57. The play was famous in the fourth century and often produced. The Alexandrians knew that there were in existence three different prologues to *Rhesus*; it seems strange that if there were three versions of the prologue of *I.A.* no Alexandrian comment on the fact survives.

58. Friedrich, p. 91, n. 2, "Man bedenke, mit welcher Häufung von Zufällen man rechnen müsste: Zufällig enthalten die Trimeter, wie zugegeben wird, gerade das, was den Anapästen fehlt. Zufällig fangen die Trimeter genau an dem Punkte an, wo die Mitteilungen erwartet werden, die Agamemnon in seiner Rede macht usw."

59. This is obscured by Murray's colometry (which departs from that of Barnes but retains his numbering). But the important point is that counting paroemiacs (more frequent in the second system because of Agamemnon's melic anapaests) as dimeters, there are exactly eighty-eight anapaestic dimeters on each side of the trimeters.

60. This article had already been in the editor's hands for some time before the appearance of Gudrun Mellert-Hoffmann's *Untersuchungen zur "Iphigenie in Aulis" des Euripides* (Heidelberg, 1969). The second part of this work, pp. 91–155, contains a vindication of the *I.A.* prologue in its present form with a careful consideration of all the objections which have been advanced against it and an especially valuable examination of the attacks on its language and style. Naturally enough, some of the material of the present article is there anticipated, but it also presents new arguments which, if generally accepted, will serve to reinforce Mellert-Hoffmann's impressive demonstration.

## *TWENTY-ONE*

# *The* Medea *of Euripides*

In 431 B.C. Euripides competed against Sophocles and Euphorion with three tragedies, *Medea*, *Philoctetes*, and *Dictys*, followed by a satyr play, *Theristae*; he was awarded the third prize.[1]

But his *Medea* left a deep and lasting impression in the minds of his Athenian audience; comic parodies,[2] literary imitations,[3] and representations in the visual arts[4] reflect its immediate impact and show that the play lost none of its power to fascinate and repel as the centuries went by. It struck the age as new, but like all innovative masterpieces, it had its deep roots in tradition; it looks back to the past while it gropes for the future. In it we can see what Euripides took over from his predecessors and contemporaries, how he transformed what he learned from them, and what he invented and was to refine and develop as his own unique tragic vision in the last twenty years of his long dramatic career.

He had been fascinated by this story from the very beginning. His first offering in the Dionysiac contest (in 455 B.C., only three years after the staging of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*) included the *Peliades*, the story of Medea at Iolcos, her deceitful promise to rejuvenate old Pelias, its king, and the king's death at her hands. Some time later (we do not know the date—it may have been before the *Medea* or after it),[5] Euripides produced the *Aegeus*, the story of Medea at Athens, married to old Aegeus, its king, and her unsuccessful attempt to engineer the death of his son Theseus. In 431 B.C., twenty-four years after his first production, he staged the play we have, the story of Medea and Jason at Corinth.

We know that the version of the myth which he used in this play was not imposed on him. The many variants of the legend which can still be found in ancient mythographers and commentators as well as in the fragments of lost epics show that he had a wide freedom of choice.[6] One account had Medea kill her children unintentionally (she was trying to make them immortal and something went wrong with the formula); in another the children were killed by the Corinthians in a revolt against Medea, whom they had appointed queen of Corinth; in yet another

This chapter originally appeared in *Yale Classical Studies*, 25 (1977). 

Medea killed Creon, left her children in the temple of Hera, and fled to Athens—whereupon Creon's kinsmen killed the children and spread the rumor that Medea had done it. At least two of these versions (and probably more besides) were available to Euripides, but he made his own by combination, addition, selection. In it, Medea, far from being queen of Corinth, is a refugee there. Deserted by her husband, Jason, she is to be deported, but she kills Jason's bride, the bride's father (Creon, king of Corinth), and her own children, whose bodies she leaves in the temple of Hera Akraia before she departs for Athens. And it seems to be suggested by the evidence that the murder of the children by Medea herself is Euripidean invention.[7]

Out of the old stories available to him, Euripides created a new one—a version more shocking, more physically and psychologically violent than anything he found in the tradition. What is even more remarkable is the way he handles it. How was he to present such a shocking series of actions to an Athenian audience in the theater of Dionysus?

There were several possibilities open to him. He might have made Medea a Clytemnestra figure—a magnificent criminal whose violence represents the primitive past of the race, posed against the civilized, rational values of male democracy, represented in this case by Jason. He might have created a version of the story in which Medea was punished for her crimes and so have shown the working of the justice of the polis,[8] represented by Creon, or of Zeus, announced by a god from the machine—Hera, perhaps, would have been appropriate, or that old standby, Apollo. He might have presented us with a Medea who murdered her children while insane, like Ino (who is actually referred to in the play), or one who murdered in cold blood but was then consumed by everlasting remorse, like Procne. But he did none of these things: what he did was, like the endings of so many of his plays, unexpected.

The prologue introduces the situation swiftly—a wife abandoned with her children for a royal bride in a foreign city. Medea will take no food, listen to no comfort, no advice: she will only weep and rage. But it soon becomes clear that she is no passive sufferer. "I am afraid," says the Nurse; "she is planning something dreadful." As the action develops, we begin to feel the brooding menace of the unseen figure behind the stage door; she is planning suicide or revenge and the Nurse fears for the children's lives. Soon we hear Medea's desperate cries from inside the stage door, her curses, her wishes for death and general destruction.

This is no ordinary woman wronged: in fact, the stage situation may have reminded the audience of a play they had (probably) seen some



years before[9]—the *Ajax* of Sophocles. There too we hear the hero's desperate and terrifying cries from inside the stage building,[10] where, like Medea, he lies, refusing food;[11] there too a woman fears for the protagonist's child (and has had it taken away to safety).[12] And there are many other resemblances. Both Ajax and Medea fear more than anything else in this world the mockery of their enemies;[13] for both of them a time limit of one day is set;[14] both in a set speech explore the possible courses of action open to them and, rejecting alternatives, decide—the one for suicide, the other for revenge.[15] And these similarities are enforced by some striking verbal parallels between the two plays.[16]

These resemblances are not coincidence. Medea, in fact, is presented to us, from the start, in heroic terms. Her language and action, as well as the familiar frame in which they operate, mark her as a heroic character,[17] one of those great individuals whose intractable firmness of purpose, whose defiance of threats and advice, whose refusal to betray their ideal vision of their own nature, were the central preoccupation of Sophoclean tragedy. The structure and language of the *Medea* is that of the Sophoclean heroic play. This is the only extant Euripidean tragedy constructed according to the model which Sophocles was to perfect in the *Oedipus Tyrannos* and which, through the influence of that supreme dramatic achievement and its exploitation by Aristotle as a paradigm, became the model for Renaissance and modern classical tragedy: the play dominated by a central figure who holds the stage throughout, who initiates and completes—against obstacles, advice and threats—the action, whether it be discovery or revenge.[18] Other Euripidean tragedies are different. *Hippolytus* is a drama with four principal characters.[19] Hecuba, who is on stage throughout *The Trojan Women*, is no dominating figure but a passive victim, as she is also in the play named after her, until she turns into a revengeful Medea figure at the end. Pentheus, Heracles, and Andromache are victims rather than actors. Electra in her own play comes nearest to Medea in stage importance, but she cannot act without Orestes, and in the *Orestes* he shares the stage with her. *Phoenissae* has no central character at all and the *Ion*, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, and *Helen* are plays of a different type, in which the "incurable" tragic act is avoided.[20] The *Medea* is the only Euripidean tragedy (in the modern sense of that word) which is tightly constructed around a "hero": a central figure whose inflexible purpose, once formed, nothing can shake—a purpose which is the mainspring of the action.

Medea is presented to the audience in the unmistakable style and language of the Sophoclean hero.[21] These have been isolated and discussed elsewhere;[22] all that is necessary here is to demonstrate their presence and function in the *Medea*. She has the main characteristic of

the hero, the determined resolve, expressed in uncompromising terms: the verbal adjectives *ergasteon* (791), "the deed must be done," and *tolmeteon* (1051) "I must dare"; the decisive futures—especially *kteno*, "I shall kill"—this word again and again. The firmness of her resolve is phrased in the customary Sophoclean terms *dedoktai* (1236), *dedogmenon* (822)—"my mind is made up." She is deaf to persuasion; she will not hear, *akouei* (29). She is moved by the typical heroic passions, anger, *orge* (176 etc.), wrath, *cholos* (94 etc.). She exhibits the characteristic heroic temper daring, *tolma* (394 etc.), and rashness, *thrasos* (856 etc.). She is fearful, terrible, *deine* (44 etc.) and wild, like a beast, *agrios* (193 etc.). She is much concerned, like the heroes, for her glory, εὐκλεέστατος βίος (810); she will not put up with injustice, οὐδ' ἀνέξεται (38), and with what she regards as intolerable, οὐ . . . τλητόν (797). Above all, she is full of passionate intensity, that *thumos* which in her case is so marked a feature of her make-up that in her famous monologue she argues with it, pleads with it for mercy, as if it were something outside herself. Like the heroes, she feels that she has been treated with disrespect, *etimasmene* (20), *atimasas* (1354 etc.); wronged, *edikemene* (26 etc.); and insulted, *hubriz'* (603 etc.). Her greatest torment is the thought that her enemies will laugh at her, *gelos* (383 etc.). Like the Sophoclean heroes, she curses her enemies (607 etc.) while she plans her revenge. She is alone, *mone* (513) and abandoned, *eremos* (255 etc.), and in her isolation and despair she wishes for death.

Like the Sophoclean tragic hero, she resists alike appeals for moderation and harsh summonses to reason. She is admonished, *nouthetoumene* (29) by her friends but pays no more attention than a rock or the sea waves. She is begged to "consider," *skepsai* (851), but to no avail: she cannot be persuaded, *peithesthai* (184) or ruled, *archesthai* (120). The chorus beg her as suppliants, *hiketeuomen* (854) to change her mind, but to no effect. To others her resolution seems to be stupidity, folly, *moria* (457 etc.), and self-willed stubbornness, *authadia* (621);[23] she is like a wild animal, a bull (92 etc.), a lioness (187 etc.).

As in Sophoclean heroic tragedy, there is also a secondary figure whose pliability under pressure throws the hero's unbending will into high relief. It is not, in this play, a weak sister, like Ismene or Chrysothemis, but a man, like Creon in the *Antigone*; in fact, he has the same name, Creon; he is king of Corinth. He comes on stage, his mind made up: he has proclaimed sentence of immediate exile for Medea. She must leave at once: he is afraid of her. Her eloquent appeal falls on deaf ears: his resolve, he says, is fixed, *arare* (322). She will never persuade him, οὐ γὰρ ἄν πείσαις ποτέ (325). But she does. He yields, though he knows that he is making a mistake, and gives her one more day.



However, the structure of the *Medea* does differ from that of the Sophoclean hero play in one important respect: the hero (like Clytemnestra in the *Agamemnon*) must conceal her purpose from everyone else in the play, except, of course, the chorus, whom (unlike Clytemnestra) she must win over to her side. Consequently, a characteristically Sophoclean scene is missing: the two-actor dialogue in which the heroic resolve is assailed by persuasion, threat, or both—Ismene to Antigone, Creon to Antigone, Chrysothemis to Electra, Tecmessa to Ajax. But there *is* a speech in the *Medea* which rolls out all the clichés of the appeal to reason, the summons to surrender which, in Sophocles, all the heroes have to face. It is typical of Euripides' originality, of the way he makes things new, that this speech is delivered by Medea herself.

It is her false declaration of submission to Jason, her fulsome confession that she was only a foolish emotional woman, the speech that lures him to his doom. "I talked things over with myself," she tells him, "and reproached myself bitterly." As she reports her self-rebuke, she pulls out all the stops of the Sophoclean summons to reason. "Why do I act like a mad woman [*mainomai* 873] and show hostility to good advice [τοῖσι βουλεύουσιν εὖ 874]? Shall I not rid myself of passion [*thumou* 879]? I realize that my judgment was bad [*aboulian* 882]. . . . I raged in pointless anger [μάτην θυμουμένη 883] . . . I was mindless [*aphron* 885]. . . . I confess I was full of bad thoughts then . . . but have come to better counsel now [κακῶς φρονεῖν τότ' . . . ἄμεινον . . . βεβούλευμαι 892–93]. My anger has subsided [μεθέστηκεν χόλος 898]." And later, when Jason accepts her apologies, she says, "I shall not disobey you [*apisteso* 927]. What you did was best for me [*lōista* 935]."[24]

Jason is understanding and sympathetic. "I congratulate you on your present frame of mind—and I don't blame you for things past. Anger is something you have to expect from a woman. . . . But your mind has changed for the better [ἐς τὸ λῷον 911]." As he turns from Medea to his sons, Euripides puts in his mouth a subtle variation on a Sophoclean theme: the threat to the hero that he or she will realize the need for surrender in time, γνῶναι . . . χρόνῳ.[25] "You have realized what the best decision is," he says to her, "though it took time [ἔγνως . . . τῷ χρόνῳ 912]." He has swallowed the bait—hook, line, and sinker: the way is now prepared for the murders that will wreck his life.[26]

This speech is part of Medea's grand design; these formulas of dissuasion masquerading as terms of submission are the instruments of her revenge. As if this were not a sufficiently daring adaptation of the patterns of the heroic play, Euripides presents us with another. There *is* one person who can and does pose a real obstacle to Medea's plans, who can effectively confront her with argument—Medea herself.[27] In the monologue she delivers after she hears that her fatal gifts have been

delivered into the princess's hands by her children, she pleads with herself, changes her mind, and changes again and then again to return finally and firmly to her intention to kill them. When the children look at her and smile, she loses her courage. "Farewell, my plans!" (1048). But then she recovers. "Shall I earn the world's laughter by leaving my enemies unpunished? No, I must dare to do this!" (1049–51). Then a sudden surge of love and pity overcomes her again and she addresses herself to her own *thumos*, her passionate heroic anger, as if it were something outside herself. "Do not do it. Let them go, hard-hearted—spare the children!" (1056–57). But her *thumos* will not relent: the children must die. In this great scene the grim heroic resolve[28] triumphs not over an outside adversary or adviser but over the deepest maternal feelings of the hero herself.

This presentation in heroic terms of a rejected foreign wife, who was to kill her husband's new wife, the bride's father, and finally her own children, must have made the audience which saw it for the first time in 431 B.C. a trifle uneasy. Heroes, it was well known, were violent beings and since they lived and died by the simple code "help your friends and hurt your enemies" it was only to be expected that their revenges, when they felt themselves unjustly treated, dishonored, scorned, would be huge and deadly. The epic poems do not really question Achilles' right to bring destruction on the Greek army to avenge Agamemnon's insults, nor Odysseus' slaughter of the entire younger generation of the Ithacan aristocracy. Sophocles' Ajax sees nothing wrong in his attempt to kill the commanders of the army for denying him the armor of Achilles; his shame springs simply from his failure to achieve his bloody objective. But Medea is a woman, a wife and mother, and also a foreigner. Yet she acts as if she were a combination of the naked violence of Achilles and the cold craft of Odysseus, and, what is more, it is in these terms that the words of Euripides' play present her. "Let no one," she says, "think me contemptible and weak, nor inactive either, but quite the opposite—dangerous to my enemies, helpful to my friends. Such are the qualities that bring a life glory" (807ff.). It is the creed by which Homeric and Sophoclean heroes live—and die.[29]

She is a hero, then, but since she is also a woman, she cannot prevail by brute strength; she must use deceit.[30] She is, as she admits herself, a "clever woman," *sophe*, and this cleverness she uses to deceive everyone in the play, bending them to her frightful purpose. Creon is tricked into giving her one day's grace; she knows that his initial bluster hides a soft heart[31] and fawns on him (her own term, *thopeusai* 368) to gain time. Aegeus is tricked into promising her asylum in Athens: tricked is the word, for if he had realized that she intended



to destroy the royal house of Corinth and her own children, he would never have promised her protection. She knows this, and that is why she binds him by a solemn oath. And Jason she takes in completely by her assumption of the role of repentant wife: she showers him with such abject self-abasement, such fawning reiteration of all the male Greek clichés about women (she even says: "A woman is female—it's her nature to weep," 289),[32] that one wonders how Jason can believe it. But she knows her man. "That's the way a sensible woman *should* act," he says, γυναικὸς ἔργα ταῦτα σώφρονος (913).

And so the poisoned gifts are taken to the new bride; Medea, when she hears that they have been delivered and accepted, successfully resists the temptation to spare the children, and then, after savoring at length[33] the messenger's frightful description of the poison's effects, she kills her sons. Her revenge is complete when Jason comes to save them; she holds their bodies in the chariot sent by her grandfather Helios, and, safe from Jason, taunts him with the wreck of all his hopes, his childlessness. The end of the play sees her leave to deposit the children's bodies in Hera's temple and then go off to Athens.

She triumphs.[34] She will always suffer from the memory of what she did to the children, as she grudgingly admits to Jason (1361–62),[35] but she has her full and exquisite revenge. "These children are dead," she says to him, "that is what will torment you" (1370). And she escapes the consequences of her action, goes safely to Athens.

This is very unlike what happens to most Sophoclean heroes. Ajax triumphs in a way, but he is dead; Oedipus wins a kind of victory, but he is blind; Antigone's victory comes after she has hanged herself. This complete success of Medea is connected with another feature of the way she is presented which is also in sharp contrast with the Sophoclean hero. She is quite sure, from start to finish, that the gods are on her side.

All the Sophoclean heroes feel themselves, sooner or later, abandoned by gods as well as men: their loneliness is absolute, they can appeal only to the silent presence of mountains, sea, and air.[36] But Medea from her first appearance has no doubts that the gods support her cause. She appeals to Themis (ancestral law) and Artemis (woman's help in childbirth!) to witness Jason's unjust action (160); she calls on Zeus, who, she says, knows who is responsible for her sorrows (332), swears to avenge herself in the name of Hecate,[37] "the mistress I revere above all others, my chosen helpmate" (395ff.). She asks Jason if he thinks the same gods by whom he swore fidelity no longer reign in power (493), appeals again to Zeus (516), and calls exultantly on "Zeus, the justice of Zeus and the light of the Sun" (764), as she sees her plans for revenge ensured by Aegeus' promise of shelter in Athens. After the murder of the children she is still confident, in her

confrontation scene with Jason, that Zeus is on her side (1352), and she makes plans to deposit the bodies of her sons in the temple of Hera Akraia (1379). When Jason appeals to the avenging Erinyes and blood retribution (*Erinys* ... *Dike* 1389f.), she dismisses his claim to divine protection with scorn: "What god or spirit listens to *your* prayers?" (1391). She never wavers from her faith that what she does has divine approval.[38] She can even say, to the messenger who brings the news from the palace which seals the fate of the children: "These things the gods and I, with my evil thoughts, have contrived [*ταῦτα γὰρ θεοὶ / κἀγὼ κακῶς φρονοῦσ' ἐμηχανησάμην* 1013–14]."

"The gods and I"—she sees herself as their instrument and associate.[39] And the play gives us no reason to think that she is wrong. On the contrary, it confirms her claim in spectacular fashion. All through the play, appeals are made to two divine beings, Earth and Sun. It is by these divinities that Aegeus is made to swear the oath that he will protect Medea from her enemies once she reaches Athens; it is to Earth and Sun that the chorus appeals at the last moment, begging them to prevent the murder of the children, and Jason, in the last scene, asks Medea how, with her children's blood on her hands, she can look at Earth and Sun. "What Earth will do we shall not be told,"[40] but Helios, the Sun, is clearly on Medea's side. Not only are the poisoned gifts sent to the princess an inheritance from Helios (and the poison acts like a concentration of the sun's fire), but, more important, it is Helios who sends Medea the chariot on which she escapes to Athens. "In the gods' name," says Jason, "let me touch the soft skin of my sons" (1402–3). But *his* appeal to the gods has no effect; "Your words are wasted" (1404), Medea tells him, and draws away in her chariot as Jason appeals again to Zeus. The chorus ends the play with lines which appear in our manuscripts at the end of several other Euripidean plays; some critics have thought them inappropriate here,[41] but they are obviously and squarely in their right place:

> Zeus on Olympus has many things in his store-room:
> the gods bring to pass many surprising things.
> What was expected is not fulfilled.
> For the unexpected the gods find a way.
> So this story turned out.

Medea's appearance as a heroic figure, as the murderer of her children who escapes the consequences of her actions, apparently with the blessing of the gods, must have seemed to the audience surprising beyond description. Euripides himself, like the gods, has many things in his store room; he has defied expectation and found a way for the unimagined.



*II*

But he has another surprising thing in his store room: Medea's final appearance. She has been on stage since near the beginning of the play; she leaves only toward the end, when she goes through the palace door to murder her sons. When she enters again, to face Jason, she is on the chariot sent by Helios, her grandfather, high up in the air. This last detail is not clearly stated in the text, but no other stage arrangement would explain why Jason cannot reach her and must beg her to let him touch the bodies of his sons. She must be either on the roof of the stage building (but that would present mechanical difficulties) or in the *mechane*—her chariot swung out over the stage area on a crane.[42] In either case, she is high up and out of reach. But this is the place reserved in Attic tragedy for gods; this is not, as the chorus of the *Electra* says, the pathway of mortals, *οὐ γὰρ θνητῶν γ' ἥδε κέλευθος* (1235–36). And as the scene progresses, this hint that she has become something more than mortal is confirmed. Her situation, action, and language are precisely those of the divine beings who in so many Euripidean plays appear at the end in power[43] to wind up the action, give judgment, prophesy the future, and announce the foundation of a religious ritual.[44]

From her unapproachable position on high, she interrupts and puts a stop to the violent action of the human beings on the lower level (Jason is trying to break down the palace door). In this she is like Apollo in the *Orestes*, Athena in the *Ion* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*, the Dioscuri in *Helen*, and Hermes in the *Antiope*.[45] She justifies her savage revenge on the grounds that she has been treated with disrespect and mockery (1354–55), like Dionysus in the *Bacchae*; in this she is like Aphrodite in the *Hippolytus* prologue, Athena in the prologue to the *Troades*. She takes measures and gives orders for the burial of the dead (her own sons 1378ff. and the princess 1394)[46] like Thetis in the *Andromache*, Athena in *The Suppliants* and *Erechtheus*, Hermes in the *Antiope*, and the Dioscuri in the *Electra*. She prophesies the future (the ignominious death of Jason) like Thetis in the *Andromache*, Athena in *The Suppliants* and *Ion*, the Dioscuri in *Electra* and *Helen*, Apollo in *Orestes*, and Dionysus in the *Bacchae*.[47] She announces the foundation of a cult (for her own children in Corinth 1382ff.) like Artemis in the *Hippolytus* and Athena in the *Iphigenia in Tauris* and *Erechtheus*.[48] She announces her departure and destination (1384ff.) like the Dioscuri in *Electra* and Apollo in *Orestes*.[49]

And Medea speaks in phrases which recur in the pronouncements of the gods from the machine. "Why are you trying to break down the doors with crowbars?" she asks Jason. "Stop!" *pausai* (1319). "Why are

you directing a pursuit?" Athena asks Thoas at the end of the *Iphigenia in Tauris*. "Stop!" *pausai* (1437). So Apollo speaks to Menelaus in the *Orestes*: *pausai* (1625). This is not the only command Medea issues from the *mechane*: like the gods she is prone to imperatives. She dismisses Jason. "Go!" she says to him, "and bury your wife," *steiche* (1394). So Athena in the *Ion* dismisses Ion and Creusa: "Go!" *steicheth'* (1616), and the Dioscuri in *Electra* send Orestes on his way to Athens with the same word: "Go!" *steich'* (1343).[50]

Medea shows the same merciless, even vindictive, attitude toward Jason that characterizes the Euripidean gods. "The children are dead. This is what will give you pain," she says to him, using the same word, *dēxetai* (1370), that Artemis uses in the *Hippolytus* when she rebukes Theseus: "Do my words pain you?" *daknei* (1313). Like Artemis, she holds out the prospect of more suffering to come. "Listen to what comes next—you will cry out in even greater agony," says Artemis (1314), and Medea tells Jason: "You are not sorrowing yet. Wait until you are old" (1396).[51] A statement of Artemis about the ways of gods with men sums up what Medea might have claimed: "Those who are evil we destroy, children and home and all" (1340–41)—except that Medea's more exquisite revenge is to leave Jason alive and alone amid the ruin of his hopes for his sons and his marriage.

Medea is presented to us not only as a hero, but also, at the end of the play, by her language, action, and situation, as a *theos* or at least something more than human. She does not start that way, but that is how she ends. Ends, that is to say, in *this* play:[52] she is going to Athens, as she tells us, and what form she will assume there we are not told. It is not likely that Euripides' audience was worried about that point: they must have been sufficiently taken aback by the appearance of Medea, the murderer of her sons, in the "habiliments of the goddess," assuming the attitude and using the language of the stage *theos*.

It is very hard to imagine what it meant to them (and what it should mean to us), for there is no parallel to it in Attic drama. Peleus in the *Andromache* is told that he will become a *theos* (1256) and is given a rendezvous for his apotheosis (1265ff.), but it does not take place on stage. Helen, at the end of the play which bears her name (1667), is given a similar assurance (not fulfilled on stage) and in the *Orestes* she actually appears on the right hand of Apollo, on her way to rejoin Castor and Polydeuces in the heavens (1631ff.), but she does not say anything. There *are* two cases in which a human being at the end of the play performs one of the functions of the *deus ex machina*. In the *Heraclidae*, Eurystheus, on the point of death, gives instructions for his burial (1036) and reveals a Delphic oracle which gives his buried corpse



protective powers for Athens in future wars (1032ff.). (However, he expressly forbids a cult of his grave 1040–41.) In the *Hecuba*, the blinded Polymestor prophesies the transformation of Hecuba and the deaths of Agamemnon and Cassandra (1259ff.). These are faint and partial approximations, but there is nothing remotely comparable to Medea's full exercise of all the functions of the *theos* and her triumphant godlike departure through the air.

The effect of this investment of Medea with all the properties and functions of stage divinity must have been to bring home to the audience the conviction that Medea is not merely an individual woman wronged and revengeful; she is, at the end, a figure which personifies something permanent and powerful in the human situation, as Aphrodite clearly does, and Dionysus also. These two were Olympian deities, worshiped in state cult and portrayed in temple sculpture, but the Greek imagination created many other *theoi*, was apt, in fact, to see a *theos* in every corner. "All things are full of gods," said Thales, and from Hesiod on through the fifth and fourth centuries, Greek literature presents us with *theoi* who represent almost every phase of human activity and circumstance—poverty, plague, reputation, force, helplessness, ambition, time, and sorrow, to name just a few. A sentence of Menander gives a clue to what lies behind this proliferating theogony: adding a new *theos* to the unofficial pantheon—shamelessness (*Anaideia*)—he says: "Whatever has power is now worshipped as a god."[53]

Medea, in her last appearance, certainly has power but it is not easy to define exactly what she represents. There is a *theos* in Aeschylus which bears some resemblance to her: the house-destroying *theos* of the *Seven against Thebes*, τὰν ὠλεσίοικον θεὸν οὐ θεοῖς ὁμοίαν (720–21). But this *theos* is almost immediately (723) identified as an *Erinys*, and that will not do for Medea; in fact, as a spiller of kindred blood, she should be their allotted victim, as Jason vainly hopes she will be (1389).[54] Revenge—*dike* in the simplest sense—certainly has something to do with it, but she is more than Lesky's "Dämon der Rache";[55] there would have been no need to give her the style and appurtenances of a *theos* for that—as seems clear from the figure of Hecuba in the last scenes of the play which bears her name. Perhaps the appearance of this ferocious incarnation of vengeance in the place of an Olympian god is meant to reinforce in the audience's mind that disconcerting sense of the disintegration of all normal values which the play as a whole produces, to emphasize visually that moral chaos which the chorus sang of earlier:

> The spell cast by sworn oaths has faded; respect for others no longer remains anywhere in Greece, it has taken wing up to the sky. (439ff.)

But Medea as *theos* must also represent some kind of irresistible power, something deeply rooted in the human situation, as dangerous as it is universal. It has something to do with revenge for betrayal, but its peculiar ferocity must stem from the fact that before she was a hero and through her action became a (stage) *theos*, she was a woman.

It is clear from Medea's very first speech that this strange drama, which uses Sophoclean heroic formulas to produce a most un-Sophoclean result, is grounded in the social reality and problems of its own time. There can be no doubt, to anyone who reads it without prejudice, that the *Medea* is very much concerned with the problem of woman's place in human society. I do not of course mean to revive the idea, fashionable in the early years of this century, that Euripides is a feminist.[56] Even though tradition has it that speeches from the *Medea* (in the translation of Gilbert Murray) were read aloud at suffragette meetings (a careful selection, no doubt), it is not likely that Sylvia Pankhurst would have admitted Medea to membership in her league. Euripides is concerned in this play not with progress or reform[57] but (just as in the *Hippolytus* and the *Bacchae*) with the eruption in tragic violence of forces in human nature which have been repressed and scorned, which in their long-delayed breakout exact a monstrous revenge. The *Medea* is not about woman's rights; it is about woman's wrongs, those done to her and by her.

## *III*

This aspect of the play is usually ignored or dismissed—on the grounds that Medea is atypical: she cannot be considered a figure relevant to the problems of Athenian society because she is an oriental barbarian and also a witch.[58] "Because she was a foreigner," says Page, "she could kill her children: because she was a witch she could escape in a magic chariot."[59] The second half of this magisterial pronouncement kills two birds with one stone; in addition to denying the play any relevance to Athenian society, it also disposes of the awkward questions raised by Medea's appearance as the *theos* on the machine—she is just a witch on a glorified Hellenic broomstick. Since Page gives no other evidence that Medea is a witch, what he seems to mean is rather: "since she can escape in a magic chariot, Medea is a witch." But supernatural winged chariots are hardly an identifying mark of witches: they are properties, in Greek mythology, of gods, of Apollo, of the Attic divinity Triptolemos, above all of Helios, the sun (who is, of course, Medea's grandfather). And yet Medea as a witch or sorceress appears as a regular feature of most discussions of the play.[60] There are of course passages in ancient literature which present us with lurid pictures of Medea as a figure resembling our conception of a witch. In the following lines, for example, she addresses her prayer to Hecate:

> For thee, my hair flowing free as is the custom of my race, I have paced the sacred groves barefoot. I have called down rain from dry clouds, driven the waves to the sea-bottom . . . changed the order of the seasons . . . brought wheat to harvest in the winter time.

Another poet gives us a detailed description of the witches' brew she cooks for old Aeson:

> And all the while the brew in the bronze cauldron boiled and frothed white: in it were herb-roots gathered from Thessaly's lonely vales . . . and hoar-frost taken at the full of the moon, a hoot-owl's wings and flesh, a werewolf's entrails also, and the fillet of fenny snake, the liver of the stag.

The first of these passages is from the *Medea* of the Roman dramatist Seneca[61] and the second from the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid.[62] It is, in fact, in the Roman poets of the first centuries B.C. and A.D. (Horace, Virgil, and Lucan) that something resembling our conception of a witch first appears, to give literary shape to the medieval witch of Christian times who serves the devil instead of Hecate but claims the same powers to raise the dead, curse, blight, transform, and prophesy. From the contents of Ovid's cauldron to that of Shakespeare,

> Finger of birth-strangled babe
> ditch-delivered by a drab
> make the gruel thick and slab,[63]

there runs an unbroken line. But it does not go back as far as the fifth century B.C. The term "witch," with its medieval overtones of black magic, ugliness, and malevolence, has no place in a description of Euripides' Medea.

There is, however, one incident in Medea's career, well-known to the fifth-century audience, which, though it does not justify the anachronistic use of the term "witchcraft," does associate her with the use of magic—her deliberately unsuccessful attempt to rejuvenate old Pelias by cutting him into pieces and boiling him in a pot. Interestingly enough, this is not magical practice, but a deliberate murder which uses other people's belief in magic to mask its real nature. Still, it is at any rate a magical context for Medea and it was a popular story; Sophocles dramatized it in his *Rhizotomoi*,[64] and it was the subject of the *Peliades* at the very beginning of Euripides' career as a dramatist. It would therefore have been very easy for him to emphasize this aspect of Medea's action: the material was familiar, needing only an emphasis on

the dramatist's part to bring it to the surface of the audience's memory and cast a baleful spotlight on Medea the sorceress. But he hardly mentions it, and when he does, it is in the blandest of terms. It is described simply as a murder—"I killed Pelias, the most painful way to die, at the hands of his own daughters" (486ff.)—without any of the sensational details. In fact, when one thinks how naturally a scathing reference to this episode would have fitted into Jason's desperate invective at the end of the play,[65] it seems as if Euripides was doing his best to avoid the subject altogether.

And in any case, in the play Euripides wrote, Medea has no magical powers at all. Until she is rescued by the god Helios, and is herself transformed into some kind of superhuman being, she is merely a helpless betrayed wife and mother with no protection of any kind. She has only two resources, cunning and poison.

Perhaps it is the use of poison which has led so many critics to use the word "witch." For the only fifth-century Greek word for witch that the dictionaries can suggest is *pharmakis*, which means of course a woman who deals with love charms, drugs, and poisons. This certainly applies to Euripides' Medea,[66] but it has nothing to do with witchcraft. Love charms, drugs, and poisons are the age-old last recourse of the unloved or vengeful wife in fifth-century Athens, modern Egypt, nineteenth-century India, or for that matter Victorian England[67]—everywhere in fact before the scientific detection of poisons made these things too dangerous (for the poisoner) to use. And Medea is not the only *pharmakis* in Athenian literature. Deianira in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* tries to win back her husband's love with a love charm which, like Medea's gift to the princess, is a poisoned robe (and has the same effect on its victim).[68] The stepmother, in Antiphon's speech, gives her husband a love charm (drinkable this time) which kills him; the prosecution claims that was exactly what she intended.[69] The Athenian princess Creusa (no barbarian witch this one) uses in Euripides' *Ion* a poison just as magical as Medea's[70] to try to kill the boy she thinks is her husband's bastard son. All three of these ladies use poison, intentionally or not, to redress the balance of their unequal struggle with their husbands, but no one dreams of calling them witches.

Of course, Greek men did not approve of such feminine initiatives, but they did not invest them with the supernatural and diabolical associations of the modern word "witch." In any case, the particular function of the medieval witch—cursing, producing barrenness in women, a murrain on the cattle, disease and death for whole families—was in the ancient world not the province of specialists but the normal recourse of ordinary individuals. This is all too clear to anyone who studies the hate-filled inscriptions known as *defixiones*, which show,



from the fifth century on, ordinary persons, in Greece and elsewhere, solemnly recording on tablets of lead or pieces of broken pottery their spells for the painful destruction of their neighbors and business rivals. "I call down on Androtion a fever to recur every fourth day until he dies," runs one of the milder specimens—scratched on a fifth-century Athenian potsherd.[71]

Medea then, in the body of the play, has no supernatural powers or equipment. All she has is a very powerful poison, but this merely puts her in the same class as Deianira and Creusa. These are of course not the parallels cited by the proponents of Medea the witch. They cite Circe and Hecate. But Hecate is a great goddess and of course Circe is a goddess too, as Homer plainly tells us.[72] The Medea of the body of the play is not comparable in any way with these powerful figures.

But if to call Medea a witch falsifies the situation, she is also, according to many modern critics, a barbarian, an Oriental, and therefore equally irrelevant to the problems of Greek society. This case is most eloquently argued by Page.

> She is just such a woman as his audience would expect a foreign princess to be. She has nearly all the features of the type—unrestrained excess in lamentation, a readiness to fawn on authority, the powers of magic, childlike surprise at falsehoods and broken promises. . . . It was natural then that Medea should be unrestrained in the expression of her sorrow, like a Phrygian or a Mysian . . . she was like a wild beast in her grief and anger. And then in a moment she changes her mood and cringes before the King . . . a second time . . . before Aegeus, a third time before Jason. Respect for authority was the primary cause. The Oriental was accustomed to despots whose word was law. . . . Broken promises Medea finds it . . . difficult to forgive. . . . The contrast of truthful barbarian and lying Greek had long been a commonplace.[73]

The case could not be more eloquently stated, but it is flawed. Medea is indeed unrestrained in the expression of sorrow, but the comparison should be "like Ajax, Odysseus, Achilles, Heracles."[74] She is compared to a wild beast, but so, sooner or later, are all the Sophoclean heroes.[75] The way she fawns on Creon, Aegeus, and Jason has nothing at all to do with respect for authority; she is deceiving them all, and two of them she is luring to their ruin.[76] As for her "childish surprise at falsehoods and broken promises," this is a trait she shares (apart from the prejudicial adjective) with Creusa, Philoctetes, and of course the Greek chorus of the *Medea*.

Page finds that "above all the inhuman quality of the child-murderess was a typically foreign quality. The chorus could think of only

one other example in the legends of Greece—Ino" (though, as he points out in a note, "they might have added at least Agave and Procne"). But Page does not produce any eastern stories which will serve as cogent parallels. In fact, as an example of the "appalling cruelty" of "foreign countries," he cites Astyages, who "set a Thyestean feast before Harpagos." But the adjective "Thyestean" gives the game away—that's a *Greek* story!—and the list of Persian atrocities which follows contains nothing which cannot be paralleled, or for that matter bettered, from Greek myth and history.[77]

"No *Greek* woman would have had the heart to do what she has done"; Page quotes Jason to sum up his case. But dramatic characters do not necessarily speak for their creator. And this speech is neatly cancelled out by one of Thoas', the barbarian king in the same dramatist's *Iphigenia in Tauris*. Informed that the captured Orestes has murdered his mother, he exclaims (using exactly the same verb as Jason, *etlē*) "Apollo! Not even among the barbarians would anyone have the heart to do what he has done" (1174).

In any case, there is no suggestion in the play that anyone regards Medea as a barbarian, except of course, in the end, Jason. The chorus of Corinthian women fully approve of her first announcement that she plans revenge on her husband (267–68). When she makes clear that this means death not only for Jason but also for the king of Corinth and his daughter, they raise no objections. In fact, in the choral ode which follows they sing exultantly of honor coming for the female sex. When she tells them that her plans have changed—she will now kill the princess, "whoever touches her," and also Jason's sons—they cry out in protest. But it is only the murder of the children which appalls them. Their protest brushed aside, they say only that she will be the unhappiest among women. Where they could have intervened decisively—the scene in which Medea entraps Jason by feigned humility—they remain silent. Finally, after listening to the messenger's ghastly account of the deaths of the king and his daughter, their only comment is: "It seems as if heaven today were bringing much evil on Jason—as he deserves!" (1231–32).

The chorus obviously feel that Medea's situation might well be their own: as far as they are concerned, she speaks like and for them, and when after the offstage murder of the children they sing their antistrophe, far from suggesting that she is a witch and oriental barbarian (and surely this was the place to make Page's point), they find a parallel in their own Greek tradition. "Only one woman, only one, have I heard of who in time past raised her hand against her children. It was Ino, driven mad by the gods" (1282ff.). The foreignness of Medea was fixed in the legend and it suited Euripides' purpose, since it made



possible the liquid fire and the chariot of the sun, but Euripides' Medea, in her thought, speech, and action is as Greek as Jason, or rather, as Ajax and Achilles.

## *IV*

But she is a woman and her first speech, that of a woman speaking to women, exploits and appeals to their feelings of sympathy. It is of course one of the most famous speeches in Greek tragedy. No more howls of despair, or threats of suicide—she comes out of the house to win the support of the chorus for her still nebulous plan for revenge. She is apologetic, conciliatory, a foreigner who must carefully observe the proprieties. But her life, she says, has been destroyed; her husband, who was everything to her, has turned out to be the vilest of men.

"Of all the creatures that have breath and intelligence, we women are the most afflicted." We buy our husbands with our dowry—her argument proceeds—not knowing if they will be good or bad, go into a new home unprepared for the new life. If we work hard and make a success of it, we're lucky; if not, death would be better. The man, when he tires of our company, can go out for distraction; we are forced to keep our eyes steadily on one single human being. They say we live at home in safety, while *they* fight the wars—what fools! I'd rather stand in the battle line three times than go through child-bearing once.

It is magnificent rhetoric, and it wins their heart. But it is not, as has so often been claimed, *just* rhetoric. It has its vital function in the construction of the drama, but it must also reflect some contemporary reality, for dramatists, especially the greatest dramatists, are not philosophers, not original thinkers; they reflect and use, dramatize and intensify, the thought and feeling of their time. And in fact there are many signs that in the intellectual ferment of late fifth-century Athens, the problem of women's role in society and the family was, like everything else, a subject for discussion and reappraisal. In Euripides' *Melanippe Desmotis*, for example, someone (presumably the heroine) makes a long polemical speech demonstrating woman's moral and religious superiority to man (Page, *GLP* 112). The *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes is of course a hilarious comedy, but it has a deeply serious undercurrent of feeling, and the heroine of the play, the woman who organizes her sex on both sides to stop the war, is wholly sympathetic—it is quite clear that her creator admired her. J. H. Finley long ago drew attention to the resemblances (some of them verbal) between Medea's speech and the arguments against marriage set forth (from the man's point of view) by Antiphon the sophist.[78] And one cannot help suspecting that much later, Plato, when he says in the *Republic* that to divide mankind into male

and female for the purposes of public life or education or anything, except the begetting and bearing of children, is just as absurd as to divide it into the long-haired and the bald,[79] may well be adapting to his own purpose, as he so often does, ideas that were first put into circulation by the sophistic radicals of the fifth century.

Even if it is conceded that the role of women in family and society was a problem under discussion in fifth-century Athens, it may be objected that it was a theme a tragic poet might well avoid, and that even if he did choose to handle it, he would never take as his protagonist a woman who butchered her own sons. Yet this same strange combination of infanticide and programmatic speech about the lot of women appears in another tragedy produced before 414 (how many years before, we do not know).[80] Its author is none other than Sophocles. His *Tereus* told the story of the Athenian princess Procne, married to Tereus, king of Thrace. She persuaded him to bring her sister Philomela from Athens to join her. Tereus, on the way home, raped Philomela, and then cut out her tongue so that she could not denounce him. But Philomela wove the story of the outrage on a piece of embroidery and so Procne learned the truth. She killed her son by Tereus (his name was Itys), cut up the flesh, cooked it, and served it up to Tereus who ate it. The gods, in pity and disgust, changed all three of them into birds: Tereus to a hoopoe, Philomela to a swallow, and Procne into a nightingale, whose song is a perpetual mourning for Itys.

This metamorphosis almost certainly did not take place on stage (though Tereus in *The Birds* of Aristophanes complains that Sophocles gave him a beak), and in fact we have very little idea of how Sophocles treated this horrendous tale. But among the few fragments that survive there is one speech of Procne, the wronged wife, which runs as follows:[81]

> Now, separated (from my family), I am nothing. Many a time I have observed that in this case our sex, the female sex, is nothing. When we are children, in our father's home, our life is the most pleasant in the world; young girls grow up in thoughtless delight. But when we reach maturity and intelligence, we are expelled, bought and sold, far away from the gods of our fathers and from our parents, some to barbarians, some to houses where everything is alien, others to houses where they meet with hostility. But all this, when one night has joined us to our husband, we must acquiesce in, and pretend that all is well.

We do not know the context of this speech but its content is astonishingly close to Medea's opening address to the chorus, and it is made by a woman who, like Medea—but in even more gruesome



circumstances—kills her child to punish her husband. The attribution of such sentiments to two such similar characters by two different playwrights suggests that the lot of women was, in late fifth-century Athens, very much a question of the day, and also a subject that fascinated the tragic poets.

Even those who recognize that Medea's speech is not merely the rhetoric of an oriental witch but a reflection of Athenian social conditions, usually tamp down its explosive potential by explaining that since women in fifth-century Athens (unlike women today) were confined to the home, children, and servants, excluded from active social, economic, and political life, some such protest was only natural in the work of an intellectual dramatist. Though this view of woman's lowly position in fifth-century Athens has been doubted by influential scholars in recent years,[82] it seems to me, on the whole, to be fairly close to the truth. But what is no longer true is the implied comparison which makes our own society look extremely advanced in this matter and permits smug and carefully qualified understanding of Medea's protest as a historical curiosity. For our own complacency about the freedom of women in modern industrial democracy has been exploded by the literature of the militant women's movement of the last decade. In fact, almost everything the play says about women's position in society is still relevant (except perhaps for the dowry, but that is still an important matter in France, Italy, and, above all, in Greece), and the startling universality of Euripides' play is clear from the fact that it says some things that do not seem to have occurred to anyone again[83] until Simone de Beauvoir wrote *Le Deuxième Sexe*.

Medea's speech wins over the chorus, but now she has to deal with Creon and his sentence of immediate expulsion. He is afraid of her, and one thing which contributes to his fear is the fact that, as he says himself, she is a clever woman, σοφὴ πέφυκας (285).[84] "Clever" is not an adequate translation of *sophe*—but then, there isn't one. It is a word used in the fifth century to describe not only the skill of the artisan and the poet, not only the wisdom won by experience and reflection, but also the new intellectual, enlightened outlook of the great sophistic teachers and the generation they had taught. This is why Creon fears her; it is on this point that she must reassure him, and she does. She admits that she is *sophe*—an intellectual, a person of great capacity—but points out that it has not done her any good. She speaks in generalities, but it is clear enough what she is talking about. Men distrust superior intelligence in general, but they really fear and hate it in a woman. *Sophos*, a clever man, is bad enough, but *sophe*—a clever woman!

> This is not the first time, Creon—it's one of many—that my reputation thwarts and harms me. No one who has his wits about

him should have his children taught to be unusually clever (*sophous*). They will be called lazy, indolent, and, worse than that, they'll win the jealous hatred of their fellow-citizens. If you offer new and clever ideas to fools, they'll think you good for nothing, not clever. And then again, if the city at large ranks you above the recognized intellectuals, *they*'ll be your bitter enemies. This is what has happened to me, exactly this. I am clever; some hate and envy me; others find me withdrawn, others just the opposite, and still others offensive. I am not so clever.

These lines have sometimes been seen as Euripides' bitter reflections on his own isolation as an advanced and intellectual poet. There is much truth in this view, but the lines are also Medea's, the complaint of a woman of great intellectual capacity who finds herself excluded from the spheres of power and action.

She wins her one day's delay from Creon and tells the chorus her plans; so far, they do not include the murder of the children. The chorus evidently approve, for they plunge straight into the great ode which celebrates the new day coming for the female sex.

The waters of the sacred rivers run upstream;
the right order of all things is reversed.
Now it is *men* who deal in treachery:
now covenants sealed in heaven's name are worthless.

So much for Jason's betrayal. But they go on.

Legends now shall change direction,
Woman's life have glory.
Honor comes to the female sex.
Woman shall be a theme for slanderous tales no more.

The songs of poets from bygone times shall cease
to harp on our faithlessness.
It was not to our minds that Phoebus, lord of melody,
granted the power to draw heavenly song from the lyre:
for if so, we would have chanted
our own hymns of praise
to answer the race of man.

Time in its long passage has much to tell
of our destiny as of theirs.

This is an extraordinary passage. All the songs, the stories, the whole literary and artistic tradition of Greece, which had created the lurid figures of the great sinners, Clytemnestra, Helen, and also the



desirable figures (from the male point of view) of faithful Penelope and Andromache—all of it, Hesiod's catalogues of scandalous women, Semonides' rogues' gallery of women compared to animals, is dismissed; it was all written by men. The chorus has suddenly realized the truth contained in the Aesopian story of the man and the lion who argued about which species was superior.[85] Shown as proof of man's dominance a gravestone on which was carved a picture of a man downing a lion, the lion replied: "If lions could carve sculptures, you would see the lion downing the man."

Xenophanes had remarked that if cows, horses, and lions had hands and could paint pictures and carve statues, they would have made gods looking like themselves. It took Euripides to apply the revolutionary implications of that statement to the relation between men and women. "Legends now shall change direction; woman's life have glory," sings the chorus, but the future tense is unnecessary. Euripides' play itself is the change of direction.[86]

For though he has spared us no detail of the hideous revenge Medea exacts from her enemies, he has presented that revenge in heroic terms, as if she were not a woman but an Achilles or Ajax. She has no doubts about the rightness of her course—her one moment of hesitation she dismisses as cowardice. Like Achilles in his rage against Hector, she surpasses the bounds of normal human conduct: Achilles wishes that his spirit (*thumos*) would drive him to strip Hector's flesh from his body and eat it raw, and he does treat his enemy's body shamefully. Medea kills her sons to make Jason a lonely, childless man. The one is as heroic, and tragic, as the other.

But Achilles relents. Medea does not. Her final words to Jason are full of contempt, hatred, and vindictive triumph: her rage is fiercer than the rage of Achilles, even of Ajax: it has in the end made her something more, and less, than human, something inhuman, a *theos*.

But this was only to be expected. For Ajax and Achilles have run their full course as men in the world of men, earned their share of glory, used to the full the power and skill that was theirs, before their time came to die. But Medea is a woman: no matter how great her gifts, her destiny is to marry, bear and raise children, go where her husband goes, subordinate her life to his. Husband, children, this is all she has; and when Jason betrays her, the full force of that intellect and energy, which has nowhere else to go, is turned against him.

One passage in their last confrontation is revealing. "Did you really think it right to kill them," he asks her, "just because of what goes on in bed?" (*lechous*, 1367).[87] And she answers: "Do you think that is a small suffering for a woman?" It is a great suffering—for she has nothing else. It was to this marriage that she devoted all the courage,

skill, and intellect she possessed—to save Jason in Colchis, to murder Pelias, for his sake, in Iolcos; to this marriage she has devoted all her energy, all her power. She could have been a queen, and who knows what besides, in her own country; she gave it up for her marriage. And when that was taken away from her, the energy she had wasted on Jason was tempered to a deadly instrument to destroy him. It became a *theos*, relentless, merciless force, the unspeakable violence of the oppressed and betrayed, which, because it has been so long pent up, carries everything before it to destruction, even if it destroys also what it loves most.

## *Notes*

1. cf. the *hypothesis* attributed to Aristophanes of Byzantium. Sophocles came in second.

2. cf. Ar. *Th.* 1130, *Ran.* 1382; Eupolis, *Demoi* K90; Strattis, *Medea* K33–35 (apparently a full-length travesty); Plato K30; Eubulus K26; Alexis K176; Philemon K79. Cantharus K, 1, p. 764 *Medea.*

3. W. H. Friedrich's "Medeas Rache," in *Vorbild und Neugestaltung, Sechs Kapitel zur Geschichte der Tragödie* (Göttingen, 1967), pp. 7–56, now reprinted in Wege der Forschung LXXXIX, *Euripides*, ed. E.-R. Schwinge (Darmstadt, 1968) pp. 177–237, is a brilliant comparative study of later versions of the *Medea* which works backwards ("Von Grillparzer zu Euripides") to an illuminating discussion of all features of the Euripidean original.

4. L. Séchan, *Etudes sur la tragédie grecque dans ses rapports avec la céramique* (Paris, 1925, repr. 1967), pp. 396–422; D. L. Page, *Euripides, Medea* (Oxford, 1938), pp. lvii–lxviii; A. D. Trendall and T. B. L. Webster, *Illustrations of Greek Drama* (London, 1971), pp. 96–97.

5. There seems to be a consensus that the *Aegeus* was produced before the *Medea*: see, for references, A. Lesky, *Die Tragische Dichtung der Hellenen* (Göttingen, 1972), p. 305, n. 27. There is, however, no external evidence for the date except vase paintings (on which see T. B. L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides* (London, 1967), pp. 79–80, 297–98). But the argument from vase paintings assumes too much; how do we know that the representations, frequent after 430, of Medea at Athens were not inspired by the *Aegeus* of Sophocles? Or of some other dramatist? Or by no dramatist at all? The fragments themselves are insignificant, and dates based on metrical statistics are in this case quite worthless.

6. See the discussion in Page, *Euripides, Medea*, pp. xxi ff.

7. I am convinced by Page's demonstration (pp. xxx ff.) that Neophron's *Medea* is later than that of Euripides. (For a survey of the controversy see Lesky, *Tragische Dichtung*[3], p. 301; Lesky agrees with Page.) K. v. Fritz, *Antike und moderne Tragödie* (Berlin, 1962), p. 386 (reprint of an article published in 1959), believes that Neophron's careful motivation of Aegeus' appearance was known to Euripides but deliberately avoided by him ("mit einer gewissen absichtlichen eigenwilligen Nichtachtung") for a purpose. This argument is developed by H. Rohdich, *Die Euripideische Tragödie* (Heidelberg, 1968), pp. 51ff. Euripides' Medea does not even offer to interpret the oracle Aegeus has received from Delphi; Neophron's Aegeus says he has come to Corinth expressly to ask her to do so. Euripides' purpose in abandoning the plausible motivation for Aegeus' entrance provided by his predecessor was, according to Rohdich, "to protect his Medea from the



suspicion that her *sophia* was something extraordinary and superhuman. . . . His Medea remains completely in the realm of the human" (p. 52). But this seems to load the Euripidean passage with more weight than it can bear. It needs no superhuman wisdom to interpret the oracle give to Aegeus; everyone in the audience would have understood at once the patently sexual purport of it. And there was sufficient reason why Medea should *not* interpret the oracle. The birth of Athens' patron hero Theseus was to follow from Pittheus' misinterpretation of it (Plutarch, *Theseus* 3); if Medea explains to Aegeus that he is not to have sexual intercourse before returning to Athens, he will never get to Troezen and Aethra. (One wonders, in fact, what Neophron did about this.) According to E. Schlesinger, "Zu Euripides' Medea," *Hermes* 94 (1966), 47, Euripides wants the audience to think that Aegeus did not go on to Troezen but returned at once to Athens (to be on hand for Medea's arrival). "Euripides gibt ja deutlich zu verstehen, dass er mit einer anderen Sagenform arbeitet." It is true that Euripides presents us with an Aegeus already married, that Medea promises to cure his sterility by *pharmaka*, and that the chorus's farewell to Aegeus can be interpreted (though it need not be) as a hint that he will go directly to Athens. But the exploits of the young Theseus on his way from his home in Troezen to Athens were so central to Athenian patriotic saga, so familiar to the audience (cf. Bacchylides, Dithyramb 18; Euripides, *Hippolytus* 976ff. for example) that it is hard to imagine Euripides "working with a different version of the saga" which had Theseus born elsewhere than Troezen.

8. In the *Medea* of Carcinus there seems to have been a trial: Medea used the argument κατὰ τὸ εἰκός (Arist., *Rh.* 1400[b]9).

9. On the date of the *Ajax* see now Lesky, *Tragische Dichtung*[3], p. 180, n. 2.

10. S., *Aj.* 333, 339, 342–43.

11. E., *Med.* 24 κεῖται δ' ἄσιτος; S., *Aj.* 323 κείμενος, 324 ἄσιτος.

12. S., *Aj.* 531, 533, 535.

13. E., *Med.* 383, 404, 797, 1049, 1355, 1362; S., *Aj.* 367, 382, 454, 961, 969, etc. The four resemblances between the two plays discussed above are noted by A. Maddalena, "La *Medea* di Euripide," *RFIC* (1963), 137–38.

14. E., *Med.* 355 ἐφ' ἡμέραν μίαν; S., *Aj.* 756 τήνδ' ἔθ' ἡμέραν μόνην.

15. E., *Med.* 364–409; S., *Aj.* 430–80.

16. E., *Med.* 974 ὧν ἐρᾷ τυχεῖν (vengeance): S., *Aj.* 685 τοὐμὸν ὧν ἐρᾷ κέαρ, 967 ὧν γὰρ ἠράσθη τυχεῖν (suicide). E., *Med.* 93 ὥς τι δρασείουσαν: S., *Aj.* 585 δρασείοις, 326 ὥς τι δρασείων κακόν. (This is a rare verb: in S. only here and *Ph.* 128; in E. only here and *Ph.* 1208; not in Aeschylus; in paratragic passages Ar., *Pax* 62, *V.* 168.) Compare also E., *Med.* 47–48 and S., *Aj.* 552ff. (children unconscious of the sorrows of their elders), E., *Med.* 173ff., and S., *Aj.* 344ff. (the chorus feels that the protagonist's passion will be calmed by their presence).

17. Maddalena, "La *Medea*," pp. 133–34, draws attention to Medea's concern for τιμή. "Disonorata: ἀτιμάζω o ἀτιμάω è la parola greca che indica l'offesa all'onore: è la parola usata da Omero nell'*Iliade* a dire l'offesa recata all'onore di Achille: è la parola usata da Sofocle nell'*Aiace* a dire l'offesa patita da Aiace. È anche la parola usata da Euripide nella *Medea*. Diversi e simili sono l'Achille omerico, l'Aiace sofocleo e la Medea di Euripide: diversi nei fatti ma simili nell'animo."

18. W. Steidle, *Studien zum antiken Drama* (Munich, 1968), p. 152, n. 1: "rechnet man die Chorverse ab, so umfassen ihre [d.h. Medeas] Äusserungen mehr als ein Drittel des Stücks, was ihre ungewöhnliche beherrschende Rolle hinlänglich deutlich macht." V. di Benedetto, *Euripide, Teatro e Società* (Torino, 1971), p. 31: "La *Medea* . . . è dominata dal principio alla fine, in una misura che non trova riscontro in nessuna delle tragedie euripidee a noi pervenute, dalla personalità della protagonista."

19. cf. chapter 17 of this book.

20. cf. chapter 19 of this book.

21. In 431 B.C., of course, the only Sophoclean hero plays we can be certain Euripides knew are the *Ajax* and *Antigone*. The characteristic mood, language, and situation of this type of drama were however, already present in the Aeschylean *Prometheus Bound* and in any case stem from Homer's *Iliad*. (Cf. B. M. W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1964), pp. 45–52.) The case for Sophoclean influence on the *Medea* is strengthened by the fact that no other extant Euripidean play deploys the full armory of Sophoclean heroic situation and formula.

22. Knox, *Heroic Temper*, pp. 10–44.

23. On this word cf. Friedrich, *Vorbild und Neugestaltung*, pp. 51–52 (Wege der Forschung LXXXIX, *Euripides*, pp. 233–34).

24. Rohdich, *Euripideische Tragödie*, p. 59, n. 78, draws attention to almost all the words cited above and characterizes Medea's speech as one "die den Nützlichkeitsaspekt der intellektuell fundierten σωφροσύνη auch terminologisch gänzlich übernommen hat." His Jason represents "die vom Intellekt kontrollierte, auf den Nutzen gerichtete σωφροσύνη"—the fifth-century sophistic claim to intellectual mastery of the world ("in ihm steht die sophistische Idee intellektuell geführter Weltbewältigung auf der tragischen Bühne," p. 58) which is to be revealed as a mere illusion by Medea's action ("ist der Triumph des Untragischen nur verblendender Schein," p. 59).

Rohdich's theory of Euripidean tragedy is an attractive one, brilliantly presented: but in this case the fact that the "terminology" of *Nützlichkeit* is employed also against Prometheus and the Sophoclean heroes suggests that it has older sources than the fully developed sophistic claims of the late fifth century.

25. Knox, *Heroic Temper*, pp. 25–26.

26. On Jason's "Blindheit" with regard to Medea see von Fritz, *Tragödie*, pp. 349ff.

27. cf. D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama* (Toronto, 1967), p. 195: "Medea herself is really the only one capable of resisting Medea."

28. cf. Schlesinger, "Euripides' Medea," p. 30, on the conflict in Medea's monologue as:

> der Widerstand des Glückstrebens des gewöhnlichen Menschen in ihr gegen das Los das ihr zugefallen ist, Taten von übermenschlichem Ausmasse zu vollbringen, heroische Taten im griechischen Sinn des Wortes. Im Grunde wird hier in der Sprache der zweiten Hälfte des 5. Jhs. nichts anderes gesagt als das, was im Monolog Hektors in X und in Achilleus' grosser Rede in I ausgesprochen ist.

29. cf. Lesky, *Tragische Dichtung*[3], p. 306, "einen Satz alter Adelsmoral"; Schlesinger, "Euripides' Medea," p. 53, "Das ist die gewöhnliche Sprache der Heroen. Ihr θυμός verlangt nach κλέος, nach dem εὐκλεέστατος βίος, und dies ist nach griechischem Empfinden eine durchaus edele Haltung."

30. cf. von Fritz' brilliant analysis (*Tragödie*, pp. 361ff.) of lines 407–9. Women are not capable of ἐσθλά—"die grossen, die herrlichen Taten, die Heldentaten, die von jedermann bewundert werden"—their position in life makes that impossible. But they understand κακά—"die krumme Wege." Jason, by breaking his oath, has descended to such means, and by them he will be defeated. But Medea speaks also of her τόλμα and εὐψυχία:

> Auch darin enthüllt sich also eine Umkehrung der traditionellen Wertungen und Begriffe. So wie hinter den ἐσθλά, die Iason vollbracht zu haben scheint, sein κακία zum Vorschein kommt, so verbirgt sich hinter den κακά, die Medea vollbracht hat und noch vollbringen will, ihre τόλμα, ihre εὐψυχία, in gewisser Weise ihre πίστις, alles Dinge, die eigentlich zu den ἐσθλά gehören, die in der Tradition als dem männlichen Geschlecht vorbehalten gelten.



31. cf. von Fritz, *Tragödie*, pp. 395ff. (with a defense of the last two lines of Creon's speech, athetized by some critics).

32. γυνὴ δὲ θῆλυ. "The neuter θῆλυ is contemptuous here" (Page, *Euripides, Medea*). Cf. S., *Tr.* 1062 γυνὴ δέ, θήλυς οὖσα κοὐκ ἀνδρὸς φύσιν.

33. 1133–34 ἀλλὰ μὴ σπέρχου, φίλος, / λέξον δέ.

34. cf. W. Steidle, *Studien*, pp. 166–67; H. Diller, *Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* VI (Geneva, 1960), p. 32.

35. cf. Steidle, *Studien*, p. 167, n. 90: "Wie wenig die moralische Seite des Muttermords eine Rolle spielt, zeigt der geringe Raum, der ihr gewidmet ist."

36. Knox, *Heroic Temper*, pp. 33–34.

37. This invocation of Hecate is often cited as part of the evidence that Medea is presented throughout as a sorceress, a witch. Cf. Page on line 364; on line 367 he cites *Ion* 650 (which must be a misprint for 1050), but that passage is an invocation of Kore in her aspect of *Einodia*, not Hecate, and asks her aid for Creusa's plan to poison Ion. (For "witchcraft" and poison, see below, section III). But there was an aspect of Hecate which had nothing to do with sorcery or poison but rather with the home and woman's functions in it. An effigy of Hecate stood in front of every house door (A., *Fr.* 742 Mette, Ar., *V.* 804, *Ra.* 366), women asked Hecate's advice as they left the house (Ar., *Lys.* 64), and played games with their daughters in her honor (*ibid.* 700—"hausliche Kult der Hekate" says Wilamowitz *ad loc.*); women called on her in childbirth (A., *Supp.* 676ff. Ἄρτεμιν δ' Ἑκάταν γυναικῶν λέχος ἐφορεύειν). Hecate is obviously an ambiguous figure, and Medea's devotion to her cannot be interpreted as an attitude typical of a sorceress unless reinforced by the context (which it is not).

38. cf. also 22, 169, 209, 1372.

39. It is typical of Jason's blind misunderstanding of his situation (and Medea's) that he can call her, in the teeth of the evidence, ἐχθίστη γύναι / θεοῖς (1323–24).

40. H. D. F. Kitto, *Greek Tragedy* (3d. ed., London, 1961), p. 199.

41. "Here they seem a little inapposite," Page, *Euripides, Medea*; "Die Schlussverse des Chores . . . haben hier bestimmt nichts zu suchen," Lesky, *Tragische Dichtung*[3], p. 309.

42. cf. Page, *Euripides, Medea*, at 1414; Séchan, *Etudes*, p. 416, n. 7; Steidle, *Studien*, p. 166.

43. cf. M. P. Cunningham, "Medea ΑΠΟ ΜΗΧΑΝΗΣ," *CP* 49 (1954), 152: "Medea appears aloft in the place and after the manner of a *theos*. She appears as a *theos* appears; she acts as a *theos* acts and she says the sort of thing a *theos* says."

44. The argument which follows in the text assumes that the appearance of a *theos* on the *mechane* was a spectacle familiar to the audience of 431 B.C., though it is of course true that all the extant examples of this phenomenon are dated (some certainly, the others probably) later than the *Medea*. (The first version of the *Hippolytus*, however, probably had a *deus ex machina*—cf. Webster, *Tragedies of Euripides*, pp. 65, 70—and may have preceded the *Medea*.) It seems unlikely, in view of the exact correspondence of all the features of Medea's final appearance with the functions of the *deus* in the later plays, that this can have been the first use of this device. The *mechane* itself was used in the Aeschylean *Psychostasia* and possibly in his *Carians or Europa* (cf. T. B. L. Webster, *Greek Theatre Production* [London, 1956], p. 12), and the appearance of a god at the end of the play to bring a conclusion occurs in the Aeschylean *Prometheus Bound* and (probably) in the lost *Danaides*.

45. cf. D. L. Page, *Greek Literary Papyri* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1941), p. 68. One may compare also the end of the *Erechtheus* of Euripides (C. Austin, *Nova Fragmenta Euripidea* [Berlin, 1968], p. 36), where Athena intervenes to prevent Poseidon from destroying Athens by earthquake.

46. 1394 θάπτ' ἄλοχον. This is, in its context, a savage, exultant rejoinder to Jason's reproaches, but it is also a regular feature and formula of the address of the *theos*. Cf. E.,

*Andr.* 1239–40 γόνον / θάψον; E., *Erechtheus* (Austin fr. 65, vs. 67) θάψον νιν; E., *Antiop.* (Page, *Greek Literary Papyri*, p. 68), ὅταν δὲ θάπτῃς ἄλοχον; E., *El.* 1278–80 μητέρα . . . Μενέλαος . . . Ἑλένη τε θάψει; E., *I.T.* 1465 οὗ καὶ τεθάψῃ κατθανοῦσα.

47. An unidentified divine figure seems to have prophesied at the end of the *Phaethon*; cf. J. Diggle, *Euripides' Phaethon* (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 44ff., 53.

48. According to a papyrus *hypothesis* of *Rhadamanthys* (Austin, *Nova Fragmenta Euripidea*, p. 92, no. 14), Artemis, ἐπιφανεῖσα, orders the foundation of cult (τιμάς) for the Dioscuri.

49. cf. also E., *Ion* 1616 ἕψομαι δ' ἐγώ (Athena); E., *I.T.* 1488 συμπορεύσομαι δ' ἐγώ (Athena); E., *Hel.* 1665 πέμψομεν (the Dioscuri).

50. cf. also E., *Ion* 1572 χώρει, Κρέουσα; E., *El.* 1289 χώρει; E., *I.T.* 1448 χώρει; E., *Or.* 1678 χωρεῖτε; E., *Antiop.* (Page, *GLP*, p. 68, v. 81) χωρεῖτε; E., *Andr.* 1263 ἀλλ' ἕρπε; E., *Hel.* 1663 πλεῖ.

51. Compare Medea's "Too late!" νῦν σφε προσαυδᾷς, νῦν ἀσπάζῃ, τότ' ἀπωσάμενος (1401–2) with Dionysus' ὄψ' ἐμάθεθ' ἡμᾶς, ὅτε δὲ χρῆν, οὐκ ἤδετε (E., *Ba.* 1345).

52. cf. Cunningham, "Medea," p. 159: "Although this final appearance of Medea involves an illusion that she is a *theos*, we are also reminded that it is not a true apotheosis. . . . She is going off to Athens to live with Aegeus there."

53. A. Koerte, *Menandri quae supersunt. II* (Leipzig, 1959), fr. 223 τὸ κρατοῦν γὰρ νῦν νομίζεται θεός.

54. ἀλλά σ' Ἐρινὺς ὀλέσειε τέκνων. It is true that the chorus, at the height of its frenzied appeal to Helios to prevent the murder of the children, uses language which is generally thought to describe Medea as an Erinys: ἀλλά νιν . . . κάτειργε κατάπαυσον, ἔξελ' οἴκων τάλαιναν φονίαν τ' Ἐρινύν (1258ff.). The words ἔξελ' οἴκων, however, seem rather inapposite if the object is Medea herself, and would make more sense as a wish to clear the house of the spirit of vengeance. So the scholiast understood it: αὐτήν φησι τὴν δαίμονα, οὐ τὴν Μήδειαν. ὑπείληπται γὰρ τῶν τοιούτων κακῶν αἰτία εἶναι ἡ Ἐρινύς. Cf. A., *A.* 1571f.

55. Lesky, *Tragisch Dichtung*[3], p. 309.

56. L. Bloch, "Alkestisstudien," *Neue Jahrbücher*, band 7 (1901), p. 30: "In seinem Herzen, stand er auf der Seite des damals gerade in mächtiger Bewegung aufwärtsstrebenden Geschlechtes." Bloch refers with approval to Ivo Bruns' "feine und richtige Beobachtung" (in *Frauenemancipation in Athen* (Kiel, 1900), p. 9) "dass Euripides die an Zahl noch geringe fortschrittliche Partei der athenischen Frauen in den Chorliedern der 'Medeia' zu Worte kommen lässt."

57. cf. K. J. Reckford, "Medea's First Exit," *TAPA* 99 (1968), 239: "This is not to say that Euripides is acting as the women's champion . . . or writing social criticism or pleading for some reform."

58. W. Schmid, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, band III (Munich, 1940; repr. 1961), p. 360: "den lässt der Dichter noch wissen, dass sie als Barbarin eine Tat verüben konnte, der eine Griechin nicht fähig gewesen wäre und dass die Täterin eine Zauberin ist, d.h. er stellt sie ausserhalb des Kreises normaler griechischer Weiblichkeit."

59. In view of the total disagreement with Page's overall conception of the *Medea* expressed in this article, it seems only fair to acknowledge at this point my deep indebtedness to his masterly commentary on the text.

60. This is especially true of critics writing in English and French. See, for example, G. M. A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (New York, 1941; repr. 1961), pp. 152–54; A. Elliot, *Euripides' Medea* (Oxford, 1969), on lines 395, 1317; D. W. Lucas, *The Greek Tragic Poets*[2] (London, 1959), p. 199: "a genuine witch"; Conacher, *Euripidean Drama*, pp. 188–89; Cunningham, "Medea," p. 153; Reckford, "Medea's First Exit," pp. 333, 374; L. Méridier, *Euripide*, t. I (Paris 1926; repr. 1965), p. 119: "une magicienne redoutable" etc.



The evidence is surveyed in C. Headlam's edition of the play (ΕΥΡΙΠΙΔΟΥ ΜΗΔΕΙΑ [Cambridge, 1904]) as an appendix, "Medea as a sorceress" (pp. 105–7). Headlam's conclusion is that "Euripides . . . in his play wisely keeps this occult power somewhat in the background and it greatly conduces to the dramatic effect that his heroine impresses us as a woman, not as a witch."

In recent German (and more rarely Italian) literature, the normal, human aspects of Euripides' Medea have been emphasized (see Rohdich, *Euripideische Tragödie*, pp. 44–46, for citations and discussion). Rohdich himself speaks of "das Bemühen des Dichters seine Medea der ihr vom Mythos her anhaftenden Monstrosität zu entkleiden und als normale Frau für den Zuschauer verbindlich zu machen" (p. 41). Thi goes too far in the opposite direction; Medea is not a "normale Frau" but an extraordinary one, as her presentation in heroic terms makes clear.

61. lines 752ff. (excerpted).

62. 7.262ff. Translated by Rolfe Humphries, *Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Bloomington, Ind., 1957).

63. *Macbeth* 4.i.30ff.

64. The three surviving fragments (A. C. Pearson, *The Fragments of Sophocles* [Cambridge, 1917], pp. 534–36) contain in their 14 lines more of the atmosphere of sorcery than can be found in the 1,420 lines of Euripides' play.

65. Jason mentions her betrayal of her father and murder of her brother (1332–34) but then proceeds directly to the murder of his own sons.

66. cf. Rohdich, *Euripideische Tragödie*, p. 48: "Auch hier zeigt sich Euripides bemüht . . . die das Normale übersteigenden Fähigkeiten Medeas auf die Kenntnis der φάρμακα zu beschränken."

67. cf. Friedrich (*Vorbild und Neugestaltung*, p. 37, Wege der Forschung LXXXIX, *Euripides*, p. 216): "Denn die 'Weisheit' mit der sie ihre Widersacher zugrunde richtet, ist nicht göttlicher als die der Locusta, der Brinvillière und der Giftmischerinnen unserer Tage, die mit Pflanzenschutzmitteln und Pralinen arbeiten."

68. The messenger speeches describing the effects of the poison in both plays have often been compared: see, e.g., Page, *Euripides, Medea*, p. xxvi, n. 4.

69. Antiphon, 1.14ff.

70. E., *Ion* 1003ff.

71. M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*[3], vol. I (Munich, 1967), p. 801 (with illustration). Theocritus' jilted girl Simaetha (Idyll 2) is a literary example of such private initiative. She is not a "witch"; she is (to quote Gow's characterization) "poor . . . perhaps an orphan, presumably bourgeoise; she is not a ἑταίρα (41). Her position appears to be that of several young women in the New Comedy" (A. S. F. Gow, *Theocritus* [Cambridge, 1965], vol. II, p. 33). For an act of sorcery performed by a whole community, see the inscription from Cyrene (R. Meiggs and D. Lewis, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions* [Oxford, 1969], 5ff.): κηρίνος πλάσσαντες κολοσὸς κατέκαιον ἐπαρεώμενοι πάντες συνενθόντες καὶ ἄνδρες καὶ γυναῖκες καὶ παῖδες καὶ παιδίσκαι. τὸμ μὴ ἐμμένοντα τούτοις τοῖς ὁρκίοις ἀλλὰ παρβεῶντα καταλείβεσθαί νιν καὶ καταρρὲν ὥσπερ τὸς κολοσός. A. D. Nock (quoted by Meiggs and Lewis, *Greek Historical Inscriptions*) says of this extraordinary procedure that the community "reinforces the magical potency of the curse with a magical act, identical with the practice of what we regard as anti-social black magic." (The inscription is dated to the fourth century B.C. but the ceremony described may be as old as the seventh century.)

72. *Od.* 10.136, 220, 297, etc.

73. Page, *Euripides, Medea*, p. xix; cf. Méridier, *Euripide*, p. 118: "Il ne faut pas oublier d'ailleurs que Médée n'est pas grecque mais une Barbare. . . . De la Barbare elle a la ruse et la puissance de dissimulation; l'élan sauvage de sa passion, la cruauté raffinée de

ses plans, l'énergie farouche dont elle en poursuit l'exécution, s'expliquent par son origine."

74. V. di Benedetto (*Euripide*, p. 33) takes issue with Page on this point: "almeno per questo rispetto il personaggio di Medea non è meno 'greco' di Alcesti e Fedra."

75. cf. Knox, *Heroic Temper*, pp. 42–43.

76. cf. di Benedetto, *Euripide*, pp. 37–38, on Medea's "freddo calcolo e ragionata astuzia."

77. There is a passage in the *Andromache* which charges the barbarian races with incest (father and daughter, mother and son, brother and sister) as well as murder of kin: but the speaker is Hermione who, with her father Menelaus, kidnaps Andromache's child, forces her to leave sanctuary by threatening to kill it, breaks the promise made to spare its life, and would have murdered mother and child if not prevented.

78. J. H. Finley, *HSCP* 50 (1939), 65ff. = *Three Essays on Thucydides* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 92–94. Cf. also Reckford, "Medea's First Exit," pp. 336ff.

79. Pl., *R.* 5.454c–e.

80. The date of production of Aristophanes' *Birds* (414) is the *terminus ante quem*. T. B. L. Webster, *An Introduction to Sophocles*[2] (London, 1969), p. 4, dates it before 431 on "external evidence" which (pp. 176–77) turns out to be its resemblance in theme and (reconstructed) "diptych form" to the *Trachiniae*, which he also dates before 431. W. Buchwald, *Studien zur Chronologie der attischen Tragödie* (Königsberg, 1939), pp. 35ff., also puts it before *Medea*: it was the model for Medea's murder of her sons. Others, basing their proposals on "contemporary allusions," have dated it nearer to 414. There is no certainty, or even probability, here: "Keine der angeführten Datierungen kann Sicherheit beanspruchen" (Lesky, *Tragische Dichtung*[3], p. 262).

81. Pearson, *Fragments of Sophocles*, p. 583. I follow Jebb's interpretation of the difficult opening lines.

82. A. W. Gomme, "The Position of Women in Athens," *CR* 20 (1925), 1–25 (reprinted in *Essays in Greek History and Literature* [Oxford, 1937]); H. D. F. Kitto, *The Greeks*[2] (Harmondsworth, 1957), pp. 219–36.

83. With the startling exception of Geoffrey Chaucer; cf. n. 85.

84. σοφὴ πέφυκας καὶ κακῶν πολλῶν ἴδρις. This phrase is taken by many proponents of Medea the witch as evidence for their case. But, though "wise woman" meant "witch" in seventeenth-century English, the Greek word *sophe* has no such connotation. The *sophia* Creon fears is the craft that rescued Jason from his pursuers at Colchis and brought death to Pelias: these are *kaka* in the sense defined by von Fritz (cf. n. 30). Medea of course deliberately misunderstands his drift, but the charge she is evading is not "witchcraft." And her argument, after all, is soundly based. Her *sophia* has brought her to her present state, a woman abandoned in a hostile country.

85. Hausrath Hunger 264: cf. Babrius 194 (Crusius) and Chaucer, *Wife of Bath's Prologue* 692ff.

> Who peyntede the lioun, tel me who?
> By god, if wommen hadde written stories
> As clerkes han withinne hire oratories
> They wolde han written of men more wikkidnesse
> Than all the mark of Adam may redresse.

86. cf. I. Caimo, *Dioniso* 6 (1937–38), 4: "in realtà l'inno che celebra la donna e suona per contro l'ignominia all'uomo è già qui nel suo nucleo primordiale."

87. cf. Rohdich, *Euripideische Tragödie*, pp. 59ff.: "Die Antithese: λέχος und Affekt."

# *TWENTY-TWO*

# *Review*

*EURIPIDEAN DRAMA: MYTH, THEME, AND STRUCTURE. By D. J. Conacher. University of Toronto Press, 1967.*

D. J. Conacher's stimulating and thoughtful study deals with the whole body of extant Euripidean drama (except for *Rhesus*, on which, not completely convinced by Ritchie's book, Conacher suspends judgment). It is an attempt "to relate the varied and often novel structures and techniques of Euripidean drama to the varied and often novel themes which the dramatist has chosen to expound" (vi). In an introductory chapter which compares Euripides' approach to tragedy with that of Aeschylus and Sophocles, Conacher defines six different types of Euripidean drama (14–15), and it is under these headings that he groups and discusses the plays in the rest of the book. These divisions are: first, "those plays which may properly be called 'mythological'" (*Hippolytus* and *Bacchae*), to which is added the "near-mythical" *Heracles*; secondly, political and social tragedies (*The Suppliants*, *Heraclidae*); third, tragedies of "war and its aftermath" (*Troades*, *Hecuba*, *Andromache*); fourth, "realistic tragedy" (*Medea*, *Electra*, *Orestes*); fifth, "romantic tragedy" (*Ion*, *Helen*, *I.T.*); and sixth and last, "satyric and prosatyric" (*Cyclops*, *Alcestis*). Two plays (*Phoenissae* and *I.A.*) which, "while they lack the credibility and thematic concentration of tragedy nevertheless contain certain paratragic effects and are quite different in substance and tone from romantic tragedy" are discussed under the somewhat prejudicial rubric *tragédie manquée* (227–64).

Conacher is aware that, "among plays which operate on the same general level of reality," these distinctions are not always crystal clear; "the groupings . . . are intended as a critical convenience rather than as rigid and mutually exclusive categories" (15). On the other hand he can claim, with some justification, that "distinctions between plays clearly opposed in mythical approach (the *Hippolytus* and the *Helen* for example) or in the kind of reality they treat (the *Bacchae* and the *Troades* for example) are readily recognizable."

This chapter originally appeared in the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, July 1968. Reprinted by permission of the University of Toronto Press.

*By the same author*

*THE HEROIC TEMPER*
*OEDIPUS THE KING (translation)*
*OEDIPUS AT THEBES*

# *WORD AND ACTION*

## *Essays on the Ancient Theater*

---

*Bernard Knox*

*The Johns Hopkins University Press*
*Baltimore and London*