Medea's Divided Self
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Medea's Divided Self

I

DEBATE OVER MEDEA'S FAMOUS monologue, in which the heroine argues with herself over her plan to kill her children, began in antiquity.[1] In this century Bruno Snell revived the Platonic interpretation of Galen, who saw in the monologue a

The following frequently cited works are referred to by author's name: Elizabeth B. Bongie, "Heroic Elements in the *Medea* of Euripides," *TAPA* 107 (1977) 27–56; Anne P. Burnett, "*Medea* and the Tragedy of Revenge," *CP* 68 (1973) 1–24; T. V. Buttrey, "Accident and Design in Euripides' *Medea*," *AJP* 79 (1958) 1–17; Eckhard Christmann, "Bemerkungen zum Text der *Medea* des Euripides," Diss. Heidelberg 1962; Albrecht Dihle, "Euripides' *Medea*," Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften (Heidelberg 1977); Hans Diller, "ΘΥΜΟΣ ΔΕ ΚΡΕΙΣΣΩΝ ΤΩΝ ΕΜΩΝ ΒΟΥΛΕΥΜΑΤΩΝ," *Hermes* 94 (1966) 267–75, rep. in *Kleine Schriften* (Munich 1971) 359–69; P. E. Easterling, "The Infanticide in Euripides' *Medea*," *YCS* 25 (1977) 177–91; Stewart Flory, "Medea's Right Hand: Promises and Revenge," *TAPA* 108 (1978) 69–74; W. W. Fortenbaugh, "On the Antecedents of Aristotle's Bi-partite Psychology," *GRBS* 11 (1970) 233–50; Christopher Gill, "Did Chrysippus Understand Medea?" *Phronesis* 28 (1983) 136–49; Bernard M. W. Knox, "The *Medea* of Euripides," *YCS* 25 (1977) 193–225; David Kovacs, "On Medea's Great Monologue," *CQ* 36 (1986) 343–52; Albin Lesky, *Greek Tragic Poetry*, trans. M. Dillon (New Haven 1983); Hugh Lloyd-Jones, "Euripides' *Medea* 1056–80," *WJA* n.f. 6a (1980) 51–59; Gerhard Müller, "Interpolationen in der *Medea* des Euripides, *SIFC* n.s. 25 (1951) 65–82; Denys Page, *Medea* (Oxford 1938; rep. 1971); Pietro Pucci, *The Violence of Pity in Euripides' Medea* (Ithaca 1980); Kenneth Reckford, "Medea's First Exit," *TAPA* 99 (1968) 329–59; Michael D. Reeve, "Euripides' *Medea* 1021–80," *CQ* n.s. 22 (1972) 51–61; Hermann Rohdich, *Die Euripideische Tragödie* (Heidelberg 1968); Eilhard Schlesinger, "Zu Euripides' *Medea*," *Hermes* 94 (1966) 26–53; W. Steidle, *Studien zum Antiken Drama* (Munich 1968) 151–68; H.-D. Voigtländer, "Spätere Überarbeitungen im grossen Medeamonolog?" *Philologus* 10 (1957) 217–37; George B. Walsh, "Public and Private in Three Plays of Euripides," *CP* 74 (1979) 294–309; J. J. Walsh, *Aristotle on Moral Weakness* (New York 1973); Christian Wolff, "Euripides," in *Ancient Writers: Greece and Rome*, vol. 1, ed. T. James Luce (New York 1982) 233–65; Otto Zwierlein, "Die Tragik in den Medea-Dramen," *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch* 19 (1978) 27–63. The following articles were unavailable to me until after

psychological struggle between reason and passion.[2] Whereas Snell argued that the speech provoked Socrates to formulate his famous dictum that virtue is knowledge, W. M. Fortenbaugh instead asserted that the passage anticipates Aristotle's concept of a bipartite soul.[3] Most recently, Christopher Gill made a case for the perceptiveness of the Stoic Chrysippus' interpretation of lines 1078–80 of the monologue, which demonstrates a psychological division "not so much within the person, and between psychological elements, but rather a division between the person as he is at the moment and as he might be, if he exercised his full potentiality for human reason. At any one moment, the person functions (in one sense rationally) as a whole; even if his functioning is (as he himself may recognize) a kind of malfunctioning."[4] From Homer onward, characters in Greek literature often seem to recognize in themselves some form of struggle between different parts of their being. Recall, for example, Achilles' famous lines in *Iliad* book 9 (645–46), "All that you have said seems spoken after my own mind [*thumon*] / But my heart [*kradiē*] is swollen with anger [*cholōi*]." Among tragedians, Euripides is notable for exploiting such moments of internal division. Nevertheless, especially given our limited knowledge of intellectual debates about ethical decision making contemporary to *Medea* (431 B.C.), we should probably be wary of both ancient and modern attempts to impose on the passage an anachronistic philosophical reading.

Alternatively, Anne Burnett and Albrecht Dihle saw the forces debating within Medea as gendered:[5] that is, the monologue presents a conflict between what the audience would have read as a masculine, heroic, and public self and a feminine, maternal self.[6] The masculine heroic self requires the killing of the

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the completion of this paper: Margaret Williamson, "A Woman's Place in Euripides' *Medea*," *JACT Review* 3 (1985) 16–20 (to be reprinted in Anton Powell, ed., *Euripides, Women and Sexuality* [London 1989]); and Michael Dyson, "Euripides *Medea* 1056–80," *GRBS* 28 (1987) 23–34.

1. See Gill on Chrysippus' and Galen's views, and see Dihle, esp. 5–11, on how later philosophy and drama produced a misreading of *Medea* as a tragedy of passion, although not all ancient interpreters discussed the dynamics of Medea's speech in these precise terms.

2. See Snell, "Das früeste Zeugnis über Sokrates." *Philologus* 97 (1948) 126; idem, *Scenes from Greek Drama* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1964) 52ff.; and idem, *The Discovery of the Mind* (Cambridge, Mass. 1953) esp. 126. Among many others who have explored this view, see esp. F. Dirlmeier, "Vom Monolog der Dichtung zum 'inneren' Logos bei Platon und Aristoteles," *Gymnasium* 67 (1960) 31–32, and J. J. Walsh 16–22. Voigtländer, esp. 236–37, in contesting Müller's claim that 1078–80 are the work of a Platonic interpolator, makes a strong argument that the passage in no way directly reflects Platonic or Socratic ethics, although the concluding lines may have been influenced by contemporary Socratic thought.

3. Christmann 137–45 also describes Medea's struggle in terms that anticipate Aristotelian practical ethical reasoning.

4. Gill 140.

5. Dihle, esp. 29, accepts Burnett's assumption in order to bolster his own argument that in the monologue Medea's maternal love temporarily defeats her masculine warrior code (see below for further discussion of his views).

6. Interpreters generally view the monologue as a struggle (with a foregone conclusion) between, on the one side, Medea's (sometimes heroic) passion for revenge and, on the other side, her maternal emotions or her rational deliberations in defense of saving the children. Yet many critics

children and the maternal self defends them. The masculine self wins. As Burnett put it, Medea's internal "dialogue is held between a part of herself called *thumos* (1056, 1079), or sometimes *kardia* (1042, 1242), and another part that is *mētēr* (1038; cf. 1247, etc.). Psychologically speaking it is a struggle between Medea's masculine, honor-oriented self and her feminine, hearth-oriented self."[7] Bernard Knox, Elizabeth Bongie, Christian Wolff, and Dihle have all offered readings of the play that support, directly or indirectly, this passing remark of Burnett's.[8] Yet in fact this perspective has played virtually no role in philological discussions and close readings of the monologue itself.[9] By advocating this second position on the internal conflict displayed in the monologue I intend to confront in more detail than have previous critics the implications of assuming that the forces debating in Medea have as it were two genders. In a larger sense, I hope to consider what point Euripides is making to his predominantly or exclusively male audience about the masculine ethics and masculine heroism adopted by his heroine, and why he chose a barbarian woman to make his dramatic statement. Before turning to a more extended discussion of my own position, however, I would like to make the case for my reading of the monologue through addressing the prevailing counterargument that reads the speech as a clash in some form or other between reason and passion.[10]

II

Those who read the monologue as a struggle between reason and passion view Medea's story as a tragedy of sexual jealousy. In the famous closing lines of her monologue (1078–80), the irrational passion for revenge (*thumos*) provoked by Jason's sexual betrayal is seen in their view to be at war with her rational *bouleumata;* passion wins. In my view, this is the Roman dramatist Seneca's Medea, not Euripides'. Seneca's Medea does allow her passion to subdue her

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still assume that this conflict serves primarily to illustrate a philosophical point concerning the relation between passion and reason in ethical decisions. Voigtländer, following Müller (who nevertheless speaks [70] of a duty for revenge), argues that the speech shows an amoral struggle between two emotions, one favoring revenge, the other maternal love; in her self-division Medea makes a typically tragic protest against the nature of the world that requires the revenge and hence her own misfortune. This interpretation has been effectively contested by Christmann 65–82.

7. Burnett 22. Knox takes a position similar to Burnett's when he argues that "In this great scene the grim heroic resolve triumphs not over an outside adversary or advisor but over the deepest maternal feelings of the hero herself" (201).

8. Wolff 238–39 briefly considers the implications of adopting this interpretation of Medea's two selves. Knox and Bongie, by making the case for Medea's masculine and heroic side, offer strong indirect support for this interpretation as well. The antipsychological reading of Schlesinger 26–53, esp. 30, laid the groundwork for all these essays.

9. The exception is Dihle. See below for further examination of his views.

10. See Dihle, esp. 28–29n 18, for a summary of those views, including his own, that contest the standard passion-versus-reason reading of the speech; Zwierlein, Lloyd-Jones, Gill, and Kovacs recently take a similar position. My own objections come closest to those of Dihle, despite my disagreement with his overall argument.

reason. Euripides' Medea, whenever she explains her decisions, is proud of her intelligence and unashamed of the complex emotional and rational motives that she has for her actions; throughout the planning of her revenge, passion and reason explicitly operate in concert.[11] Medea is quite capable of recognizing that emotion can lead her to make critical errors. At 485 (see also 800–801) she complains that she was more eager (*prothumos*) than wise when she allowed her love for Jason to lead her to commit crimes against her family and to depart from her homeland. She also knows that decisions can be arrived at through a suppression of passion by reason (although she uses no technical terms to this effect), but she never makes this a goal in her own decision making. This is partly because the control or devaluation of emotions by rational deliberation is an ethical mode that she associates with the despised Jason. Thus at 598–99 Medea rejects Jason's practical rationalization for the marriage with the princess on the grounds that she wants no happiness won with pain. Jason claims to Medea that he has not been motivated by desire in his decision to marry the princess (556); he has considered (*bebouleumai,* 567) his actions and their consequences and so can claim to be *sophos* (548) in the plans he has made. In her second interview with Jason, Medea pretends to apologize for her anger (*orgas,* 870; see also 883) and lack of good sense (882, 885). She has engaged in discussion with herself (*logon,* 872; *bebouleumai,* 893) and decided to give up her anger (*thumou,* 879). Having considered her children's welfare and her impending friendless exile, she says she has come to a better understanding. Jason, pronouncing Medea's anger understandable, is delighted that after reflection Medea has accepted the superior plan (his own: *boulēn,* 913). But this is all playacting on Medea's part; she cleverly mimics Jason's own mode of ethical reasoning and feigns female subservience only in order to deceive her adversary. Although she is in full control of her reason throughout,[12] Medea never elsewhere indulges in such bloodless decision making; indeed, she aims in her revenge precisely to make Jason feel the emotions he once rejected (1360, 1370).

As would be expected in a debate that pits a maternal Medea against an avenging Medea (rather than reason against passion), there are rational as well as emotional or counter-rational considerations on both sides of Medea's internal conflict concerning the children. On the one hand, Medea first rationally reflects that killing the children will bring punishment to herself as well as to

11. In this respect I disagree with Fortenbaugh, who makes the most extensive proto-Aristotelian reading of the passage. Fortenbaugh argues that Medea often engages in Aristotelian practical ethical reasoning, in means-ends deliberation. But with Medea it is not, as in Aristotelian practical reasoning, a simple case of emotion proposes, reason disposes. She is motivated from the start in her revenge plans by justice and intellect as well (see below for further discussion). Medea does not reason against emotion in wanting to spare the children, or reason about emotion (Fortenbaugh 238n) in the monologue. As Dihle 28–29 points out, one cannot distinguish in Medea Aristotle's two forms of ethical reasoning, practical planning and the moral control of reason through emotion.

12. See *manthanō* in 1078. Despite the Nurse's fears of Medea's heroic, almost bestial wrath, the Medea we see on stage never seems close to *mania* or irrationality.

Jason and will destroy her own future (1021–39); the sight of the children with their breathtaking childish beauty and innocence then reawakens vivid maternal feelings (1040–43). Yet to the Medea who advocates revenge these maternal arguments instantly appear "soft" (1052 at 677 such soft words are associated by Medea with female subservience and deceptiveness); insofar as they violate from this opposing perspective her self-interest and reputation, the arguments of the mother are in Medea's view counter-rational. On the other hand, we come to Medea's monologue with an accumulated knowledge of all her motives for revenge, both rational and irrational, although in the speeches in which she addresses her revenge plans she stresses the rational motives for her act.[13] We have, of course, been told repeatedly from the beginning of the play that Medea is enraged at Jason's erotic betrayal of her, and in the closing scene she eloquently defends being motivated in her revenge by *erōs:* "Do you think bed [*lechos*], then, a trivial pain for a woman?" (1368; see also 265–66, 1354). Justice is an even more important motive (see 26, 160, 165, 578, 580, 582, 592, 1352–53). Medea has sacrificed her homeland for Jason; she has incurred many enemies in order to help her husband (483–87, 506–8). Jason has made his plans without thinking of the welfare of either Medea or the children. He has thus in Medea's view wronged his friends, while she has kept her side of the bargain by giving him heirs (470, 696, 698; 490–91). Above all, Jason broke his oath to Medea, an oath sworn by the gods (20–23, 161, 439, 492, 1392);[14] Medea is for this reason quite certain that the gods will support her punishment of Jason. And the final surprising appearance of the chariot of the sun seems to prove her right.

Medea does not need to review all these concerns in the monologue for them to be present in the minds of the audience. Here she stresses above all the need to take revenge regardless of the personal costs involved, and to avoid being mocked by her enemies. This argument, has its own rationality as well, although some recent critics assume the contrary. In his commentary on the passage Alan Elliott, for example, asserts that "Here as in 797, Medea is concerned not so much that her treatment has been unjust, but that her enemies may have the chance to laugh at her. Moral principle plays no part in her revenge."[15] This is taking the speech out of the context developed for it in the play as a whole, for the line is a shorthand reference to a position Medea has developed in detail earlier in the play. A Greek hero traditionally wished above all to do good to his friends and harm to his enemies. (The desire to avoid the laughter of enemies is a logical extension of this shame-culture position.) That this remained a dominant Greek ethical position as well as a major, even the major, principle of social organization in the archaic and classical periods is made clear in the first book of Plato's *Republic* (332a–b), where it is adopted quite sincerely as a definition and

13. See Bongie 42 and 44, on Medea's first scene with Jason, and Dihle 14–16.
14. On the importance of Jason's breaking of the oath, see esp. Burnett and Flory.
15. *Euripides Medea* (Oxford 1969) 94. See also Voigtländer 223.

apparently the standard popular definition, of justice.[16] A failure to win honor and defend his self-worth made a hero a fool in the eyes of his enemies. Medea has evoked this standard for her actions at several earlier points in the text. Medea succinctly explicates the conception of the self that compels her to complete her revenge: "Let no on think me of no account or powerless, nor a quiet stay-at-home. Quite the contrary: consider me hard on my enemies and to my friends kindly. That sort of person has the life of greatest glory."[17] In a world without trial by jury, without justice for women and foreigners (Jason is *xeinapatou,* 1392; see Medea's speech at 230–51), revenge, however necessary and justified from one point of view, may in its wake bring death and other devastating consequences for the revenger. The shame culture of the *Iliad* does not treat the *motives* for Achilles' wrath as irrational (though the principles governing his wrath conflict with those governing relations between *philoi*); instead the poem emphasizes the devastating effects of this (initially) justified wrath on Achilles' friends and its unforeseen consequences for the hero himself. As in the case of Achilles, Medea's pursuit of her code tragically seems to require the injury of friends as well as foes. To characterize a revenge so carefully motivated throughout the early scenes of the *Medea* as merely the product of irrationality flies in the face of the entire Greek heroic code.[18] Nevertheless, unlike Achilles, Medea fully anticipates how painful the emotional consequences of her revenge will be on herself as a woman.[19]

III

The case for reading the monologue as a debate between passion and reason rests above all on retaining lines 1078–80 of the text and on interpreting these three lines as a summation of the struggle in which Medea engages throughout the speech. Several scholars have in fact bracketed lines 1056–80 of the monologue;[20] many others have felt pressed to defend or explain them. Although deleting all or part of 1056–80 eliminates some serious difficulties in the passage,

16. Müller 70 makes a similar point, but then contradicts himself by arguing that the monologue pits two emotions against each other.

17. Lines 807–10, trans. Wolff 238.

18. See Dihle's emphasis (14–16) on Medea's warrior code as a product of her powerful intellect. As he points out, to equate this code exclusively with emotion would have shocked a Greek audience. For women's exclusion from this code, see my discussion below.

19. See Schlesinger 53, who nevertheless thinks that Medea does not at first realize the consequences of her action. I think rather (see 791 for her initial awareness of the pain her crime will bring) that she does not anticipate how powerfully her maternity will contest her determination for revenge.

20. Theodore Bergk, *Griechische Literaturgeschichte,* vol. 3 (Leipzig 1884) 512n. 140; G. Jachmann, *Binneninterpolation,* vol. 2: *Nachr. Gott. Ges. d. Wiss.* (1936) 193n. 1; Müller; Reeve; and Zwierlein. On the strength of Reeve's arguments James Diggle brackets the passage in his 1984 Oxford text. Voigtländer (emphasizing [224–25] the dramatic richness of the contested lines) and Steidle defend the passage at some length, while Lloyd-Jones and Kovacs, contesting Reeve and Zwierlein, propose briefer deletions (see infra n.12). For other recent summaries of the controversy, see Christmann 125ff. and Lesky 226–27.

arguments can be made for retaining the text as we have it. Tempting as it would have been for an actor to enlarge this remarkable speech, it is in my view too easy to assume, especially given Euripides' complex and contradictory dramaturgy, that the textual difficulties here are due to an interpolator's incompetence. Hence, while remaining uneasy about aspects of the passage, I shall base my argument almost entirely on Murray's Oxford text,[21] although my overall interpretation of the nature of the forces contending within Medea in the speech does not, in fact, depend on retaining the disputed lines.

Although there are three important arguments for deletion of 1056–80 (see infra, Appendix, for a brief discussion of the other two), only the third, the authenticity and the interpretation of lines 1078–80, is relevant to my discussion here. The debate centers above all on the translation of line 1079: θυμὸς δὲ κρείσσων τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων.[22] Several translations claim to resolve the difficulties posed by the text. Philosophically-oriented scholars often translate the line, "My passion is stronger than my rational deliberations / plans [concerning murder of the children]." The proponents of this translation variously interpret *bouleumata* as: deliberations provoked by Medea's maternal emotions; rational plans to save the children; or general and rational deliberations on the evils of her plan or on the negative effects her passionate emotion for revenge have on her reason.[23] Both the logic of the monologue itself, which brings the maternal Medea into conflict with the avenging Medea, and Medea's previous habits of deliberation make translating *bouleumata* as "rational plans to save the children" the most viable of the alternatives offered above. *Bouleumata,* both in this play and elsewhere in Euripides, are generally specific plans, rational deliberations directed to a practical goal, rather than ethical meditations about what is virtuous or bad.[24] Medea's deliberations, except when she is pretending otherwise to Jason, consistently involve considering how to put into effect specific plans proposed to her by her emotions, her heroic code, her sense of what is good for herself, and her sense of injustice (usually in combination). Even in this passage, she deliberates, not over the morality of the crime or its violation of her

21. Oxford 1902, rep. 1963; one exception is noted below. Even the almost universally bracketed 1062–63 contribute to the argument of the passage.

22. The grammar of these lines is not in question. I shall return later to lines 1078 and 1080.

23. For a recent summary of this range of interpretations, see Dihle 27–29n. 18.

24. For arguments in favor of this position, see esp. Diller 375–76. Christmann 137–45, Lesky 227, and Dihle 28–29. In their support, it should be emphasized that every other use of *bouleumata* and *bouleuō* in *Medea* refers to a precise plan or change of plans: at 372, 769, 772, 1044, and 1048 *bouleumata* refers to Medea's revenge plans, at 270 to Creon's plans to exile Medea, and at 449 and 886 to the plans of Jason and Creon for a new marriage; 402, *bouleuousa* refers to Medea's plans; 893, *bebouleumai* to Medea's false change of plans; 317, *bouleusēis* to Kreon's fear of Medea's evil plans; 37, *bouleusēi* to the Nurse's similar fear; 567, *bebouleumai,* to Jason's plans concerning his marriage to the princess; and 874, *bouleuousin,* to Jason's plans for Medea. Christmann 65–82, who argues for an opposition between the rational plans of the mother and emotional self-destructive revenge, makes the case that 1079 thus translated can form a proper climax to the struggle between mother and avenger in the monologue.

own ethical code (the injustice of harm to *philoi*), but about whether to put into action a rescue plan that will save her from pain and bring her practical advantages and pleasure in the future. She previously viewed the deed as unholy (796; see also 1383), but this knowledge did not deter her; in the monologue she gives divine authority to the murder by describing it as a sacrifice (1054).[25] Earlier in the play Medea says explicitly that women do not have the resources to do good (*esthla*), but are of every evil the cleverest of contrivers (407–9). In the monologue she observes self-consciously that she is being led by her *thumos* to a choice with bad consequences for herself. In addition, she has earlier mocked Jason for his rejection of emotion in favor of the dictates of reason.[26]

The most important argument against translating *bouleumata* as "plans to save the children," however, is that the word is used emphatically to refer to "revenge plans" twice in this speech as well as elsewhere (along with related words) in the play.[27] This consideration led Hans Diller to suggest the attractive alternative "Meine Leidenschaft Herr über meine Pläne ist."[28] In this reading Medea knows (*manthanō,* 1078) that she is about to do herself harm (*kaka*), but her *thumos* triumphantly insists on putting into action her plans of revenge.[29] Yet one could object that Diller's translation of *kreissōn* as "is master of" or "controls" is far less intuitively obvious than the comparative use of the word, "stronger than." Could the hearer easily suppress the common meaning of the word?[30]

A third reading, proposed by Dihle, who translates *thumos* as the maternal

25. For a discussion of Medea's use of the rhetoric of sacrifice and self-pity to make the murder of the children appear to herself inevitable, see Pucci chap. 4. As Pucchi stresses, Medea sometimes equates her "I" with maternal feelings, sometimes with her revenge. At other times she sees the "I" under pressure from separate forces inside herself, like *thumos*. Pucci's argument confirms from another perspective that Medea is not here determined by her passion but chooses finally to side with her *thumos*.

26. See below for further discussion of this last point. Christmann argues strongly against Snell's Socratic reading of the passage by arguing that *kaka* in 1078 means what is bad for Medea, in the sense that the murder is to her practical disadvantage as a mother and as a human being who seeks pleasure rather than pain. This interpretation makes the meaning of *kakos* throughout the passage consistent and consolidates the argument made by others that *kaka* here does not mean morally evil. Lloyd-Jones 57 dismisses the problem of a possible inconsistency in the use of *kakos* here.

27. See 372, 769, 772, 1044, 1048. Dihle 27–29 (with bibliography) consolidates the case for this extremely telling point. The word would have been ringing in the audience's ears, and in this dramatic context the term cannot be considered neutral (contra Lloyd-Jones 58). The argument that *bouleumata ta prosthen* at 1044–45 implies an imposing set of plans to save the children is very weak from the dramatic perspective of a listener; furthermore, as Voigtländer 226 recognizes, *bouleumata* in Euripides refers far more frequently to destructive than positive plans.

28. Diller 367, anticipated by J. J. Walsh 19, and defended by Steidle 165 and Rohdich 64.

29. Diller 366 also argues that since at 1060–63 Medea has rejected the notion of saving the children, at 1079 she can hardly view these plans as viable. In his favor, note that she does not speak of rescuing them after 1058, but only bemoans her loss (1071–75).

30. Lesky 227 (citing, following Kessel [*RhM* 116 (1973) 103n. 21], *Medea* 965) and Reeve 59n. 2 (citing Euripides frag. 718N2, but not giving full credit to Diller's whole argument) are reluctant to accept Diller's parallels (*Med.* 443–45, *Ba.* 880, and later philosophical passages) as sufficient evidence. I view Diller's translation of *kreissōn* as both possible and preferable, and problematic only because it is the more obscure alternative.

love that proves stronger than Medea's revenge plans, poses even more substantial difficulties.[31] Neither in this play nor elsewhere in Euripides is *thumos* equated with anything like maternal love. The *thumos* to which Medea appeals at 1056 is capable of hearing the arguments for sparing the children and being cheered by them (1057–58). But the request to the *thumos* to spare the children makes it clear that *thumos* is also capable of sacrificing them; *thumos* is thus equated at 1056 not with maternal love but with a capacity in Medea that presently favors the revenge (and will do so in 1079), but might be persuaded to spare because the children will bring it pleasure. Yet Dihle's discussion should make us wary of being too reductive in translating *thumos* simply as passion for revenge and a capacity for the irrational.[32] In both archaic poetry and Euripides, *thumos* can be virtually equated with *erōs* or anger, but it is also a more general term used to describe a force (courage, for example) that directs the self to action. The Homeric *thumos* can be affected by a vast range of feelings, from anger and *erōs* to pity and reverence, but it can also make rational decisions (e.g., *Il.* 1.193 or 2.5; *Od.* 14.490)[33] or, as in the passage from *Iliad* 9 quoted earlier, even feel itself in tension with a *kradiē* swollen with anger. In this sense it is most commonly a capacity in the self, particularly vulnerable to the persuasion of strong emotions, but not in essence irrational; when a character addresses his *thumos* in internal dialogue, it even comes close to representing what we might call a self.

A study of the term *thumos* in Euripides indicates a range of meaning comparable to epic, if somewhat narrower.[34] The Euripidean *thumos* is the seat

31. Scholars have rejected the translation for 1079 "My passion is stronger than my revenge plans," although it is grammatically correct, because this would mean that Medea has decided to save her children. Yet this is basically the argument of Dihle. Dihle's essay makes many brilliant points, but I cannot accept his ingenious but ultimately unconvincing reading of 1079. The arguments that he makes for reading *bouleumata* as revenge plans should hold as well for interpreting *thumos. Thumos* in the *Medea* is elsewhere said most often to be affected by *erōs* (8, 639) and anger (879, 1152), and this is even more the case with related words e.g., *oxuthumos,* 319; *thumoumenēn,* 271; etc.) Medea's feelings in this passage are not consistently against her revenge plan (Dihle 16)—they waver back and forth—and her plan is not quite so intellectually motivated as Dihle suggests. Dihle admits Medea's actions are overdetermined, that she cannot spare the children. Hence his reading makes Medea's decision to save the children unrealistic and irrational, when she elsewhere seems highly realistic. Dihle also argues that his view makes sense of the chorus immediately following the speech, where the chorus speak, not of the horror of killing the children, as elsewhere, but of the burdens of maternity. Yet there are other possible interpretations of this chorus (Buttrey 9, for example, sees it as a lament for Jason, not Medea, and I shall offer another below). See further the arguments of Zwierlein 35–37n. 24c against Dihle's interpretation.

32. See Dihle 30. Schlesinger 29 reduces *thumos* to "lebenskraft" or "vitalität." Dihle argues effectively against earlier translations and for Medea's powerful and controlling intellect, but then settles once again on equating *thumos* with emotion.

33. See Diller 364–65 on decisions made by the Homeric *thumos:* Medea's case is anomalous here because, in contrast to Homer, her *thumos* directs her to a choice described as bad. In the case of decisions made by the archaic *thumos,* reason can act in concert with emotion (e.g., *Od.* 20.9).

34. Previous discussions have looked more narrowly at *thumos* in *Medea* or in archaic poetry, where the acts influenced by *thumos,* as here, are associated with courage (see 1042, 1051, 1242) or anger. My discussion here omits lines too difficult to categorize precisely: several fragments and *Hipp.* 1087.

of emotion, of instinct, and even of deliberation and is subject to a range of emotions from anger, grief, and *erōs* to pity, hope, or pride. Medea is twice said to be struck in the *thumos* by *erōs* (8, 639) and a cloud of grief has fastened on her great *thumos* (108). Medea pretends to Jason that she will give up *thumos* (anger, 879), and Jason asks the princess to give up hers (1152). Similarly, Heracles is supplicated by Amphitryon to check the *thumos* of wild lion (a mixture of suicidal grief and anger, *HF* 1211). A *thumos* elsewhere can be violent for revenge (*Hr.* 924); Hecuba avoids the vengeful *thumos* of the blinded Polymestor (*Hec.* 1055); Aphrodite gratifies her *thumos* in destroying Hippolytus (*Hipp.* 1328). An angry person breathes out *thumos* (*Ba.* 620, *Ia.* 125, *Pho.* 454). Theseus advises those who have been wronged to bear the injustice moderately in their *thumos* (*Su.* 556). The chorus thinks that Medea's *thumos* will pity her supplicating children (865). Elsewhere a chorus can wish for a *thumos* untouched by grief (*Hipp.* 1114). In more unusual cases, the grieving Electra's *thumos* is not stirred by festive jewelry (*Electra* 176); Peleus' *thumos* is prophetic in anticipating the news of Neoptolemus' death (*promantis, An.* 1073); Creon's preference for a son-in-law is located in his *thumos* (*Medea* 310). A *thumos* under the influence of or the seat of emotions or instincts can be viewed positively or negatively. Hope may negatively influence the *thumos* (*Su.* 480); a grieving *thumos* has no stability (fr. 1039). *Thumos* can be classified as a bad thing with *axunesia* (fr. 257). A wise man does not have a *thumos* that thinks like a woman (*gunaikophron,* frr. 362, 34). Yet *thumos* (anger) can under the proper supervision be a valuable quality in the people (*Or.* 702). Achilles' proud *thumos* is uplifted at the thought of rescuing Iphigeneia from her death (*IA* 919). Heracles' *thumos* warned him not to carouse in Admetus' house (*Alc.* 829). Electra's *thumos* shows the capacity to deliberate when it is persuaded by the tokens offered by the old man of Orestes' identity (*Electra* 578).

Prior to the monologue, Medea's *thumos* is said by characters other than herself to be affected by anger, grief, and *erōs,* and, in the imagination of the chorus, it will soon be affected by pity. In the monologue she first asks it to listen to the reasons for sparing the children (1056–57). The use of *ge* to reinforce *su* in 1056 is especially telling:[35] "Do not [*mē dēta*], *thume,* do not you of all people [*mē su ge*] do these things [*ergasēi tade*]." A *thumos* that can impel Medea either to kill or to spare, and to hear the reasons on both sides for so doing, is apparently capable, like the Homeric *thumos,* of some sort of deliberate choice, even if, by 1079, the *thumos* is finally set (and was probably from the start irrevocably set) on doing things to Medea's harm (*kaka*). Hence it is better to categorize *thumos* in the monologue not as "irrational passion" or "rage" but as a capacity located in Medea that directs her to act, a "heart" that can (or at least pretends

35. On this point see Dihle 14. It could perhaps be disputed whether *ge* should be strictly attached to *su* or rather to the combination *mē su,* making the prohibition more forceful, as probably in Soph. *OC* 1414 or Eur. *Phoen.* 532, among the passages cited by Denniston *GP2* 122.

to itself that it can) choose to side either with the arguments of the revenger or the arguments of the mother (although it is predisposed to the former).

IV

In view of all the above considerations, let us now return to the problem of interpreting 1078–80:

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

The following (expanded) translation might best capture the implications of these lines in the context of this play and this monologue: "I understand what sort of bad things I am about to do [or, suffer],[36] but my heart-determined-on-revenge is master over my [revenge] plans,[37] a[n avenging] heart that is generally the greatest cause of bad consequences for mortals." I wish in particular to preserve in this rather awkward translation both the combination of reason and passion operating in Medea's *thumos* at this climactic moment (her revenge is motivated by rational heroic principles as well as avenging anger) and the transition that Medea's *thumos* has undergone in this passage. Medea's *thumos* presumably begins the monologue determined on revenge; at 1056–58 she gives it arguments for sparing the children, apparently appealing to its capacity, well known to herself, for a rational pity (*su ge*). At 1059ff. these arguments are rejected through an appeal to the counterarguments for revenge. The *thumos* Medea addresses at 1056 could *not* be categorized in a general fashion (*hosper,* 1080) as "the greatest cause of bad consquences for mortals." But by 1079 the *thumos* is irrevocably set on revenge, and it is this avenging *thumos* that, however justified from one perspective, predictably creates, as it has from Achilles onward in Greek poetry, negative consequences.

By suppressing any moral opposition between passion and reason, this translation of 1079 would make a proper and predictable climax to a deliberation by the Medea we have come to know both in the speech and throughout the play (see my further discussion below), whereas to read the speech as a victory of passion over reason would be anomalous, producing a Medea who resembles Jason (who is concerned with the ill effects of passion on reason) more than

36. This line consciously underlines the defeat of the maternal by the heroic Medea. I have accepted here Kovacs' argument (351–52) for printing *tolmēsō* (the reading in all the manuscripts except L) for *dran mello; tolmēsō* can be understand in an active or a passive sense.

37. Although I here adopt Diller's reading of *kreisson* and *bouleumata,* his translation of *thumos* as "passion" leads him to support Snell's reading of the speech as a battle between reason and passion. Diller 358 sees here a tragic tension between the goddess in Medea who accomplishes a just revenge and the woman who is painfully aware of the senselessness of her act.

herself.[38] In the latter case, the audience would surprisingly confront in the monologue the victory of an irrational masculine imperative over a rational maternity. By suppressing altogether the claims of her maternal side, this interpretation of 1079 confirms our sense that Medea's choice for revenge has been inevitable from the start, that her self-debate aims finally not at persuading herself to save the children (a plan in any case abandoned after 1058) but at making the crime seem inevitable to herself.

Plato in the *Republic* sees *thumos* as a capacity in the soul, like anger, which can ally with reason or with the appetites. Euripides' own sense of *thumos* is much more easily understood in the light of epic; Medea's *thumos,* like that of epic characters, is not so much a part of her soul as it is a capacity in herself that can reason (in a practical sense) as well as feel. In Medea's case, the *thumos* which rules her plans, if we read it in the context of the motives for her revenge offered throughout the play, unites jealousy, anger, and courage with justice and a rational principle of heroic action which has consistently operated for Medea: that of harming enemies and helping friends. This is true within the speech itself but is even more obviously true when we consider the speech in the light of the dramatic action up to this point. In sum, I would not wish to deny Euripides' interest in what later became explicitly philosophical problems.[39]

Furthermore, no philological argument can suppress the ambiguities present in language, and all possible readings of 1079 must be present at some level in the consciousness of the hearer. If the closing lines of this speech are genuine, an audience cannot but see reflected in their ambiguity the overdetermination of Medea's thoughts, emotions, and actions throughout the play. We may even recall here Jason's preference for plans that purportedly subordinate emotion to reason (though, given the nature of these plans, his preferred mode of decision making appears dubious). Yet what seems more certain than any one authoritative translation of 1079 (for scholarly controversy has demonstrated that this is impossible) is that the speech as a whole represents a clash between two posi-

38. Christmann 143 argues effectively against an anachronistic philosophical reading of the monologue, yet ends by taking a closely similar position himself. According to Gill's analysis, Chrysippus cites *Medea* 1078–80 to illustrate his account of *pathos:* "Medea, on the other hand, was not persuaded by any reasoning to kill her children; quite the contrary, so far as reasoning goes, she says that she understands how evil the acts are that she is about to perform, but her anger is stronger than her deliberation; that is, her affection (*pathos*) has not been made to submit and does not follow reason as it would a master, but throws off the reins and departs and disobeys the command" (4.2.27 [372K], Gill 140). In Gill's subtle account of Chrysippus' reasoning on this point, the Stoic view comes far closer than a Platonic or Aristotelian reading to capturing the dynamics of the monologue: in particular, Medea's self-division "between two possible (complete) selves" (Gill 142), the fundamentally rational nature of all human impulses (in the sense that they involve judgments that a certain goal is desirable), and Medea's *deliberate* rejection of the rational arguments of the mother in herself. Yet it anachronistically ignores the fact that for Medea her motives for revenge are not simply irrational. She does not have an "irrational and unnatural" (cf. 4.2.8 [368K], Gill 140) impulse to kill her children; she wants to take revenge on her enemies and save face before them, and she convinces herself that killing the children is necessary to attain this goal.

39. See frr. 220, 572, 840ff. N2.

tions in which reason and emotion unite on either side of the argument. And it is precisely this inseparable combination of rationality and irrationality, passion and intelligence, in Medea's determination for revenge that makes it so very terrifying, and, I think, far more tragic than a philosophical defeat of reason by passion.[40]

V

Through a careful dramatic orchestration of the relation between the two engendered sides of Medea that is echoed in the conflict between male and female characters,[41] the earlier scenes of *Medea* prepare for the climactic display of self-division in the monologue. (By contrast, the play does not prepare the audience to confront in the monologue a conflict between passion and reason or between two emotions.) The first scene provides disturbing hints about the contradictory aspects of Medea's character. On the one hand, Medea seems suicidal, a helpless, feminine victim of her husband's desertion. She has sacrificed everything for Jason. This is the side of Medea that moves and impresses the chorus of women. On the other hand, the Nurse, as she expresses her fears about the dangerous temperament of the proud and wrathful heroine, anticipates in her language Medea's own heroic view of herself. Her nature is royal (119–21; see Medea at 403–6); she is self-willed (*authadous,* 104; see Medea at 1028), high-spirited, and hard to check (*megalosplanchnos* and *duskatapaustos,* 109), and in her anger against the injustice (26) and dishonor (20, 33) done to her may turn against her own *philoi* (95).[42] From the moment of her first appearance on stage, Medea's female side is in this play not taken for granted but carefully defined through the relationship she creates with the chorus.[43] Her heroic, masculine side only emerges explicitly in the speeches (364–409, 764–810) where Medea announces her revenge plans, although it is implied to a lesser degree in her first and final forthright encounters with Jason.

At her first entrance Medea makes an appeal to the chorus as fellow married

40. Gill (142–43) comments on the horrifying way that Medea's rationality "deliberately intensifies, by arguments and exhortation, her own desire to carry out her revenge" (142) and on the way that she passively distances herself from her crime in announcing the final subjection of her maternal side to her *thumos.*

41. See Schlesinger's emphasis (45) on the pervasive conflict between male and female worlds in the play.

42. See my discussion of Medea's motives for revenge—injustice, dishonor, mistreatment of *philoi*—above. Still, as Buttrey 13–14 argues, we should not yet anticipate here any real threat to the children, since the audience would not have expected Medea's decision to kill them.

43. There seem to be two reasons for this. First, the play can win sympathy for Medea as victimized woman before revealing the full range of her differences from her own sex; second, Euripides must confront the mythological tradition, which often envisioned Medea as a witch with magic powers. See, however, Knox 204 and 212–13 for the ways that Euripides plays down Medea's supernatural powers here, at least until the concluding scene. Rohdich 47–55 overemphasizes the degree to which Medea has become merely a woman in this play.

women by describing her own situation in terms of the difficult life of all women and their potential for becoming victims of a male order (230–51). With this speech Medea obtains the silence of the chorus and—surprisingly, given her myth—establishes a strong association between herself and the ordinary housewife in a Greek city. The chorus approve her revenge on Jason (267) and even tacitly consent to the destruction of members of their own royal family, although they do not wish to be tortured by *erōs* like Medea but desire for themselves a moderate Aphrodite appropriate to a proper wife (635–41). For them, Medea's eloquence and just complaints against Jason and Creon represent a reversal of poetry's silencing of women through the centuries and its maligning of them as sexually unfaithful (410–30). The chorus only break with Medea, see her as other than themselves and unlike women, when she determines to include the killing of the children in her revenge on Jason. The protection of children from harm is such an intimate part of the self-interest of mothers (the chorus repeatedly remind Medea of the negative effects that the crime will have on herself: see esp. 818, 996–97, and 1261 on the waste of Medea's efforts in rearing her children), that they can think of only one example of a woman who killed her children, Ino, and she (unlike Medea) was mad when she committed her crime, and she followed the murder by suicide (1282–89).

The case for Medea as an ill-treated female victim is tellingly built up in the early scenes of the play where she adopts traditionally "feminine" weapons in her self-defense. Both Creon's gesture of immediate exile for a woman who has nowhere to go and Jason's indifference to it seem extraordinarily callous, as the shocked reaction of King Aegeus to Medea's plight later confirms (704–7). The egotistical Jason has clearly given little thought to his family's welfare, despite his belated protests to the contrary, and his callous behavior in his first scene with Medea cannot but call attention to her beleaguered situation. Creon is aware of Medea's unusual intelligence and her capacity for anger, but Medea deceives him into a temporary reprieve by using the weapons of the weak: supplication (338) and an appeal to her children's welfare (340–47). Medea also gives up trying to persuade Jason honestly. Instead, she successfully feigns being the helpless woman, given to tears and irrationality, who will now for the good of her children accept, as a proper woman should, her husband's superiority and guidance. This feminine role-playing, which in the second scene with Jason does have some basis in Medea's feeling for the children, dupes even her own husband, who should (like the Nurse) have known better.

These early scenes of the play, by building a powerful case for male exploitation of women and Medea's entrapment in a female role, may temporarily distract the audience from the initial contradictory view of a dangerous Medea presented above all by the Nurse in the first scene. Increasingly, however, the text emphasizes Medea's distance from her carefully contrived appearance of solidarity with her fellow women, as she uses her "femininity," the desire for children, and even her own maternal love to manipulate and deceive not only

Creon and Jason but even her supporter Aegeus. Furthermore, as several critics have pointed out, her eloquent first speech on the wrongs of women deceptively applies only in part to herself.[44] For Medea is far from the passive victim of marriage and masculine brutality that she claims to be. Unlike the typical housewife, she did not in fact need the dowry she complains of to the chorus (232–34); she chose her own husband and has won him by her ruthless deeds. Indeed, she often seems to envision herself, contrary to Greek practice, as an equal or even the dominant partner in the marriage. Note the use of *gamousa* at 606 (women normally marry in the middle voice); she speaks of her gift to the princess as *phernas,* or dowry (956). In her view the choice of a husband is an *agōn,* a contest (235). The clasping of right hands that confirmed Medea's marriage to Jason is a gesture typical of the affirmation of bonds between men;[45] for a marriage the man normally grasps the woman's wrist in a gesture of domination. Medea speaks of reconciliation with Jason as if it were a truce between two cities (898).

Extraordinarily intelligent (*sophē*), Medea can sing an answer to the other sex (426–27). She is not, as the chorus continue to believe (1290–92), motivated only by betrayal in bed (265–66). Medea is also responsible for Jason's fame (476–82; she even, probably contrary to the better-known tradition, kills the dragon herself, 480–82), as he himself indirectly admits when he says that she should be consoled for what has happened to her because if she had not come to Greece *she* would not have been famous (see 536–41). Medea would prefer battle to childbirth (250–51), and Euripides uses the language of athletic contest to describe her struggles against Jason (44–45, 765, 366–67, 403, 1245). Despite her own denial (407–9), Medea, though a woman, has the capacity actively to do good, as the Corinthians and Aegeus know.[46] We are told by the Nurse that Medea won the favor of the Corinthians (11–12, probably by averting a famine [see schol. on Pindar *O.* 13, 74; in some versions of her myth, Medea even ruled Corinth for a while]);[47] she wins a promise from King Aegeus that because she can make him fertile, she may live under his protection in Athens.

The desire to avenge erotic betrayal is characteristic of women in Greek poetry,[48] as we see from the chorus's sympathetic reaction to Medea and from Medea's own words (263–66); so is Medea's choice of weapon, poison, and the

44. See esp. Pucci 64ff., Bongie 36, and Easterling 182.

45. Flory 70–71.

46. Easterling 179 emphasizes that Aegeus treats Medea as a respectable religious authority.

47. See schol. *Medea* 264 and Apollodorus 1.9.28.

48. Throughout Greek drama we are of course dealing with woman as a fictional construction, not a cultural reality. The growing literature on this complex question is already too large to cite here. Much of the earlier work is cited in my essay "The Conception of Women in Athenian Drama," in *Reflections of Women in Antiquity,* ed. H. Foley (New York 1981) 127–68. Among recent discussions, see especially Froma Zeitlin, "Playing the Other: Theater, Theatricality, and the Feminine in Greek Drama," *Representations* 11 (1985) 63–94, on the way that tragedy uses its fictional women to conduct a discourse about primarily male concerns.

deceptive rhetoric and gestures (tears, suppliancy) with which she manipulates her masculine enemies. Yet the side of Medea that plans and executes revenge, and especially the death of the children, is not represented in the language of the play as "feminine."[49] Above all, as Knox and Bongie in particular point out, the avenging Medea thinks and acts not like a classical woman but like an archaic and Sophoclean hero when he feels he has been wronged. Her first off-stage words, her screams of suicidal rage which may endanger even those she loves, may be deliberately reminiscent of Sophocles' Ajax.[50] Her brilliance, craft, and drive for survival recall the Homeric Odysseus. Like Ajax or Achilles, she would deliberately sacrifice friends to defend her honor against a public slight from a peer. She has the stubborn individualism, intransigence, power, near-bestial savagery, and lack of pity of such beleaguered heroes. As hero, she wants to do good to her friends and bad to her enemies, quell injustice, win fame (810), and protect her reputation. She is so fearless that the sword would be her weapon of choice if circumstances permitted its use (379–85, 393). Poison, the feminine weapon, is her choice of necessity (ironically, she goes back to the sword to kill her helpless children). No woman in tragedy—none of all those who take revenge—models her self-image so explicitly on a masculine heroic and even military model (see esp. 1242–45).[51] Like a hero, she wishes to live up to her identity as the child of noble ancestors; she is the granddaughter of the sun: "Advance into danger. Now is your trial of courage. You see what you suffer. You must not be mocked by this marriage of Jason and his Sisyphean in-laws, for you are descended from a noble father and from the sun" (403–6).

What is shocking about Medea, as opposed, for example, to Clytemnestra in *Agamemnon,* where we are told from the first of her masculine aspects, is that Medea's heroic side emerges fully only as the play goes on, as she shrugs off the mask of subservience she has accepted as Jason's wife and finds the means to effect her revenge. I have argued that the audience, like the chorus, is at first partly deceived by Medea's view of her plight as typically female. The first scene hints at Medea's outrage and capacity for violence, but those hints are obscured by her threats of suicide, her domestic confinement, her solidarity with the chorus, and her use of "feminine" wiles to manipulate Creon, Jason, and even Aegeus. Euripides' audience probably did not know that Medea would deliber-

49. As was emphasized earlier, when Medea describes her plans she stresses the rational and heroic motivations for her revenge and virtually ignores the erotic ones.

50. See Knox 96, and cf. infra n.51.

51. See Bongie 28 and 30–31 on Medea's masculinity, in contrast to Knox, who sees Medea as heroic on the Sophoclean model regardless of sex. When they speak and act as Attic women could not or should not, many tragic heroines, and especially Sophoclean heroines, are characterized by the text as masculine. Medea's behavior is set apart from that of any other "masculine" tragic heroine above all by the language in which she describes her revenge. Even Clytemnestra, with her man-counseling (*Ag.* 11) mind, describes her killing of her husband in *Agamemnon* not with military metaphors but with language that perverts ritual and cycles of nature. Hecuba in Euripides' *Hecuba,* whose situation and revenge are very similar to Medea's, lacks her sense of heroic dignity at all costs. She says that she would accept slavery in exchange for the chance to obtain revenge (756–57).

ately destroy her children or escape in the sun's chariot at the end.[52] They may even have feared for some time, as Buttrey argues,[53] that Medea was unwittingly destroying herself by leading her children into a death trap.

Medea plays for Creon, Aegeus, and finally Jason the part of the tragic damsel in distress in need of a masculine rescue that she finally acquires in part from Aegeus. But as the feminine mask gradually slips to reveal first an archaic hero and finally a near-goddess, the story of her revenge takes on a pattern typical of divine rather than human action.[54] Dionysus in Euripides' *Bacchae,* for example, punishes disbelievers who fail to revere him and to penetrate his disguise. Similarly, the once victimized and seemingly powerless Medea appears finally as a semidivine fury whose true nature and authority were not recognized by the mortals around her (except, to some degree, the Nurse). While fully aware of Medea's intelligence, Creon (286), Jason (527–28, 555, 568–73, 1338), and even the chorus (1291–92) see Medea as a woman, and therefore as motivated only by jealousy (whereas she herself mentions this motive only at 265–66, 1354, and 1368). For Jason, Medea is a temperamental barbarian concubine who must be cast aside for the advantages of a real Greek marriage. Jason mistakenly fails to treat Medea as a hero, to value their mutual oaths and her favors to himself. He cannot hear the heroic language and values she adopts for herself in their first encounter.[55] And so, like Pentheus, he pays for his misunderstanding.

But before the final revelation of her superhumanity, Medea has been shown to have a masculine and a feminine side—each exercising its capacity for reason and emotion—which at first establish an uneasy complicity in the pursuit of revenge but finally split in tragic conflict during the famous monologue. By the conclusion of the monologue Medea's female self is once more a victim, this time both of her masculine self and of Jason, for at 1074 (see also 1364 and 1397–98) she blames her husband for the children's death (presumably because she cannot succeed in punishing him without killing the children). What is Euripides' point in turning the tragedy of jealousy we expect in the first scene into a tragedy of gender? By this I mean, not that Medea's tragedy is *about* gender, but that it raises its tragic issues as a double conflict between male and female, both on stage in the external world and within Medea's self. And what is the significance of the structure of the play, in which the hero and finally the divinity in Medea emerge to dominate, if not entirely obscure, the victimized woman?[56]

52. See Page xxi–xxv.

53. Buttrey 12.

54. This shift from a rescue to a revenge plot-pattern is implied in Buttrey's discussion of the structure of the play (10; see also Burnett 8). Burnett 17 argues that the messenger speech describes the death of the princess in an explicit fashion characteristic of divine revenge plays. Many critics have noticed the similarities between the conclusion of the *Bacchae* and the *Medea.* On Medea as *dea ex machina* see esp. M. P. Cunningham, "Medea *apo mechanes,*" *CP* 49 (1954) 152; N. E. Collinge, "Medea *ex Machina,*" *CP* 57 (1962) 170–72; and Knox 206–11.

55. See Bongie 42.

56. My previous discussion does not intend to question the reality of Medea's female and victimized self; she remains, despite her rhetoric, confined within female social limits until her final

I do not believe one can find a simple answer to these questions. Euripides' plays tend to leave us, as here, with more questions and revolutionary critiques than answers. The attitude of the chorus of ordinary women reminds us that for Euripides' audience a proper Greek wife had no fully autonomous sense of self, no muse, no public voice (421–30, 1085–89). Legally she was under the permanent supervision of a guardian and could make no significant decisions. Any independent action on the part of a classical Athenian woman, or any pursuit of her own desires, was not acceptable in a wife unless it involved carrying out household duties such as weaving, cooking, or guarding and caring for household property and children (see also the *Odyssey*'s Penelope, who takes action only in these matters). Nor did a woman, living confined to the household and religious activities, have the knowledge or the educated discipline needed to make independent decisions (see, for example, Sophocles' Deianeira). Tragic heroes like Medea frequently do not play by the rules governing the conduct of Attic women, yet these limits are, I think, implicitly present in the language and structure of all tragedies.[57] For every action a tragic woman takes in her own interest—every action outside of self-sacrifice for family or community—receives explicit criticism within the plays as unfeminine and has destructive consequences. Even Antigone is condemned for her unfeminine behavior and brings two other deaths in her wake. Is Euripides' *Medea,* then, confirming the audience's worst fears of what will happen when a woman takes action? Is it anticipating Aristotle in arguing that women are naturally *akuros,* lacking moral authority,[58] that because they cannot control their emotions with reason they cannot be permitted moral independence but must, as Jason thinks Medea should, obey the plans of their more reasonable husbands (565–75)? And all the more so because women are so clever at the rational planning of ways to achieve the goals dictated by their emotions (see esp. 407–9 and Creon's fear of Medea's intelligence)? These are in fact the very cultural clichés that Medea exploits in her second scene with Jason, where she pretends to accept and conform to his notions of what a woman is like and what she should be. In her speech at 869ff., Medea plays on women's supposed inferiority to men in making judgments (889–93) and emphasizes the wisdom of obeying those planning wisely for herself, the king and her husband, and the folly of her anger (873–78, 882, 885, 892). Later in the scene she hides the true reason for her tears at the sight of the children by remarking that women are given to tears (928).

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supernatural departure. Her use of the magical poison (see Knox 214) does not by itself characterize her as a witch. A similar poison, a typical female weapon, is used (unintentionally) by the feminine Deianeira of Sophocles.

57. For further discussions of this issue see supra n.48 and Nicole Loraux, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman,* trans. A. Forster (Cambridge, Mass. 1987).

58. Implied in Fortenbaugh's discussion at 238–39. See also Euripides fr. 362 on the *gunaikophrōn thumos* quoted earlier. As was remarked earlier, Jason repeatedly sees Medea's only motive for action as *erōs.* Medea flatteringly distracts Jason from his view of female nature by pretending to imitate him.

Though Greek tragedy generally tends by displaying the devastating consequences of inverting cultural norms ultimately to affirm those norms, our earlier discussion of the monologue has made it clear that this interpretation of *Medea* cannot be true in any simple sense. For we must not forget that Euripides has presented in a negative light and even punished the ethical behavior of all the male characters in the play except Aegeus,[59] who sides with Medea and displays a heroic integrity comparable to the heroine's, and that the vengeful Medea deliberately imitates a heroic brand of masculinity. Since there is for the Greeks no model of autonomous and heroic femininity outside of self-sacrifice, Medea can only turn to a male model if she wishes to act authoritatively and within *timē*. If she acts in a way that guarantees self-preservation and child-preservation, she will in male-public terms lose face and fail to make a dramatic display of her wrongs. Like all disfranchised rebels, she can tragically imagine no other self or self-defense to imitate than that of her oppressors. By this I mean, not that she sets out to imitate Jason or Creon, but that the heroic code itself oppresses women, both because it traditionally excludes and subordinates them and because it gives priority to public success and honor over survival and the private concerns of love and family. The debate between Hector and Andromache in *Iliad* 6 makes this clear in a more benign way. In this play we see that oppression in the inability of Jason to recognize Medea's heroic self and in Medea's own failure to accept the arguments of her maternal voice. Furthermore, as Walsh and Pucci have shown, the Medea who contests Jason's injustice and pursuit of profit at the cost of emotional pain (598–99) ends up adopting all too similar goals for herself.[60] She chooses to accept emotional pain in order to achieve her revenge; a victim of injustice, she ends up like Jason, wronging her friends and rejecting suppliants (the chorus who plead for the children at 853–55, and, by implication, the children, 863).[61] She wants to be understood and accepted for what she is (215–24; 292–305), but ends by doing everything to hide what she is from those around her. Thus, by pursuing her heroic code she ends by imitating even her despised immediate oppressors and harming herself.

For a moment in the monologue we hope that her maternal side will successfully contest the masculine heroic logic, but everything in Medea and her circumstances has conspired against this frail possibility. For Medea has tried to sup-

59. See Schlesinger 45. Burnett argues that this atmosphere of moral corruption makes tragic Medea's otherwise monstrous and archaic revenge.

60. See the very different arguments of G. B. Walsh 296–99 and Pucci (passim, esp. chaps. 2 and 4), who emphasizes how the oppressed Medea adopts the position of a master. Hans Strohm, *Euripides*, Zetemata 15 (Munich 1957) 3, shows how the positions of Jason and Medea have been precisely reversed by the exodus (for linguistic echoes of the earlier scene in the later one, see Burnett 22). The same is true for prologue and exodus. Jason begins by devaluing children for expedient reasons and ends as movingly paternal. Medea, in her movement toward masculinity, follows the reverse course.

61. At 1250 Medea, just before killing the children, admits they were *philoi:* but it is too late to recognize the full irony of her position.

press this voice too long. In addition, she has come to envision all that is female as despicable,[62] a source of oppression of her need to be accepted for her own capacities and to achieve due recognition, a source of bad and never of good (407–9). For Medea, women are cowards except when they are wronged in bed (263–66); they are forced to depend on one person (276); they must buy a master for their bodies (232–34); any reputation they have must be to their disadvantage (215ff., 293ff.) Maternity and *erōs*—emotional dependence on others—have tied her to Jason and led her to the predicament in which she is now trapped. In the monologue the maternal voice appears to her masculine self to present only the "soft arguments" of a cowardice to be expected from women (1052; see also 1242–46 and 776). Finally, Medea's repeated use of her femininity to manipulate and deceive has reduced her womanly side to a role so lacking in heroic integrity that she can only wish to slough it off.

Moreover, through the chorus, we have already seen how the female voice, silenced for centuries, lacks the confidence and authority necessary to make a reply to a long masculine tradition. The chorus hoped to find this female voice in Medea, after her brilliant exposure of marriage and Jason's betrayal; but even they did not really expect a victimized woman to live up to their hopes (410–45). Later, aware after the monologue that they have lost their spokeswoman[63]—or, in fact, that they had never had one—the previously timid chorus struggles to give voice to the female muse in themselves and fails (1081–1115). Pitifully, their reasoning leads them to lose their grip on their one certainty, their maternal feelings, as they wonder if it would not be better never to have experienced parenthood at all.[64] If the chorus of women can be swayed momentarily to abandon the core of their self-interest as women, it is hardly surprising that the brilliant and semidivine princess Medea finds in her maternity no positive basis for action.

Is Euripides, then, making in *Medea* a tragic point about social oppression and social change? Medea has been treated unjustly by men, and her eloquent indictment of women's lot is never denied.[65] By developing the case for Medea's oppression first, the play seems to urge us to understand Medea's later behavior as a reaction to this oppression. We saw in the monologue how Medea's female side predictably (especially given the gender relations obtaining in Greek culture) fell victim to her masculine side and Jason. Jason's failure to treat Medea as the fully human (rather than in a traditional Greek sense female) and even

62. On the general point, see Pucci 64. Jason, Creon, and even the chorus make other negative judgments of women.

63. The third and fourth stasima reverse the chorus's earlier hopes and reveal their despair and horror at Medea.

64. As Wolff 240 notes, by coming, like Medea, to overvalue self-sufficiency, they deny the human need for reproduction. Reckford 346 sees in this chorus a divorce between reason and feeling.

65. Even if, as Pucci 65ff. argues, Medea's argument contradicts itself, it presents a substantially accurate indictment of contemporary Attic reality (see Knox 219–21, Reckford 336–39, and Guido Paduano, *La Formazione del mondo ideologicale e poetico di Euripide* [Pisa 1968] 259–71).

heroic being he married with a clasp of right hands and supplicated in times of trouble propels her to ever greater daring. His own significant—if not, as Medea sometimes claims, exclusive—responsibility for the tragic outcome seems confirmed both by the appearance of the sun's chariot and by the plot pattern that structures the final scenes. Reckford sees in the alienation and corruption of Medea the self-fulfilling power of prejudice.[66] Yet Euripides also seems to imply that the oppressed, by being trapped into imitating their oppressors, can in the end only tragically silence what should have been their own true (here maternal) voice, destroy themselves, and confirm an unjust status quo.

Or is Euripides, as Wolff suggests, also using *Medea* to bring home a point about masculine ethics?[67] Greek poets repeatedly demonstrated the tragic consequences of the brand of heroic individualism imitated by Medea and of the "do good to friends, bad to enemies" ethic. Here Medea, like Achilles (or Ajax), destroys (or threatens to destroy) in her heroic wrath those who are her friends. She talks herself into believing that her revenge will be inadequate without the death of the children; for when the chorus asks her how she could endure to kill her own offspring, she replies that her husband would above all be tortured (*dēchtheiē,* 817) by this. Yet unlike Achilles, who regains his humanity in *Iliad* 24, Medea finally leaves female and even human limits behind. The audience is literally distanced from her as she appears high above the stage, and for the first time it is invited to feel pity for Jason, who, wracked with paternal anguish, has lost all identity with the loss of his children. By choosing Medea, a barbarian woman, to display the contradictions inherent in this heroic ethic and behavior, Euripides has achieved a particularly devastating and grotesque demonstration of the problematic nature of this archaic heroism—and one he might have hesitated to make through a Greek or male protagonist.[68]

True, there is a certain integrity in Medea's single-minded pursuit of this archaic masculine ethic, especially when we are offered as an alternative the dubious sophistic or unprincipled masculine behavior of Creon and Jason. The play uses Medea's heroic ethic to expose the callous amoral pragmatism of the unheroic Jason[69] and Creon, and then turns on the ethic itself as it deteriorates into a ghastly version of her enemies' behavior. By implicitly taking as her heroic models both the avenging archaic warrior Achilles and the clever and crafty survivor Odysseus, and thus conflating two brands of heroism that epic views as partially contradictory, Medea shows herself a pathetically confused imitator of heroic masculinity. By adhering blindly to her warrior code, she ironically comes

66. Reckford 345. See also Reckford 346n. 26 on the possible allusions in Medea's case to the plight of noncitizen wives in Athens after Pericles' citizenship law of 451. Knox 222 sees in the hostility expressed toward Medea as a *sophē* a reflection of Euripides' own reception by his contemporaries.

67. Wolff 238–39.

68. See Burnett on the ways that Euripides has stripped Medea's revenge of all the circumstances that mitigate other tragic revenges.

69. See Kurt Von Fritz, *Antike und moderne Tragödie* (Berlin 1962) 322ff. on how the play deprives Jason of his epic heroism.

to the peak of daring (394): the slaughter of her own children.[70] She achieves, not the fame she sought, but infamy. By going beyond the tragic, by not paying for her revenge with suicide or death (as in the case of Ajax, or Ino and Procne;[71] see Medea's own earlier courageous resolve to face death at 393), Medea further destroys the heroic integrity of her ethic. Unlike the Sophoclean hero who gains a certain authority not only by dying but by remaining tragically alienated from the world to the bitter end, the once mistreated and misunderstood Medea goes off to fit all too well into the contemporary world; indeed, she will marry Aegeus and go on, after denying progeny to Jason, to produce the child Medus.[72] Medea's final transformation into an amoral deity, something beyond the human female or male, expresses not only the death and betrayal of her maternal self[73] but what she has become through her abuse of her masculine ethic. Unlike Sophocles in the *Ajax,* with its guarded celebration of heroic glory and brutality even at the expense of humanity, Euripides seems finally to have little nostalgia for the epic past. Indeed, we might view the play as—at least in part—an implicit attack on the typical Sophoclean hero. But, above all, the poet comes close to labeling the "friends-enemies" ethic as destructive of humanity and human values and thus suitable only for gods.

In his long career Euripides created adulterous and murderous women, as well as male characters, like Jason here (esp. 573–75) or Hippolytus (*Hipp.* 616ff.), who indulge in misogynist outbursts. He also created courageous female sacrificial victims, female advocates of public ideals, defenders of the female sex like Melanippe, and a Helen who sat out the Trojan War guarding her virtue in Egypt. Aristophanes' accusation of misogyny in *Thesmophoriazusae* must be viewed in relation to that poet's own (mis)representations of women; besides, his Euripides is finally exonerated on the basis of his *Helen* and *Andromeda.*[74] Knox argues that *Medea* is neither feminist nor misogynist but a play about the wrongs done to and by women.[75] *Medea* exposes male suppression of women in marriage and the tragic results of a male refusal to recognize in women the same capaci-

70. Bongie 32, 50, 55 tends to view Medea's excessive pursuit of her code in terms that better suit the Sophoclean hero.

71. See Suzanne Mills, "The Sorrow of Medea," *CP* 75 (1980) 289–96, on the similarities and differences between Ino and Procne's story and Medea's, which includes a supernatural dimension. Rick M. Newton, "Ino in Euripides' *Medea,*" *AJP* 106 (1985) 501–2 speculates that if, as seems likely, Euripides invented Ino's killing of her children, Medea's crime truly lacks precedent.

72. In other versions (although this one was certainly known in Attic tragedy) Medus was the son of a barbarian king whom Medea married after she fled from Athens. For a discussion and a list of ancient sources, see Pierre Grimal, *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology* (Oxford 1986) 276 and 496.

73. See Schlesinger 51. In her dissertation, "Euripides' Medea: A Study in Dramatic Mythopoeia," Stanford 1976, 121–22, Suzanne Mills, noting the similarities established between Medea and her rival, the princess, intriguingly suggests that Medea moves toward divinity through the sacrifice of a double.

74. See Froma Zeitlin, "Travesties of Gender and Genre in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae,*" in *Reflections of Women in Antiquity,* ed. H. Foley (New York 1981) 186ff.

75. See Knox 211 and also Reckford 339–40.

ties, feelings, and needs they accept for themselves; and it shows the corrupting effects of this mistreatment of a woman of tremendous feeling and intelligence. At the same time Medea's overly literal imitation of an anachronistic masculine code, her dehumanization, and her betrayal of her own sex could be said equally to confirm woman's ultimate incapacity for independence and civilized behavior. For if Euripides is using Medea to examine critically masculine heroism and masculine ethics, he cannot be arguing that women should be liberated to pursue these same goals, and there is a certain irony in the heroine's pursuit of a code that even Sophocles' *Ajax* displayed as outmoded.

Yet this play is equally about the wrongs done to and by men. By showing how Medea's concern for status and revenge at all costs can disintegrate into something uncomfortably close to the callous utilitarianism of Jason and destroy those whom her ideals were meant to protect, Euripides makes a devastating philosophical case against both the shallow modern ethics of Jason and Creon and the heroic ethics of the archaic past. Only Athens, with its harmonious blend of *erōs* and *sophia,* and Aegeus, who shows respect both for Medea's person and for her oaths, appear exempt from the general indictment; yet Athens itself is about to be visited by Medea. Medea seems to make at first an eloquent case for her own truth, integrity, and justice. Yet in the end her inability to trust her own maternal voice in the monologue destroys our hopes for a more enlightened form of human ethics, for the creation of an authoritative female identity and integrity that could contest masculine ethics, whether archaic or contemporary. By dividing Medea's self along sexual lines, Euripides creates, not a private psychological drama and/or an abstract struggle between reason and passion, but an ambiguous inquiry into the relation between human ethics and social structure.

APPENDIX

The other two main arguments against accepting the present text of Medea's monologue are as follows:

1. The children are told to go off-stage at 1053 but are still there at 1069, awkwardly witnessing in person Medea's struggle over whether to kill them. We can justify the extant text only by assuming that the children leave the stage (1053) and return at Medea's call (1069),[76] or, as seems far less dramatically awkward, that they begin to leave the stage but are temporarily arrested in their departure by Medea's distraught behavior.[77] In any case, the children are proba-

76. E. R. Dodds, "Three Notes on *Medeia*," *Humanitas* 4 (1952) 14–15. He alters *dot'* in 1069 to *deut'*.

77. This is the view of Page 148 on line 1053, supported by Voigtländer 230–31; Steidle 163; Donald J. Mastronarde, *Contact and Discontinuity: Some Conventions of Speech and Action on the Greek-Tragic Stage* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1979) 110; and Lloyd-Jones 57. Stage directions in Greek drama generally appear in the texts and mutes generally obey instructions promptly (D. Bain, *Masters, Servants and Orders in Greek Tragedy: Some Aspects of Dramatic Technique and Convention* [Manchester 1981] 33). Yet in a comparable situation earlier in the play, the Nurse twice directs

bly too young to understand Medea's words fully. Her language is euphemistic about the murder except between 1053, after she has dispatched the children to the house, and 1063. She addresses the children again at 1069, so that they would have been moving away from her during the only explicit lines, and in production this fact could be made visible by having the actor turn away from the children at appropriate moments, or speak 1053 to himself, 1069 more emphatically to the children.[78] The visual contrast between the distraught mother and the innocent children makes a stage effect worth prolonging.

2. Medea at 1045 and 1058 speaks of taking the children with her to Athens, but later in the speech (1060–63) and before (see 791 and 1013) and after (1236–43) this speech she invokes a necessity that requires their death.[79] Is Medea being inconsistent here? In my view, it seems best to argue with Schlesinger that what makes the killing of the children necessary is her revenge plan (see esp. 791–93, 817, and 1059).[80] Medea has at this point abandoned her initial plans to attack Jason's person directly (374–75). Hence, without killing the children she cannot take fully effective revenge on her husband and will be made to look like a fool before her enemies (1049–50). If Schlesinger is right, the seeming inconsistencies of the passage represent a momentary hesitation over whether to take the children and abandon the full revenge plan or to pursue her revenge plan.[81] Once

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the Tutor to take the children inside (89, 100–5); the first time they do not go in. Kovacs' objection (345) to this example, that the Nurse continues to address the Pedagogue, thereby preventing prompt obedience, applies also to the monologue, if the children are arrested by Medea's continuing speech. For a discussion of other less likely explanations of the staging here (e.g., Grube's view that Medea imagines addressing the children from 1021–80), see Reeve 54ff.

78. See Steidle 163–64.

79. Most scholars view 1062–63 as interpolated from 1240–41; G. A. Seeck, "Euripides' *Medea* 1059–68: A Problem of Interpretation," *GRBS* 9 (1968) 291, brackets 1060–63; Christmann 133–36 (see Reeve's objections, 59n. 1) proposes a lacuna here. Lloyd-Jones advocates deleting 1059–63 (yet Kovacs 352n. 17 rightly notes the problematic absence of an adversative in 1064 to show a mind change), and Kovacs deletes 1056–64. As Lesky 226 rightly objects, Seeck's deletion ignores the implications of 1059 and leaves the audience unprepared for 1236–41 (see also the chorus at 976–77 and Medea at 791 and 1013; Medea would not lament the necessity invoked here if it did not imply the killing of the children [Steidle 161]). Kovacs' proposal is ingenious, but he has no strong grounds for deleting 1056–58 (see Lloyd-Jones 54 on *ekei*); the parody in *Acharnians* of *Medea* (see *Ach.* 450–52 and 480–89, and in addition *Medea* 1242ff.) almost certainly refers to Euripides', not Neophron's, address by Medea to her *thumos*. In short, bracketing all or part of 1056–80 does not fully resolve the problems raised by those objecting to the lines.

80. Schlesinger 30–32; Voigtländer 234–35 makes a similar argument. Lloyd-Jones 55 argues against Schlesinger that a Medea who earlier made no apologies for her revenge need not offer to herself the excuse of necessity. In my view it is precisely because Medea is both determined on revenge and confronting the painful consequences of this decision that she needs at this crucial moment the reinforcement of additional arguments to make the revenge seem inevitable (the argument for necessity does not replace the argument for revenge).

81. We have no reason to find implausible either alternative that Medea mentions concerning the children. Medea never doubts her ability to escape. Though she does not explain to the audience how she will make this departure, we have no reason to view her plan to take the children with her as a lapse into wishful fantasy, a powerful example of psychological realism. The appearance of the chariot of the sun is reserved as a surprise for the audience and probably, since she feels so pressed

she has determined on the latter (as 1059 implies),[82] she must kill the children herself, rather than surrender them to the Corinthians. Finally, it should be noted that the ambiguities of the monologue in this respect have one decisive advantage: the killing of the children appears tragically determined by a combination of external and internal pressures,[83] yet the way remains open for Medea's surprising antitragic escape from Corinth in the chariot of the sun.[84]

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for time (Steidle 161), for Medea herself. Previous mythological tradition had the children die in Corinth, and in one version the Corinthians killed them in revenge for Medea's deeds (see Page xxi–xxv for a review of the mythic tradition here). The audience would thus have found convincing Medea's argument that if the children are to remain in Corinth, she must kill them to avoid their deaths at the hands of her enemies.

82. The transition from 1058 to 1059 is disturbingly abrupt, and the argument implied by 1060–63 very condensed. Yet the invocation of deities of revenge in 1059 can serve as a succinct indication that Medea has shifted back to favoring her revenge plan (Voigtländer 234) and must now pursue its implications for the children. Page 149 offers a psychological defense of Medea's sudden vacillations here.

83. As many critics have seen (see esp. Diller 362, Voigtländer 225, Easterling 188, Steidle 162, Lloyd-Jones 52 and 59, Kovacs 344–45), there is no real possibility that Medea will choose to save the children. External necessity limits her options and favors the revenge plan; the audience expects the children's death and does not know about the chariot of the sun; Medea has already invoked the gods' aid for her revenge plan (see 160, 764, 1013); above all, her powerful identity with her revenge plan makes the outcome inevitable. Yet to interpret the monologue simply as displaying the divided Medea's struggle to confront the costs of a predetermined revenge (see, for example, Lloyd-Jones) is to play down the text's moments of genuine hesitation. A combination of predetermination and active choice is typical of tragedy, but Medea's unique situation—she makes a conscious choice with full knowledge of the bad consequences of her action—makes the monologue exceptionally striking.

84. I wish to thank discerning audiences at Delphi, Connecticut College, Lehigh, Emory, Oberlin, and CUNY Graduate Center, as well as Michael Jameson and the anonymous referees for *Classical Antiquity,* for their comments and questions on earlier versions of this paper.