THE LANGUAGE OF RECIPROCITY IN EURIPIDES' *MEDEA*

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EURIPIDES' MEDEA IS A CHARACTER WHO is adept at speaking many languages. To the chorus of Corinthian women, she presents herself as a woman like any other, but with fewer resources; to Jason in the *agōn* she speaks as if man to man, articulating her claim to the appropriate returns of *charis* and *philia*. Even when she addresses herself, in the great monologue, two distinct voices appear, that of the pitiful mother who loves her children and, opposed to this, the voice of the heroic warrior who demands revenge.[1] The subject of this article will not be the versatility of Medea's speech, per se. Rather, I will consider the narrower but related issue of how—with what words and weapons—Medea enacts her revenge on Jason.

Christopher Gill recently has argued that Medea's revenge is the final episode in the series of exchanges of *charis* between husband and wife.[2] The exchanges began long ago in the mythical past, when Medea first helped Jason obtain the Golden Fleece.[3] My argument, building on that of Gill's, is that the language of *charis* extends in this play to the material medium of the heroine's revenge. The "textiles" given by Medea to Creon's daughter are, I suggest, a significant component in the play's construction of Medea's agency and her participation in relations of *philia*.[4] What can the objects that Medea uses as instruments of vengeance tell us about the identity of this heroine and the active role she

[1] See Foley 1989 on Medea's "divided self" in the monologue. On Medea's first speech to the women of Corinth, see Goldhill 1986, 115–17; Segal 1996, 28–31; Williamson 1990, 19.

[2] Gill 1996, 154–74.

[3] Gernet (1981a, 131–40) calls the fleece a "composite image" (136) since it combines two categories of wealth: herd animals and precious metal. For more on resonances between the Golden Fleece and Medea's offer of *golden* gifts to the princess of Corinth, see the last section of this article.

[4] On the importance of textiles and weaving in this play, see Blundell 1998, 69–72; Jenkins 1985, 127–28; and Rabinowitz 1993, 143.

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creates for herself?[5] Why, more specifically, does Medea use gifts—a crown (*plokos*) and a robe (*peplos*)—to kill Creon and his daughter?[6] By reading the gifts themselves in relation to the preceding *agōn* and Aegeus episode we will arrive at a more complete picture of the issues at stake in Medea's revenge.[7]

To do this we will need to take into account several preliminary considerations. First of all, gifts are not given in isolation.[8] There is always some reference to past acts of generosity as well as to future obligation when an offer is made. In Medea's case, the *plokos* and *peplos*—gifts given to her by her grandfather, Helios—are implicated in her own genealogy and, as I will argue, in her history with Jason. Standing as symbols of the autonomous power that Medea once used to give herself away in marriage, these objects are called upon once again, in this play, in order to punish Jason for his violation of *philia*.

Secondly, the giving of gifts and the revenge take place in the context of two marriages: the marriage of Jason to Medea, and subsequently, his marriage to the princess of Corinth. In the final section of this article I will argue that Medea manipulates wedding gifts and imagery in such a way that the fulfillment of her revenge is conditional upon (and coextensive with) the unraveling of both of these marriages. The approach I am taking toward Medea's revenge therefore raises the important issue of female subjectivity in Greek tragedy, especially in the context of marriage. Recently, Victoria Wohl, Kirk Ormand, and Nancy Rabinowitz have given subtle and thorough consideration to the problems that arise in reading female subjectivity within the constraints of male authorship and the patriarchal systems of exchange of Greek trag-

[5] See Boedeker 1991, 109, on Medea's becoming the author of her own *logos;* Rabinowitz (1992, 49) describes Medea as the "dramaturge behind the messenger speech" and (1993, 145) "the playwright orchestrating the deaths from a distance."

[6] I focus primarily on the first part of Medea's revenge, since the infanticide has been well covered by Gill (1996, 154–64, in relation to the *agōn*) and others. On sources and interpretation of Medea's murder of her children, see McDermott 1989.

[7] The idea of reading autobiographical narratives through objects comes from Hoskins (1998, 12), who introduces the subject of her book as the internarrative relation between people and their possessions: "Here, I try to take very personal, grounded narratives and show how they are made up of metaphors involving objects, which tell a story that then provides a unity to a sometimes disparate self."

[8] The literature on gift-exchange theory (and its application to classics) is large and growing. The following are particularly useful: Bourdieu 1977 and 1990; Gill 1998; Hoskins 1998; Kurke 1991; Mauss 1967; Ormand 1999; Rabinowitz 1993; Rubin 1975; Van Wees 1998; Von Reden 1995; Weiner 1992; Wohl 1998.

edy. I am for the most part in agreement with their description of marriage in tragedy as a homosocial institution: the exchange of women solidifies social and economic bonds between *men*—and therefore, should be read from this perspective.[9]

Nevertheless, I believe that the *Medea* offers an interesting and significant challenge to this generalization. For it is precisely containment by a patriarchal system (and husband) that Medea seems to defy. Medea speaks a language of reciprocity that is usually spoken between men only, and she negotiates an uneasy balance for herself (in the *agōn*) between the roles of marital and aristocratic *philia* (as discussed below). When her claims to *philia* are not heard there, she stages another scene of exchange—this time using real gift objects—in which her control over the dynamics of *philia* is not only voiced but actually performed. Medea in the end manages to break out of the subservient and objectified role that Jason had scripted for her. What this "victory" means, in cultural terms, is much harder to assess.

Simon Goldhill (1986, 137) writes on the *Hippolytus:* "The language of the play does not simply reflect a discourse of sexuality but challenges, ironizes, undermines the safe use of the language of that discourse, particularly in the way that the play contests the security of the processes of classification, reading, interpretation, by which distinctions, decisions, regulations are determined." The *Medea* too encourages us to consider its heroine and the discourses that create her from multiple, and even contradictory, perspectives. Perhaps our goal need not be to arrive at a final "interpretation." What is offered here is an attempt to make sense of the strands of discourse about agency and autonomy from the perspective of the female heroine of this play, by interpreting her words and actions within the context of ancient Greek marriage and of the language of *charis.*

THE *AGŌN,* OR THE CONTEST OF *CHARIS* AND *KERDOS*

The *agōn* is a contest between husband and wife. Two terms in particular—*charis* and *philia*[10]—emerge as crucial to understanding the different

[9] On marriage as homosocial, see Ormand 1999, 14–18; Rabinowitz 1993, 21–22; and Wohl 1998, 18–22, 128–31, 178–79.

[10] On *philia* in Greek tragedy, see Belfiore 1998; Blundell 1989, 46 (on marriage as *philia*); Gill 1996, 166–70; Goldhill 1984, 111–31, and 1986, 79–106; Konstan 1997, 53–67; Schein 1990; and Williamson 1990, 24–25. *Charis* as it is used in the *agōn* and Aegeus

and incompatible ways in which each spouse represents the balance of power in their relationship. The *agōn* does not even begin to resolve all the questions it raises.[11] Nevertheless, by representing the contest as one that turns on the issue of reciprocity, it prepares the audience to judge the revenge as a consequence both of Medea's failed negotiations with Jason and of her successful encounter with Aegeus. Jason tries, in the *agōn,* to dismiss Medea's claim to *charis* by ascribing her past actions to the influence of divine agents (such as Aphrodite). I will argue that Medea's response to Jason, both in the *agōn* and later in her revenge, takes up the challenge posed by Jason's representation of her lack of autonomy.[12] As the *agōn* makes clear, Medea cannot reclaim her agency through words alone; hence, the importance of her mastery of the art of gift exchange.

The language of reciprocity that is used in the *agōn* will continue to be important when we evaluate the heroine's subsequent attempts at controlling reciprocity through revenge. Medea's revenge establishes in a definitive sense her authority both to assume the role of a *giver* in her marriage with Jason and, coordinate with this, to have her autonomous status recognized by him.[13] Medea is clearly the one who is in control at the end, when she denies Jason the only favor that he asks of her, to be able to touch the dead bodies of his children (1399–1404).[14]

The importance of being the *giver* in a relationship of reciprocity is a function of the social and competitive aspects of the gift-exchange economy. Material transactions within such a system are embedded in a

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episode can be translated roughly as "a favor that is proffered within a reciprocal relationship with the intention of extending that relationship in time." It acquires a broader range of meanings, I will argue, in the fourth choral stasimon. On *charis* more generally, see Herman 1987; Kurke 1991, 103–7 and passim; MacLachlan 1993, 4–12; Redfield 1982; and Wohl 1998, 61 and 155–58.

[11] Lloyd (1992, 15–18) discusses the typical lack of resolution in Euripidean *agōnes*. In only two plays (*Hecuba* and *Heracleidae*) is it made clear that an end is achieved by means of what has been said.

[12] Gill 1996, 168.

[13] By "autonomous" I do not mean to suggest that Medea rejects all external aid; rather, that she proves her independence of the "debt" and "need" that Jason attempts to ascribe to her in the *agōn*. See further Segal (1996, 30), who contrasts Medea's autonomy in Euripides' play with her subservience to Aphrodite in Pindar's *Pythian* 4.218–20. Cf. Pindar's *Olympian* 13.53–54, where Medea goes against her father to arrange her own marriage.

[14] Gill 1996, 170: "Indeed, one way of understanding the function of the scene is as a vehicle by which Medea can be enabled to give the response to Jason which she was not able to give, effectively at least, in their earlier *agōn*." See Cunningham 1954, 152–53 and 158–60, on the staging of the exodos and Medea's association with a *theos*.

complex web of social relations.[15] Under normal circumstances, participants in this system of exchange are expected not only to give but also to receive, and to repay in turn the gifts that have been received.[16] Thus there is an ongoing cycle for the circulation of material goods as well as the social capital transferred through them.[17] While aristocratic *philia* assumes a measure of social parity between the partners of exchange, other forms of reciprocity presume and reinforce relations of inequality.[18] For instance, in relations of exchange between the head of a household and his dependents, the distribution of gifts is not directly reciprocated with material countergifts. Instead, a long-term relationship is established in which the goal is not the discharging of a debt, or the balancing of accounts, but rather the continuity of the relationship itself.[19]

In contrast to the dynamic of reciprocity that operates between the head of a family and his household, the social relations between (nonfamilial) *philoi* or *xenoi* in ancient Greek culture are carried out more or less on terms of equality. Therefore if the value of the gifts exchanged between friends is not moderately balanced, the very validity and continuity of the social relationship are thrown into question. Likewise, explicit discussion of both "profit" and "need" must be kept out of reciprocal transactions between friends. For the display of "gratitude" depends on misrecognizing the economic component of social exchanges.

[15] On embeddedness see Polanyi 1968, 7 and 148; and Donlan 1982, 139. For a useful discussion of the competitive aspects of gift exchange and its role in social differentiation, see Van Wees 1998, 29–34.

[16] Bourdieu (1977, 5–7) discusses the importance of making a *different* and *deferred* countergift so that it not be seen as a refusal of the gift (i.e., "the return of the same object"), or as a recognition of the obligation imposed by that gift. Gift exchange requires an element of misrecognition (*méconnaissance*). Bourdieu says, "Thus gift exchange is opposed on the one hand to *swapping,* which, like the theoretical model of the cycle of reciprocity, telescopes gift and countergift into the same instant, and on the other hand, to *lending*, in which the return of a loan is explicitly guaranteed by a juridical act and is thus *already accomplished* at the very moment of the drawing up of a contract capable of ensuring that the acts it prescribes are predictable and calculable."

[17] See Bourdieu 1990, 118–20, on *symbolic capital*.

[18] See Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1161b12–13 on *philia* between family members and *Rh.* 2.1381b29 on the different types of friendship; commentary by Herman 1987, 19.

[19] Of *generalized reciprocity*, which often takes place between kin, or between a chief and dependents, Sahlins (1972, 194) writes: "The material side of the transaction is repressed by the social: reckoning of debts outstanding cannot be overt and is typically left out of account. This is not to say that handing over things in such form, even to "loved ones," generates no counterobligation. But the counter is not stipulated by time, quantity, or quality: the expectation of reciprocity is indefinite."

Generosity between friends is typically depicted as "gratuitous" or unnecessary, thereby directing attention to the *social* rather than the financial component.[20] Although material profit may in fact be made and help be given in the form of money or other material currency, if this aspect of the transaction is made to seem primary, the gift is no longer "mystified" in the sense required of a reciprocal (as opposed to disembedded) economy.[21] In what follows, we will examine Jason's rhetoric of finance and material "need" and "profit," keeping these distinctions in mind.

First, we need to clarify the two (incommensurable) concepts of *philia* that inform the respective positions of Jason and Medea in the *agōn*. In using the term *philos* to describe his relationship with Medea, is Jason depicting himself as kin (husband) or as aristocratic friend? His position, on either account, is a slippery one. For, if he fashions himself as an aristocratic friend, his language of "profit" and "gain" directly violates the code of silence regarding the balancing of favors between friends. It is also contrary to the notion of classical friendship to impute "social or financial dependency" to a relationship between equals.[22] If, however, Jason speaks to Medea as a husband (*philos*) to his wife, it is entirely appropriate for him to offer her material support. But the financial support should be offered within the context of marriage; it is much harder for a marital *philos* to justify a use of his money that will actually destroy *philia.* Jason's money is to be used to finance Medea's exile, while Jason sets up a new *oikos* in Corinth. His "generosity" therefore is inseparable from his bringing to a shameful end his marriage with Medea.[23]

[20] See Van Wees 1998, 19–20, on gratuity in gift exchanges.

[21] See Bourdieu 1990, 112–13, on the misrecognition that is implicit in the practice of exchanges. Herman (1987, 88–92) emphasizes that money was exchanged between *xenoi* in ancient Greece but that the *intention* of giving the money was to reinforce a long-term relationship: "The whole pattern of action makes sense only if we posit, on the part of the people involved in these networks, an expectation that momentary sacrifices they made would in the long run be reciprocated" (90).

[22] I agree with Konstan's assessment (1997, 82) that "the generosity of friends is imagined as uncoerced and spontaneous: instead of being motivated by a sense of debt, *philoi* are presumed to act out of an altruistic desire to be of benefit to each other." He goes too far, however, in saying that "friendship in the classical city was not embedded in relations of economic exchange." This, in my view, was the ideal that was preserved through a process of mystification or misrecognition; to what extent "altruism" worked as a matter of practice is much harder for us to determine.

[23] Aegeus' confirmation that Jason has acted "shamefully" (οὔ που τετόλμηκ' ἔργον αἴσχιστον τόδε;, 695) will be an important validation, as I will argue below, of Medea's case against Jason in the *agōn*.

Medea also vacillates between two notions of *philia* (marriage and aristocratic friendship). She presents herself as worthy of treatment as a social equal, but at the same time she holds Jason accountable to the standards of marital *philia*. Her accusation, for example, that Jason married again in spite of the existence of their children (παίδων γεγώτων, 490) appeals directly to the notion that children validate and confirm the legitimacy of a marriage.[24] Her precise reckoning of the balance of favors between them more closely approximates the terms of aristocratic friendship or exchange between social equals. The fact that Medea is so explicit about the content of the *charis* exchanged is problematic for her own self-presentation as an aristocratic *philos* (for reasons outlined above). Nevertheless, that she even presents herself as Jason's savior, and vocally holds him in her debt, in itself attests to her view of herself as a participant in the kind of *philia* normally practiced only by men.[25] Likewise, Medea's language of abuse appeals to both registers of *philia.*[26] When she calls Jason *pankakistos* (465) and *echthistos* (467), Medea attempts to induce shame in Jason for even daring to speak face to face with *philoi* whom he has treated badly. The ethical charge here of Medea's abusive language overlaps with her claim that Jason is behaving in a very nonaristocratic fashion—he is *kakos* in both senses, morally and socially. Yet we should also be aware that Medea prefaces her later charge, namely that Jason is a delinquent husband/father, with almost the same term of abuse at 488: ὦ κάκιστ' ἀνδρῶν. Thus Medea criticizes Jason as a failed husband as well as a failed aristocrat.

In the first speech of the *agōn,* Jason tells Medea that she should consider her sentence of exile "completely a gain" (πᾶν κέρδος, 454) and that she will not be lacking in material resources (μήτ' ἀχρήμων, 461). Jason, moreover, argues that Medea has brought exile upon herself by speaking badly of the king. "I, for my part, kept trying to lessen the king's anger and I wanted you to stay; but you were the one who would not stop acting foolishly, always speaking badly about the king. That is why you will be banished" (455–58). Jason here attempts to absolve himself of responsibility for Medea's exile. Medea's own speech, he claims, is what

[24] See Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1162a28–29 on children holding a couple together (τὰ γὰρ τέκνα κοινὸν ἀγαθὸν ἀμφοῖν, συνέχει δὲ τὸ κοινόν).

[25] The classic discussion of Medea's heroic self-presentation is Knox 1977. Konstan (1997, 91) notes that the term *philos,* in the context of "friendship" between men and women, was used in everyday language to refer to the clients of a courtesan or *hetaira*.

[26] See further McClure 1999a, 384, on Medea's "blame speech."

has caused her to fall out of favor with the king of Corinth. He, nevertheless, regards her as a *philos*. It is clear from this defense that Jason is concerned with how Medea's exile will reflect on *him*. He turns the situation of her exile, moreover, into an opportunity to display his own "generosity." But the terms of this generosity deserve closer analysis:

> ὅμως δὲ κἀκ τῶνδ' οὐκ ἀπειρηκὼς φίλοις
> ἥκω, τὸ σὸν δὲ προσκοπούμενος, γύναι,
> ὡς μήτ' ἀχρήμων σὺν τέκνοισιν ἐκπέσῃς
> μήτ' ἐνδεής του· πόλλ' ἐφέλκεται φυγὴ
> κακὰ ξὺν αὐτῇι. καὶ γὰρ εἰ σύ με στυγεῖς,
> οὐκ ἂν δυναίμην σοὶ κακῶς φρονεῖν ποτε. (459–64)
>
> Nevertheless, even after all of this, I have not abandoned my "friends"—here I am, woman—and I am looking out for your interest, so that you will not be completely resourceless when you are exiled with your children, and you will lack for nothing. Exile brings many evils along with it. So truly, even if you hate me, I could never be ill-disposed toward you.[27]

Whether he is acting as "friend" or husband in claiming to not have abandoned his *philoi* (459–60), Jason's offer of material benefaction will prove to be problematic. If, on the one hand, he wishes to be seen as an aristocratic *philos,* it is inappropriate for Jason to demonstrate his generosity (and "friendship") toward Medea by acting as her material benefactor. For he is disguising his intention of breaking off *philia* by pretending to extend it through material generosity. The issue, let me emphasize again, is not simply that Jason offers Medea money (as opposed to another type of gift)—for money can be an appropriate gift between friends—but rather that his *intention* in giving her material help is to expedite the end of their relationship (by facilitating her exile) without losing face or being seen as *kakos*. Similarly, the offer of money alone does not constitute *philia* between a husband and his wife either. Material generosity cannot replace the continuity of the relationship of patronage and dependency on which familial reciprocity, in the ancient Greek sense, is based. Thus Jason ends up deconstructing the logic of his own defense when he attempts to play simultaneously the roles of aristocratic *philos* (and equal) and generous husband (and supporter). Each role demands a different kind of "generosity," and Jason in conflating the two succeeds at fulfilling the expectations of neither one. He says that he

[27] All translations from Greek are my own; they aim to be accurate rather than elegant.

will make sure Medea is not *achrēmōn,* lacking in material resources, or in want of anything (*endeēs tou*). This, together with the language of *kerdos* noted earlier, places Jason's gifts securely in the realm of money and material benefaction, without reference to *charis*.[28] His discourse of *kerdos* is, in fact, focussed on drawing attention away from his refusal to reciprocate in terms of *charis*.

Annette Weiner has argued that the dynamics of exchange function to keep certain valuable items out of circulation by putting a greater quantity of less valuable objects into circulation.[29] Medea's reference to *charis* in her speech (508), as well as her earlier references to *thrasos* and *anaideia* (465–72), raises the possibility in the audience's mind that this (*charis*) is what Jason is withholding. For in the beginning of her speech, Medea validates her right to call Jason *pankakiste* by making allusion, through the language of "shame" (466, 472) and "boldness" (*thrasos* and *eutolmia,* 469), to Jason's violation of the terms and bond of affection expected of a *philos*.[30] Jason's shameful boldness, his loss of *aidōs*, is made public in Medea's addressing him as a *kakos,* a man who has forfeited his claim to the title of *philos* or *aristos*. The fact that Medea views Jason's behavior toward her as not just a personal insult and injury but as causing a public loss of face for *his* aristocratic persona will be made more explicit in the upcoming scene where she offers him gifts for his new bride.[31] In her speech in the *agōn* Medea turns to the loss that she has experienced from Jason's failure to reciprocate as a *philos*:[32]

[28] Mastronarde (2002) sees examples of Jason's mercantile (and explicitly economic) language at 527, 532, 533, 535, 560, 561, 565, 566, 567. Jason's overtly financial rhetoric would situate him within the category of *negative reciprocity*, which, according to Sahlins (1972, 195) is "the most impersonal sort of exchange. In guises such as 'barter' it is from our own point of view the 'most economic.'"

[29] Weiner 1992, 43: "What motivates reciprocity is its reverse—the desire to keep something back from the pressures of give and take. This something is a possession that speaks to and for an individual's or group's social identity and, in so doing, affirms the difference between one person or group and another." Jason's withholding of *charis* is what will come to define him as *kakos*.

[30] On *aidōs* as preventing injury between *philoi* in Homer, see Glotz 1904, 138–39, and Redfield 1975, 118; on *aidōs* between family members, see Glotz 96–98, 102; on *aidōs* and supplication, see Gould 1973, 85–90. See also Belfiore 1998, 146–147; Blundell 1989; and Redfield 1975, 115–17.

[31] I discuss the "bridal" gifts in the final section.

[32] For *philos* as referring to blood relative, family, or friend see Blundell 1989, 39–49, and Williamson 1990, 25. Medea plays on the ambiguity of the term in that she holds Jason accountable for a double failure toward her, as both an aristocratic *philos* who has broken his oath, and a husband who has neglected his wife and children.

ἔχει γὰρ οὕτω· τοῖς μὲν οἴκοθεν φίλοις
ἐχθρὰ καθέστηχ', οὓς δέ μ' οὐκ ἐχρῆν κακῶς
δρᾶν, σοὶ χάριν φέρουσα πολεμίους ἔχω. (506–8)

This, then, is my situation: I have become an enemy to my friends from home, and those whom I should not have treated badly, I now have as enemies *on account of giving you charis*.

Medea's *philia* with Jason, she claims, has won her two new sets of enemies: the *philoi* from home (her family), whom she betrayed, and the other group (presumably the family of Pelias), whom she also treated badly for Jason's sake. By helping Jason—by giving him *charis,* no less—she has lost *philoi* and gained enemies. Consequently, Medea now has nowhere to turn, no house to go back to, no family to receive her (502–5). It is clear therefore why money (*chrēmata*) is not an adequate substitution for *philia*. For money cannot replace the loss in social standing, the total loss of identity that Medea has suffered.

Jason, however, chooses an aggressive rather than defensive strategy in his next speech. If he proves that Medea never really gave him *charis* in the first place—that she was in fact incapable of this kind of social gesture—then Jason can exonerate himself from the failure to reciprocate (*charis*). He argues, therefore, that because she was under the influence of Aphrodite, it is to a divine agent and not to Medea that he owes gratitude (526–28). In saying this, Jason's aim is to deprive Medea of responsibility for her own actions, thus ridding himself of a debt that otherwise would have to be paid:

ἐγὼ δ', ἐπειδὴ καὶ λίαν πυργοῖς χάριν,
Κύπριν νομίζω τῆς ἐμῆς ναυκληρίας
σώτειραν εἶναι θεῶν τε κἀνθρώπων μόνην. (526–28)

But I, for my part, since you exaggerate your munificence so greatly, consider Kypris alone of gods and men to be the savior of my expedition.

Jason justifies his failure to reciprocate, first, by arguing that Medea has exaggerated the value of her help (*charis*) and, second, by claiming that she did not act of her own free will. Aphrodite (Kypris 527, Eros 530) was acting through her. Earlier he had tried to sustain a fictive friendship by offering Medea *chrēmata* for her exile. He reiterates the offer of "friendship" with an ungrudging hand, toward the very end of the *agōn*.[33] Medea,

[33] Cf. *Med.* 459–62, 612–15.

he says there, will benefit greatly if she releases her anger. The word he uses for "benefit"—κερδανεῖς—is related to the word *kerdos* that he used at 454, when he told Medea to consider her exile a gain. These terms differ from the *charis* that Medea introduced into the discussion, in that *kerdos* can be proffered outside of the reciprocal social relationship in which *charis* is always transacted. As Medea says in response to Jason's final offer of help, "I wouldn't profit by your friends, I wouldn't receive anything at all from you, don't try to give me anything, *for the gifts of a* kakos *man do not bring profit* (616–18)." Once again the term *kakos* refers to more than the loss of friendship between Medea and Jason; it cuts to the core of the social contest between the two. By calling Jason *kakos* Medea directly contradicts his claim to be a *philos* and thus a responsible aristocrat. In the very last line of this speech—κακοῦ γὰρ ἀνδρὸς δῶρ' ὄνησιν οὐκ ἔχει—Medea reinforces the loss of status Jason has suffered in her eyes. Even his gifts now are worthless to her, for they do not have a value independent of their donor. Rather, the type of *philia* Medea practices reckons the value of a gift according to the (reciprocally negotiated) status of the *giver*. Because Jason has reneged on his social obligation toward her as a *philos,* Medea regards Jason's offer of material benefaction as nothing more than a sign of his failure to reciprocate in the currency appropriate to their relationship.[34]

Charis, in the language of fifth-century Greek tragedy, refers to a favor that is done with the expectation that repayment will be made, at some later point in time. The element of delayed repayment is important, as is the mentality of the person who repays: a gift is given not to fully "discharge" a debt, thereby bringing to an end the cycle of reciprocity, but rather to keep this cycle going indefinitely.[35] Ideally, both partners to the exchange share the same understanding of the conditions and effects

[34] See Herman 1987, 80, on the moral distinction between gifts given within and those exchanged outside of friendship. "By contrast, within the framework of amiable relations (kinship, friendship, ritualised friendship), exchanges have a long-term expectancy. Gifts beg counter-gifts, and fulfill at one and the same time a number of purposes: they repay past services, incur new obligations, and act as continuous reminders of the validity of the bond. Non-reciprocation is in this context frequently interpreted as a relapse into hostility." See too Wohl 1998, 25 and 59–70.

[35] Bourdieu 1977, 6, on deferral. Sahlins (1972, 222) recognizes the importance of maintaining imbalance within *balanced reciprocity* and marital alliances: "If neither side is 'owing' then the bond between them is comparatively fragile. But if accounts are not squared, then the relationship is maintained by virtue of the 'shadow of indebtedness,' and there will have to be further occasions of association, perhaps as occasions of further payment."

of their reciprocal "giving." If their intentions do not match, however, the relationship enters a state of crisis. In the context of marriage, it is generally the wife's expectation that her husband will provide her with a new home and family to replace those she abandoned for his sake. The terms of the marriage of Jason and Medea are harder to read, since Medea has given herself away in marriage (more on this below). Nonetheless, her rhetorical questions at lines 502–3 should be taken as an echo of the traditional ancient Greek wife's dependency on her husband's *kyrieia* to replace that of her father: νῦν ποῖ τράπωμαι; πότερα πρὸς πατρὸς δόμους, οὓς σοὶ προδοῦσα καὶ πάτραν ἀφικόμην; ("Now where am I to turn? Should I go back to my father's house, which I betrayed for you, and my country too, when I came here?"). Medea's situation is, in this sense, an extreme case of the "ordinary" wife's situation, in that she has actively destroyed—for Jason (σοί has an accusatory ring to it)—the links to her paternal home and thus does not have *philoi* to go back to, in the case of a divorce. Jason's offer of material compensation (*kerdos*) now appears almost as a forceful attempt to withhold *charis,* the more valuable return gift that Medea seeks.[36]

Similarly in the context of male aristocratic friendship *kerdos,* or material profit, fits into a dynamic of giving in order to withhold. A debt of *charis* cannot be paid off with monetary currency alone, for money (*chrēmata*) can be exchanged outside of the system of expectations and symbolic recognition generated by the elite group of people (almost always male) who participate in *charis* exchange. Not only is money (*chrēmata*) an unsuitable return to one who expects *charis,* but the person who tries to substitute money (or material recompense) for *charis* risks provoking the anger and indignation of his exchange partner. This too would account for Medea's anger in the *agōn:* Jason insults her by attempting to obfuscate his true debt of *charis* to her with the rhetoric of *kerdos*.

To better understand the incommensurability of *charis* and *chrēmata* in the context of heroic alliances, let us turn to the embassy scene of *Iliad* 9.[37] The dialogue between Odysseus and Achilles offers a useful compari-

[36] See Wohl's (1998, 152–58) analysis of *charis* in the *Alcestis*. On the gap between Pheres' and Alcestis' notion of economy, Wohl (155) writes: "Pheres, for all that he appreciates the material profit her action has brought him, rejects Alcestis's trade of life for *kleos*, calling her choice foolish (728), and subjecting her *kharis* to an accountancy alien to it. Although he understands well the material underpinnings of his royal status, *he is completely uncomprehending of the notion and value of symbolic profit*" (emphasis mine).

[37] Gill (1996, 156–62) also compares Medea's position in the *agōn* (and her subsequent quest for vengeance) to Achilles' attitude in the embassy scene.

son to the tragic *agōn*. There are important differences, of course, between the two texts, in both the quantity of material goods offered and the social effect such goods are meant to perform. First of all, Jason does not offer Medea recompense for an injury he has committed. On the contrary it is precisely the existence of any debt on his part that Jason is unwilling to recognize. Rather, he represents his offer of money as an unusual act of generosity, given that exiles are often poor and that Medea (as he has argued) has alienated herself with her own words (461–64). Christopher Gill has argued that Jason's unilateral reasoning process, and his refusal to give Medea an active role in his narrative of the past, accounts for the failure of *philia* and Medea's subsequent vengeance.[38] In line with this, I would read Jason's attempt here (463–64) to blame Medea for ending the relationship as a preemptive strategy. It is as if, in anticipation of Medea's insistence on *chari*s, Jason attempts to remove himself from the nexus of reciprocal social obligation entailed by *philia*. In the Iliadic context, however, the offer of material wealth in the form of *apoina* (recompense) was considered an appropriate substitution or repayment for the loss of kin or social status.[39] But for Achilles, Agamemnon's gifts are a sign that the latter wishes, not to make compensation for an injury, but rather to assert his social superiority.[40] As Achilles informs Odysseus, Agamemnon could not win him over with any amount of gifts, since Achilles has lost respect for the man himself.[41] Achilles explains his rejection of Agamemnon's gifts as a function of their failed (and unequal) social relationship: ἐχθρὰ δέ μοι τοῦ δῶρα, τίω δέ μιν ἐν καρὸς αἴσῃ, 9, 378 ("His gifts are hateful to me and I value him at one split hair"). This sounds very similar to Medea's rejection of Jason's money on the principle that gifts of an unworthy man (a *kakos*) do not bring profit (618). Thus both Medea and Achilles reject the gifts offered to them on the grounds that these gifts do not properly acknowledge their own construction of their social status.[42]

[38] Gill 1996, 162–74.

[39] *Il.* 9.632–36 and Gill 1996, 143–44; see Seaford 1994, 27–29, on *apoina* as the ideal resolution to conflict in Homer.

[40] Donlan 1981, 171; Gill 1996, 144; Redfield 1975, 16; Von Reden 1995, 26.

[41] *Il.* 9. 378–87.

[42] Whitman (1958, 193), on the importance of the giver's intentions, writes: "One may well believe that had the gifts been offered together with some abatement of kingly pretensions and the abandonment of unsavory comparisons, Achilles must have accepted. Achilles has been called stubborn, but Agamemnon is the really stubborn one. Achilles simply refuses to accept false coin for true."

There is a wide discrepancy between the value of the gifts offered by Agamemnon and Jason. Nevertheless, both Medea and Achilles make it clear that they are concerned primarily with the *social* relationship that underlies the offer of gifts. Achilles, moreover, makes a point of saying that no amount of gifts would win him over: "Not if he (Agamemnon) should give me as many gifts as there are particles of sand or dust, not even then would Agamemnon persuade my mind, before he paid back to me in full the heartrending insult" (9.385–87). For Achilles it is not a matter of material recompense, but rather, as he says himself, of *charis*:

> οὔτ' ἔμεγ' Ἀτρεΐδην Ἀγαμέμνονα πεισέμεν οἴω
> οὔτ' ἄλλους Δαναούς, ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἄρα τις χάρις ἦεν
> μάρνασθαι δηΐοισιν ἐπ' ἀνδράσι νωλεμὲς αἰεί. (315–17)
>
> I think that neither Agamemnon, son of Atreus, nor the other Danaans will persuade me, seeing that there was no gratitude when I fought relentlessly against the enemy.

Charis here stands for the total set of expectations with which Achilles went to Troy for Agamemnon. These expectations were irreparably destroyed when Agamemnon deprived Achilles of his rightful prize. It was not the loss of Briseis herself, although Achilles claims to have loved her as if she were a wife, but rather his loss of status as first of the Achaeans for which she was the symbol, that caused the "heartrending insult."[43] Moreover, if Achilles, as the foremost of the fighters, can be treated like any other warrior, regardless of his achievements in battle, then it would not, in theory, be possible for anyone to win *kleos*, or gain lasting recognition for his deeds on the battlefield (318–19).[44]

Achilles charges Agamemnon not only with personal injury, but with destroying the very meaning of *charis,* the principle according to which he and other Achaeans were willing to sacrifice the comforts of a peaceful life at home for the extreme risks, compensated by commensurate prizes, of war. The *charis* for which a man would die in battle, however, is fundamentally incompatible with the kinds of gifts Agamemnon makes available in the embassy scene. For as Achilles tells Odysseus, no amount of material wealth can equal a man's life (οὐ γὰρ ἐμοὶ ψυχῆς ἀντάξιον, 401); nor can material gifts ever replace the honor that he could have won from fighting.

[43] MacLachlan 1993, 18–22; Whitman 1958, 186–87.
[44] Redfield 1975, 31–38, on *kleos*.

It is essential that the person who first performs an action (or actions) that can be described as *charis* does so with the belief in mind that he will eventually be repaid in the currency of honor (*timē*), appropriate to his status. For Achilles, repayment would have consisted in the acknowledgment that he had a right to a share in prizes reflective of his high standing in the community of warriors. For Medea, the expectation was that Jason would provide her with the benefits of *philia*—both conjugal fidelity and the security of having a city, family, home, and friends. Instead, she finds herself with new enemies. In the process of giving *charis* to Jason, she has done harm to her own *philoi* as well as to the family of Pelias (506–8).

We have concentrated thus far on *charis* as signifying the debt or "gratitude" created within the reciprocal alliance of *philia* (whether between friends or family members). Yet we should be aware, too, of an important distinction between the "gratitude" that characterizes the *philia* between male friends and that which is more characteristic of a "friendship" between a man and a woman. What does it mean for *charis* to be exchanged between men and women who have a sexual relationship in Greek tragedy? And should this affect our reading of Medea's quest for *charis*? *Charis* can refer explicitly to sexual gratification and the debt (or gratitude) incurred thereby. It is significant, first of all, that Medea does not refer in the *agōn* specifically to the sexual *charis* for which Jason is in her debt. We have examples, in Tecmessa and Hecuba, of female characters in tragedy who place men in their debt for sex. Tecmessa, in Sophocles' *Ajax,* reminds Ajax of the *charis* he owes her for the pleasure (*terpnon*) she has given him, and Hecuba, in Euripides' play of the same name, makes a similar claim to Agamemnon on behalf of her daughter Cassandra.[45] In *Medea,* however, it is Jason rather than Medea herself, who juxtaposes a reference to *charis* and Aphrodite (in lines 526–27). As I have argued already, Jason's attribution of agency to Aphrodite is a direct threat to Medea's conception and presentation of her own subjectivity: if she gave everything to Jason under the influence of Aphrodite, then Medea can claim none of the actions as her own; consequently she invalidates her own *logos* and her claim to be the giver of *charis* of the heroic/aristocratic type. It is of extreme importance, therefore, that Medea distinguish herself from Aphrodite if she wants to emphasize her subjectivity.

[45] *Ajax* 520–24; *Hec.* 824–32. See Blundell 1989, 75, on Tecmessa; Burnett 1998, 164, and Zeitlin 1991, 77–78, on Hecuba.

Another reason for Medea to keep Aphrodite at a distance is the issue of social status. The tragic females who appeal to the *charis* of Aphrodite are concubines and slave women.[46] Medea, whose status as a dowered wife is hardly secure, is constantly in danger of being relegated to the category of "other" (i.e., inferior).[47] She could easily slip into the role of concubine, as she combines all the attributes that are typically associated with the illegitimate wife: she is barbarian, she has magical powers, and she has not been betrothed by her father (through *engyē*).[48] For Medea to hold Jason accountable to the reciprocity of marriage she must either appeal to a concrete aspect of this union or risk presenting herself as the concubine/*hetaira* who has no legal claims to her man.[49] Hence the importance of the children, who act as a visible proof of her marriage. Were she to speak instead of a sexual *charis* removed from marriage, Medea would be playing directly into Jason's attempt to extricate himself from the long-term obligations of marital *philia*. Thus, I would conclude, Medea's self-presentation in the *agōn* is weighted more toward the heroic and maternal than toward the *hetaeric* aspect of the feminine.

Furthermore, while Medea does not avoid voicing her claims as the mother of Jason's children, her rhetoric of *charis* and her language of reciprocity in the *agōn* identify her as more an Achilles figure than a tragic female with claims to *charis*. Helene Foley (1989) has argued that Medea's monologue articulates the strife between two "selves" in conflict within the heroine. Ultimately, the "heroic" voice prevails over the maternal and compels Medea to enact the revenge that will hurt her even more than her husband. I hope to have shown here that signs of that future division—and its tragic outcome—are already visible in the uneasy balance between the two (incompatible) conceptions of *philia* to which Medea holds herself, as well as Jason, accountable in the *agōn*.

[46] By "concubine" I mean a woman who lives with a man as a wife but has not been betrothed (with *engyē*) and dowered by a male *kurios*. In tragedy (i.e., Andromache in *Andromache,* Tecmessa in *Ajax*, Iole in *Trachiniae,* and Cassandra in *Agamemnon, Troades,* and *Hecuba*) these women have been captured as prizes in war. The ancient Greek word for "concubine" was *pallakē,* but this does not appear in the tragic corpus. On tensions between concubines and dowered wives in tragedy, see Foley 2001.

[47] Goldhill 1986, 116–17.

[48] See Patterson 1991 on criteria for establishing legal marriage in Athens; Oakley and Sinos 1993, 9–10, specifically on the betrothal (*engyē*).

[49] Davidson 1997, 73–77 and 109–36, and Kurke (1999, 175–219) on the *hetaira.*

THE AEGEUS EPISODE

Medea's dialogue with Aegeus offers us another perspective from which to evaluate her debate with Jason.[50] While the *agōn* showed us two sides or two versions of what had transpired in the past between Jason and Medea, the interchange with Aegeus provides an outside perspective from which to evaluate each speaker's credibility in the *agōn*. In particular, Aegeus readily greets Medea as a friend and engages in reciprocal benefaction (or exchange of *charis*) with her, in contrast to Jason's perverse insistence on maintaining "friendship" on his terms only.[51] Thus I suggest that contradictions in Jason's self-defense in the *agōn* are clarified for us in retrospect by the exchange of *charis* between Medea and Aegeus.[52]

Aegeus functions in several ways as a precise complement to Jason. His marriage is childless, but he has remained loyal to his wife and seeks help from the Delphic oracle. Jason has broken his alliance with Medea in spite of the binding tie of children (490–91).[53] Moreover, Aegeus acknowledges that Jason has treated Medea unjustly (699), and he goes beyond mere sympathy in actually promising Medea refuge in return for her promise to end his childlessness.[54] At lines 719–21, Aegeus says to Medea:

[50] See Buttrey 1958, 5–10, Dunkle 1969, and more recently Sfyroeras 1995 on the centrality of the Aegeus episode and its integration into the play as a whole (*pace* Aristotle).

[51] Dunkle (1969, 99–101) emphasizes the similarities between Medea's relationship with Jason in the past and with Aegeus in this scene; in particular he points to the repetition of the themes of oath taking, suppliancy, and self-interest in Medea's interaction with Aegeus.

[52] Schein (1990, 63–64) reads the future disintegration of their *philia* already into the present passage: "Such an expectation would have been strengthened for Euripides' original audience by their familiarity with the story of Medea's later attempt to make Aegeus murder his son, Theseus." There is also room here for a more immediate (maybe even optimistic) reading of the Aegeus scene as a contrast to the *agōn* that so closely precedes it. Whereas Medea harbors a hidden agenda during this exchange, Aegeus participates with straightforward generosity, thereby offering by example a corrective to Jason's position in the *agōn*.

[53] Gill (1996, 168–69) notes that the children are the living seal of the inextricable bond of *philia* between their parents.

[54] Dunkle (1969, 98) characterizes the agreement between Aegeus and Medea as a bargain, arguing that mutual self-interest is predominant. But since the language of *charis* is used (see below), I would place their exchange under the category of aristocratic *philia,* which is often characterized by the swearing of oaths of friendship (Donlan 1982, 145).

πολλῶν ἕκατι τήνδε σοι δοῦναι χάριν,
γύναι, πρόθυμός εἰμι, πρῶτα μὲν θεῶν.
ἔπειτα παίδων ὧν ἐπαγγέλλῃ γονάς. (719–21)

For many reasons, woman, am I eager to do you this favor (*charin*). First, for the sake of the gods, and then on account of the children that you promise me.

It is important to notice here that Aegeus, without prompting from Medea, grants *charis* of his own accord. Moreover, his act of generosity is partially motivated by his desire for children. In this respect, Aegeus demonstrates the value that any man (other than Jason) places on having progeny.[55] Furthermore, he recognizes Medea as a worthy recipient of *charis*. He also mentions the gods, another sign that he is aware of the proper relations of elite exchange, which must take into account the divine validation of oaths sworn on the right hand.[56] It is almost as if he has overheard Medea's criticism of Jason for breaking his oath and wishes to assure her that he is a god-fearing man.[57] Aegeus takes it upon himself to do what is right for a suppliant to whom he had no previous obligation.

Thus the social exchange between Medea and Aegeus is both complementary to and markedly different from the earlier dialogue between Medea and Jason. *Charis*, which in the *agōn* scene was defined only through its absence, is here exemplified by a mutually satisfactory and willing exchange of favors. Aegeus, unlike Jason, initially greets Medea as a friend and proceeds to treat her, in his actions, as an ally deserving his sympathy and aid. He, in many ways, comes much closer than Jason to fulfilling the expectations that Medea had of her husband.[58] In fact, Pavlos Sfyroeras has argued recently that the familiarity between Aegeus and Medea when they first encounter each other (663–66) is an allusion to the Athenian mythological tradition that makes Medea the wife of Aegeus after she flees Corinth.[59] If the Athenian

[55] See Buttrey 1958, 3–4, for a critique of the view that Aegeus' interest in children is what puts the idea in Medea's head to kill her own children.

[56] On the importance of oaths in this play, see Burnett 1998, 204–7; on the right-hand pledge see Flory 1978, 70–73; and Herman 1987, 49–54.

[57] Cf. *Med*. 492–95.

[58] Williamson (1990, 19) compares the exchange between Aegeus and Medea to a kind of marriage contract. Medea offers children in return for a home (the protection of a *polis*) and in her own language later (1385) tells Jason that she is going to "live with Aegeus" (Αἰγεῖ συνοικήσουσα). *Sunoikein* is the standard word for husband/wife cohabitation.

[59] Sfyroeras 1995, 127–29.

audience were aware of this tradition (and they were likely to have been), they may have appreciated a clever play on the semantics of *charis* in this scene too. For the *charis* that is exchanged between Aegeus and Medea (two *philoi*) belongs, once again, ambiguously to both kinds of *philia,* "friendship" and marriage. We should not assume that the slipperiness of the term is a result of conscious manipulation on the part of characters in the play; rather, it is an irony in the mythological tradition itself that Medea seems to be caught in a vicious cycle of destructive *philia* as she moves from husband to husband.[60]

The oath that Aegeus swears as a sign of his goodwill, is, moreover, another reminder of Jason's failure to abide by his promises (752–55). As early as the prologue, we hear from the Nurse how Medea laments the broken oaths and failed right-hand pledge that should have sealed her marriage:

> βοᾶι μὲν ὅρκους, ἀνακαλεῖ δὲ δεξιάς
> πίστιν μεγίστην, καὶ θεοὺς μαρτύρεται
> οἵας ἀμοιβῆς ἐξ Ἰάσονος κυρεῖ. (21–23)
>
> She calls out loud upon the oaths and she invokes the greatest pledge of the right hand, and she calls upon the gods to be witnesses of what kind of return she has received from Jason.

Later, in the *agōn*, Medea repeats her incredulity at Jason's breach of faith (490–95). In both passages, Medea refers to the oaths that sealed the pact of marriage. Medea's concern with oaths can be read as a symptom of her general aristocratic outlook (in accord with the importance she places on *charis* and on solidifying *xenia*/*philia* relations).[61] It is significant that Medea conceptualizes her marriage to Jason as a union between two equals, a relationship symbolized by the heroic handclasp.[62] For Medea's conception of her marriage as a reciprocal relationship between equals is the foundation for her case against Jason in the *agōn.*

[60] See Sfyroeras 1995, 127–29, for more on correspondences in plot structure between the Athenian and Corinthian Medea myths.

[61] See Flory 1978, 70–71; Foley 1989, 75; and Williamson 1990, 18, on Medea's unusually active and masculine role in giving herself away in marriage. On oath taking as a component of "aristocratic networking" between *hetairoi,* see Griffith 1995, 70–72, and Herman 1987, 59 and 71.

[62] Burnett (1973, 13) compares the union between Jason and Medea to that between two states "where one had performed marvels of aid for the other and was to be repaid by an eternal treaty of friendship and support." Flory (1978, 70) contrasts the situation in Apollonius, where Jason grasps Medea's right hand after she has supplicated *him* (*Argon.* 4.99–100).

Moreover, Helios, the enforcer of oaths, is also Medea's grandfather.[63] And he, too, will have a role to play in the giving of the fatal wedding gifts to the princess. Thus Medea's concern with the sanctity of oaths intersects directly with her "family" interests. I will argue below that her conception of marriage—and particularly the meaning of wedding gifts—has been conditioned by this aristocratic male outlook on the dynamics of *philia*, in a way similar to what we have seen already in the *agōn*. We will now consider the mechanics of Medea's revenge in the light of the insights we have gathered from the *agōn* and Aegeus episode.

THE INTERTEXTUALITY OF MARRIAGE AND REVENGE

The Aegeus episode paves the way for Medea's more complete assertion of her power to control events through gift exchange. Let us now turn to the scene in which Medea tricks Jason into receiving a poisoned robe and crown for his second wife. This scene of exchange (944–75) in some sense resurrects and replays the conflict over reciprocity that we witnessed earlier in the *agōn*. But the conflict, in the later scene, is brought into sharper focus by the objects themselves and what they tell us about the perceptions of their exchangers.[64] In other words, the very same objects that Jason receives as a *kerdos*, Medea offers as retribution for ruined *charis*.

Why does Medea seek Jason's approval for the gifts that are designed to destroy his new wife? By framing the first part of her revenge as a scene of gift exchange, Medea capitalizes on Jason's tendency to abuse *charis*. In the *agōn*, Jason denied that he had received help from Medea in the past. In the present scene, by contrast, he is persuaded before our very eyes to accept gifts that are reminiscent of the Golden Fleece. All of Medea's offers of golden objects—the fleece, the robe, and the crown—are made in connection with marriage.[65] They can even be read, I suggest, as dowry items that Medea has used both to contract and then later to dissolve her marriage. The robe and crown are referred to

[63] See Burnett 1998, 221–23, on Helios and oaths.

[64] See Taplin 1978, 77–100, on the dramatic significance of objects and tokens in Greek tragedy; his observations are applicable to the *Medea,* although he does not discuss this particular play.

[65] See Gernet 1981b, 84, on the theme of wedding gifts that come in pairs (e.g., the robe and necklace of Eriphyle).

explicitly as *phernas* (956), a word that can mean dowry.[66] Thus by naming her gifts to Jason's second wife as *phernas,* Medea provokes the audience to reflect on other marriage gifts—her own to Jason—and thus to draw in our minds a connection between the beginning of one marriage and the ending of another.

More explicitly, Medea refers to her gifts as a *plokos* and *peplos* first in her monologue, at 786, and then again in her speech to Jason at 949.[67] Both objects have associations with weaving, *plokos* in connection with the verb *plekein* (to "braid") and *peplos* as a woven fabric. I have mentioned above that the golden gifts are reminiscent of the fleece that Jason formerly acquired with Medea's help. The crown (*plokos* and *stephanos*) is made out of gold.[68] And the robe is possibly golden, too (983).[69] However, even if this were not the case, simply as a cloth object, it could be seen to complement the (metal) crown in a reflection of the "composite" nature of the Golden Fleece itself.[70] A *peplos,* from a materialist perspective, may be viewed as a fleece that has undergone transformation, through the (feminine) craft of weaving— through a *sumplokē* of masculine and feminine components—into an object of culture.[71]

[66] *Phernē,* according to the Suda, is equivalent to *proix,* the Attic word for dowry. Schaps (1979, app. 2) views *phernē* as the poetic and non-Attic term for *proix*. *Phernē* occurs ten times in tragedy, only once in the whole of oratory. Seaford (1994, 210), however, interpreting Solon's restriction of the *phernē* to three garments (Plut. *Sol.* 20.4), writes that "φερνή here is not dowry but something more like the trousseau. Wedding processions in archaic Greece could be . . . an opportunity for display that would no doubt include a splendid φερνή of costly items to accompany the bride to her new home." See too Gernet 1981b, 162; Just 1989, 72–74; Schaps 1979, 102–5; and Wolff 1944.

[67] Line 949 is bracketed in Diggle's 1984 text (followed by Mastronarde 2002). Page 1938, however, prefers to keep 949 and regards 786 as an interpolation, arguing that "the mention of the details of that costly finery is almost indispensable in 947 sqq."

[68] Diggle 1984: *Plokon chrusēlaton,* 786 and 949; *chruseōn anadesmān,* 978; *chrusoteukton stephanon,* 983; and *chrusoun stephanon,* 1160.

[69] In Murray's 1902 edition *chrusoteukton* (agreeing with *stephanon*, 983) is changed to the genitive plural *chruseōn* (*teukton*) in order for it to agree with the manuscripts' *peplōn.* Most editors (including Diggle 1984), however, print *chrusoteukton <te>* instead of Murray's *chruseōn teukton,* with the result that it is the crown and not the robe that is fashioned out of gold (see Page's 1938 discussion of lines 982–84).

[70] I am revising Gernet's (198la) observation slightly here, in order to emphasize the woolen aspect of the fleece. See note 3 above.

[71] *Peploi* are not necessarily wool; nor am I suggesting in a literal sense that the *peplos* given to the princess is created out of the Golden Fleece. I would underline rather the gendered and symbolic associations of Medea's particular choice of weapon—objects that in their own way tell the story of her marriage to Jason and her quest for renewed autonomy—as well as the metaphorical intersections between fleece, weaving, and marriage.

Scheid and Svenbro, moreover, have explored many links, both ritual and metaphorical, between the *peplos* and marriage.[72] In the case of Jason and Medea, the association between the *peplos* and conjugal history is reinforced by the debate over gift exchange in the *agōn,* where explicit mention was made of the role of the fleece (480–81).[73] If the weaving of the fleece, then, can be read metaphorically as the union (*sumplokē*) of Jason and Medea through marriage, its unraveling is a logically parallel enactment of that marriage's destruction. Thus, when Medea's *peplos* touches the body of the princess, it destroys more than that woman and her father; the disintegration extends to Medea's own marriage, brought to an end symbolically by the same objects with which it was first contracted.[74]

There is another word whose appearance and repetition in this context speaks to the interrelation of marriage, adornment, and revenge: *kosmos* (786, 951, 954).[75] Medea sends for a servant to bring the *kosmos* (i.e., the *peplos* and *plokos*) to her so that her children may present it to the princess of Corinth. She then mentions that this *kosmos* was a gift to her from her grandfather Helios:

ἀλλ᾽ ὅσον τάχος χρεὼν
κόσμον κομίζειν δεῦρο προσπόλων τινά.
εὐδαιμονήσει δ᾽ οὐχ ἓν ἀλλὰ μυρία,
ἀνδρός τ᾽ ἀρίστου σοῦ τυχοῦσ᾽ ὀμευνέτου
κεκτημένη τε κόσμον ὅν ποθ᾽ Ἥλιος
πατρὸς πατὴρ δίδωσιν ἐκγόνοισιν οἷς.
λάζυσθε φερνὰς τάσδε, παῖδες, ἐς χέρας
καὶ τῆι τυράννωι μακαρίαι νύμφηι δότε
φέροντες· οὗτοι δῶρα μεμπτὰ δέξεται. (950–58)

[72] Scheid and Svenbro 1996, 13–15.

[73] The Nurse also makes reference to the *panchruson deros* at the very beginning of her speech (5).

[74] Burnett (1973, 19 n. 42) comments on the image of flesh as a garment in relation to the separation of Creon's flesh from his bones at *Med.* 1217 (see also 1200). "Marriage" imagery in this scene is closely linked to death; so too in a macabre inversion is the donning of clothing transformed into the tearing of the "garment of flesh."

[75] In Euripides, *kosmos* is used in the context of wedding (or bridal) imagery at *Med.* 787, 951, 954, 972, 981 and 1156; *Hipp.* 631; and *Andr.* 147. It refers to an adornment of the dead at *Alc.* 149, 161, 613, 618, 631; *Hec.* 578, 615; *HF* 329, 334, 548; *Tro.* 1200, 1208; *IT* 632; *Hel.* 1062, 1068, 1279; *Bacch.* 857 (and by association) 832; and, in a slight variation on the topos of lamentation as an adornment for the dead, *Supp.* 78. See McClure (1999b, 172–73), who compares the *kosmos* of Hermione in *Andromache* to the costume of Pandora.

> But as quickly as possible let one of the attendants bring the *kosmos* here. She (the princess) will be happy not only in one way, but in a thousand: for having gotten you—the best kind of man—as her husband, and also for receiving the *kosmos,* which Helios, the father of my father, once long ago gave to his descendants. Take these bridal gifts, children, in your hands and bring them to the blessed royal bride. For I'm sure she will not despise them.

Aside from noting the blatant irony of Medea's calling Jason an *aristos anēr* (recall her naming him *kakos* earlier, also in connection with gifts), there is a great deal to say about Medea's rhetorical presentation of her gift.[76]

In this passage, Medea uses the word *kosmos* twice: first (at 951) to refer to the objects she is asking to be brought to her and then again at 953, where she briefly mentions the previous (original) donor of the gift.[77] The repetition of the word is significant. For in its second appearance *kosmos* is inserted into a biographical narrative that draws us into the process of interpreting the close connection—the *intertextuality*—of Medea's marriage and her revenge. By specifying that Helios gave (in fact "gives") this *kosmos* to his descendants, Medea focuses attention on two themes that are central to the last part of this play: first, her own divine heritage, which gives her a measure of autonomy and adaptability unavailable to the average Athenian wife; and second, the role of gifts in creating and transferring identity.[78] In relation to the latter point, the present tense of the verb *didōsi* (at 955) is telling, for it creates an ambiguity with regard to when and how Helios gave/gives the *kosmos.* More to the point, the action of giving ascribed to Helios in the past (ποθ') can be read as *continuing* to have an effect in the present act of gift exchange.[79] The identity of the original owner (and perhaps every subsequent recipient?) is represented as inhering within the object itself, to the extent that Helios never really stops "giving" the *kosmos* that he

[76] Cf. *Med.* 618.

[77] Gernet (1981a, 138–39) remarks that *agalmata,* precious objects whose value is increased through circulation, usually are represented as having a divine origin (often they are made by Hephaestus).

[78] Burnett (1998, 216 n. 96) notes that the "fiery diadem is the doublet of Helios' ray-spiked crown, the attribute by which he was recognized on Attic pottery."

[79] I thank Leslie Kurke for suggesting that δίδωσι be read in this way. Cf. *Bacch.* 2 and Rijksbaron 1991, 1–4, on the use of the "perfective" present tense with ποτε to emphasize that "a past state of affairs is still relevant at the moment of utterance" (3).

once passed down to his descendants.[80] When Medea passes on the gifts, through the hands of her children, to the princess of Corinth, she is in fact extending the family narrative (recorded in the objects themselves) both forward and backward.[81] For in these gift objects crucial strands of Medea's identity intersect and cohere: her descent from Helios, her marriage to Jason, and the imminent destruction of her own children for the sake of revenge. Medea is creating, on the one hand, a biography for her gift; on the other hand, the gift is also constructing a biography for Medea.[82]

From this moment, when she offers the *kosmos* to Jason, until the end of the play, we can read Medea as the granddaughter of the sun god. It is as if she is acquiring (or at least renewing contact with) the divine side of herself that has been held in suspension during her agonistic debates with Jason. The ending of the play, where Medea rides in Helios' chariot, represents the climax to this transformation, which involves a return in some sense to her identity prior to her marriage. Moreover, if the *kosmos* forges a link between Medea's past (prior to marriage) and her present circumstances, then we might even interpret her naming of the objects' pedigree as a kind of coded speech act; for Medea names her own divine lineage at the same moment that she gives the history of her gifts, and, in so doing, she sets in motion the performance (by the objects) that will bring her back, closer to her original autonomy. The gifts recall Medea's former (and still present) ability to create and destroy the most

[80] The presence of the original donor's identity within the object he/she gives is similar to what Mauss (1967, 8–10) describes as the *hau* (usually translated "spirit") of the gift.

[81] The close association between the children and the gifts is made when Medea specifies that the children are to take the gifts in their hands (956) and, again, when the Messenger calls the *peploi* the "gifts of (Medea's) children" at 1188.

[82] See Hoskins 1998, 8, on the differences (in relation to time, space, and consumer) between "biographical objects" and commodities: "At the temporal level, the biographical object grows old, and may be worn and tattered along the life span of its owner, while the public commodity is eternally youthful and not used up but replaced. At the spatial level, the biographical object limits the concrete space of its owner and sinks its roots deeply into the soil. It anchors the owner to a particular time and place. The public commodity on the other hand is everywhere and nowhere, marking not a personal experience but a purchasing opportunity. . . . Finally, the biographical object 'imposes itself as the witness of the functional unity of its user, his or her everyday experience made into a thing'" (Hoskins is quoting Morin 1969, 137–38). The public commodity on the other hand is not formative of its user's identity, which is both singular and universal at the same time."

intimate relationships.[83] But the gifts, inscribed within a narrative of marriage, also create a commentary on the debate over *charis* that was left unresolved by the *agōn*. For it is the *charis* that emanates from these objects that, as the Chorus predicts, will persuade the princess to don the fatal robe and crown (982–83).[84]

The Chorus's language in the fourth stasimon, which follows immediately upon this episode, adds confirmation to the idea that the objects are agents in themselves. In the first antistrophe the Chorus sings: πείσει χάρις ἀμβρόσιός τ' αὐγὰ πέπλον / χρυσότευκτόν ⟨τε⟩ στέφανον περιθέσθαι (983–84) ("*Charis* and the immortal gleam will persuade her to put on the robe and the golden-crafted crown"). The *charis* in this context appears to be different from the *charis* that had been contested between Jason and Medea, as a reciprocal entity; it refers here to the pleasurable brightness of Medea's gifts.[85] Yet the word is the same, and as I have suggested, Medea's bestowal of these fatal gifts is itself an act of *charis* addressed to Jason.[86] Thus the Chorus's choice of vocabulary to describe the shimmer of the golden gifts could not be more appropriate. The objects themselves, one of which is made of gold—*chrusoteukton,* echoing *chrusēlaton* in the earlier description (786, 949)—are literally an embodiment of the *charis* that Medea wants to work in her favor. This *charis,* however, that emanates from the objects she gives, possesses a persuasive force that is as destructive as her previous offer of *charis* was beneficial.[87] Whereas Jason previously became a hero through his quest and attainment of the fleece, by once again accepting Medea's help he will lose even more than he previously gained: two marriages and two

[83] Visser 1986 sees Medea as conforming to the pattern of mythical women who privilege their marital over their natal families, only to end up being portrayed as destroyers of those (marital) relationships as well.

[84] See MacLachlan 1993, 31–40, on the persuasive force of *charis,* which is related to its ability to produce pleasure in its recipient or viewer.

[85] See MacLachlan 1993, 35–38, on *charis*' association with light and sparkle, sometimes produced by the gleam of metals/jewelry, as in the case of Pandora, over whom Aphrodite pours *charis* (*WD* 60) and on whom the Charites fasten a golden necklace (73).

[86] In this context *charis* seemingly given to Jason is actually produced in Medea, as the satisfaction she gains from causing suffering in her enemies. Note what she tells the messenger who will narrate the death of Creon and his daughter: δὶς τόσον γὰρ ἂν τέρψειας ἡμᾶς, εἰ τεθνᾶσι παγκάκως, 1134–35 ("You would give me twice as much pleasure if they have died most wretchedly"). Cf. MacLachlan 1993, 21, on Achilles' retributive *charis*.

[87] The previous *charis* included not just the material aid of capturing the fleece, but also the services provided by Medea as Jason's wife, of which the most obvious is the bearing and raising of their children.

children, not to mention his claim to heroism. This *charis,* which works on its own (as if a free agent) but at Medea's behest, will simultaneously contract one marriage (to Hades) as it destroys two others. The princess of Corinth becomes Hades' bride (985) at the same moment that she stops being Jason's.[88] For she will be consumed by the *charis* that will persuade her to put on the fatal gifts (982),[89] and the children, the most concrete symbol of shared *charis* between Jason and Medea, will also soon be destroyed. While Jason is the ultimate recipient of Medea's gifts, he never actually touches the objects. They destroy him indirectly, by destroying those whom they do touch (the children, Creon, and Creon's daughter).

The *agōn* performed one kind of contest over *charis:* a contest of words. In the second half of the play there is another contest, but it is one that is focused on the objects that now symbolize the reciprocal relations between husband and wife. If Jason was deaf to the "logic" of Medea's rhetoric in the *agōn,* here he can be described as blind to the visual language of *charis*. Let us explore this metaphor in greater detail.

The adjective *chrusoteukton* at 983 refers, as discussed earlier, to the crown that the princess will be persuaded to place on her head. Most literally, we might translate this adjective simply as "fashioned of gold." But, as the preceding dialogue between Medea and Jason demonstrates, there is nothing simple about the language of gold.[90] On the one hand, gold can function as currency.[91] Jason appears to understand Medea's offer of a golden crown as no more than an offer of gold, aimed at increasing his impoverished stores. Thus he sarcastically questions Medea's motive for giving, at line 961. On the other hand, as Medea recognizes, gold has the potential to stand for more than commodified wealth. Challenging Jason's mercantile perspective at 965, Medea tells him that "gold is stronger than a thousand speeches." This description of gold is heavily layered with allusions to past and future gifts: in it we may read a reference to the Golden Fleece that persuaded Jason to join himself to Medea. We may also, as the Chorus does, hear a more immediate refer-

[88] Seaford 1987, 119–23, on the theme of death as marriage to Hades.

[89] Cf. 1156 where the sight of the *kosmos* is said to be irresistible to the princess.

[90] Gernet (1981a, 138–40) discusses golden *agalmata* and particularly the golden vine as an object that "operates as a hereditary talisman" in the case of Hypsipyle's sons. See Kurke 1999, 61–64, on golden objects as talismans or tokens of legitimate kingship.

[91] Von Reden 1995, 138 and 162–64, on the distinction between gold and silver currency in the *Agamemnon*. Gold has mythical value, while silver (the *argurōnētous* webs, as Agamemnon calls them) belongs in the human sphere of exchange.

ence to the golden *kosmos* that will, shortly, seduce the princess of Corinth.[92] It would be a mistake to try to reduce the sentence to any single interpretation. The meaning of gold is overdetermined in this passage, as the Chorus seems to recognize, when it is its turn to speak. For by naming the crown *chrusoteukton* it in fact underlines all the *construction,* linguistic and otherwise, that has taken place in the preceding scene around the subject of gold. There, Medea and Jason both construct a reading of the golden gifts that matches up well with their reconstructions of past events and reciprocal relations in the *agōn*.

Jason, as we might expect, comments on the cloth component of the gift, only to read it as a reference to the wealth of his house.[93] He speaks of gold as if it were no different from *chrēmata* (commodified wealth). The personal significance of Medea's choice of gifts (their links to the fleece and the conjugal narrative) are completely lost on Jason:

> τί δ', ὦ ματαία, τῶνδε σὰς κενοῖς χέρας;
> δοκεῖς σπανίζειν δῶμα βασίλειον πέπλων,
> δοκεῖς δὲ χρυσοῦ; σῴιζε, μὴ δίδου τάδε.
> εἴπερ γὰρ ἡμᾶς ἀξιοῖ λόγου τινὸς
> γυνή, προθήσει χρημάτων, σάφ' οἶδ'ἐγώ. (959–63)
>
> Why, oh foolish woman, are you emptying your hands of these things? Do you think that the royal house is lacking in robes, or short of gold? Keep these things. Do not give them away. For if my wife thinks that I'm worth anything at all, she will surely value me more than she values *chrēmata*.

As the speech unfolds, we recognize that what Jason sees when Medea offers (and perhaps displays) the robe and crown is a certain quantity of material wealth (*chrēmata*). He does not accept the objects with the intention either of creating a new bond or strengthening a preexisting relationship with their owner, for he still expects that Medea will go into exile, with or without her children. Nor does he question Medea's motive in giving a gift to a woman who is clearly not her friend. At lines 962–63, he says that Creon's daughter will place more faith in him than in Medea's *chrēmata*. Jason clearly feels challenged by the persuasive power

[92] The princess is described as finding great pleasure in the gifts (1165).

[93] I have not made explicit reference to the gendered division of wealth here, although it could be argued that Jason is less attuned to the "language of cloth" that Medea's revenge employs because he is focused primarily on the male discourse of commodified wealth (*chrēmata*). See further Jenkins 1985, 120–26, and Lyons 2002 on the applicability of gender to different economic spheres (metal vs. textile).

that he senses the gifts will have on his new wife. But he does not perceive the threat as one that stems directly from his own failed reciprocal relations with Medea. It is once again anxiety about his own status, and his claim to social differentiation through the ability to *give* gifts, that surfaces here as reluctance, on Jason's part, to accept anything from a (perceived) social inferior. Medea's ability to offer Jason *chrēmata* dangerously inverts the dynamic of patronage in the *agōn.* There, of course, his attitude toward *chrēmata* was significantly different; since he was the one offering money, it became a symbol of his social authority.

To lessen some of Jason's anxieties, Medea tells him that even the gods are persuaded by gifts. "And for mortals," she adds at line 965, "gold is stronger than a thousand speeches." We hear in this line an allusion to Jason's own willingness to be persuaded when he accepted Medea's help in obtaining the Golden Fleece. If we take it as alluding to the past, the sentence summarizes the way in which Medea sees her history with Jason: gold persuaded Jason to marry her, but her speeches (in the *agōn*) could not persuade him to act as a true *philos* toward her. Now reading the sentence with reference to the present context we see its relevance for Medea's final acts of persuasion. For the gold itself (perhaps even more than Medea's words) is what melts away Jason's reluctance to receive gifts from his former wife; just as the princess's view of the *kosmos* is what will, later on, overcome her resistance toward Jason's words. As the Messenger reports back to Medea:

> ἡ δ', ὡς ἐσεῖδε κόσμον, οὐκ ἠνέσχετο,
> ἀλλ' ἤινεσ' ἀνδρὶ πάντα . . . (1156–57)
>
> And she (the princess), as soon as she saw the *kosmos* she was no longer able to resist, but she gave in to her husband in everything.

Let me summarize then the conflicting discourses on gold. At 960–61 (quoted above) Jason questioned Medea's motive for giving. Does she offer gifts because she thinks the royal house is lacking in robes and gold? Why else would she be so generous? He cannot see the *kosmos* as the bridal clothes and dowry that symbolize the history of his marriage to Medea. In this sense, Jason reduces the biographical richness of these objects to anonymous gold and wealth, without a personal history. And as he did in the past, he ignores the element of social obligation implicit in the acceptance of precious gifts.[94] The same objects that Jason sees as

[94] Jason, of course, cannot know that what Medea offers is vengeful *charis* that cannot be reciprocated, except through the suffering that Medea plans for him.

chrēmata contain, for Medea, the story of her own problematic experience with reciprocity: they represent, on one level, the failure of her *charis* relations with Jason. But in a more positive light, they are also the material symbols of the power she once held and which she used to give herself away in marriage.

A few final thoughts on the dowry: The content of Medea's *kosmos,* clothes and metal adornment, has a strong correspondence with a category of movable property known to us from the forensic sources as *himatia kai chrysia*.[95] Schaps (1979, 10) describes this collocation as "a technical term for the personal accoutrements brought along by the bride into the husband's house." It is still a subject of debate whether these personal items were included in the calculation of the monetary value of a woman's dowry; this would be important when determining how much the husband owed to her natal *oikos* in the event of a divorce. Nevertheless, I think that the resonance between Medea's bridal gifts to Jason—"clothing and jewelry"—and this historical category of property, strengthens the reading offered here of the *kosmos* alluding, in a very realistic way, to Medea's own dowry.

With her dowering of Jason's bride, moreover, there is an additional ironic twist on Medea's original autonomy. If, in the beginning, she betrothed herself to Jason, by heroically binding the two of them with oaths, now in her revenge, she has moved even more audaciously into a male role.[96] For in giving *phernas* to Jason's second wife, Medea is actually occupying the father's role in giving away his daughter.[97] She has, in effect, made herself into the "father of the bride," both replacing Creon (literally and figuratively) and betrothing his daughter to Hades. The medium chosen by Medea to punish her enemies is in this sense extraordinarily appropriate, for she has found a punishment that fits the original

[95] Schaps (1979, 10–13) discusses Lys. 12.19 and the golden earrings of Polemarchus' wife; Dem. 41.11 (*In Spudiam*); 45.28 (*In Stephanum*); and Isae. 2.9; 3.35. The word *kosmos* is actually used as a synomym for *himatia kai chrysia* at Dem. *In Aphobum* [27]10.8. Wolff (1944, 54) considers the wife's "trousseau" (her personal effects) to be legally separate from (and not assessed with) her dowry. It is important to recognize, however, that even if a woman had no legal claim to her trousseau, it may have been standard practice to return this property to her in any case. Schaps (1979,12) cites as support for this claim the examples of Chrysis (Men. *Sam.* 381–83) and Neaera (Dem. 59.35), who took her *himatia kai chrysia* with her when she left Phrynio's house.

[96] I owe the following observations on Medea's active dowering of the bride to the very helpful comments of an anonymous referee.

[97] At Eur. *Hipp.* 628–29, *phernē* is the price a father must pay in order to be rid of his daughter. See note 66 for more on *phernē*.

crime—Medea takes a marriage for a marriage—and she has (more than) reclaimed her original autonomy. This autonomy, which was effectively silenced in the earlier parts of the play, reasserts itself at the end, in the language of revenge.

Medea's words and actions in this play challenge the imbalanced reciprocity that is inscribed within the cultural institution of marriage. This challenge is carried out, as I hope to have shown here, through a variety of resources, some purely rhetorical and others that are more hidden in the objects that Medea, like most Athenian wives, has kept in her possession as both a material and symbolic alliance with her natal family. It is the more personal narrative—the biographical history of a woman inscribed within the objects that she keeps with her when she marries—that I have tried to draw out here, as a complement to the *logos* Medea creates for herself in the *agōn*. As she argues in the *agōn,* Medea exercised control over resources in her native land effectively to bind Jason to her with her many benefactions.[98] But rather than accept the enslavement that she describes as the universal lot of wives, she demands compensation for her many gifts.[99] And her means of obtaining this compensation is to stage yet another exchange of gifts. She herself refused to accept gifts from a man whom she could no longer call *philos;* so too Medea teaches Jason about accepting a gift when the social relationship, the *philia* that validates the exchange as more than simply a material one, has already been destroyed.[100] For when he lets Medea make a gift of poisonous apparel to his new wife, Jason has in essence agreed to renew the *philia* that was violated earlier; but this time, the reciprocity will be transacted on Medea's terms. With her revenge that is disguised as *charis*, Medea simultaneously "gives" and totally destroys everything she had given to Jason in the past.[101]

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[98] Burnett (1998, 202) notes the unusual marital situation caused by the hostile relations between Jason and the father of the bride: "Jason, however, was the enemy of his bride's father, which meant that Medea had to play parent to herself, binding her husband to his future duties as Aeetes would have done."

[99] In her first speech to the women of Corinth, Medea describes marriage as a woman's purchase at great cost (χρημάτων ὑπερβολῆι) of a master for her body.

[100] Cf. 616–18.

[101] Earlier versions of this article were presented at the American Philological Association in 1999 and at the Euripides and Tragic Theatre in the Late Fifth Century Conference, also in 1999. I would like to thank my audiences there for their helpful comments. I

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