that *Medea* was of interest to these star-actor troupes (particularly to those centred on a female star) primarily because it offered a unique opportunity to display their talent. A peculiar pattern emerges right from the beginning; every performance of *Medea* served to create or consolidate an actress's star status. So one of the main reasons for the frequent performances of this play was the desire of Greek star actresses to defeat their rivals.

The first performance of a *Medea* on the modern Greek stage was not by a Greek troupe. In 1865, the Italian actress Adelaide Ristori starred in Legouvé's *Medea*, in the one and only new theatre building of Athens: the stone Theatre Boukoura.<sup>7</sup> (For this production see Macintosh, Chs. 1 and 4.) This was an event of major importance. The Athenian public of the period had never before witnessed an ancient drama performed by a professional company. Up till then, such performances were generally staged by students, and always within the framework of moral and educational values deemed appropriate to the spirit of Enlightenment. In forming the repertory for her Athenian tour Ristori, wishing to attract Greek audiences, chose plays that had contributed to the consolidation of her international fame, but which would also act as a reminder of the much-desired continuity of Greek civilization. So she appeared onstage between 9 and 12 January 1865, starring in Legouvé's *Medea*, in Alfieri's *Judith* and *Mirra* and Racine's *Phèdre*. *Medea* was performed once more on the 13th as a charity benefit—indeed, the benefit was quite an event: the cost of a box went up to twenty times its normal cost, and the total revenue reached an unprecedented 5,050 drs.!

Ristori's *Medea* excited the nationalism of the audience. A daily newspaper published the next day states:

The appearance of Madam Ristori on the Athenian stage stirred such grand memories in all of us, descendants of the great tragedians of antiquity! Listening to her, I thought for a moment that I was transported to the southern side of the Acropolis where more than two thousand years ago Euripides' *Medea* was performed. It is true that the language was different, but what of that? Madam Ristori, through the medium of her truly magical art [. . .] compensated for everything [. . .] and we Athenians, for the first time since the Muses left Greece, were the spectators of a drama truly worthy of this art.<sup>8</sup>

So the brief appearance of Ristori on the modern Greek stage acted

as an example for emulation by Greek theatrical practitioners. But this first diva set the standard for every approach to the role during the coming century.

Greek professional companies began their preoccupation with *Medea* in 1869. The first performance of the play in modern Greek was staged in Constantinople by the Hellenodramatike Hetairia, a company comprising the whole first generation of great professional Greek actors. Once again, though, it was not Euripides' tragedy that was staged but an adaptation by Ioannes Zabelios of Cesare della Valle's version of *Medea*. This adaptation (of an adaptation) proved so successful that the troupe added it to its standard repertory and continued to perform it until the end of the nineteenth century. By that time, similar lesser troupes had produced adaptations of *Medea*, but of particular note was the adaptation 'in imitation of Euripides' by Niccolini, with the great *fin de siècle* actress Evangelia Paraskevopoulou in the title role.<sup>9</sup>

This preference for adaptations of Euripides' tragedy over the ancient Greek play itself is the product of a double difficulty. The first is related to the conditions of development of theatre activity in Greece, which had not yet managed to attain an advanced level of acting and directing. The star-actresses of that era did not really face the interpretative questions posed by the Euripidean play; their acting abilities were better suited to simple plays centring on the emotional upheavals of love and jealousy. The second difficulty has to do with the education of a public used to performances of Italian opera (mainly through the tours of various Italian companies) or of Greek melodramas, and to productions of nationalistic plays exploiting ancient Greek themes. The formation of professional troupes during the 1860s is a reflection of these conditions, which prevailed until the 1890s, when the first important modern Greek playwrights appear.<sup>10</sup>

Of all adaptations of *Medea*, the definite preference of Greek professional companies was Legouvé's version, which continued to be performed until 1919. Later, within the same framework of star companies, the great star actress of the early twentieth century, Marika Kotopouli, often staged Grillparzer's *Medea*, perhaps in an effort to distinguish herself from her predecessors. While Kotopouli had taken part in productions of ancient Greek plays such as the Royal Theatre *Oresteia* in 1903 and the famous Photos Politis *Hecuba* in 1927, she never staged Euripides' *Medea*.<sup>11</sup> She insisted on the Grillparzer *Medea*, which featured in her repertory from 1915 to 1930.<sup>12</sup>



Around the end of the century, after 1895, the increasing attraction of the ancient world found expression in the emergence of a new company 'In Favour of Staging Ancient Drama', characterized by performances in ancient Greek. This company's appearance was due to an extreme reaction to linguistic controversies, and the emerging use of *dimotiki*, the popular language, against the purist *katharevousa*. Its formation was an expression of the conflict, which would come to a head on the occasion of a performance of the *Oresteia* by the National Theatre in 1903, the events later labelled as 'Oresteika'. The inspiration behind it came from the Classics Professor George Mistrionis, a violent militant for *katharevousa*. The troupe consisted of a few minor professional actors of the time who interpreted the main parts, but mostly students from Mistrionis's classes. Presumably the choice of Euripides' *Medea*, produced by this troupe in 1903, was in answer to the prevalence of 'foreign', western adaptations. However, since the performance was in ancient Greek, their choice had little influence on the fortunes of *Medea* on the modern Greek stage. The only reviewer showing faint traces of sympathy praised the attempt of the troupe to 'hold the interest of foreign travellers'.<sup>13</sup>

This performance did not succeed in turning the interest of the audience, or of other troupes, towards the Euripidean play. With the exception of a rather insignificant semi-amateur production in 1932, the discovery of Euripides' *Medea* still lay ahead. It was only in 1942 that the first truly professional production of *Medea* occurred, directed by Takis Mouzenidis in the National Theatre.<sup>14</sup> The part of *Medea* was played by a previously unknown actress, Elsa Vergi, who later left the National Theatre to form her own troupe, but continued to join other troupes in performances of *Medea*.

During the next two decades, two of the most important modern Greek performances of *Medea* were staged. One was the production of Alexis Minotis with Katina Paxinou in 1956. This *Medea* was an elegant staging, with co-ordinated movements of the chorus in rhythmic but not dancing formations, in fact a simplified version of the style of Rondiris and Politis. Undoubtedly, the main attraction was Katina Paxinou, who emphasized the human element of *Medea*, while implying both her secret magic power and her deeply tragic characteristics. Paxinou's *Medea* is regarded as one of her major interpretations, and perhaps, as much as any other, one of the roles that established her as a modern Greek diva.<sup>15</sup>

The second was the *Medea* of Dimitris Rondiris, who produced the

tragedy repeatedly, with Aspasia Papathanasiou in the main role,<sup>16</sup> in Greece and on tours abroad from 1959. In this the director was paramount; the star actress was not. Rondiris's demand for a proper interpretation of tragic style centred on a recognition of its 'ritualistic nature', as well as on 'passionate, bulky movements of the chorus'. His aim was to retain a 'celebratory character' which would give 'expression to the religious and deeply humanistic spirit of tragedy'.<sup>17</sup> The need to put his vision onstage compelled him in effect to return the words to the place for which they had been written, the ancient Greek auditorium. To his mind, the performance of tragedy was no longer simply an option within the National Theatre's standard repertory, but demanded a special approach in order to reach its unique goal: answering the fundamental questions posed by these texts. A performance of ancient drama had to be a spiritual event, and even needed an intellectual approach, which had to be different from the usual criteria for the audience's experience applicable to most plays. With this last demand, Rondiris helped establish the view that tragedy must be distinguished from the main body of standard repertory. In this respect, his productions truly centred on the figure of the director.

A relatively minor production of the same period was performed by the peculiar 'Thymelikos Thiasos' of Linos Karzis, in an effort to maintain the so-called 'museum spirit'. Between 1962 and 1967 he occasionally brought together his semi-amateur troupe to try to conserve the spirit of performance established by Eva Sikelianou in the Delphic Festivals of 1927 and 1930, which sought to re-create the 'authentic' conditions of ancient theatrical production. He was known for insisting on the use of any knowledge he managed to obtain on the visual dimension and impact of ancient performances. Productions characterized by bulky *kothornoi* and masks were lost in garbled utterances of sung speech, creating a generally primitive spectacle.<sup>18</sup>

At the beginning of the 1960s, the star-actress reached a kind of pinnacle with the *Medea* of the diva of the twentieth century: Maria Callas's interpretations eclipsed all others. The operatic *Medea* was, in fact, Callas's special property, since it was she who restored Cherubini's *Medea* to the stage, and continued playing it from 1953 to 1962. Despite Minotis's stated intention of directing this production in the spirit of Euripides' tragedy, the Epidaurus performances in 1961 followed a conventional operatic logic with the emphasis on spectacular effects.<sup>19</sup> After this, *Medea* was indivisibly linked with the idea

of the diva. Callas also contributed, however, to the wider acceptance of Euripides' play by those with influence in the Greek theatre, and led to the determination to demonstrate the difference between opera and tragedy.

The production of *Medea* in 1968 by the National Theatre, which at the time lay under grave suspicion of collaboration with the junta, added nothing to Minotis's approach. In fact, the director Lambros Kostopoulos, one of Minotis's pupils, tried to reproduce his teacher's approach while lacking the dynamic presence of Katina Paxinou in his cast. The production by the State Theatre of Northern Greece in 1973 starred Elsa Vergi; but although she had been playing *Medea* since 1942, and in 1966 even interpreted the part for Rondiris, Vergi never became a diva like Kotopouli or Paxinou.

In 1976, the Epidaurus Festival broadened its horizons to include other, non-state-subsidized groups like Karolos Koun's *Theatro Technis* and Spyros Evangelatos's *Amphi-Theatro*; and in so doing it motivated the state theatres to try more daring moves. The State Theatre of Northern Greece invited Minos Volanakis to direct *Medea* starring Melina Mercouri. In a conservative countermove, the National Theatre announced its own production of *Medea* starring Eleni Hatziargyri. This move was made to confirm its priority in the theatre at Epidaurus, and thus to bar Mercouri's own way to Epidaurus, because of her connections with the opposition to the right-wing government led by Karamanlis (as a result Mercouri was called 'the exiled *Medea*' in the press). The National Theatre performance, directed by the experienced Alexis Solomos, was generally regarded as confusing and monotonous. It seemed to be an attempt to liken Euripides' play to Cherubini's opera, especially as the chorus was subdivided into 'arias, duets, groups etc.' Despite the fact that the main part was given to an acclaimed actress, her presence failed to rescue the production because her interpretation was pulling in a contradictory direction from that of the director.

By contrast, Volanakis' production was generally taken to derive from Pasolini's 1970 film *Medea*, starring Maria Callas, and so was accused of trying to 'correct' the Euripidean text. Within a set built around a central opening in the floor, said to symbolize the female genitalia (see fig. 13), the Chorus used a mixture of *Sprechchor* and melodies reminiscent of Gregorian chant. Melina Mercouri's own interpretation was praised for its humanity and emotional power. Indeed this production inspired Jules Dassin to produce the film *A Dream of Passion*, based on a parallelism between an infamous





13. Melina Mercouri as Medea, 1976 (photograph).  
Minos Volanakis's production, performed by the  
State Theatre of Northern Greece

American woman charged with infanticide and Medea, and examining the woman's relationship with an actress studying for the role of Medea (see Christie, Ch. 7). With Ellen Burstyn as the prisoner and Melina Mercouri as the actress, this was presented as a film focusing on the status of women (the French title was *Cri de femme*). Still, it is indicative of Mercouri's special relationship with *Medea*.<sup>20</sup>

After these stirring events of 1976 interest in Medea was revived through the impact made by the exotic performance by the Japanese group Toho directed by Ninagawa in 1983 (see Smethurst, Ch. 10).<sup>21</sup> With an entirely male cast and the famous actor Hira in the leading role of Medea, this performance was made memorable by the use of Japanese forms and traditions.

Minos Volanakis produced *Medea* again in 1985, using similar stage solutions but starring Jennie Karezi. About this time, two more *Medeas* appeared on the Greek stage, a folkloric version by Exodos Aigaiou and a new version by Aspasia Papathanasiou.<sup>22</sup> This marked Papathanasiou's first-ever appearance in the ancient theatre at Epidaurus, in a production which, while based on Rondiris' original version, also featured some significant changes, such as the use of masks in the last few scenes of the play.

In the 1990s, *Medea* became *the* main challenge for Greek star-actresses with, as it happens, a performance of Euripides' *Medea* every two years.<sup>23</sup> In 1990 and 1991, a production of *Medea* by the State Theatre of Northern Greece starred Lydia Photopoulou. It was directed by Andreas Voutsinas, in a new translation by Giorgos Chimonas, and attempted to turn the tragedy into a *drame bourgeois*. In 1993 the National Theatre performed at Epidaurus with the well-known actress Antigoni Valakou, directed by Nikos Charalambous. The version by Teatro Technis in 1995, directed by Giorgos Lazanis, met with a mixed reception, despite the interpretation of Medea by Reni Pittaki, which was much influenced by the Ninagawa production (fig. 14). The most recent production by the National Theatre in 1997, directed by the up-and-coming Nikaiti Kontouri, and starring the equally ascendant Karyophyllia Karambeti, was based on an impressive use of the setting by Giorgos Patsas, but marked by a tense and uncomfortable rendering of the Euripidean text. All these productions exploited the star-actress principle discussed above—though it remains to be seen whether the National Theatre's choice will emerge as a new diva.

During recent times performances of ancient Greek drama have been taking on the characteristics of a national mission aimed at tourist



14. Dimis Argyropoulos, Reni Pittaki as Medea, 1995 (photograph).  
Giorgos Lazanis's production, performed by Theatro Technis



consumption. Epidaurus has seen an amazing change. No longer—happily—the sole province of the National Theatre, it hosts productions that have changed the history of the Greek theatre, and it has turned into a sort of stadium for the rich and the social élite. The Festival of Epidaurus is now like a great Cup Final match, having lost its original purpose in the 1950s as a forum for the exchange of challenging arguments. It is now a space open to negotiation, but the argument for gaining entry to this Festival has tended to become a matter of star casting. The performances of ancient drama are arguably undermined by their very frequency. They are the obvious answer for a summer repertory, and this tends to confine all discussion of ancient drama to words of praise or condemnation over any alleged ‘originality’.

Still, the scope is endless. Recent productions have turned increasingly to *adaptations* of *Medea*. The version by Mikis Theodorakis, presented in 1991, offered a political account of *Medea* (see McDonald, Ch. 5),<sup>24</sup> and the experimental production by Michail Marmarinos, *Medea in a Desperately Closed Space*, also in 1991, pointed to this changing approach. *Medea by Silence*, a pantomime performance presented in 1992, seemed to tend in the same direction. This turn towards adaptation is characteristic of troupes that abstain from the star-system.<sup>25</sup> A final adaptation worth mention is the production by the Edaphos Dance Theatre, inspired by the story of *Medea* and accompanied by a collage of extracts from Bellini operas—an extraordinary aesthetic experience.

Perhaps the strangest—and in some ways most impressive—of these versions is the naïve adaptation by Mentis Bostantzoglou, the painter, comic writer and political cartoonist known as ‘Bost’, which was produced in 1994. This is a parody of *Medea*, using common puns that aim at linguistic anarchy,<sup>26</sup> deconstructing all nationalistic pomposity. Within an outrageous plot,<sup>27</sup> including the appearance of Euripides asking details about the story of *Medea*, or of *Oedipus*, one can discern comments on tragedy. An illustration is the linguistic confusion of the Chorus in the form of (untranslatable) nonsense sounding like ancient Greek:

Εσίν φησίν, τουθόπερ γαρ, κλείδων ο τάλας φίλων  
 γαίαν πυρί βαρείαν φρην, παίδας εκ τρόχων ζήλον  
 Τί δ' έστιν φθόνει γεραιέν τα πρόσθεν ειρημένα  
 πάσχοντας δύστανος εγώ δήλον εξαιρομένα;  
 Μη φάντας, δάντας Τλήμονας, φίλτατον δε μοί στόμα;  
 μη δήτε παίδες πέπρατε φιλτάτω σοί ακόμα [. . .]

and so forth.

Medea's adventure in Greece still continues. From the old adaptations of the nineteenth century, which presented simple versions of the role of Medea, enabling the star actresses to display their charm and talent, we move to the twentieth century, when Euripides' *Medea* provides a challenge to the divas of the Greek theatre. The recent tendency has been to see the play as material to be developed by writers or directors. The text thus becomes the pretext for performances which overcome the limits that traditional Greek theatre practice has imposed on the interpretation of ancient Greek drama. But as with any other ancient text, the Euripidean *Medea* can never be captured in its entirety. It will continue to be a great challenge.

### Notes to Chapter 8

1. According to the first complete modern performance history of ancient Greek drama included in the series 'Ancient Greek Theatre' by Epikairitita Editions, vols. 1-47 (hereafter Epik), there were 633 performances in all, including the works of Menander, up until 1994. This production history was the product of a thorough search carried out by Evangelia Andritsanou, Mary Iliadi, Nikos Karanastasis, Platon Mavromoustakos, Agni Mouzenidou, Christina Symvoulidou, Mirka Theodoropoulou, and Iosif Vivilakis, a team of researchers gathered together for this purpose and working under the supervision of Platon Mavromoustakos.
2. This was thoroughly investigated by Spathis (1986); see also Sideris (1976), 18. The latter is an essential textbook for the understanding of modern Greek performances of ancient drama, as is Sideris (1990-2001), of which a second volume from unpublished manuscripts was edited in 1999 and two more should be published by the end of the year 2000. The entire work is to be completed in 2001 with the edition of additional unpublished manuscripts.
3. See Sideris (1990-2001), i; also Spathis (1983).
4. As characterized by Puchner (1984).
5. See Spathis (1986), Sideris (1990-2001), ii, and Mavromoustakos (1999), 273-81.
6. See Sideris (1976) and the introductory notes in the relevant volumes of Epik (12, 16, 25).
7. See Sideris (1976), 35-42, and the introductory note by Platon Mavromoustakos in Epik 26.
8. The excerpt is from Sideris (1976), 36, who draws it from the newspaper *Palingenesia*.
9. See Sideris (1976), 62, 73, and 110-11, and the introductory note in Epik 26.
10. See Sideris (1990), Spathis (1983) (1986). On the Italian melodrama performances, see now Gheorghakaki (1998).
11. See Sideris (1976) and the relevant volumes in Epik.
12. On Kotopouli, see also Anemogiannis (1994).
13. In the newspaper *Εστία*. See Sideris (1976), 185-6, and Epik 26.
14. All information concerning the performances of Euripides' *Medea* by Greek

- professional companies from 1942 to 1990 can be found in Epik 26. That on professional Greek performances, performances by foreign groups, or performances of non-Euripidean texts after 1990, was gathered specifically for the conference organized by the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama in Oxford in 1998. Further detailed information has been gathered in order to continue the research on ancient Greek drama performances for the pilot phase of the international project of the European Network of Research Documentation on Ancient Greek Drama. This part was accomplished with the help of three new researchers in the Greek team: Vana Diakaki, Grigoris Ioannidis, and Youli Pallanda, to all of whom I am grateful.
15. More information on the performances of Minotis and Paxinou with detailed chronology, casting, and photographic material has been compiled by Mavromoustakos and Symvoulidou (1997). Paxinou's interpretation of Medea's mourning and some of her other major roles are recorded on a CD compiled and produced by the composer Manos Hadzidakis (PolyGram CD 526 458-2).
  16. The role was also played occasionally by other actresses (in several touring performances up until 1967) such as Zorz Sarri, Elsa Vergi, Titika Nikiforaki, and Maria Moscoliou or Elda Athanassaki; but none reached the heights of Aspasia Papathanasiou's interpretation.
  17. These phrases are from the analysis by Georgousopoulos (1986); see also Rondiris (1977).
  18. For critical reviews of these performances see Dromazos (1984), Georgousopoulos (1982), Varveris (1986-94), and Lignades (1988) (1990-1).
  19. On Callas's Greek performances see Nikolaidis (1981); Marsan (1983); Bakounakis (1995).
  20. Mercouri was established as a film star through her role in *Stella* directed by Michael Kakoyannis. The script was taken from the play *Η Στέλλα με τα κόκκινα γάντια* (*Stella with the Red Gloves*) by Iacovos Kambanellis, who, as he explains in his introductory note, was inspired by elements of Mercouri's personality. He combined this with the main roles from Anouilh's *Médée* and Bizet's *Carmen*, which he happened to be translating at the time for a radio broadcast. See Kambanellis (1991). In her famous film *Never on Sunday*, directed by Jules Dassin, the character played by Mercouri goes to the Odeion of Herodes Atticus to attend a performance of *Medea*. She then narrates the plot with charming *naïveté*—much to the amusement of the American tourist played by Dassin, who is amazed at the facility with which a lay audience in Greece is able to approach tragedy and feel at ease with its heroines and heroes.
  21. This performance was such a success in the open theatre on Mount Lykavittos that it was invited to return for a second year for performance at the Odeion of Herodes Atticus.
  22. In 1995 Papathanasiou recorded another interpretation of *Medea* based on the Rondiris approach, but with the new translation by Giorgos Chimonas, as used in the 1991 State Theatre of Northern Greece performance (a recording was issued on CD Dionysos 0957).
  23. We may note too that in 1994 a cycle of performances at the celebrated Megaron Concert Hall in Athens was dedicated to *Medea*. Also an 'avant-garde' festival in the ancient theatre of Argos was devoted to interpretations of *Medea*, and a



cultural centre near Athens organized a series of performances under the title 'From Iphigeneia to Medea: Woman—Myth—Love'.

24. See also McDonald (1997).
25. Other related productions would include Seneca's *Medea* directed by Evangelatos for the State Theatre of Northern Greece in 1975; and the performance of *Medea* based both on Euripides and Seneca directed by Andrei Şerban with the La Mama Repertory Theatre at the Lykavittos Open Theatre during the summer of 1975. There have also been productions of Anouilh's *Médée* by Greek groups.
26. Μήδεια ('Medea') in modern Greek sounds like μύδια = 'mussels'. In some scenes, the moment when Jason calls Medea by her name coincides with the entrance of a mussel-seller.
27. In Bost's version Medea kills her children because they slept with the maid and had an affair with the paedophile Zeus. Furthermore, they wouldn't take the letters from the post office where they worked during the summer to deliver them. Another pun is hidden here. The writer uses the Greek phrase δέν παίρνουν τα γράμματα, which has a double meaning: literally it means 'they didn't get the letters', while metaphorically it means 'they were not susceptible to knowledge'.

## CHAPTER 9



# Central European Medea

*Eva Stehlíková*

The Medea of myth is a complex being. She may be an infamous witch or accommodating priestess, a founder of cities, a child of the Gods, the daughter of a mighty mortal king, a sister, a passionate lover, a devoted wife, a loving mother and an artful murderess, a cold-blooded fratricide, and a ruthless infanticide. Euripides' tragedy gave her a somewhat simpler identity: she is (to paraphrase *Med.* 997–8) the wretched mother of children, who killed her offspring in vengeance when her husband deserted her. So she becomes the archetypical anti-mother, yet the play tried to make her more understandable, more acceptable, to diminish her inhuman act by stressing both her loneliness in unfriendly Greece and Jason's perfidious cowardice. Still, she remains a miasma (*Med.* 1268) and an ἀθλιωτάτη γυνή [most wretched woman] (*Med.* 818), both avenging and punishing herself.

*Medea* is a relatively simple play: it does not suggest contradictory interpretations as much as, for example, *Oedipus the King*, *Philoctetes*, or *Iphigenia in Aulis*. We are faced, indeed, with the question of whether there is scope for basic differences in the interpretation of this play, or whether the attempts of producers must necessarily be based on factors such as varying the form of the chorus and dealing with permutations of its possibilities (a reciting or a singing chorus, a chorus in unison or with individual utterances, static or moving, on the stage or in the auditorium amongst the viewers, etc.). We cannot find even a provisional answer to these questions unless we persistently ask 'Why?' and 'How?' Our answers will evidently be more convincing the greater the number of productions taken into consideration. Allow me, however, to remain on my home ground and examine the character of Central European Medea.

Within the boundaries of the present-day Czech Republic,

Euripides' *Medea* has drawn the attention of theatrical performers a total of fifteen times—beginning with the first Czech production in the National Theatre in 1921 (1) and coming down to 1997 (15). [Figures in bold refer to the checklist at the end of this chapter.] Only *Oedipus*, *Antigone*, and the *Oresteia* have been produced more frequently. To be completely correct, however, it is necessary to add that *Medea* has frequently been staged in the later twentieth century in the guises created by Robinson Jeffers and Jean Anouilh.<sup>1</sup>

The first production of Euripides' *Medea* was over thirty years after the first modern Czech production of a Greek tragedy (*Antigone* in 1889). *Medea* was not, however, unknown to the Czech public, since the first translation was published in 1878. And some of the audience in 1921 were graduates of schools where the tragedy was either read directly in the Greek or was expounded by the teachers. The production was directed by K. H. Hilar, who had also studied Greek at Charles University in Prague; and it was fairly successful (it played for eight performances). Nonetheless, the critics of the time expressed great surprise that the Czech public should be suddenly faced with 'such burning, bitter gall, so many sudden outcries', rather than with the accustomed 'noble simplicity and quiet grandeur' of Winckelmann, which had characterized productions of Greek tragedies in Bohemia up to that time. It was also a surprise to discover that 'classical theatre had anticipated the local fight of women against family bondage'. The 'barbaric' scenic designs were favourably received: there was only a single object on the stage, a huge gate, complemented by coloured projections in the background. A chorus reciting the stasima in unison was also regarded favourably. Both the audience and the critics were, however, rather confused by the part-decadent, part-expressionist acting style. We read that 'it would have been more suitable for Strindberg than for a Greek play'.<sup>2</sup> So it is clear that the questions that always accompany the production of Greek tragedies were posed during this very first production of *Medea*.

While considering the Czech tradition of producing *Medea*, it is necessary to point out that there are some factors which have long limited both the possibilities of presenting Greek tragedies on the stage, and even of their interpretation. The most important of these is the fact that theatre has had a quite specific significance for Czech society. Since the nineteenth century and—with the exception of a brief period—up until the eighties of the twentieth century, it replaced the non-existent political structures. This fact has led to a predominant

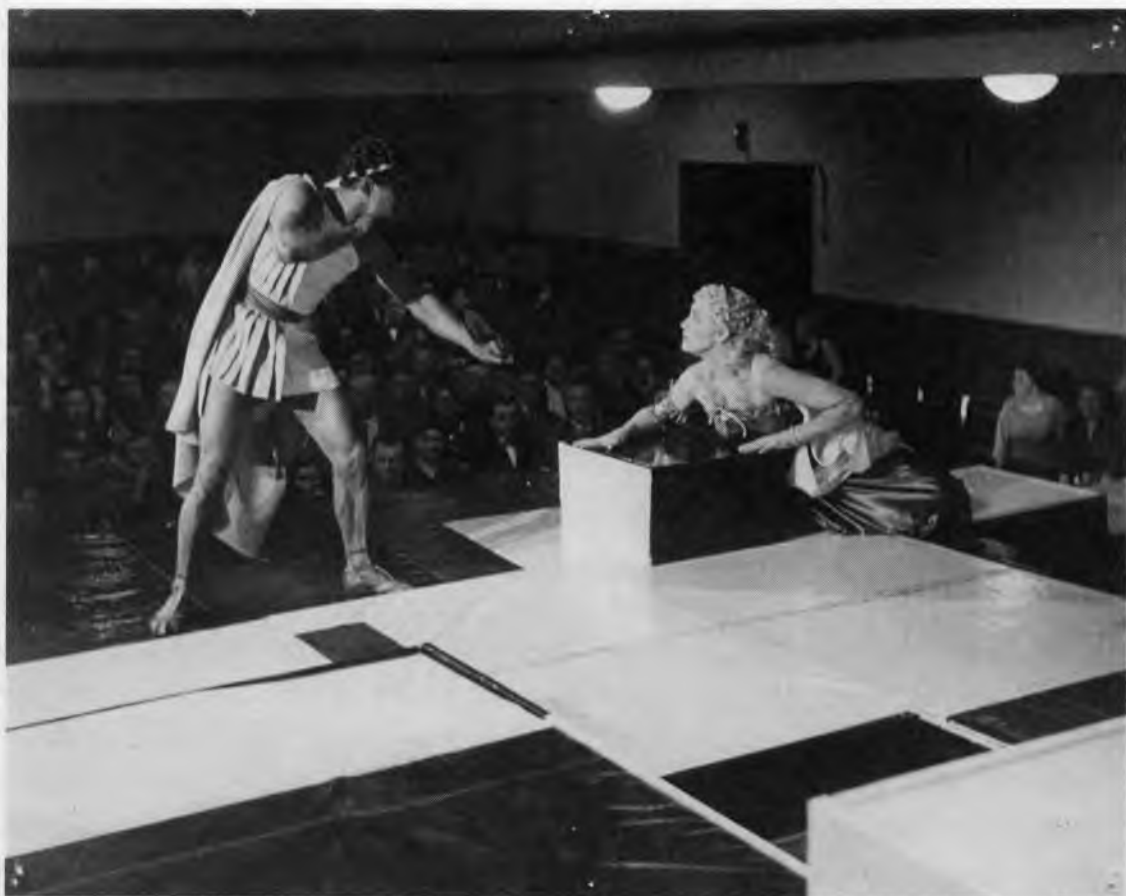


political emphasis in the presentations of these plays. This was felt most strongly in the period of the German occupation during the Second World War and over the forty years of the totalitarian regime after that. During these periods, the repertoire of the Czech theatre was controlled by censorship. During the War, a list was made of 'unsuitable' theatrical plays, whose authors were guilty through either their origins or their democratic ideas. This list was constantly updated (i.e. extended), so that in the end it included the plays of all English and French playwrights, with the exceptions of Shakespeare and Shaw. Under these circumstances, the plays of Greek and Roman authors became not only an available means of extending the repertoire, but also, because they were considered to be a part of the European humanist tradition, they were seen as a medium for expressing resistance.

It may now seem almost incredible that this approach was taken towards Plautus' *Pseudolus* as well as Sophocles' *Electra*. At the same time, productions of *Electra* were not received especially favourably (in fact, the heading of one critical review was 'The End of a First Night Catastrophe'). Nonetheless, *Electra's* rebellion—thanks to the excellent performance of the actress in the title-role—was not so much an expression of hysterical lability as an expression of resistance based on hatred for oppressors and compassion for their victims. It is apparent that the four wartime productions of *Medea* (2–5, especially that of 1942 [3]) also fulfilled this function, although each in different ways.

In the period of supremacy of what is known as 'socialist realism' after 1948, a basic schedule of the theatrical repertoire was again imposed. According to this scheme, 30 per cent of productions had to consist of original Czech (i.e. 'progressive') plays, 30 per cent of Czech and Russian classical plays, 30 per cent of plays from other communist regimes, and 10 per cent 'Western classics' (which included Greek plays, as well as Shakespeare, Molière, Ibsen, etc.). Greek tragedy did not accord with the obligatory optimism of the time, so it is not surprising that it did not return to the stage until around 1956, the time of the fall of the Stalin-type personality cult. It is gratifying that one of the plays that attracted great attention at the time was the *Medea*, produced twice in 1958 (7, 8; see fig. 15).

These political and social factors created the framework within which creative theatrical artists could manoeuvre only with considerable difficulty. However, Greek tragedies allowed speculation on taboo subjects and clearly expressed the moral questions that disturbed society. In the first Czech presentation of *Medea* in 1921, it is apparent



15. Jaroslav Svoboda, Jarmila Derková as Medea, 1958 (photograph).  
Milan Pásek's production

that emphasis was placed on the aspect that connected Euripides with the fight for the equality of women that was occurring at the time. Thirty-seven years later, the theatre once again found a contemporary voice in Euripides: 'A striking drama that deals with the contemporary crisis in marital relations and loosening of family bonds has been found. It was written by Euripides, it is about two and a half thousand years old, and it is called *Medea*.'<sup>3</sup> This crisis was strongly felt at the end of the fifties, although officially every mention of it was firmly suppressed, because this image in no way corresponded to the proclaimed vision of a conflict-free socialist society. It was difficult to admit that, in addition to the collapsing value system, a great contribution to this crisis was also made by the proclaimed equality of women, which in practice meant that almost 100 per cent of women were employed. This meant that they had almost a double work-load, which was relieved only by the existence of crèches and nursery schools (assistance in the home was considered to be a bourgeois luxury). It may not be surprising that, after this dramatic experience, a feminist theme on the stage seemed somewhat subdued, as the audience receiving the message consisted of a generation of physically and psychologically exhausted mothers and their deprived children.

From this point of view, the recent production of *Medea* in the National Theatre in Prague (14; fig. 16) is interesting. It was produced there from 1992, it was in repertory for more than six years, and was performed about eighty times. For the first time, critical reviews mention that the production was received in the light of contemporary feminism. The production was 'not a play about a fatally inseparable connection and multiple punishment for infringing order, but a destructive conflict between two obdurate partners, the psychologically based and almost feminist story of a murderer-mother'.<sup>4</sup> When we examine the production we find, however, that this tends rather towards critical rhetoric. The conflict between Medea and Jason has the parameters of unending family arguments, full of avenging threats and insults, in which both partners move in the vicious circle of their inability to accept and deal with the situation that has arisen. Both are full of hate; they speak of the love that once joined them, but they were only joined by evil. This was what their relationship was based on, and the children were only an accidental side-product of this relationship. They both swear by them, but they do not love them. The new, more advantageous position and the revenge are more attractive for both of them. They both suffer,





16. Oldrich Pernica, Karel Roden as Jason, 1992 (photograph).  
Ivan Rajmont's production

that is, from the same boundless selfishness that sacrifices the children. But their conflict does not grow into a war of the sexes because there is another mirror-image of Medea built into the play. This is the leader of the chorus—a clever and wise woman, who understands all, has the same experience as a wife and mother, and thus has great understanding for Medea; but she has the strength to refuse to accept the madness of revenge. This leader of the chorus becomes a Medea who does not kill.

In Czech productions, there tends to be little emphasis on the barbarian origins of Medea and the subsequent conflict between the barbarian and Hellenic worlds. It was probably played this way only in the first production in 1921 (1). The critical reviews of the time mention this fact; but in practice there was no difference between the two worlds, not even in the costumes. The famous black Medea, who first appeared in 1933 in Jahn's production (see Macintosh, Ch. 1), is inconceivable in the Czech context. The reason is simple. For forty years, Czech society was divided from the rest of the world by an impenetrable barrier of instructions and prohibitions, which did not allow free entrance and exit from the area that was appropriately called 'the socialist camp'. It was thus not confronted with the surrounding world in a natural manner, and has been faced with the subject of migration—for which it was quite unprepared—only in the last decade. The latest production of *Medea* on the Czech stage in 1997 (15) does reflect the subjects of exile and immigration. This new Medea is 'a suspicious barbarian from an unknown quarter of the world, whose culture is considered to be inferior even by her husband. However, he himself, although a Greek, is only a foreigner in Corinth, and thus intends to remarry into a local family.'<sup>5</sup>

I should not like to give the impression that all the productions simplify Euripides' text, bringing it down to a common level, and making it something like the police reports in a newspaper. As one critic described the play: 'Mrs M., the mother of two small children, has been left by her husband. In an attempt to get her revenge, she killed not only his future wife and her father, who was also mixed up in the matter, but, in a sudden loss of reason, both her own two children, the man's heirs. This story did not take place in a Prague apartment district or behind a country tavern, but in long-past antique times.'<sup>6</sup> On the contrary, a number of productions have rather accented the monumental nature of the Greek tragedy. Thus, *Medea* has always been a great opportunity for true tragediennes. Those

playing *Medea* included the best-known Czech actresses, such as Leopolda Dostalová (1921, 1), Olga Scheinpflugová (1942, 3), Jarmila Derková (1958, 8), and Zora Rozsypalová (1965, 9).

This performance of *Medea* in 1965 (9) was fortunately captured in a small extract in the film-portrait of the actress. Although the film recording is quite inadequate (as pointed out by all those who saw the live performance), it at least suggests the magnitude of her achievement—the only creation that drew forth real enthusiasm from the public, and which has been the subject of extensive studies in the prestigious theatrical magazine *Divadlo*.<sup>7</sup> This interpretation of Euripides' tragedy in Ostrava was, in any case, surprising. The director did all he could to ensure that Medea's act was understood, and was not seen as the result of unquenchable thirst for revenge that would destroy all her rivals; she was rather seen as a heroic victim, who has to remedy the dreadful moral order of the world. The terrible act is presented to arouse our numb moral consciousness. When Medea battles with her maternal instincts, she does so in order that she may fulfil her moral destiny even at the price of terrible pain. This concept could best be characterized as Sophoclean. The performance provided, nonetheless, a great Euripidean experience, thanks to the actress. The critic Jaroslav Král (the last to know Greek in the Czech theatre) wrote:

She has everything for the role. Her dark voice is an extraordinarily flexible and sensitive interpreter of enormous scales of emotion [...]. She is capable of great hardness and great passion. She has a great sense for stylization, which never seems unnatural or confined. Exact order rules everywhere, but is never cold. Her acting is extraordinarily intense, but never overstrained. Her explosions are as broad as the sea and, even in the most strained parts, one has the feeling that she could add more. She never loses her sense of proportion, over which passion and intelligence watch covertly [. . .]. She has enormous strength. Once she has grasped the viewer, she never lets him out of her power. And she grasps him immediately, at the moment when the oval of her face appears in the cone of light and the first cries of Medea's laments call forth from the interior of the house.<sup>8</sup>

The climax of the performance of this actress was the scene where the children are killed. Through the realization of Aegeus' longing for the children, her terrible intention was born: if the children are of such great value to the man, then this revenge will be the greatest. Then nothing could have held her back, not entreaties, threats, warnings, nor arguments. She drove forward without hesitation towards her goal; yet she nonetheless wavered, when she had the children before



her, when she began to touch them. Then her maternal feelings burst forth in their full intensity and passion, feelings that are a greater joy than the joy of sexual love. When she killed them, she was engulfed in horror and dread that was not superhuman but inhuman. She could not enjoy the moment for which she had sacrificed everything. She was transformed into a pillar of unbearable pain.

To master Greek tragedy means to master that which is timeless and yet universally comprehensible within it; but Greek tragedy also has to accept, experience, and transform into a new theatrical language all that is foreign to us. The chorus is foreign to us and the Czech theatre (like most theatres in the world) has struggled using various permutations, such as were mentioned at the beginning. There is really only one special Czech feature here: the chorus on the Czech stage cannot imitate the movements of a Greek chorus, because such an approach would be irresistibly comic for a Czech audience. This is because the communist mass physical-training celebrations (partly loved and partly hated by the population), whose visual climax was a regrouping which formed geometric shapes, was the heir to the Czech physical training movement of the nineteenth century. Its founder, Miroslav Tyrš, was in his turn a great devotee of Greek *kalokagathia*, and was inspired to introduce this type of exercising by the ancient Greek hoplite army and by the Greek theatre.

The space for which Greek tragedies were composed is also foreign, so that the performance of *Medea* constitutes a great challenge for designers. For the 1965 *Medea* (9), the set-designer created a highly dramatic space using white stone slabs composed of two differently shaped blocks which drew apart and collided. Their movement was magnified and accelerated by a revolving stage. The monumentality of the stage in no way confined the actors: on the contrary, it gained significance only on their entrance, lent rhythm to their tragedy, and—often in counterpoint—emphasized it. On the other hand, a kinetic set was used for *Medea* in 1981 (11), in which a net with broken masts or two columns was lowered, which allowed the concept of a single site to be broken.

Finally, the first completely consistent implementation of a central acting space for Greek tragedy was not in the alternative theatre, which frequently adopts this approach, but in 1958 (8). The director and set-designer placed the stage in the centre, the audience area of a traditional theatre, and surrounded it by the audience on all sides. The viewers also sat within the area of the stage itself and in balcony boxes

enclosing the stage from the sides (see fig. 15). This was not done for its own sake, but was a reflection in the set of the directorial concept of the play.

Thus Euripides' *Medea* became the insane monologue of a wounded woman, flung out in this place that is open on all sides, but from which there is no escape and which lies under the gaze of all. A gaze that freezes, unable to believe what it sees, unable to prevent the tragedy but not having the strength to censure or condemn.<sup>9</sup>

It is apparent that Euripides' *Medea* provides sufficient scope for invention to directors, set-designers, and actors, for the expression of specific contemporary problems. Otherwise, Euripides' *Medea* could not have been put on throughout almost every part of the Czech country during the twentieth century. On the one hand, these performances have reflected the contemporary concepts of classical theatre; on the other, they have also created these concepts, especially when the great majority of the audience identify the modern performance of the play with the preserved text of the Greek author. There was a remarkable experimental performance in 1981 (12). In this all the roles were, in fact, played by two performers. It had a very unusual set, where the stage horizon consisted of tyre inner-tubes pushing through cloths in warm colours; it also had Orientalizing costumes and strange musical accompaniment (Tibetan dishes, bells, etc.). The scene of the murder of the children, during which Medea only wound a white scarf around her husband's hands, until they sank down dead, almost seemed to be the only possible, true expression of the horror of such an act. It also demonstrated that very little is required for the effective performance of a Greek tragedy. It is only necessary for the performers to provide us with the opportunity to experience the fate of Greek heroes through our own emotions. Then, as Gorgias put it, we who have let ourselves be deceived by theatrical illusion shall be wiser than those who refuse to be deceived.

### Appendix: Czech productions of *Medea*

(D = Director; A = Adaptor; S = Designer; M = Composer; C = Costume designer)

1. Prague, Národní divadlo, 1921  
D: K. H. Hilar; S: J. Wenig
2. Ostrava, České divadlo Moravsko-ostřavské, 1941  
D: K. Palouš; S: J. Sládek; M: Fr. Jílek

3. Prague, Národní divadlo, 1942  
D: K. Dostal; S: F. Muzika; M: M. Ponc
4. Olomouc, České divadlo, 1943  
D: K. Svoboda; S: O. Šimáček
5. Středočeská činohra J. Burdy, 1944  
D: T. Bok; S: J. Bok
6. Karlovy Vary, Městské divadlo, 1948  
D: T. Bor; S: J. Šťastný; M: O. Čermák
7. Brno, Mahenovo divadlo, 1958  
D: M. Seeman; S: V. Friedrichová; C: V. Provazníková
8. Hradec Krajské, Oblastní divadlo, 1958  
D: M. Pásek; S: J. Fiala
9. Ostrava, Státní divadlo, 1965  
D: R. Koval; S: Vl. Šrámek; C: L. Purkyňová; M: K. Kupka
10. Brno, Divadelní studio JAMU Brno, 1968  
D: M. Pásek; S: M. Zezula
11. Brno, Divadlo bratří Mrštíků, 1981  
A, D: M. Pásek; S: K. Zmrzlý; C: K. Asmusová; M: V. Werner
12. Olomouc, Studio Forum při divadle O. Stibora, 1981  
A, D: I. Balada; S, C: J. Malina
13. Cheb, Západočeské divadlo Cheb, 1988  
D: J. Budínský; S, C: J. Zbořilová
14. Praha, Národní divadlo (studio Kolowrat), 1992–7  
D: I. Rajmont; S: I. Židek; C: I. Greifová; M: M. Jelínek
15. Karlovy Vary, Divadlo Dagmar, 1997  
D: K. Skladan; S, C: D. Hávová

### Notes to Chapter 9

1. There were productions of the Jeffers *Medea* in 1962 (Prague), 1972 (Most), 1973 (Prague), 1977 (Liberec), 1980 (Karlovy Vary), and 1983 (Prague). The *Medea* of Anouilh was performed in 1962 (Prague), 1972 (Most), 1973 (Prague 2x), 1974 (Liberec), 1978 (Plzeň), 1980 (Karlovy Vary), 1981 (Prague), 1983 (Prague).
2. Čapek (1921), 7.
3. J.S. (1958).
4. Mazáčová (1993); Hrabák (1992) speaks of 'the slightly feminist and misogynist tone'.
5. Pavlovský (1997).
6. Červenková (1992)
7. Král (1965).
8. Ibid.
9. Černý (1958).



## CHAPTER 10



# The Japanese Presence in Ninagawa's *Medea*

*Mae Smethurst*

The Japanese theatre director Yukio Ninagawa, known in Japan for expressing in his productions opposition to repressive politics during the 1960s, claimed in an interview given in 1992 to have staged *Medea* because he wanted Japanese women to know that they can be as strong, as straightforward, as *Medea*.<sup>1</sup> Japan, which has been the main audience for this *Medea*, was and still is a male-dominated society and, according to Ninagawa, was a country in which for a woman to be demure and weak was considered a virtue. And yet, if you look closely at Euripides' *Medea*, you might agree with Lida Geh of the Singapore *Sunday Star*, who wrote a critique of Ninagawa's production in 1992, that *Medea*, although strong, is not an ideal role-model for women.<sup>2</sup>

Still, Ninagawa did choose this tragedy, a tragedy with which he has met success again and again in a total of more than 250 performances, in Japan, in other parts of Asia, and in the West, even though they were all were presented in Japanese. For example, on a second tour to Athens in 1984, over a two-night run at the Herodes Atticus theatre with a capacity of 6,000 people, 14,000 attended the performances, and, according to the producer, Tadao Nakane (whom I interviewed in Tokyo in March 1999), the audiences, including those sitting on the sides of the Acropolis, applauded so long and hard that tears came to his eyes.<sup>3</sup> In London, in 1978, Tokusaburo Arashi's performance brought him a nomination for an Olivier award;<sup>4</sup> and Ninagawa served as the first non-English-speaking foreign director of the Royal Shakespeare Company when he directed *King Lear* in the autumn of 1999. Given these and other successes, it is clear that Ninagawa has been able to bridge the gaps both between Japan and the West and between Japan and the rest of Asia.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how Ninagawa was able to take an ancient Greek tragedy and make it popular, not so much with Western or other Asian, but with Japanese audiences. Between his first production of *Medea* in 1978 and the latest in 1999, it has played to full houses not only in Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya, but in smaller cities throughout Japan.<sup>5</sup> He based his *Medea* on the poet Mutsuo Takahashi's line-by-line adaptation of Euripides' *Medea*,<sup>6</sup> though not all lines are used in each production. Ninagawa's productions of Greek tragedy—*Medea* and *Oedipus the King*—do adhere, however, to the words of the text much more closely and fully than do Tadashi Suzuki's *Bacchae* or *Trojan Women*. Ninagawa infused his *Medea* with a very strong Japanese presence, consisting of elements drawn from Japan past and present. And it is these that I believe have helped ensure his success with Japanese audiences who (like us) bring their own cultural baggage to the theatre.

This chapter is an analysis of the Japanese presence in one production, a performance of *Medea* in Tokyo in 1993.<sup>7</sup> I shall attempt to place this performance within its cultural context by pointing out some of the Japanese elements that may have helped Ninagawa insinuate his message into the Japanese audience with a play that he had already shown to have universal aesthetic (if not always social) appeal.<sup>8</sup> With the exception of an occasional comment on the ancient Greek reception of Euripides' *Medea*, this chapter omits discussions of well-known controversies and most of the bibliography connected with this Euripidean tragedy. To classicists it should, however, be obvious from my reading of Ninagawa's directing strategies how he has resolved these controversies.

To present to his Japanese audience a *Medea* who was a sympathetic female character, a victim of the perceived weaknesses and constraints of her gender, one exiled by the king and forsaken by her husband for another woman, yet at the same time both strong-willed and determined in her resolve, Ninagawa drew on some of the theatrical conventions of both kabuki, a traditional theatre of Japan, and bunraku, the puppet theatre. Anyone who knows the conventions of these theatres can readily see that Ninagawa's production is not pure kabuki/bunraku. He himself described his *Medea* productions as (1) avant-garde/modern (*zeneiteki*), (2) traditional (*dentōteki*), and (3) symbolic (*shōchōteki*); and he also played the elements of kabuki/bunraku off against those of other theatres and performing arts.<sup>9</sup> This tripartite description does not include the term 'Western', because

there is such a high degree of Western inflection in the Japanese way of life, that what some Westerners might label as Western elements of the performance—and in their original form may have been influenced or inspired by the West—to a great extent represent elements that have become fully assimilated into Japanese culture and are considered neither foreign nor exotic. To the Japanese they are part of the Japanese presence.

The overture to the *Medea* provides one example of what Ninagawa might have meant by his tripartite description of his productions. The guitar music in the mode of modern pop folk, and sounding Western, belongs to the Pepsi/Coke generation to be sure; however, it belongs to the Pepsi/Coke generation of Japan. The music and the lyrics of the song entitled *Daikanjō* ('Deep Feeling') were written and sung for the production by Hiroshi Mikami, a famous and popular Japanese pop artist.<sup>10</sup> With this overture, Ninagawa attracts the audience's attention and creates a context that is modern and familiar, not foreign-sounding, and more than likely emotionally compelling to the young Japanese at the time of the production in 1993. Given their attitude towards this kind of music in other contexts, the older members of the audience might have called it new-fangled, overemotional, and unwholesome for the young (the kind of criticism launched against Euripides' music by 'Aeschylus' in Aristophanes' *Frogs* at ll. 1301 ff.). At the same time, within the overture, Ninagawa punctuates Mikami's music with the sound of gongs ringing, as if from a temple bell-tower. By using this convention from kabuki, especially in those kabuki plays set at a Buddhist temple, he adds a traditional, serious-sounding note which might evoke a Buddhistic atmosphere. It might even call to mind one of the most famous passages from the canon of their literature, the first lines of *The Tale of the Heike*, an epic-like account of the famous Heike and Genji wars, dating from the twelfth century, wars as famous in the Japanese context as the Trojan Wars were within the Greek. The lines read as follows: 'The sound of the Gion Shōja bell echoes the impermanence of all things; the color of the sala (teak) flowers reveals the truth that the prosperous must decline. The proud do not endure, they are like a dream on a spring night; the mighty fall at last, they are as dust before the wind.'<sup>11</sup>

Ninagawa also manipulates some of the kabuki/bunraku conventions in such a way that he even subverts them. For example, during the overture, the backdrop consists of what in the traditional Japanese context looks like a rudimentary Shinto shrine, but also like a gate,



the entrance to a Buddhist temple (these two religions have become inextricably intertwined with each other in Japan). As the guitar music plays and Mikami sings, Medea's nurse, wearing a white head-piece to disguise her character before the prologue, which is slightly suggestive of a Shinto priest's headdress, sprinkles pieces of paper about the stage. These are evocative of the ubiquitous falling paper cherry blossoms or snow in kabuki productions, themselves reminders in Japan of the impermanence of all things in the world. However, Ninagawa directs the actor playing the role of the nurse, before he sprinkles the pieces around, to lift up what looks like a thin book to his face in the ritual fashion of the bunraku narrator, the *gidayu*, who, on a platform to the side of the stage, always holds up his text similarly before the bunraku performances in which he both narrates and reads the lines for the puppets. He also does this before those kabuki performances in which he both narrates and reads the lines for the actors, as if they were dolls—that is, when the texts are taken over from bunraku. The nurse does so with a stage-property, but then tears up the pages and sprinkles these shreds of paper about the stage so that they resemble paper blossoms or snowflakes. With this gesture Ninagawa makes a strong metatheatrical statement to the *cognoscenti* that he is not only using, but also altering, even subverting, kabuki/bunraku practices.

Some knowledge of kabuki/bunraku techniques greatly enhances an appreciation of the impact on a Japanese audience of some of the production's most memorable moments, for example, the choral piece after the Creon scene during which Medea learns that the king will exile her and her two children. In preparation for this moment, Ninagawa begins to fill out the atmosphere begun in the overture, an atmosphere which is vaguely evocative of, but an alteration of, kabuki/bunraku. For example, in this cast, all male as in kabuki and ancient performances of Greek tragedy, a chorus of sixteen men enters strumming shamisen, banjo-like, three-stringed instruments, usually associated with kabuki, bunraku, and traditional Japanese dance and song. Kabuki performances can employ a large number of shamisen players or small choruses, but does so differently: to accompany a dance they sit in rows along the back of the stage without moving or engaging in dialogue or song. The kabuki choruses do not play instruments, but do move around and do engage in a kind of dialogue, including the practice of *watarizerifu*, passing on from one member to another the words of a long speech and then concluding it in unison.

Next, by choosing the *Tsugaru shamisen*, a *shamisen* not as refined in tone as the *shamisen* of kabuki, Ninagawa adds an extra twang to the sound of the strings, one that alters the reception.<sup>12</sup> He also offsets the kabuki effects, and adds an exotic touch, by taking wide-brimmed hats, looking somewhat like the straw hats that are a part of the costumes of women in kabuki, especially in female dance pieces, but then draping long veils down from the brims to cover the faces of the chorus members. He also replaces the conventional movements of kabuki dancers with a chorus moving diagonally across the stage in two groups, single file.

Against this background evoking kabuki/bunraku practices, yet certainly not kabuki because slightly exotic and slightly modern—for example, the nurse's screams do not belong to kabuki—Medea appears. Played in this production by Arashi, a kabuki actor trained in the rigours of an *onnagata*, that is, one who traditionally plays female roles, appears after the tutor has led the two children away, and, in a pure kabuki style, speaks at the doors, now identified as those of Medea's palace. She says, 'Of all beings that exist within this world the most pitiable ones are we, that is, women.'<sup>13</sup> It is this voice as much as any other feature which transforms the performance into one with a strong kabuki presence. Although Arashi allows his voice to sound masculine when Ninagawa so directs, the assumed female voice, along with Arashi's gestures and costume, continues to bounce back and to remind us that this is the voice of the *onnagata* in the world of kabuki. It is a world that Ninagawa brilliantly manipulates by piling Japanese layers on Western-influenced layers, traditional on modern, female on male.

Flute music, soft and mellow, played in the background from off-stage in the manner of the traditional kabuki flute, sounds like new-age music in some scenes, and then with the addition of a violin-like traditional Western classical music, it recalls, for example, Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings*. This replaces the guitar music after the overture and the *shamisen* after the choral entrance. A musical *mélange*, albeit of different kinds of music, is conventional in kabuki.<sup>14</sup>

Medea's costume, weighing approximately 20 kg, is a gorgeous robe heavily layered, with an interior third layer in red, almost, but not quite, the red worn in kabuki/bunraku by young women and geisha. It is and is not a kimono. The large and voluminous obi, the hallmark of repressed Japanese women, a sash wound around the waist almost high enough to bind the breasts, sometimes flaring out in front

with winglike projections to obscure the chest, waist, and abdomen, is missing. Instead, with great attention to detail (the hallmark of a Ninagawan production) Jusaburo Tsujimura, the costumer and artistic director, took fifty antique brocade obis, cut them up, sewed them together again, using them not to bind, but to create the magnificent robe which reveals a second layer of costume with fulsome, artificial breasts attached to it. The large headdress in turn reproduces the size and general shape of the headdresses of some women's roles in kabuki, especially of geisha, including long ribbons hanging down over each shoulder. But dangling sequins and decorations, including what look like ram's horns and a young face, replace the hair ornaments, which normally include such items as cherry blossoms and combs in black hair elaborately coiffed into a large wig. The partially blackened teeth and the white face make-up are a conventional part of female roles in kabuki, harking back to the style of women in the late eighth to late twelfth centuries. However, at that time the faces were a starker white, more like the female faces on black-figured Greek vases of antiquity. In addition, the light black and blue make-up applied around Medea's eyes is a colour conventional in kabuki, but in the make-up of a man or a supernatural or evil being, rather than a female human role.

The intensity of the kabuki infusion into the play increases after the king exits and Medea has learned that she and the children will be exiled. It is then that we hear the clack of the *ki*, rectangular-shaped wooden clappers struck against the floor in kabuki performances to alert the audiences for especially dramatic moments, usually filled with emotion. These are the high points for which most Japanese go to the kabuki and bunraku theatres. From the time that kabuki first developed into an artistic form it has appealed to the audiences for its theatricality, for the ability of the actors, and for the visual and aural colour and excitement. For the kabuki audiences, it is these, not the structure or the plots of the plays, which are the indicators of character, of people's problems and their tragedies, and which are considered most important.<sup>15</sup> In fact, kabuki/bunraku plots are of the type that Aristotle would have called episodic. Kabuki performances often consist of only an episode or two pulled out of a longer play. Members of an audience in a kabuki theatre are not likely to sympathize with Aristotle's claim that the sudden entrance of the character Aegeus, later in the play, is illogical. In that scene, the kabuki audience would concentrate on the characters, Aegeus and Medea, not the structural probability or necessity of its being there.



In Ninagawa's production the first theatrically engaging moment occurs when the first clack of the *ki* resounds, and Medea says in her kabuki voice that for revenge against the king, who has decided to exile her, and against her husband, who has abandoned her, she will destroy her three enemies, these two men and her husband's newly betrothed. With the clacking, Arashi assumes a *mie* pose and laughs in a kabuki style of laughter. Arashi's *mie* is slightly quicker and shorter in duration than the conventional version, in which the kabuki actor rolls his head around, nods, and then crosses one eye with a powerful glare; however, there is no mistaking this pose since the *ki* draw our attention to it, as the clacking would do in a kabuki performance.

The *ki* (used again several times later in the play, including the moment when we hear that Medea will kill her own children and later that the princess and the king are dead), the distinctive laugh, and the *mie* are markers of especially dramatic moments in kabuki, as I said. Once again, however, Ninagawa manipulates and alters these by allowing an *onnagata* to assume this *mie* pose. In kabuki that is the privilege of the *tachiyaku*, the player of a strong 'macho' male. At the same time, he also allows Arashi's male voice to filter through, when holding his sword with a show of strength he climbs up the stairs to the palace and then descends very deliberately, to the accompaniment of the *ki* clacking even more incessantly. The audience is alerted to what Ninagawa calls the ambivalence of Medea's persona.

These borrowings from modes of acting in kabuki/bunraku help to prepare for the choral declaration of what Ninagawa viewed as his intent in producing the play. At first individually and then in unison, the chorus speaks out loudly the following words (it does not sing as in the Greek original):

The direction of the river's flow changes; there is nothing in the world that does not change. Men's hearts, which are unreliable, change with exceptional ease. We do not know when, but their firm oaths made in the name of god will be broken. Should not women be praised and extolled for their virtue instead of men who tell lies excessively? The singers of tales should be ashamed of themselves for singing what is far from the truth, namely, that the hearts of women are inconstant. If the god of music takes up his lyre and empowers women in their breasts to make the decision, then at that time we will want to sing with loud voices that it is not a woman's heart that easily changes but a man's. There are many songs to be sung about us as well, who are not men.<sup>16</sup>

This is the moment in which Ninagawa speaks directly to the

audience. With a superb display of theatricality, in which the form underscores the content, and thanks in great part to the talents of Tsujimura, who was trained in bunraku puppet techniques, he marks the inversion of the traditional roles of women by inverting a kabuki convention. The music, sounding vaguely like Handel, but more like *La Follia*—music heard again and again in this performance—resounds loudly, along with the chiming of church bells, in place of the traditional Japanese music of shamisen and the flute.<sup>17</sup> Medea and each of the chorus members draw red ribbons slowly and deliberately out of their mouths in a piece of gripping choreography performed *en masse* (fig. 17). Ninagawa's staging suggests on one level that the chorus and Medea are spewing blood: red ribbons can signify blood in both kabuki and bunraku.<sup>18</sup> However, these theatres also use red ribbons differently. For example, in the very popular and frequently performed dance piece, *Fuji musume* [Wisteria Girl], a lovely woman, the spirit of the wisteria, dances, a girl at play, falling in love, coy and coquettish. To express her love, kabuki convention requires that the actor place the red ribbons attached to his red hat into his mouth.<sup>19</sup> In many kabuki performances, male and female characters alike place handkerchiefs, scarves, or the ends of their sleeves into their mouths in order to stifle any expression of emotion. Ninagawa subverts and inverts the conventional pattern in which the young woman coyly exhibits her love or characters attempt to hold back their feelings: Medea and the chorus do not place the ribbons into their mouths, but spew them out. The egurgitation of the red ribbons is a stunning alteration, indeed subversion of kabuki practices; these altered practices, such as the kimono not secured by but made out of obis, significantly apply only to Medea aided by the female chorus and the nurse. It is Arashi, Medea that is, who uses the distinctively kabuki style of delivery in his speeches, his laughter, and his crying; the other actors speak in the style of the modern Japanese classical theatre, or in the case of Aegeus, in the style of contemporary, realistic Japanese theatre.

When the king first appears on stage, in Takahashi's version of the text, unlike others, he addresses Medea (271) as *ikoku no onna*, a woman from a foreign land. Because the Japanese phrase can mean a woman from somewhere else within Japan but outside the capital city, Ninagawa can represent Medea as a Japanese who not only speaks Japanese, but is not explicitly called a foreigner from another country by any of the male characters.<sup>20</sup> Only the nurse, the chorus, and



17. Tokusaburo Arashi as Medea, 1994 (photograph).  
Yukio Ninagawa's production



Medea herself say that she belongs to another realm. Yet he does differentiate her from the other characters: she is an *ikoku no onna*, an outsider, because she and she alone is permitted to speak in a pure kabuki style. And when she does, she lies outside the norm; she becomes an anachronistic figure within the context of the play.

The other characters adhere closely to one style of speech, that of the modern theatre, and during the course of the performance remain consistent to this type. For example, the nurse, the tutor, and the messenger, all servants, are polite in their language towards Medea and her children, although not particularly to each other.<sup>21</sup> In a way not found in Greek, the status markers in the morphology of Japanese readily indicate when someone places himself or herself into a position inferior or superior to another character; grammatical gender as such does not exist, but male and female speakers have different usages. Creon, being the king, does not use polite forms when speaking with Medea, but being older sounds old-fashioned throughout.<sup>22</sup> Medea's husband, Jason, on the other hand, speaks in a modern and impolite manner, like the stereotypical, present-day Japanese husband toward his wife. In the Greek he calls her γύναι, not Medea; in the Japanese, he uses abrupt endings to all of his sentences.

Finally, Ninagawa chooses to have Aegeus speak in a standard, contemporary Japanese, the least theatrical, and the least impolite among the men of any status. Aegeus has come from the capital city, which must mean Tokyo, the location of the theatre. (Takahashi does not use proper names for Greek places, people, or gods—instead of Athens, he writes *miyako*, which to the Japanese can mean only their capital.) Is Ninagawa suggesting with the language of Aegeus and his display of respect towards Medea that there is hope for the women in the audience, who are in Tokyo, that men and women can talk to each other as equals at least there? The intonation assumed by Aegeus is strikingly different from that of Creon and Jason.<sup>23</sup>

Given his *onnagata* training, Arashi can in his speeches easily and naturally use the kabuki intonation of a female—a forsaken woman, a geisha, or a seductive woman—and in all of these depict Medea as a traditional woman, a victim of her society, and polite in her speech. She belongs to the world of kabuki in which an *onnagata* can represent a single character in various manifestations such as, for example, the woman in the popular kabuki *Musume Dōjōji* [The Maiden of Dōjōji]. She is first a jilted maiden, then a courtesan (who is in fact a maiden in disguise), and finally an avenging spirit in the form of a serpent. In

addition, Arashi can speak in a masculine or a neutral Japanese when so directed, and depict Medea as strong in her resolve, modern, and able to take control of her own life.<sup>24</sup> Ninagawa uses the world of kabuki to create a persona with many faces, a Medea out of an actor trained as an *onnagata*, who does and does not follow the dictates of his very strictly disciplined and in some respects feudalistic training. Arashi steps in and out of conventional behaviour, as he represents a Medea who does likewise. She not only steps in and out of different images of a woman, but she also crosses the lines of gender.

For example, Medea speaks naturally and without markers of status when she speaks to her own soul, steeling herself to kill her children, without an assumed kabuki *onnagata* voice, without a masculine voice. But when she weeps, clinging to Creon, her voice and cries come directly out of the *onnagata* delivery,<sup>25</sup> with a level of politeness and deference all the more apparent because the king speaks with an impolite intonation in the style of the modern classical Japanese theatre.<sup>26</sup> But when her faithless husband enters and speaks in very abrupt language to her, Medea responds in kind. Now Arashi's rough intonation sounds like that of a man. She then slips into the use of polite forms and words when she is sarcastic about his sophistic attempts to explain why it is beneficial to her and the children that he marry another woman. Politeness is a sign of sarcasm in Japanese for both men and women, when it is used with those with whom one does not have to be polite.<sup>27</sup>

In the next scene, when she begs Aegeus to grant her asylum in his city, Arashi speaks at first at the most polite level found in kabuki, saying in place of the more customary word *anata*, meaning 'you', the very polite word *anatasama* (used five times), and instead of *kudasai*, meaning 'please', saying *kudasaimashi*. He now assumes the feminine and geisha *onnagata* style of delivery—seducing Aegeus, in both intonation and words. Arashi's gestures help. In the same scene, Medea places her hands on her breast in a modern style of seduction, and holds the end of one of her kimono sleeves up toward her mouth when she claims that women are weak, in a kabuki geisha style of seduction. This scene is suggestive of those scenes of seduction that have always been a major attraction to the kabuki enthusiast, an opportunity to see how well the *onnagata* can play his role. It is also a scene that again the Aeschylus of Aristophanes' *Frogs* (1043–4) might have chosen as an example of Euripides' portrayal of active sexuality in women.

Successful in her attempt to gain asylum into the capital city, Medea then speaks as an equal to Aegeus, without the seductive language and gestures, and persuades him to take an oath on her own terms. Later, because she was successful with Aegeus, she again uses the same technique of seduction when she elicits from her husband a promise that he will ask the princess, his betrothed, to entreat her father not to exile their children. Earlier her polite tone with him had been sarcastic, but now, as the actor's gestures clearly indicate, the tone becomes seductive, the language of the bedroom. And as one might expect, since Medea is playing the weaker sex, her husband, unlike Aegeus, becomes even more masculine-sounding than in the earlier scene. In the Greek she speaks of tears; in the Japanese, she uses a female kabuki intonation. In the Greek Jason says *μάλιστα* 'certainly'; in the Japanese he grunts *un*, instead of saying 'yes', and says, *kiite kure yo*, 'yeah, I'll try'.<sup>28</sup> Takahashi's language and Ninagawa's direction portray him as an archetypically boorish man in a modern world, all too familiar to the women in the audience. However, the shamisen music in the background, the silk-tasselled cover on the Japanese-style gift box which contains a poisoned robe intended for the princess, the adornments hanging down Medea's face, and the gestures reinforcing Arashi's style of *onnagata* delivery all belong to a world of the past disguising a contemporary issue. By capitalizing on the kabuki practice of setting contemporary events and issues into a fictional or legendary context, so as to avoid the sanctions of censorship during the Tokugawa period, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when kabuki first developed, Ninagawa better directs his message at the audience. It is not because there is censorship in Japan related to women's issues, but because he can avoid sounding too didactic.

With the special status he grants to the role of Medea, that of more than one persona, Ninagawa not only sets her squarely into the timeframe of Japan's past, but he also moulds her into someone equal to men. In addition, because the masculine code of the Tokugawa period, which Medea imitates when she acts firmly and in control, is outdated and inoperable, Ninagawa avoids the problem of forcing his audience into thinking that women today have to be like men in order to take control of their lives. He does this by having his Medea interact with men who belong to a different world from herself, that is, the world of contemporary theatre, not of kabuki. So the production demonstrates that, with the exception of Aegeus, men acting like Japanese men are treating women as if they belonged to the Tokugawa



era; and simultaneously that women, like Medea, can escape from their stereotypical roles by rejecting outmoded conventions and ethical norms.<sup>29</sup>

Kabuki arose at a time when the *shōgun*, who ruled Japan during the Tokugawa period, in order to consolidate their own position, were trying to suppress the traditional samurai code of honour, which included individualistic integrity and a strong sense of pride and self-will, in favour of Confucian doctrines. These included above all loyalty and obedience to a superior authority, subject to lord, child to father, wife to husband, and younger to elder brother. This moral principle called *girininjō*, creating conflict between one's social duty *giri* and personal interests *ninjō*, lies at the heart of the pathos in kabuki's most emotionally gripping scenes in which characters are caught in the web of this conflict. In the context of the kabuki world, *giri* is such a strong sanction that it can cause parents to sell their daughters into prostitution, kill their children, or sacrifice their own lives.<sup>30</sup>

Within a traditional Japanese context driven by this ethic, because Jason's treatment of her was shameful, Medea can feel that she is disgraced, dishonoured, and humiliated, one who must get revenge. She says that he knows no shame—*haji shirazu*, a translation of the Greek ἀναίδεια (472). Near the end of the play, Medea in a strong male voice says to Jason (1354 ff.): 'You were going to make a laughing-stock out of me in front of other people when you yourself were about to lead a uniquely pleasant life and to despise the bed of one bound by duty to her household. I have fittingly stung you so that your anger cannot be healed.' In the Greek she says that Jason dishonoured her, ἀτιμάσας: in the Japanese using the ethical term *giri*, she says that she was loyal to her duty, which would mean in contrast to *ninjō*, her personal interest, and that Jason despised their marriage contract. In the traditional context of *girininjō*, this means that he dishonoured her. It also means that, like the most popular Japanese legendary hero from *The Tale of the Heike*, Yoshitsune, who though loyal to his brother was then betrayed by him, Medea—who has been loyal to her husband as the Confucian ethic requires—was treated unfairly. If she has any integrity and sense of honour, she must act. Ninagawa elevates her to the level not only above ordinary women, but also above ordinary human beings. She is made to speak like the famous heroes of kabuki. Yoshitsune's integrity reached such a high level that when his brother, exploiting him for reasons of

personal aggrandizement, ordered Yoshitsune's wife and child to be put to death, he killed them himself. Numerous legends rose up around Yoshitsune afterwards, most of them folklore. But there is one fact about him: he, like many another avenging hero of Japan, became the leading character of kabuki, bunraku, and noh plays. These were not merely valiant men, but *hitokami* 'man-gods', who had the power of performing miraculous feats, even appeasing powerful, revengeful spirits.<sup>31</sup>

Ninagawa sets Medea on a pedestal, on a level equal with these men who, when unfairly treated by those in power, exacted revenge out of a sense of honour. But of course he is using the ethical sanctions out of the world of kabuki only to subvert them: Medea is not a man, but a woman. As she disrobes, Medea says in a strong voice at 807 ff., 'Let no one think this woman is weak, this woman is spineless.' (The Japanese repeats the word *onna* 'woman' twice; the Greek uses feminine endings without emphasizing her gender.) 'No,' she says, 'it is the opposite. I am one who understands no mercy at all towards enemies and no limit of devotion towards friends.' Here, at l. 809, the Japanese and the Greek texts are almost identical; in the tradition of both cultures the language is that of heroes, like Sophocles' Ajax and Homer's Achilles.<sup>32</sup>

As in other memorable moments, Ninagawa draws on the conventions of kabuki and bunraku to emphasize Medea's decision to take revenge on her enemies. Following a kabuki convention called *hikinuki*, that is, the removal of one's costume during the course of a play, he directs Arashi to remove a large part of his costume, including the attached breasts, that had marked Medea's sexuality. His full costume is very elaborate, a visible sign of how restrained Medea has been within the female trappings. (Arashi is quoted as saying that three months before he plays the role of Medea he has to jog, swim, and cycle daily in order to build up the strength to bear both the burden of the role and the weight of the costume.) And in accordance with another kabuki convention, that of featuring characters disguised as someone else and representing themselves as someone else (there is scarcely a kabuki play without a disguised character whose identity the audience waits to discover), Arashi reveals the male, self-assertive side of Medea's character thus far disguised. With her kimono removed she stands before the audience stripped down to a red sheath, angry and resolved to act, like a Japanese male hero.

It is never easy for the characters in kabuki, whether they are male

or female, to sacrifice their own family members, as invariably they must, if they are to maintain their honour.<sup>33</sup> It is not easy for Medea to make the decision to kill her own children. During her monologue Medea struggles within herself and agonizes whether she should kill the children who made her belly hurt in childbirth (see Eur. *Med.* 1024–31), who can comfort her as she wanders from place to place, and whom she embraced and suckled with milk at her breast. The second and third of these images, delivered in *onnagata* style, are not in the Greek. When Medea returns to the words of Euripides at l. 1043, she asks her heart, *kokoro* (θυμός, in the Greek), not to carry out the act. But she also says to herself, with the intonation of a man, 'Don't be weak.' She struggles over the impending deed, with all the emotion that a kabuki actor can muster. However, using the very reasoning that the hero Yoshitsune might have used, she understands that the consequences of not killing the children would be to expose them to the contempt of her enemies. And so she makes a vow to the bloodthirsty beings in hell: 'I will not in full knowledge of what I am doing surrender to the enemy these children. Their fortune (*shiwase*) is greater if they die at their mother's hands than face the contempt of the enemy' (1060 ff.). She then adds, 'My chest is crushed [the Greek here means 'I am overcome with evils']. I understand what kind of terrible thing I do. And although I understand, I must do it.' And then she explains at ll. 1077 ff., 'Even though I understand that it is the source of *wazawai* ['evils', the word can mean, 'serious trouble', 'woe', 'disaster', 'calamity', 'evil', 'ruin', like the Greek κακά], my *ikidōroshisa* ['resentment, feeling of insult'] is stronger.' In the Greek these well-discussed lines read θυμός δὲ κρείσσων τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων/ὅσπερ μεγίστων αἴτιος κακῶν βροτοῖς. Takahashi translates θυμός, 'the place out of which arise emotions like anger', as 'resentment'; he does not include the controversial second half of the Greek sentence, which explains what her feeling is stronger than or what it controls.<sup>34</sup> In the Japanese, Medea says simply that she has been insulted and resents that insult. Dishonoured in this way, she feels justified in her actions, in spite of the consequences, and she appeals to the right for retribution. The pathos and emotional outpourings in this scene are extraordinarily intense. Medea confronts a difficult choice with the emotions deep within her, as characters do in similar scenes of kabuki in which *giri* and *ninjō* are in conflict. If she is a true Japanese hero, however, there is no choice; she must act. There is no intellectual discourse involved here, but there is emotional



outpouring. It is for this that an audience in a kabuki theatre would be waiting.

Many scholars have observed that Euripides' *Medea* is like a hero, inflexible, strong-willed, and determined to take revenge, because dishonoured.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, many have said that the dishonour does not alleviate the horror and consternation we feel over her murder of the children, a viewpoint shared as we have seen by Lida Geh.<sup>36</sup> In fact, Ninagawa seems to intensify the emotional impact of the murder by following Euripides in bringing the children on stage, allowing them to interact intimately with Medea before she kills them (fig. 18), and by having them cry out loudly for help from within the palace during the murder.<sup>37</sup> In kabuki, the participation in the drama on stage by child actors regularly brings the audience's handkerchiefs up to their eyes.<sup>38</sup> If kabuki productions of tragic pieces are successful, both genders in the audience can indulge in and open themselves to a display of emotions that their culture does not allow in public, outside the theatre.<sup>39</sup> And yet, these productions, even when a child is decapitated, do not shock: there is always an honourable justification for the killing.

In defence of Euripides—and in spite of Aristotle's criticism (*Poetics* 1454b1) of the use of a contrivance—some have argued that he mitigates the effect of Medea's murder of her children by transporting her on the vehicle of Helios to another world, one where she no longer need be judged by human standards. To some extent Ninagawa would agree, although he imported Aristotle's term *katarushisu*, 'catharsis', to describe the effect he wanted to have on his audience. In the finale after the murder of her children, he brings out Medea, now wearing all-white robes and make-up appropriate in kabuki to a supernatural being, looming on high in a cart, drawn by a pair of dragons. He thus uses a technique of the sort it is generally agreed Euripides employed,<sup>40</sup> one that is also familiar to kabuki audiences, called *chūnori*, literally meaning 'riding through the air', which has actors carried up over the stage or out over the audience's heads by a crane or pulley.<sup>41</sup> Medea now is superior to all other human beings. She literally rises above them, and has become a *hitokami*, 'a god person', like the superheroes of Japanese legend and kabuki. This is pure theatricality played to the hilt. The audience's attention is directed for a moment toward the spectacle, *opsis*, and away from the murder. At the same time, this is not a real kabuki performance. It is Ninagawa's *Medea* in which he said he represented Medea as an



18. Tokusaburo Arashi as Medea, 1995 (photograph).  
Yukio Ninagawa's production

ambivalent, even multifaceted, character with more than one persona.<sup>42</sup> She is disguised like many a kabuki character, but that disguise is multilayered, like her robes. Even on the chariot she represents more than a *hitokami*.

In the final exchange, when Jason threatens Medea with *onryō*, the hungry ghosts of their children (a translation of *μιάστορες*, 'avenging spirits') that will fly around her head for her hideous act, she reinforces her justification for the killing in terms of the traditional Japanese heroic ethos; and she refuses him the burial of their sons because she says it would be as shameful as handing them over to an enemy for burial. She then proclaims that instead she herself will bury them in the earth of a remote shrine (*yashiro*, the Shinto word for shrine) of the queen goddess of high mountains. She adds, with words not in this production, though in Takahashi's text, that she will bequeath to posterity a *matsuri* (occasion for a repeated ritual) to purify the pollution (*tsumi*). This kind of ritual, corresponding to *έορτή και τέλη* ('festival and rites') in the Greek, sounds quite natural and appropriate to a Japanese audience, inasmuch as such *matsuri* for the purification of the dead are not limited to heroes but are established today as regularly as they were in the past. The *matsuri* help to alleviate the crime religiously. And she will go, Medea says, to live with the ruler of the capital city nearby happily ever after. She then adds that, as is fitting, Jason will pay for his evil deeds (her word *akugō* means that he will have an evil karma). He again calls on the children's female 'hungry ghosts' that are justly thirsty for blood. She asks what god would listen to someone who broke his oath, as was predicted in the choral ode of eurgitation. In our production, however, Jason again calls down the 'hungry ghosts', and a female god of justice who is thirsty for blood (a translation of *Erinyes*, 'a Fury') upon Medea's head as punishment for her murder of the children.

At this juncture, Ninagawa redirects the audience's attention away from Medea, the *hitokami*, to a Medea who is like an avenging spirit of revenge. In many *noh* and kabuki plays, for example in the various renditions of *Dōjōji*—including the kabuki *Musume Dōjōji*, to which I alluded earlier—the avenging spirit of a jealous or wronged woman is transformed by a change of costume into a serpent or dragon.<sup>43</sup> A member of the audience who knows the traditional legends and stories about angry women would be bound to think of these spirits, which are essential ingredients of numerous kabuki/bunraku plays; and many Japanologists have mentioned them in the context of the



*Medea*. The difference is that here Medea is transported by rather than turned into a serpent/dragon, flying over Jason's head, as he crouches on the ground below her, beating his breast, and weeping like a defenceless woman. So he was all wrong, when he threatened her with the *onryō* of the children flying over her head (the words 'flying over the head' are not in the Greek). Medea, played by an *onnagata*, the type of actor conventionally chosen to play the role of avenging spirits rather than the male *hitokami*, is triumphant in her revenge. No avenging spirit will haunt her. By bringing the *onryō* of the children to haunt him, she has the last laugh (Arashi actually laughs—see below).

In an interview of 1978, Ninagawa claimed that he did not want to shock his audiences or cause the consternation which infanticide entails, and he explained that he lightened the heavily charged, emotional burden of the murders not only with the flying machine, but also by using dolls.<sup>44</sup> He did make the children appear doll-like; they have a pierrot quality about them and wear white, not customarily worn by real or kabuki children, but a colour that in kabuki signifies either death or divinity. Then, in a commonly employed kabuki technique, he also decided to use actual dolls in place of the child actors for the corpses (he also uses a doll as a baby for Medea to hold during her heartrending monologue). This directing strategy disembodies them and directs the audience's attention away from the deed. The dolls are very small and the red ribbons hanging down from them and the dragons now signify blood. Ninagawa said that his decision was connected in part with the fact that a male actor plays Medea's role and, therefore, unlike real women she/he is in fact barren and cannot be a mother. On the other hand, he said that his choice to use live actors as children before the murder was tied to Jason's love for them. He directed Tsuchi Kurahiko, playing Jason, to express intense grief to the fullest of his acting ability at the end of the play. Jason's interaction with the children earlier and his emoting at the finale increase the effect of his loss, while the use of dolls lightens the effect of the act itself.

Medea's final laugh is important in this regard. It recalls the earlier laugh accompanying her first *mie* pose, in which Arashi, an *onnagata*, was assuming the stance of a *tachiyaku*, a male role-portrayer. But there as here, where Medea is both a male and a female spirit, the sound is almost exactly like the laugh of a bunraku narrator or *gidayu*, who usually laughs for the puppets who have no life, and therefore no

voices. (Medea's final emotional outburst before murdering her children similarly replicated cries in the voice of the *gidayu*.) In the West, we may see actors playing actors who play characters, or actors playing characters who play actors. But in Ninagawa's production *Arashi*, an actor, assumes for himself the voice of a narrator, that is, a non-interlocutory kabuki actor, who, like a puppet, plays the character of Medea. This is an inversion/subversion of a kabuki/bunraku technique, which creates moments that only those familiar with these two theatres will notice for their theatricality. Ninagawa represents Medea's barrenness, not only with the removal of the kimono and attached breasts and with the use of dolls in place of living children, but also with Arashi's voice. When Medea cries, and at the end when she laughs at Jason, Arashi is no longer acting as an *onnagata* or a male actor: with a stroke of genius Ninagawa transforms his voice to a voice from outside, which objectifies the shock of the murder.

After Medea's exit, the Handelesque music continues playing, and Jason calls upon the gods in the heavens and the other gods to hear the words of the murderous lioness. He grieves for the helpless children, himself unable to do anything for them, and then adds a sentence that is not in the Greek: 'I want to tear off my robe down to my chest, put ashes on my head, and weep to the limits of my voice.' Ninagawa assigns Jason the role of a female mourner in a Greek tragedy, though this is not in the Greek original, and furthermore, directs him to weep at the end in the style of the narrator of bunraku, as Medea had done in her cries and her last laugh. Both she and he, because they use the narrator's voice, are like the children turned into puppets.<sup>45</sup> They are all on an equal footing and judged by the audience not as part of the world of spirits, but as dolls in a bunraku/kabuki production. It is for this effect, it seems, that Ninagawa directed the nurse at the beginning to hold up the text in the manner of a *gidayu* and then to tear it into shreds. Ninagawa's goal in his *Medea*—to effect a catharsis, *katarushisu*—is complete. He explained that it was his aim to take an audience, engrossed in the performance within the first three minutes, and at the end leave that audience as a group with a feeling of anarchy (his word); and in addition to leave each individual with a resolute sense of self—not the social norm for women in Japan in 1993—for at least three minutes after the conclusion of play.<sup>46</sup>

With *La Follia* music still playing in the background,<sup>47</sup> *Medea* ends with a coda spoken by the chorus to the accompaniment of their *Tsugaru shamisen*. In this blended musical finale, the chorus speak

about the ways of the gods: what the gods accomplish is not expected, what one thinks will occur does not. Thus the play ends with the words of Euripides, not with those of kabuki. But the shamisen increases in volume and gradually drowns out the sound of *La Follia* until only the shamisen music remains to accompany the chorus off stage—music from the Japanese instrument, in a Japanese musical idiom, in the presence of a predominantly Japanese audience.

## Notes to Chapter 10

1. Ninagawa (1992).
2. Geh (1992). In the late 19th and early 20th cc., when Western drama was first imported into Japan and staged in Western style by the Japanese, Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler* were especial favourites of the audiences.
3. The performance at the Herodes Atticus theatre is mentioned as an entry in a list of modern productions of classical plays in Walton (1987), 290; but he does not discuss this or any of Ninagawa's productions of the *Medea* in the main body of his book. Yet it has even been claimed that Ninagawa's *Medea* stands on a par with Hofmannsthal and Strauss's *Elektra* as a reception of a Greek tragedy. See Foley (1999), 8–9.
4. The performances by the other actor who has played the role of *Medea* for Ninagawa's productions, Mikijiro Hira, have also brought great applause and many curtain calls in Edinburgh, Athens, and elsewhere.
5. In 1978, for example, in Tokyo's Nissei Theatre, with a capacity of 1,200 seats, 33,000 people attended the 37 performances; the same year at the Asahi Theatre in Osaka, with a capacity of 900 seats, 23,400 people attended the 26 performances. Nine years later, in Kofu City (some 100 miles west of Tokyo), in a theatre with a capacity of 1,300 seats, over the three-night run 3,900 people attended. The statistics for all performances both in Japan and elsewhere in the world between 1978 and 1997 are published in a programme sold at the Setagaya Public Theatre during the successful 1998 run of the *Medea* there.
6. The translation was published in Takahasi (1995). The author is known for his religious and homoerotic writings, of which some have appeared in English; see Takahashi (1975) (1984) (1995).
7. The written sources for this chapter include programmes, playbills, and the published notes for the years 1966–88 in Ninagawa (1989), giving the background to his directing strategies of earlier productions of the *Medea*. I must assume that some of these strategies apply to our production. I have chosen this production in particular, rather than the latest that I saw live, because I have had at my disposal a videotape that I was able to view repeatedly and analyse carefully.
8. I agree with those many scholars who recognize the importance of contextualizing performances; see e.g. Goldhill (1989).
9. For example, *Shingeki* and *Shogekijo undō*, the new theatre movement begun in the 1970s, of which he was a member.
10. Ninagawa does not comment on his use of guitar music as an overture to his *Medea*, except to say that it was inspired by Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells*.



The words were not published with Takahashi's translation, but with the help of Jun Yasuba I have determined that they approximate to the following: 'Going to the capital city over the sea from very ancient times, hundreds of millions, tens of thousands, and thousands [Japanese can be very vague: I assume years are meant], the small white boat bobs up and down, hundreds of millions, tens of thousands, and thousands [I assume miles or times are meant]. If one goes to Miyakejima, to the distant end of the sea [an island about 60 miles south of Tokyo, traditionally a place of exile], hundreds of millions, tens of thousands, and thousands [miles again], gold and silver glisten and can be seen, can be seen, can be seen. If one returns to Tsugaru village [the home of the *Tsugaru shamisen* played in the Ninagawa production and the location of some of the earliest indigenous people in Japan], white towers in great numbers can be seen [the towers mark the archaeological ruins in the Tsugaru area] beneath a dark sky in the rift between the clouds, can be seen, can be seen, can be seen, hundreds of millions, tens of thousands, and thousands. If one goes to Hida no Takayama down along the middle of a flowing river [Takayama is an area in the midst of the mountains, a likely site for Medea's burial of the children's corpses; in some productions she says at the finale that she will bury them at the holy shrine of the god of the mountains], the blood of venerable people can be seen, can be seen, can be seen. If one returns to the inner depths of one's body, how many springs, from the very, very distant past, hundreds of millions, tens of thousands, thousands, crying voices can be heard, can be heard, can be heard!' With Mikami's words Ninagawa transports the audience back to Japan from a faraway place, back in time to the archaeological remains of the earliest Japanese settlement at Tsugaru, and deep into themselves, by expressing the feeling of one's body and the cries that can be heard. The repeated refrain, 'how many hundreds of millions, *ikuoku*, how many tens of thousands, *ikuman*, and how many thousands, *ikusen*', refers to the miles, years, and cries.

11. McCullough (1988), 23. Gion Shōja is a monastery, built at Śrāvastī, in India, by a wealthy man in honour of Śākyamuni, the Buddha. 'The impermanence of all things' are words from a Buddhist text of which the quatrains were tolled by bells set in the four corners of the Mujōdō hall where sick priests imagined that they could forget all earthly suffering and enter Nirvana. In the *Nirvāṇasūtra*, where Buddha's entrance to Nirvana was described, it is said that at each corner of his bed there stood a pair of *śāla* (teak) trees which bowed down toward the centre and their colour changed to the white of cranes as the Buddha began to pass into Nirvana. See Kitagawa and Tsuchida (1977) i. 23 nn. 1-3.
12. This *Tsugaru shamisen*, originating in Tsugaru (Aomori) in a northern area of Japan mentioned in the overture, and just beginning to enjoy great popularity with urban audiences in concerts throughout Japan at about the time of the first performance of the *Medea* in Tokyo, provided Ninagawa with another ready way of engaging his audience's attention with a contemporary sound.
13. Throughout I give my translation of Takahashi's text, which here represents ll. 230-1 of the text, and the Japanese translation by Kazuhiko Tange in Matsudaira, Ikeda, and Kawashima (1990). I shall not identify the lines of the Greek text with each translation of Takahashi's text; but I do so occasionally in order to impress upon the reader the extent to which Ninagawa adheres to the sequence of lines in the original, and thus to more than just its spirit.
14. On the subject of Japanese music, see Malm (1959), 213-33.

15. So Barlow (1989), 170: 'It is not the crime which makes the drama but the analysis of character which leads to it.'
16. Takahashi has changed the original (ll. 421 ff.) and given the women a slightly more positive outlook than we find in the Greek or in Tange's versions. Kovacs (1994) renders as follows: 'The poetry of ancient bards will cease to hymn our faithlessness. Phoebus lord of song never endowed our minds with the glorious strains of the lyre. Else I could have sounded a hymn in reply to the male sex. Time in its long expanse can say many things of men's lot as well as of women's.'
17. I owe the identification of this music as the melody of *La Follia* to Marianne McDonald. The music by Handel sounding somewhat like that of this piece is *Lascia ch'io pianga* from his opera *Rinaldo*, which also features a vehicle drawn by two dragons of the sort Ninagawa uses at the end of his production.
18. e.g. in *Shinobiyoru koi (ha) kusemono* [The Witch Princess].
19. An *onnagata* actor, like Bandō Tamasaburo, whose performance of this role in March 1999 at the Kabukiza in Tokyo is just one example of his virtuosity, can be exquisite in his display of enticing femininity.
20. At ll. 536 and 591, one can read *ebisu* as meaning 'foreigner' or as 'Ainu', that is, an indigenous Japanese from the northern area in which Tsugaru is located; however, *ikyō* at l. 256 should mean 'foreign' (a word spoken by Medea). Line 1330 reads: 'from a land that touches the sky rather than the one over which the sun's light pours'. These words, spoken by Jason, again probably refer to the northern part of Japan, not a foreign country.
21. The nurse very politely tells them to enter the palace: *ohairi nasaimashi*, 'please enter'. The paidagōgos, *moriyaki*, is not particularly polite when he speaks with the nurse, but is with Medea. The messenger, after speaking politely to Medea, changes to the narrative mode in his report.
22. e.g. at l. 317 he says, 'You speak words mild-sounding to the ear, but I am afraid that you are planning something evil.' In the Japanese he says, 'What you say is mild sounding, but frightening.' Here Takahashi captures the flavour of the old-fashioned Greek word *ὀρρωδία*, 'fear'; in the Japanese the suffix *-yaka* attached to the adjective *otonashii*, which means 'gentle', 'mild', or 'grown-up', also sounds old-fashioned.
23. The chorus members speak politely, but not as politely as the nurse—they use the form *kudasai* instead of *nasaimashi (se)*. However, to Jason they speak more politely, after his long speech at 522 ff. and when praying to gods.
24. The flexibility thus derived is an immeasurable advantage to Ninagawa's depiction of Medea as both modern and traditional, as both feminine and masculine, and as both victim and victimizer.
25. For example, instead of using the simple *desu*, the neutral form of the verb 'is', at 307–8 she says, *arumai dewa gozaimasen ka*. The sentence, directly translated, reads, 'Is it not so that I, in an inferior position, should not intend to oppose you and the royal house?' *Gozaimasen* is more polite than *desu*. In Japanese, the more indirection there is (as in Medea's speech), the politer the language becomes, and the politer it becomes, the more deference one shows. In the Greek she says, 'Don't be afraid of me, Creon. I am not in such a position as to commit a fault against royal personages.' When left alone, she continues to use her kabuki voice, but with male terms of abuse. She calls Creon a 'moron', *manuke*, and 'monster of cruelty', *hitodenashi*, words of extreme insult in Japanese.

26. As in the language of Ninagawa and Nakane's productions of *Genroku Minato Uta* [Genroku Harbour Song], set in the Genroku period (1688–1704).
27. Ever in control of each situation, as the other characters are not, she says at ll. 499 ff., after enumerating the ways in which she helped Jason, including the murder of her own brother and leaving her own home, *Ō yasashii anata wa sono orei ni to, kono watakushi o hito mo urayamu tobikiri shiawase na onna ni shite kudasatta koto. Anata to iu okata wa, hontou ni gorippa na, hontou ni tanomi kai no aru otto desu wa.* [Oh, how nice and courteous you are and what a fortunate person people out of envy will think I am for all you have done for me. And as for you, you are a truly wonderful, truly effective husband.] The Greek is sarcastic; but this is more intense in the Japanese by virtue of the position into which the language helps Medea place herself—she ends the second sentence with *desu wa*, a very feminine way of speaking.
28. Perhaps a mistranslation of 944 πείσειν γε δοξάζω σφ' ἐγώ [I think that I shall persuade her].
29. In an interview Ninagawa claimed that his productions of *Medea* were in part a *parodei*, the Japanese pronunciation of 'parody', not meaning parody exactly in our sense, but more like the practice in kabuki of disguising something, be it old or legendary or famous, into something else in terms that are not so much vulgar as familiar. In kabuki many characters appear disguised as someone other than they seem to be. For example, in one of the most popular plays, *Sukeroku Yukari no Edo Zakura* [= *Sukeroku, Flower of Edo*, trans. Brandon (1975), 51–92], *Sukeroku*, a suave, dashing man-about-town, with his eyes on the geisha *Agemaki*, is really a hero in disguise, namely *Soga no Gōrō*, one of the famous *Soga* brothers, known in legend for avenging their father's death—as famous as *Orestes* in Greek legend. Other kabuki featuring disguised characters who play a lead role are *Rokkasen* [Six Poets] and *Narukami* [Narukami the priest].
30. See e.g. the *Terakoya* [Village School] scene from *Sugawara Denju Tenarai Kagamai* [The Secret of Sugawara's Calligraphy], summarized in Scott (1955), 261–70.
31. See Ortolani (1995), 170. On bridging the gap between our world and the spiritual in kabuki cf. *ibid.* 172.
32. In l. 810, Takahashi's text reads in translation, 'With splendid praise to be praised as a heroine in songs and tales, isn't that what kind of person a woman (that is, I) should be?' The Greek at ll. 809 f. reads: 'hard on enemies and kind to friends, for such people have the life of greatest glory (εὐκλεέστατος βίος)'. Taking out of the Greek adjective the element κλέος, meaning 'the glory/fame of a Greek hero', Takahashi applies the heroism to *Medea* and embellishes upon it. The uncommon word *retsujo*, containing the feminine suffix *-jo* and the prefixed Chinese character meaning 'strong-willed and passionately determined on a course of action', means 'heroine'. And the phrase 'to be praised in songs and tales, isn't that what kind of person a woman (that is, I) should be' provides the beginnings of *Medea's* realization of the hope of a future in which women are the subject of songs (*Eur. Med.* 418–30), as first expressed in the choral piece during which she and the chorus egurgitated convention symbolized by the red ribbons.
33. See e.g. Ernst (1956), 233–4, 237, 244–5.
34. There are many articles on *Medea's* speech and the authenticity of the lines, among them Reeve (1972); Foley (1989).



35. Many have said that Medea is like a hero, has lost her womanhood, and acts like a man: Knox (1977); Bongie (1977); Easterling (1977); Burnett (1973); Rabinowitz (1993); des Bouvrie (1990); Rehm (1989).
36. See e.g. Easterling (1977), 188.
37. In the performance, according to kabuki convention, although the children are standing at the top of the stairs in full view of the audience, they are considered outside the action. The audience does not think of them as participant characters until Medea addresses them again and they come down the stairs to her.
38. In *Sakaya* [The Sake Shop] a child carries a missive announcing his parents' impending suicide to his grandparents. In *Hirakana seisuiiki* [Simple Chronicle of the Vicissitudes (of the Heike and Genji Clans)], cf. Gunji and Yoshida (1987), a child speaks only at the end of the play and is saved from being killed.
39. See e.g. on Greek tragedy Zeitlin (1996), 363. According to Aelian, *Varia Historia* 14. 40, the actor Theodoros (who was associated with female roles such as Antigone (Demosthenes 19.246) and had an unparalleled gift for imitating the voice of his character; Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1404b21-4) drew tears from members of the audience, even from the tyrant Alexander of Pherai, when he played the role of Hecuba in Euripides' tragedy *Trojan Women*, and the actor Polos had the same talent for making members of the audience cry when playing the female Electra (Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 6. 5. 7).
40. According to Mastronarde (1990).
41. For example, in the kabuki *Yoshitsune sembonzakura* [Yoshitsune of the Thousand Cherry Trees], Yoshitsune's retainer Tadanobu, a fox in disguise, rises up into the sky and is carried over the heads of the audience. (This scene is explicitly reproduced in the background of the set for *Genroku Minato Uta*.) I had the experience of seeing the actor Ennosuke in the role of the hero Yamato Takeru, a character connected closely with Japan's founding myth, swoop over my head in Kyoto at the Minamiza theatre.
42. Ninagawa (1992).
43. In *Modoribashi* [Modori Bridge], another dance drama, a woman changes into a demon and performs a battle scene; in the noh *Aoi no Ue* (a woman's name), a jealous Rokujo is the demon. There is a whole mythology connected with these women. On the one hand, females are considered evil; on the other hand, since Buddhism was thought able to transform evil into good, women, on condition that they are first transformed into another being, can be saved. In some versions of the *Dōjōji* story the woman does receive enlightenment, in others she does not. When Medea says to her children that they will enjoy happiness somewhere else, *betsu no tokoro*, 'a separate place' (a translation of ἐκεῖ 'there' in the Greek at l. 1073), Takahashi introduces the possibility that the children and she are granted enlightenment in nirvana.
44. Interview recalled by author; fuller documentation not available.
45. The movements and speech of the kabuki actors are often based on the technique of the bunraku theatre, and the *gidayu* is used as an accompaniment and in some cases as a voice. See, for example, the outline of the play *Sakaya*, in Scott (1955) 249-54. In the kabuki *Ayatsuri Sambasō* [Puppet Sambasō], Sambasō dances as if he were a puppet on a string. See Gunji and Yoshida (1987), 115-16.
46. On the Japanese audience and its attitudes, see Ernst (1956), 67-91.

47. The music of *La Follia* was heard near the end of the scene in which Medea rejects Jason; in the scene when she decides to kill her children and removes her headdress, outer robe, breasts, and yellow gown; at the end of the scene in which the chorus addresses the wonders of Athens; and in the scene in which Medea enters the house to kill her children and the chorus cry to the Sun for help.

## CHAPTER 11



# Medea Comes Home

*Olga Taxidou*

### The Place

In early October 1997 *Medea: A World Apart*, an adaptation I had been working on for some time, was performed in Georgian translation at the Georgian International Festival of Theatre (GIFT) in Tbilisi. The festival was the first of its kind to be held after the collapse of the Soviet Union and after the bloody civil war between Georgia and Abkhazia. Indeed, the festival was an attempt to bridge the divisions created by that war and, as the name suggests, cultural events, particularly theatrical ones, were consciously presented as 'gifts', offerings within a broader process of peace and reconciliation. Performers, writers, students, and journalists from all over the world were invited to take part in this festival, not merely as observers but as co-creators of an extraordinary event, an event that attempted to bring together performing traditions of Europe, the Americas, and the former Soviet Union. In Tbilisi, right on the edge of Europe, and under the inspirational aegis of Ketil Dolidze, the director of GIFT, we were about to see a meshing of cultural traditions and voices in an attempt to redefine the civic role of theatre after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

The choice of *Medea* within this politically and socially charged context is highly significant. The adaptation produced at the opening of the GIFT festival is one that quite consciously both reworks the myth and relocates it within contemporary crises and anxieties about 'homes' and 'nationhoods', about borders and boundaries. The world that the adaptation inhabits is one that is torn apart, whose centre is missing. Like the original play, this modern *Medea* enacts the fraught relationship between barbarism and civilization. It also rehearses this



relationship through the discourse of the Cold War, and refracts it through the workings of gender and power. The Argonautic myth itself is read as one of the first attempts within the European canon to make sense of the concept of 'otherness', to turn into narrative the fraught relationships between empire and culture. The specific role of Medea within the context of the myth also underlines the constituent function of gender, as both structure and theme, at the interface between nation and narration. This modern *Medea*, located on the edge of Europe, where borders are constantly changing, once again sets out to scrutinize these relationships.

The discussion that follows tries to trace the making of both the adaptation and the specific production. It also maps out a geographical and discursive arena within which to discuss the writing and the making of the play. This arena includes Georgia (as contemporary state and as ancient Colchis), the Black Sea, a version of Greekness (or Hellenism), and Scotland. The appearance of Scotland on this list might at first glance seem a little odd. However, its significance is vital. GIFT was in many ways modelled on the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and partly funded by one of its main venues, the Assembly Rooms. The production itself would visit the Fringe the following year, in 1998, continuing the company's long-standing relationship with the Edinburgh Festival. Euripides' *Medea*, moreover, had an honourable place in the history of the Edinburgh Festival: it was the first Greek tragedy ever to have been performed at the Festival, in its second year (1948), when John Gielgud produced Robinson Jeffers's adaptation with Eileen Herlie in the title role (see Macintosh, Ch. 1).<sup>1</sup> So Edinburgh and Tbilisi, two cities on the peripheries of Europe, both cities that have created distinct versions of Hellenism (Edinburgh is after all the 'Athens of the North'), frame this discussion.

The position of Georgia as one of the first sites of 'otherness' in European literature is something that inspired both the adaptation and the production of this play. This inspiration is in turn informed by the ancient perceptions of Georgia, aptly described by David Braund in his introduction to his important study of ancient Georgia:

Throughout its history, ancient Georgia stood at the frontier of the Greek and Roman worlds. Yet, at the same time, it occupied a central position in Greek and Roman ideology, not least because of its distant and peripheral location. In particular, the Argonauts' quest for the Golden Fleece of Colchis was among the oldest Graeco-Roman myths [. . .]. The myth retained that prominence because it was germane to a series of key issues and themes

which remained current and problematic in the Graeco-Roman world: the ethics of sea-travel, man's abuse of nature, the use of magic, the dangerous stranger, the power of oaths, the limits of proper vengeance, relationships and loyalties within a family, the problematics of marriage and parenthood, gender, ethnicity, and much more besides.<sup>2</sup>

The ancient significance of Georgia is crucial to this production of *Medea*. Any reading of theatre as performance needs to take into account not only the textual dimension of a project but also the spatial, geographical one. Yet the Colchis from which this Medea comes is not necessarily exactly the same one she inhabits in other Greek and European versions of the myth. It was important that this version was performed from the 'other side' of all the binary oppositions mentioned above. In Georgia, far from representing 'otherness', Medea is *almost* a heroine, in the traditional sense of the word. *Almost*, because a heroine is usually one-dimensional, whereas the version of the persona that exists is one that captures all the ambivalence and the ambiguity of the Euripidean character. Still, it is a name that is commonly used. People call their daughters Medea. It is a name that you can hear when you are walking along the streets of Tbilisi.

Another important site for the purposes of the adaptation was the Black Sea as both geographical and imaginary location. In his book about the Black Sea, Neal Ascherson claims that it was the encounter with the Black Sea that helped Europe shape some of its most crucial discourses. He writes:

One discourse concerns 'civilisation and barbarism'. A second is about cultural identity, and about where its distinctions and limits should be drawn. A third is deep self-criticism which imagines that technical and social sophistication entails not only gain but loss [. . .]. All three, provoked by the encounter in the Black Sea, were debated in the classical world [. . .]. On the Black Sea itself, however, these matters were not so much debated as lived.<sup>3</sup>

It is this aspect of the Black Sea—as an early, indeed aboriginal, site of multiculturalism—that I wanted to explore in this reworking of Euripides. In particular *Medea: A World Apart* is fuelled by my interest in the history of the Greeks of the Black Sea. This interest is not obviously present thematically or stylistically, but took the form, rather, of a personal motivation, which may or may not permeate the final version of the text.

In the story that the play enacts, of home and homelessness, of motherland and colony, of empire and love, the Pontic Greeks play an

important role. Originally arriving as colonizers in the Black Sea as long ago as the Archaic period of ancient Greece, the era which turned into poetry the story of Jason and the Argonauts, they remained on its shores throughout the Classical Greek and Hellenistic periods, and throughout the duration of the Roman and Ottoman empires. Some returned more recently to mainland Greece during the notorious 'exchange of populations' between Greece and Turkey in the 1920s (popularly known as 'the catastrophe'), while others remained and were persecuted under Stalinism. The history of the Pontic Greeks is too long, fraught, and complex to relate in detail here, but their presence on the Black Sea and their particular 'construction' of Greekness is one that informs this project. It is a version that, as Ascherson rightly claims, is defined by culture and ideology rather than origin or biology. When the civil war broke out between Georgia and Abkhazia in the early 1990s, the Pontic Greeks living in Sukhumi (ancient Colchis) had to be evacuated by the Greek government on an aeroplane appropriately called 'The Golden Fleece'. They were returning to a homeland that had lived in their imagination for over two millennia; a homeland that they would ultimately inhabit as refugees.

While all this was going on in the early 1990s I met the Georgian Film Actors' Studio in Edinburgh after a magical performance of Molière's *Dom Juan* in the Georgian language. This was the performance that Peter Brook had seen when he invited the company to Paris. It was the first production with which the company went on a world-wide tour. After one of their performances I asked to speak to the company and was greeted by Ketidolidze. On hearing I was Greek, she proceeded to speak to me in a Pontic dialect, which she understood to be standard Modern Greek. She said she had Greek friends in Tbilisi. Obviously her version of 'Greekness' was not the standard one, associated either with modern Greece or with classical Greece.

I mention this incident in an attempt to explain why an adaptation of *Medea*, which was triggered by my personal response to the refugee problem in Greece, and specifically the plight of the Pontic Greeks, would interest a company in search of a play to stage after the end of a civil war. In this context the whole Pontic experience acts as a type of emblem of a fractured notion of ethnicity, of the 'other side' of a Hellenism that superficially represents itself as homogeneous, all-pervasive, unitary, and universal. And, as I mentioned earlier, these were my personal motivations, which do not necessarily make any obvious appearance anywhere in the final text. The fact that this aspir-



ation was reinterpreted within a Georgian context was as fascinating to me as I hope it was for the audiences that witnessed it.

### The Adaptation

The specific textual reworking of *Medea* is part of a trilogy of adaptations (*Medea*, *A World Apart*, and *All About Phaedra*). These are at once a homage to Euripides (being inspired by his *Medea*, *The Trojan Women*, and *Hippolytus* respectively), and an attempt to look again at the relationships between gender and empire within a contemporary context. This particular production blended together the texts of *Medea* and *A World Apart*, making the Trojan women a chorus for Medea. Rather than analyse the texts of the adaptations systematically, I shall present some extracts, which may give some indication of the overall style and effect.<sup>4</sup> As I mainly wish to discuss the production, they are presented under the headings used in the rehearsal process.

#### *Medea's Migraine*

MEDEA     Where is the axe?  
               The axe that cut the trees of Pelion  
               To make the Argo  
               Should now fall onto my head  
               And cut it in two  
               [ . . . ]  
               They crossed the great dividing line.  
               I watched all this  
               With my eyes perched on the Caucasus  
               And my feet wet  
               By the tides of the Black Sea.

#### *The Song of the Market/The Song to Troy*

ANDROMACHE   We thought we were privileged.  
                   Living in a city where you could buy  
                   all the scents of Anatolia  
                   and all the herbs of Egypt  
                   and all the books from Athens.  
                   The whole world was our backyard  
                   And the markets stretched on for miles and miles.  
                   Under huge coloured tents  
                   with fat men shouting.  
                   ‘This way madam, I have the finest silks in the East.  
                   I am sure I can find something to suit your taste.’



with that bozo Hercules.  
 Jason! I gave you the fleece.  
 I killed my brother for you.  
 For the new life that you promised.  
 For the fire that you started  
 between my legs.  
 Jason! You talked of families,  
 and happiness,  
 and houses with gardens,  
 and TVs with remote control.  
 Jason! What a cliché.  
 I fell in love with the enemy.  
 I sold my country  
 For a Greek fuck.

*The Lament*

MEDEA    Go my darlings, go to the new queen.  
 Learn to call her mother.  
 No doubt your father will have more children.  
 But know that he loves you best.  
 Take these gowns to the young bride.  
 Go and claim your new home, your new country.  
 These are difficult times to be unsheltered  
 And while you are away.  
 I will prepare a new home for you.  
 One without a mother.  
 One without a mother  
 to make your wedding beds.  
 To dress your brides  
 with old laces that I carried in trunks  
 all over the Aegean.  
 Your wedding ceremonies will take place in darkness.  
 I won't be there to light the candles.  
 I won't be there to choose the invitations  
 and draw up the guest lists.  
 I won't be there to make  
 your brides jealous  
 and break the pomegranate  
 at your door.  
 [. . .]  
 The memory of my homeland stings me,  
 like a sun-stroked bee.  
 [...]



Please spare me the graphic details  
 of how Jason's new bride died.  
 Don't tell me how her face melted  
 until the gold from the crown and the skin  
 and the blood became one.  
 Don't tell me how the skin dropped off her bones  
 and lay like sawdust on the floor.  
 I might find these descriptions enticing.  
 And I don't want to become cynical.  
 Whatever horror your lips may utter  
 I can match and further.  
 The stories I can tell you about the Argonauts.  
 About children running to the boats for shelter  
 and getting their little palms chopped off  
 as soon as they got a grip of the oars.  
 About the priestesses of Artemis  
 whom the Argonauts starved  
 and who only saw the light  
 when they were dragged out to the Greeks' camp  
 to be raped by Jason's sailors.  
 About the abortions  
 they then performed on each other  
 with burning needles.  
 So keep your lips sealed, women.  
 Your descriptions leave me untouched.

These extracts, as reproduced here, do not exactly correspond to the progression of the action, but function as samples of the approach followed. There are sequences with Cassandra, who is suffering from False Memory Syndrome. Aegeus, on the other hand, has a low sperm count and seeks advice from Medea. The encounter between Aegeus and Medea takes place at the opening of a new refugee shelter. Helen, hatched as she was from an egg, sings songs about technologies of reproduction. Finally, Medea leaves on a plane that awaits her on the outskirts of the city. She has been promised a talk show: 'To talk of women who share my plight.' Before she goes she leaves a note for Jason:

Jason,  
 I have killed the children.  
 I hope that has opened a hole in your heart  
 that is at least as fierce, and as hollow, and as dry,  
 as the one in mine.

As for me,  
 I want you to hate me.  
 Go and bury your wife.

### The Production

The overall tone of the adaptation is one of melancholia. Indeed, melancholia functions as a type of *gestus* for the whole production. In the Brechtian sense, *gestus* both formalizes and highlights the main concerns of a production. It brings together in a metatheatrical manner the main conflicts of a play, so they can be easily codified and read. The paradigmatic *gestus*, commonly cited, is Mother Courage constantly opening and shutting her moneybag, drawing attention to the relationships between money and war. *Gestus* also prevents a character from resorting to individualized expressions of emotion, and adds an emblematic and parabolic quality to a production.

Melancholia and lamentation were closely linked in the production itself. My reading of melancholia derives from recent neo-historicist and anthropological research into the relationships between lamentation and tragedy. In her study *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature*, Gail Holst-Warhaft draws parallels between the appearance of tragedy as a specific artistic discourse and civic institution and the banning in ancient Athens of female traditions of lamentation. In general, she is part of a whole school of thought that sees the emergence of Athenian tragedy as inextricably linked with death ritual. She also believes that this shift from rite and ritual, to art and institution, is a gendered one. She writes:

Tragedy, the invention of Athens that is so preoccupied with the lament and appears to subsume its ritual function, ends by reducing the magical power of women's voices to a civic danger with at best private therapeutic value.<sup>5</sup>

This view of lamentation as structurally bound to tragedy ties in with the Georgian oral tradition of lament, a tradition that was heavily drawn on in the production.

Furthermore, melancholia works as a kind of negative critique to the ideas of *peripeteia*, adventure, and progress more traditionally associated with tragic heroes. The stage is littered with ruins from what we, as audience, might read as a classical tradition. The main 'monument' consists of four caryatids, torn apart at the edges. Their heads are stuck to the ceiling and their bases to the floor. In between

the Trojan Women stretch out in an attempt to make whole again the shattered image. This is how the play begins. At the front of the stage there is a round glass bowl filled with water. This is clearly the Aegean. On the top of it stands a small replica of the Argo (see fig. 19). The women use this as a drinking-fountain. The whole front of the stage down to the auditorium is covered with wood, and the words 'Fragile' and 'This Way Up' appear stamped across its surface. From time to time the sound of a train rushing across over the top of the stage can be heard. This makes the statues and the ruins crumble even further. The concept of decay and catastrophe was visually present all over the stage.

The textual reworking of the myth was heavily influenced by Walter Benjamin's view of tragedy (*Trauerspiel*) as lament-song. In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* he writes:

In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting. And in this guise history does not assume the form of the process of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay. Allegory thereby declares itself to be beyond beauty. Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things.<sup>6</sup>

It is this allegorical quality that the images on the stage create. They are at once recognizable and yet not realistic. Throughout the performance the women enact famous scenes from paintings, mainly those of the Renaissance. These act as a dirge to a lost beauty, but also as a critique of the 'classical' representation of the female image. And in this way Benjamin's view of historical catastrophe becomes not homogeneous and universal, but specifically historical and gendered. For although these women are trapped in some sort of 'celestial transit camp' (as one reviewer put it),<sup>7</sup> their experience is constantly historicized by these patterned references to both the classical and neo-classical traditions of Europe. (At the far end of the stage there is a Magritte-style painting of a woman bound.)

Melancholia as a philosophical stance, rather than a disease, is a notion as old as the school of Aristotle. In the *Problems* attributed to Aristotle, melancholia is read as a basic attribute of the philosopher rather than as a disease (30. 1). Melancholia is seen as a trait of an 'exceptional personality' as 'a well-balanced diversity' (εὐκρατος ἀνωμαλία), something that does not constitute a philosopher's disease, but helps form his *ēthos*. In this context, melancholia is itself a philosophical discourse; one that views notions of loss and sadness as part





19. Ken Reynolds, Ketid Dolidze as Medea, 1998 (photograph).  
Olga Taxidou's *Medea: A World Apart*, performed by the  
Tumanishvili Film Actors' Studio at the Edinburgh Festival

of the condition of being rather than as an illness. This notion of melancholia is parallel to Montaigne's view that 'to philosophize is to learn how to die'. And it is this view of melancholia, one energized by the Georgian traditions of lament, that the production proposes. However, it is significantly different from the philosopher's melancholia in at least two respects. These melancholic characters are women and they are performers.

My gendered reading of melancholia was inspired by Julia Kristeva's book *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, where she puts forward the notion that melancholia is structurally linked with the processes of representation and gender differentiation. It is this combination of a philosophical and a psychoanalytical melancholia that I wanted to explore in the adaptation. These relationships for me were compounded by the fact that in both Freudian and Kristevan psychoanalysis the examples and metaphors are drawn from Greek tragedy.<sup>8</sup>

All these thoughts and theoretical viewpoints fuelled the textual reworking of the Euripidean text, but were absent from discussions with the company. From the moment the production process started I had to rely on the text that was available. There was no point in explaining or theorizing it. I was very fortunate that many of these concerns were mirrored in the performance styles and conventions; and, as I mentioned earlier, the references to traditional laments proved particularly fruitful.

This, however, was not a production without humour. In the juxtaposition between 'ancient' and 'modern', and mainly between melancholia and melodrama, an ironically comic effect was achieved. The Georgian Film Actors' Studio (as their name suggests) have been trained in both theatre and film acting. Anyone familiar with the work of the cinema directors Sergei Paradzanov and Tengiz Abuladze would immediately recognize the stunning visual style; it is one that blends Byzantine with modernist traditions in perspective, the use of colour, and the representation of character. This is also a style that manages to combine highly stylized melodramatic acting with equally stylized tragic acting. The 'slippage' from one to the other initially appears to be seamless. In effect the two styles are constantly played against each other. This approach not only provides comic relief, but also critical distance. The use of incidental music was crucial in this context. Present not simply to provide an aural equivalent of the action, but also to constitute a commentary upon it, the music functioned as both an interpretation and a critique of the characters' actions and words.

The overall effect was also modified by a new introduction I wrote for the Edinburgh performances. This was presented by a 12-year-old boy, who was on the stage from the moment the audience entered the theatrical space. He was hiding behind a broken shield and playing around in the rubble. As the audience settled down he started to mention casually that the show they were about to witness was made up of a series of stories told to him by his mother and aunts while they were refugees. As the scenic space was quite abstract I felt it crucial that a sense of space should immediately be created. So the young boy, Otto, proceeded to describe all the public spaces—squares, railway stations, churches, schools—which the refugees would occupy in the course of their search for a home. It is these very spaces that supposedly provide a sense of civic identity; a place where the private and the public meet. Ironically they are also the spaces that homeless people and refugees are forced to occupy. Neal Ascherson writes:

The Polish artist Krzysztof Wodiczko, who has drawn many ideas from the 1980 'Traité de Nomadologie' by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, perceives how the hordes of the displaced now occupy the public spaces of cities—squares, parks or railway station concourses—which were once designed by a triumphant middle class to celebrate the conquest of its new political rights and economic liberties. Wodiczko thinks that these occupied public spaces form new *agoras* (the paved assembly-square in the midst of the Greek *polis*) which should be used for statements.<sup>9</sup>

Having listed these civic spaces for people who have no civic identity, the boy left the stage. He reported that he had promised to go and help on the other side of the city, where a truckload of medical supplies was about to arrive.

### The Protagonists

The fact that the production went ahead at all was due to the commitment and dedication of everyone concerned. The play was rehearsed for a period of about four months from March to June 1997, under very difficult circumstances, and with almost no funding available. For the director Nana Kvashvadze it was the first play she had worked on after three years of silence following the war. For Keti Dolidze, who played Medea, it was a return to acting after almost ten years spent organizing the company's international tours. Indeed, the persona and the personality of Keti Dolidze were crucial in getting the production off the ground, and in organizing the whole of the



GIFT Festival. In addition, she is responsible for reviving a medieval Georgian tradition: the White Scarf Movement. This refers to a time when in an attempt to stop war the women laid white scarves in between the fighting lines.

At the height of the civil war in 1992 and amidst heated nationalist feelings Ketí Dolidze made a plea on national television for the women of Tbilisi to join her in the city's central square. More than 5,000 women did so. She led them all onto a train that was heading straight for the front line. Once there, the women stood and held hands in front of the troops in an attempt to end the madness that the war had created. Various nationalist groups threatened to blow up the train, but the women all returned safely.

Ketí Dolidze now divides her life into two sections: before and after the train. Of course, this gesture was not alone enough to end a bitter civil war, but it is indicative of the drama, the passion, and the desperation that these women felt. And all these energies were filtered into Ketí Dolidze's performance of Medea. It made for quite a heady combination of public persona, individual performer, and role; one that was immediately recognizable to a Georgian audience.

### The Tour

'It's quite a jolt to the imagination to discover that, in ancient times, Georgia was Colchis, land of the fabled Golden Fleece,' wrote Mary Brennan reviewing the performance for *The Glasgow Herald* during the Edinburgh Festival in 1998.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, for a play that tries to renegotiate the relationships between historical space and mythological space, this 'jolt' produced an extremely desirable effect. The Assembly Rooms in Edinburgh provided a supremely hospitable space and managed to accommodate the whole company, which comprised some thirty-five people, since it always travels with its own technical staff. The performance was very well received and then went on to close the Sarajevo Festival in October 1998. In March of the following year it was invited to Warsaw and in May to Moscow.<sup>11</sup>

The shift from the text to the stage created a whole new life for the story of Medea. Indeed, it is a story that derives its power as much from its original Euripidean version and its original outlines as it does from the act of retelling. The original, the adaptation, the production, and the tour all in varying degrees recast and throw into relief the debates between gender and power, empire, conquest and culture. If

these central themes of the play are also read as a dialogue between centre and periphery, then the power of live performance itself plays a crucial role. The ephemeral nature of performance, with its emphasis on the physical and the bodily, creates yet another version of Medea herself; one without a centre; one that celebrates the ephemeral and peripheral qualities of performance; one that is constantly reconstituted in the interaction with different audiences.

What started as a personal obsession with a myth and a passion for Euripides turned into a much greater story. A story that was rewritten and filtered through the specific history and aesthetic legacy of the Georgian Film Actors' Studio.<sup>12</sup>

### Some People Involved in the Production

Director: Nana Kvaskhvadze

Designer: Ivengo Chelidze

Make-up Artist: Tina Gomelauri

### Cast

Medea: Keti Dolidze

Hecabe: Mzia Arabuli

Cassandra: Lali Kekelidze

Andromache: Darejan Jojua

Helen: Nino Burduli

### Notes to Chapter 11

1. See Bruce (1975), 136–7.
2. Braund (1994), p. iv.
3. Ascherson (1995), 7–8.
4. The unpublished manuscript in English is available for consultation in Edinburgh University Library.
5. Holst-Warhaft (1992), 169.
6. Benjamin (1985), 178.
7. Robert Dawson Scott, *The Scotsman*, 1 Sept. 1998.
8. Kristeva (1989).
9. Ascherson (1995), 55.
10. *The Glasgow Herald*, 3 Sept. 1998.
11. All these productions were in Georgian.
12. The company has since changed its name into 'The Tumanishvili Film Actors' Studio' in honour of its founder and director Michael Tumanishvili, who died in 1996.

## CHAPTER 12



# *Medeas* on the Archive Database

*David Gowen*

The following table traces the great variety of *Medeas* enacted through the 450 years for which records have been entered onto the database at the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama—beginning in the mid-sixteenth century and extending into the third millennium. There are over 500 entries in this work-in-progress, yet it remains just that, for there are yet more to be discovered; and the documentation of Senecan versions is particularly incomplete. Nevertheless we hope this will serve as a fuller production history of an ancient play than any previously published.

Our principal textual sources have included Jane Davidson Reid's *Classical Mythology in the Arts, 1300–1990s* (New York, 1993) and Stanley Sadie's *New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (London, 1992). But the information about the vast majority of these performances derives from the scholarly work of the Archive's senior and associate members (Edith Hall, Oliver Taplin, Fiona Macintosh, and Pantelis Michelakis); from the collaboration of our partners in the European Network of Research and Documentation of Ancient Greek Drama; and from the shared findings of the Open University's project, *The Reception of the Texts and Images of Ancient Greece in Late Twentieth-Century Drama and Poetry in English*. We are also indebted to our many international colleagues, including all participants in this volume, and to the many theatregoers from around the world who have made innumerable contributions to our growing collection of theatrical documentation.

Given the Archive's emphasis on *production*, plays and other works for which no reports indicate an actual staging are omitted from this list. In the few cases where sources appear to conflict, however, the works are included in the table, signalled as '? performed'.

Perhaps the greatest advantage that an electronic relational database



enjoys over a printed table is the flexibility it permits during a search—whether chronological or geographical, by director or actor, or according to company or venue. For the present fixed publication, however, an organizational choice had to be made; and, given the Archive's other and equal emphasis on *history*, a straightforward chronology seemed the obvious approach. Within any given year, productions are grouped geographically, and countries are generally identified with the names by which they are now most commonly known (although there is inevitably an element of arbitrariness here).<sup>1</sup> This ordering is alphabetical, except in cases where a production from one country has travelled to, or clearly influenced performances in, another country (for example Legouvé's version of 1856, staged first in France and later that same year in Britain).

While the majority of the translations documented are of Euripides, many of the early texts are based on Seneca. Works considered to depart significantly from their Euripidean or Senecan predecessors are loosely described in this table as 'adaptations'. The nature of many of these is discussed more fully within individual chapters of this volume. Although we have not attempted to chronicle each performance of such new versions, we have tried to record their *premières* and some significant revivals (especially when referred to elsewhere in the book).

### Note to Chapter 12

1. Thus, for example, the database refers to the Czech Republic rather than to Czechoslovakia or to the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

- 1540s **Britain**  
*Medea*; translated into Latin from Euripides by George Buchanan;  
performed at Westminster School
- 1553 **France**  
*La Médée*; adaptation by Jean-Bastier de La Péruse;  
? performed in Paris
- 1558 **France**  
*Argonautes*; ballet by Jodelle; performed in the court of Catherine de  
Médicis
- 1560-1 **Britain**  
*Medea*; performed in Latin by students at Trinity College, Cambridge
- 1563 **Britain**  
*Medea*; performed in Latin by students at Queens' College, Cambridge
- 1577 **France**  
*Médée*; adaptation by Binet; performed in Paris by Les Confrères et  
Les Basochiens reconciliés
- 1598 **France**  
*Medea*; adaptation; performed at the Schultheater, Strasburg
- 1619 **Britain**  
*The Courageous Turke*; adaptation by Thomas Goffe
- 1635 **France**  
*Médée*; adaptation by Pierre Corneille; Théâtre du Marais, Paris
- 1648 **Britain**  
*Medea*; translated from Seneca by Edward Sherburne;  
? performed in London
- 1649 **Italy**  
*Giasona*; opera composed by Francesco Cavalli; libretto by Giacinto  
Cicognini; performed in Venice
- 1659 **France**  
*La Conquête de la toison d'or*; adaptation by Pierre Corneille; performed  
at the Château de Neubourg
- 1665 **Netherlands**  
*Medea*; adaptation from Seneca by Jan Vos; performed in Amsterdam
- 1675 **Italy**  
*Medea in Atene*; opera composed by Antonio Giannettini; performed  
in Venice
- 1685 **Italy**  
*Teseo tra le rivali*; opera composed by Domenico Freschi; performed in  
Venice
- 1688 **Germany**  
*L'enchantement de Médée*; ballet-opera adaptation by Wolfgang Carl  
Briegel; performed in Darmstadt  
*Theseus*; opera composed by Johann Löhner; performed in Nuremberg

**Italy**

*Teseo in Atene*; opera composed by Bernardo Sabadini; performed in Parma

1692 **Germany**

*Jason*; opera composed by Johann Sigismund Kusser; performed in Braunschweig

1694 **France**

*Médée*; opera composed by Marc-Antoine Charpentier; libretto by Thomas Corneille; Académie de Musique, Paris

*Médée*; adaptation by Hilaire Bernard de Requeleyne de Longepierre; performed at the Comédie Française, Paris

1696 **France**

*Jason; ou, La toison d'or*; opera composed by Pascal Collasse; performed at the Opéra, Paris

1698 **Britain**

*Phaeton; or, The Fatal Divorce*; adaptation by Charles Gildon; performed at the Theatre Royal, London (Frances Mary Knight as the Medea-figure 'Althaea')

1700 **Germany**

*Medea*; opera composed by Johann Christian Schieferdecker; performed in Leipzig

1702 **France**

*Médus, roi des Medes*; opera composed by François Bouvard; performed at the Opéra, Paris

1712 **Britain**

*Teseo*; opera composed by George Frideric Handel; performed at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket, London

1713 **France**

*Médée et Jason*; opera composed by Joseph-François Salomon; libretto by Simon-Joseph Pellegrin; performed at the Opéra, Paris

1726 **Italy**

*Medea e Giasone*; opera composed by Giovanni Francesco Brusa; libretto by Simon-Joseph Pellegrin; performed in Venice

1728 **France**

*La méchante femme*; parody (of Longepierre's *Médée*) by Dominique (= Pierre François Biancolelli)

1730 **Britain**

*The Tragedy of Medæa*; adaptation by Charles Johnson; performed at Drury Lane, London (Mary Ann Porter as Medea)

1742 **Italy**

*Giasone*; opera composed by Nicola Porpora; performed in Naples

1744 **Italy**

*Medea*; opera composed by David Perez; performed in Palermo



- 1752 **Germany**  
*Medea*; opera composed by Georg Gebel II; performed in Rudolstadt
- 1762 **Germany**  
*Médée et Jason*; ballet choreographed by Jean-Georges Noverre; performed at the Württemberg court
- 1763 **Germany**  
*Médée et Jason*; ballet choreographed by Jean-Georges Noverre; music composed by Jean-Joseph Rodolphe; performed at the Hoftheater, Stuttgart (Nancy Levier as Medea)
- 1764 **Italy**  
*Medea*; opera composed by Josef Mysliveček; libretto by Friedrich Wilhelm Gotter; performed in Parma
- 1765 **France**  
*Thésée*; opera composed by Jean-Joseph Cassanéa de Mondonville; performed in Fontainebleau
- 1767 **Britain**  
*Medea*; adaptation by Richard Glover; performed at Drury Lane, London (Mary Ann Yates as Medea)
- 1770 **France**  
*Médée et Jason*; ballet choreographed by Jean-Georges Noverre and Gaetano Vestris; music composed by J.-B. de La Borde; performed at the Opéra, Paris
- 1771 **Italy**  
*Médée et Jason*; ballet choreographed by Jean-Georges Noverre and Charles Le Picq; performed in Venice
- 1772 **Germany**  
*Médée et Jason*; ballet choreographed by Étienne Lauchery; performed in Mannheim
- 1774 **Sweden**  
*Medea*; opera composed by Bengt Lidner; performed in Stockholm
- 1775 **Germany**  
*Medea*; opera composed by Georg Anton Benda; performed in Leipzig
- 1776 **France**  
*Médée et Jason*; ballet-pantomime choreographed by Jean-Georges Noverre and Gaetano Vestris; music composed by Louis Granier, with J.-J. Rodolphe and P. M. Berton; performed at the Opéra, Paris
- 1781 **Britain**  
*Médée et Jason*; ballet choreographed by Jean-Georges Noverre and Gaetano Vestris; performed at the King's Theatre, London
- 1782 **France**  
*Thésée*; opera composed by François-Joseph Gossec; performed at the Opéra, Paris

- 1785 **Italy**  
*Giasone e Medea*; opera composed by Gaetano Andreozzi; performed in Naples
- 1786 **France**  
*La toison d'or*; opera composed by Johann Christoph Vogel; performed at the Opéra, Paris
- 1787 **Italy**  
*La vendetta di Medea*; opera composed by Giuseppe Moneta; performed in Florence
- 1788 **Germany**  
*Medea in Colchide*; opera composed by Johann Gottlieb Naumann; performed in Berlin
- Italy**  
*Giasone e Medea*; ballet choreographed by Jean-Georges Noverre and Dominique Le Fèvre; performed at La Scala, Milan
- 1789 **Germany**  
*Medea und Jason*; opera composed by Peter Winter; performed in Munich
- 1792 **Britain**  
*Medea's Kettle; or, Harlequin Revisited*; harlequinade; performed at Sadlers Wells, London (Mrs Dighton as Medea)
- Italy**  
*La vendetta di Medea*; opera composed by Gaetano Marinelli; performed in Venice
- 1793 **Italy**  
*Giasone e Medea*; opera composed by Gaetano Andreozzi; performed in Naples
- 1797 **France**  
*Médée*; opera composed by Luigi Cherubini; libretto by François-Benoît Hoffman; performed at the Théâtre Feydeau, Paris  
*La Sorcière*; parody (of Cherubini's opera) by C. Sewrin; performed in Paris  
*Bébé et Jargon*; parody (of Cherubini's opera) by P. A. Capelle and P. Villiers; performed at the Théâtre Montasier, Paris  
*Médée ou l'Hôpital des Fous*; parody (of Cherubini's opera) by 'Citizen' Bizet and H. Chaussier; performed at the Théâtre de l'Ambigu, Paris
- 1798 **Italy**  
*La vendetta di Medea*; opera composed by Francesco Piticchio; performed in Naples  
*Il Teseo riconosciuto*; opera composed by Gaspare Spontini; performed in Florence
- 1807 **Russia**  
*Médée et Jason*; ballet choreographed by Charles-Louis Didelot; performed in St Petersburg

- 1813 **Italy**  
*Medea in Corinto*; opera composed by Giovanni Simone Mayr; libretto by Felice Romani; performed at the Teatro di San Carlo, Naples
- 1815 **Italy**  
*Teseo e Medea*; opera composed by Carlo Coccia; performed in Turin
- 1818 **Germany**  
*Medea*; adaptation by Gotter; directed by Klingemann; Nationaltheater, Braunschweig
- 1821 **Austria**  
*Medea (Das Goldene Vließ)*; adaptation by Franz Grillparzer; Burgtheater, Vienna
- 1824 **Germany**  
*Medea*; adaptation by Franz Grillparzer; directed by Klingemann; Nationaltheater, Braunschweig
- 1825 **Italy**  
*Medea*; adaptation by Giovanni Battista Niccolini; performed in Florence
- 1826 **Britain**  
*Medea in Corinto*; opera composed by Giovanni Simone Mayr; libretto by Felice Romani; performed at the King's Theatre, London (Giuditta Pasta as Medea)
- 1827 **Britain**  
*Medea in Corinto*; opera composed by Giovanni Simone Mayr; libretto by Felice Romani; performed at the King's Theatre, London (Giuditta Pasta as Medea)
- 1828 **Britain**  
*Medea in Corinto*; opera composed by Giovanni Simone Mayr; libretto by Felice Romani; performed at the King's Theatre, London (Giuditta Pasta as Medea)
- 1843 **Germany**  
*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Johann Jakob Christian Donner; performed at the Königliches Schauspielhaus, Berlin
- Italy**  
*Medea*; opera composed by Giovanni Pacini; libretto by Benedetto Castiglia; performed in Palermo
- 1845 **Britain**  
*The Golden Fleece; or, Jason in Colchis and Medea in Corinth*; adaptation by James Robinson Planché; performed at the Haymarket, London (Elizabetta Vestris as Medea)
- Italy**  
*Medea*; opera (revised version) composed by Giovanni Pacini; libretto by Benedetto Castiglia; performed in Vicenza



- 1851 **Britain**  
*Jason and Medea*; burlesque written by Jack Wooler; performed at the Grecian Saloon, London
- Italy**  
*Medea*; opera composed by Saverio Mercadante; performed in Naples
- 1855 **France**  
*Médée*; adaptation by Hippolyte Lucas; performed at the Odéon, Paris
- 1856 **France**  
*Medea*; adaptation by Ernest Legouvé; performed in Joseph Montanelli's Italian translation at the Théâtre-Italien, Paris (Adelaide Ristori as Medea)  
*La Médée en Nanterre*; burlesque (of Legouvé's adaptation) by Cogniard, Grange, and Bourdois; performed at the Théâtre des Variétés, Paris
- Britain**  
*Medea*; adaptation by Ernest Legouvé; performed at the Lyceum Theatre, London (Adelaide Ristori as Medea)  
*Medea; or, A Libel on the Lady of Colchis*; burlesque (of Legouvé's adaptation) by Mark Lemon; performed at the Adelphi Theatre, London (Edward Wright as Medea)  
*Medea; or, the Best of Mothers with a Brute of a Husband*; burlesque (of Legouvé's adaptation) by Robert Brough; performed at the Royal Olympic Theatre, London (Frederick Robson as Medea)
- 1857 **Britain**  
*Medea in Corinth*; adaptation by John Heraud; performed at Sadlers Wells, London (Edith Heraud as Medea)
- USA**  
*Medea*; adaptation by Matilda Heron; performed at Wallack's Lyceum, New York (Matilda Heron as Medea)
- 1858 **USA**  
*Medea and My Deary*; burlesque; performed at the Chatham Theatre, New York (G. L. Fox as Medea)
- 1859 **Britain**  
*Medea in Corinth*; adaptation by John Heraud; performed at the Standard Theatre, London (Edith Heraud as Medea)
- USA**  
*Medea*; tragedy; performed at Tripler Hall, New York
- 1860 **USA**  
*Medea*; opera composed by Pacini; the Italian Cortesi Company; performed at Niblo's Garden, New York
- 1861 **Britain**  
*Medea*; adaptation; performed at Drury Lane, London (Avonia Jones as Medea)

- Medea*; adaptation by Matilda Heron; performed at the Lyceum Theatre, London (Matilda Heron as Medea)
- Medea; or, the Best of Mothers with a Brute of a Husband*; burlesque (of Legouv e's adaptation) by Robert Brough; performed at the Grecian Theatre, London (George Conquest as Medea)
- 1863 **USA**  
*Medea*; adaptation by Matilda Heron; performed at Niblo's Garden, New York (Matilda Heron as Medea)
- 1864 **USA**  
*Medea*; tragedy; performed at Mary Provost's Theatre, New York
- 1865 **Greece**  
*Medea*; adaptation by Ernest Legouv e; performed at the Boukoura, Athens (Adelaide Ristori as Medea)
- 1866 **USA**  
*Medea*; adaptation by Ernest Legouv e; performed at the Th atre Franais, New York (Adelaide Ristori as Medea)
- 1867 **USA**  
*Medea*; adaptation by Franz Grillparzer, Academy of Music, New York (Francesca Janauschek as Medea)  
*Medea*; tragedy; performed at the Broadway Theatre, New York (Miss Hayne as Medea)
- 1869 **Turkey**  
*Medea*; adaptation by Ioannes Zabelios (based on an adaptation by Cesare della Valle); performed by Hellenodramatike Hetairia in Constantinople
- 1872 **Britain**  
*Medea in Corinth*; adaptation by William Gorman Wills; performed at the Lyceum Theatre, London (Isabel Bateman as Medea)
- 1873 **Ireland**  
*Medea*; adaptation; performed in Dublin [also performed in Liverpool, Hull, and London] (Genevi e Ward as Medea)
- 1874 **Germany**  
*Medea*; opera composed by Otto Bach; performed in Gotha
- 1875 **USA**  
*Medea*; adaptation by Ernest Legouve; performed at the Lyceum, New York (Adelaide Ristori as Medea)
- 1876 **Britain**  
*Medea*; adaptation by Franz Grillparzer; performed at the Haymarket, London (Francesca Janauschek as Medea)
- 1878 **Britain**  
*Jason and Medea: A Ramble after a Colchian*; burlesque; performed at the Garrison Theatre, Woolwich
- 1880 **USA**  
*Medea*; ?opera; performed in New York (Magda Irschik as Medea)

- 1898 **France**  
 *Médée*; adaptation by Catulle Mendès; performed at the Théâtre de la Renaissance, Paris (Sarah Bernhardt as Medea)  
 *Médée*; adaptation by Jules Gastambide; performed at the Théâtre de la Bodinière, Paris
- 1903 **Greece**  
 *Medea*; directed by Georgios Mistriotis; performed in ancient Greek by the Society for the Teaching of the Ancient Dramas, at the Demotic Theatre, Athens (Loukia Tiveri as Medea)
- 1904 **Germany**  
 *Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff; directed by Max Reinhardt; performed at the Neues Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, Berlin
- 1906 **Italy**  
 *Medea*; opera composed by Vincenzo Tommasini; performed in Trieste
- 1907 **Britain**  
 *Medea*; translated from Euripides by Gilbert Murray; directed by Harley Granville-Barker; performed at the Court Theatre, London (Edyth Olive as Medea)  
 *Medea*; translated from Euripides by Gilbert Murray; performed at University College London (Ethel Abrahams as Medea)
- 1909 **Italy**  
 *Medea*; opera; performed at La Scala, Milan (Ester Mazzoleni as Medea)
- USA**  
 *Medea*; performed by students at Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania
- 1911 **Germany**  
 *Das Goldene Vließ*; film based on Grillparzer's adaptation; produced by Oskar Messter (Dora von Warberg as Medea)
- USA**  
 *Medea*; directed by Mabel K. Whiteside; performed in ancient Greek by students at Randolph-Macon Women's College, Ashland, Virginia
- 1913 **USA**  
 *Medea*; performed by students at Wabash College, Crawfordsville, Indiana
- 1914 **USA**  
 *Medea*; translated from Euripides by Gilbert Murray; directed by Maurice Browne; Little Theatre, Chicago, Illinois
- 1915 **USA**  
 *Medea*; translated from Euripides by Gilbert Murray; music composed by Walter Damrosch; directed by Margaret Anglin; performed at the University of California at Berkeley (Margaret Anglin as Medea)
- 1917 **USA**  
 *Medea*; performed by students at Bates College, Lewiston, Maine



1918 **Germany**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff; directed by Johannes Tralow; performed at the Stadttheater, Nuremberg

**USA**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Gilbert Murray; music composed by Walter Damrosch; performed at Carnegie Hall, New York (Margaret Anglin as Medea)

1919 **Britain**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Gilbert Murray; performed in London (Sybil Thorndike as Medea)

**Germany**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff; directed by Johannes Tralow

1920 **Austria**

*Medea*; film, adapted and directed by K. Teme

**USA**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Gilbert Murray; directed by Maurice Browne; Little Theatre, Chicago, Illinois; performed at the Garrick Theatre, New York (Ellen Van Volkenburg as Medea)

*Medea*; directed by Mabel K. Whiteside; performed in ancient Greek by students at Randolph-Macon College, Ashland, Virginia

1921 **Czech Republic**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ferdinand Stiebitz; directed by K. H. Hilar; National Theatre, Prague (Leopolda Dostalová as Medea)

**USA**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Gilbert Murray; performed in New York (Margaret Anglin as Medea)

1923 **Germany**

*Medea*; Theater Darmstadt, Darmstadt

**USA**

*Medea*; performed by students at Bates College, Lewiston, Maine

*Medea*; performed by students at Occidental College, Los Angeles, California

*Medea*; performed by students at Wells College, Aurora, New York

1924 **Germany**

*Medea*; directed by Germanowa; performed at the Künstlertheater, Berlin (Germanowa as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff; directed by Johannes Tralow; performed at the Stadttheater, Frankfurt am Main

- Poland**  
*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Jan Kasprowicz; directed by Stanisława Wysocka (Stanisława Wysocka as Medea)
- 1925 **Britain**  
*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Gilbert Murray; performed at Christ Church, Oxford (Sybil Thorndike as Medea)
- USA**  
*Medea*; performed by students at the University of Chicago, Illinois
- 1926 **Germany**  
*Medea*; adaptation by Hans Henny Jahnn; directed by Fehling; Staatstheater, Berlin (Agnes Straub as Medea)
- 1927 **Britain**  
*Medea*; performed at the Prince's Theatre, London
- France**  
*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Gilbert Murray; performed in Paris (Sybil Thorndike as Medea)
- Germany**  
*Medea*; adaptation by Johannes Tralow; performed at the Königliches Staatstheater, Kassel
- Italy**  
*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ettore Romagnoli; directed by Ettore Romagnoli; Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico; performed at the Teatro Greco, Syracuse, Sicily (Maria Letizia Celli as Medea)
- Slovenia**  
*Medea*; directed by A. Danilova; performed at Slovensko Narodno Gledališče Ljubljani
- 1928 **Germany**  
*La Délivrance de Thésée*; opera composed by Darius Milhaud; performed in Wiesbaden
- South Africa**  
*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Gilbert Murray (Sybil Thorndike as Medea)
- USA**  
*Medea*; performed by students at Pennsylvania State College
- 1929 **South Africa**  
*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Gilbert Murray (Sybil Thorndike as Medea)
- 1930 **USA**  
*Medea*; performed by students at the University of Iowa
- 1931 **France**  
*Asie*; adaptation by Henri Lenormand; performed at the Théâtre Antoine, Paris

**Sweden**

*Medea*; orchestration composed by Hilding Rosenberg; performed in Stockholm

1932 **Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Theoni Drakopoulou; directed by Alex Philadelphus; Euripides Dramatic Group; performed at Herodes Atticus, Athens (Angeliki Kotsali as Medea)

**USA**

*Medea*; performed by students at Wellesley College, Massachusetts

1933 **Britain**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Gilbert Murray; performed at Wyndham's Theatre, London

**Germany**

*Medea*; adaptation by Franz Grillparzer; directed by Agnes Straub

**Spain**

*Medea*; adaptation from Seneca by Miguel de Unamuno; directed by Cipriano Rivas Cherif; performed in Mérida

1934 **Spain**

*Medea*; adaptation from Seneca by Miguel de Unamuno; directed by Cipriano Rivas Cherif; performed in Mérida

**USA**

*Medea*; performed by students at Pacific Union College, Los Angeles, California

1935 **USA**

*Medea*; adaptation by Countee Cullen; performed in New York

1936 **USA**

*The Wingless Victory*; adaptation by Maxwell Anderson; directed by Guthrie McClintic; performed at the Empire Theatre, New York (Katherine Cornell as 'Oparre')

*Medea*; performed by students at Albright College, Reading, Pennsylvania

1938 **France**

*Médée*; opera composed by Darius Milhaud; directed by Charles Dullin; performed at the Opéra, Paris (Marisa Ferrer as Medea)

**USA**

*Medea*; directed by Mabel K. Whiteside; performed in Ancient Greek by students at Randolph-Macon Women's College, Ashland, Virginia

1939 **Belgium**

*Medea*; opera composed by Darius Milhaud; performed at the Opéra Flamand, Antwerp

**Italy**

*Medea*; music composed by G. F. Ghedini; performed at the Teatro Romano di Ostia Antica



- 1941 **Britain**  
*Medea*; performed by the Old Vic Company
- Czech Republic**  
*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ferdinand Stiebitz; directed by Karel Palouš; performed in Ostrava (Táňa Hodanová as Medea)
- 1942 **Czech Republic**  
*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ferdinand Stiebitz; directed by Karel Dostal; National Theatre, Prague (Olga Scheinpflugová as Medea)
- Greece**  
*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Lekatsas Panagis; music composed by M. Hadjidakis; directed by Takis Mouzenidis; Greek National Theatre; performed at Herodes Atticus, Athens (Elsa Vergi as Medea)
- 1943 **Britain**  
*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Rex Warner; Raynes Park County School, London (Vera Lewington as Medea)
- Czech Republic**  
*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ferdinand Stiebitz; directed by Karel Svoboda; performed in Olomouc
- 1944 **Czech Republic**  
*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ferdinand Stiebitz; directed by Tomáš Bok; performed in Poděbrady (Zuzana Kocová as Medea)
- 1945 **Germany**  
*Medea*; Stadtische Bühnen Regensburg
- 1946 **USA**  
*Cave of the Heart*; ballet choreographed by Martha Graham; music composed by Samuel Barber; performed at Columbia University, New York
- 1947 **Austria**  
*Medea Post Bellica*; adaptation by Franz Theodor Csokor; ? performed
- USA**  
*Medea*; adaptation by Robinson Jeffers; directed by John Gielgud; performed at the American National Theater, New York (Judith Anderson as Medea)
- 1948 **Britain**  
*Medea*; adaptation by Robinson Jeffers; directed by John Gielgud; Edinburgh Festival [transferred to the Globe Theatre, London, later that year] (Eileen Herlie as Medea)
- Czech Republic**  
*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ferdinand Stiebitz; directed by T. Bor; performed in Karlovy Vary

**Finland**

*Medeia*; directed by E. Kalima; performed at the National Theatre, Helsinki

**1948-9 Finland**

*Medeia*; performed at Tampereen Teatteri, Tampere

**1949 Britain**

*Medea*; radio broadcast; translated from Euripides by Gilbert Murray (Eileen Herlie as Medea)

**Germany**

*Medea*; directed by Roland Ricklinger; performed in Freiburg (Ruth Baldor as Medea)

**Italy**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ettore Romagnoli; directed by Guido Salvini; Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico; performed at the Teatro Romano di Ostia Antica (Sarah Ferrati as Medea)

*La lunga notte di Medea*; adaptation by Corrado Alvaro; music composed by Ildebrando Pizzetti

**USA**

*Medea*; adaptation by Robinson Jeffers; directed by John Gielgud; American National Theater; performed at the New York City Centre (Judith Anderson as Medea)

**1950 France**

*Médée*; translated from Euripides by Louis Méridier; directed by Luchino Visconti directed by Xavier de Courville; Groupe de Théâtre Antique de la Sorbonne; performed in Paris

**Sweden**

*Medea*; ballet choreographed by Birgit Cullberg; Robinson Jeffers's text as libretto; performed at Riksteatern, Gävle

**1951 Germany**

*Medea*; adaptation by Robinson Jeffers; directed by Guthrie McClintic; performed at the Hebbeltheater, Berlin (Judith Anderson as Medea)

**USA**

*Medea*; dance-theatre; choreographed by Lester Horton; music composed by Audree Covington; Dance Theater Company; performed at the Ojai Music Festival, Los Angeles, California

**1953 France**

*Médée*; adaptation by Jean Anouilh; performed at the Théâtre d'Atelier, Paris (Michèle Alfa as Medea)

**Italy**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Manara Valgimigli; directed by Luchino Visconti; performed at the Teatro di via Manzoni, Milan (Sarah Ferrati as Medea)

*Medea*; opera composed by Pietro Canonica; performed at the Teatro dell'Opera, Rome

*Medea*; opera composed by Luigi Cherubini; performed in Florence (Maria Callas as Medea)

**Yugoslavia**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by M. Djurić; directed by H. Klajn; National Theatre, Belgrade

**USA**

*Medea*; musical dramatic monologue for contralto (or soprano) and orchestra composed by Ernst Křenek, using Robinson Jeffers's text; performed at the Ojai Music Festival, Los Angeles, California

1954 **Germany**

*Medea*; performed by Landesbühne Niedersachsen Nord in Wilhelmshaven

1955 **Britain**

*Medea*; directed by Peter Fish; performed in Ancient Greek by King's College London (Pat Moss as Medea)

**Israel**

*Medea*; directed by Peter Frye; performed at the Habimah National Theatre, Tel Aviv (Hana Rovina as Medea)

**Portugal**

*Medeia*; translated from Euripides by Maria Helena da Rocha Pereira; directed by Paulo Quintela; performed at the University of Coimbra (Lídia Vinha as Medea)

**Spain**

*Medea*; adaptation from Seneca by Jaime Ferranza; directed by Álvaro J. Castellanos; performed in Mérida

1956 **France**

*Médée*; directed by Jean Gillibert; Groupe de Théâtre Antique de la Sorbonne; performed in Paris

**Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Pantelis Prevelakis; music composed by M. Hadzidakis; directed by Alexis Minotis; Greek National Theatre; performed at Epidaurus (Katina Paxinou as Medea)

1957 **France**

*Médée*; directed by Jean Gillibert; Groupe de Théâtre Antique de la de Sorbonne; performed in Paris

**Germany**

*Medea*; performed by Theater Konstanz

**Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Pantelis Prevelakis; directed by Alexis Minotis; Greek National Theatre; performed at Epidaurus (Katina Paxinou as Medea)

**Italy**

*Medea*; television production; translated from Euripides by Manara Valgimigli; directed by Sarah Ferrati (Sarah Ferrati as Medea)

**New Zealand**

*Medea*; directed by Peter Carey; performed at the Globe Theatre, Dunedin

1958 **Czech Republic**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ferdinand Stiebitz; directed by Miloslav Seeman; performed in Brno (Jarmila Lázničková as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ferdinand Stiebitz; directed by Milan Pásek; performed in Hradec Krajské (Jarmila Derková as Medea)

**Georgia**

*Medea*; directed by A. Chkhartistchvili; performed at Mardgianischvili, Tbilisi (Veriko Andjaparidze as Medea)

**Germany**

*Medea*; adaptation by Matthias Braun; performed at the Luisenburger Festspiele

**Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Pantelis Prevelakis; directed by Alexis Minotis; Greek National Theatre; performed at Epidaurus (Katina Paxinou as Medea)

**Italy**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ettore Romagnoli; directed by Virginio Puecher; Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico; performed at the Teatro Greco, Syracuse, Sicily (Lilla Brignone as Medea)

**Spain**

*Medea*; adaptation from Euripides by Alfonso Sastre; directed by Jose Tamayo; performed in Mérida

**USA**

*Medea*; opera composed by Luigi Cherubini; performed in Dallas, Texas (Maria Callas as Medea)

1959 **Britain**

*Medea*; opera composed by Luigi Cherubini; performed at Covent Garden, London (Maria Callas as Medea)

**Italy**

*I Figli di Medea*; television

**Georgia**

*Medea*; directed by G. Sulikashvili; performed at the S. Chanba Sukhumi State Dramatic Theatre (M. Zukhba as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea*; directed by Dimitris Rondiris (Aspasia Papathanasiou as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Malena Anousaki; directed by Lykourgos Kallogis (Malena Anousaki as Medea); touring production

**Spain**

*Medea*; adaptation by Juan Germán Schroeder; directed by Armando Moreno; performed in Mérida



**USA**

*Medea*; film adaptation of Robinson Jeffers's adaptation; directed by José Quintero (Judith Anderson as Medea)

*Medea in Africa*; adaptation by Countee Cullen; directed by Owen Dodson; performed in Washington, DC

1960 **Belgium**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by E. Dewaele; directed by J. Dua; performed at the Royal Flamand, Antwerp (Gella Allaert as Medea)

**Hungary**

*Medea*; performed at the National Theatre, Pécs

**Italy**

*I Giganti della Tessaglia*; film

**Poland**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Stanisław Miller; directed by Lidia Słomczyńska; performed at Kameralny, Kraków (Lidia Słomczyńska as Medea)

1961 **Germany**

*Medea*; directed by Fr. Siems; performed at the Bühnen der Stadt Essen

**Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Dimitris Sarros; directed by Dimitris Rondiris (Aspasia Papathanasiou as Medea)

*Medea*; opera composed by Luigi Cherubini; directed by Alexis Minotis; performed at Epidaurus (Maria Callas as Medea)

**India**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Rex Warner; directed by E. Alkazi; Theatre Unit, Bombay (Usha Amin as Medea)

**Russia**

*Medea*; directed by N. Okhlopkov; performed at the Mayakovsky, Moscow

1962 **Czech Republic**

*Medea*; adaptation by Robinson Jeffers; performed in Prague

*Medea*; adaptation by Jean Anouilh; performed in Prague

**Georgia**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by P. Beradze; directed by A. Chkhartishvili (Veriko Andjaparidze as Medea)

**Germany**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ludwig Wolde; directed by Karl Heinz Stroux; performed in Düsseldorf (Maria Wimmer as Medea)

*Medea*; performed at the Städtische Bühnen Duisburg, Germany

**Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Dimitris Sarros; directed by Dimitris Rondiris; Piraikon Theatron (Aspasia Papathanasiou as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Linos Karzis; directed by Linos Karzis; Thymelikos Thiasos; performed at Herodes Atticus, Athens (Malena Anousaki as Medea)

**Italy**

*Medea*; opera composed by Luigi Cherubini performed at La Scala, Milan (Maria Callas as Medea)

**Poland**

*Medea*; adaptation by Stanisław Dygat; directed by Jerzy Markuszewski; performed at Dramatyczny, Warsaw (Halina Mikołajska as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Stanisław Dygat; directed by Jerzy Pieśniarowicz

**1963 Germany**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ludwig Wolde; directed by Karl Heinz Stroux (Maria Wimmer as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Linos Karzis; directed by Linos Karzis; performed in Athens (Malena Anousaki as Medea)

**Portugal**

*Medeia*; translated from Euripides by Dimitris Sarros; directed by Dimitris Rondiris; Piraikon Theatron; performed at the Cinema Tivoli, Lisbon [also performed that year in Germany and Spain] (Aspasia Papathanasiou as Medea)

**1964 Georgia**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Dimitris Sarros; directed by Dimitris Rondiris; Piraikon Theatron; performed at the Paliashvili Tbilisi Opera and Ballet State Academic Theatre [also performed that year in Spain and the USA] (Aspasia Papathanasiou as Medea)

**Germany**

*Medea*; adaptation by Hans Henny Jahnn; directed by Hansgünther Heyme; performed in Wiesbaden

**Mexico**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by A. Garibay; directed by J. Solé; Patronato de Teatros de Seguro Social (Ofelia Guilmain as Medea)

**Slovenia**

*Medea*; directed by A. Slieng; performed at Slovensko Narodno Gledališče Ljubljani

**1965 Czech Republic**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Václav Renc; directed by Radim Koval; performed at the State Theatre, Ostrava (Zora Rozsypalová as Medea)

**Denmark**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by A. Garff; directed by S. Besekow; performed at Det kongelige Teater (Bodil Kjer as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Dimitris Sarros; directed by Dimitris Rondiris; Piraikon Theatron; performed at Herodes Atticus, Athens [also performed that year in Santiago, Chile] (Aspasia Papathanasiou as Medea)

**Russia**

*Medea*; directed by N. Okhlopkov; performed at the Mayakovsky, Moscow (E. Kozyreva as Medea)

**USA**

*Medea*; adaptation by Robinson Jeffers; directed by Cyril Simon; performed in New York (Gloria Foster as Medea)

*Medea at Kolchis, the Maiden Head*; adaptation by Robert Duncan; performed at the University of California at Berkeley

1966 **Austria**

*Medea*; adaptation by Jean Anouilh; performed by students at the University of Vienna (Erika Pluhar as Medea)

**Cyprus**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Dimitris Sarros; directed by Dimitris Rondiris; Piraikon Theatron (Elsa Vergi as Medea)

**Italy**

*Médée*; adaptation by Jean Anouilh; directed by Gian Carlo Menotti; performed in Rome

1967 **France**

*Medea*; directed by Jean-Louis Barrault; performed in Paris

**Georgia**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by P. Beradze; directed by A. Chkhartishvili

**Greece**

*Medea*; Thymelikos Thiasos (Eleni Sofra as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Dimitris Sarros; directed by Dimitris Rondiris; Piraikon Theatron (Maria Moscholiou as Medea)

**Sweden**

*Médée*; opera, composed by A. Kovách; adaptation by Jean Anouilh; directed by Ingmar Bergman

1968 **Czech Republic**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Václav Renc; directed by Milan Pásek; performed in Brno (Vlasta Peterková as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by E. Pherentinou; directed by Lampros Kostopoulos; Greek National Theatre; performed at Epidaurus (Aleka Katseli as Medea)

*The Return of Medea*; film; directed by J. Kristian

## USA

*The Golden Fleece*; opera; adaptation by Jean Anouilh; directed by Ingmar Bergman

*The Golden Fleece*; adaptation by A. R. Gurney; put on by Edward Albee at the Playwrights Unit of New York

## 1969 Greece

*Medea*; Greek National Theatre; performed at Herodes Atticus, Athens

*Medea 70*; film; directed by M. Papanikolaou

## Poland

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Jerzy Łanowski; directed by Michał Pawlicki; performed in Warsaw

## 1970 Brazil

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Aldomar Conrado and Carlos de Queiroz Telles; directed by Silnei Siqueira; Teatro Anchieta; performed in São Paulo (Cleyde Yaconis as Medea)

## Britain

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by David Thompson; directed by David Thompson; performed at the Greenwich Theatre, London (Katharine Blake as Medea)

## Greece

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by E. Pherentinou; directed by Lampros Kostopoulos; Greek National Theatre; performed at Epidaurus (Aleka Katseli as Medea)

## Italy

*Medea*; film; directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini (Maria Callas as Medea)

## Portugal

*Medea*; adaptation by Robinson Jeffers; directed by Tomaz Ribas; performed at the Palácio Nacional de Queluz, Sintra (Hermínia Tojal as Medea)

## USA

*Deafman Gance*; adaptation by Robert Wilson; directed by Robert Wilson

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Philip Vellacott

*Medea*; opera composed by Jonathan Elkus; performed at the University of Wisconsin Opera Theatre, Milwaukee

## 1971 Greece

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by E. Pherentinou; directed by Lampros Kostopoulos; Greek National Theatre; performed at Epidaurus (Elsa Vergi as Medea)

## Israel

*Medea*; directed by Yossi Yzraeli; performed at the Cameri Theatre, Tel Aviv (Hana Meron as Medea)



1972 **Britain**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Gail Rademacher; directed by Hovhanness I. Pilikian; performed at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford, Surrey (Margaret Whiting as Medea)

**Czech Republic**

*Medea*; adaptation by Robinson Jeffers; performed in Most

*Medea*; adaptation by Jean Anouilh; performed in Most

**Italy**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Carlo Diano; directed by Franco Enríquez; Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico; performed at the Teatro Greco, Syracuse, Sicily (Valeria Moriconi as Medea)

*Medea*; television production of a performance near Pisa; directed by Paolo Benvenuti

**Poland**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Jerzy Łanowski; directed by Stanisław Wieszczycki; performed in Białystok

**Zimbabwe [Rhodesia]**

*Medea*; directed by Adrian Stanley; performed at the Reps Theatre, Harare [Salisbury] (Pauline Bailey as Medea)

**USA**

*Medea*; directed by Andrei Șerban; performed at Café La Mama, New York (Priscilla Smith as Medea)

1973 **Czech Republic**

*Medea*; adaptation by Robinson Jeffers; performed in Prague

*Medea*; adaptation by Jean Anouilh; performed in Prague

**Germany**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Curt Woyte; directed by Christian Bleyhoeffer; performed at the Bühnen der Stadt Gera (Otti Planerer as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by E. Pherentinou; directed by Kostis Michaelidis; State Theatre of Northern Greece; performed at Philippi (Elsa Vergi as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by E. Pherentinou; directed by Lampros Kostopoulos; Greek National Theatre; performed at Epidaurus (Aleka Katseli as Medea)

**USA**

*Medea*; adaptation by Minos Volanakis; directed by Minos Volanakis; performed at the Circle in the Square, New York (Irene Pappas as Medea)

*Medea*; directed by William Graham and Mercedes McCambridge; performed at the Catholic University, Washington, DC

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Rex Warner; directed by George Arkas; performed at the Players Theatre, New York (Yula Gavalas as Medea)

1974 **Britain**

*Medea*; music composed by Philip F. Radcliffe; performed in Ancient Greek at Cambridge University (M. M. McCabe as Medea)

*Medea*; orchestration composed by Philip F. Radcliffe; performed in London

**Czech Republic**

*Medea*; adaptation by Jean Anouilh; performed in Liberec

**Germany**

*Medeaspiel*; adaptation; written and directed by Heiner Müller

**Greece**

*Medea*; Greek National Theatre; performed at Herodes Atticus, Athens

**Poland**

*Medea*; directed by Jerzy Hoffman; performed by Teatr Nowy in Łódź.

**USA**

*Medea (Fragments of a Trilogy)*; adaptation by Andrei Șerban; music composed by Elizabeth Swados; directed by Andrei Șerban; La Mama; performed in New York

*Medea and Jason*; adaptation (of Jeffers's adaptation) by Eugenie Leontovich; directed by Eugenie Leontovich; performed at the Little Theater, New York (Maria Aho as Medea)

1975 **Britain**

*Medea (Fragments of a Trilogy)*; adaptation by Andrei Șerban; music composed by Elizabeth Swados; directed by Andrei Șerban; La Mama; performed in Edinburgh [also performed that year in Athens and Berlin] (Priscilla Smith as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea*; directed by Spyros Evangelatos; State Theatre of Northern Greece

**Italy**

*Medea*; ballet choreographed by John Butler; music composed by Samuel Barber; performed in Spoleto (Carla Fracci as Medea)

**USA**

*Medea*; directed by Herberto Dume; performed at the Dume Spanish Theatre (Virginia Arrea as Medea)

1976 **Britain**

*Medea*; directed by Deborah Lee; performed in Ancient Greek by King's College London (Deborah Lee as Medea)

**Germany**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ernst Buschor; directed by Franco Enríquez; performed in Munich (Lola Muthel as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ernst Buschor; directed by Hans Neuenfels and Walter Pfaff; performed at the Schauspielhaus, Frankfurt (Elisabeth Trissenaar as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Minos Volanakis; directed by Minos Volanakis; State Theatre of Northern Greece; first performed at Didimoticho, Evros (Melina Mercouri as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Pantelis Prevelakis; directed by Alexis Solomos; Greek National Theatre; performed at Epidaurus (Eleni Hatziargyri as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Myrto Paraschi; directed by Myrto Paraschi; Teatro Re; performed at Epidaurus

*Medea*; opera composed by Theodore Antoniou; performed in Thessaloniki

**USA**

*Medea (Kings)*; dance-drama; performed at the Alvin Theatre, New York (Emily Frankel as Medea)

1977 **Czech Republic**

*Medea*; adaptation by Robinson Jeffers; performed in Liberec

**Germany**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Alfred S. Kessler; directed by Peter Ries (Almuth Schmidt as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ernst Buschor; directed by Hans Neuenfels and Walter Pfaff; performed in Berlin (Elisabeth Trissenaar as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea*; Greek National Theatre; performed at Herodes Atticus theatre, Athens

**Italy**

*Medea (Female Parts)*; one-act mime adaptation by Dario Fo and Franca Rame

*Medea*; adaptation from Euripides by Roberto De Anna; Cooperativo Teatro della Selva; performed at the Teatro Gnomo, Milan

**Poland**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Jerzy Łanowski; directed by Hanna Skarzanka; performed in Warsaw

**South Africa**

*Medea*; adaptation by Franz Grillparzer; further adaptation by Barney Simon; directed by Barney Simon; performed at the Space Theatre, Cape Town (Yvonne Bryceland as Medea)

**USA**

*Medea*; ballet choreographed by Michael Smuin; music composed by Samuel Barber; performed in San Francisco, California

1978 **Czech Republic**

*Medea*; adaptation by Jean Anouilh; directed by L. Engelová; performed in Plzeň

**Georgia**

*Medea*; ballet choreographed by Georgy Aleksidze; music composed by Revaz Gabichvadze; directed by Georgy Aleksidze (I. Jandieri as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Pantelis Prevelakis; directed by Alexis Solomos; Greek National Theatre; performed at Epidaurus (E. Hadziargyri as Medea)

*A Dream of Passion*; film adaptation by Jules Dassin; directed by Jules Dassin (Melina Mercouri as 'Maya', the actress playing Medea; Ellen Burstyn as 'Brenda', the mother)

**Japan**

*Medea*; adaptation from Euripides by Mutsuo Takahashi; directed by Yukio Ninagawa; Toho Company; performed at the Nissei Theatre, Tokyo (Mikijiro Hira as Medea)

**Poland**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Stanisław Dygat; directed by Stanisław Brejdygant; performed in Warsaw

**USA**

*Medea*; adaptation by Robinson Jeffers; directed by Jim Honeyman; performed by students at the University of Iowa (Neave Cathcart Rake as Medea)

1979 **Bulgaria**

*Medea*; directed by Ljuben Groiss; performed in Plovdiv

**Poland**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Jerzy Łanowski; directed by Maria Teresa Wójcik; performed in Warsaw

**Spain**

*Medea*; adaptation by Juan Germán Schroeder; directed by José Tamayo; performed in Mérida

**USA**

*Black Medea*; adaptation by Ernest Ferlita; directed by Glenda Dickerson; New Federal Theatre; performed at the Harry DeJur Playhouse, New York

*Medea*; opera composed by Ray Edward Luke; libretto by Carveth Osterhaus; performed at the New England Conservatory, Boston, Massachusetts

*Medea*; adaptation by Jean-Claude Van Itallie; performed in Kent, Ohio

1980 **Czech Republic**

*Medea*; adaptation by Robinson Jeffers; performed in Karlovy Vary



*Medea*; adaptation by Jean Anouilh; performed in Karlovy Vary  
**France**

*Médée*; Comédie-Française; performed at the Palais des Papes, Avignon  
**Germany**

*Medea*; adaptation by Michael Koerber; directed by Michael Koerber; performed in Stuttgart (Edith Baumker as Medea)

**Portugal**

*Medeia. Rito e cerimónia sobre uma lenda imortal*; adaptation by Juan Morillo; directed by Jesús Fuentes and Miguel A. Butler; Teatro Carrusel (Spain); performed at the Auditório Nacional Carlos Alberto, Porto

**Switzerland**

*Medea*; adaptation by Hans Henny Jahnn; performed in Bern

**USA**

*Medea*; adaptation by Robinson Jeffers; performed in repertory by the Denver Center Theatre Company

**1980-1 Finland**

*Medeia*; performed at Svenska Teatern, Helsinki

**1981 Czech Republic**

*Medea*; adaptation (of Ferdinand Stiebitz's translation) by Ivan Balad'a; directed by Ivan Balad'a; performed in Olomouc (Miluše Hradská as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Václav Renc; directed by Milan Pásek; performed in Brno (Sylva Talpová as Medea)

*Medea*; adaptation by Jean Anouilh; performed in Prague

**Germany**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Peter Krumme; directed by Nicolas Brieger; performed in Düsseldorf (Barbara Petrisch as Medea)

*Medea*; adaptation from Euripides by Roberto Ciulli and Helmut Schafer; directed by Roberto Ciulli and Helmut Schafer; Theater an der Ruhr; performed in Stuttgart (Veronica Bayer as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Peter Krumme; adaptation by Gabriele Grimpe; directed by Barbara Bilabel; Deutsches Schauspielhaus, Hamburg (Hildegard Schmahl as Medea)

*Medea*; adaptation by Hans Henny Jahnn; directed by Ernst Wendt; Münchner Kammerspiele, Munich

**Israel**

*Medea*; directed by David Levin; performed at the Habimah National Theatre, Tel Aviv (Miriam Zohar as Medea)

**Spain**

*Medea*; adaptation by Juan Germán Schroeder; directed by L. Pasqual; performed at the Teatre Grec, Barcelona

**Switzerland**

*Medea*; directed by Luca Ronconi; performed in Zurich

**USA**

*Medea*; adaptation from Euripides by Robert Hyde Wilson and Minos Volanakis; directed by Robert Hyde Wilson; performed by students at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City (Gail Hickman as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Nina Kaminer; directed by Nina Kaminer; performed by students at Amherst College, Massachusetts (Paura Patricia Carrington as Medea)

*Medea*; adaptation by Robinson Jeffers; performed in repertory by the Denver Center Theater Company

**1982 Britain**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Philip Vellacott; directed by George Eugeniou; Teatro Technis (The Cypriot Community), London (Angelique Rockas as Medea)

**Germany**

*Medea*; directed by Henri Hohenemser (Jutta Eckhardt as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Nikos Parikos; directed by Nikos Parikos; Half State Theatre of the Aegean Islands (Marina Gazetta as Medea)

**Russia**

*Medea*; ballet; music composed by R. Gabichvadze; Samarkand Opera and Ballet State Theatre

**USA**

*Overture to the Fourth Act of Deafman Glance*; adaptation by Robert Wilson; directed by Robert Wilson

*Cave of the Heart*; ballet choreographed by Martha Graham; music composed by Samuel Barber; performed in New York

*Medea*; adaptation by Robinson Jeffers; directed by Robert Whitehead; American National Theater; performed at the Kennedy Center, Washington, DC (Zoe Caldwell as Medea)

*Medea*; opera composed by Luigi Cherubini; performed at the City Opera, New York

**1982-3 Finland**

*Medeian lapset*; devised by Suzanne Osten and Per Lysander; performed at the Vihreä Omena, Helsinki

**1983 Britain**

*Medea*; adaptation by Robinson Jeffers; directed by Angela Langfield; Royal Academy of Dramatic Art; performed at the Vanbrugh Theatre, London (Janet McTeer as Medea)

*Medea*; adaptation by Franz Grillparzer; further adaptation by Barney Simon; directed by Barney Simon; performed at the Edinburgh Festival (Yvonne Bryceland as Medea)

**Czech Republic**

*Medea*; adaptation by Robinson Jeffers; performed in Prague

*Medea*; adaptation by Jean Anouilh; performed in Prague

**France**

*Médée*; adaptation by Junji Fuseya and Philippe Franchini; directed by Junji Fuseya; Théâtre du Temps, Paris

**Germany**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Peter Krumme; directed by Achim Thorwald; performed in Würzburg (Wiebke Weggemann as Medea)

*Medeamaterial (Verkommenes Ufer; Medeamaterial; Landschaft mit Argonauten)*; adaptation by Heiner Müller; performed at the Schauspielhaus, Bochum

**Italy**

*Medea*; adaptation from Euripides by Mutsuo Takahashi; directed by Yukio Ninagawa; Toho Company; performed in Rome [also performed that year in Athens and Osaka] (Mikijiro Hira as Medea)

**Portugal**

*Os Encantos de Medeia*; adaptation by António José da Silva; directed by Castro Guedes; Teatro Estúdio de Arte Realista; performed at the Auditório Nacional Carlos Alberto, Porto (Fátima Castro as Medea)

**Spain**

*Medea*; directed by Manuel Canseco; Compañía Española de Teatro Clásico; performed in Mérida

**USA**

*Medea*; directed by Amy Saltz; Playhouse in the Park, Cincinnati, Ohio

*Medea*; adaptation by Shozo Sato; directed by Shozo Sato; Wisdom Bridge, Chicago, Illinois (Barbara Robertson as Medea)

*Medea (Orgasmo Adulto Escapes from the Zoo)*; one-act mime adaptation by Dario Fo and Franca Rame; performed at the Public Theater, New York (Estelle Parsons as Medea)

*Medea Sacrament*; adaptation by Conrad Bishop and Elizabeth Fuller; performed at the CSC Repertory Theater, New York

*Medea*; adaptation by Robinson Jeffers; performed in repertory by the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis

*Medea*; television adaptation of Robinson Jeffers's adaptation; directed for television by Mark Cullingham, based on the stage direction of Robert Whitehead (Zoe Caldwell as Medea)

**1984 France**

*Medea*; operatic adaptation by Robert Wilson; composed by Gavin Bryars; directed by Robert Wilson; performed in Lyon

*Medea*; opera composed by Marc-Antoine Charpentier; performed in Lyon

*Médée*; adaptation by Junji Fuseya and Philippe Franchini; directed by Junji Fuseya; Théâtre du Temps, Paris

**Georgia**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by P. Beradze; directed by R. Mirtskhulava (Z. Kverenchkhiladze as Medea)

**Germany**

*Medea*; directed by Eva Niedermeiser; Württembergische Landesbühne Esslingen, Germany (Sabine Hahn as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Diagoras Chronopoulos; directed by Diagoras Chronopoulos; Cyprus Theatre Organization; performed at Epidaurus

**Japan**

*Medea*; adaptation from Euripides by Mutsuo Takahashi; directed by Yukio Ninagawa; Toho Company [also performed that year in Athens, Rimini, and southern France] (Mikijiro Hira as Medea)

**Portugal**

*Medeia—O amor de uma mulher*; adaptation by Maricla Boggio; directed by Júlio Cordoso; Seiva Trupe; performed at the Sala da Cooperativa do Povo Portuense, Porto (Estrela Novais as Medea)

**Spain**

*Medea*; ballet choreographed by José Granero; music composed by Manolo Sanlúcar; Ballet Nacional de España; performed in Mérida

**USA**

*Medea and the Doll*; adaptation by Rudi Gray; directed by Rany Frazier; performed at the Frank Sivera Workshop, Harlem, New York

*Medea*; adaptation by Robinson Jeffers; performed in repertory by the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis

1985 **Australia**

*Medea*; opera composed by Felix Werder; performed at the Melbourne College of Advanced Education

**Britain**

*Medea*; directed by Nancy Meckler; touring production by the Leicester Haymarket Studio Company [ran at the Almeida Theatre, London, later that year] (Linda Bassett as Medea)

**France**

*Médée*; adaptation by Junji Fuseya and Philippe Franchini; directed by Junji Fuseya; Théâtre du Temps, Paris

**Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Minos Volanakis; directed by Minos Volanakis; Theatro Athinaion (Karezi-Karakos); performed at Herodes Atticus, Athens (Jennie Karezi as Medea)



**Japan**

*Medea*; adaptation from Euripides by Mutsuo Takahashi; directed by Yukio Ninagawa; Toho Company; performed at the Zojo-ji Temple in Shiba, Tokyo (Mikijiro Hira as Medea)

**USA**

*Medea*; directed by Peter Steadman; performed in Ancient Greek by the New York Greek Drama Company, at the Triplex II Theater, New York (Lavinia Lorch as Medea)

*Medea*; adaptation by Shozo Sato; directed by Shozo Sato; performed at the Kennedy Centre, Washington, DC (Barbara Robertson as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Mary-Kay Gamel; directed by Christopher Grabowski; performed by students at the University of California, Santa Cruz (Patti Fitchen as Medea)

1986 **Britain**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Philip Vellacott; directed by Mary McMurray; performed at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith (Madhur Jaffrey as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by David Wiles; directed by Marina Caldarone; Theatre City; performed at the Gate Theatre, Notting Hill, London (Shireen Shah as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Philip Vellacott; directed by Nigel Parmenter and Richard Woolf; Croxleywood House Theatre Club, Rickmansworth (Irene Hardy as Medea)

*Medea*; adaptation from Euripides by Mutsuo Takahashi; directed by Yukio Ninagawa; Toho Company; performed in the courtyard of the Old College at the University of Edinburgh [also performed that year in New York and Vancouver] (Mikijiro Hira as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Jeremy Brooks; directed by Toby Robertson; Theatr Clwyd, Wales [transferred to the Young Vic, London, later that year] (Eileen Atkins as Medea)

*Medea*; performed in drag by the GAG theatre company at the London Gay and Lesbian Festival

**Germany**

*Medea (Trilogie der Leidenschaften 1)*; adaptation by Alexander Lang; directed by Alexander Lang; performed at the Deutsches Theater, Berlin (Katja Paryla as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Peter Krumme; directed by Henri Hohenemser; performed in Augsburg (Gudrun Erfurth as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Giorgis Iatromanolakis; directed by John Theocharis and Aspasia Papathanasiou; Desmoi Cultural and

Artistic Association; performed at Herodes Atticus, Athens (Aspasia Papathanasiou as Medea)

**Portugal**

*Medeia*; directed by Atanasse Bahtchevanov; Companhia de Teatro da Juventude de Gorna Oriahovítza (Bulgaria); performed at the Auditório Nacional Carlos Alberto, Porto

**USA**

*Medea*; video; directed by Peter Steadman; performed in Ancient Greek by the New York Greek Drama Company (Lavinia Lorch as Medea)

*Medea*; adaptation by Claire Bush and Alkis Papoutsis; Pan Asian Repertory Company; performed at the Susan Bloch Theatre, New York

1987 **Britain**

*Medea*; adaptation from Euripides by Mutsuo Takahashi; directed by Yukio Ninagawa; Point Tokyo; performed at the Royal National Theatre, London (Tokusaburo Arashi as Medea)

**Germany**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Johann Jakob Christian Donner; adaptation by Wolfgang Trevisany and Raymund Richter; directed by Raymund Richter (Ulla Willick as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea's Summer*; film adaptation; directed by B. Plaitakis

**USA**

*Medea*; adaptation by Charles Ludlam; Ridiculous Theatre Company; performed at the Charles Ludlam Theater, New York

1988 **Britain**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Rex Warner; directed by Peter Hilton; University College London Classical Society; performed at the Bloomsbury Theatre, London (Julia Hagan as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Jeremy Brooks; directed by Alan England; performed in Sheffield (Helen McCallum as Medea)

**Czech Republic**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Václav Renc; directed by J. Budínský; performed in Cheb (Jarmila Simčíková as Medea)

**Denmark**

*Medea*; film; adaptation by Carl T. Dreyer and Preben Thomsen; directed by Lars von Trier (Kirsten Oleson as Medea)

**Germany**

*Medeamaterial*; adaptation by Heiner Müller; directed by Theodoros Terzopoulos; ATTIS Theatrical Group; performed at Theater Manufaktur, Berlin [also performed that year in Mérida, Spain]

**Ireland**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Brendan Kennelly; directed by Ray Yeates; Medea Productions; performed at the Dublin Theatre Festival (Susan Curnow as Medea)

**Poland**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Maciej Słomczyński; directed by Zygmunt Hubner; performed in Warsaw (Krystyna Janda as Medea)

**Portugal**

*Material Medeia*; adaptation by Heiner Müller; directed by Jorge Silva Melo in collaboration with Manuel Mozos; ACARTE; performed at the Sala Polivalente do Centro de Arte Moderna da Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon (Manuela de Freitas as Medea)

1989 **China**

*Medea*; adaptation from Euripides by Mutsuo Takahashi; directed by Yukio Ninagawa; Point Tokyo; performed at the Lyric Theatre, Hong Kong [also performed later that year in Kobe, Japan] (Tokusaburo Arashi as Medea)

**Germany**

*Medeas Kinder*; translated from Euripides by Hildegard Bergfeld; adaptation by Suzanne Osten and Per Lysander; directed by Hans-Jürgen Kuhnert; performed in Magdeburg (Barbara von Steuben as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Giorgis Iatromanolakis; directed by Aspasia Papathanasiou; Desmoi Cultural and Artistic Association; performed at Epidaurus (Aspasia Papathanasiou as Medea)

**Ireland**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Brendan Kennelly; directed by Ray Yeates; Medea Productions; performed at the Gate Theatre, Dublin [transferred to the Purcell Room, South Bank, London, later that year] (Susan Curnow as Medea)

**Italy**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Italo Lana; directed by Alvaro Piccardi; Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico; performed at the Teatro Antico di Segesta, Sicily

**Netherlands**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Gerard Koolschijn; directed by Gerardjan Rijnders; Toneelgroep, Amsterdam (Kitty Courbois as Medea)

**Portugal**

*Gota d'Água*; adaptation by Chico Buarque de Hollanda and Paulo Pontes; directed by Ulysses Cruz; Seiva Trupe; performed at the Teatro da Trindade, Lisbon

*Medea Material (Ribera Despojada, Medea Material, Paisagem com Argonautas)*; adaptation by Heiner Müller; directed by Carlos Marquerie; La Tartana Teatro (Spain)

**Romania**

*Medea (An Ancient Trilogy)*; directed by Andrei Șerban; performed in Ancient Greek, at the National Theatre, Bucharest

**Spain**

*Medea*; opera composed by Luigi Cherubini; directed by José Luis Alonso; performed in Mérida

1990 **Britain**

*Medea*; directed by Richard Syms; Operating Theatre Company; performed at the Duke's Head Theatre Club, Richmond, London (Christine Hoodith as Medea)

**Germany**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Peter Krumme; directed by Dieter Lobach; performed in Aachen (Chantal Le Moign as Medea)

*Medea*; adaptation by Heiner Müller; directed by Andreas Kriegenburg (Barbara Teuber as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Giorgos Chimonas; directed by Andreas Voutsinas; State Theatre of Northern Greece; performed in Thessaloniki (Lydia Photopoulou as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Nikos Flessas; directed by Michael Marmarinos; Diplous Eros; performed at the Ilisia Studio, Athens (Amalia Moutousi as Medea)

*Medeamaterial*; adaptation by Heiner Müller; directed by Theodoros Terzopoulos [also performed that year in Austria]

*Medeia*; directed by Vasilis Bountouris; performed in Ancient Greek (Athina Pappa as Medea)

**South Africa**

*DEMEA*; adaptation of Euripides by Gary Butler

**USA**

*Medea*; dance-theatre; choreographed by Ann Papoulis; performed in New York

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by E. P. Coleridge; directed by Shepard Sobel; Pearl Theater Company; performed in New York (Joanne Camp as Medea)

1991 **Britain**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Frederic Raphael and Kenneth Macleish; directed by Phyllida Lloyd; Royal Exchange Theatre Company, Manchester (Claire Benedict as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Clare Venables; directed by Clare Venables; Monstrous Regiment; performed at the Sherman Theatre, Cardiff (Ishia Bennison as Medea)

*Pecong*; adaptation by Steve Carter; directed by Paulette Randall; performed at the Tricycle Theatre, London (Jenny Jules as the Medea-figure 'Mediyah')



*Medea: SexWar*; operatic adaptation by Tony Harrison; directed by Janek Alexander; Volcano Theatre Company; performed at the Edinburgh Festival

**Germany**

*Medea*; adaptation by Georg Froscher and Kurt Bildstein; directed by Georg Froscher and Kurt Bildstein; performed in Munich (Kurt Bildstein as Medea)

*Medea*; adaptation by Herbert Adamec; Zimmertheater Tübingen

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Peter Krumme; directed by Christian Pade (Ursula Erb as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Giorgos Chimonas; directed by Andreas Voutsinas; State Theatre of Northern Greece (Lydia Photopoulou as Medea)

*Medea of a Desperately Closed Space*; experimental production directed by Michael Marmarinos

**Portugal**

*Os Encantos de Medeia*; adaptation by António José da Silva; directed by Helen Vaz; Marionetas de S. Lourenço; performed at the Teatro Académico de Gil Vicente, Coimbra

**Spain**

*Medea*; operatic adaptation by Mikis Theodorakis; performed in Bilbao

**USA**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Philip Vellacott; directed by Garland Wright; Guthrie Theater, Minneapolis, Minnesota (Brenda Wehle as Medea)

*Medea*; adaptation by Beverly Smith-Dawson; directed by Wendy Knox; Frank Theatre; performed in Minneapolis, Minnesota

1992 **Britain**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Alistair Elliot; directed by Jonathan Kent; Almeida Theatre Company (Diana Rigg as Medea)

*Medea: SexWar*; operatic adaptation by Tony Harrison; directed by Janek Alexander; Volcano Theatre Company, Wales; performed at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London

*Medea (It's All Bed, Board and Church)*; one-act mime adaptation by Dario Fo and Franca Rame; performed at Riverside Studios, Hammersmith, London

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Jeremy Brooks; directed by Lynne Brackley; Prometheus Theatre Company; performed at the Brixton Shaw Theatre, London (Heather Imani as Medea)

*Medea (The Ancient Trilogy)*; directed by Andrei Şerban; performed in Ancient Greek by the Romanian National Theatre, Bucharest, at the Edinburgh Festival (Maia Morgenstern as Medea)

**Czech Republic**

*Medeia*; translated from Euripides by Václav Renc; directed by Ivan Rajmont; National Theatre, Prague (Zuzana Bydžovská as Medea); this production ran for five subsequent years

**Germany**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Peter Krumme; adaptation by Beat Fah; directed by Beat Fah; Ulmer Theater, Ulm (Gaby Pochert as Medea)

*Medea (Das Medea-Projekt)*; translated from Euripides by Gerhard Piens; directed by Arne Retzlaff; performed in Dresden (Babette Kuschel as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea by Silence*; mime adaptation

**New Zealand**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Philip Vellacott; directed by Gail Tatham; Classics Department, University of Otago, Dunedin (Terry MacTavish as Medea)

**Portugal**

*Medeia é bom rapaz*; adaptation by Luiz Riaza; directed by Fernanda Lapa; Albino Moura; performed at the Teatro do Século, Lisbon

**Singapore**

*Medea*; adaptation from Euripides by Mutsuo Takahashi; directed by Yukio Ninagawa [also performed that year in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia] (Tokusaburo Arashi as Medea)

**USA**

*Medea*; directed by Keenan Hollahan; Greek Active; performed in Seattle, Washington (Mark Mitchell as Medea)

1993 **Britain**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Alistair Elliot; directed by Jonathan Kent; performed at Wyndham's Theatre, London (Diana Rigg as Medea)

*The Pan Beaters*; written by Stephen Landrigan; directed by Felix Cross; performed at Greenwich Theatre, London

**Germany**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Herbert Meier; directed by Gert Jurgons (Elke Richte as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Peter Krumme; directed by Ulrich Hub; performed in Darmstadt

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff; directed by Jurgen Kruse; performed in Frankfurt am Main (Anne Tismer as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea*; directed by Nikos Charalambous; National Theatre; performed at Epidaurus (Antigoni Valakou as Medea)

*Medea*; operatic adaptation by Mikis Theodorakis; performed at Herodes Atticus, Athens (Katerina Economou as Medea)

*Medea*; television broadcast; adaptation from Euripides by Mutsuo Takahashi; directed by Yukio Ninagawa (Tokusaburo Arashi as Medea)

**Ireland**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Brendan Kennelly; performed at Trinity College, Dublin

**Netherlands**

*Medea*; directed by Ursel Herrmann

**Portugal**

*Medeia*; directed by Yolanda Alves; Teatro de Papel; performed at the Sala Polivalente de Escola D. António da Costa, Almada

**Taiwan**

*Medea*; adaptation from Euripides by Mutsuo Takahashi; directed by Yukio Ninagawa; Point Tokyo; performed in Taipei [also performed that year in Japan and Switzerland] (Tokusaburo Arashi as Medea)

1994 **Britain**

*Medea*; adaptation by Jean Anouilh; Moscow Theatre Company; performed at the Edinburgh Festival (E. Makhonina as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Rex Warner; directed by Ann Neuff; Hitchin Girls' School, Hitchin, Hertfordshire (Rebecca Hunt as Medea)

*Medea*; directed by Dennis Douglas; touring production by Shoestring Theatre Company (Lisa Mason as Medea)

**Canada**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Anthony Podlecki; directed by Barry W. Levy; Magic Owl Theatre; performed in Vancouver, British Columbia (Catherine Williams as Medea)

**Germany**

*Medea*; adaptation by Holger Teschke; directed by Frank Lienert (Cornelia Schonwald as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea*; parody written by Mentis Bostantzoglou

**Japan**

*Medea*; adaptation from Euripides by Mutsuo Takahashi; directed by Yukio Ninagawa; Point Tokyo; performed at Yamanahi Prefectural Hall, Kofu (Tokusaburo Arashi as Medea)

**South Africa**

*Medea*; written from improvisation by Mark Fleishman; choreographed

by Alfred Hinkel; directed by Mark Fleishman and Jennie Reznek; performed in Capetown (Bo Petersen as Medea)

**USA**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Alistair Elliot; directed by Jonathan Kent; performed at the Longacre Theatre, New York (Diana Rigg as Medea)

*Médée*; opera composed by Marc-Antoine Charpentier; directed by Jean-Marie Villégier; performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music

1995 **France**

*Medea*; translated from Seneca by Florence Dupont; directed by Gilles Gleizes (Laurence Roy as Medea)

*Beloved; ou, La Médée du 124*; adaptation (of Toni Morrison's novel) by Garance; co-production of Compagnie de l'Obsidienne and Théâtre A. Toursky; performed in Marseilles

**Germany**

*Medea*; performed at the Schauspielhaus, Bochum

*Medea*; performed by Das TAT at the Bockenheimer Depot

**Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Giorgos Chimonas; audio recording on compact disc (Aspasia Papathanasiou as Medea)

*Medea*; directed by Giorgos Lazanis; Teatro Technis (Reni Pittaki as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Innokenty Annensky; choruses translated by Joseph Brodsky; directed by Yury Lyubimov; performed in Athens

**Italy**

*Medea*; adaptation by Franz Grillparzer; translated into Italian by Claudio Magris; directed by Nina Garella; Teatro Stabile del Friuli; performed at the Teatro Studio, Milan (Ottavia Piccolo as Medea)

**Japan**

*Medea*; adaptation from Euripides by Mutsuo Takahashi; directed by Yukio Ninagawa; Point Tokyo; performed at Miyagi Prefectural Hall, Sendai (Tokusaburo Arashi as Medea)

**Netherlands**

*Vertel, Medea, vertel*; adaptation by Pauline Mol; performed for 10- to 15-year-old children by the Artemis theatre group

**South Africa**

*Medea*; written from improvisation by Mark Fleishman; choreographed by Alfred Hinkel; directed by Mark Fleishman and Jennie Reznek; performed in Grahamstown (Bo Petersen as Medea)

**Sweden**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Agneta Pleijel and Jan Stolpe;



directed by Lennart Hjulström; Kungliga Dramatiska Teatern, Stockholm, Sweden (Stina Ekblad as Medea)

**USA**

*Medea*; directed by Larry L. West; performed by students at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City (Trudy Jorgenson as Medea)

*Medea, the Musical*; musical adaptation by John Fisher; choreographed by Jan Paik; directed by John Fisher; performed at the University of California at Berkeley

1996 **Australia**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Greg McCart; directed by Wayne Harrison and Chrissie Parrott; Sydney Theatre Company; performed at Wharf 1, Sydney (Sandy Gore as Medea)

**Britain**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by David Stuttard; directed by David Stuttard; Actors of Dionysus; performed at the Turtle Key Arts Centre, Fulham, London (Tamsin Shasha as Medea)

*Medea*; opera composed by Luigi Cherubini; translated from Euripides by Kenneth McLeish; directed by Phyllida Lloyd; Opera North; performed at the Grand Theatre, Leeds (Josephine Barstow as Medea)

*Medea in the Mirror*, adaptation by Jose Triana; directed by Yvonne Brewster; performed at the Brixton Shaw Theatre, London (Angela Wynters as the Medea-figure 'Maria')

*If I am Medea*; one-person show, written and directed by Zofia Kalinska; performed at the DeMarco Foundation Theatre, Edinburgh (Zofia Kalinska as Medea)

**Canada**

*Medea*; directed by Martin Boyne and Toph Marshall; Trent University Classics Drama Group; performed at Lady Eaton College, Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario (Kim O'Hearn as Medea)

**Germany**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Ernst Buschor; directed by Edith Clever; performed at the Schaubühne, Berlin (Edith Clever as Medea)

*Medea*; directed by Nada Kohatovic (Heike Trinker as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea*; adaptation by Jean Anouilh; performed in Megalo Papingo

**Italy**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Maria Grazia Ciani; directed by Mario Missiroli; Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico; performed at the Teatro Greco, Syracuse, Sicily (Valeria Moriconi as Medea)

*Medea*; directed by Luca Ronconi (Franco Branciaroli as Medea)

**Jordan**

*Medea*; adaptation from Euripides by Mutsuo Takahashi; directed by

Yukio Ninagawa [also performed that year in Cairo] (Tokusaburo Arashi as Medea)

#### Netherlands

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Gerard Koolschijn; directed by Agaath Witteman; Noord Nederlands Toneel; performed in Groningen (Josée Ruiter as Medea)

#### Portugal

*Medeia*; adaptation by Heiner Müller; directed by Theodoros Terzopoulos; ATTIS Theatrical Group (Greece); performed at the Palco Grande da Escola D. António da Costa, Almada (Alla Demidova as Medea)

#### South Africa

*Medea*; written from improvisation by Mark Fleishman; choreographed by Alfred Hinkel; directed by Mark Fleishman and Jennie Reznick; performed in Johannesburg (Bo Petersen as Medea)

#### USA

*Medea, the Musical*; musical adaptation by John Fisher; choreographed by Jan Paik; directed by John Fisher; performed at the Stage Door Theater, San Francisco, California

#### 1997 Britain

*Medea*; audiobook; translated from Euripides by David Stuttard; directed by David Stuttard; Actors of Dionysus (Tamsin Shasha as Medea)

*Medea*; directed by Tom Lewis; performed in Ancient Greek by King's College London (Kate Adams as Medea)

*Medea Media*; radio broadcast; translated from Euripides by Rod Wooden; directed by Kate Rowland (Geraldine James as Medea)

*Medea*; directed by Michael Toolan; performed at the Burton-Taylor Theatre, Oxford (Morenike Williams as Medea)

#### Czech Republic

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Václav Renc; directed by Karol Skladan; performed in Karlovy Vary (Lucie Domesová as Medea)

#### Georgia

*Medea: A World Apart*; from Euripides by Olga Taxidou; directed by Nana Kvashvadze; Tumanishvili Film Actors' Studio (Keti Dolidze as Medea)

#### Germany

*Medea-Stimmen*; adaptation from the novel by Christa Wolf; directed by Gunnar Petersen; Theaterzelt das Schloss, Munich (Beles Adam as Medea)

*Medea*; Staatstheater, Stuttgart

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Peter Krumme; Landestheater Schwaben

**Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Giorgos Chimonas; directed by Niketi Kontouri; Greek National Theatre (Karyophyllia Karambeti as Medea)

**Japan**

*Medea*; adaptation from Euripides by Mutsuo Takahashi; directed by Yukio Ninagawa; Point Tokyo; performed at Gunma Prefectural Hall, Maebashi (Tokusaburo Arashi as Medea)

**Russia**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Innokenty Annensky; choruses translated by Joseph Brodsky; directed by Yury Lyubimov; performed at the Taganka Theatre, Moscow (L. Selyutina as Medea)

**Spain**

*Medea*; Grupo Doménico de Toledo; performed at the Teatro Romano de Segóbriga

**USA**

*Cave of the Heart*; ballet choreographed by Martha Graham; music composed by Samuel Barber; Martha Graham Dance Company; performed in Fairbanks, Alaska

*Medeamaterial*; adaptation by Heiner Müller, translated by Mark von Henning; directed by Stephan Suschke; performed at the Castillo Theater, New York

1998

**Britain**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by J. Michael Walton; choreographed by Nike Imoru; directed by J. Michael Walton; Hull University Department of Drama, Hull (Nike Imoru as Medea)

*Medea: A Dance Drama in Eight Scenes*; dance-theatre; choreographed by Dimitris Papaioannou; directed by Dimitris Papaioannou; Edafos Dance Theatre; performed at Riverside Studios, Hammersmith, London (Angelliki Stelatou as Medea)

*Medea: A World Apart*; adaptation from Euripides by Olga Taxidou; directed by Nana Kvashvadze; Tumanishvili Film Actors' Studio; performed at the Edinburgh Festival [also performed that year at the Sarajevo Festival] (Keti Dolidze as Medea)

**Germany**

*Medea-Stimmen*; adaptation from the novel by Christa Wolf; directed by Gunnar Petersen (Beles Adam as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Giorgos Chimonas; directed by Niketi Kontouri; Greek National Theatre; performed at Herodes Atticus, Athens [also performed that year in Australia and the USA] (Karyophyllia Karambeti as Medea)

*Medea*; operatic adaptation; directed by Jinlin Luo; Hebei Bangzi Opera (China); performed at Delphi (Choui Cheng Peng as Medea)

*Medea*; adaptation from the novel by Christa Wolf; directed by Nikos Diamantis; performed at the Museum of Delphic Festivals, Delphi Israel

*Medea*; directed by Robert Woodroff; performed at the Habimah National Theatre, Tel Aviv (Gila Almagor as Medea)

#### Japan

*Medea*; adaptation from Euripides by Mutsuo Takahashi; directed by Yukio Ninagawa; performed at the Setagaya Public Theatre, Tokyo (Mikijiro Hira as Medea)

#### Portugal

*Jasão & Medea, o pesadelo do amor*; adaptation by Ricardo Carísio; directed by Ricardo Carísio; Companhia Absurda; performed at the Teatro Maria Matos, Lisbon (Maria Almeida as Medea)

*Escrita da Água (no rasto de Medeia)*; adaptation by Carlos Jorge Pessoa; directed by Carlos Jorge Pessoa; Teatro da Garagem; performed at the Grande Auditório do Rivoli, Teatro Municipal, Porto

#### Russia

*Medea*; directed by Hans-Ulrich Becker; State Theatre Stuttgart; performed at the Chekhov Art Theatre, Moscow

#### 1999 Britain

*Medea*; directed by Alan Beale; performed in Ancient Greek at Central Newcastle High School (Katherine Radice as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Dennis Douglas; directed by Dennis Douglas; touring production by Shoestring Theatre Company (Lisa Mason as Medea)

*Messing with Medea*; adaptation from Euripides by Bill Buffery; directed by Bill Buffery and David Farnsworth; Orchard Theatre Company; performed at the Other Place, Stratford (Gill Nathanson as Medea)

*Medea*; one-person mime adaptation; performed at the Hill Street Theatre, Edinburgh (Jonathan Burnett as Medea)

#### Germany

*Medea*; opera composed by Luigi Cherubini; libretto by François-Benoît Hoffman; performed in Trier (Sophia Larson as Medea)

#### Italy

*Medea*; translated from Seneca by Filippo Amoroso; directed by Marco Gagliardo; performed at the Teatro Greco di Palazzolo Acreide (Antonietta Carbonetti as Medea)

#### Japan

*Medea*; performed by the Greek National Theatre



**Poland**

*Medea: A World Apart*; adaptation from Euripides by Olga Taxidou; directed by Nana Kvashvadze; Tumanishvili Film Actors' Studio; performed in Warsaw [also performed that year in Moscow] (Keti Dolidze as Medea)

**Spain**

*Medea*; Grupo Doménico de Toledo; performed at the Teatro Romano de Segóbriga

**USA**

*Medea (Fragments of a Trilogy)*; adaptation by Andrei Șerban; music composed by Elizabeth Swados; directed by Andrei Șerban; performed at Café La Mama, New York (Karen Kandel as Medea)

*Medea Redux (Bash)*; written by Neil Labute; directed by Joe Mantello; performed at the Douglas Fairbanks Theater, New York

2000 **Australia**

*Medea*; devised and directed by Wesley Enoch; Sydney Theatre Company; performed at Wharf 2, Sydney (Tessa Rose as Medea; Justine Saunders as Older Medea)

**Britain**

*Medea Redux (Bash)*; written by Neil Labute; directed by Joe Mantello; Almeida Theatre, London (Mary McCormack as Medea)

*Medea*; adaptation by Liz Lochhead; directed by Graham McLaren; Theatre Babel; performed at the Tramway Theatre, Glasgow (Maureen Beattie as Medea)

*Medea*; directed by Josh Elwell; performed by students of Salisbury College at the Salisbury Playhouse, Wiltshire (Kate Ross as Medea)

**France**

*Médée*; translated from Euripides by Myrto Gondicas and Pierre Judet de la Combe; directed by Jacques Lassalle; performed at the Avignon Festival (Isabelle Huppert as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Daniel Mesguich; directed by Daniel Mesguich (Luce Mouchel as Medea)

**Germany**

*Medea*; directed by Andreas von Studnitz; performed at the Kleines Hause, Wiesbaden (Ragna Pitoll as Medea)

**Greece**

*Medea*; performed by Omada Edafous at the Dimotiko Theatro Papagou, Athens

*Medea—Exodus*; one-person show, written and directed by Yannis Kontrafouris; performed at the Delphi Festival (Maria Nafpliotou as Medea)

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by J. Michael Walton; scenes directed by J. Michael Walton; performed at the Delphi Festival (Nike Imoru as Medea)

*Tristia*; dramatic synthesis (of Euripides' *Medea*, Sophocles' *Electra*, and Marina Tsvetayeva's *Phaedra*) by Alla Demidova; performed at the Delphi Festival (Alla Demidova as Medea)

*Mystic Earth*; 'mythodrama' (based on Euripides' *Medea*, *Bacchae*, and *Trojan Women*) written and directed by Catherine Papaïacovou; performed at the Delphi Festival

#### **Ireland**

*Medea*; translated from Euripides by Kenneth McLeish; directed by Deborah Warner; National Theatre of Ireland; performed at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin (Fiona Shaw as Medea)

#### **Italy**

*Medea*; translated from Seneca by Filippo Amoroso; directed by Walter Pagliaro; performed at the Teatro Antico di Segesta, Sicily (Micaela Esdra as Medea)

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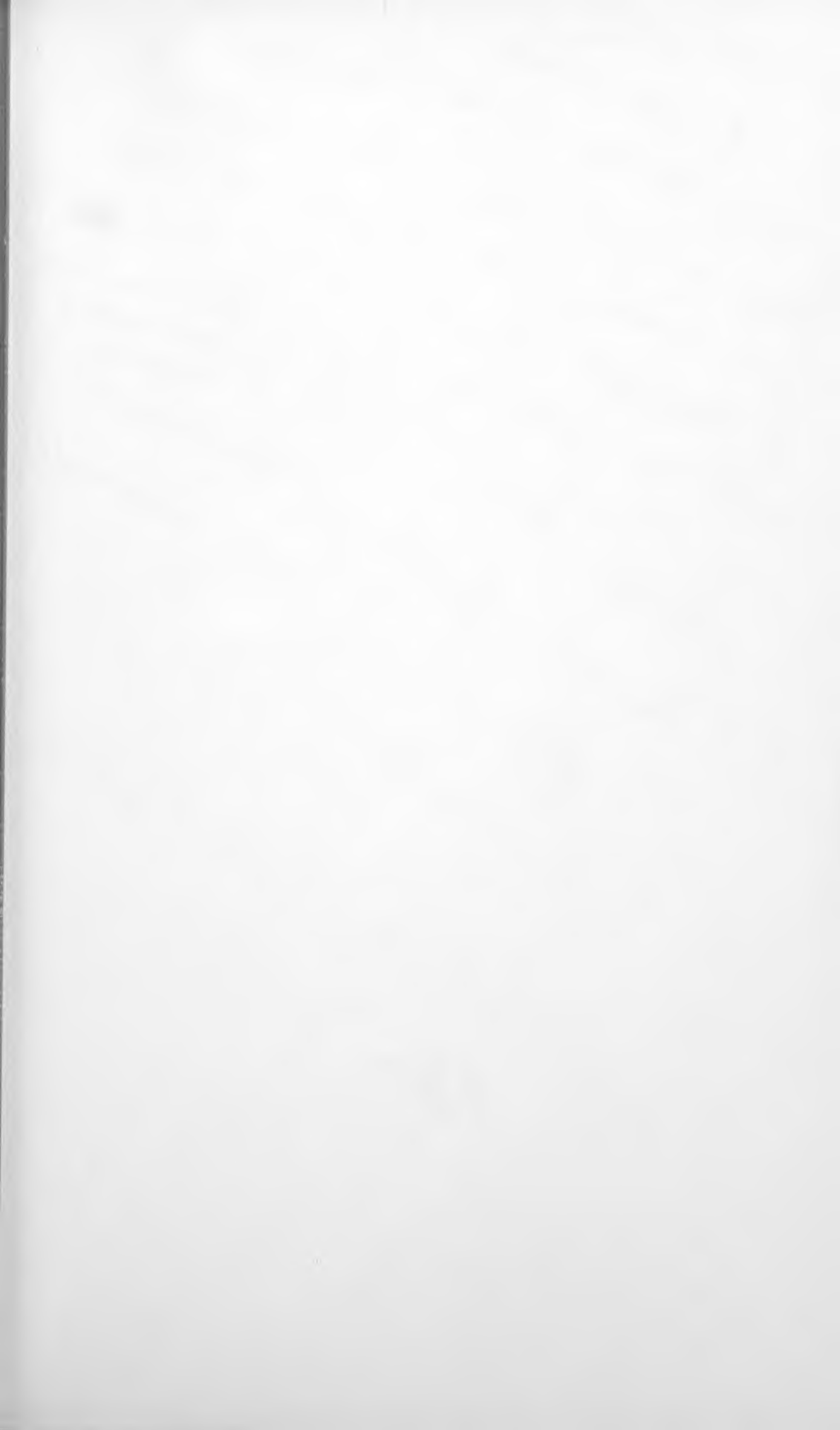
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a Winckelmann's  
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at ancient statues (did not see  
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